The Laslett Affair

A Gentleman with a Duster
[Edward Harold Begbie]
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THE LASLETT AFFAIR

By A GENTLEMAN
WITH A DUSTER

THE MIRRORS OF DOWNING STREET
THE CONSERVATIVE MIND
THE GLASS OF FASHION
POMPS AND VANITIES
THE GREAT WORLD
THE OTHER DOOR
THE HOWLING MOB
PAINTED WINDOWS
JULIUS LEVINE
SEVEN AGES
DECLENSION

THE LASLETT AFFAIR

BY

A GENTLEMAN WITH A DUSTER

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THE LASLETT AFFAIR

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUNDS

I

One winter morning in London, a young man, dressed in almost bridal splendour, hastened through the Narrows of Bond Street with an air which suggested that he was new to freedom, new to a cheque-book, and new to the glances of women, so that many people noticed him, some with amusement, and some with envy.

He was tall and loosely built, with dark hair, small sullen dark eyes, a sulky full mouth, and a skin so intensely fine and bright that the sharpness of the frosty December morning flushed his cheeks to a shining scarlet.

The nervous brightness of his eyes, as well as an increasing flurry in his haste, witnessed to a character as yet unsophisticated. The boy, who no doubt wished to be taken for a man of the world, was plainly aware of glances, and disconcerted by stares. A sense of being uncomfortably different from every one else appeared to agitate his mind. No doubt he found himself wishing that there were more top-hats in the street, and fewer overcoats; and was perhaps unpleasantly conscious of the white carnation in his button-hole as a too conspicuous advertisement of youthful exuberance. In any case he attracted an unusual amount of attention, and the more attention he attracted the unhappier he seemed to be.

A girl coming out of a shop turned to the elderly man who followed her, and said, "Did you see that boy?"

Her companion looked, frowned, and asked, "The silly young ass without an overcoat?"

The girl said, "That's Stephen Laslett, son of the company promoter. I danced with him the other night."

The man tossed up his head, and grumbled, "He'll be worth millions, I suppose; that is if he doesn't die of pneumonia before he succeeds."

The girl said, "He was at Eton with Reggie, and he's now rather a nut at

Cambridge; writes amusing verses for the *Granta*, and makes brilliant speeches at the Union."

"Oh, does he!" chuckled the old gentleman, very well satisfied. "Then I'll bet you a bob, my dear, that he'll illustrate the truth of a great saying in America."

"What's that?" she asked indifferently, drawing up before a shop window.

The old gentleman replied, "That there's only one generation between shirt-sleeves and shirt-sleeves."

II

Mrs. Laslett and her daughter Phillida awaited Stephen in the lounge of the Ritz Hotel, where the family was staying till their house in Belgrave Square had recovered from its dedication to War work.

They were both beautifully dressed, and were not undistinguished-looking—Mrs. Laslett, a brunette, upright and vivid; Phillida, a blonde, delicate and pale.

"Stephen is very much *en retard*," said his mother, who was unmistakably a lively lady, and might have been described as all eyes and appetite. She leaned forward to look down the long corridor, which was comfortably warm and pleasantly populated. "I must smoke another cigarette," she announced, and opened her vanity-bag. "Shall I order my little lambkin a cocktail?"

Phillida replied languidly, "Let's wait till Stephen comes." She was watching with absorbed interest a group of laughing and loud-voiced young things in the distance.

"He oughtn't to be late to-day," Mrs. Laslett declared, with a certain amount of impatience.

A smiling waiter came forward to light madam's cigarette, after which he moved the table between the two ladies a shade nearer to Mrs. Laslett, wiped it with his cloth, and slid an ash-tray in her direction.

"Shall I bring you a cocktail?" he insinuated.

"We are waiting for Mr. Stephen."

"Ah! I will come again."

The orchestra began to tune their strings.

"I wonder what's keeping him," Mrs. Laslett complained, glancing at the watch on her wrist. "He was so excited this morning, and told me that I mustn't be a moment late for lunch."

"I can tell you what's keeping him," Phillida replied. "He has gone to be photographed, and he is choosing a Christmas present for Susan Anstey."

"Then he's wasting his money," retorted Mrs. Laslett, rather angrily, tipping the

ash from her cigarette into the tray at her side. "Ridiculous! But London will soon put that childish sloppiness out of his head. Susan's a plotting and intriguing hussy. She irritates me now every time I see her."

"She appeals to his clever side," said Phillida. "They talk books."

Mrs. Laslett blew a long cloud of smoke from her pursed lips, beat it away from her eyes with a quick movement of her left hand, and exclaimed, "Don't encourage that idea. For goodness' sake, don't do that. I want him to marry usefully. Fancy spending one's life talking about books! Besides, Susan is after his money—nothing else; books are merely one of her dodges. Look at that old man staring at you. Just look at him. Horrid old thing!" She laughed, partly at the absurdity of the spectacle, and partly out of an indefinable sympathy with the ways of the world, whatever they might be.

Phillida laughed too. "If it amuses him, poor old dear," she said, with a half-challenging glance at the offender, "it doesn't worry me. I'm quite used to it now. In fact, I'm rather *blasé* in that matter."

"Well, that's the proper way to take such affairs," agreed Mrs. Laslett, and almost immediately, growing excitedly serious, she touched Phillida's arm, and whispered, "Look: now, that's a man I could love!"

The man to whom so suddenly and excitedly she drew her daughter's attention was tripping with great animation towards the restaurant in the company of two extravagantly dressed women, one of whom was glancing with affected boredom in her made-up eyes at her own over-painted reflection in a hand-mirror.

Phillida looked, and was so slightly interested by the man, who seemed to her a very commonplace little foreigner, that she almost immediately gave her attention to the two women, who were certainly attractive to a degree almost amazing. But her mother's whisper came to her again, and then she did look at the man as he passed, eagerly and ardently, before it was too late to see him.

"That's Leo Daga," Mrs. Laslett had whispered.

At that name Phillida started, for, like every one else in the world of fashion, she loved the comedies with which Mr. Leo Daga had just recently begun to startle London—delighting in their flippancies, amused by their irreverence, and fascinated by the frankness of their sensuality.

She was disappointed to discover that the author of these notorious plays was a person insignificant in stature, disposed already to corpulence, and of a colour that suggested the need of soap and water, if not of a razor as well. For a moment she wished that she had never seen him, or that her mother had not known his identity, but an impassioned exclamation from Mrs. Laslett—"That man knows women

through and through"—dissipated every feeling of disappointment, and sent her gaze after the fashionable playwright with a determination to see him steadily and see him whole.

His face, the olive-coloured face of an Eastern-European, seemed to her to suggest the psychological drama of a divided mind—the dark, luminous, and searching eyes expressing, in spite of their habitual smile, a disposition towards melancholy and reflection, while the coarse mouth expressed nothing, so far as she could see, but a ribald and rejoicing gluttony. What a difficult character to understand!

She was puzzled and confused, and felt herself infinitely green and inexperienced, because she could not begin to understand this man, of whom her mother had just said that he knew women through and through.

"To understand women," Mrs. Laslett dogmatised, gazing after the departing dramatist, "a man must be half a woman himself. If you notice, Leo Daga has the waist and hips of a woman, and walks with the small steps of a woman. A man like that can enter into all the delicacy and refinement of a woman's mind. Goodness, what a lover he must be! I hear that scores of women are mad about him. They say his flat is always full of flowers and that there's no room on his dressing-table for the gifts of his admirers. I wonder who those two women are. I rather think that one of them——"

At this moment Stephen appeared, having changed into a grey suit and carefully chosen harmonious linen and hosiery.

He was now no longer bashful and disconcerted. Here the setting perfectly harmonised with his expensive appearance, and if people stared at him, particularly pretty girls, he knew that it was with no surprise or amusement. Moreover, he responded with delight to the gay welcome of his lively mother and his admiring sister. In a moment, then, he was man of the world in charge of womenfolk. The polite waiter, already at his side, was greeted by name and with a friendly word, cocktails were ordered, cigarettes were lighted, and with smiles and laughter, the three voices often clashing together, mother, son, and daughter chattered, gossiped, and delighted in themselves.

III

At luncheon, which Stephen had ordered to be served quickly, Phillida asked him, mischievously, "What did you choose for her?"

"Something frightfully expensive," he laughed, and flourished a fork over his

plate.

"What was it?"

Mrs. Laslett, who was eating heartily and glancing down the room at Leo Daga, said, "I thought you were grown up. Just now I said to myself, What a man he is! And here you are confessing that you're still a silly little sentimental boy. Why, I should have thought that you had already seen in London a hundred girls who attracted you far more than simple Susan—who's not half so simple, believe me or believe me not, as she pretends to be. How good this sauce is! What a pity it makes one fat."

Stephen smiled with the frankest amusement, knowing what was in his mother's mind, and liking to find himself a subject of discussion. "Well, that's the bother," he confessed. "For example, while I was in the shop this morning a girl came to the same counter so extravagantly beautiful that I wanted to propose to her then and there! Honestly, she was as lovely as an angel. Oh, quite positively. Yes, I assure you. That's the devastating thing about London. One sees adorable girls at every step. It seems contrary to nature to think of loving only one. Almost they persuade me, the darling buds, to become a Mohammedan. In fact, I've been upbraiding myself all the morning for disloyalty to my rustic Susan."

"Disloyalty!" cut in Mrs. Laslett, and laughed scornfully. "Don't talk such nonsense! You're not engaged to the girl. She's only a friend. Disloyalty! Good heavens, I should be very sorry if I thought you were going to become Susan's pet poodle—a man with your future! Rustic's a very good name for her, although she's as artful in her own sly way as a cage full of monkeys."

Afraid of this subject, and never caring to speak on one theme for more than a few moments, Mrs. Laslett looked longingly down the room at Leo Daga, and all of a sudden brought conversation round to their engagement for that afternoon.

"I really think it's too cold for our trip to Twickenham," she announced, glancing out of a window at the bleak greyness of the park. "Let's take tickets for a matinée, and keep ourselves warm. I'm sure you only go to these ugly amusements, Stephen, because you think you ought to. It's just a part of your silly old *esprit de corps*."

Stephen laughed at that. "You enjoyed the match last year," he reminded her. "And this year it's going to be an epic of a fight. Ha, something tremendous. Have another glass of wine, mother. Oxford's howling for our blood. Is she not? Thinks she's got a pack this time that will beat ours to blithereens. And she's bucking her head off about Butcher—Big Jack Butcher—never was such a Back in the history of Rugger. In other words, high-cockalorum-jig-jig-jig! But let them wait. My dear mother, what are you talking about? To miss this match would be to miss the last

train to Paradise."

Mrs. Laslett laughed. "I shouldn't mind doing that," she said, "so long as I could catch the next train to Paris. No; I don't pretend to be interested in football. I don't even pretend to care whether Cambridge beats Oxford, or Oxford beats Cambridge, in any of their various games. I'm supremely indifferent to both of them."

"Which is flat heresy in my presence," declared Stephen, not without a certain annoyance in his face and in his voice.

"One thing will cheer you up, mother," said Phillida. "You'll see Mr. Jodrell."

"Ah," cried Stephen; "the finest sprinter in England, an international three-quarters, and my chosen friend for life. Here's to Hugh Jodrell! God bless him."

Mrs. Laslett considered and at last remembered that name. This Jodrell had once paid them a visit in the summer holidays when Stephen and he were at Eton. And she had met him three or four times since at Cambridge and once at Lords. Yes, she perfectly remembered him—a boy with very broad shoulders, fair hair, small eyes, and a nose that jutted out from his face like a bird's beak. Yes, she remembered him, distinctly.

"You mean the boy who is a nephew of the Earl of Norwich?" she inquired languidly, flustered for a moment by the belief that Leo Daga had caught her eye and was answering her look of interest.

Stephen laughed. "Be careful, dear mother. Remember, a little Norwich is a dangerous thing! Think of him only as the greatest sprinter of his times."

"Still," said Phillida, "all Norwich is power."

"Phillida!" exclaimed Stephen, "you should never make other people's puns. It encourages a second-hand mind; and, besides, intellectual petty larceny is worse than shop-lifting."

Mrs. Laslett suddenly remembered that she had noticed in young Jodrell a distinct interest in Phillida, and had even contemplated the happy idea of Phillida becoming engaged to this scion of an ancient and noble house. But she hadn't seen him for a year, and she had almost forgotten his existence, and now, for some reason or another, the thought of Phillida marrying any one at all irritated her nerves; it seemed to force her to contemplate her own image in the glass of time as a grandmother.

She suppressed a shudder and said carelessly, "Well, I suppose I must go, if it's only to see Mr. Jodrell smothered in mud," and again she looked across the room to the table at which Mr. Daga was sitting with an enviable woman on either side of him.

"There's a man you ought to know, and cultivate," she said to Stephen. "Over

there between the windows."

"He's Leo Daga," said Phillida.

Stephen set down his glass with a jerk. "Oh, my aunt," he exclaimed, with a laugh of great knowingness; "hot stuff, very hot stuff! Let's have a look at him." He turned on his chair, and stared down the room. "Well, he ain't exactly Vere de Vere, is he?—looks more like the superintendent of a restaurant taking a busman's holiday; all the same, he can write, and every author can't look like Rupert Brooke, can he? Oh yes, the little beggar can write; and he knows a deal about women, some sort of women. I expect he's collecting copy from those two vamps at his table. If you look closely you'll see he's gloating over them. *Ger-loat* is the *mot juste*, as he would put it. What a pity we don't know him. I'd like to talk to him. Let's drink his health. Here's to the Adulterous Lady and her Laureate!"

Mrs. Laslett rebuked him for that, with a laughing, "Stephen! you naughty boy!" and Phillida, regarding him enviously as one who knew more about life than she did, smiled admiration.

Stephen exclaimed, "Here is a quatrain for your edification:

"Smoke not the Pipe, nor yet the Larranaga,
Abandon Ale, abjure old Homer's Saga;
The Modern Spirit cometh, saying, 'Take
Cocktail, and Cigarette, and Leo Daga!'

I'll polish it after the match," he said, "and send it to the little squit with my compliments. In the meantime, here's to him and the Muse of Indecency."

At this point, Stephen stopped abruptly, put down his glass, and under his breath exclaimed, "Family, pull yourselves together; here comes the Bread Winner!"

William Laslett, famous in two continents for his company promotions, approached the table slowly and wearily, like a man who is bothered as well as tired. He was short, square-shouldered, and fattish, with thin gold-red hair, a yellowish skin, and small deep-set pale eyes which were almost invisible under drooping lids.

"Well," he asked; "having a good time?" His voice was low, and he spoke with the accent of his Derbyshire ancestors, who were peasants. The question was put rather scornfully, rather contemptuously.

"I've just thought of a riddle, Bread Winner," said Stephen. "Why are you like Debenham and Freebody?"

Mr. Laslett shook his head.

"Because you deal in combinations," said Stephen.

"I call that horrid," said Phillida.

"Silence, child," answered Stephen, "or I'll turn the hose on you. *Hose*; do you see the jest? Ha, ha! Bread Winner, may I offer you a glass of château-bottled Moselle, nineteen hundred and eleven?"

"No, thank you."

"A glass of port, sir?"

"I think not."

"Then a chair?"

Mr. Laslett ignored this sportive invitation, as if Stephen had now gone far enough in his foolery, and asked, looking from his wife to his daughter, with an air of no interest, "You're going to this football match, I suppose; all three of you?"

Stephen thrust in the answer. "Why don't you come too?" he asked, in no mood to be suppressed, much less ignored. "Do you good, Bread Winner. Take you out of yourself. Help you to forget the oppressive number of your millions."

"No doubt. But I'm going to Manchester." He looked at his wife. "Anything you want from me?"

"Manchester!" exclaimed Stephen to the gods. "And he might be at Twickenham!"

Mrs. Laslett considered, fingering the spoon in the saucer of her coffee-cup. "No, I don't think so."

"Well, then, I'll be off. I've got some friends lunching with me across the room. See you all later in the week."

"You'll be at home for Christmas, I hope?" asked Stephen. "Good King Wencelas expects you, you know. Besides, it's the feast of Stephen, is it not?"

Mr. Laslett almost smiled at that. "Seems to me," he said, "that you regard every day in the year as that."

"I've got a handsome present for you," announced Stephen very impressively.

"And so have I," said Phillida; "something particularly posh."

"You mustn't spoil me, you know," said the Bread Winner grimly, and walked away from them.

Stephen looked after him, nodded his head very gravely, and said, "There, but for the grace of God, goes Stephen Laslett." He picked up the waiter's pencil from a plate at his side, and initialled the bill. "Now, ladies: your sable coats, your muffs, and your fur gloves. The magic word is Twickenham."

"Muffs!" laughed Phillida; "why, they went out of fashion before I was born."

As they walked between the crowded tables, Mrs. Laslett looked at Leo Daga, and turning her head said to Phillida, "I shall never be happy till I know that man."

"I should think that was easy enough," said Phillida, drawing up to her mother's side.

"But how?"

"Well, he knows Mrs. Vaudrey; I heard Jane talking about him at their house in the summer. She spoke about him as Leo, as if they knew him quite well."

Mrs. Laslett's face burnt with excitement. "I'll ask Ann Vaudrey to dine," she exclaimed. "Remind me to telephone directly we get back from this dreadful match."

"Mind you," said Stephen, coming between them, "goloshes are *verboten*. I give you three minutes. You'll find me at the car. *Vite!*"

IV

Mrs. Laslett had been used to luxury, that is to say, very great luxury, for more than twelve years; but she still found an almost childish pleasure in her magnificent limousine, just as she had never lost the thrill of putting on new garments or buying an extravagant piece of jewellery.

Therefore when, very expensively dressed, she crossed the pavement from the hotel to her motor-car, at the door of which stood the porter and the chauffeur, while Stephen was already at the wheel, she brightened up, felt that she would enjoy this football match after all, and pleasantly responded to the thunderous stir of Piccadilly and to the stares of curious people who slowed down their paces to watch her progress.

Seated in the car, with a fur rug tucked well round her knees, she expressed the hope, laughingly, as if it were a thing not to be expected, that Stephen would drive carefully; after that, settling herself down to look at the movement of the world from her window, she began to think of the wonderful adventure which was now opening before her, as if by magic—a meeting with the man who knew women through and through.

"I think I must smoke," she exclaimed, opening her vanity-bag, as the car glided forward after a scarlet omnibus, with little muddy taxi-cabs shooting by it one after another. "I feel desperately the need of being soothed. I don't know what's coming to my nerves: they seem to have gone back to that Christmas Eve feeling, when I hung up my stocking and half believed in Santa Claus coming down the chimney. It's a sort of tiptoe, breathless feeling."

But with her cigarette lighted, she ceased to prattle, ceased even to look out of the window, and soon sank into a reverie which lasted until Stephen drew up the car at the gates of the famous ground at Twickenham—a reverie as romantic and

sentimental as ever translated a Victorian girl into the world of enchanted make-believe.

A crowd always dissipated Mrs. Laslett's thoughts, however important those thoughts might be. Something in her disposition streamed out from the centre of her being and mingled itself gratefully in any concourse of human beings bent upon pleasure. She loved the pressure of people in the foyer of a theatre, or at a fashionable garden-party, or at a race-meeting, or in a casino, just as a night-club or a restaurant could never be too crowded for her satisfaction. So, on this occasion, she no sooner found herself at Twickenham, thronged by eager and happy people pressing forward to their seats, than her love-sick desire for the sympathetic friendship of Leo Daga vanished clean out of her mind, and she entirely forgot that only a few minutes ago she had expressed a real reluctance to come to Twickenham at all.

"Now, isn't this delightful!" she exclaimed to Phillida, with the pack of people crowding her in all directions. "Give me life and I'm satisfied. What I can't stand is the dead-alive. Stephen, don't go so fast. You've got the tickets. Goodness me, what a crowd! Shall we ever find our places?"

When those places were found—very good places they were too—she began by taking a general and undiscriminating survey of the entire ground, simply seeing masses of human beings, and feeling in her blood the stir and thrill and amusement of so much seething vitality. It was splendid, this spectacle of pleasure-loving humanity. The roar of voices broke in upon her observation from time to time like the smash of waves on shingle, giving her for the moment a sensation which was pleasantly akin to fear.

The spectacle of two old gentlemen meeting on the ground, meeting joyously and evidently with glad unexpectedness, caught her excited eyes. She watched them shake hands—no formality in their case—and saw how they fondled each other's arms, and smiled, and laughed, and swayed towards each other as they stood talking. The faces of these old gentlemen were extraordinarily gentle, wonderfully charming. How courteous they were to each other—affectionate and yet courteous—and how gracious were all their movements and gestures. Old friends. The meeting of old friends.

She became suddenly angry with these two old men, and exclaimed to herself, "Old humbugs!" and looked away from them.

"There are very few women here," she said aloud, turning to Phillida.

"I don't know; there are a lot of girls over there."

"So there are. Who's Stephen speaking to?"

"Some one he met at Ciro's last night."

"I thought perhaps it might be the Mr. Jodrell he was talking about at lunch."

"Oh, dear no! Hugh Jodrell's not a bit like that. Besides, he wouldn't be in one of the stands! Whatever can you be thinking about?"

"Well, I told you I know nothing about football. I'm beginning to find it even more boresome than I thought it would be."

Phillida laughed. "That's good! Why, it hasn't even begun yet."

Mrs. Laslett seated herself, and after some moments narrowed down her observation, contemptuously and impatiently, to two old gentlemen immediately in front of her. They were very old indeed, these two; one a clergyman with a thin line of white whiskers descending from his ears; the other, a soldier, some general or field-marshal, perhaps, who wore a big threatening white moustache, and had large generous eyelids which blinked incessantly, and a prominent chin decorated by a miniature imperial.

Mrs. Laslett wondered how old they were; over eighty, she thought, and perhaps nearer ninety. Wonderful how they kept their vitality!

These two old creatures were talking, with an extraordinary fire of animation. The clergyman was leaning forward, and half-turning to the soldier, and as he spoke he used a woollen-gloved hand to emphasise his words by beating it on his knee; the soldier, keeping his eyes rigidly in front of him, flung his head sideways from time to time, thrusting out his two hands which rested on a stick, and almost barked his words at the clergyman over the edge of a noticeably tall collar.

What were they talking about?

Mrs. Laslett, merely to divert herself, leaned forward to overhear them.

"It doesn't matter what you say," declared the clergyman, "I *know* what was the result of that match. Oxford won by a goal to nothing." The voice was charming in tone, and the accent that of a scholar, but the speaker was evidently exasperated.

"I say that it was a goal and try," countered the soldier. "I'm entitled to my opinion, I suppose?"

"I saw the match myself, and I say most solemnly and confidently——"

"You'll back your memory against the Official Programme and the Rugby Football Annual?" demanded the soldier.

"Certainly."

"Ha!"

The clergyman, irritated by that scornful "Ha!" which was very military in tone, affected to smile, even to laugh, but became extremely serious and a little tremblingly persuasive, as he turned to the now thoroughly annoyed soldier, and declared, "My

dear fellow, I tell you I saw Isherwood score the try and saw him convert it into a goal—saw him with my own eyes. That was the first 'Varsity match. It was played on the Parks at Oxford on the 10th of February *1872*. Isherwood, who was at Rugby, scored the try, and converted it. I saw it. And there was no other score. That I'll swear to."

There was a pause for a moment, in which the old soldier's stick went backwards and forwards rather violently, and then he demanded over the side of his tall collar, slowly and emphatically, not looking at his antagonist, "Can you explain to me how it is that in the unchallengeably accurate pages of the Rugby Football Annual the result is given, as I say it was, a goal and a try? That's all I ask you. Can you explain it?" He swung suddenly round and glanced at the parson.

The parson said, "I haven't the smallest misgiving in my mind about that match. I was there. I've discussed it a hundred times with Lushington and W. O. Moberly. My dear fellow, I assure you that——"

Mrs. Laslett, smiling like a girl of sixteen, turned to Phillida and said, "These two old dears in front of me are fighting like a couple of gamecocks over something that took place in 1872!"

A shout of welcome from the enormous crowd drew her attention to the turf in front of her, now cleared of human beings. The players were streaming out into the wintry air, some of them hugging themselves for warmth, others striding quietly forward as if it were as warm as summer. Mrs. Laslett thought it very undignified and grotesque that they should have numbers on their backs.

The air about her now became full of names. Every one except the two old men in front, who were still arguing, appeared to be engaged in identifying the players. A few of the younger people behind her were naming some of those players in a familiar way, as if to tell the world that they knew these famous men, knew them intimately.

"That's Big Jack Butcher," cried Stephen to Phillida. "Look, over there. Isn't he a whopper? The fellow following him is Watkinson, one of their three-quarters."

"Where's Hugh Jodrell?" asked Phillida; "I can't make him out."

"Wait a moment. There he is! Look; the centre of those three on the left. Good old Jod! By gad, he's trained to a hair. You can see that, can't you? Fit as a racehorse. Finest sprinter in all England, best three-quarters in the whole world; good old Jodder! A pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift!"

Mrs. Laslett caught some of these words, but felt none of Stephen's enthusiasm. Stephen was very young; at times, absurdly young. She knew that she would understand nothing of the game, and would be only confused by attempting to

identify any of these thirty young men in different coloured jerseys, or to watch their bewildering movements. Why should she be bothered by attending to them? More interesting to her was the immense spectacle of these thirty or forty thousand people crowding the ground on every side, as if life itself hung upon the result of the players' antics with a ball. Yes, these people were worth watching; but the game—well, she might just as well look at two people playing Mah-Jong, or whatever it was called.

Voices came to her, "Oxford's the lustier eight." "Smithson's the man for the blind side of a scrummage." "Egerton's a greatly improved wing three-quarters." "No one's faster than Jodrell." "Cambridge has got the cleverer back division."

What a strange power games possessed to maintain some people's interest in life! And she herself couldn't understand that interest, could not begin to imagine it. No doubt Stephen would still be looking at a 'Varsity match fifty years hence, probably quarrelling with some other old veteran over the result of this afternoon's contest. She began to feel isolated from humanity. A feeling came to her that she would like to understand games, would like to have the same feelings as all these keen people about her.

She heard a whistle blown, noticed that the roar of voices suddenly died down to a murmur, and glanced towards the turf so beautifully smooth and green even under a grey sky and in that murky air. Well, the game had begun, she supposed. Some one had kicked the ball, and there it was now bouncing up from the ground. Some one ran to catch it; all the others ran after him, some quickly and some slowly; and then—for her, absolute confusion. Yet the roar of voices rose again, tumultuous, terrific, and Stephen's shout came to her like a battle-cry.

What a problem Stephen presented to her mind! Here was a handsome young man, with his pockets full of money, the heir to many millions of money—here was this good-looking young son of fortune, with innumerable pretty girls longing for a smile from his eyes, shouting at a football match, like a mere schoolboy! How differently, if she had been in his shoes, would she have ordered life! Goodness, what a time she would have had!

She sat back in her place, closed her eyes, shivered a little, and presently found her thoughts travelling in a direction which satisfied her. She imagined herself back in the hotel, and imagined that the dark expressive eyes of Leo Daga, so full of secrets, were suddenly raised to look at her across the restaurant. Bliss! If Ann Vaudrey could come to dine that very night! She would ring her up directly she got back. Why hadn't she rung her up before she started?

Once or twice the roar of voices was so great that she opened her eyes, but only to see the same confusion of moving figures on the misty ground, and to see that

confusion end in the boring event which Stephen called a scrum. How often that shrill whistle blew in her ears, as if something really exciting had occurred, and yet when she opened her eyes it was always to see only some tiresome pause in this tiresome game.

She began to tell herself a story, just as she had told herself stories as a child. She met Leo Daga in this story, and he was drawn to her at once, and they made secret plans to be alone together, and she said to him, when they were parting, "I married for money; I have been faithful to my husband; I have been a good mother; and I'm not happy. What is it that I want? Why am I not satisfied? Why should love seem to me the most desirable and necessary thing in life? You who understand women, you who know our cravings, tell me why I want so tremendously—to commit a big sin?" There the story hung, astonished at its own daring, too bewildered to frame Leo Daga's answer.

Suddenly Stephen's voice rose to a shout. "By gad, he'll get through! What a breakaway! That's Thompson. He's devilish fast. Gad, he has sold Carter a dummy. Ah! Jodder will collar him. He's funking a straight path. Good old Hugh! Run, man, run! No, by heaven, he's missed him. Oh, Hugh, Hugh! It's no use. By gad, he's through. He'll score. Nothing can save it. He'll score——"

The rest was drowned in a shout so tremendous that every nerve in Mrs. Laslett's body tingled.

"For pity's sake, tell me what has happened," she shouted to Phillida.

Phillida shouted back, "Oxford has got through and touched down."

She tried hard to understand what followed, and did at least perceive that the ball was kicked wide of the goal-posts, concluding from Stephen's scream of infernal joy that Cambridge had done something very creditable, in which it was her duty to rejoice.

"Come," she said to Phillida, "that was much better, wasn't it?" She was perhaps a little ashamed of that daring pronouncement in her story—*I want so tremendously to commit a big sin*.

Later in the afternoon, however, when she was comfortably telling herself that the match now would soon be over, she came to the conclusion that things were not going well for Cambridge. She heard Stephen say repeatedly, "This is awful!" or "This is the very devil!"—and saw him take out his watch and heard him exclaim, "Only eight minutes more." She began to look at Stephen, so handsome and alert, and to feel sorry for him.

"Is anything very wrong?" she asked Phillida.

"Oxford's score is a try," Phillida explained; "there's only a few minutes' more

play; and the ball's in the Cambridge half."

"The Cambridge half is this end of the ground?" asked her mother, very intelligibly.

"Yes."

"And this, I imagine, is another scrum?"

"Yes."

"God, this is awful!" muttered Stephen, breathing very hard; "only five minutes!"

Mrs. Laslett said, "Why does Stephen take things so seriously?—it is very absurd of him. He's suffering, poor boy. Fancy suffering about a game! What does it matter?"

Before Phillida could reply there was another of those tremendous shouts which made Mrs. Laslett's nerves tingle. "Well passed, by Jove!" shouted the old clergyman in front of her, leaping up. "Great work," bawled the old soldier, leaning on his stick and staggering to his feet. "Hugh's caught it!" yelled Stephen. There was a shout like thunder, "Jodrell! Jodrell!" All round the ground, "Jodrell! Jodrell!" Stephen's voice rang like a shriek in his mother's ear, "Jodrell! Jodrell!"

"Finest pass I ever saw in my life," shouted the old parson, dancing on his feet.

"It was very good, certainly," allowed the old soldier.

Even Mrs. Laslett could understand now what was happening. Jodrell had caught the ball from a half-back, and was running with it, running like a hare from the scrum, running to the other end of the ground, running with his head thrown back, his right arm working like a piston, outdistancing every one else, breaking clean ahead from every other man on the field—except one, the big man by the posts on the far side of the field, who was advancing quite slowly and calmly to meet him.

Yes, Mrs. Laslett understood, and thrilled. She felt her body grow tense and knew that she was holding her breath, but did not realise that she was running with Hugh Jodrell. She became angry and indignant. Why does Hugh Jodrell run straight towards that great big person advancing towards him? Why not avoid him? How stupid of Hugh Jodrell to risk an encounter. Surely to goodness there is plenty of room on either side of him!

A moment before her knees were working like a sewing-machine in sympathy with Jodrell's magnificent run; now they were frozen stiff, and her whole body was locked in a paralysis of fear. The meeting of those two men! How awful it must be. She imagined black hatred in the heart of Big Jack Butcher, and delirious terror in the mind of Hugh Jodrell.

There was a roar of thunder all round her, a clash of voices that seemed to possess the whole earth, shot through with cries and yells that swept her forward on

a wave of inexpressible emotion. The meeting of those two men!

Suddenly came absolute silence. She couldn't breathe. She shivered like a leaf. Stephen's mutter reached her, wrenched out of him, between his teeth, "Watch for Jodder's swerve!" Then—what happened? Those two men on the field seemed to her to crash together, and there was a flash in the air which she could not follow, and then—pandemonium.

For some reason or other, every one in the stand seemed to go mad, particularly Stephen; even the two old men in front of her were shouting to each other, crying and laughing, rolling about, clasping each other by the hand, saying that they would not have missed that for anything on earth. Missed what? Good heavens, would no one tell her?

Something of enormous importance had occurred, that was clear, and something, she imagined, which was quite wonderfully splendid for Cambridge. She felt that she must share in it. She had an overwhelming desire to understand exactly what had happened.

She turned to Phillida, and caught her by the arm, shaking it. Phillida's face came round to her, and Mrs. Laslett gasped with astonishment, for Phillida's face was as white as paper, and her eyes were streaming with tears.

"Didn't you see?" said Phillida, laughing and crying. "Every one thought Hugh Jodrell was going to dodge at the last moment; but he didn't; he charged straight at Butcher; and just as Butcher flung himself forward to collar Hugh by the knees, Hugh jumped clean over him, clean over his body, and touched down right in the middle of the Oxford goal!"

V

Before the curtain went up, it was apparent to every one in the theatre that there was going to be trouble. Managers, hoping for the best, endeavoured to dispel the fears of actors and actresses on the stage, and a telephone message to the police was mentioned in the front of the house as a promise of security to gentlemen anxious about the safety of their wives.

But the din of voices in the theatre grew steadily louder; songs of a tipsy character came rowdily from the stalls; a party of young men standing in a box on the dress-circle tier was amusing itself by dropping lemons into the orchestra.

Hugh Jodrell, who was wearing the old-fashioned dress-suit of an older brother, and whose collar was frayed, and whose black tie was not of a fashionable shape, sat very upright in his stall and wished himself back at home. He had been made the

hero of the dinner, and as fuss of any kind tended to disorganise his disposition, he had not enjoyed that festivity; moreover, he was entirely convinced that the really decisive thing in the match was Gunning's amazing pass from the blind side of that critical scrummage, at the last moment in the game, the finest and surest pass he had ever seen; and besides this, he was still in training, booked to play for England in ten days' time, and therefore in no mood for frolic.

All the same, sitting in his stall with no mind for a rag, he kept a smile on his face, hating to appear different from other members of the team, and looked about him as if the excitement amused him, as if he too was as ready as any one else for the fun of a lively night.

"Look at our brilliant Stephen," said one of his neighbours, and laughingly indicated Stephen Laslett, who was standing up in the box on the dress-circle tier full of noisy young men, and was now apparently endeavouring to address the whole theatre.

"He's pretty tight," said Hugh's other neighbour. "Wilson dined with Carrington, and he said that Stephen arrived at the dinner in a state of glory; must have had a dozen cocktails before he started. Couldn't talk of any one but you, Jodder. I hope he isn't going to fall out of the box. He might hurt some one."

Jodrell, who was very fond of Stephen, and admired the brilliant ease of his mind, and believed that he might do wonderful things in the House of Commons, kept an eye on him, and felt sick to see his greatest friend making so conspicuous an ass of himself.

He had liked Stephen from their first association at Eton, and had felt that Stephen conferred a great honour by his friendship. He had never lost that early sense of inferiority even when he himself came to great triumphs at Cambridge. Stephen, in his eyes, had three wonderful gifts—swiftness of thought, vivid sympathies, and a gay gallantry of spirit. Moreover, Stephen was wonderfully attractive in appearance, and had an inherent dashingness of nature which made him a commanding figure in all assemblies. But, chief quality of all, Stephen was also, in his intimacies, a humble person, and would pour out to Jodrell his doubts, perplexities, and temptations, so that Jodrell, in trying to help him, had come to love him. No other man of his experience had so many gifts, so many attractions, so great a promise of a brilliant future, and yet so confiding and friendly a nature.

No sooner did the curtain go up, and the chorus begin to sing, than a loud cheer, mingled with discordant cries, filled the whole theatre, completely drowning the music. This loud cheer, and the various cries, were quite evidently inspired by the provocative dresses of the chorus. The chorus, visibly shaken, bravely kept up its

usual smile, danced merrily, and pretended to be still singing, the cheers and cries growing louder and louder.

Jodrell looked away from Stephen, who was leaning right over the box to blow kisses to the girls on the stage, and sinking down in his stall gave himself up to a miserable effort to attend to the show.

At last, as if they had simultaneously exhausted themselves, all the raggers in the theatre suddenly fell silent, and the voices of the singers came to the audience with a pleasant freshness and sweetness. Even Jodrell revived, and sat up again in his seat. But almost immediately shouts were raised throughout the house, and various unpleasant insults were thrown at the girls of the chorus—insults which could be plainly heard, and which were awkward for married people to hear.

A famous comedian made his entrance. He was greeted first with resounding cheers, which delighted him, and then by angry boos and shouts of, "Go home: we don't want you: we want the girls." He pretended to be amused. He indulged in gestures and grimaces which he hoped might bring the interrupters to accept him; he walked easily and cheerfully about the stage, speaking to various ladies of the chorus; he advanced to the front and indulged in a laughing conversation with the conductor of the orchestra; then, suddenly straightening himself up, he gazed, as if spellbound, at the party of roysterers in the box.

There was a sudden pause. He seized it, and called up to the box, "Mr. Jodrell, I congratulate you. I never saw a finer——"

Deafening cheers filled the house, almost drowning the cries of, "He's in the stalls! Jodder, stand up! We—want—Jodder! We—want—Jodder!" The comedian beat time to this cry, and in a sudden pause exclaimed, "And *some* people want our show, and I hope they'll get it." There were loud cheers for this. "If any one," he shouted in a stern and angry voice which produced instant silence, "had interrupted *your* show this afternoon, by Jove, I'd have killed him!"

Rapturous was the delight of the undergraduates at this stroke. The comedian was cheered and cheered for a full two minutes, and then invited to go ahead, voices assuring him that he should have a fair deal.

To Jodrell's horror, Stephen Laslett, standing in the box, and swaying over the edge of it, called out to the comedian:

"I give you my word of honour, I'll see fair play. If any one interrupts you, I'll chuck him out. And if you come up here, I'll give you a drink."

The revue proceeded from that moment with scarcely any serious interruptions, until, late in the evening, when an actor and actress appeared to sing a duet notorious in London both for its innuendoes and the amorous dancing with which it was

accompanied. At this number, excitable young men, who had liberally refreshed themselves in the interlude, broke out into disorderly cries, most of them cries of mock protest, but some of them cries of salacious encouragement.

Jodrell turned to the man on his right for relief, "This is getting pretty ghastly. I've a good mind to chuck it. What do you think?"

"Oh, we shall have to stick it," came the answer.

At that moment rose a new shout, sudden and sharp, and every one's eyes were turned to the box in which Stephen Laslett and his party were leading the disorder. Jodrell looked, and sickened at what he saw, but with a certain swift anxiety in the midst of his disgust.

Stephen had climbed over the edge of the box, and, holding on to the hands of his friends, was being let down to the box below. He hung for a few seconds, his coat-sleeves withdrawing almost to his elbows, his toes feeling for a landing-place, and then slithered out of the grasp of his friends, stumbled awkwardly on the cushioned ledge, sprawled for a moment, staggered up, and swinging himself into the orchestra, presently climbed on to the stage. Amid a scene of the wildest tumult, he attempted to address the house, standing there with a whitish dust all over his splendid clothes, his shirt ridiculously crumpled, his eyes half-closed, his face brick-red. While the pandemonium was at its height, the manager appeared on the stage, and to a chorus of menacing boos attempted to persuade Stephen to withdraw. Stephen, whose hair was hanging limply over his forehead, and whose white tie was a little askew, could be seen stubbornly arguing with the manager, evidently attempting to persuade him that a speech would put an end to the hubbub.

Jodrell, watching Stephen, so handsome and so foolish, so splendidly high-spirited and yet so hopelessly and dreadfully an ass, thought of how often he had listened to his friend's Platonising in Trinity and to his brilliant speeches in the Union, and wondered how a spirit so fine and swift could be capable of such pitiful folly.

There were cries all over the house of "Speech! Speech!"—accompanied by noises of every conceivable kind, chiefly zoological, and at last the manager desisted from his efforts, and Stephen came forward to the footlights, tremendously cheered.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, very solemnly, in a laughing silence that suddenly fell upon the house. His voice was pitched high, and rang with the excitement of his feelings. "As a member of, and a subscriber to the funds of, the Purity League," he went on, waiting for a yell of delirious laughter to subside, "I greatly disapprove of the duet which has so rightly met with your protests." Prolonged cheers greeted this austere judgment. "At the same time, to the pure all things are pure"—cries of, *Not at all! Try again! Pure be damned for a*

tale!—"and if you will listen to this offensive duet, as I intend to listen to it, with a mind absolutely fireproof and a soul which has never known the contagion of the world's slow stain——"

The shrieks, the yells, the cat-calls, and the shrill whistling which met him at this point, broke him down; he turned to the manager beside him, shook his hand, and was about to go back the way he had come, when the manager, taking his arm, led him gently to one of the wings. At this, there was a sudden movement of young men in the theatre towards the stage. "We want to go too," they cried. "Put us among the girls."

The scene that followed was one of wild disorder. The whole house appeared to be on its feet. Cries of derision and shrieks of hysterical laughter mingled with cries of terror. There was a movement of panic. Men and women were trying to escape to the exits; helmeted policemen were hurriedly entering at several points; undergraduates, flourishing walking-sticks and shouting war-cries, were shoving their way through the departing audience with the intention of storming the orchestra. The safety-curtain descended on a stage from which the performers were flying with uncontrollable alarm to the wings, while a few members of the orchestra, sticking to their post, bravely attempted to play the national anthem.

VI

It took Jodrell a considerable time to get his coat and hat from the cloak-room, and when he did eventually extricate himself from the theatre he was separated from his friends.

He found the outer world, which was foggy and cold and damp, almost as tumultuous as the smaller, duskier, and stuffier world of the theatre. As far as eye could see in that lamp-lighted scene there was a complete stoppage of wheeled traffic and a continuous movement of pedestrians in a strange swaying movement, as of water tilted from side to side in a basin. Whistles were blowing in all directions. Shouts, laughter, and singing filled the air. Every now and then the lights shone on the figure of a young man who elevated himself above the mob on the top of a taxi-cab, and stood lurching there till he fell forward and disappeared. Policemen could be seen thrusting their way through the dense pack, while men and women on the tops of buses stood up and surveyed the scene below them, some with consternation and some with cynical amusement.

Jodrell took his bearings, and decided to make his way with the crowd—from which it seemed impossible to disentangle himself—as far as Piccadilly, and then slip

into Jermyn Street, and so down to his home in St. James's Square—a most delectable haven in that horrible heaving sea of riot and tomfoolery. He kept repeating to himself the words of Pepys, "And so to bed," as he quietly moved westward with the mob, hating the hubbub, disliking intensely the smell of this enormous multitude pressing into him, and longing for fresh air, solitude, and peace.

In the greater brightness of Piccadilly Circus, where the fog had a whiter aspect, he found to his relief that the forces of order were getting hold of the situation. Motor-cars filled with frightened people, and omnibuses packed with excited spectators, were at least on the move; while the stern order of the police, "Pass along, please," was succeeding up to a point in clearing the pavements of congestion. But there was evidently still some central excitement in the Circus, holding things up, for people were risking their lives among buses and cars by running frantically from that direction, while every now and then Jodrell heard a loud scream from that point, and caught sight of something flung into the air, either a garment or a missile.

He was looking to this crowded centre, wondering what particular madness was going on there, when suddenly, over the heads of the crowd and between vehicles stationary in a block, he caught sight of Stephen Laslett, an extraordinarily clear vignette of Stephen himself, surrounded by a blur of swaying undergraduates mixed up, infernally mixed up, with a body of police. It was only a momentary glimpse, but it had a tremendous effect on Jodrell. The look of Stephen's face frightened him. The boy was evidently mad drunk, and lost to all sense of reason, and yet in a condition of excitement so great that he was capable of using his keen brain to do dangerous things. He was arguing with men who were pushing him, and fierce argument in his condition might easily become a blow. Jodrell said to himself, "I must get hold of him," and, using as little brute force as possible, edged his way through the crowd to the roadway.

He was nearly caught between two motor-buses, and escaping from that peril received a nasty bump on the leg from a car on the other side, the chauffeur of which grinned quietly as he saw Jodrell crumple up. Hugh thought of his match for England, and limped forward to a strip of pavement in the centre of the Circus, crowded with people. From this point, balancing himself with difficulty on the kerb, he could see Stephen quite clearly, an alarming picture seen vividly between vehicles brought to a standstill and the heads of people in front of him. He pressed his way into the crowd on the refuge, angering two well-dressed, middle-aged men, but maintaining his position. He was considering whether he could risk a further dive through the traffic, loathing the job in hand and cursing this disgraceful rag with all his heart, when one of the two men in front of him said to the other, "Damned young fools! I hope they'll

spend the night in Vine Street."

Jodrell turned to him, and said, "Who are you calling damned young fools?"

The man looked at Jodrell's stern face, quailed a little, and said nothing.

"Weren't you young yourself, once upon a time?" asked Jodrell, and pushed his way between the two men, and passed behind a motor-car, and forced himself forward into the swaying mob in the centre of the roadway.

He set his gaze on the mad-drunk Stephen and battled forward. As he shoved on into the roaring and seething pack, Stephen, who was still some distance off, was grabbed by a policeman and shot suddenly forward. A moment afterwards Jodrell heard himself addressed by name, and turning round saw Big Jack Butcher smiling at his side.

"Bit of a scrum, what?" asked Butcher.

"You're my man," said Jodrell. "Quick; follow me!"

"What is it?"

Jodrell put his lips as near as possible to Butcher's ear, so that no one should hear him, and told Butcher that the police had got a friend of his, and that this friend had to be rescued—a man with a future.

Butcher laughed quietly, and said, "Point him out, old man. The bobbies have got more than one."

They pressed forward together, shouldering people right and left. Whistles were blowing furiously. Traffic was completely blocked. Shouts, screams, and yells mingled with the sounds of smashing glass and the metallic bangs of sticks on the bonnets of motor-buses. Students of all kinds were attempting to get into motor-cars, or were standing on the steps of others, or were riding on the bonnets of taxis and buses. Beyond them was the pack to which Jodrell and Butcher pressed forward, a pack of lunatic young men engaged in painting London red—most of them with no top coats over their evening clothes, and with shining silk hats pressed over their ears. This central pack was surrounding and attempting to argue with a body of exasperated police who had captured three of its ringleaders.

Jodrell pointed Stephen out, and Butcher said to him, "Get behind me, and when bobby goes down, you catch hold of young Bacchus and run him out of danger before bobby gets up again."

Butcher lowered his head and went through the tipsy young men as a tank goes through whins. Jodrell walked almost at ease behind those broad shoulders, his eyes set upon Stephen, who was struggling in a policeman's grasp. Arrived behind that policeman Butcher, pretending that he could not help himself, and angrily shouting out, "Don't push, confound you!" affected to stumble, fell forward, and suddenly

down went the policeman.

Stephen would have fallen too, for the policeman did not easily let go his grip, but Jodrell was over Butcher's body in a moment, and seized Stephen round the waist, and bore him straight forward, sending people flying to right and to left of him, receiving more than one nasty blow in his progress.

For a few moments the drunken Stephen believed himself to be still in the custody of police, and struggled, shouted, argued, endeavouring all the while to wrench himself free. When at length he discovered his mistake, although he ceased to bawl and to struggle, he complicated matters for Jodrell by attempting to plant his feet firmly on the ground, while he shouted hoarsely, in a voice that cracked comically, "Here's the hero of the day! Good old Jodder! Three cheers for Jodder!"

Fortunately few people heard him, and those near enough to catch the name either disbelieved him or did not understand what he meant. Annoyed that no cheers were raised, and stupefied by the entire lack of enthusiasm on the part of the crowd, he turned to Jodrell and exclaimed, "What's the matter with the world? Is it mad, or is it drunk? Damn it, why aren't they carrying you shoulder high?"

Jodrell silently and relentlessly pressed him forward, his eyes straining for the easiest way to safety. People made way for him as well as they were able, and he heard voices on all sides of him exclaiming, "How horrible!" "How shocking!" or "That's right; take him home!"

He shot Stephen between two vehicles, and began to press him swiftly forward in the roadway, between the traffic attempting to go north and the traffic attempting to go south. Stephen went headlong for some considerable way, but as they were approaching Lower Regent Street he suddenly realised what Jodrell was doing, and caught hold of the brass rail of a bus and shouted out, "I'm not going home!" and hung there, arguing and furious, his hat on the back of his head, his white tie hanging loose, the front of his shirt gaping open, and blood trickling down his cheek.

The conductor of the bus looked at him for a moment, and then raising his ticket-punch brought it down on Stephen's fingers.

Once again Jodrell was able to go forward, Stephen yelling and shouting, "I want that devil's number. He's smashed my hand. I'll smash his nose for him. Let me go, Jodder! What the hell are you doing?"

It was easier in Piccadilly, and after a few difficult and sickening minutes Jodrell was bearing the protesting Stephen down a foggy passage into Jermyn Street. Here he got hold of a taxi-cab at the corner of York Street, pushed Stephen inside, and gave his order to the driver, jumping in without having released his hold.

For half an hour the cabman drove them through the quietest and darkest streets

of London, where fog hung thick and no shop-signs were to be seen; and during that half-hour Jodrell talked soothingly to Stephen, who was spent to the point of exhaustion.

"You mean to say that I'm not to go to Murray's?" Stephen asked plaintively, tragically; "an awful lot of pretty girls at Murray's, best dancers in London, I assure you. By God, Hugh old man, I had the time of my life with the ladies of the chorus behind the scenes. I scattered my calling cards among them. I'm going to send flowers for the whole lot of them to-morrow. Oh, lovely girls! There's only one religion—Woman—Woman! No more philosophy for me. I've graduated man of the world. Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow—ah, to-morrow we ourselves may be with yesterday's seven thousand years. For some we loved, the loveliest and the best——"

After more of this, and a little argument, Jodrell was able to explain his plans to Stephen. Stephen, who was neither to be trusted in the streets nor presentable enough to return to his hotel, was to sleep in Jodrell's home. Jodrell would take him straight upstairs and put him to bed, before any one in the house knew of his presence. Early in the morning he would send to the hotel and get Stephen a change of clothes.

"As long as I can have a drink and a cigarette," replied the conquered Stephen, "I don't care what you do with me. It's an awful thought, Jodder, and explains a good deal of difficult history to me, but just now I'd sell my country for a whisky and soda."

VII

In the peaceful and dimly-lighted library of his old house in St. James's Square, Alfred Riding Spencer Jodrell sat before a slumbering fire, an open book on his knees, tumbled newspapers by his side, discussing with three of his tall sons a political crisis which was like to touch the family fortunes.

Every now and then, however, he appeared to lose interest in this discussion, and would look secretly away to the clock on the mantelpiece, and purse his lips, and wind his long watch-chain round a forefinger, as if waiting for some one to arrive, afterwards bringing his deep-set eyes round to the group before the fire, nodding his head as if he had been listening with great attention, and saying, thoughtfully, "Yes, that is very true," or "You are quite right, Arthur."

He was a tall, thin, slightly-built man of sixty-eight years, who had devoted himself to scholarship, athletics, country work, agriculture, politics, and the Church,

making himself universally beloved, and earning for himself in all camps an enviable reputation for scrupulous fairness, a wide charity, and a sound judgment—an honourable figure in the national life.

But now this once bright and whimsical spirit was surrendering to the fatal pessimism of old age. He told himself that he had failed in everything. His translation of the Odyssey, the careful and yet impassioned work of many years, was forgotten; since the War, ministers had ceased to consult him in their difficulties; the party in the Church to which he was profoundly devoted was going over to extremists; neglected agriculture was drifting into a condition of ruin; the splendid and familiar houses of his neighbours in Gloucestershire were either in the hands of the new rich or being turned into schools and public institutions. Because he was getting old and his faculties were wearing out, he could not see that though some things have changed for the worse many more things have changed for the better. He had fallen out from his place in the ranks of humanity, and believed therefore that the Grand Army was marching to defeat.

And here were three of his six sons, one of whom was a member of the House of Commons, another a King's Counsel, and the third a director of a great bank, all sound and careful men who weighed their words and never listened to mere gossip, speaking openly of a condition in the political world which appalled him. He shook his head with great sorrow, and with sharp distress showing in his face.

"But he does draw the line somewhere," said the K.C., speaking of a certain minister.

"Does he?" asked the Member of Parliament. "Where?"

"For one thing, he cannot swallow William Laslett," replied the lawyer.

"But he has taken his money."

"He'd take any one's money, of course; but all the same, Laslett is not going to get a peerage."

"I should hope not. A peerage! Good heavens!"

"Laslett?" questioned Mr. Jodrell. "That's the company promoter, is it not? The fellow who is engineering all these combines, as they are called?"

"Yes; he started as an office boy to a solicitor in Derby," replied the lawyer.

"Hugh has made a friend of his son," said Mr. Jodrell.

"That's a pity," said the banker.

"I think I remember Hugh telling us that he's a very clever and charming boy."

The banker looked at his brother the K.C., and said, "I think you'll agree that we should warn Hugh against cultivating that friendship too far?"

The lawyer nodded his head with decision, as if to say, There can be no question

about that.

"You think the father is not a desirable person?" asked Mr. Jodrell.

"I'm quite sure he's not," replied the banker.

"To be perfectly direct," said the K.C., "he's a crook."

At that moment, Hugh entered the room, having seen Stephen safely to bed, put straight his own disordered appearance, not forgetting to rub some ointment into the bruise on his leg.

Mr. Jodrell's face lighted up. "Ah, not so late after all!" he exclaimed, leaning forward from his chair. "Come and tell us all about it, old man. Did you have to make a speech? I hope not, for your sake. Draw up a chair."

The change from the tumultuous streets to this quiet and peaceful room seemed to Hugh almost inconceivably great, almost unimaginably delightful.

He pulled up a chair, said he was afraid he was interrupting an important conference, and then announced, addressing his father, "I've brought a friend back with me, and put him to bed in my room. I hope you don't mind?"

There was a general smile.

"Mind!" said Mr. Jodrell. "I'm delighted. Why should I mind? Was he a little above himself, Hughie?—just a little jocund? Well, after such a match, we will forgive him."

"To tell the truth, he was, sir," replied Hugh. "But there was a rag on, and he got carried away by that." He pulled up his trousers, smiling with amusement, looked at the fire, and added, "Now that I know you don't mind, I can address myself to another problem. Ought I to go round and tell his people? I don't want to. In fact, I want to go to bed. But they may be anxious."

"Can't you telephone?" asked a brother.

"Yes, I could do that, couldn't I?"

"Where are his people?"

"At the Ritz."

"Well, then," cried the father, leaning over his chair to ring the bell, "tell Walker to telephone: that's quite simple. No need to bother, old man." His face lighting up again, he added, "It was a great match, Hugh. That run of yours sent the blood coursing through my veins. I think old Homer could have made something out of that! We nearly cried, didn't we?" he demanded, turning to his other sons. "We had hard work to behave ourselves properly. And the timing of your spring, that was really superlatively good—it was a bit of the purest poetry as well as a truly magnificent bit of athletics."

The butler appeared.

Hugh looked back over his chair, and said, "You might ring up the Ritz, Walker, will you?—and tell the clerk to let Mrs. Laslett know that Mr. Stephen Laslett is sleeping here to-night, and that he'll want a change of clothes sent round in the morning."

The brothers exchanged glances at the notorious name of Laslett, and Mr. Jodrell, drawing down his lips, looked from one to the other of them with twinkling eyes. The humour of the situation was too much for them. When Walker departed, they all laughed together, and all turned to look at Hugh, who was mystified and could not understand why they were amused.

"What's the matter?" he asked, answering their smiles, but anxiously all the same.

"A very curious coincidence," said Mr. Jodrell, "We were speaking of this boy's father, Hughie, a moment before you came into the room."

"Really?"

There was an awkward pause, in which one of the brothers got up and knocked the ashes from his pipe into the fire, looking into the bowl afterwards with a rather grim smile on his lips.

Mr. Jodrell rubbed his chin with the forefinger of his right hand, blinking his eyelids a good deal, and inquired:

"You like the boy, don't you, Hughie?"

"Yes, very much indeed.

"He's quite a nice, straight boy, then."

This was said so emphatically and lovingly that Hugh felt the tension in the room give way, and found himself breathing once more the air of perfect confidence and tranquillity which was the normal atmosphere of the house.

"I think he's bound to make his mark," said Hugh. "He's one of those lucky fellows who do things easily. Nothing's a grind to him. He's going into politics, and a lot of people think he'll be another F. E. Smith: take the House by storm with a first speech, and all that sort of thing. He's what one calls an inspirational person."

"Come, that's interesting," said the father encouragingly.

Hugh got up from his chair, and went across the room to help himself to a glass of soda-water from the syphon. "I think he's now at the critical stage," he said, "and wants a bit of shepherding." He returned to the group, glass in hand, and stood there in the midst of them, an impressive figure, even in his brother's old clothes. "He's a bit high-spirited," he continued. "It might do him good, sir, if you had a talk with him after breakfast to-morrow." He drank, and added, "He told me once that I'd got a laborious mind in a pard-like body. He finds me a bit slow in the uptake. He thinks

one ought to take intellectual risks, and trust to instinct more than to reason." He drank again. "That's all very well, of course, if one has got the machinery for it," he continued, "but it's a bit dangerous even if one has, don't you agree?" He looked round the group, drank again, and returned to the table to put down his glass.

The brothers, who were rather witty people, exchanged smiles.

"There's this to be said, I think," Mr. Jodrell remarked with noticeable deliberation, "that a friendship between you and this brilliant young person has its difficulties, in the circumstances of the present time. We have been speaking this evening, Hugh, rather seriously," he continued, "of a situation which is now rapidly developing in the House of Commons. I needn't trouble you with that; but we are agreed, your brothers and I, that there is likely, very soon, to be a political change of real importance, with even higher taxation, and a consequent worse condition for industry. In other words, times are going to be worse, old man, before they get better, which means particularly bad times for people in our position. Well, that's partly the price of the War, and partly the consequence of a purely urban democracy. We must take things as they are, and make the best of them. I shall certainly have to sell this house, and to get rid of a number of our farms. It is unfortunate, but there it is. I don't want you to worry over these difficulties, which we shall solve in one way or another; but I do think, Hughie old man, that you might with advantage turn it over in your mind whether you can, with comfort to yourself, maintain a friendship so very unequal in material fortune as this friendship of yours with the young man now, I hope, sleeping peacefully in your bed." Mr. Jodrell stroked his chin, and added, "He belongs, you see, to another world. You two can meet in future only by crossing into each other's territory. And he, I take it, would be as discomposed by the climate of your world, as you would be distressed, I am quite sure, by the temperature of his."

The brothers smiled again.

Hugh, who was still standing, and who had listened intently, nodded his head with slow approval. "Yes, that's true. I don't expect to see much of him in future. But I should rather like to see him started. He has got great points." He turned and met his father's eyes. "I'm sorry to hear about your worries. It must be a bad time for you. I've thought of that often lately. I wish I could do something."

"My dear boy, you have covered me with glory to-day; isn't that enough? And next year, you're going to turn schoolmaster and make a fortune!"

"If I had the brains for it," said Hugh, smiling, "I'd ask Mr. Laslett to take me into his office, and see if I could——"

"God forbid!" cried Mr. Jodrell, and flung up his hands in mock horror, and

laughed very heartily as he brought them down on his knees with a resounding slap.

VIII

Stephen came down to breakfast the next morning rather the worse for wear. His face was redder than usual, his eyes appeared to be smaller and more scowling, the look of sulkiness on his lips was more pronounced. He was not only physically deranged by the excess of the previous night, but mentally distressed by the knowledge that he had made a considerable fool of himself in a very public manner.

His distresses might have been less acute if his first appearance after so great a folly had been made in the privacy of his own family. But to descend the stairs of a house quite strange to him, and to take his place at the breakfast-table of a family renowned for its aristocratic exclusiveness and its devotion to the Church, this was a very painful ordeal for so self-conscious and inexperienced a young man.

It was at any rate something of a relief to him to be met by Hugh at the foot of the stairs, and to be greeted in a cheery fashion, as if nothing had happened, and as if no dragons waited behind the door of the dining-room. But when that door opened and he found himself, as it were, pitchforked into the midst of what appeared to be a crowd of very formidable people, the relief of Hugh's presence instantly evaporated from his mind and left him with no other feeling than one of miserable loneliness.

The greeting he received from Lady Emily Jodrell, a big and motherly old person, was kind but a little formal; the greeting from Mr. Jodrell, warm, generous, and friendly. As for Hugh's sisters and brothers, all of whom seemed to Stephen in his present mood very distant and aloof people, they nodded at him, looked at him, he thought, as if he were some odd creature from the Zoo, and then turned to talk among themselves.

While he was standing in their midst, flushed, awkward, and dumb, he noticed that two solemnly-bound books were placed at the head of the table. With a disorganising sensation of sick faintness, his bewildered and chaotic mind realised that these two books signified Family Prayers. He felt his mouth become dryer, so dry as to make speech impossible, and at the same moment his brow became clammy and stone cold.

Before he could right his feelings, the door opened, and at the same moment there was a portentous movement in the Jodrell family, and a sudden cessation of voices. Mr. Jodrell went to the head of the table, Lady Emily sat down in an arm-chair by the fire, the brothers and sisters dispersed themselves about the apartment. Stephen, who had felt himself rooted to the ground, suddenly found himself blocking

the advance of processional servants advancing from the door, and bolted to Hugh's side. They sat down together, at a little distance from the line of servants, who subsided into chairs at one and the same moment.

Stephen clasped his hands between his knees, tucked his feet under his chair, and sunk his head, setting his eyes on a butter-dish on the table, just as he had stared so often at any stupid object outside a dentist's window when the critical moment arrived. The voice of Mr. Jodrell came to him, quiet, deep, resonant, reading from the Gospel. He squeezed his hands between his tight knees, scowled at the butter-dish, and wondered how many of the brothers and sisters were looking at him.

"Let us pray." At last! Thank God!

He got up hurriedly from his chair, kneeled down, buried his face in his hands, and hoped that Mr. Jodrell would go on praying till he had recovered at least something of his shattered composure.

It was with something of a shock that Stephen found the whole family chattering together at the conclusion of these prayers, and heard Hugh slyly suggesting that perhaps he would prefer iced soda-water to coffee or tea. But his nerves were soothed by the voice of Mr. Jodrell addressing him on the subject of the rugger match, and when at last he took his seat at the table, with Hugh on one side of him, and Lady Emily on the other, he was in the mood, if not to do justice to an English breakfast, at least to behave himself with the appearance of a civilised being.

Half an hour afterwards he found himself alone in the library with his host, and before he quite knew how it came about he was giving Mr. Jodrell his views as to his future—what he intended to do when he came down from Cambridge. Mr. Jodrell was interested. There was no doubt about that. You can always tell by the manner in which a man listens whether he is interested or bored. Stephen felt quite sure that this nice old bird was interested. Flattered by the look in the old bird's deep-set grave eyes, by the encouraging nod of the old bird's exceedingly solid big head, and by the occasional "Good!" or "Well done!" that came from those long, judicious-looking lips, Stephen swaggered beautifully about the constituency which was being nursed for him, and the line he intended to take in Parliament.

Then, somehow or another, he found himself entertaining a notion concerning politics which had never before entered his mind. Perhaps he himself had said something which suggested this notion to Mr. Jodrell, for Mr. Jodrell was certainly speaking as if he wished to give Stephen the credit for the idea. He was speaking of England's need for young men in her Parliament who would put country before party, who would be governed by moral earnestness, who would feel in their bones how high and holy a thing it is to serve so great a country, and who would fight with

all the ardent passion of knights-errant to rescue politics from the shameless corruption of these sordid and disappointing times.

"You are perfectly right," he would say; or, "I quite agree with you;" and then go straight ahead with these ideas of his—ideas which made politics something of a religious crusade.

He began to speak of Hugh. He was not sorry, he said, that Hugh had no ambition, and wanted to become a schoolmaster. He thought that the schoolmaster, the conscientious schoolmaster, the schoolmaster born and bred in the great traditions of our race, might do the chief work of the nation in the next fifty years or so—the work of broadcasting those traditions, if he might so put it, among a generation suffering, so far as he could see, from an inadequate home-life and a false theory altogether concerning the business of evolution and the true ends of individual existence.

When they parted it was as if a Nestor, too old to fight, was taking farewell of a young Achilles armed for the battle.

Hugh Jodrell walked to the Ritz Hotel with Stephen, and on the way Stephen, gratefully reviving in the fresh air, held forth on the ideas of Mr. Jodrell. He was impatient to be done with Cambridge, and be out in the fighting line. He spoke of men who would have to be smashed, statesmen whose names were known in every nation, and implied that he was to do the smashing. "The old gang has got to be broken up. What the country wants is young blood."

At the door of the hotel Hugh would have left him, but Stephen was now so wound up to talk that he would give Hugh no rest till he came inside. "I suppose you know," said Hugh, looking at his watch, "that it's nearly twelve o'clock."

"Is it?" cried Stephen; "why, good Lord! I thought it wasn't eleven. But come in; you must."

As they were entering, Mrs. Laslett and Phillida, who had been shopping, drove up to the door. Phillida called to Stephen from the window of the car, making him turn in the doorway.

At sight of his sister's face, smiling at him out of the car's window, Stephen lost all sense of political ambition, and also all feeling of moral fervour. He smiled very pleasantly back, waved his hand, and exclaimed to Hugh, "Hullo, here's Phillida: you remember her? Good luck—you'll be able to give them a full history of last night."

"I don't think that I had better quite do that," replied Hugh, interested by these new arrivals, and curious about them.

"I've seen your background, you know," said Stephen, "and now you will see mine. We're rather a lively lot, let me warn you; new blood, you see!"

Mrs. Laslett greeted Hugh with an easy laughing good-nature, flashing her great eyes at him, challenging him to tell her what he had been doing to her lamb of a son since last night, and before he could answer that question, inviting him to come inside and drink a cocktail. "I expect that both of you," she said, "have got mouths like brick-ovens."

Phillida, who was watching Hugh, saw that he did not respond with the average young man's pleased satisfaction to this gay raillery of her mother, and began to speak to him about the match at Twickenham, telling him how much she had enjoyed it, using the slang of the modern girl to impress him with the knowledge that she was grown up and out in the world.

They went up by the lift to the Lasletts' suite of rooms, and were greeted there by the persistent sound of a telephone bell, tinkling with a gentle politeness.

Hugh was impressed by the magnificence of the apartment in which this little bell was ringing so urgently and yet so politely. It seemed to him as big as a ballroom, with its end windows looking out on the Green Park and its front windows on Piccadilly. It was elaborately furnished, blazed with lights and flowers, and seemed to have no need of the roaring fire in the grate, it was so oppressively hot even at the door.

Mrs. Laslett with her rich furs thrown open, and seated on a sofa, showing a considerable length of silk stocking, did not wait till Phillida had answered the telephone, but straightway endeavoured to get from Hugh a personal relation of the rag which figured so eminently in many of the newspapers, chaffing both Hugh and Stephen in a manner which declared her cordial sympathy with high spirits of any sort or description.

"It must have been topping fun," said Phillida, coming from the telephone; "I wish I had been there."

"You would probably have had your frock ruined," laughed her mother. "It says in the paper that no end of women had their dresses torn from their backs."

"From their hips, you mean!" laughed Phillida.

At that moment the telephone rang again, and again Phillida went to it, conducting a drawling and slangy conversation about an engagement at a dance-club.

Hugh studied Stephen's background. There were painted boxes of sweets on the centre table, the lids off, the contents disordered. There were numerous unopened packets and parcels fresh from the shops on tables, chairs, and sofas. On the sideboard there was an array of bottles and glasses, with fruit of all kinds on dishes and plates. Sofas and chairs were littered with the Christmas Numbers of

illustrated papers.

Hugh was conscious of these things, and of lights in opposite windows shining through the fog at them, and of Mrs. Laslett's astonishing long leg, and of Phillida's tired drawl as she spoke through the telephone; but more than of anything else he was aware of some almost indefinable scent in this rich and disordered room, which seemed to take all the stuffing out of him, and to make it difficult for him to breathe with freedom.

He thought to himself, "How the deuce do people manage to live such a life as this?" and then, "How the dickens am I to get out of this fugg?" And then, with some sudden, sharp, and miserable pain in his heart, he said to himself, "All the same, this is Stephen's background."

"Mix us each a cocktail," said Mrs. Laslett to Stephen, "while Mr. Jodrell tells us how you both managed to escape Vine Street."

Stephen explained that Hugh was thinking just then more of a white jersey with the red rose of England on its breast than of all the wines and liqueurs in the world.

"Perhaps you will succumb to a chocolate," said Phillida, and advanced to Hugh with one of the boxes from the table. She stood before him, smiling down on him as he raised his eyes to her face.

"Not on your life!" cried Stephen, going to the bottles on the sideboard: "neither sweet nor cigarette must corrupt him till Scotland's glory has bitten the dust. Get away, Delilah; avaunt, Cleopatra!" He asked his mother to name her mixture, and began taking the corks out of bottles.

Again the telephone rang, this time for Stephen, and when Mrs. Laslett heard who it was that had called him she laughed cynically and told Hugh that all the mothers in London were beginning to run after Stephen for their daughters. "What with guarding Stephen from these designing mothers," she said, "and protecting Phillida from Don Juans of every conceivable age, I scarcely have a moment I can call my own."

Hugh was interested in Phillida. He remembered her as a small girl, and as a flapper. He had always thought of her as a queer and perplexing creature who, in a rather diverting fashion, was different from other girls. Now, as he looked up at her smiling eyes, he found that she was not at all different from other girls, but entirely different from the girl he remembered. What had happened to her? How had she managed so completely and so suddenly to jump out of her own skin?

Mrs. Laslett, smoking a cigarette and swinging a leg on the sofa, noticed how Hugh looked at Phillida, and the notion of marrying these two children revived in her mind. She thought that Hugh was one of the most uninteresting young men she had

ever met—heavy, awkward, dumb, and not in the least aristocratic-looking; but what did that matter?—he was the nephew of an earl, his name was part of the history of England, and his family would be extremely useful to Stephen. She decided that she would ask him to dinner to meet Ann Vaudrey.

A page entered the room bearing a letter on a tray. He took it briskly to Stephen, who was just then coming from the sideboard with a glass in his hand.

"For me?" asked Stephen.

"Yes, sir," breathed the page heavily, in a voice evidently affected by the fog. "Just come by special messenger, sir. I brought it up at once."

Stephen took the letter, put down his glass, and while the others talked, and while the page beat his knees with the tray, or knocked the tray with his knees, and looked about him at the grand people in the grand room, he broke the envelope and read the contents. A frown in his eyes gradually gave way to a smile, and then the smile ended in a laugh which attracted the attention of the others.

"There's no answer," he announced to the page. "You are entirely free, my lad, to hop it. I say, Hugh, here's a joke——"

"Hi, wait a minute!" called Phillida to the page, and getting up from her chair she went to the table, took a handful of sweets from one of the boxes, and gave it to the boy, who departed rosy and beaming.

At that moment the polite telephone buzzed again, and once more Phillida went to answer its summons.

"What the devil do you make of this?" asked Stephen, standing at Hugh's side, and handing him the letter.

It was a letter written in a woman's hand on scented paper, with a pretty coloured monogram in a corner. It expressed the hope that Stephen had not been locked up in Vine Street last night, and invited him to tea that afternoon in the writer's flat, as she wanted very much to know how the rag had ended.

Hugh handed the letter back to Stephen, smiled in an amused manner, and said, "Wastepaper-basket."

"But who is she?"

"Goodness knows."

Mrs. Laslett demanded, "What's all this mystifying whispering between you two? What's it about?"

Phillida, who had been listening, put her hand over the telephone and said, "Stephen has had a letter from an admirer." She then continued her conversation.

"Come, Stephen, tell us the secret," smiled Mrs. Laslett. "Who is the wicked vamp that thinks to prey upon his mother's joy?"

Stephen was tearing the letter in half, but he stopped, and said, "No, by Jove; it's polite enough to demand an answer. *Noblesse oblige. Place aux dames.* Never let us forget that. But who the devil is she? I wonder if by any chance she's one of the ladies at the show. Yes, by gad, that's who it is—one of the girls at the show last night!" He laughed delightedly, but of a sudden grew serious and anxious. "But how in thunder," he demanded, "did she get hold of my name and address?"

His mother laughed, laughed with huge amusement, and said that Stephen and Hugh had evidently been going it last night in a manner that did not bear publication. She made a great joke of this suggestion, and elaborated it with all sorts of inferences, and went on laughing and chaffing until even she herself was exhausted.

When Hugh went, very glad to escape from such tedious persiflage, Stephen accompanied him, and descended with him in the lift to the ground floor. At the doorway Hugh suddenly raised his head, looked at Stephen, and said, "By the way, you know, it's quite simple how you came to get that letter."

"How?" asked Stephen, bringing his eyes from answering the look of a pretty girl just entering.

"You told me last night," said Hugh, "that you had scattered the contents of your card-case among the ladies on the stage."

Stephen burst out laughing. "By gad, did I do that?" he asked. "I say, old man, how young that was!"

"I shouldn't answer the letter if I were you."

"No, of course I won't. Gracious, I should think not. But I don't know, you know. I think that I ought to send the child a few flowers and a word of apology for my behaviour last night. Don't you think so? You know, Hugh, when I come to think it over I must have been something a little more than pretty tight last night. God knows what I said and did on the stage. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if some one told me I'd invited the whole chorus to dinner and proposed to half a dozen of the prettiest of them."

Hugh smiled and nodded his head. "I shouldn't be surprised if you had," he said quietly. "You've no idea how uncommonly unlike yourself you were last night." He paused, then added, "But don't forget you're going to set the Thames on fire at Westminster next year. Young blood, old man; young blood and new ideas. I must go now; lots to do: good-bye."

He walked away, thinking to himself that if Stephen had been uncommonly unlike himself on the previous night, Phillida this morning was uncommonly unlike anything that he remembered of her. He was disappointed in Phillida. Why? He could not quite formulate his disappointment in words. Perhaps it was because she

was no longer a child. He was fond of children; always got on well with them; yes, Phillida was no longer a child. In thinking about her he thought of Mrs. Laslett, and thinking of Mrs. Laslett, somehow or another, he recalled the warning of his father in the library last night. He saw quite clearly that Stephen's women-folk complicated his friendship with Stephen.

CHAPTER II

MISCHIEF

I

With the feeling that her life had now come to a crisis, Mrs. Laslett woke one morning, ecstatically, in her house on the Sussex downs. Sunlight filled the sweet heavens, while on earth there was that regal pageantry and hushed stillness of autumn which the month of October, when it is in a poet's mood, can bring to such majestic perfection. Ella Laslett, bubbling a blessing to Nature, and breathing with a smile on her lips, lay wide awake, dreaming her autumn dream.

It was just such a day as she could have wished for this delicious crisis in her life, and long after she had drunk her tea and loved the day for its sympathy with her, she lay in a drowse of dawn, thinking feverishly of the assignation which had at last been compassed—the assignation between her and Leo Daga, not a mere meeting such as had occurred in other people's London houses with vexatious difficulty three or four times since Ann Vaudrey first brought them together, but a real and most blissful assignation for three days' communion in the peace of the country.

The knowledge that Phillida was in the house, that Stephen was arriving soon after breakfast from the constituency he was now nursing with high excitement, and that during the afternoon Hugh Jodrell was to come as a guest for several days—this knowledge did not fret her mind with a single difficulty, nor whisper to her conscience even a passing doubt. Indeed, it must be confessed that this knowledge imparted to the lady's enterprise a feeling of bravado and headlong daring which added an almost swooning intoxication to her pleasure. For was it not in her mind, and had she not nourished the same dear thought at her heart for months and months, not merely to do something slightly improper or a trifle unconventional, but deliberately to sin? And sin, as she saw it, must involve risk, and imply a challenge; indeed, the idea of a God was as necessary, she told herself, to fulfil the ecstasy of a sinner, as the fact of a policeman must be necessary, she imagined, to thrill the danger courted by a thief.

She lay luxuriously in bed beyond her wonted time, looking at the sunlight where it glittered in the burnished tree-tops, inhaling the rich scent of flowers which came to her through the open windows, and listening in a dazed reverie to the two sounds

which of all others most powerfully revived memories of her childhood—the murmurous buzzing of insects and the soft rustling croon of the sea.

Phillida had wakened with at least something of her mother's excitement; for another Season, in spite of all its high jinks and adventurous encounters, had failed to cure her of a feeling which Hugh Jodrell had unconsciously planted in her heart years ago now.

She had often told herself that it was very "young" to think about Hugh as she did think about him, and sometimes she was sufficiently elated by the rush of exciting engagements to think of those thoughts about him as the most ridiculous sentimentalism; but, all the same, the fact stuck in her heart, and could not be dislodged, that no other man in her now quite numerous acquaintance ever created among her disorderly feelings such a delightful sense of romance as Hugh Jodrell, Stephen's friend, who had not been near them for so many unaccountable months, but who was coming to-day on a real visit.

At her mother's instigation, who had her own reasons for keeping her as young as possible, Phillida had submitted her little head, in the summer which had just gone, to a hairdresser famous for the daring and delicacy of his Eton crop. She now presented to the world the most extraordinary spectacle of a boy-girl, for besides being naturally slim and wiry, she wore clothes which emphasised her crop, and fell into the habit of attitudes, gestures, and mannerisms which were certainly more masculine than feminine.

She dressed herself on that particular morning entirely in white, and wondered, as she considered the effect of her reflection in a cheval glass, standing before it slack and bored, whether Hugh would like her in this new fashion, or whether he would say to her reproachfully, "What have you done with your bob? I liked it so much. Please bring it back again." She hoped, of course, that he would like it as much as her girl friends, who envied her daring, and as much as many men she had met in London, who called her "Little Boy Phil," and invited her to sit on their knees.

As it turned out that morning, Mrs. Laslett talked about Hugh Jodrell at breakfast, not to please Phillida, but to keep her own thoughts off the too excitable topic of Leo Daga. Phillida, to avoid any betrayal of her own excitement, coupled the name of Hugh with that of Stephen, and so they talked at breakfast of the meeting between Stephen and Hugh, after months of separation and estrangement, and, each deceiving the other, made that encounter the chief event of this eventful day.

Stephen arrived early in the morning, full of enthusiasm for his election prospects, and with many tales of his effective prowess in dealing with hecklers. He was not

arrogant, not domineering, but his high spirits had carried him to a certain altitude of self-satisfaction, and he had developed a breathlessness of utterance and restlessness of movement which Mrs. Laslett found extremely irritating.

"I wish," she said at last, "you could sit still for a few moments, instead of pacing up and down the room like a caged tiger; sit down quietly, and tell us about Hugh Jodrell. How have you persuaded him to come to us, and how long does he propose to stay?"

"Ah," cried Stephen, with menace; "I'm going to have it out with old Jodder to-night." He renewed his pacings. "I shall leave it till after dinner. I shan't say a word till then, not a word." He stopped dead. "What do you think? Why, honest to God, he wrote me a letter in answer to my direct question whether he wanted to cut connection with me"—here he began to walk about again—"saying that I was a rich man, he a poor man, that we inhabited two different worlds, and all that sort of slosh." He pulled himself up abruptly and flourished a right arm. "Good Lord! why, if I could get him on to one of my platforms I'd sweep the board"—here he started to walk quickly. "They're all mad on footer up there: Jodder's a bigger name with them than Haig, Beatty, or the P.M.: I mentioned him once in one of my speeches and it simply brought down the house." He stopped before them, assumed an oratorical attitude, and spouted, "I said, 'As my school and college friend, Hugh Jodrell, faces a race or charges down on a goalkeeper, so do I face this election, and set out on my victory.' Whoop! you should have heard them. By God, it was splendid!" He burst out laughing. "They shouted and cheered like the very devil."

Mrs. Laslett said, "It's very absurd of him, a man of his birth, and in his situation, to speak of cutting his connection with us. Why, we're the very people to find a rich wife for him."

"Exactly," said Stephen, laughing: "and why not Phillida?"

"I hope he'll get on all right with Leo Daga," said Mrs. Laslett, as if it was a matter of no great moment.

Stephen pulled up short. "What!—is he coming here? When?"

"He's driving himself down. He'll arrive in time for dinner."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night."

"But he's not running after Phillida, is he?" demanded Stephen.

"Don't be ridiculous," said his mother.

II

Mrs. Laslett had given orders early in the morning that the windows in the bedroom reserved for Leo Daga were not to be opened, and she herself had filled that luxurious room with crimson and yellow roses, so deep-scented that when she went there in the afternoon it had the atmosphere of a florist's shop.

This room looked over a terraced garden, with old walls and flagged paths, to magnificent woods of beech and elm, which rose with leisurely and luxurious serenity to a noble height in the far distance, hiding everything beyond themselves save the sky. It was a dim and mysterious room, burning with deep colours, furnished with a significant splendour, adorned with the studied subtleties of a corrupted taste—a taste which felt itself chilled by restraint and irritated by the wholesomeness of simplicity. It was the kind of room, in short, which would have comforted an Oriental potentate, almost satisfied an American film actress, overwhelmed a provincial, and disgusted or amused a gentleman.

Ella Laslett surveyed every object of this splendid room with an anxious and critical eye. She looked at that moment neither gay nor romantic, but hard, stern, merciless, businesslike. She might indeed have been, not a passionate great lady contemplating a sin, but the forewoman of a milliner's shop, taking a last look round, before the doors of the premises were opened to an exacting public. She turned this way and that, examined the roses to see that none had faded, moved a cushion here, an ornament there, ran her eyes over leather-bound books, and at last opened the leaded casements to the westering October sun. Then she passed through a velvet-curtained doorway to the bathroom beyond, where she inspected every detail of that efficient chamber, which had the odour of a hairdresser's establishment. Satisfied at last, satisfied that nothing was amiss, and nothing wanting that could soothe and satisfy the fastidious mind of her guest, she returned to the bedroom, went to the dressing-table, and looked at herself in the glass.

III

For months of ceaseless excitement and feverish unrest, rushing about with fashionable society from one distraction to another, the lively Ella Laslett had nursed the idea in her heart that she would commit a great sin.

She used the word "sin" in her thoughts because it quickened her excitement and vivified in some tremendous way the daring of her impulse. She imagined that she had never been sinful before, conceived of herself as a good person who had been imprisoned all her life in the dungeons of morality. She did not say to herself, "I have been a selfish and stupid person all my days, and now I am going to be more selfish

and stupid still." No; that would have been, for her, wholly untrue. The delight of her soul lay in this very fallacy that she had been an absolutely good woman for years too many to count, and now, before it was too late, she was going to break free from unsatisfying goodness and drink deeply of the intoxicating waters of sin.

As she stood before the glass, thinking of herself in relation with Leo Daga, she became conscious of an idea which filled her heart with an extreme of bitterness. She was young in the worst sense of that word—that mysterious word of a hundred meanings. She was inexperienced. She knew everything; but she had done nothing. Old in knowledge; a child in experience. And Leo Daga, who knew everything, whose penetrating eyes read nothing but the deepest secrets of women's hearts, would he not be sure to think of her disdainfully, with amused contempt, as a woman who too late wanted to be young?

There for her was the bitterness of this colloquy with the soul. Would Leo Daga see?

But Ella Laslett was a fighter, a proud fighter and a gay; and she wanted so terribly to have one great undying memory, sweet with romance and scarlet with iniquity, to colour the greyness of old age; one memory of a daring and tremendous sin to enrich the poverty of advancing solitude and to break up the monotony of her appalling respectability—she wanted this so intolerably that she rallied her fighting high spirits, told herself that she was an extremely handsome woman still, and that even Leo Daga would never guess that she was a complete stranger to wickedness.

IV

Of course Stephen did not keep faith with himself. No sooner had Hugh Jodrell stepped out of the train than Stephen was at him. "My dear old idiot, what on earth made you write me that extraordinarily pompous letter?"

They had it out in the car, and by the time they reached the house the ground was clear for the real business of the day. But before Stephen embarked on that matter they ran upstairs, changed into flannels, and with towels and bathing-dresses over their shoulders set out across the garden for the sea.

"You're going to meet down here," said Stephen, "a girl of whom I want you to take particular notice, one Susan Anstey. The question is this, Jodder: Do I love her, and, even if I do, is she the sort of wife for a political adventurer? Take good stock of her, and report to me your verdict. I may tell you in advance that I've known her all my life. She isn't exactly beautiful. She isn't exactly brilliant. She isn't at all likely to make a sensation in London. But I find her nice and comfortable. Now, can I

afford a wife like that, I who am consumed by ambition?"

Hugh laughed with great amusement. "Are you pulling my leg?" he asked.

"What makes you think that?"

Hugh said that he was the last person in the world to give advice in such a matter, and that, besides, Stephen was sufficiently not a fool to know that the right sort of love never made a mistake. Either a man knows when he's in love, or he isn't in love. If Stephen had any doubt in the matter he had better leave the girl alone.

"That's what I tell myself whenever I'm away from her," replied Stephen; "but the devil of it is, my dear chap, that whenever I come back here and see her I can think of nothing else but loving her. I ran in to see her for five minutes before your train came in, just to make arrangements for to-morrow. Directly I was in the house the old feeling returned, and no sooner did she enter the room than I was—oh, my aunt, all of a shake! Dammit, I nearly proposed to her." He laughed gaily and nervously. "It's a devil of a queer business, this matter of love," he continued. "How is a man to know when he's in love? I get the same feeling I have for Susan when I meet dozens of other girls; the only difference is that with Susan the feeling lasts longer. But suppose I marry her, old cockalorum; suppose I do that; how the devil am I to be sure that the feeling won't wear out, and when I meet other pretty girls ——"

"Oh, that!" interrupted Hugh Jodrell impatiently.

"What do you mean?" demanded Stephen, turning sharply to look at him, half angry, half perplexed.

"Why, you know, you're talking like a rotter; like any tomfool young rotter whose head is turned by the world."

Stephen laughed, and demanded, "Come on, proceed with your lecture."

Hugh proceeded with his lecture. Had they not at Eton taken jolly good care to give the rotters a wide berth? Had they not at Trinity decided that the rotters up there were a sick little lot, not worth a moment's thought? What was it that made a fellow a rotter? Want of principle and want of purpose. Stephen had never been without principles, and without purpose. Why shed them now? Why not stick to his first impulse?

They descended by a sandy path, between tussocks of grass in which here and there was a tamarisk or a stunted whin, Stephen leading the way, to a broad stretch of firm sand with two gay bathing-huts, painted green and white, at its edge.

Stephen was protesting that he hadn't shed one of his principles, and that he had demonstrated a high purpose in life by at once taking up politics, when round one of the bathing-huts, wrapped in a lavender-coloured gown, and with no cap over thick

yellow hair, Eton-cropped, came Phillida, smiling, laughing, and excited.

"I've been waiting for hours. What a time you've been, Stephen."

Such was her greeting, after she had shaken hands with Hugh, and observed with unhappiness the look of startlement in his frowning small eyes as they steadied to take her in.

"Don't be long," she called out over her shoulder, as she walked away from them, drawing the gown closer about her little slender body; "I'm simply dying for a swim."

As they undressed, Stephen went on with his protest. It was just because he had got a serious purpose in life, he declared, that he was so dam anxious about choosing the right sort of wife. He didn't want to make a fool of himself there. The wife he needed was a woman who could help him in his career. He wasn't going to be a silent member. He wasn't going to use St. Stephen's as a club. No dam fear! He was out for blood. *Aut Cæsar, aut nihil!* Now, Susan Anstey, to come to business, was just the very person he would love to stick in his home, if he was going to do nothing but hunt and shoot; but, although his mother persisted in thinking that she was deep, devilish deep, was in fact after the Laslett millions, consumed with social ambitions (Hugh rather started at that), she was in truth an entirely simple thing, and therefore he had to ask himself was she the sort of person who could help him to challenge the world, who would go up with him, singing the "Marseillaise," against the forts of folly, and who would lend him a hand in planting the flag of Youth's Revolt on the battered and fallen walls of Authority!

To which Hugh's final answer, standing there stark naked for a moment in the gloom of the warm hut, was that the only woman a man could marry, he should have thought, was the woman a man knew unmistakably that he loved.

Stephen stopped in divesting himself of his last garment, and exclaimed, "My God, if I had a body like yours I'd conquer the world!"

"And if I had a mind like yours," retorted Hugh, "I'd conquer myself."

V

It bothered Hugh to walk beside Phillida to the distant sea. She walked mincingly, affectedly, like a mannequin, smoking a cigarette as she stepped delicately in canvas shoes at his side. He liked girls, girls interested him, but he could not help himself from wishing this particular specimen of girlhood a hundred miles away, so that he could run through the strong sea air, over those firm sands, to that glittering line of green, blue, and white, breaking, with a sort of menacing challenge, against

the dazzling blue of the sky.

Moreover, Phillida's society made talking a necessity, and Hugh just then did not want to talk, did not want even to think. Set free from the heat and jolting of a third-class carriage on a long cross-country railway journey, escaped, too, from the nonsense to which Stephen had just treated him—unhealthy nonsense, he thought, and implying a bad state of mind in Stephen—he wanted now to think of nothing at all; wanted nothing at all but to run like a boy to the sea, to fling himself into that bracing cold, to wade out quickly, and then to swim with his whole heart in the swimming.

Somehow Phillida took the joy out of things. He did not fancy her Eton crop. He thought she rather overdid things in the matter of her bathing-dress—scarlet, with a dragon-fly or sea-serpent in gold sprawling all over it. And he wished that she was not quite so free with powder-puff and lipstick, and that her drawl was not quite so comically out of tune with the fine sands, the bustling waves, the glowing sky, and the delicious salt sea air. Goodness, what London could do to children straight from the nursery! He should never have known her for the Phillida of even ten months ago.

Luckily for his discomposure, Stephen soon overtook them, running up with high steps, rubbing the muscles of his arms, and going a little beyond them in his eagerness for action.

"Phillida doesn't look," he called, glancing back over his shoulder, "as if she were going to swim the Channel, does she?" He stopped, till they came up with him, and addressing himself to Phillida, told her that she looked more like a chorus girl in a revue than the sister of a future Cabinet Minister. Then, turning to Hugh, he asked, "How do you like her prison-crop, Jodder? Remind you of Eton, old cockalorum?"

"I can see he doesn't like it," laughed Phillida, throwing away her cigarette. "But I assure you it's jolly convenient; it saves no end of bother."

"And it's the last word," said Stephen. "That's what puts the crown on it. *Vive le dernier cri! Toujours le dernier cri!* Come on: I'm cold. Let's run for it. Jodder, I'll race you."

VI

At tea, which was set out for them on a lawn between two confidential-looking cedars of Lebanon, an extraordinary impulse came to Mrs. Laslett. She looked up in passing a cup to Hugh, and really saw him for the first time; and in seeing him for the first time, she had this extraordinary impulse, the impulse to break through his greenness, to trample down his inexperience, to corrupt him and laugh at him.

At that very moment, Phillida, who had been silent and preoccupied ever since the bathe, also looked at Hugh, who, for her, was not only a young giant in flannels, but a man with a mind above flippancy and a soul set on something she could not understand, and felt an overpowering desire to be fine enough in her nature to attract him, dismally telling her poor little mind that she would never attract him, not the least bit in the world, so long as she remained what she was, which was—just any girl of the period.

The consequence of these two looks at Hugh was, first, that Mrs. Laslett became extremely live and provocative, greatly offending Stephen; and, second, that Phillida fell into an even deeper muse than ever, resting her face on the side of her chair and looking sorrowfully to a distant corner of the garden, wondering what she could do to become a different person.

It was a breathless and languorous afternoon—such an afternoon as lulls the mind and encourages the senses to become active. Stephen was disposed to be silent; Hugh was in need of nothing so greatly as forty winks.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Laslett, challenging Hugh with an amused and rather scornful play of smiles in her bold eyes, "that you think us very frivolous people!" She laughed. "Now, don't you? Be honest, and tell us."

Up went Hugh's eyebrows at that, startled and confounded at the same moment. What was he to say?—or to do? He turned to Stephen, also in flannels, who was stretched full length on the grass, looked down at him with a shy and uncomfortable grin, and demanded, "Are you frivolous, Stephen?"

"My excruciatingly funny mother," replied Stephen, without looking up from a dish of sandwiches, "means that you consider she is frivolous, she and Phillida. And so they are. Between them, they have only two ideas in their heads—just two: one, to spend money; two, to kill time."

"That shows how much you know about us," smiled Mrs. Laslett. "But I have never expected you to know anything about me, or about Phillida—anything at all. You are far too self-centred for that."

She looked at Hugh, as she helped herself to a sponge-finger, which she dipped in a bowl of cream, and winked at him. Then she leaned back her head, opened her mouth, and bit at the loaded finger in a manner which was meant to convey the impression of a dashing nature and a wicked disposition.

"That's good!" munched Stephen. "That's almost sublimely good! Self-centred! —a man who has given up everything he cares for in life—hunting, shooting, fishing, and dancing—to serve his country in the hour of its direst need."

"Pecksniff!" said Mrs. Laslett, and at that Hugh smiled so spontaneously and

broadly that Mrs. Laslett really and truly warmed to him.

"People rootedly and inextricably selfish," replied Stephen, "always conceive of disinterestedness in any form as a manifestation of cant."

"But you must admit," said Mrs. Laslett, addressing Hugh, and leaning a little forward to do so, looking at him with unmistakable favour, "that if we are a frivolous lot, we are at least amusing. Stephen's oratory, for example; how killing that is! And his wit—why, it sparkles as brightly as the grains of sand in your ears, on your cheek-bones, and round your mouth." She laughed, keeping her eyes on his. "I wonder how much sand you have swallowed with your tea! No!—don't brush it off; it looks charming, I assure you. Phillida, let me look at you. Are you also sand powdered? What are you doing, child, moping like that?"

Phillida, called from her musing, turned round to find the others staring at her, even Stephen, who had rolled on one side to do so. "I think I've eaten too much tea," she said sadly; "I feel rotten."

She looked like an abandoned doll, thrown there by a child who had gone off to play with something more exciting; pathetic, too, she looked, with her cropped hair, her powdered face, her pencilled eyebrows, and her carmine lips—such a child, and yet as unlike a child as a poor little fungus is unlike a branch of apple-blossom.

"You oughtn't to have bathed," said her mother.

"Go to bed," said her brother, and rolled back to the sandwiches.

But Phillida, ignoring these remarks, took a cigarette from a box on the table, and said to Hugh, "Aren't you going to play tennis with Stephen? I'm sure talk must bore you."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Laslett; "I hope to heaven he isn't bored by talk. If he is, Stephen will bore him to death before dinner, and Leo Daga this evening will extinguish him quite."

"Ah," cried Stephen, looking up suddenly at Hugh; "you didn't know you were going to meet Leo Daga to-night, did you? Toss me a cigarette, Phillida. Well thrown! Also well caught. No, thanks; I've got a match. No; you didn't know that, Jodder, did you? It's my mother's idea of an *omelette surprise* for you: something screamingly hot that will leave you stone cold. Ever heard of him, by the way?"

"Heard of whom?" asked Hugh.

"Leo Daga."

"I'm afraid not," said Hugh, who never went to the theatre, was seldom in London, and who had had little time to spare for the last few years from Plato, Aristotle, and Herodotus.

There was a great outburst at that—Stephen uttering some sort of delighted

crow, Mrs. Laslett exploding with amazement, and Phillida, who was very unhappy, expressing incredulity with the bitter laughter of reproachful scepticism.

"Honour bright," asked Stephen, recovering himself, and genuinely interested—he was sitting up now, with his hands clasped round his knees, his eyes fixed upon Hugh—"honour bright, you've never heard of Leo Daga?"

Hugh shook his head, expecting that this illustrious foreigner was a member of the Russian ballet.

"I don't believe it!" expostulated Mrs. Laslett, with tremendous emphasis.

"How could he escape hearing of him?" asked Phillida.

"I don't believe it," repeated Mrs. Laslett; "not for a moment. He's pulling our legs."

"That's very interesting," said Stephen to Hugh quietly, reflectively, nodding his head. Then he turned his eyes to his mother. "How often have I told you, my dear and most expensive Mama," he said, "that there is not one world in London, but a score at the very least. You will persist in imagining, nothing will cure you of it, that there is only one great big world, which, in the words of your favourite poet, keeps on turning—turning to the hurdy-gurdy music of fashion's merry-go-round. But, in truth, London is divided up into as many parties as split the Christian Church; and there's a world in England still which cares as greatly for the invisible values as you care for those visible things which fashion sticks in her window, which irony tickets with a price, and which God Almighty warrants not to wear."

"I love him in these moods," said Mrs. Laslett; "he makes me feel so exquisitely young."

"Young!" exclaimed Stephen. "You're the youngest thing I've ever known. It isn't the beauty doctor or the permanent waver of hair who keeps you so exquisitely young, my lady mother; it's your own inexhaustible appetite for gewgaws; you are like Tennyson's delightful baby, new to earth and sky, always new; and your newness will go on being newness to the end of your days, simply because you are satisfied with little things. I envy you, I assure you. It must be very jolly to come fresh to every silly pleasure of the world; to greet each new Season when it comes round as a child greets its first grand party. But every jolly thing in life has to be paid for, you know; and you are paying for your youngness as you go along. Oh, I could hold forth on this theme for many hours; but Phillida said something about tennis, and I don't want to bore Hugh another moment, seeing what is before him this evening, poor dear. Dammit, I wouldn't have asked him if I'd known about Leo Daga. Honest to God, I wouldn't!"

He threw away the end of his cigarette, got upon his feet, and then, the cloud

clearing from his eyes, with a sudden smile, very boyish and free from all malice, he said to Hugh, "I say, what about pulling Leo Daga's leg to-night? You and I together could do that beautifully. He's a sort of Thespian Freud, let me explain to you: a pathological Oscar Wilde: phosphorescent on the surface and slimy underneath; oh, lots of slime. Let's pull his leg. Shall we? We could do that, you know, by pretending to treat him as a serious thinker. Oh yes, lots of fun there. But, in the meantime, tennis."

VII

From one of her bedroom windows, a window facing east, Ella Laslett saw the motor-car of Leo Daga, scarlet and black, shining through the trees as it came swiftly and smoothly up the gravelled carriage-road to the balustraded court in front of the house.

She stood by a curtain of rose-coloured silk, with diamonds in her hair, diamonds round her neck, and diamonds in her ears, clothed, so far as she was clothed at all, in a flashing, glove-fitting, snake-like dress of silver sequins, her arms bare, her back naked, glittering paste buckles on her silver shoes—a really picturesque figure of a fashionable woman standing up to middle-age, and defying the world to overlook her—a figure still picturesque and not yet ludicrous.

The shaded lights on the broad dressing-table, which was strewn with jewellery and sprinkled with powder, threw no softening pink ray on her glowing face and fevered eyes. She looked, indeed, almost her years, and hard, and unromantic, as the tremulous mist of twilight, through which the scarlet-and-black car was flashing its way, fell on her through the grey panes of the leaded casement.

But she did not want to look romantic—indeed, that was the last thing she desired to look—nor did she greatly mind if she did look just a little hard. No, there was no nonsense about her; she was a realist before everything else. No; she was perfectly honest; not pretentious; not the silly and deluded victim of a girlish sentimentality—the thing of all other things that would bore a man like Leo Daga. She knew how she looked, and it was what she wished to look—a woman of years, with a heart full of gay wickedness, and with courage enough to meet a bold man something more than half-way.

As the car swerved from the roadway to take the turn into the courtyard, with its iron gates thrown wide open, something about Leo Daga, something she had never before noticed, struck her all of a sudden as irresistibly comic. He looked so very small in that great long showy car—so very small and so absurdly nonchalant; and he

seemed to her to be sitting up to keep control of the steering-wheel as a child sits up to catch hold of something just above its reach. Was he, or was he not, rather like an organ-grinder's monkey? She laughed, and looked quite handsome. The laugh did her good; it strengthened her self-confidence. He really was rather a funny little person.

She waited till the car had stopped at the porch, just beyond her view, and waited till she heard Stephen's voice greeting the distinguished guest; then, as they entered the house together, she turned away from the darkening window, glanced at the watch on her wrist by the light on her dressing-table, walked about the room for some moments, occasionally looking at herself as she passed a mirror, and finally, as if she had made up her mind to do a daring thing, went quickly to a line of books on a table beside her bed. With her breath coming a little faster, and a warmer colour brightening her face, she chose two of those slender books—bound in brown leather and beautifully gold-tooled—and carrying them in her hand, went to the door, opened it, and stood there listening, waiting to hear Stephen and Leo Daga go to their rooms.

VIII

One of Hugh Jodrell's aunts, a widow who lived in Herbert Crescent and was interested in hospitals and in hostels for girls, had given him a hundred guineas on his coming down from Cambridge, and told him, with a gentle laugh, to buy himself a respectable wardrobe of clothes. To-night he was wearing some of these new clothes for the first time, and, as it happened, experienced the most trying difficulty in getting a new collar to take kindly to an old stud in a new shirt. Arrayed in new trousers, new shoes, and this new shirt, his hair unbrushed, and traces of soap in his ears, he was walking up and down a gaudy bedroom, cursing the rebellious stud, when all of a sudden there came to his ears a soft and rather significant tap on the door.

He stopped, listening, his hands still raised to the collar, and when the tap was repeated, he called out, uncertainly, "Come in," and stood facing the door in an attitude which suggested a question.

To his amazement, and also to his consternation, Stephen's mother glided into the room, dressed in some confounded garment that shivered like burnished steel, her body all over the shop, and a reek of scent coming from her which was altogether too thick for his notion of healthiness.

"Don't be frightened!" she laughed, when the door was closed, and advanced

towards him.

He said something about being sorry he was so late, and she laughed again, telling him he looked extremely well in that *déshabillé*, and offering to fasten his collar for him.

But he would not have that, and backed away from her, and went on working at the collar and the stud with a contorted face and angry hands, damaging his finger-tips and crumpling his shirt.

She laughed again. "Look here," she said, "I've brought you these books. They're two of Leo Daga's comedies. You really ought to read them. Glance through them to-night, and to-morrow you'll know something about him. Whatever Stephen may say, he's a genius, and you ought to know what he is thinking about. It will make you less—what shall I say?—less stiff and starchy. Look, I'll put them on your bed-table."

"Let me do that."

"No, stick to your collar."

"I've done it now. At least, I think so."

"Good. Shall I tie your bow for you?"

"Oh no, thanks. I can do that all right, after a fashion."

She looked about her. "You're sure you've got everything you want? They're looking after you properly?"

He assured her on that point.

"You're such a boy," she said, laughing and flushing, "that I feel I ought to come to you to-night to tuck you up in bed."

He laughed uneasily. "Oh, my hat, please don't do that!"

She laughed again. "But why? Are you frightened of me?"

"Anything you like," he said, rather brusquely, but still smiling.

"All the same, I don't think you're frightened of me in particular. You're frightened of women in general. Aren't you, now? You think we're awfully dangerous; don't you? You amuse me, you know. It's wonderfully refreshing to meet a handsome young man——"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed, and laughed, and picked up his hair-brushes.

"It's wonderfully refreshing to meet an extremely handsome young man," she persisted, "who thinks women are wicked and dangerous, and all that sort of old-fashioned stuff about us. We're not in the least that, you know; we're only mischievous. We keep our childhood longer than men, and we like fun. Shall I brush your hair for you? I'm sure you can't see in that bad light. Why, you haven't turned

up all your lights! How stupid of you!" She went to the switches, and filled the room with brightness in every corner. He was grateful for that. "That's better, isn't it?" she asked. "Now Adonis can see himself as Venus sees him!"

"I say," he exclaimed, "you are making me feel awfully uncomfortable. I don't want to be rude, you know, but I wish you'd go. D'you mind? I hate people in the room when I'm dressing. It makes me stick about."

This sort of thing was as new to her as it was to him; and she was as greatly exercised in her mind as to how she could go gracefully as he was to be rid of her without positively shoving her out neck and crop.

"Well, I'll go," she laughed, "on one condition."

"What's that?" he asked, rather too quickly for politeness.

"Why," she blinked, fingering her necklace, "that you will promise me to read Leo Daga's plays. I really want you to understand him. I want you to be friends with him. Will you promise me, now?"

"Yes, rather. Thanks awfully for bringing the books."

"Well, we'll meet downstairs."

IX

Phillida had asked her friend Tony Hellington to dinner, to make the third woman, for Tony was a girl. She was a girl of a naturally exuberant nature, full of individuality, a copy of no one, unconventional, bright as a button, healthy as a lark, freckled and sandy-haired.

It was of this nice Tony that Hugh was first aware on rather miserably entering the long low-ceiled drawing-room, with its subdued amber-coloured lights, its numerous cushions, the colour of which were not subdued, its bowls and bowls, and vases and vases, of splendid flowers, its jade walls, and its black silk curtains.

She was standing beside the mantlepiece, holding forth to Phillida, who was crumpled up at the end of a couch smoking a cigarette. Mrs. Laslett was sitting in an arm-chair under a standard lamp, at some little distance from the fire, reading an evening newspaper. The freckled Tony was describing in a loud but pleasant voice to Phillida a county tennis championship in which she had just taken part, and was swaying from one wide-planted foot to another as she spoke, sometimes running her right hand down her right thigh, while with her left hand she held a piece of nibbled nougat half-way to her lips. The box of nougat stood open at her side on a little walnut table.

She looked at Hugh with genuine interest and frank admiration, and so pleasant

and natural was her greeting that he quite forgot the appalling glory of his new clothes, and almost forgot the abysmal misery which Mrs. Laslett's recent mischief had planted in his mind. In a few moments he and Tony were talking with ease and pleasure of rugger and soccer, cricket and tennis, hurdling and running, while Mrs. Laslett went on reading her paper.

Phillida, very pale, less painted, and utterly miserable, smoked her cigarette in silence, listening to these two healthy and athletic people with a sick anguish in her heart, wishing that she had asked Susan Anstey, who was quiet and demure, instead of Tony Hellington, who was so overpoweringly muscular, wishing also that her hair was not Eton cropped.

Stephen's vigorous entrance into the room, flushed by all his exercise and a steaming hot bath, diverted her from this brooding; she roused her drooping spirits to attend to his answers to their mother's questions concerning Leo Daga, finally breaking into those laconic answers to ask, "I say, aren't we going to have a cocktail to-night?"

Stephen rang the bell, and turning to Hugh, dabbing one of his cheeks with a handkerchief, after the manner of one who has just shaved over-quickly for comfort, declared that this great lion in their midst was very like the result of a famous mountain's parturition.

"He stands with his hands on his hips," he said, "his arms akimbo, and sways from his waist, and looks at one as if he had whiskers and was twitching them at the smell of cheese. About so high. His feet are rather smaller than Phillida's, I should say; and his little pudgy square hands are the colour of Gruyère cheese. I'm perfectly certain that his luggage contains face-powders, scented hair-lotions, and curling-tongs. Well, you'll see for yourself. But I warn you beforehand you won't like him."

A servant entered with cocktails.

Mrs. Laslett, laying down her paper and telling Stephen not to talk nonsense and not to give himself airs, said to Tony, "You've seen his plays, haven't you?"

"I've seen one of them," said Tony, refusing a cocktail.

"Didn't you like it?" asked Mrs. Laslett.

"Now be honest, Tony," cried Stephen; "we won't split on you."

"I thought it was awfully clever," smiled Tony.

Phillida, taking a cocktail, half-turned to Hugh and said, "You haven't seen or read any of them, have you?"

"Not yet."

"I don't think you'll like them. They're awfully clever, as Tony says, but I doubt if any one really likes them."

"I adore them," said Mrs. Laslett.

"I think it's like this," began Tony vigorously, addressing both Hugh and Phillida, "they're brilliantly clever, brilliant, but they're all about the sort of people——"

At that moment the door of the drawing-room was rather quickly thrown open by a servant, and, after a moment's pause, Mr. Leo Daga entered the room.

Entrances are a part of our manners, and the best entrances, like the best manners, are, of course, natural and unstudied.

But Leo Daga's manners were acquired from watching people in fashionable hotels, restaurants, night-clubs, and casinos, and they were not quite English, though he thought they were, for he loved the English above all other nations; and so his entrances, his important entrances, were never natural and simple, but studied and acted.

He could act, not very well, the entrance of cheerful and frank gladness, or the pleased and agreeable but restrained entrance; better the bored, listless, unattending entrance affected by young bloods at smart gatherings; or the casual sort of entrance, with its scarce lifted hand, and its smiling, "Hullo, old man!"—suitable for clubs and hotels; and, best of all, as on this occasion, the dubious and expectant entrance, the slightly embarrassed entrance, the entrance of one who knows himself to be a social lion but is a little painfully apprehensive at coming among people whose degree of civilisation is not known to him, the entrance of an established lady-killer, stimulating and provocative; in short, the staged and studied entrance which is one-third assurance, one-third misgiving, and one-third watchfulness for effect.

It was to be noticed that his right hand fingered the coat sleeve of his left arm, while the left hand, between the fingers of which was a newly lighted cigarette, wriggled itself in its cuff. Also that he took small hesitating steps, looking doubtfully from one to other of the people he was to meet, his head moving a little from right to left, his body wriggling from the hips in the same direction, a boyish smile on his lips, a smile that was almost a croon, while a bright-darting light in his restless dark eyes seemed to be a disarming appeal for a kind welcome from people who, he felt certain, were as modern as himself, and, of course, charming.

It was plain that he knew himself to be the perfect European, at home—oh, so beautifully at home—in Paris, Cairo, Venice, Deauville, and Cannes, though the Riviera was getting a little vulgar, don't you think?—and a connoisseur in women—but of course; all kinds of women, naturally—Grand Duchesses and dancing girls, courtesans and artists' models, the woman one remembers for a year, the girl one forgets next morning, and the great lady to whom one still sends little precious gifts from Bond Street and the Rue de la Paix; and an epicure in the matter of eating and

drinking, but that goes without saying, one to whom the director of every exclusive restaurant in Europe flew on his entrance, brushing aside the stupid new waiter handing Monsieur the ordinary menu or *carte du jour*—flew to him eagerly, as poet to poet, to compose, with his help, of course, a *déjeuner* of exquisite satisfaction or a dinner that would haunt memory like a strain of music.

This was plain, this was at once manifest; as also that he knew the names and addresses of all the most expensive tailors, bootmakers, shirtmakers, hatters, florists, jewellers, hairdressers, and glove-makers in London; and yet it was also plain that he did not want you to think of this; that he did not want you to be in the least afraid of him, or overawed by the immense range of his knowledge and the unerring character of his taste, or to think that he was criticising your clothes and your furniture, and would presently criticise your dishes and wines; no, he wanted you to be perfectly at your ease, and to like him because he liked being liked, and because it was so much more jolly when people liked each other at once.

"How good of you to come!" said Mrs. Laslett.

That, of course, called for an immediate expostulation. "But," flashing his eyes all over her, drinking her in, "how delightful to be here." He looked about him, his hands on his hips, the cigarette smoking between his fingers.

The tone of his husky voice lingered in the room.

"I hope Stephen received you properly?" asked Mrs. Laslett, endeavouring to appear nonchalant.

He swung round on his hips, and flashed his eyes over Stephen. "He was charming to me."

"Have a cocktail," said Stephen.

"Even more charming now!" laughed Leo Daga, and removed his right hand from his hips to take the glass, laughing his thanks into Stephen's face, and then drawing a little back from him.

Mrs. Laslett introduced Leo Daga to the others, pointing each one out with a careless wave of a naked arm and a smile of chaffing pleasantness. "That's Antonia Hellington—for short, Tony." "That's Mr. Hugh Jodrell, famous in all sorts of strenuous ways." "And this is Phillida, without her bucket and spade. She has been paddling this afternoon and has overtired herself."

To each one of them Leo Daga made an appropriate little bow, accompanied by a nice little gurgling laugh, and a nice little gurgled "How-do?" as if the whole thing was a delightful joke.

Then Mrs. Laslett said, for a servant had just then thrown open folding doors at the end of the room, "Shall we go in to dinner?" and took Tony Hellington's hand

and walked towards the open doors, shimmering, tinkling, and diffusing perfume.

Leo Daga, drawing sharply back to let her go by, seemed for an unguarded moment to express surprise and disappointment. His dark eyes flashed. He looked from Stephen to Hugh, and from Hugh to Stephen, finishing his cocktail quickly, leaning forward to fling his cigarette into the fireplace, which was strewn with such litter. Then recovering himself and pulling down his dinner-jacket, he inquired of Stephen in a subdued voice, "But is your father not here to-night?"

X

Ella Laslett did not know that there is a mischievous spirit in the universe, as well as in the hearts of certain high-spirited ladies; and that this mischievous spirit, into whose charge the universe appears to have given some of its resources in retribution —for retribution has its comic aspects as well as its tragic aspects—is never quite so impishly active, never quite so Puckish with inspiration and invention, as when it comes across a person who sets out to defy in a gay and playful spirit those useful provisions which Providence has ordained for the good and advancement of mankind.

Not knowing this, the high-spirited lady sat down to her oysters on powdered ice, Leo Daga at her right hand and Hugh Jodrell in his new clothes at her left hand, with no misgiving in her heart, and with no notion at all in her mind that she was playing the chief part in a comedy which had perhaps already begun to move the universe to titters. If she had thought about the universe at all she might have imagined it as angry with her, shocked by her, or in tears because of her, but surely not as laughing at her. And so to-night, dressed, as we have seen, in the shimmering armour of defiance, she looked about her with all the amusing self-assurance of recent fashion and with all the imprudent recklessness of modernity, sublimely aware of only one thing, as her merry eyes flashed from the freckles of Tony to the thin shoulders and Eton crop of Phillida, that, for a man of taste and knowledge, there was only one woman at that table.

They sat in a circle of orange light glittering with silver and glass, and burning with magnificent roses. Maids in purple dresses, with a purple band in white linen caps, came noiselessly to their sides from the mysterious gloom of dark peacock-blue walls faintly reflecting a greenish opalescent light. Heavy curtains of dull gold, looming from the mysterious shadows of the background, suggested veiled doorways leading to haunted chambers or gardens of moonlit enchantment. Gently and almost elusively, stringed music floated through the room from a wireless

contrivance in the hall, whispering to the young people not to be too long over their eating and drinking, for dancing was to come, humming in the ear of Ella Laslett, the high-spirited lady, who was all eyes and appetite, a lilt which went from ribaldry to depravity as easily, naturally, and lightly as words or stupidity go to music of vulgarity.

To play impudently with the unsmirched spirit of Adonis on her left hand, to meet boldly and rakishly the unclean spirit of Lothario on her right hand, and all the time to keep the tinsel ball of frivolous conversation tossing between Phillida, Stephen, and Tony—this was the part she had chosen for herself, and this was the part she now began to play with a self-confidence and a gay excitement which animated both her manners and her fine eyes.

Leo Daga, having sat down impressively, and possessed himself of his napkin, delicately took a fork to his oysters, touched one of them lightly, playfully, and then, looking up at Mrs. Laslett, inquired in his husky cigarette voice:

"Your husband, then, is not here to-night?"

She met his gaze with an understanding smile and a slight flicker of her eyebrows. "Isn't it a nuisance?" she said, and laughed softly to herself at the way in which these modern men about town waste no time in making their advances.

"I am disappointed," he said, and there was no mistaking the fact that he was disappointed. He took an oyster as if he hated it.

Yet, Ella Laslett, intoxicated by her mischievous spirit, could not believe in his disappointment. He was acting, of course; hiding his secret pleasure behind one of the amusing hypocrisies of politeness. How soon might she expect to feel the edging advance of a shoe under the table? "Perhaps," she said, turning to him with an oyster stuck in a fork and held almost against her painted lips, "he will come to-morrow."

"Only perhaps!" he reproved her.

She threw back her head, making the diamonds on her full neck glitter excessively, and popped the little oyster into her open mouth with an air intended to convey a meaning—to him, a meaning, oh, so stale.

This reproof, however, though it did not choke her, came as rather a shock. Could it be that he was not acting his disappointment? Could it be, but this surely was unthinkable, that he wanted to meet her husband? She looked at him, met his dark eyes, tried to smile, and said, "You puzzle me."

He drew back his head, trying to think what she could mean, and then gratefully swayed away from her as a maid came out of the shadows to take his plate. He picked up a little piece of brown bread-and-butter at his side, looked at it, and replied, "I hate not being lucid;" then, suddenly raising his eyes, "How have I puzzled

you?"

She laughed, and at that he began to eat the bread-and-butter, glancing away from her, running his eyes round the table, from Hugh to Tony, from Tony to Stephen, and from Stephen to Phillida, who was on his right. What the devil did she mean, this tiresome woman?

"But why do I puzzle you?" he asked, and laughed too, for the sake of politeness, but it wasn't a polite laugh.

"I don't understand," she replied, standing up to that laugh very well, "why you should want to meet my husband; you would have nothing in common with him."

"It is part of my modernity," he said, gently correcting her, but firmly, unmistakably, "that I have something in common with every one. Besides, your husband must be a very interesting person." Then in a tone of quiet but really annoyed reproach, "Don't you remember you told me at Lily Bradford's that he would be here? and don't you remember that I said how much I should like to meet him? Don't you remember?"

"I thought you were being beautifully polite."

"On the contrary, I was never so selfish."

At that there was a pause, and in the pause came the soup. They both touched the edges of their plates, looking into their contents, and then raised their heads and confronted each other. In the meeting of their eyes their souls crossed swords. Hers said, "I am getting rather sick of this!" and his, "You don't suppose I came all this long way to see you, you vulgar old minx!" She felt herself go suddenly cold; he, that if he did not quickly bring the safety-valve of laughter into action he might explode with his hot, angry disappointment.

She smiled her eyes away from him and took up a spoon to play with her soup. He smiled his eyes away from her, pushed his soup-plate from him, rested his hands on the edge of the table, and turned to Phillida on his right. "Oh dear," sighed his soul, "what a fool I was to come to these dreadful people."

Phillida, who had lighted a cigarette after her oysters, held the cigarette between her fingers, while she drank her soup. It sent up a little column of smoke between them. She looked at him through this drifting smoke as he turned to her, and said, "I suppose you're studying us. All's fish that comes to your net, I expect. It must be frightfully interesting."

He said to himself, taking her in at one glance, "Imitation!" but aloud, and with a smile, "I give myself sometimes a holiday. How beautiful these roses are! They smell, too, which is so kind of them. Tell me, do you drive a car?"

In a moment his conversation had skipped over her plate and passed into

energetic partnership with Stephen. Stephen was interested in cars. They talked about different engines and various bodies, and the subject being an extensive one, they talked about it till dessert came to the table and the noiseless maids in purple had withdrawn from the room, leaving the port in front of Stephen. All that long time Leo Daga's left shoulder was turned to Ella Laslett. He talked across Phillida, who was merely an Imitation of every other young girl of the period; he sometimes exchanged a word with Tony, whom he had classified with no hesitation as "Muscular and Bucolic"; but to Ella Laslett, the glittering and reckless lady of mischievous defiance, he presented, not a fumbling foot, but a cold shoulder.

She had broken her word to him.

As she gave the signal to Tony, and as Tony rose, she turned to Leo Daga and said in a low voice, "I want to talk to you, alone——" and rose before he could reply, saying to Hugh, who was pulling back her chair, "Don't let Stephen talk himself hoarse."

A fire of logs had been lighted in the drawing-room while they dined, and with one of her arms round Tony's waist and the other round Phillida's, she drew them up with her to the hearth, and stood before the cheerful spluttering of the fire, asking them what they thought of her literary hero.

Tony said that he was more agreeable than she had expected, and that he evidently knew all there was to know about cars. Phillida said that he was not in the least like his plays, and that she had never sat next a man who had so persistently talked across her.

"What do *you* think of him?" asked Tony, lifting her freckled face from looking at the burning logs and directing one of her least frank smiles at Mrs. Laslett.

Ella Laslett, still looking down at the fire, said offhandedly that she had been so interested in Hugh Jodrell that really she had taken very little notice of Leo Daga. "I think," she said slowly, slowly for her, "that Hugh is one of the strangest young men that I have ever met."

"Oh, but he's a dear, isn't he?" cried Tony, with absolute conviction.

"Isn't he?" said Phillida.

"Not an atom of swank about him," said Tony. "You'd never think—would you?—that he's adored at Cambridge and gets the biggest cheer of any man in England on the rugger field. He's just as simple and natural as a schoolboy." She named a younger brother, then at Marlborough, and said he'd be frightfully bucked when she wrote to tell him that she had met the great Jodder at dinner, and had even sat next to him.

Ella Laslett said, "But why is he so entirely without ambition? He hasn't got an

ounce of Stephen's go. Fancy a man of his family, and with his chance, wanting to be a schoolmaster."

"Yes, I can't understand that," said Phillida.

"Well," argued Tony, "he's devoted to games; and a schoolmaster gets jolly long holidays."

"Still," said Ella Laslett.

"Yes, it beats me," agreed Phillida.

"I see what you mean," conceded Tony.

At that moment coffee was brought into the room, and they backed away from the fire, and separated—Ella Laslett going to the chair under the standard lamp, where the evening newspaper still lay, and Tony taking one corner of a couch, and Phillida the other.

"Don't you want to dance?" asked Phillida.

"I do rather," Tony admitted. "After supper walk a mile."

"If they don't come soon I'll call them. Have you seen the *Sketch* this week?"

"No."

"I'll get it."

They looked at pictures for some time, and then Phillida drank up her liqueur, lighted another cigarette, and foxtrotted to the folding-doors. Tony watched her; Mrs. Laslett, reading the evening newspaper, listened.

"Aren't you coming in?" inquired Phillida, putting her head round the corner of the door, which she had opened only a little space.

"Go away," said Stephen.

"We want to dance," pleaded Phillida.

"You are interrupting a philosophical discussion of the greatest moment," said Stephen. "Go away."

Phillida closed the door and returned crestfallen to the couch. As she passed Mrs. Laslett, who lowered the newspaper to look at her, she said, "Isn't Stephen a beast?" To which Mrs. Laslett made answer, "Almost always. How did Leo Daga look to you? Bored or otherwise?"

Phillida pouted. "They all looked the same. As if they wanted to go on talking for ever and ever."

Tony jumped up. "Let's dance, Phillida. Come on. This is a jolly tune: don't let's waste it."

They went to the hall and danced, and when they were tired they returned to the drawing-room, flopped down on the couch, and talked, neither of them with any pretence of being interested.

At last Tony announced that she must depart, and got up from the couch. Phillida went to the bell, and rang it. "Come on," she called; "I'll go with you to put your things on."

Tony bade Mrs. Laslett good-bye, and strode lustily after the departed Phillida, who was now dancing by herself in the hall.

Alone in the deserted room, Ella Laslett let the paper lie on her knees, rested her elbows on the arms of the chair, joined the tips of her fingers together, and, over their tips, looked at the distant fire.

A maid appeared.

"Miss Hellington is going," said Ella, lifting up the paper.

The maid bowed, and began to move away.

"I think," said Ella, "you had better go into the dining-room now. It's getting late."

The maid, who had turned, announced from the door that they had already cleared the table.

Ella was surprised. "Where are the gentlemen, then?"

"They are in the garden, madam."

In her bedroom, when the lights were put out, Ella Laslett looked from the big open windows above the lawn, and saw three white shirts approaching from the distance and heard the sound of Leo Daga's husky voice. She stood beside the curtains, unseen, looking out on the starlit lawn. The advancing white shirts became departing black backs, but the husky voice still sounded from the great stillness of the night. On the return journey, the three white shirts were accompanied by two red points of fire, and the smell of tobacco ascended to the window with the faint rumble of the husky voice.

"They will be there all night," she told herself crossly, and went shivering to her bed and her hot-water bottle.

XI

Soon after eight o'clock next morning, Stephen, accoutred in a most elaborate dressing-gown, with a towel over his right arm, canvas slippers on his feet, and a cigarette in his mouth, entered Hugh's room with an invitation to bathe.

Hugh, finishing his tea, declared that he had wakened from sleep with an epigram. "The annoying thing is," he smiled, "that I ought to have fired it off last night."

"Ah, the belated back answer, the unpunctual riposte, the too tardy retort!"

cried Stephen, walking about the room. "What the neat Frenchman describes as *l'esprit d'escalier*—the effective replication which you think of as you descend the stairs from an audience with your tutor, your banker, or your mistress. What is it?"

"You remember," said Hugh, "that Leo Daga asked me last night if I did not sometimes find the Narrow Way a trifle monotonous?"

"To which you rather savagely made answer, I remember, that at least it was clean underfoot. Whereupon said he, with a wan smile, But if one doesn't have to clean one's own shoes?"

"Yes, and that knocked me out."

"It did."

"Well, I've thought of the answer," said Hugh.

"Let's have it."

"It's the Second Commandment."

"Too long for an epigram, my dear fellow. Besides, I don't see the point."

"The point is," explained Hugh, rubbing his head and blinking his eyes, "only I don't quite know how to put it tersely, that the shoes we leave behind us have to be cleaned by the next generation. You see what I mean?"

"Is that the Second Commandment? My memory tells me that it's a long one, all about the proud exclusiveness of Lord God Almighty."

"Well, you remember—visiting sins on the third and fourth generation: a great safeguard that, for the evolution of a respectable species. What I ought to have said was something like this: It's just because other people have to clean our shoes that we ourselves ought to keep out of the mud."

"Ah, but he never would have understood that. However, he's miles more interesting than I expected him to be. He's a thinker—pagan, I agree, but a thinker. I like hearing him talk; I like hearing any one talk whose head, like my own, is crammed with ideas."

"Are you sure," asked Hugh, "that crammed is the right word? Don't you mean cramped?"

At which Stephen, flicking ash from his cigarette, smiled very appreciatively, and looked at Hugh as though Hugh's mind was occasionally worth attention, and said, "Anyhow, get you up; I want my swim; I also want to speak to you on a serious matter."

Hugh, pushing back the bedclothes and drawing up a leg, nodded his head to two books on the table at his side, and said, "I looked into those last night."

While he was putting his feet into slippers, Stephen picked up one of the books. He laughed. "Well, how did you like it? Hot stuff, what?"

Hugh, getting into his dressing-gown, made answer, "If you and I talked like that what should we think of each other? Honest," he said, "if I had thoughts like that I'd blow my brains out."

"As bad as that."

"I shouldn't be able to bear myself."

"And yet you can see that he's driving at something serious all the time; can't you? I don't quite know what it is; but it's in his beastly books and it's in his unbeastly talk."

"Come on," said Hugh, picking up a towel. "I was never more ready for a swim. Nasty minds always make me feel the need of water. I know what he's driving at. Life is a game, and a game to be played without rules. He's a Bolshie in the sphere of conduct, that's what the little devil is. Better not ask him to bathe with us. I might drown him."

In the hall, Hugh picked up a mashie and a few old golf-balls, saying that he would like to practise the cut-approach on their way to the sands. Stephen exclaimed, "Always practising! What's your handicap now?"

"One," replied Hugh.

"One!" cried Stephen. "Good Lord, and I'm still sticking at twelve!"

This led to an informing discussion as these two tall young men in their dressing-gowns walked through the beautiful autumn air towards the sea.

When he had hit a ball ahead of him, Hugh said that the reason Stephen's handicap stuck at twelve was the ease with which he played the game at his first acquaintance with it; "whereas I," he said, "had to study the mysteries with a humble heart and a baffled mind."

Stephen took the club, swiped a ball forty yards farther than Hugh's, but not so straight, and said, "The difference between us is this: you take pains about little things; I take pains only about big things."

"It's not that at all," countered Hugh. "I say that if one sets out to do anything, it's his business to try to do it well; but you say, 'Anything that I can't do at the first try isn't worth doing.'"

"Now listen to me, friend of my bosom," said Stephen. "The real difference is this, I want to explore the whole field of life: you are satisfied with the nice little smooth corner your father mowed and rolled for you what time you muled and puked in your nurse's arms. That's where I find Leo Daga stimulating, and you find him dangerous——"

"Not dangerous: disgusting—disgusting and detestable. Lord, when I think of those filthy books——! By the way, what sort of a Dago is your Daga, exactly?

What's his breed, I mean?"

"He's a Bulgarian," said Stephen.

"Ah, I knew he was some sort of Atrocity," laughed Hugh, and picked up the golf-ball he had driven ahead of them.

"You can't understand him," said Stephen, "because you are the most conceited peacock that ever strutted in ancestral gardens. Let me explain that: I'm very earnest just now: you've set me thinking. It's like this, my Jodder; you are convinced, you and your people, that you know all about God Almighty, all about human existence, and all about what's to come after death. Leo Daga, on the other hand, is beautifully humble about himself. He starts by saying, 'I know nothing,' and from that he sets out to explore, seeking truth. His God has not been made for him by other people: he's looking for a God. His code of morals has not been handed down to him by his fathers: he's looking for his standard, as a man of science looks for truth. Take women, for example."

"What sort of women?" demanded Hugh.

"All sorts and conditions of women," retorted Stephen. "That's the whole point, don't you see? What do they know of England who only England know? What does he know of the sea whose sail was never to the tempest given? The only man who ever really lives—lives, not vegetates—is the explorer. 'There's no epic of the certainties.' We've got to live daringly. We've got to court risks, not avoid them. We've got to mix cheerfully and merrily with our fellow-creatures, like the Elizabethans. That's where the Victorians came short. They divided up too much. There were too many partitions about. People were peeping over fences at each other, or through keyholes. What this age means to do is to break down fences. It's a democratic age, my Jodder, and the first step in self-knowledge is to know that one is human. By the way, I've got something to say to you on that head. I thought of it yesterday as a sort of confession: now I see it as a sort of challenge." He quickened his pace. "Do you happen to remember," he asked, with an effort to seem careless, "a letter I received from a lady of the footlights after that big rag last year?"

Hugh looked up at him quickly.

Stephen laughed, laughed with bravado, laughed with self-satisfaction, and yet in that laugh of bravado and self-satisfaction there was just a faint ring of uncertainty. "I knew it would shock you," he said, and laughed again. "But she's quite a nice little thing all the same."

Hugh pointed with the club. "Hadn't you better pick up that ball," he said shortly; and while Stephen went aside, he himself dropped a ball, dropped his towel

too, took up his stance, and had another shot towards the sands—a shot perfectly controlled and loaded with back-spin: the ball dropped and lay still.

"I thought," he said, as they came together again, "that you wanted to talk to me about another girl altogether. What about her?—the girl who lives down here, the deep girl who is after the Laslett millions. For example, is she anything like the girl who was at dinner last night?"

"Not in the least."

"Like your sister?"

"Not the least bit in the world."

"Will she like the Bulgarian Atrocity?"

"I shouldn't think so. She might, though. She's very tolerant."

"Clever or sporting?"

"Can't she be both?"

"Is she?"

"Well," said Stephen, "she plays a number of games and she reads a number of books. Perhaps she's better at books than games. That is to be explained by the circumstances of her life. She lives with her grandfather: looks after him. He's nearly eighty, looks sixty, and is as athletic intellectually as you are physically. He's an old general: soldiered with the Khyber Rifles: looks as if he had been staring all his life at the tops of stony mountains: a great old bird: makes one think of an eagle, hovering. Susan's father, by the way, was killed in the War. He was the old general's favourite son, you know. Hit the old man a hell of a smack. Fact is, he'd never have got over it but for Susan. Hardest old nut before that you ever came across, hard as the devil: now he's a bit more human—a bit more, but, still not a pleasant person for a tea-party. You'd better give him a wide berth, by the way. He doesn't like religion: got a down on parsons: calls them merchants of superstition: says superstition is the curse of the human race. Queer old fellow—bit of a scientist."

The jerkiness of these sentences, and the tone in which they were uttered, told Hugh that Stephen was annoyed with him for having made that challenging mention of the chorus girl an adroit opportunity for talking of the lady of his love. But Hugh had never in all their long intimacy cared a button about Stephen's occasional exhibitions of petulant indignation; indeed, had often used them to manifest the superior attraction of lucid sanity, sometimes driving the high-spirited Stephen to call him hard names and even to avoid him for a sulky nine days or so.

"Can you talk politics with her?" he asked.

"I can," said Stephen.

"Better than with the other girl?"

"What other girl?"

"Well, aren't you asking me to advise you which of these two girls you should marry—the local Susan or the metropolitan Topsy?"

"Don't be a damned fool."

"Seems to me," said Hugh, "you're getting a bit off-side."

Stephen quickened his pace. "My God," he exclaimed, "when I think of your narrowness, Hugh, of your blasted prudery, of your damned cocknose Puritan airs, it makes Leo Daga seem almost lovable! If you aren't careful, you know, you'll end up as a prig."

"What's a prig?" asked Hugh.

"A prig," began Stephen, but broke suddenly into an exasperated growl of, "Oh, go to blazes!"

Hugh said, "Well, I'm jolly glad to see you're ashamed of yourself. That's something, at least. How far has your intimacy with Topsy gone?"

"I tell you what," cried Stephen, wheeling round on him; "you'll die without having ever lived. You're the coldest-blooded and the most satisfied buckstick I ever met. Damn it, you aren't far off being a Pharisee now! What you'll end up as—God knows!"

Hugh laughed at that, and they walked for some time in silence, Stephen muttering to himself.

"I didn't want to speak of him again," inquired Hugh, after a few moments, "but do you think Leo Daga writes with his tongue in his cheek, or is his beastliness natural?"

"I'm not going to talk to you," said Stephen.

"You might just tell me this," said Hugh; "how far's your nearest golf-course?"

Stephen tried not to answer, but said, "A couple of miles."

"Is it a good one?"

"You'd better try it for yourself."

XII

The sea that morning was in a mood which made for brotherly love. To sulk was impossible, to quarrel was sacrilege. It lay trembling under the distant deep blue of the sky and under the nearer piled whiteness of the anchored clouds, dimpled with the smiles of a new day—a twinkling plain of liquid violets, greens, and greys, glittering to the horizon with points of fire, rustling up to the sands with the clearness of river water, breaking there in a curve of white crystal, breathing into the still air the

most delicious imaginable sense of freshness and content.

The two young men going into that kindly sea together became like boys again, and coming out of it found themselves back in the old pleasant intimacies of their long friendship.

On their way to the house, Stephen suddenly took Hugh's arm, and plunged with no introductory apologies into a very painful confession. He began with the words, "Look here, Hugh, I got you down here, old man, to ask you to help me out of a mess," and from that beginning went straight to the mess itself.

The lady of the footlights had become a complication. She was too expensive, for one thing; and, for another thing, she was getting into bad habits—drink for one. Any hint from Stephen of breaking off their relations led first to tears, and second to anger—anger accompanied by threats. But the break would have to be made. At the same time, he didn't want to have a row until the next election—which would surely come soon—was safely over. She might queer his pitch in the constituency; indeed, had she not threatened to do so? Then what the devil was he to do? Could Hugh advise him?

Hugh could advise him. There was only one way in such matters—the family solicitor. Stephen himself must do nothing. If he did, he'd find himself in a most unholy mess. A document would have to be signed, a sum of money would have to be planked down, and after that there must be no more correspondence of any kind.

Stephen explained why this course of action could not be followed. First of all, the girl was a fighter, a regular little hell-cat when she was roused, and, with nothing to lose herself, she would certainly take her revenge on him, one way or another, if he attempted to legalise her out of his life. Such a procedure as Hugh suggested would be bound to eventuate in publicity, and publicity to a man just setting out on a political career meant ruin. No; what he wanted was a friend who would go to see her, and as his friend explain matters, and as his friend get to know how she herself would like the matter settled. She, he felt, might be reasonable if she were invited to dictate terms, particularly if an appeal were made to her better nature by some one whose personality made a moral impression. In short, if dear old Hugh——

Dear old Hugh, protesting that he was the last man in the world for such a job, and saying that he would be sure to bungle matters, nevertheless agreed to see the troublesome girl in London, and begged Stephen, whatever might come of his diplomacy, to break off such perilous and unworthy relations.

At four o'clock that afternoon he was seated at the window in his bedroom writing letters. He had played a round of golf in the morning with Stephen, thus escaping Leo Daga, who had taken breakfast in bed, and at luncheon he had shut his

ears to Leo Daga's conversation by talking almost entirely to Phillida, an occupation none too easy. But he was now in a thoroughly distressed state of mind. He felt that the atmosphere of this luxurious and garish home was unhealthy, and that Mrs. Laslett was making this unhealthy atmosphere absolutely poisonous by some loathsome disposition in her mind which made him sick to think about and which he refused to let himself define.

She was now in the garden, sitting alone with Leo Daga. Stephen had gone to fetch Susan Anstey in his latest car, and Phillida was in the drawing-room, smoking cigarettes and looking at illustrated papers. The thought of Stephen's mother sitting alone with a person like Leo Daga—engineering things so that she could sit alone with him—made Hugh sick and cross. He wondered how Stephen could stand it, and what Phillida thought of it, but, most of all, how a woman of Ella Laslett's age, even if she was bad by nature, could so openly and shamelessly display her badness before the eyes of her own children.

There came a loud rap at the door, and almost at the same moment Stephen entered the room. Hugh, his pen arrested, glanced over his shoulder. The light of the window fell on a Stephen he had not seen for a year, a Stephen almost as he remembered him in their last year at Eton. "Come down and see her," said Stephen, who was in flannels and carried a racquet.

Hugh put down his pen and got up.

"We're going to play a couple of sets before tea," said Stephen. "Susan and I, against you and Leo."

"How kind of you," replied Hugh, "to let me play with him."

"She's tremendously keen to meet you," said Stephen, as they went from the room. "She likes you already for wanting to be a schoolmaster." He half turned to Hugh, beating his racquet against his leg, and continued, lowering his voice a little, "I must warn you that she isn't much to look at. You'll probably be disappointed when you see her. But I'll bet my life you'll like her in the end. She's so natural."

"Like Leo Daga, for example!" said Hugh.

Stephen said, "They seemed to be getting on all right when I left them. She's wonderfully tolerant is dear Susan. But of course she's as different from him as a lark is different from a parakeet."

"Good," said Hugh, and pulled up for a moment to rub the calf of his right leg. "I've got stiff," he explained, "sitting in that window." They went down the stairs.

The house was extraordinarily still. Doors were standing open, but no sound came from the rooms. Sunlight could be seen in the distance shining in at open windows, making a dazzle on carpets and shimmering on still curtains. The

atmosphere of the place was that of a deserted house. Hugh picked up his racquet and sweater from a coffer, and followed Stephen across the hall to a morning-room which opened on the garden. Their rubber soles made no sound on the rugs in the hall. The clock standing against the panelled wall had stopped. The stillness was like sleep.

As Stephen, going on ahead, crossed the morning-room to the open French window, Hugh stopped once more to rub the troublesome muscle in his leg. All of a sudden, as he was bending down, vexed with his stiffness, voices broke on the afternoon stillness of the empty house, changing the whole atmosphere of the place in a moment. He looked up and saw two people approaching the window hurriedly, Phillida first, and after her another girl, exquisitely dressed, evidently Susan Anstey. He raised himself up, and directed his eyes to the deep girl who was after the Laslett millions.

Phillida, entering the room, addressed Stephen. "I'm just taking Susan to see the new wireless. We shan't be a minute."

Stephen laughed. "But, my dear Phillida," he said, "the Children's Hour isn't till five o'clock!"

"I said see it," retorted Phillida.

Stephen turned back, took Hugh by the arm, brought him forward, and said, "This is Hugh Jodrell, Susan."

Hugh looked at the tall slim girl who seemed to him so exquisitely dressed, and was conscious of a strange little movement of her head, a sort of quick upward jerk, then of a smile, very frank, in her hazel eyes, then of a look, candid and friendly, which took him in with an unhesitating welcome, and then of a voice which he thought was extremely pleasant.

In a moment she was gone, leaving a certain vibration behind her, and he stepped out of the room into the garden with such an alert sense of interest in his heart that all the annoyances of which he had been so unrestfully conscious only a few moments ago vanished clean out of his mind.

"Well?" asked Stephen, looking at him with a boy's self-conscious smile.

But Hugh refused to make any answer.

"Not sure?" challenged Stephen.

Hugh stopped again to rub the stiff muscle, and said, "I think she's deep, but I rather like her voice."

"Every one likes her voice. Any opinion as to her looks?"

"I hardly saw her."

"Is your leg really bad?"

"No; it will work off; sort of cramp. How does she play tennis?"

"About eight or nine handicap."

"Leo Daga's handicap, I should guess, would be twenty-four. You ought to give us points."

At that moment Leo Daga appeared round the confiding cedars rolling up the sleeves of his shirt, a racquet in his hand, his head turned to say something to his hostess. He was smiling and looked happy, and had the air of one determined to enjoy himself.

He was happy because Mrs. Laslett had promised to telegraph to her husband inviting him down to luncheon on the following day. Leo, who was frankness itself, had explained matters to Mrs. Laslett. He had a considerable sum of money lying idle at the bank, and wanted some one with the knowledge of Mr. Laslett to advise him in the perilous matter of investment. Moreover, there was a rumour that Mr. Laslett was going to buy a London theatre, and as Leo Daga was just then completing a play he felt that a conversation with Mr. Laslett might have the most amusing consequences.

This confidence of his had not disappointed the lively lady. She felt that it brought her friendship with Leo Daga to a degree of intimacy which was both delightful and useful. She liked to think that he wanted to use her husband, and that she and he together would make plans in that direction, as it were plotting against her husband. Moreover, the artful writer, in making his confidence, had looked at her so appreciatively, and had even taken into his two hands, with an air of such charming friendliness, the long chain she was wearing, that she had been able to tell him something of the secret thoughts of her heart.

"Don't let the children keep you after dinner to-night," she had said to him in a low voice as Hugh and Stephen approached. "I want to speak to you alone. We might go into the garden together. I've got heaps and heaps I want to tell you." And to this he had made answer, "It is very nice to know that you want to tell me delightful things," ending with a flash of his eyes, and a laugh which enchanted her.

XIII

All the time that he was playing tennis, Hugh Jodrell was trying to make up his mind about Susan Anstey. For some reason or other she absorbed his interest and made a regular commotion in his feelings.

She was his first experience of woman as a mystery. Hitherto he had regarded the traditional allusions in literature to the mystic quality of woman's nature as a

superstition, as a mere pretence of imaginative and romantic writers, something that men, cheated in their dreams of love, liked to think was true, but knew all the time was only a convenient make-believe of art. Woman, to a rational mind, was plainly no mystery at all. She was simply the feminine of man, inferior to man in point of strength and intellect, but more cunning, because she had always to rely on tricks and wiles to get her way. To make a mystery of her was absurd; like man she could be good or bad, and clever or stupid; but there was no more mystery—absurd word in this respect!—in the feminine sex than in the masculine sex. One might just as well attach mystery to a hen because it did not crow.

But here was a girl who simply knocked the bottom clean out of this logic, and that with scarcely a word to him, with scarcely a glance in his direction. Why was she able to do this? Why was it he could not concentrate on the game? Why was it he only laughed when Leo Daga served funny little double faults as a matter of course, and he himself hit shot after shot far out of the court? Why was he content, he who had never yet played any game without seriousness, to look at this girl, and wonder about her?

He did not agree with Stephen about her looks. On the contrary, he thought of her as beautiful. But it was a beauty all its own; he admitted that;—a strange and secret beauty which would probably elude the camera just as it most certainly eluded definition. How could he express that beauty? First, he would say that it was the very opposite and contradiction of showiness. There was no richness of colour in that face, no wonderful glory of the eyes, no shining splendour of expression. It was a subdued and furtive beauty, some queer quality of loveliness that waited almost mischievously to be discerned, and smiled as it waited, with the smile of the Mona Lisa, quietly and serenely indifferent to the transitory beauty which blows like a June rose for all the world to see.

Hugh saw her as a slim and active girl with a golden skin, thickly-lashed eyes (that drooped at the corners), and delicate features, a girl who smiled as if to herself, and walked as lightly as a bird, and had a charming way of jerking up her chin when she spoke, and whose attraction lay rather in the spirit which looked out of those smiling, heavily-lashed, hazel-coloured eyes with such secret amusement than in anything to which a sculptor could give a name.

One thing he saw plainly enough. Whether Mrs. Laslett was right or wrong about her, Susan Anstey was certainly making herself exceedingly attractive to Stephen, as if she wanted all the world to see that they were in love with each other.

Hugh and she scarcely spoke at tea, and, as Leo Daga continued to be his partner after, Hugh had few opportunities of speaking to her during the remaining

game. But when those games were over, and when she was buttoning her long knitted coat, while Stephen went to fetch the car for her, she looked suddenly up at Hugh, left the others, and came to him, and said, smiling very engagingly into his eyes, "Mr. Jodrell, my grandfather gave me a message for you. He would be so glad if you could spare time to come to see him. One of your uncles, he thinks, served with him in India—a Colonel Chester Jodrell; he and my grandfather were great friends."

Hugh explained that Chester Jodrell was an older brother of his father, and said that it would be a great pleasure to meet General Anstey.

"Perhaps," she said, watching him more steadily, "you might also like to meet David Ramsay, who is a neighbour of ours."

At this, Hugh's face expressed a lively interest. Not only was David Ramsay a famous Oxford blue and a county cricketer, but he was running a Preparatory School, of which great things were being said.

"Oh, that's awfully kind of you!" he exclaimed. "I should like to meet him tremendously."

"Well, he wants to meet you, too," said Susan Anstey, "so our tea-party ought to be a success. Shall we say to-morrow?"

"I shall be delighted."

XIV

Ella Laslett came down to dinner that night dressed in radiant blue and looking ten years younger than her age. She found a dismal little Phillida in the drawing-room smoking a cigarette and staring into the unlighted fire.

Phillida was unhappy, miserably unhappy, because she had watched Hugh all that afternoon and had seen how completely he was bewitched by the arts and wiles of Susan Anstey. She knew now that she would never be able to create the smallest interest in him, and told herself that he probably looked upon her with positive dislike as a girl who had no serious interest in life.

She had been wondering most of the afternoon, and all the time she was dressing, whether she could not break free from the innumerable entanglements of her life, and cultivate some serious interest, perhaps music or painting. She had become aware of her life, the hurrying life of one excitement after another, as a weariness and a folly. Only a little while ago she had thought of that life, her mother's life, as a splendid adventure, almost as a fairy-tale too good to be true, and yet here she was, a mere child still, all of a sudden thinking of that life with the bitterness of a

misanthropical philosopher.

Mrs. Laslett was far too full of her own happiness to be aware of Phillida's mood; moreover, she was so overflowing with rich vitality that anything in the nature of lovesick sorrow appeared to her in the light of a mere peevishness. On this occasion, briskness itself, and mischief, and confidence, she came so radiantly into the room that even Phillida was roused out of her stupor, and sat up and took notice of her mother, admiring her and wishing she was like her.

Soon afterwards Hugh and Stephen entered the room arm in arm, and evidently in high spirits. They had been talking of Susan, and Hugh had come down eventually in Susan's favour, and now Stephen's mind was made up to propose. He liked to think what a bombshell he was going to pitch into the family circle on the following day, and looked at his mother as he entered the room as if to say, "You won't be smiling quite so cheerfully to-morrow."

Leo Daga also entered the room in high spirits, for playing tennis had done him good, and he had enjoyed a hot bath, and he was thinking how easily he could make use of Ella Laslett, for whose jolly and generous nature he now entertained an unfeigned affection.

They were waiting for cocktails when Hugh, who had picked up the evening newspaper in order to look at the result of a certain cricket match, suddenly exclaimed, "I say, Stephen, there's something here that ought to interest you,"—holding out the paper in Stephen's direction.

Stephen took the paper carelessly, read the announcement to which Hugh pointed, and, all of a sudden, waving the paper about his head, uttered a "View-Holloa," executed a dance, and announced excitedly that he would be off for the north by the first train to-morrow. There was to be a General Election.

This great news gave an unexpected animation to the dinner, and Stephen, of course, dominated the conversation. He was so excited, so spoiling for a fight, and so sure of a crushing victory, that even Leo Daga fell under the spell of his boyishness, and studied him with interest, this heir to unnumbered millions, who was giving up a life of luxurious ease for the poor hazards of politics, and came to like him sincerely. Even Phillida was animated by Stephen's fighting spirit, and declared to her mother that they must go with him to his campaign, while Hugh thought that he had never seen Stephen in a mood so full of inspiration.

To Ella Laslett, Stephen's enthusiasm was simply an amusement, and while she listened to him, or said to Leo Daga, half under her breath, "Isn't he a child?" the lively lady thought only of the delight that was coming to her when the dinner ended, and loved herself with a love that warmed her whole being.

This dinner was drawing to a close when out of the shadows surrounding the table one of the maids in purple, like a messenger of destiny, came more swiftly to her mistress's side than was altogether suitable for the occasion, and in a voice so loud and trembling that it startled every one, even Stephen, announced that Mrs. Laslett's maid had found the door of her bedroom locked from the inside, and on going to the next room and looking out of the window had seen a ladder against the wall.

In an instant every chair was pushed back from the table, and every person was moving towards the door, Mrs. Laslett, no longer radiant and mocking, but fierce, angry, and alarmed, racing after Stephen and calling her orders.

Hugh suggested going to the garden, and Leo Daga, hearing this excellent advice, followed him to the front door, while all the others raced upstairs. "You are the only one of us," said Leo Daga, "with a cool head."

He and Hugh went out into the courtyard, and round the walls of the old house, ghostly and still in the twilight, till they came to the farther side, where they found a ladder reaching up to the floor above.

"We must be careful," said Leo Daga, "not to blur any footprints."

"Which way did they go, I wonder?" exclaimed Hugh, and looked towards the park, grey and shadowy, with pale stars shining over the trees.

"I am listening for the sound of a car," said Leo Daga.

Suddenly they both started, and turned sharply round, thinking the burglars were still about; but the noise they had heard was explained by a group of gardeners who came hurriedly from the distance.

"If the car has only just started we should hear it," said Leo Daga; "the road is well under half a mile away."

At that moment lights began to appear in the upper windows of the house, and suddenly Stephen appeared at one of these upper windows, leaning out, breathless and excited.

"Climb up, Hugh," he called, "and open the door to us. Be quick, there's a good fellow."

Hugh began to mount the ladder.

"Look out, you know," called Leo Daga; "they may not have got away yet."

This thought gave Hugh an uneasy feeling, but he continued to mount the ladder, while Leo Daga counselled the gardeners to keep away from that part of the grass which might bear footprints.

"The swine have cut the telephone wire," called Stephen from the window. "I've ordered a car to be got ready, but of course they're miles away by now."

"I rather hope they are!" said Hugh, which puzzled Stephen, and almost annoyed him.

Mrs. Laslett now came to the window, suddenly, fiercely. "Do be quick!" she called to Hugh, and disappeared at the same moment. Her voice was trembling with rage.

Hugh swarmed over the window-sill, made his way gropingly across a dark and disordered room towards the door, fumbled for switches, found them, turned on the lights, and opened the door.

Mrs. Laslett was the first to enter. She charged into the room, pushing past Hugh and crying out, "The brutes! the brutes!—just look what they've done!"

Stephen followed with the housekeeper at his heels, Mrs. Laslett's tearful maid at her heels, Phillida behind the maid, and behind Phillida a fireman, rather guilty-looking. In a moment the room was full of exclamations and cries.

Such disorder no one there had ever seen before, and it shocked them all, and filled them all with a burning anger, so that they looked at it with sick hearts, almost with nausea, and wanted to get away from it. Even Mrs. Laslett, seeing at one swift glance that the burglars had made a clean sweep of all her splendid jewels, did not now want to examine the room, or to stay there.

"Touch nothing!" she ordered. "Leave it all just as it is." Her voice shook; a sob came to her throat; and she led the way from the room, her handkerchief to her eyes.

A servant met her in the corridor. "If you please, madam, they've been in Mr. Stephen's room too, and Miss Phillida's, and Mr. Daga's." The girl was trembling and white.

"Leave everything as it is till the police come," said Mrs. Laslett, making an effort to command her voice, and went towards the stairs, Phillida hurrying to her side, and putting an arm round her waist.

XV

When Ella Laslett found herself thus suddenly bereft of uninsured diamonds and pearls worth well over two hundred thousand pounds, she became so sobered and so severely practical that she not merely turned instantly away from the idea of romance which had governed her behaviour for many months, but felt herself entertaining a positive dislike, which amounted almost to aversion, for the person who had inspired her heart with that idea, now seen to be so foolish and so mad.

Indeed, it might even have been inferred from her conduct to Mr. Leo Daga that

she suspected him of complicity with the motor-bandits; for while she did occasionally in her hot temper speak to Stephen and Hugh about that grave matter, consulting them in this or that particular, she turned angrily away from the beautifully proffered sympathy of the Bulgarian Atrocity, and even flung glances in his direction which seemed to imply that she regarded her terrible loss of property as a judgment on her for listening to his wicked insinuations.

Leo Daga's extensive knowledge of women, and particularly of women who fly into pets and go off into tantrums, enabled him to bear with equanimity these painful signs of Mrs. Laslett's disfavour. He saw her as one of those fervid and temperamental women, so common in his world, who make no scruple of showing their feelings, whose likes and dislikes are not to be accounted for by any form of rational thinking, and who are as subject to sudden and ungovernable fits of temper as they are open to every temptation of every imaginable vice. He concluded that in this moment of prodigious loss she was so angry that any memory of tenderness enraged her, and comforted himself with the belief that when she had got over that loss she was likely to be an even greater nuisance to him than ever before.

When she had gone to bed, therefore, he turned his attention to Stephen, who, having settled matters with the police for that night, was now in no mood for sleep. Leo Daga was drawn to Stephen, not only because the boy was so handsome and so romantically rich, but because he was also high-spirited and amusing. Leo Daga, then, suggested that they should endeavour to forget the burglary by discussing the General Election, a matter that was likely to be of more permanent interest to Stephen than the loss, which Mr. Daga hoped was only temporary, of his mother's jewels.

From this suggestion, made so easily and as it were so triflingly, there followed a discussion which was destined to leave a profound mark in the character of Stephen, and which did undoubtedly lead to the tragedy of a few years later on.

The three men, then, Leo Daga, Stephen Laslett, and Hugh Jodrell, sat in the smoking-room—well provided with whisky, sandwiches, and cigarettes—while Ella Laslett tossed and tossed in her bed upstairs, as sleepless as any one on earth, her mind racing with chaotic thoughts, her heart boiling with rage and bitterness. How much more furious she would have been, however, had she known that Leo Daga, who, she insistently told herself, was in part responsible for her loss, was discussing politics downstairs with a detachment and a charm which so enthralled Stephen that he had entirely forgotten the motor-bandits.

Leo Daga began by expressing the hope that Stephen would never allow the contacts of a political career to break his contacts with literature. He invited Stephen

to look back over the past century and to observe that the only English statesman who had a living interest for mankind was Disraeli. The reason for this, said he, was Disraeli's richness of personality, and that richness had been nourished from early youth by literature; without literature there had been no Disraeli.

The only two men of recent time who have a perennial interest for cultivated minds, he said, are Napoleon and Disraeli, both adventurers who played their parts in life with the genius of great actors. Nothing is more dangerous, he declared, than taking oneself seriously, unless it be taking other people seriously; and the only way to succeed in life is to enjoy it, and the only way to enjoy it is to regard it as a play.

He refused, with a boyish smile, Stephen's request for a programme, explaining that he was merely recommending an attitude of mind.

"I suggest to you," he said, "that you should make yourself the political representative of the modern spirit, that wonderful spirit which is revolutionising literature and conduct, but which has not yet even begun to touch politics. That is why political discussion is so dull. The politician is still a serious person, like a vestryman or a Lord Mayor. He has not yet perceived, poor darling, that no one believes either in the millennium or in human perfectibility."

He proceeded with easy eloquence to enlarge on the modern spirit, pointing out to Stephen how widely it was making itself felt over the national life. "There is now no clergyman," he said, "who would write so tedious a book as Newman's *Apologia*, which should be compared with the tittering confessions of Ronnie Knox to see how fatally it is 'dated'; and no dissenting minister, I imagine, who feels the same morbid interest in his own soul as that which seemed to Martineau and Arnold of Rugby so gratifying to their Heavenly Father. No one in the Victorian Age, we can see now, was happy; every one of them was wrapped in the melancholy wet-blanket of moral earnestness. But, thank God! that illusion of the soul has vanished into air, into thin air. The human pulse is now sensibly more even, the temperature of the human spirit more sensibly normal. The girl of to-day, that delicious thermometer, is not like her mother, a romantic person cherishing the notion of an ideal love and committing adultery in a kind of religious fervour; on the contrary, she is a healthy and rational little person, who knows all there is to be known, and is content with amusement of a quite transitory nature, recognising that all life is an adventure in personality, and that anything permanent is bound to be tedious. Our duty to our neighbour is now narrowed down to manageable dimensions. We are to be charming and amusing, *c'est tout*. We are not to bother our little hearts about being 'in tune with the infinite'—delightful phrase!—but only about being in step with the dance music of earth's delightfulness. If the modern spirit can be expressed in a

single word I should say that the least unsatisfactory word for a definition is lawlessness. Hitherto, particularly in the last century, human nature was beset by laws; laws were imposed upon it by religion, society, and the State; it could hardly move, poor thing, without offending either the priest, public opinion, or the policeman. But now it has broken through all those tedious and illogical laws. It accepts only the law of its own nature. It listens, not to the dogmatist, not to the moralist, and not to the bureaucrat, but solely to the voice of its own impulses. But, as I say, this great achievement of the modern spirit, which is visibly affecting letters and architecture, painting and sculpture, manners and conduct, has not yet come to the knowledge of politicians. How amusing for you to be its prophet!"

Stephen, who had so far conducted his political campaign as a very earnest young Tory Democrat, and who had cultivated on the platform the rather bombastic seriousness of political oratory, listened to this exordium of the playwright with a timorous scepticism and a wondering enchantment. He found himself thinking how far it was possible for him to take this particular line, which greatly attracted him, considering whether he had not already gone too far along another and a very different path. His desire for notoriety made him listen greedily to Leo Daga's counsel, and his impatient dislike of beaten tracks, persistent industry, and solid work, led him to envy a road to fame which seemed so romantic, and, if practical, so easy.

But the fight was upon him. In a few weeks' time he would be either in or out. And it was almost a hopeless fight—a fight against a popular Liberal politician who had for many years now commanded enormous majorities. Moreover, the hope of getting in by means of a split vote was a slender one, because, unfortunately, the Labour candidate was regarded as a quack even by his own party, and had altogether failed to arouse any enthusiasm in the constituency. No; it was impossible, he decided, at this time of day to adopt the delightful pose recommended so persuasively by Leo Daga. He must go to the electors as a fighter, and as a fighter terribly in earnest, and endeavour by perfervid oratory and all the flashing sword-play of a political gladiator, to shake the composure of his easy-going liberal opponent.

But later on, when this first election was over, he would think about Leo Daga's prescription, and certainly he would maintain his contacts with literature, and in the meantime cultivate this modern spirit, cultivate that liberating and enlarging spirit, till all his thinking and all his utterances were governed by it; and then, perhaps, he would find a constituency less industrialised and more impatient of change, and appear before it in the captivating disguise of a new Disraeli.

For a moment there flashed across his mind school memories, and memories of Cambridge—memories which had once seemed to him so sacred, because they were memories of his young soul in conflict with influences which he felt were evil, and memories of aspirations never suggested to him in his home, learned partly from the traditions of the school and partly from the friendship of Hugh Jodrell. But these memories came and went like a star on a night of storm, and he was untroubled by them.

He turned to Hugh Jodrell, and asked, "You haven't said a word yet; what do you think of this new gospel of politics?"

"Oh," explained Leo Daga, "he won't approve. He belongs to another world. I doubt if he has even listened to us. All he has been thinking for the last hour, I am sure, is that it is high time we were in bed."

"As a matter of fact," said Hugh, "I've been thinking that if lawlessness is such a fine and splendid thing as you'd have us believe, we oughtn't to have set the police on these motor-bandits."

And with that he got up, pulled down his coat, and added, "But I do agree with Mr. Daga that it's time we were in our beds."

XVI

Neither Mrs. Laslett nor Phillida appeared at breakfast on the following morning. Stephen, half-way through that meal when Leo Daga and Hugh arrived, announced to them hastily that it was the will of his imperious mother that they should go to their own homes as soon as it might be convenient to them, she and Phillida being minded, he said, to depart for Scotland Yard as soon as their packing was completed, while he himself would be starting in less than ten minutes or so for the constituency which he hoped might have the good sense to return him to Parliament in the course of a few weeks.

Leo Daga offered to drive Hugh to London, but Hugh replied that he was going to Gloucestershire, and sat before his breakfast wondering how he could contrive a meeting with David Ramsay before he departed. At the end of the meal he had made up his mind what to do in that matter, and inquired of Stephen, who was now making haste to depart, if Miss Anstey was on the telephone.

Stephen checked at that question, like a man reminded of something infinitely important which he had clean forgotten. He exclaimed, with an oath, that he had meant to call upon her. He consulted his watch. Bad luck to him, it was now too late. What was he to do? He couldn't possibly delay his departure. Yes, she was on

the telephone—Silverton 4. He'd be greatly obliged if Hugh would ring her up and explain that he was obliged to rush off to his constituency. "Tell her," he ordered, "about the motor-bandits. She'll see about the Election in the newspaper," and he went off thinking that Hugh had asked if she was on the telephone only to remind him of his overnight resolution to propose to her that day.

When Leo Daga had departed, Hugh Jodrell, who could not bear to lose the opportunity of meeting David Ramsay, lighted his pipe, took a turn in the garden, and considered his plan of campaign. Presently he returned to the house, examined time-tables, and went to the telephone.

He called Silverton 4, and was answered by a maid. He gave his name and inquired if he might speak to Miss Anstey. The maid asked him to hold the line, and he stood at the telephone, smoking his pipe, and wondering whether he could devise any better plan than to ask the deep and scheming Miss Anstey whether he might call on David Ramsay that morning, explaining to her that as the party was broken up at the Lasletts' he must start for Gloucestershire early that afternoon.

As he stood there, a sound of commotion in the hall came to him, muffled by distance, and he guessed that Mrs. Laslett and Phillida were now descending the stairs to the car which was at the door, ready to take them to London. He was thinking of Mrs. Laslett's dreadful exhibition of ill-temper on the previous night, and wondering how she could endure to live the feverish life which seemed to give her such unaccountable happiness, when, all of a sudden, he started, as if some one had suddenly rushed to him breathless with urgent news.

He was in love with Susan Anstey.

He was, of course, too startled by this knowledge to wonder how the mere sound of her voice, uttering his name over the wire, and bidding him good-morning with a smile in the words, could bring him such incredible news. All he realised, for the moment, as he stood there with his pipe held an inch from his lips, and the stir of Mrs. Laslett's departure sounding faintly in his ears from the hall, was a tingling of his body, and a queer kind of dizziness in his mind.

He waited a moment for his feelings to right themselves, shifted his feet, made an effort to return to normal, and began to speak down the telephone, rapidly, and rather off-handedly.

He told Susan about the burglary, and how Stephen, who had meant to call on her that day, had been obliged to rush off to his constituency, and how every one had now gone away, and how, therefore, it was necessary for him to set out for his home in Gloucestershire. But, before he could make his proposal about going to call on David Ramsay that morning, if she thought it feasible, Susan interrupted him to

say that she really could not allow such people as motor-bandits to spoil her party, and she therefore could not hear of Hugh's departure for his home that day. The matter was perfectly simple. He must come to them at Silverton, and they would gladly do everything they could to prevent him from missing too dreadfully the luxurious splendour of the Lasletts' house.

"That sounds perfectly simple," he said, wondering if he ought to accept the invitation.

"And it *is* simple," she replied.

"I wonder!" he answered, reminding himself that he was Stephen's friend.

"What makes you say that?"

He did not answer.

"I hope you don't mean," she said, "that you are a complicated person. That would be very disappointing. But I'm sure you're not, and I can promise you," she went on, "that your visit will give us no trouble, and that my grandfather will be delighted when I tell him you are coming. Besides, you mustn't disappoint Mr. Ramsay, must you? I have promised him that he shall meet you."

"I want very much to meet him," said Hugh. "In fact——"

"Then you'll come? That's delightful. I take it they've left a car for you?"

"Yes."

"Well, come soon; as soon as you can."

"May I have a swim first?"

She laughed. "Of course. Come to us straight from the sea. Au revoir, then."

Hugh walked away from the telephone, which had changed his life, feeling that there was no firm ground under his feet, that his ears were stuffed with wool, and that he had landed himself in a considerable hole. He was so dithered that everything real and solid about him appeared to be unreal and shadowy, like scenery in a dream.

He walked into the deserted hall, which was as silent as it had been yesterday when he crossed it to meet Susan Anstey, and stood by the closed front door, looking through the glass panels to the courtyard and the trees beyond. He knew now that he had cared for Susan Anstey like this when he first saw her, and blamed himself for not having known it, and blamed himself too for having accepted the perilous invitation to stay at Silverton.

A servant entered the hall who, he thought, stared at him as if she saw what had happened to him. He told her that he would be glad if he could have a car in an hour's time, and then, possessing himself of the key of the bathing-hut, left the deserted, still house, and walked across the fields to the shore, smoking his pipe,

and trying hard to think.

CHAPTER III

MAGNETISM

I

General Anstey's manor-house stood at the end of a peaceful and undisfigured hamlet long ago established in a cup of the Sussex downs.

Hugh Jodrell, very uncertain of himself, glanced quickly up at this house, as the Laslett car began to slow down in front of the posts and chains guarding it from the road. Almost at the same moment the front door swung open, and down the two steps came General Anstey to welcome his guest, followed by a couple of Cocker spaniels barking angrily, but wagging their stumps of tails with great friendliness.

He was a tall and erect person, once all whipcord and steel, but now mainly skin and bone, a gaunt, severe, and rather threatening figure, with staring blue eyes in a sun-scorched face, the nose aquiline, the thin hair grizzled, the mouth firm and decisive. It was characteristic of him that he greeted Hugh with no smile and no pleasant words, but rather with a bustling and fussy activity, giving orders to the chauffeur about the luggage almost as soon as he had taken Hugh's hand, and giving other orders to the elderly maid at the door, as he hurried rather than led his guest into the house and across the hall.

Hugh—wondering how he should greet Susan—was raced by his tall host into a pleasant drawing-room, but before he could observe this long and restful room in any particular, he was bustled across it to the tall windows on the other side, and through one of those tall windows into the garden.

Hugh exclaimed, "Oh, how delightful!" as he set foot on the lawn, and found himself surrounded by old walls, with clumps of beeches, yews, and cypresses at every turn, and an ancient bridge crossing the river which ran through this rather monastic garden in a delightful curve and under the branches of elms and chestnuts on the farther side.

"It's a regular bird sanctuary," said the General.

It is also, old gentleman, thought Hugh, just the very setting for your superlative granddaughter.

The General related that he had counted forty-eight nests in the garden that year. He gave Hugh, who was thinking just then how lovely Susan would look on the old

bridge, the date when the first chiff-chaff arrived, and deplored the fact that no dipper had returned to the garden for two years. A pair of goldfinches, he said, had nested in that chestnut tree beyond the bridge for three seasons. The nesting-boxes, which he had made himself, and which he pointed out to Hugh in the ivy clinging to old trees, were always occupied by bottle-tits. He said there was a pair of goldcrests in the garden, but that he could never depend on nuthatches to pay him a visit.

When they came to the bridge, the General turned from birds to fishing, and told Hugh of a trout which he had once fought for half an hour at a difficult bend in the stream, and which yet weighed only a pound and a quarter.

They stood on the bridge, like good fishermen, for some few minutes, looking at the sweep of the dimpled water between clumps of willow-herb and meadow-sweet, and then crossed to the other side, and made their way through a grass-carpeted glade to a yew-hedged tennis court, then crossed an orchard, on the farther side of which were water-meadows.

At every moment Hugh expected Susan to appear, and at every sound started, thinking she had suddenly come upon them; but no Susan arrived, and the old General continued to treat him as a boy, talking of birds, fishes, and beasts with the keen affection of a naturalist and a true sportsman.

On their return journey to the house, they were just setting foot on the lawn when a bareheaded man in a grey flannel suit came from one of the windows of the drawing-room, and slowly approached them across the lawn.

"Ah, here's David Ramsay!" exclaimed the General, but continued to talk of warblers and pipits, while the Cocker spaniels raced ahead to greet an old friend.

Hugh, instantly alert and curious, looked with interest at the broad-shouldered and thick-set figure advancing at a leisurely pace across the lawn, stooping down and clapping his hands over the Cockers as they leapt and barked their welcome in front of him.

In spite of his trepidation at meeting Susan, which up to this moment had possessed his mind and still disturbed him, Hugh was now excited and critical, realising that here was a man who as well as any in England, and far better than most other schoolmasters, could help him to find the school for which he was in search.

Ramsay hailed the General with quiet cheerfulness, and then turned to Hugh, addressing him as "Jodrell," and asking him what he thought of the General's garden, almost at the same time stooping down once more to pat the spaniels, calling them by their names, and laughing at their excitement.

Hugh liked him, drawn to him by a boyish smile, a subdued voice, and also by

the slight nervousness which characterised his manner. He thought to himself, "Here's a man one can depend upon; a sound fellow."

They were standing in the centre of the lawn, Hugh and Ramsay quietly studying each other, when Susan came to them from the drawing-room. Hugh started. He was at once conscious that she brought a vibration into the garden, that because of her the whole atmosphere of the place was changed; yet he was also conscious of this odd thought about her, that she had the most perfect taste in dress, was able to wear rich and brilliant colours which caught the eye and yet were nevertheless perfectly right colours; to be, too, smartness itself, and yet not to suggest London in the country. Uncertain of himself, but not awkward or ungainly, he turned from talking to Ramsay, looked at her with admiration and expectancy, and went forward to meet her, master of himself, apparently nothing more than a pleasantly shy guest greeting a very young and charming hostess.

She welcomed him with one of her quick little jerks of the head, holding his hand long enough to thrill him from head to foot, then turned to David Ramsay, whom she approached less ceremoniously, calling him by his Christian name, and saying with the manner of an old friend how kind it was of him to forsake his boys. After that she took her grandfather's arm, and announcing that luncheon was ready, with one backward look at Hugh, led the way to the house.

As they crossed the drawing-room together, Ramsay pointed out to Hugh a frame stretched with canvas which was partially covered with silk tapestry-work. "Isn't that beautiful?" he asked, and then pointing to some William and Mary chairs covered with petit-point he said, "This is her work too; isn't she wonderful?" He then addressed himself to Susan direct, who was just ahead of him with her grandfather, saying, "You won't forget your promise about our chapel altar-cloth, will you?"

At luncheon, which was served in a pleasant little morning-room, conversation lay chiefly between Ramsay and Hugh, and took the form of question and answer about men notable in athletics. "You know Charlie Glyn, I take it?" Ramsay would ask, his cheerful brown face animated by a smile. "Oh, rather," Hugh would answer, smiling his appreciation of the question. "Isn't he a good fellow?" "A rare good fellow." And so it went on, the General eating silently and industriously, taking great care to masticate his food with proper thoroughness, Susan smiling to herself over her plate, occasionally looking from Ramsay to Hugh, and from Hugh to Ramsay, as if she knew a secret about them both, without fuss seeing that every one had what he wanted.

Towards the end of the meal she said to Ramsay, "You're taking Mr. Jodrell

back to the school with you?"

"I should like to, if he'd care to come."

Hugh said he would very much like to visit the school.

"Will you keep him to tea, or bring him back to us here?" asked Susan, and the question seemed to mean a great deal to her.

"Oh, we shall keep him to tea," replied Ramsay, with decision.

At that answer Susan, exchanging a half-challenging glance with Ramsay, seemed to Hugh to smile even more mischievously, and he half wondered whether she was not relieved to know that he would be out of her way till evening. But before he could decide that question she said with decision, "Very well, then. Grandpapa will have his nap, and I will do an afternoon's gardening." She turned to Hugh. "Come back whenever you like. We dine at eight, and I must warn you that Grandpapa sits up till midnight. Don't let Mr. Ramsay tire you out."

She looked at him as if to say, "You see how quickly I arrange things."

Hugh wondered, as he steadied his eyes on her while she was speaking to him, whether she divined his secret, and whether the mysterious smile in those slanting eyes of hers meant that she was amused by it. He felt certain that her intuitions must tell her something about his feelings, but he wondered how much they told her, and what exactly that knowledge meant to her. Certain he was that she knew something about him which interested her, and that she had some secret purpose in all the arrangements she made for him.

He got up from the table completely under her spell, and yet wondering to himself whether Mrs. Laslett was right about her, in saying that she was deep and that she had designs on the Laslett millions. Something about her perplexed him.

As it happened, David Ramsay spoke of no one but Susan Anstey on the drive to the school. He told Hugh a number of things about her which interested and puzzled him. He said that although the General had rammed it down her throat ever since babyhood that superstition is the chief enemy of the human race, Susan was as superstitious a person as one could meet. She managed, however, in some extraordinary way never to offend the General, who adored her, and in secret groaned over her want of scientific backbone. She was wonderfully well-read, and yet never put on the airs of a blue-stocking. She loved clothes, shops, dancing, and music, but seldom went to London for more than a few days at a time. She had worshipped her father, who was evidently a man of amazing charm, and yet she had borne his death with wonderful courage, and was one of the happiest people Ramsay had ever met.

So thoroughly did he praise Susan that Hugh was sensibly relieved in the end

when Ramsay said, "My wife says that she has never met any one who can hold a candle to her"—for he had been half afraid that Ramsay was in love with her, and, worse still, that she was in love with Ramsay.

"You've met my friend, Stephen Laslett?" Hugh inquired.

"Only once or twice."

"I asked you because he also thinks there's no one like Miss Anstey."

"He's a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"Well, I mustn't say too much, but I don't think, from all I hear, that he's good enough for her."

"Don't you? Why?"

"Well, my wife knows him better than I do, and she thinks he is too interested in himself, and also that he's not firm enough in the foundations. What do you think?"

"I think that's fairly true," replied Hugh; "but isn't that all the more reason why he should marry a person like Miss Anstey?"

"It depends whether you look at the matter from his point of view or hers! Doesn't it?"

"Yes; I see what you mean."

"Miss Anstey has served a long apprenticeship in self-sacrifice; it's time, I think, that she should have what she wants."

"But don't you think," asked Hugh, marvelling at his own daring, "that she wants Stephen?" He held his breath for the answer.

Ramsay thought over that question in the deliberate way that was characteristic of his careful mind, and then made answer, "I don't think any of us know what she wants. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Laslett is so long in coming to the point. He's afraid, I mean, of finding that she doesn't want him."

Hugh said, "I can tell you in confidence that he would have proposed to her to-day if it hadn't been for this General Election."

"That's interesting," said Ramsay. Then, after a pause, he turned to Hugh with a smile, and asked, "But if you were in love with her, would you let a General Election, a World War, or the Day of Judgment, stand in the way of telling her so?"

He laughed quietly to himself. "However, here we are. This is my little shop. The boys will be wonderfully excited to see you. I hope you're ready with a speech."

II

After he had been all over the school, going through the bright class-rooms and

the windy dormitories with their curtains tugging at the rings, visiting, too, the playing-fields, the new gymnasium, and the swimming-bath in which the boys every morning took a cold plunge before breakfast, Hugh was conducted by David Ramsay to his study, and there introduced to Mrs. Ramsay and to their daughter, a demure young person of two years.

In answer to a question from Mrs. Ramsay, who was making tea, Hugh replied with quiet enthusiasm that he thought the school a wonderful place, adding with a smile in the direction of Ramsay that if he could have brought such a thing into existence he should be a very proud man.

"I shall be a good deal prouder than I am now," replied Ramsay, with a rather shamefaced smile, "when those new buildings are paid for!"

They began to talk of the motor-bandits' visit to the Lasletts, and then of Mrs. Laslett and Phillida, and then of Stephen, and presently of General Anstey and Susan.

"I told Jodrell," said Ramsay, "that you admired Susan almost as greatly as I do."

Mrs. Ramsay, who was a good-looking brunette with kind eyes and a trick of very rapid speech, looked at Hugh, and announced impressively, "There's no one in the world like Susan Anstey. She's entirely unique. She's everything a woman ought to be, and as all women are more or less what they ought not to be, I say she is unique. Oh, she's a dear! I hope you agree with me. Perhaps you don't know her well enough yet. But you will one day, I'm sure. David and I worship her; and she's this young lady's godmother, which was the finest christening present we could make her; wasn't it, David?"

She told Hugh that although Susan was so unusually clever, and really adored poetry, she was just as feminine as other women in the matter of pretty clothes, and loved dancing, and was very fond of going to bright plays, and sang "Susannah's Creaking Shoes" as no one else could sing it, and was wonderfully witty, and took off people in the most amusing way imaginable—additional information concerning Susan which Hugh carefully stored away with his own puzzled thoughts about her.

When tea was over, the smiling Mrs. Ramsay and the demure daughter retired. Then David Ramsay invited Hugh to fill his pipe, taking his own pipe from the mantelpiece, and sat down, looking into the empty fireplace, waiting for Hugh to finish with the tobacco jar, and apparently thinking hard, for the cheerfulness had drifted out of his brown face, and there was a deep line between his eyebrows.

After a period of silence, in which they both sat smoking in the quiet room with their eyes on the empty fireplace, Ramsay rather suddenly lifted his head, turned

sideways to look at Hugh, and asked him if he was sincere in his approval of the school.

Hugh assured him that indeed he was.

"Then," said Ramsay, after tapping his teeth for a moment with the stem of his pipe, "why not join us?"

Hugh said that if Ramsay really meant that, he should be a very happy person.

"I should like you as my partner," said Ramsay.

"As a partner!" exclaimed Hugh.

Ramsay nodded his head and uttered a grunt that was intended to be an affirmative.

Hugh said that he would like that better than anything in the world, and that he was tremendously flattered by Ramsay's proposal, which seemed altogether too good to be true, but he supposed that a partnership meant a lot of money, and as for a lot of money he really hadn't even a very little.

"That's a pity," said Ramsay. "But I shouldn't ask for much. In fact, I should only ask for a very little."

Hugh was reflecting. "By the way," he said, "my father has invested enough capital in my name to give me an income of two hundred and fifty a year. Perhaps the lawyers would let me sell some of the capital. I wonder if they would. I don't see why they shouldn't."

"Well, I don't know," replied Ramsay. "They might, of course; the idea is worth investigation; but, I tell you what, why not join us for a year, see how you like us, and at the end of that time discuss matters with your father? That seems a good sensible way of proceeding; don't you think?"

Hugh did think so, but was so enthusiastic to become Ramsay's partner that he said he should consult with his father directly he got home. He had a rather well-off aunt, by the way, who might do something for him. In any case, he would begin school-mastering next term. He told Ramsay that he had opened for him just the very door of which he had been dreaming all through his last year at Cambridge.

"Well, that's a proof to you," replied Ramsay, pulling hard at his pipe, "that Susan Anstey is everything my wife said she is. It was her idea. She came back from the Lasletts' yesterday, rang me up on the telephone, and said, *I've found a partner for you*. I knew she was to meet you that afternoon, and so I said, *All right, I'll take him*. Her comment on that was, *You'll never regret it* ; and I don't think I ever shall. I feel certain that you and I are going to hit it off together. She's a wonderful judge. I've never known her make a mistake about man, woman, or child."

That night, when Hugh came down to dinner, he found Susan alone in the drawing-room. She was sitting at the far end of that long room, wearing a dress of green and silver, her hair parted on one side and draped round the perfect oval of her face, a piece of embroidery in her hands. It was the first time Hugh had seen her without a hat, and he loved to know how thick and radiant her hair was, and how beautifully its brown colour harmonised with the golden tone of her skin. He thought he had never in his life seen anything half so beautiful as this lovely and mischievous-looking young girl seated at the end of a long cool room which was full of bright chintzes, radiant with flowers, and lighted by only a few shaded lamps.

She looked up with a smile, and said, "You allowed David to keep you a long time!"

He was so happy in the news he had for her, that he was not nervous in her presence, and went right up to her, and for the first time since meeting her addressed her with perfect confidence. He said, "I want to thank you for a recommendation which has got me just the very job I wanted."

He was standing close to her chair, looking down at her, his hands at his side, and all of a sudden, as she looked up at him, he found her fingers closing round one of his hands. "I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "I felt it would come off. But I didn't expect it quite so soon. David, you know, is a very wary person. It must have been a case of love at first sight. I hope you love him too."

He had taken possession of her fingers, and held them against him, and said, "I think it most tremendously good of you to take such an interest in my affairs," feeling that even if she were Becky Sharp herself he must love her to the end of his days.

"I have been long prepared for taking an interest in your affairs," she answered. "Stephen has been your fugleman for at least nine years."

He allowed her to withdraw her fingers, and as she took up her needlework, and bent her eyes to rearrange it, Hugh felt that Stephen's name had been introduced to prevent him from placing a too impulsive interpretation on her friendly act in giving him her hand.

"Ah," he said, crossing to the other side of the hearth, "I wonder how he is getting on with his constituents. I hope well, but I'm sure he's not half so happy as I am."

"He can't expect to win," she replied, "but I'm sure he'll make a very gallant fight of it." She glanced at him with one of her queer smiles, and added, "I rather wonder, you know, why you haven't gone to help him!"

He laughed at that. "I'm no politician," he said.

"But he leans on you so greatly. Doesn't he? He takes your advice about

everything. Isn't that so?"

She seemed anxious for his answer.

"He asks for it very often," smiled Hugh, "but whether he takes it is another matter. I think he rather likes going his own way; don't you?"

"What attracts you in him?" she asked suddenly, and laid down her work.

Hugh laughed, shifted on his feet, and replied that her question was a considerably tall order for one who had not yet begun to parse his feelings and knew little about psychology, and nothing at all, thank Heaven! about psychoanalysis.

"But try to answer it," she persisted.

"Well, he's extraordinarily attractive, isn't he?" expostulated Hugh. "I mean, he's vivacious, he's thundering clever, he's tremendously keen, and he's very affectionate." He paused, exhausted by his effort to catalogue a personality, and said, "But, after all, it's you who should answer your own question, for Mr. Ramsay told me this afternoon that he'd never known you make a mistake in judging character. Do tell me, I wish you would, what you think makes old Stephen so likeable."

"*Old* Stephen!"

"Well, I mean old in the sense of——"

"I know; but I always think of him as young."

"In the sense of——"

"In the sense of not having clear notions. Oh, he's young in other ways too. He's delightfully simple and easy to understand; not in the least complex. But he's young in his impulses. He rushes into things. He has sudden enthusiasms. He likes notoriety. He is very self-conscious about his appearance. All that, of course, makes him likeable, too. He comes to everything in life with a freshness that is rather jolly. He's like a schoolboy with both hands full of pocket-money; isn't he? One likes him for that. And he's extravagantly generous. But I'm sure he isn't going to be always young. I'm quite sure he's going to grow old, and perhaps suddenly. I wonder what he'll be like then. Do you feel that?—that something will happen to him, and that he'll grow old all of a sudden?"

Hugh shook his head, looking at her with brooding eyes, fascinated by the change that had come into her face, and yet dismally depressed by her evidently absorbed interest in Stephen.

"But do you think," she asked, "that he will always be high-spirited and vivacious? Look at his eyes! Look at his mouth! Are they the eyes and the mouth of a man who is born to happiness? I wish I could think so."

"You mean a sort of sulky look?"

She nodded her head.

"I think that's only the expression of one who doesn't like frustration and disappointment," said Hugh.

"Well; but if frustration came?" She jerked up her head and looked at him. "It comes to most of us, in one way or another."

"He'd take it badly," Hugh admitted—"worse than a colder-blooded person would take it; but he's a fighter, and he'd get over it."

"And everything in his life turns on that."

Hugh agreed, and said that because he had long ago realised how Stephen's life was likely to consist of a number of crises he had always wanted to be at Stephen's hand, as a colder-blooded person who might be useful to him in an emergency.

"I'm tremendously fond of Stephen," said Susan, "and I should feel it dreadfully if he missed happiness. Perhaps you and I together may be able to help him."

At that moment the door opened, and the tall and bony General strode into the room, sniffing an unfolded handkerchief, which filled the air with the smell of lavender water.

"We were speaking of Stephen, Grandpapa," Susan announced.

"Ah, the future Prime Minister!"

The old gentleman tucked away his handkerchief in the tails of an old-fashioned dress-coat, and surveyed Hugh very alertly, as if to say, "You observe, of course, the irony in that remark."

"I was telling Mr. Jodrell how fond we are of him, and how anxious we are that he shouldn't come to grief in any way."

The General turned his staring blue eyes on Hugh, and said, "That's a young man, Jodrell, that will take a deal of taming."

Hugh nodded his head.

"Too much money," said the General, "and not enough discipline."

"But he has got serious ambitions," suggested Hugh.

"So long as things go well with him," said the General, "he'll make a fair success of his life; but let things go ill with him, and neither you nor I, not even Susan, could clear up the mess."

"Well," said Susan, as if the discussion had gone far enough, "let's hope that things will go well for him. And now let me tell you, Grandpapa, a piece of cheerful news." She got up, and stood before the General, her hands holding the lapels of his coat. "Mr. Jodrell is coming to help David with the school."

"Capital!" said the General.

"I'm going to ring up David after dinner to congratulate him."

"Give him my congratulations too."

"You're both very kind to me," said Hugh. "I feel—how shall I put it?—infinitely bucked."

The General said, "I know something of Jodrell blood, and I took good stock of you this morning. You're the very man, as Susan said yesterday, for our friend, David Ramsay. Well, I'm very glad for our own sake, too. We shall see something more of you."

III

That night, when Susan had gone to bed, after enchanting her guest by singing "Susannah's Creaking Shoes" and some other equally amusing songs, General Anstey took Hugh into his study, where a fire was burning, and pushed forward the best chair in the room for Hugh, insisting that he should sit in it. He then brought from a cupboard a big box of cheroots, rejecting Hugh's plea to be allowed to smoke a pipe, exclaiming that the cheroots were in perfect condition, and showing Hugh how to extract the straw down the centre of the particular cheroot which he had selected for his guest.

After this, standing on the hearth, and pulling hard at his own cheroot, the old General began to speak to Hugh about Stephen and Susan.

"I'm very glad," he said, "of this opportunity for a quiet talk, a quiet and confidential talk with you. I'm going to speak to you as if I'd known you all your life. I'm going to consult you. I'm going to ask your advice. And let me explain why, my dear fellow. The reason is this: I'm an old man, nearly eighty, and I'm a poor man—a poor man taxed out of existence by a Government that made War like a spendthrift. I've got several children, and grandchildren, and I've got Susan, the best of them all, the daughter of my best and dearest boy, killed in the War; and she has given up everything to live with me, and when I go she'll get only the merest pittance from me, not enough to keep body and soul together; and what is she to do then? Now, that's why I speak to you as an old friend. You know young Stephen Laslett well. He's a great friend of yours. You probably know, then, his feelings towards Susan. If you can do so, my dear fellow, I want you to tell me what those feelings are? I ask you that delicate question point-blank. And let me explain why. If, you see, he intends to propose marriage to Susan, then I can keep her here with no misgiving of selfishness on my part; whereas, if he is only fond of her as every one else is fond of the dear child, then I feel that I ought to make up my mind to part with her. I mean, I ought to send her to relations in London, and let her meet people, and

be in the way of making friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. I hope you don't think I'm imposing on our acquaintance by speaking to you on this subject? You see how it is with me? And I hope you understand that it is only the anxiety of an old man that has led me to go straight to the point with you. I can't live for ever, and I can't expect to live much longer. And, as you can see for yourself, Susan is extremely dear to me."

Hugh said that he perfectly understood the General's reason for opening this subject, and assured him that he felt very much flattered by his confidence. He then proceeded to relate his conversation with Stephen on the previous day, and told the General that he was certain Stephen would have called that very morning to ask the General's permission to propose to Susan but for the confusion introduced into his plans by the Election.

The old General, sceptical and questioning, was at last convinced that Hugh had not mistaken Stephen's intentions, and greatly relieved walked to and fro in the room, pulling at his cheroot, and explaining that while it would be a brilliant marriage for Susan from a pecuniary point of view, he could truthfully say that such a union would be the saving of Stephen. He insisted that Stephen's destiny, and even his happiness, hung by a hair, declaring that all the millions of his father could not save such a temperament as Stephen's from great calamity, unless he had that absolute steadiness of soul that such a person as Susan, and Susan in particular, and perhaps Susan alone in all the world, could give him.

He checked suddenly, approached Hugh with a frown in his eyes, and said, "Mind you, Jodrell, when I speak of steadiness of soul, I use that word 'soul' in the literary sense, not in a literal sense. You see, I am an atheist." He stood over Hugh like some tremendous bird of prey, threatening him. "I think that when we die we go out like the flame of a candle," he continued. "I think that the universe is the result of blind mechanical forces. And I am perfectly sure, because I can prove it, that the progress of mankind towards sanity has been more impeded by religion than by any other folly of the human mind. I had the honour of knowing Darwin. I had the honour, too, of corresponding for many years with Huxley. I know my way about *The Golden Bough*, that stupendous work, as easily as I know my way about my own garden. And over there"—he pointed with the long forefinger of his bony right hand to a division in his bookshelves—"there are several scrap-books of my own making which prove, by newspaper cuttings which give proceedings in the law-courts of the world, that priests, parsons, ministers, hedge preachers, and salvationists are as capable of crime, and crime of the blackest order, as the worst and lowest of the criminal classes. I won't trouble you now, but I'd like you to

glance through those scrap-books to-morrow. They're an eye-opener, I tell you. Susan, of course, hates the sight of them. She takes a sentimental view of the matter, and will have it, poor child, that all those scoundrels were sorry afterwards for what they had done. Sorry? Of course they were sorry! So is every criminal when the handcuffs are snapped over his wrists. But if they had never been found out? Ah! You'd be surprised, my dear fellow, what crimes parsons have committed. Every crime in the calendar! The respectable papers don't publish the proceedings against them. I have to go to newspapers that I dare say you've never heard of; but the proceedings are true, and the sentences are true, and the crimes *were* committed by these fine merchants of superstition who get their disgraceful living by vile trading on the fears of death entertained by ignorant people."

Almost without a stop, he proceeded to invite Hugh to curb as far as he could David Ramsay's unworthy leaning to superstition, telling Hugh that Susan was now engaged by Ramsay to embroider an altar-cloth for the school chapel, and that Ramsay had got hold of a young priest to come out to the school every Sunday and ram religion down the throats of his boys.

"I can't for the life of me see," cried the old man, in evident distress, "why you can't teach a boy to be moral without encouraging him to be as superstitious as any Kaffir in Africa or any low-caste Hindu in India. Why can't a boy be taught the virtues of a gentleman, the great Roman virtues of an English gentleman, without being told that he must pray to some hypothetical Personage in the sky, who never yet stopped the ravages of plague and who never yet saved a child from a burning house or an ill-handled ship in a tempest? Ramsay says you must have religion. But I tell him that his boys learn far more about conduct in the cricket-field and the gymnasium than in his gaudy chapel. Teach a boy to take punishment without a whimper, to play for his side and not for himself, to despise lying as a form of cowardice, and to shun uncleanness as a form of disease; teach him to fish and shoot, to ride boldly, to love cold water, and to observe Nature with the intelligence of a naturalist; teach him those things, and you've done all you can for him, and enough for any boy with the germ of virtue in his character; and if he hasn't got that, I say you can do nothing for him; and I also say that five hundred years hence the child who isn't naturally virtuous will be exterminated by medical science, just as we now exterminate puppies which are not true to breed."

All this was uttered, not in the manner of one who is seeking to make a convert, and who desires argument, but as one assured that his listener is so sensible a person that he himself must hold identical opinions.

It was wonderful how the flow of the gaunt old man's eloquence poured forth

from him, reminding Hugh of the flooding water which he had seen that morning swirling into distance from the bridge in the garden—surging away in a swift and eddying mass which seemed as if it might bear the whole world away with it to the sea.

He felt himself to be in the dilemma of the Wedding-Guest waylaid by the Ancient Mariner, and wondered what he should say when this torrent of eloquence came to an end. It seemed to him painfully clear that passive acquiescence was an act of cowardice; and yet the thought of arguing with this great, gaunt, bony vulture of a man filled him with a profound disquiet. What should he say, he to whom religion was both strength and beauty, to one who could see nothing in it at all but the degradation of necromancy? Happily for Hugh, pulling miserably at his cheroot, the General did not long pause for any comment; but, having turned from his topic to offer Hugh a peg of whisky, plunged at once from religion into the less delicate matter of politics.

"Science," he said, straightening himself and flinging back his shoulders, "will one day take the place not only of religion, but of politics. I'm sure you agree with me that the politician is not only one of the most ignorant and inefficient of men, but one of the most dishonest." He pointed again to the bookshelves, and said, "Over there I've got another set of scrap-books. They're composed of the claptrap of politicians. I read their speeches, their humbugging speeches, and I cut out those passages in which they most glaringly commit themselves to some particular absurdity, and index the cutting under each particular politician's name. Every now and then one of these gentry dies, and the newspapers all come out with pompous and fulsome obituary articles, making it seem that the late lamented was a greater man than Chatham, a more profound political genius than Walpole, and I cut these things out of the papers, and stick them in my scrap-books under the specimens of the gentleman's claptrap already preserved, and there they'll remain to show some future historian what a canting lot of shallow-pated humbugs we were, and how all our troubles come from our want of courage to look truth in the face."

From this point in his indictment of the age, the General, warming more and more to his theme, and never sitting down for five minutes together, proceeded to discuss the condition of politics at that time, the confusion of parties, the lack of great men, and the rowdy manners of the Labour Party. On this exciting topic he held forth with tremendous scorn, and it was well after midnight when he and his utterly exhausted guest retired to their beds.

IV

Hugh did not wake till tea was brought to his room a little before eight o'clock. Breakfast was at nine, and he was to catch a train which left a distant station soon after half-past ten. He reflected then, as he drank his tea, thinking of these arrangements, that he was not likely to see much more of Susan before he left; and this reflection greatly depressed him, although he could not understand why he should want to see one who was beyond his reach, and contact with whose so desirable enchantment could only add to his misery.

But to be in love, he discovered, is to brave all pain, and even to take pain into one's embrace, dwelling on it as a kind of awful pleasure. To love hopelessly is, after all, to love, and to love is to attain the extremest height of feeling. Besides, wasn't he helpless? Had he not fallen under a spell? Whatever else might be said of Susan, it was quite certain to him that she was the most magnetic of her sex.

Never before, certainly, had Hugh known what manhood meant, and what life holds, and of what tremendous desires the soul is capable. He lay there thinking of Susan, of her loveliness and of her mystery, wondering what thoughts lay closest to her heart, and whether it was true, as Ramsay had said, that no one knew what she wanted.

Did she want Stephen? Hugh told himself that she did, but did not believe it. He tried to convince himself that she was indeed in love with Stephen, and that Mrs. Laslett's idea of her as a scheming adventuress with designs on the family fortunes was a grotesque absurdity; but even though he recalled every gentle thing she had said to him of Stephen, and reminded himself of the anxiety in her voice when she spoke of Stephen's future, he could not persuade himself that she did really love him.

What did she want? Was there some one in the world whom she loved with all the force of her secret and mysterious nature, and was she quietly waiting for him, knowing well that the day would come when he would be given to her? The idea that she was in love haunted him with despair. He came to be more and more certain of it. Yes, she was in love. Not with Stephen, not with any one known to the General or to David Ramsay, but with some one she had met in London, some one with whom she had gone to the plays she loved, and with whom she had danced, held in his hands, her eyes raised to his face, his words whispered into her ears—some one amazingly handsome, amazingly attractive, amazingly perfect.

Very unhandsome, unattractive, and imperfect did Hugh feel as he dressed that morning; and very dismally unhappy was his heart as he descended the stairs to breakfast.

He had, at any rate, solved part of this desolating problem. Susan was in love, and it was the contentment and happiness of the secret love which gave her that extraordinary air of mischieful mystery which Mrs. Laslett had so vulgarly misunderstood. He began to feel sorry for Stephen, and to associate him with himself in a community of hopeless pain.

When he entered the dining-room, very sad and sore-feeling, he found Susan reading letters at the table, and the elderly maid, now in a stiff cotton frock, carrying dishes to a sideboard on which pleasant-smelling coffee was already simmering.

Susan looked up from a letter as Hugh entered, and greeted him with a smile. "I'm afraid Grandpapa kept you up very late," she said. "You don't look as if you had slept too well. Did he attack you on the subject of superstition? I expect he did."

Hugh, observing with surprise and not a little pleasure that breakfast was laid for only two people, told her that the General had interested him very much indeed.

"You're the sort of person, you know, who invites confidences," she smiled.

"Am I?"

"You look as if you never want to talk yourself, and as if you are tremendously interested in every one you meet. You'll be told many secrets in the course of your life."

He looked at her as if to tell her that he did very much want to be told her secret, and then lowered his eyes, and walked to one of the windows and looked out on a world which now had no interest for him.

She got up, went to the sideboard, and invited him to follow her. As she was helping him to the dishes he had chosen, she said, "I've got a message for you from David Ramsay. He telephoned just now to ask what train you were going by, and to say that he would come for you in his car and drive you to the station."

"How very kind of him!"

"You have evidently made a great impression, for he never likes leaving his boys in the morning."

She explained to him as they sat down together that the General always took breakfast at seven o'clock, and was out in the fields before half-past seven, either with a gun, a fishing-rod, a butterfly net, or a bird-glass—just like a boy.

"I wonder," said Hugh, "how you have been able to withstand his eloquence."

"In what way?"

"You're rather superstitious, aren't you?"

"How do you know that?"

"Mr. Ramsay told me so yesterday."

She laughed. "Well, you see, if you live with some one who is always girding at a

thing you are apt to think of what can be said in its favour. Isn't that so, don't you think?"

He asked her whether she threw spilled salt over her left shoulder, whether she dreaded the number thirteen, and whether she touched wood on saying or hearing anything cheerful.

She laughed softly, shaking her head, and rebuking him with a smile, which made him long to take her into his arms, for thinking so ill of her. No, she explained, her superstition did not take that form. It was simply a feeling of complete dependence. She felt sure that no one in the world had the least idea whatever about the real nature of things.

"I'm only sure of one thing in life," she added, "and that's the power of one's own thoughts."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

She said to him that her grandfather had lived for many years in India, had seen there the most sordid and debasing forms of superstitious beliefs, and, brooding on those things, which offended all his firmest notions, he had come to attribute everything evil in the world to religion. "He doesn't realise it," she said, "and it is no good trying to persuade him that it really is so, but he is the victim of his own thoughts. They have mastered him. He can't help thinking as he does. And I believe it is the same thing, too, with people like Mrs. Laslett; in fact, the same thing with almost every one who thinks intensely in one direction."

"That's the theory of auto-suggestion, isn't it?" he said.

She nodded her head. "I'm sure the wise thing to do is to trust to our natural impulses."

He started at that. "Do you really? I always thought impulse was a dangerous thing."

"Ah, but I mean," she explained, "that one must first be right in oneself. Impulse is only dangerous when we're wrong somewhere. When we're right, it's the safest guide we've got."

He looked at her. "I suppose it is from you, then," he said, "that Stephen gets his faith in instinctive action. That's one of the themes he likes to talk about. He believes in sudden inspirations."

"But, of course, it's dangerous in his case."

"Why?"

"Because he's not right in himself."

"Isn't he?"

She dipped her head, looked at him rebukefully, and said, "You know he isn't.

Why do you ask?"

Hugh was taken aback. "Well, then," he asked, "what ought he to do?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I wish I could tell you."

"It is not easy, I suppose," said Hugh, "to get right in oneself if one's impulses are strong."

"No, it's the most difficult thing in the world."

"The problem is," said Hugh, "why some people are right in themselves, and some aren't. Your grandfather was saying last night that it's no good trying to make a boy good if he isn't born good. Isocrates said something like that too. I wonder if it's true. I don't think it is quite true."

"Ask David Ramsay what he thinks about that!"

"What does he think? Do tell me."

"He believes that environment is more important than heredity, ever so much more important. And he believes tremendously in the power of influence. That's why he wants you as a partner. He sees that you are a person who exercises a great influence."

Hugh laughed. "He is taking me on," he said, "only because you advised him to do so. He told me so himself. You are the person who exercises great influence!"

"But he looked at you to see if I was right."

"And do you think I can influence people?"

She laughed gently. "I'm sure," she said, "you could influence little boys."

"Ah!"

"Why do you take that as an ambiguous compliment?"

"I don't know. It sounded to me as if it was meant to imply a limitation."

"Well, you haven't done with life yet, have you? Some day you may influence grown-up people. Why shouldn't you? I think you will."

"I'm likely to be well schooled in that direction!" he said bitterly, and half challenged her with his eyes.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, trying to look at her with great deliberation, "that I've got to learn to bottle-up my feelings, and to ride my impulses with a rein of iron."

She kept her eyes on his face, which grew hard as he was speaking, almost twitching with the pain of his confession, and checked the immediate comment that was on her lips. Then she looked slowly away from him, and said with a smile that was gentle and sympathetic, "But we all have to do that, don't we? That's how we grow."

"Those of us who aren't right in ourselves?"

"Well, those of us," she corrected, "who aren't yet quite right in ourselves." Then more cheerfully, more vigorously, she added, "And, after all, there are no end of our feelings and impulses which needn't be held back, even in our imperfect stage."

At that moment the door opened and the elderly maid entered the room with a telephone form on a salver. To Hugh's surprise she came to his side, and presented it to him.

"For me?"

The maid said that the message had just come over the telephone from Mrs. Laslett's house, and that it was a telegram which had arrived there for Hugh from Gloucestershire, sent off late on the previous night.

He took it hastily, fearing that his father or mother was ill, and read, greatly puzzled by the message: "Your presence on my platform may turn the scales. Urgently beg you to come here at once and take part in really big scrum. Don't fail me in the fight of a lifetime.—Stephen."

"There's no answer," he said to the maid, and passed the message to Susan.

She read it with a smile, handed it back to him, and said, "Of course you'll go."

"If you tell me to."

"Well, then, I do."

"You see," he said, "how readily I take my orders from you. I simply hate the idea of going, but I shall go because you want me to."

"That's very charming of you. I feel—how shall I put it?—infinitely bucked."

They laughed together over that quotation.

"All the same," he said, "it's perfectly absurd. What can I do? I know nothing of politics, and I've only made about two speeches in my life, and they were the most appalling failures."

"Ah, but yours is a name to conjure with up there. Stephen told me so. He dragged his friendship with you into one of his speeches, and brought the house down. I think you sometimes forget, and it's very nice of you to do so, that you're an International!"

He grinned. "But isn't it rather horrid to drag sport into the service of politics? What would your grandfather say about that?"

"But you're not dragging it into the service of politics. You're going to bring it, like an oriflamme of war, to the aid of a great friendship."

"Well, I don't think I shall be of much use to old Stephen; but, as I say, since you want me to go, I go. By the way, this message interrupted you. You were saying something which interested me enormously."

"What was that?"

"About impulses which needn't be held back."

"Oh, but I'm sure you know what those impulses are just as well as I do. The only real theory I've got about life is that we must think delightful things about it. When I hear people running down the present generation I think of them as injuring their health. It's bad to take gloomy views of anything. The best impulse we've got is to believe in life and love it, and tell ourselves fairy-stories that always come true. And now what are you going to do? Are you going straight to Stephen, or must you go home first? I ask because I must telephone to David if you are going by train to London."

He told her that he must go home first, that it was necessary for him to see his father about David Ramsay's proposal, but he promised her that he would go to Stephen on the following day.

Soon after this, the General came into the room, fresh from his long walk through the fields, and at once invited Hugh to smoke a pipe with him in his study.

"I should like you," he said, "just to run your eyes over my scrap-books."

CHAPTER IV

DANGERS

I

It was a day of dismal rain which witnessed the somewhat sheepish arrival of Hugh Jodrell in Stephen's constituency.

As he stepped out of the carriage into the grey and dank atmosphere of an industrial railway station, he half feared to find himself surrounded by a band of Stephen's henchmen and borne off shoulder-high, to a thin sound of affected cheers, as a useful exhibit in their hero's fight. He was, therefore, pleasantly relieved to find, as he handed his bag to a porter, that no such gang of supporters was on the look out for him. Apparently, Stephen was acquiring the virtue of restraint.

He noticed, as he followed the porter up the platform, two or three queer little men who were eagerly and anxiously scrutinising the faces of arrivals, and thinking that they looked like people who had been bitten by the political bug, and were either experts in canvassing or excitable Napoleons of organisation, wondered if by chance they were looking for him. But no one interfered with him, and, having successfully passed the barriers and emerged into the ceaseless downpour of rain in the station yard, he got into a rickety and musty old taxi-cab, and, feeling that after all things were not so bad as he had imagined, drove off to his hotel.

He was, perhaps, a little annoyed that no one welcomed him at this hotel, which was a noisy, crowded, and a none too attractive establishment. When he had registered his name, with no comment on the part of the reception clerk, he inquired if Stephen was anywhere to be found on the premises, and received the reply that Mr. Laslett was out and that it was impossible to say when he would be back.

Hugh proceeded by the lift to his bedroom, but finding that dark and depressing apartment uncongenial to him, descended by the stairs to the hall, found with difficulty an empty table in the lounge, and after waiting for a considerable time succeeded in attracting the attention of a lugubrious waiter, who wearily removed the litter from the table and contemptuously received his request for tea.

He wondered, as he sat there, with loud-voiced men constantly going past him, and flashily-dressed girls eyeing him from neighbouring tables, and a string band in a gallery playing music of the most unmusical description, what Susan would now think

of his prospects as a bearer of the oriflamme of sport at the head of Stephen's charging legions. An hour crawled by, and he began to feel really annoyed that some one in Stephen's entourage had not come to tell him what was expected of him. At the end of another hour's solitude in this horrible place he was angry, and could bear the situation no longer. He got up, walked into the hall, and, biding his time at the office, which was besieged by inquirers, at last succeeded in asking whether Mr. Laslett had yet arrived.

"Mr. Laslett?" repeated another clerk, standing tiptoe to peer over the hats of the besiegers; then, turning his head to the clerk Hugh had addressed, he said, "He's just coming in."

Stephen, unbuttoning his overcoat and smoking a cigarette, entered the hotel laughing and jesting, surrounded by delighted admirers. Hugh noticed at once, even at that distance, a disagreeable change in Stephen's appearance. His face was flushed to a flaming red, his eyes seemed to be both darker and smaller; his lips more swollen and coarse; moreover, his expression, his air, his manner, and his movements, all suggested to Hugh that the excitement of the Election was proving too much for him.

When at last, advancing into the hall, Stephen caught sight of Hugh, he raised his eyebrows, as if Hugh's presence in that town was an immense surprise to him, laughed, hastened his approach, and put out his hand, exclaiming in a voice as hoarse as a crow's, "Good old Jodder! This is splendid. By gad, what a bit of luck! You've come just at the right moment."

Before Hugh could make any reply, he had swung round, caught hold of one of his henchmen, and said, "Look here, Roberts; this is Mr. Hugh Jodrell; better run him up to the committee-room straightaway. You've got a car of some sort outside, haven't you? Well, run him up, introduce him to Tappett, and get him put on the job at once. Mind you, I shall want him to-night for the meeting in Plomberley Hall; but that's not till nine, and Tappett can put him on to something before that. Anyhow, tell Tappett not to waste our International. Buzz him around as much as you can." And with this, his voice hoarser still, and his face even redder, he clapped Hugh laughingly on the shoulder, and pushed him towards the door after the sparkling and delighted Mr. Roberts, walking a few paces at his side, telling him that he had just held the most successful of all his meetings, and that things were going swimmingly.

II

Of all the surprises in that General Election, Stephen's victory was reckoned one

of the most dramatic and amusing. It was ascribed in this quarter to the dashing nature of his attack; in that, to his youthfulness and the sparkling wit which had distinguished his speeches; and in yet another quarter, to the exalted moral earnestness of his patriotism. Certainly in no quarter at all was that unexpected victory, which saw the fall of so many giants, attributed to the intervention of Hugh Jodrell.

As soon as he decently could after the declaration of the poll, Stephen, accompanied by his mother and Phillida, departed for London, and highly excited and boundlessly pleased, entered the house in Belgrave Square, which was now redeemed by decorators from its painful war services.

He still could not believe his luck, and still could not speak of anything else. So many of his party had gone down, including illustrious ministers, and here he was overwhelmingly at the top of the poll in a fight which every one had regarded as hopeless. Could it really be true? Was he indeed Stephen Laslett, M.P.? He drank a couple of whiskies-and-soda in the magnificent drawing-room of his father's house before he could persuade himself that he was not dreaming.

His father had provided him with a singularly efficient secretary, a thin and spectacled man verging on the forties, Mr. Shrimpton by name, who knew all there was to know about the inside of political life and something, too, about the inner workings of the financial world. This secretary, a thorough cynic gifted with the quietest of manners, a white-faced man with a peaky chin and his thin hair parted in the middle of a good-shaped head, came into the drawing-room, where the hoarse-voiced Stephen was holding forth to his cigarette-smoking mother and his cigarette-smoking sister, and told him that the editor of an extremely popular newspaper wanted an article from him, and that it would be sent for at eight o'clock that night.

Stephen leapt up, refreshed by the two whiskies-and-soda, uttered a cheerful oath, and exclaimed, "This is fame!" He regarded his imperturbable secretary. "It's an opportunity not to be missed: isn't it, Shrimp?" he demanded.

"You've got a following wind," said Mr. Shrimpton. "If I were you I'd make the most of it."

"What's it to be about? How I beat Sir Thomas Chigwell?"

Mr. Shrimpton shook his head. "No fear. They want something hot. What the Tory Party Must Do to Save the Country."

"By God, I'll tell 'em!" cried Stephen.

"You've got to pitch into your own party."

"By God, I will!"

"Well, I'd make a start now, if I were you."

Stephen swung round to his mother and sister, laughed as he waved them his farewells, and exclaimed, "Who said I wouldn't set the Thames on fire? Dammit, it will be blazing to-morrow from Tilbury to Hammersmith!"

In the library on the ground floor he refused Mr. Shrimpton's offices as a shorthand writer, said that he required perfect solitude for composition, and, taking a cigarette from a box on the writing-table, asked the secretary before he departed to tell the butler to bring him whisky and a syphon of soda.

An hour afterwards, very red-faced and worn-looking, his hair disordered and a worried expression in his eyes, Stephen rang the bell and ordered a car to come to the door. "Tell Mrs. Laslett," he instructed the butler in the hall, who was watching a young footman helping the new Member of Parliament into his overcoat, "that I'm going to see Mr. Leo Daga. If I'm not back by eight, keep the newspaper messenger till I telephone to you saying where to send him."

He snatched up the sheets of his manuscript from the hall table, and departed hastily to the car at the door.

III

Leo Daga began to read Stephen's manuscript with slow carefulness, and then with an impatience which quickened as he read.

"You want my truthful opinion?" he asked, lowering the sheets to his knee, and turning his head in Stephen's direction. Stephen took a cigarette from his lips, nodded his head, and said hoarsely, "Of course I do."

Then Leo Daga told him that this screed wouldn't do at all. He said that it was as dull as a leading article. He said it was what every one would write who was asked to answer that particular question. If it were published, which God forbid! the whole world would conclude that Stephen was no different from every other politician; and the entire point of this great opportunity, of course, lay in using it to acquaint mankind with the interesting and arresting fact that Stephen *was* different from every other extant politician—charmingly, amusingly, and notably different.

Stephen groaned out that the article had to be in the printer's hand at eight o'clock. What the devil was he to do?

Leo Daga shrugged his shoulders and announced with a smile that printers had been known to be kept waiting. He rang a bell, and when it was answered by his valet, gave orders for a particularly potent cocktail. He then lighted a cigarette, looked at himself in the glass, smoothed his hair, rearranged his tie, and turning about to Stephen, with one hand on his hip, and his eyebrows twitching with mischief, said

that it would be great fun to compose a political article together. "I suggest to you that we should set about it in this way. I will utter the first sentence, you the second, I the third, and you the fourth, and so on. And while we sit looking at each other, and I hope smiling at each other's wit, a certain Miss Cosmore, the most unemotional of her sex, will take it all down in shorthand."

The cocktails were brought in, Miss Cosmore sent for, and with his glass to his lips, the sparkling playwright exclaimed, "Here's to your fame. With God's good help, we'll have all London talking about you to-morrow."

He suggested, as an inspiration for Stephen's mind, that the opening sentence should be something bright and buoyant, such as, "Politics ceased to amuse the English people when they ceased to be the sport of English gentlemen." He might go on from that to say that it is the mission of a courageous Conservatism to restore politics to their proper place in the affections of a nation rightly convinced that beer, tobacco, and horse-racing are more important than the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon opinions of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, and also that silk stockings play an infinitely more delightful part in human happiness than any of the emigrant references of Mr. Lloyd George, that born village poet, to his native mountains.

From this beginning, he suggested, they should between them develop the thesis that men with the minds of rural district councillors, and with the imagination of local vestrymen, were hardly likely to solve the problem of our national politics, which was simply this, How to be as happy as possible on a very little money. From that point they should go on, or rather Stephen should go on, to describe Liberalism, as a bourgeois enthusiasm for Suspended Animation, Socialism as a sansculotte enthusiasm for St. Vitus' Dance, and Conservatism as the natural temper of the normal Englishman in addressing himself to any really important question such as, What play shall I go to to-night? What novel shall I order from the library? What horse shall I back for the Derby? What gift shall I make to my mistress?

He said, "Let us make it quite clear that the average Englishman, in spite of the stupidity which becomes him, the grossness which he has inherited, and the stubbornness which he has brought to an almost mulish perfection, is more gifted than the people of other nations, not only in the art of strong and blasphemous language, but in that instinctive good sense which enables one to know what is what. He is a cheerful realist whom the Liberal would vulgarise and the Socialist would gammon. It is the mission of Conservatism to stand by the average Englishman, and to call the bluff of the social reformer. The future of politics is boundless freedom."

Stephen saw an opportunity in this suggestion for exhibiting his wit, but rather dismally felt all the same that his blood was chilling, his pulse beating slower, and that

his mind was clouding with doubts. Leo Daga, however, smiling and debonair, so cleverly made him feel that at all costs he must be original and amusing, made him feel, too, that to muff this Heaven-sent opportunity for acquainting the world with the fact of his existence would be really too disastrous for words, that finally, with the unemotional Miss Cosmore seated at the writing-table, and another cocktail quickening his courage, Stephen completely surrendered.

When the article was typewritten, and Leo Daga read it aloud to him, the last of Stephen's doubts vanished from his mind, and he declared, sparkling with excited delight, that it was as witty a pronouncement as ever he had read in his life.

"And now," he said, looking at his watch, "I can just get back in time to catch the printer; and after that I'll take a bath, and then, if you will, and nine isn't too late or too early for you, we'll dine together, and make merry, and dance with the most agreeable girls in town."

Leo Daga laughed in the quiet and cheerful way that was so characteristic of his particular form of good-nature, looking at Stephen, whom he both admired and liked, and placing an affectionate hand on the young Member of Parliament's arm, said that if Stephen could not humanise politics he was quite certain that no one else could.

"And to-morrow," he exclaimed, his eyes dancing, his eyebrows twitching, "you will be a famous man!"

IV

Whether it was the article signed with his own name, or an article about him, illustrated with a very taking photograph of him, which article Mr. Shrimpton had suggested to a popular newspaper, the proprietor of which was under numerous obligations to Mr. William Laslett, certain it is that next morning Stephen became a public character.

His telephone bell was going all that day. He was invited to write articles for Sunday newspapers, begged by fashionable photographers to give them sittings, asked out to luncheon and dinner by people whom he hardly knew, implored to make speeches at forthcoming charitable meetings under royal and ducal patronage, even, though it may sound absurd, invited to join the board of a singularly doubtful public utility company which was just then in the course of formation.

But the most interesting consequence of his sudden impact on the public consciousness was its effect in those more or less exalted circles of society wherein good mothers take thought, and an incredible amount of pains, concerning the

welfare of their marriageable daughters.

Over and over again that day, and during the days which followed, the question was asked, "Who are the Lasletts?" And the answers were as confusing as they were numerous. The Lasletts were said to be fabulously rich; they were declared to be charming, awful, possible, dull, provincial, amusing, improper, dangerous; some one had met the mother; another had met the daughter; some one had a son who was at Eton with Stephen; another one had a daughter who had met Phillida at the Trevor Lumleys', and another had heard this or that about William Laslett; some one could be certain of one thing, another could be certain of something else; and gradually, in the end, it came to this, that while Mr. Laslett must be regarded as impossible, Mrs. Laslett as inconvenient, and Phillida as negligible, Stephen was in every way a most desirable young man, with a brilliant future in front of him, and most urgently in need of a wife who would see that he committed no social mistakes in the course of his political career.

There seemed to be little doubt that the young, handsome, and wealthy Member of Parliament would have been smothered under his new and unexpected notoriety, but for the wisdom of Leo Daga, in whose amusing society Stephen now discussed almost every detail of his affairs. Mr. Shrimpton told Mrs. Shrimpton in the early days of this popularity that Stephen would never stand it, that he hadn't got the guts of the old man, nothing like 'em, and that he'd lose his head as sure as winking, and go under like thousands of other youngsters of his time. But Leo Daga's influence preserved Stephen at least from losing his feet in that strong-running tide of bewildering popularity.

He impressed upon his disciple the value of mystery. He must not let himself become a bore to the public. He told Stephen that Sarah Bernhardt had maddened the world to see her, because she never showed herself to it except on the stage; and incited it to know about her, because the only knowledge she imparted to it concerning her disposition stimulated further curiosity and provoked the right sort of gossip.

Stephen's public appearances should be as rare as possible. He should lunch and dine only with the most amusing people. Shrimpton must not communicate to the Press dull articles about the prizes he won at Eton and Cambridge, but should drop dark hints about a secret passion corroding his happiness, and about mysterious adventures in Capri or Cairo which had changed his whole life. He must never be photographed with a smile on his face, but always with the air of brooding melancholy which so became his dark beauty. The wit of his newspaper articles—and these articles must not become too common—should be mordant and rather

savage, and Shrimpton should drop hints that he wrote in that manner to hide a wound in his heart.

So completely did Stephen surrender to this counsel of his mentor, that Mrs. Laslett and Phillida declared that they hardly knew him, and were quite thunderstruck when he answered their good-tempered raillery with dark frowns and brief words of heavy scorn.

Mrs. Laslett, it must be related, finding herself now rather sought after by people whom she had never expected to know, began to reconsider her attitude to life, and to talk seriously to Phillida about their place in the world. At first she went to charity bazaars, charity concerts, and drawing-room meetings, in a rather jesting spirit, declaring them to be merely dull and humbugging ways of bringing people together, and saying that for Stephen's sake she supposed she must make a martyr of herself; but, truth to tell, she rather enjoyed this new employment of her time, this new way of seeing what goes on in the world, and gradually, almost imperceptibly, the atmosphere of a more serious and interesting world entered into her soul and influenced her disposition in a fresh direction.

She began now definitely to circulate in these more or less exalted circles, winning for herself the sufficient reputation of being an extremely generous woman, and a woman of practical good sense, who gave herself no airs, and was not ridiculously uneducated. She widened her acquaintance very extensively, and established two or three interesting friendships. Occasionally, too, circulating in this busy and friendly world of decent people, she caught glimpses of those exclusive ones who descend from their own definitely exalted circle only to show themselves, in the sacred interest of charity, to those who dwell below, people who, if they did not call upon her or ask her to luncheon, at least graciously smiled upon Mrs. Laslett at church or hospital bazaars when she spent a great deal of money at their stalls, or entered their drawing-rooms to attend meetings in aid of patriotic funds or missions in the slums.

But although, making good use of her sharp eyes wherever she went, Mrs. Laslett caught glimpses among these great ones of aristocratic girls who, to her great surprise, reminded her by their demeanour and style of Susan Anstey, it never once occurred to her that Susan should become Stephen's bride. She persuaded herself that the resemblance of these aristocratic girls to Susan was only superficial, and that if she came to know them better she would discover them to be infinitely more brilliant and more charming than the rustic Susan. All the same, she began from this time to modify her raiment, and Phillida's too, in a direction which brought their style nearer to the style of Susan's than she had ever deemed conceivable.

She was relieved and gratified, in this difficult matter of Susan, to find that Stephen showed no desire to go down to Sussex, and never now even so much as mentioned Susan's name. She came to think, very happily, that he had quite outgrown his foolish feelings for that scheming girl, and would soon be looking about him for a wife, as he ought always to have done, in this great and powerful world of London society. Indeed, having met Lady Norwich at a ball in aid of Disabled Ex-Service Men, and having been quite pleasantly received by this very great lady, who knew, it appeared, of Hugh Jodrell's friendship with Stephen, she began to think that Stephen might hope to marry even into the most exclusive of the great families.

She began also to think about Phillida, and to keep her eyes out for young men of rank and position who might reasonably be considered as possible husbands for Phillida. But soon after her practical and now sobered mind turned cheerfully in this direction, she was brought suddenly to see Phillida in an entirely unsuspected and very alarming light.

There was a Mrs. Callington among Mrs. Laslett's new acquaintances, and this Mrs. Callington, besides being the daughter of an Irish peer and a very popular person in many circles of society, for she was witty without malice and knowledgeable with pedantry, was a very good woman, one who had a gift for interposing usefully in the affairs of her friends and never neglected it. Every one liked her, and Mrs. Laslett had been quick to perceive that friendship with this popular person, who had so many contacts in the great world, would be extremely useful to her. She had, therefore, always been on her best behaviour with Mrs. Callington, and with considerable tact had been able to behave generously towards her without offence.

One day Mrs. Callington called upon Mrs. Laslett, and when the other people in the drawing-room were all talking together, drew her chair nearer to the tea-table, as if she wanted to be very friendly and intimate, and said to her hostess, "I wish to talk to you about your daughter——" in a low and rather ominous tone of voice.

Ella Laslett, who was stirring the tea in its pot, thought that Mrs. Callington had found a husband for Phillida. She, therefore, turned to her eagerly, a bright smile in her handsome eyes, and, shutting down the lid of the teapot, and in a voice as low and confidential as her guest's, begged her to proceed.

Mrs. Callington did proceed. "I'm going to take a great liberty," she said, "and tell you that I'm quite sure London is not good for your girl."

Ella Laslett was almost frozen with consternation. She sat back from the tea-table, let her hands fall in her lap, and said, "Do tell me what you mean."

For these simple words of Mrs. Callington conveyed a tremendous meaning to

the sharp-witted Ella Laslett. They conveyed the meaning that London was destroying Phillida's chances of finding the right sort of husband, that London was undermining Phillida's moral health, that people were talking about Phillida, and that Phillida was doing things of which her mother had no knowledge.

In answer to her anxious request for an explanation, Mrs. Callington said very impressively, "If I were you I should take her to see Dr. Mersey. He is a wonderful person for treating women's nerves; he understands women, and particularly young women who cannot quite manage the excitement of life in London. He will probably send her away to a nursing home in the country. But you must put up with that. She wants quiet. She wants regular hours. I'm quite sure she smokes far too many cigarettes, and depends far too much on cocktails for her energies. I knew a girl who got into those habits who became a complete wreck, and is now, I am sorry to say, what is called a border-case: her mind, it is feared, is permanently damaged—she will never quite recover."

This was what is called an eye-opener for Mrs. Laslett, who had hitherto been either so taken up with herself, or so dazzled by the excitements and pleasures of life, that she had really never seen Phillida as other people saw her. She looked across the room, caught Phillida at a moment when the child's white face was twitching, and felt her blood run cold in her veins.

From that moment Mrs. Laslett began to observe Phillida with keen anxiety. She dropped hints, which however had no effect, about Phillida's habits. She went further and spoke directly about those habits and their effect on Phillida's health, and was something more than perturbed by Phillida's reply, that it didn't much matter what became of her.

Shortly after receiving that dismal reply she made up her mind to act, and one day she and Phillida drove off to see Dr. Mersey.

The result of Dr. Mersey's examination was that Mrs. Laslett, very much shaken, took Phillida to a clinic in the country—a beautiful old house in a park which was no longer the home of a distinguished and happy family, but a highly scientific establishment full of people, otherwise intelligent, whose appetites had brought them to a dangerous condition.

After seeing that the child was in every way well-cared for in this fine place, which frightened and depressed her, Mrs. Laslett returned to London in a very sober state of mind, for the first time in her life, perhaps, conscious of something more important in human existence than the pursuit of pleasure. Even her new excitement of social mountaineering seemed to her to have a relative unimportance, even a relative insignificance. She wondered, for she came of sound middle-class stock,

whether she had not neglected her duties as a mother.

Her arrival in London was not brightened by Stephen's immediate announcement to her that he was going to St. Moritz with Leo Daga.

"Aren't you seeing more of that man than is either wise or desirable?" she asked him.

V

One day, before they started for Switzerland, Stephen confided to Leo Daga the troublesome matter of his relations with the chorus girl, Hugh's intervention in that dismal business having proved entirely ineffectual.

Leo Daga, who had listened to the narrative with the air of one whose sense of smell is offended by a noisome vapour, was quite horrified that Stephen should have entered into any such sordid arrangements. He did not denounce Stephen's relations with the chorus girl from a moral point of view, but from an æsthetic point of view. Money, he said, must never enter into any of Stephen's sex adventures. He must leave that sort of degraded business to old men and provincial visitors to London. Never again must he pollute his feelings with such a mercenary and soul-destroying entanglement.

However, recovering from his first shock, he cheerfully bade Stephen not to worry himself any further in the matter, and undertook to see the girl and make an end of the business out of hand.

Stephen was so intensely and profoundly grateful for this intervention of so knowledgeable a man of the world, that their friendship from that moment became almost a sacred one. But Leo Daga did not know the lady in question, and returned from his interview with that audacious little baggage very much ruffled and annoyed. He told Stephen, in a tone which clearly marked his irritation, and rather frightened Stephen, that there was really nothing for it but to consult solicitors.

Stephen, crestfallen, disappointed, and alarmed, considered this advice and decided that he would first of all consult Mr. Shrimpton. He showed Mr. Shrimpton a letter he had received from the girl that morning, furiously denouncing him for having sent Leo Daga to see her, and declaring her intention to call upon him next day in Belgrave Square if he himself did not come to see her that afternoon.

Mr. Shrimpton, to Stephen's relief, did not seem to be in the least alarmed by this letter. He tossed it on to the table, and said, "Leave her to me."

Stephen smiled, as if to show that he was not really worried in the matter, and asked, "What are you going to do about it?"

"Tell her to call," said Mr. Shrimpton.

Next morning the girl did call at the big house in Belgrave Square, and on asking to see Stephen was at once conducted by a footman to the library. There she was received, not by Stephen, but by Mr. Shrimpton, who invited her, without offering her his hand, to take a chair in front of the writing-table at which he was seated, apparently very much occupied.

The girl remained standing, her angry eyes glancing from the white-faced, cynical, and imperturbable Mr. Shrimpton to another person in the room—a heavily-built and very unemotional person who sat wearily on an upright chair against one of the walls, with a notebook and pencil in his left hand, his right hand smoothing a particularly official-looking black moustache.

"I've come," she said, rather weakly, and yet with an effort at challenge, "to see Mr. Laslett."

"What for?" Shrimpton demanded, and blotted the paper in front of him.

"That's my business," said the girl, worried because the man by the wall never once looked in her direction.

"Well, you're not going to see him," said Mr. Shrimpton, "and if you don't tell me what your business is in two minutes out you'll go." He sat back in his chair, and stared at her, contemptuously.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, putting a hand on the back of the chair by which she was standing. "Who are you to talk to me like that?"

"You've got one minute left," said Mr. Shrimpton, and sniffed.

The girl eyed him with increasing rage, and burst out, "Then I'll spend it in telling you that Stephen Laslett is a dirty dog."

"What of that?"

"What of what?"

"We're all dirty dogs, aren't we?" said Mr. Shrimpton. He looked at her, very nearly with a smile, and inquired, "You don't call yourself a spotless porcupine, do you?"

"Whatever I am," she cried fiercely, "he has made me."

"Rats!" said Mr. Shrimpton.

"You dare say that to me!"

"I'd say anything to you. Why not? What are you, anyway? All you're after is money, isn't it? You aren't asking him to marry you, are you? Go away with you: all you want is money. That's what you're after, money!"

"Never mind what I'm after."

"I don't. It doesn't hurt me."

She swallowed in her throat, clenched one of her hands, and taking a step nearer to the table, burst out, "I tell you this: I'll make him wish he'd never been born before I've done with him. You see if I don't!"

"Got that?" inquired Mr. Shrimpton, and turned to the man with the notebook.

The man with the notebook nodded his head without looking up. He seemed rather bored than otherwise by the proceedings. Perhaps it was his boredom, rather than Mr. Shrimpton's cold-blooded cynicism, which prevented the girl from giving hysterical vent to her now thoroughly overcharged feelings.

She said to Mr. Shrimpton, "What's your game?"

"Reducing yours to writing," answered Mr. Shrimpton.

"My what?"

"Why, your game, of course. What else do you think?"

"And what is my game?"

"Blackmail."

"Who said so?"

"You did."

"You're a liar."

"So was Ananias."

"You think you've trapped me, do you?"

"I'm sure of it," said Mr. Shrimpton.

"Well, then," said the girl, "prosecute me. Go on, you prosecute me."

"We shall apply for a warrant for your arrest to-morrow morning," said Mr. Shrimpton.

"You think you can frighten me."

"Best thing you can do is to see if you can find some one to go bail for you."

The girl, who had been growing gradually whiter, paler, and more breathless, jerked out, "I've never demanded money from him, or from you either!"

"Don't talk rot."

"I haven't."

"You make me tired. Clear out. You'll find some one in the hall to open the door for you, and two policemen on the doorstep to see you go quietly."

She wilted visibly. "I say I've never demanded money from him," she cried weakly, her voice trembling. "Never! Never I haven't! And you can't prove that I have."

"Oh, get out," said Mr. Shrimpton, apparently impatient beyond all bearing. "You're talking like a fool. Get out, I say. I've got work to do."

But the girl seemed afraid to get out.

Mr. Shrimpton looked up at her suddenly.

"I've never demanded money from him," said the girl.

"You don't want to be pitched out neck and crop, do you?" demanded Mr. Shrimpton.

The girl, who had been standing all the time, suddenly swerved sideways and collapsed into the chair in front of the writing-table. She bent her head, and appeared to sob.

"I give you two minutes," said Mr. Shrimpton, "and then I ring the bell."

The girl looked up, and asked tearfully, "Can't I see him?"

"No, you can't."

She thought desperately for a moment. Then she straightened herself and said, "Well, what does he propose to do for me?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Shrimpton.

"Nothing!"

"He left that to me."

"To you?"

"That's right."

She thought hard, never taking her eyes off Mr. Shrimpton's face. She read in those cold eyes of his something that emboldened her. She swallowed her sobs and hardened her lips. "Well, what do you propose as a fair compensation?" she asked.

"What should you say?" inquired Mr. Shrimpton.

"A thousand pounds."

"Nothing like it!"

"Five hundred then, and not a penny less."

"Divide it by five."

"What are you talking about? That's no good to me."

"It's as far as I'm going all the same," said Mr. Shrimpton.

"It's an insult!"

"Then five hundred would be a greater insult still."

"You're a hard one, you are."

"Well, you see, I've read all your letters and they've soured me. Lord, I never read such letters! And you talk about insults! You! That's a good one, that is! Why, if I was to show your letters to my wife——"

"Make it two hundred and fifty," she said.

"You're asking for trouble."

"What's two hundred and fifty to him?"

"Nothing."

"Well, then?"

"It's more than you're worth. A hundred, that's my figure. Take it or leave it."

"I won't take it!" she cried in a genuine rage. "A hundred! Why, I never heard of such a thing. I'll take two-fifty, but I'm damned if I'll take a farthing less. That's little enough that is, God knows it is! A hundred! You're trying to make me wild, that's what you're doing. Why, I never heard of such a thing. A hundred!"

"It'll be fifty if you aren't careful," said Mr. Shrimpton.

She jumped up from her chair. "No, I won't take it." she cried, her eyes flashing, her lips shaking. "I won't. I'll see you in hell first, and him too. And you arrest me! You do! I dare you to. You put me in the courts. You try it. I'll tell them something! I'm not afraid to go there. You try it. A hundred pounds!"

Mr. Shrimpton got up and rang the bell. "I'm sorry," he said, "we can't do business. I thought you'd got more sense."

"I've got something," she said indignantly, "which you haven't got, and that's proper pride."

"Oh, there's nothing proper about you," he said. "You ought to know that by this time."

A footman, the tallest and sternest of the establishment, entered the room.

"Show her out," said Mr. Shrimpton, and took up his pen.

A few minutes after she had departed, Mr. Shrimpton, who now felt that he had blundered the business, and who certainly knew he had failed, as Hugh Jodrell had failed, and Leo Daga had failed, called Mr. William Laslett on the telephone.

That afternoon a well-known person in the theatrical world paid a visit to the lady in question and offered her a place in a comic opera company which would be starting in a few weeks for South Africa. The terms were handsome, and her almost forgotten theatrical ambition was awakened by the announcement that she would probably be required to understudy a leading lady.

Next morning this same person again called upon her, this time in some agitation. He had her agreement with him, but dared not ask her to sign it. He had been told, he said, that she might be involved in an action for blackmail. Was it true? Of course the company couldn't dare to risk such a scandal as that. Besides, it would throw out rehearsals and might lead to trouble in the company, which was a very select one.

She told him something of the matter, and he was sympathy itself. She told him the whole story, and he was like a father to her.

"Look here," he said, "will you let me settle it for you? I think I can do it. Give me all the letters from the young fool, and I'll see our solicitors at once. What would

satisfy you? Don't ask too much, and I'll have it put through before the day's out. You see we go into rehearsal next week."

He was so sympathetic that she said she would leave it to him to suggest what she should receive, protesting that but for Stephen Laslett she might now have been far higher up in the profession, and declaring on her oath, tears in her eyes, that she was not thinking of money at all, but of her feelings.

The theatrical gentleman, who had been commissioned to settle matters whatever it cost, suggested three hundred pounds, and, greatly thanked for his kindness in the matter, departed with all Stephen's letters and a document signed by the lady to the effect that she had no claims on that young gentleman and hereby acknowledging the receipt of three hundred pounds, promised never to molest him in any way.

Thus did William Laslett settle a matter which his famous son, Hugh Jodrell, Leo Daga, and even the cold-blooded Mr. Shrimpton had only bungled.

VI

Delivered from this one annoyance in his life, this one visible menace to his political career, Stephen set out with Leo Daga for St. Moritz in the best of spirits, fascinated by the intellectual pleasure of the playwright's companionship and almost anhungered for the fun and festivity of winter sports.

He now seldom thought of Susan Anstey, and only occasionally would her memory, which had for so long held him by its spell, float palely across his darkening consciousness as he went off to sleep. She was no longer vivid to him. His life had suddenly become full of rich colour and exciting action; and now his eyes were too ravished by the colour, his mind too absorbed in the action, for any of his memories to be either clear or vigorous. A cloud descended and enveloped the attraction of Susan Anstey. The same cloud covered, too, the once delightful charm of Hugh Jodrell. He was no more aware of the chorus girl rehearsing for a tour in South Africa than he was of his sister Phillida lying wretched and forlorn in a nursing home. Perhaps he saw no one in the whole world at that time with clearness and distinction except Leo Daga, not even the girls at St. Moritz with whom he flirted, and the one or two women with whom Leo Daga permitted him to establish dangerous intimacies.

Because of what followed it is important to understand the nature of the influence which Leo Daga exercised over him. There is no doubt that it saved Stephen from many vulgarities, many follies, many mistakes; it was all on the side of restraint and

prudence. It certainly prevented a rather violent and reckless nature from rushing headlong towards the steep places of social and moral disaster. Stephen learned to hold himself in, to cross-examine his fiery impulses, to see the danger of making himself cheap, and to use the attraction of his youthful good looks with a certain degree of calculated discretion. There is no doubt, that is to say, that because of Leo Daga's restraining influence Stephen learned to put a check on the more vulgar of his appetites, and to husband his energies for a purpose which was not wholly without both virtue and dignity.

And yet, with this, a subtle change for the worse was proceeding in the recesses of his character. It was a change hard to name, and one of which Stephen himself was wholly unaware; one, moreover, which Leo Daga certainly did not consciously intend and direct. It was a change which weakened the delicate fineness of character and strengthened its coarser elements. It confirmed an already dangerous vanity; it intensified an already perilous egoism. It encouraged Stephen to throw off many wise restrictions and to forget many pious memories. It made, not a man of him, but a man of the world of him, a type of man which can come into being only at the cost of boyhood's purest ambitions and manhood's noblest possibilities. There was no longer any watching of himself for faults, no longer any striving of what was good in him to get the better of what was bad in him, no longer any sadness of repentance when he fell, nor any seeking of help from the Invisible when he tried to rise again.

He felt that he was now enfranchised from the long, unexciting, and slightly ridiculous make-believe of boyhood. He need now acknowledge no laws and fixed rules. He was to consider the act of living as an art, and delicately to amuse himself with the pleasures of the world, while he conspired to win only the most dazzling of its rewards.

He stood, then, at the threshold of his career, in a lawless world, with only worldly wisdom for his guide. When he moved it was in the company of revellers who had no sight of a perceptible purpose, no knowledge of an ascertained goal. He was set free from all his former checks, and delivered from all his former self-inhibitions. He told himself that he was a man at last, fairly launched on the sea of life, and free to do what he wanted. This new liberty, the liberty of a lawless world that preaches the gospel of a good time, intoxicated him like a strong wine. He was not only enchantingly, ravishingly, happy; he was also invigorated by the bliss which a sense of high adventure creates in the mind. He looked back on what he once had been with amused wonder. He remembered the chains of his youth with shamefaced amazement for his own absurdity.

And yet, he was not free; he was only adrift.

VII

One morning, as he sat on the veranda of the hotel, waiting for Leo Daga, and enjoying the bright sunshine and refreshing cold air after a night of vigorous dancing and exciting flirtation, a girl, in a group of people passing across the trodden snow in front of the hotel, suddenly broke away from her friends and came towards him with a smile of confident friendliness.

He did not recognise her until she was near enough to hail him by his name, and wondered who she could be, this rather jolly-looking girl in breeches and gaiters, whose little red face was so becomingly surrounded by grey fur, whose fine teeth shone like pearls in the sunlight. But when she said, "Hello, Stephen!" and laughed as she said it, he recognised her as Tony Hellington, and caught hold of her hand, without getting up from his seat, and pulled her down to sit at his side, saying how very jolly it was to see her out there.

She told him with whom she was staying, at what hotel, and informed him that she was coming to his hotel that night for a dance. Then she began to ask him about Phillida, anxiously, but hurriedly because her friends were waiting for her. She was on her feet ready to go, when she said, "I saw Susan Anstey before I came away. She's awfully glad about your success."

He got up and said, "Ah, dear Susan! I must write to her," walking at Tony's side.

"You know, of course, that Hugh Jodrell is joining David Ramsay?"

"Yes, he told me."

"Every one's awfully glad about it."

"But what a life!"

"Why?"

"No ambition, no chance of adventure."

"But plenty of time for games!"

She left him, and he sauntered back to the hotel thinking of Susan, and telling himself that he really must write to her.

At luncheon that day, refreshed and cleansed by his exercise, he confided to Leo Daga for the first time the secret of his complicated feelings for Susan. Leo Daga was smilingly horrified. He told Stephen that he must not dream of marriage till he was approaching the forties, or even well launched on that peaceful Mediterranean of human life. To marry now would be to confess himself before the world irreclaimably bourgeois. He would never get over it. And when he did marry, the lady must not be some quiet and uneventful paragon of the English countryside, but

either the most paragraphed of society's favourites or the most beautiful and unlettered flower-girl from Whitechapel.

Stephen, who was not at all in the mood to commit himself to domestic life, saw that marriage might jeopardise his career of daring political adventure, and promised Leo Daga that he would keep away from Susan to prevent himself from being tempted. But the thought of Susan, which Tony Hellington had awakened in his mind, stayed there, and some few days afterwards, ashamed of his long neglect, he wrote her a cheerful and amusing letter.

Susan's answer to this letter arrived on his penultimate day at St. Moritz—a day of burning sunshine, deep blue windless skies, and air as cold as the snow on the mountain-tops. He was again sitting by himself on the veranda of the hotel, with all the stir and jollity of crowding holiday-makers going on before his eyes—horses in sleighs tossing their heads and setting their bells ringing, jolly voices calling across the snow that they were going to Suvretta House or Sils Maria, young men hurrying forward either with skates in their hands or with ski-sticks under their arms, girls standing about in groups laughing and gossiping, people being photographed, women setting out for a tour of the jewellers' shops, parents watching from the steps of the veranda the departure of their children on skis beeswaxed by the porter of the hotel—sights and sounds of which Stephen was scarcely aware as he glanced through his budget of letters, and wholly unaware when he came to open the letter from Susan.

He was at first amazed, then deeply hurt, to see how short was her answer to his long and witty letter. Before he had read a word of it he was angry, and when he had finished reading it he was furiously enraged. What could it mean, this letter of one single, and apparently, scornful sentence?

"Dear Stephen," he read, "I am glad you remember me, but I should be happier if I thought you had not forgotten Hugh Jodrell. Yours sincerely, Susan Anstey."

What on earth could that mean?

Did it mean that Hugh was hurt because Stephen hadn't written to him? He tried to persuade himself that it meant only this; but conscience told him it meant something much more. It meant, and he knew it, though he suppressed the knowledge with bitter anger, that he had forgotten Hugh's influence, that he had taken into his life another influence, and an influence of which Susan disapproved.

He said to himself, "Some one has gossiped about me. Perhaps Tony has written to her; I remember how she avoided me at that dance. Susan has probably seen photographs of me in the illustrated papers and drawn conclusions that aren't justified. She thinks I am simply playing the fool. She doesn't know that Leo Daga is seriously helping me to prepare myself for success in politics."

He forgot all his misdeeds, and was entirely oblivious to his dangerous condition. He did not know, for example, that he now never looked at a good-looking girl except to think of her in only one way, and that he had fallen into a trick of the eyes with these pretty girls which made their fathers indignant, their brothers angry, and their lovers jealous. He did not know that he was now never an intelligent and perfectly sane person with women, except when they were physically unattractive or purely intellectual, in which instances he became soon impatient and bored. He did not know that he was conscious of pleasure in the knowledge of his popularity with women, and that he studied his appearance to intensify that popularity, and that he never came into the company of women without the excitement of looking out for a fresh adventure.

These things he did not know, in his great vexation with Susan, nor that people had long begun to talk about him with disapproval; but, stranger still, he put out of his mind, as if they were lies, as if they were the invention of malignant scandal, not only the several improper flirtations which had characterised his visit to St. Moritz, but the two serious affairs with married women which Leo Daga had begun to watch with some anxiety.

He thought of himself solely as the witty and charming young man who had entered so cheerfully into the vigorous sports and bright amusements of the place, who was so universally popular, who was even so entirely lovable to many, and who was earnestly preparing himself in Leo Daga's society for a great success in the new Parliament.

He sat there, very sore and indignant, thinking of himself in this way, and meditating a cold and rebukeful reply to Susan—all the brightness gone out of the sun, all the blue of the sky faded to a hodden grey, and all the pure glad freshness of the mountain air changed to the atmosphere of a smuggler's cave.

Suddenly he started, and looked up. Some one stood at the end of the veranda, staring at him, hesitating to approach, smiling at him from the distance—a woman.

She was dressed in a grey the colour of her hair, with a scarf of pale mauve lace thrown over her head, and in her hands she held two or three little books and papers.

Stephen recognised her as a Mrs. Malleverer.

He rose as she came near to him, surprised and uneasy, wondering what she could have to say to him. She put out her hand with a gesture of charming frankness, and raised an almost mirthful face to him. Then she laughed softly and said, standing quite close to him, still holding his hand, "Mr. Laslett, it's dreadfully rude of me to break in upon you like this, isn't it? But I do so want to say something to you. Can

you spare me"—she paused, drooped her head to one side, and smiled, raising her eyebrows, as she added—"three minutes?"

Stephen was conscious of the healthy coldness of her firm hand, and ashamed of the heat of his own. In a voice which he felt was degradingly husky he begged her to sit down, and placed a chair for her.

"How kind of you," she said, and laughed softly, studying him, as she put back the scarf from her face, and arranged the little books and papers in her lap. She appeared to be as excited as a girl, and yet without flurry or foolishness of any kind.

After a few cheerful words about the place, the weather, and the games, she seemed to settle herself down for a real conversation, and looking at him with affection, as if she loved his youth and its promise, said that she was so interested in Stephen, and did so hope that he was going to be a real strength in the House of Commons, and that she had wanted to speak to him directly he arrived, feeling that an old woman might take that liberty, but something had deterred her, some stupid nervousness on her part. That morning, however, there were certain verses in the Psalms for the day which had emboldened her, and here she was to tell him how she hoped and prayed that he would be a tower of righteousness in the new Parliament, a real leader of the nation, setting his face like flint against all those things in our political life which mocked the heroic dead and shamed the great name of England in the eyes of the world.

She asked him if she might read to him the verses in the Psalms of which she had spoken, opening one of the little books in her lap, and saying that she regarded these particular verses as a veritable prescription for Stephen's own career.

She took a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles from their case, put them on, and looked up at him with a bright smile of amusement, saying, "It's dreadful cheek of me to talk to you like this, isn't it? But you see we are all so interested in you, and feel that you can be such a help to the country."

Then she read to him, and he listened to the words of that ancient psalm with the colour rising in his face and confusion in his brain, wondering only what he could say to her when she had done. This was what she read:

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord: or who shall rise up in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart: and that hath not lifted up his mind unto vanity."

She snatched off her spectacles, sat eagerly forward in her chair, and said with an extreme earnestness, "Oh, I'm so sure that is true! Doesn't it *ring* with truth? We can't help, we can't do anything, unless our own hands are clean, our own hearts pure, our own minds free of all vanity."

She did not appear as if she wanted him to make any answer, but rather as if her sole purpose was to fasten into his mind those three ideas of clean hands, a pure heart, and a mind free from vanity. Perhaps she feared to keep him too long, or to outwear his patience. In any case, no sooner had she done speaking before she hastily groped among the papers in her lap, and finding one for which she had been searching, at once rose from her chair, and put out her hand to him as he stood before her, raising her face to his, and thanked him for listening to her.

Then she said, standing close to him, "Mr. Laslett, I want to give you something as a little souvenir of our meeting. Will you let me do that, and will you keep it as a marker in your Bible, and sometimes think of me, knowing that I shall pray for you?"

When she had left him he sat down in his chair, almost suffocated by his discomposure, and read the little illuminated card which she had placed in his hand.

The words on that card would have had, perhaps, no more meaning for him than the words which she had read to him in the midst of his nervousness, but for the fact that their familiar music revived in his mind memories which had once been sacred to him; for these words were not new to him, like the words of the psalm, but almost as old as his first memories. They were the words of the Collect which speak of the frailty of man's nature, and the so many and great dangers that beset him.

He read that familiar prayer a second time, sinking deeper and deeper into a muse that was sullen and resentful, yet seeming to hear from a far distance, like an obbligato to his fading memories, sounds that offered him a desirable peace—the vibrating chords of the organ in the school chapel, the chanting of a priest at the altar in Trinity, the music of church bells on the stillness of a summer evening's air, and the voice of Hugh Jodrell speaking of human life as some thing which involves an inner struggle.

But the change which had been taking place in his character ever since that night when he first heard of the General Election repelled the full power of these bygone memories, and left him, when they had passed, sunk in the same muse of sullenness and resentfulness—a muse in which he felt that he had a grudge against some unnamed enemy who had told the world false tales about him.

It was impossible, of course, in his then condition, that either the psalm or the prayer should have any real meaning for him. He had discovered during the first weeks after the Election, without realising its significance, that he could no longer find anything to hold his attention in an anthology of English poetry given to him many years ago by Susan Anstey, hitherto one of his bedside books, and that his thoughts wandered half-way down a leading article, and that he yawned and wanted to sleep directly he began to read any book of a serious value.

He had discovered, too, since his arrival at St. Moritz, that the only reading which could keep him from thinking of himself were detective stories, and that even when these stories were preposterously impossible, and palpably written by the grossest vulgarians, he could still go on reading them to find out how they would end.

In this condition of mind, and not knowing that he was beginning to pay the price which feverish excitement demands of the delicately poised soul of man, he found no other meaning in Mrs. Malleverer's psalm or prayer than evidence of an insufferable impertinence on the part of a crazy fanatic. She, too, had listened to the voice of a slanderer.

He was sitting there, still cherishing himself as a man with a grievance, when some one came from the hotel on to the veranda and walked towards him. He looked up with sulky anger in his eyes and encountered the good-natured smile of Leo Daga.

CHAPTER V

MISUNDERSTANDING

I

It was one of General Anstey's annual remarks that only those people who have the courage to outlast an English winter ever hear the bugles of spring.

According to the behaviour of the weather, this remark came from his lips either in the middle of February or at the beginning of March, but it would seem that the idea itself began to take shape in his mind from the moment when the first snowdrop appeared, for at that time he would give evidence to all who studied him of a noticeable exhilaration both in the tone of his voice and in the briskness of his movements, as if he had at last found something for which he had long been in search.

Snowdrops came out in Silverton that year at a time when Stephen was still at St. Moritz; and before he had returned to London for the opening of Parliament those many thousands of white hanging bells were surrounded on all sides by the shining upturned yellow cups of the aconite. Wherever one walked in the General's garden, whether across his slightly mossy lawn, or down the beautiful verdurous paths that led from one delicious part of that bird-haunted garden to another, there one saw snowdrops as numerous as stars in a winter sky and aconites as numerous as the sands of the seashore. The music of the river, chanting its way through the garden to the meadows, seemed to take a more joyous sound, as though it had turned from the Kyrie Eleison of Winter to the Venite of Spring because of those thousands of little flowers in the garden above its banks; and certainly the song of blackbird, thrush, starling, and robin rose at that identical time to a note of gladness far more confident of Nature's ultimate benevolence. It was, indeed, as if all the energies and facts in the physical universe were making a particular effort to celebrate the death of an unusually dismal and depressing winter, and to hail the birth of a superlatively exquisite spring.

But although the General made his annual remark this year, and although he gave evidence of great boyish excitement when the first crocus showed above ground, there was no doubt in Susan's mind, even when the garden was ablaze with primroses and daffodils, and loud with the song of tits and warblers, that for one

reason or another the spring this year had failed to awaken the old man's full capacity for enjoyment. There was a revival of his bodily energies, but not of his martial spirit.

She was now making marked headway with the altar-cloth for the chapel of David Ramsay's school, and every day for hours together sat before her frame in the drawing-room stitching rich-coloured silks and gold thread into green brocade. She was thus able to reflect for hours together, and chiefly in complete silence, on matters which occupied her attention, and among these considerations, for she had many interests and numerous friends, was the question of her grandfather's health—his increasing tendency to be alone with himself, the failure this year of his usually vivid response to the reveille of spring.

One day in April, when the borders of the garden were brilliant with aubretia, alyssum, and arabis, she was sitting by an open window of the drawing-room, working at the altar-cloth, when her grandfather, followed by his faithful cockers, came across the lawn from the bridge, with his hands full of flowers—narcissus, forget-me-nots, and wallflowers. She rose at once to get suitable bowls and vases for this noble bouquet, and told the General, as he arrived at the window, that he must wait while she went to fetch a jug of water.

She said to him, when she had returned to the room and while she was arranging the flowers, "It's more than ever true this year, Grandpapa, what you say about staying in England for the winter, isn't it? I can't remember a more beautiful spring."

"And yet, young woman," he said, affecting an ironical smile and a savage tone of voice, "you spend it, this beautiful pagan spring, blinding your eyes and wearing out your fingers in the service of a dead and wintry superstition."

"Is that the reason," she asked, with a low laugh, still busy with the flowers, "why you so neglect me?"

"Neglect you!"

"Does it really offend you as much as all that?"

"What do you mean by saying that I neglect you?"

"You shun me, Grandpapa. I don't see half as much of you as I want to, and it's weeks since you brought a book into the drawing-room to read aloud to me."

The General seemed disturbed. He began to walk about the room, the spaniels getting up in the belief that he was now about to return to the garden. As he turned about he found his way blocked by these dogs. The sight of their pathetic eyes, raised to him inquiringly, and their stumpy tails at work as if to encourage him to go out, appeared to distress the old man; he frowned fiercely, blinked his eyes, cleared his throat a number of times, and twitched the corners of his firm lips, looking at the

dogs from time to time as if to tell them that he was in a difficulty and wanted their good wishes.

"Why aren't you as happy this spring as last?" inquired Susan, gently and smilingly; still busy with the flowers. "I know, of course, that it isn't my embroidery; you're far too broadminded a man for such an insignificant little prejudice as that; but something is distressing you, I'm sure of it, and, being a woman, I want to know what it is."

The General came to a stop for a moment and said with amused scorn, "You women and your precious intuitions! How you trade on that, don't you?" Then he started to walk again. "All imagination on your part!" he said. "Wool-gathering, morbid introspection!—a just penalty for your crime of bolstering up religion with needle and thread. Fancy, taking a part in deceiving defenceless little boys! And a girl of your intelligence too!"

"That's the first time," she said quietly, "you have told me a fib."

He burst out with a disdainful laugh and stalked over to the open window, and stood there looking at the sunlight on the trunks of the beeches, and the white rail of the bridge. But she persisted that he had indeed told her a story, declared that he was not candid with her, said that there was indeed something on his mind, and professed herself certain that, whatever it might be, it had nothing whatever to do with her needlework.

"Sit down, Grandpapa, like a good little boy," she said, raising a smiling face to look at his back-view, "and tell me what it is."

He did not sit down; but he turned away from the window, sorely disappointing the spaniels, and began to walk faster than ever up and down the long room; and, presently, as he walked he confessed to her that a certain matter was troubling his mind, and that he had only kept it from her out of fear of distressing her.

"The truth is," he said, "that the flowers this year, and the birds too, have told me that I'm not so young as I was, and that I can't expect to see many more springs, and that another winter like the last may well polish me off. And this has set me thinking about you. What are you going to do when I'm picked off? So far as I can see you're waiting about for a man who isn't worthy of you, wasting your time and your opportunities over one who is far more likely to go off with his mother's maid, or some golden-wigged girl in a florist's shop, than to come down here like a gentleman and ask you to do him the honour of becoming his wife. That distresses me. And it will continue to distress me until you put the young coxcomb out of your mind, and tell me that you no longer care a straw for him."

Susan, carrying one of the bowls which she had just arranged to a table in a

corner of the room, looked up to him as he came to an end, and said, "I must be careful not to spill the water, but really, Grandpapa, I was never nearer to a convulsion of laughter."

He walked after her, and when she had put the bowl down on the table, caught hold of her arms with his great sinewy hands, held them firmly, stared fixedly into her eyes, and said to her, "Do you think you can deceive me? A girl of your age! What impertinence!"

"No, but I'm perfectly sure you can deceive yourself."

"Come now; we'll have this matter out. You're not in love with Stephen Laslett?"

She shook her head, smiling up at him.

"You'll swear that?"

She nodded.

"Well, I never!"

He was utterly confounded, and released her, and was about to turn away when a new idea occurred to him, and he swung round, took her by the arm again, and demanded, "Then you're not in love?"

"Not with Stephen."

"But, with some one else?" he inquired, taken aback and more confused than ever. He was thinking, Who can it be?

She raised her eyebrows, smiled, and gravely nodded her head three or four times.

It shot into his confused thoughts that she was in love with Hugh Jodrell, and he looked searchingly at her, and asked, "Who is it?"

"Ah, that's telling!"

"Who is it?"

She laughed. "As if a slighted and neglected girl, breaking her heart in solitude, would tell the name of the cruel one!"

"Who is it, Susan?"

"Some one I've known for—let me see, oh, ten years or so, a little longer perhaps."

That beat the General completely. He puckered his brows, compressed his lips, and remained staring at her, his hands still on her arms.

"Ten years ago," he said slowly, "you were a child."

"That's the time to fall in love—when one believes in fairies."

"And you swear it's not Stephen?"

"Oh yes; I'll swear and swear it's not Stephen. Would you like to see me go

quite black in the face?"

"Then I'll tell you something," said the General, with great meaning.

"What is it?"

"A secret," he said portentously.

"I love secrets, Grandpapa."

"You must swear again; swear that you will never repeat it, and never ask who told me."

"Sworn!"

"Well, you remember the night when Mrs. Laslett had her jewels stolen?"

"Yes."

"On the afternoon of that day, Stephen told some one that he was coming to propose to you next day."

Her eyebrows quivered, a slight colour came into her face, and her lips moved. "Are you sure of that?" she asked.

"Yes: perfectly sure. Then, you remember, came news of a General Election, and off he went next day to his constituency. But why he hasn't been here since I cannot explain. That is one of the reasons why I'm not as cheerful as usual this spring. I've been wanting to horsewhip him for weeks and weeks. How dare he treat you like this? Whether you love him or not, it was his duty to come down here and propose to you."

She laughed lightly, gently made herself free of his hands, and, taking his arm, led him slowly up the room, saying, "I really can't see that, Grandpapa."

"What! you can't see that a man who has discussed you with others, who has announced his intention of proposing to you, and who, ever since that time, has kept away from you, is guilty of an insult towards you!—you can't see that?"

No, she couldn't see that, and she wouldn't see that; and she begged her grandfather not to think anything more about the matter, but to put it clean out of his mind, and promised him, so far as she was concerned, not to break her heart over Stephen, or any other man, even the man she loved.

"And as for worrying about me and my future," she said, stooping down to fondle the dogs, "first of all, you and I are going to live happily together for years and years, and when you are told in another world that you have been a Christian all your life without knowing it, and that you are therefore to enter into the joys prepared for those who have loved beautiful things, I down here shall be earning quite a nice little income with my needlework, and growing quite enough flowers in my cottage garden to keep your grave beautiful all the year round!"

She raised herself up, smiled at him, and turned away to her work.

"No," he said firmly, "now that I know how the land lies, you'll go straight off to London. D'you hear that? Straight off to London. I won't have you down here, wasting your time. You'll go to London, and meet people, and find a husband able to look after you before I get my final reward as a life member of the Cremation Society."

"But you will have to wait," she said, "till I've finished this altar-cloth."

II

Hugh Jodrell was fighting a queer battle in the deeps of his simple nature.

When he returned from acting as the standard-bearer of sport in Stephen's constituency, he was so displeased with Stephen that it was as much as he could do to fulfil his pledged word in the matter of the menacing chorus girl. And when he returned from that abortive mission, so horrified was he by the hard face, the coarse voice, and the scented flat of this little vixen of the London suburbs, that his great affection for Stephen, already weakened by his experience of the Election, very nearly perished of disgust.

In fact, on his way home to Gloucestershire he assured himself that he would go to Susan Anstey at the first opportunity, tell her of his love, and explain to her that he made this confession because he had discovered Stephen to be a worthless braggart, and a mean creature utterly beneath her notice. There was not a doubt in his mind, during the long journey to his home, that he was entirely justified in this idea, and that not to take that course would be as unfair to Susan as, on his part, it would be absurd and quixotic.

But no sooner had he established himself once more in the old affections of his family life, no sooner was his spirit in its old communion once more with his father and mother, than this vigorous and fighting resolution died out of his mind. He found that he was ashamed of himself for ever having entertained it. In the atmosphere of London, and in the atmosphere of a crowded railway carriage, he had been one man; here in the home of his fathers, in the garden of his childhood, in the society of his parents, whose familiar ways fitted his with the ease and comfort of an old garment, he was another. He could no more have gone to Susan denouncing Stephen, or even take any advantage of Stephen's absence, than he could have told a lie to his father, or said a cruel word to his mother.

Perhaps the celebration of Christmas in his old home helped him to fight down his own desires, for it was a celebration which revived many of his happiest memories, deepened his most sacred beliefs, and confirmed him in his governing idea

that life was a simple and straightforward conflict between palpable right and palpable wrong.

When he departed from his home to take up his duties in David Ramsay's school, he was quietly sure that he would have strength enough to maintain his position as Stephen's friend, even if he saw Susan every day. He had fought many hard battles with himself of which no one knew a thing, and as an athlete, of course, he had long schooled himself to practise restraints of no mean order. Moreover, he was by nature one of those rather silent and observant people who are seldom visited by gusts of passion, or stirred out of their habitual self-repression to do emphatic actions. He did not underrate the struggle before him, but he never envisaged it as a conflict which would try him to the last ounce of his strength.

He did not see Susan frequently, for his duties at the school were many, and his delight in those duties absorbing; but when he did see her, he found at once that her power over him was infinitely greater than he had imagined even in his fiercest longings for her, and discovered that there was no reserve of strength in his nature to withstand the tremendous force of her fascination.

There was no question that he desired her as he had never desired anything before, and no question that he would give everything he had to possess her. There was no question either, that in a moment of temptation he might forget his honour and attempt to win her love by traducing Stephen's character—a discovery which sickened and horrified him to a point of desperate self-contempt.

What was he to do? He fought with himself to settle that question as a matter of duty, because it came between him and his work at the school, breaking his peace, riding his thoughts in class, holding him from sleep at night. It was a question, he told himself, which he must settle before he saw her again. In fact, he dared not see her again until he had discovered its answer.

The answer came to him in a strange way. It happened one afternoon that he was returning from a long walk over the downs with a party of boys, when he was met by another of the masters and told that Mrs. Ramsay wanted him to go to tea with her. When he arrived in David Ramsay's study, where tea was always served, he found Tony Hellington there. He remembered having met her at the Lasletts', and soon they were talking of the jewel robbery, of Stephen's election to Parliament, and of Phillida's illness. Presently the conversation centred on Stephen, and both Mrs. Ramsay and Tony began to hint that all was not well with him, that his friendship with Leo Daga was unfortunate, and that just as fast society in London had been too much for Phillida's nerves, so success and excitement were likely to be too much for her brother's strength of character.

All this was said as if Hugh Jodrell would, of course, agree with it, and as he and David sat silently eating their tea and listening to the ladies, neither Mrs. Ramsay nor Tony minced their words in speaking of Stephen's changing nature. But when the meal was nearly over, Hugh looked up at Mrs. Ramsay with a smile—a smile, because he had suddenly found an answer to his question—and began to champion his friend.

III

He was extraordinarily happy that night, having found this answer to his question and telling himself that now he could see Susan, the most magnetic of her sex, with perfect safety.

But his visit to Susan had to be postponed for a somewhat amusing reason. One of the popular daily newspapers had published a photograph of Hugh—an old Press photograph showing him breasting the tape in a 100 yards race—and had informed its readers that the famous International was now a schoolmaster in Sussex. On the following day several other newspapers published photographs both of Hugh as a footballer and David as a cricketer, together with a number of paragraphs concerning Hugh's distinguished family, and David Ramsay's ambitious ideas about his school.

The result of these publications, which brimmed over into several illustrated weekly papers, and appeared even in the more serious of the Sunday newspapers, was that David's correspondence swelled to an unmanageable bulk. Letters poured in from all parts of the country asking for particulars of the school and for permission to visit it.

"It is a case," said David, smiling over this enormous correspondence, "of all hands to the pumps"; and he even enlisted the services of Mrs. Ramsay in replying to the numerous inquiries of these innumerable anxious parents. Hugh, of course, being mainly responsible for the avalanche, was called upon to sacrifice every hour of his spare time in dealing with it, and as the spate continued for some weeks, the first replies bringing further inquiries in a number of cases, it was some considerable time before he could put to the test his solution of the question which Susan's sweetness had posed to his soul.

It was a gusty and showery Sunday afternoon when he mounted his motor-cycle —the gift of the old aunt in Herbert Crescent—and rode down to Silverton. He arrived at the General's house to find Susan working at her frame in the drawing-room, while her grandfather, with his two spaniels at his feet, was reading aloud to

her.

At his entry she raised her head with one of those quick and impulsive little movements which he had observed in her from their first meeting, and awaited his approach up the long room with a smile which seemed to tell him that she knew he was coming that day. She watched him shake hands with the General, who had intercepted his approach, the same quiet and confident and rather mischievous smile in her eyes; but when he came up to her, she raised her head to him, smiled with unaffected pleasure, and said, "I know why you have kept away from us so long. Isn't it splendid? I'm so glad. David tells me that you'll be having a hundred and twenty boys next term."

"And perhaps a hundred and fifty after the summer holidays," said Hugh.

"It's wonderful."

"We're all awfully bucked about it."

The General said, "I can't say I'm altogether pleased with the news. It has made Susan work harder than ever at that gaudy thing on the frame. She sits at it all day. It's as much as I can do to get her to take even a few minutes' walk in the garden. Still, it's very good news, and I congratulate you."

He walked down the room, the spaniels at his heel, and said, "I'll come back when tea's ready. Tell him what we've heard about the future Prime Minister."

Hugh sat down, and said, "What does he mean by that?" He asked the question idly, conscious of very little else save the delight of being in the same room with the most magnetic of her sex, able to look at her loveliness, and to listen to her voice, which for him had always been one of the greatest of her charms. He said, "What does he mean by that?" smiling as he sat down and looking at her.

Before she could answer there came a sudden gust of wind, with fine rain which hissed against the windows, and streamed down the panes, the room darkening as storm-clouds passed across the sun.

She glanced up from her work, a pair of scissors in her hand, and, looking towards the windows, exclaimed, "Poor flowers! And it promised to be such a beautiful spring." Then she snipped off an end of gold thread, laid down the scissors, and said, "Grandpapa was speaking of Stephen. We both feel that he is getting into foolish habits." She glanced at him rather quickly. "I expect you have heard all about him?" she asked.

Just at that moment the sun burst through the clouds, burned its way through the streaming windows, and shone all about Susan and the altar-cloth with a weak and watery radiance which seemed to intensify both her beauty and her mysteriousness.

Hugh said to himself, "Now or never!"—realising that here was the opportunity

of putting his solution to the test. He wanted with all his soul to get up from his chair, to go to her, to bend over her, and to say close to her small ear, "I never saw you look so beautiful as you look now in this queer stormy light, and I never felt so powerfully before how impossible it is not to tell you that I love you before all things in earth and heaven and utterly beyond the reach of language to express"—but he fought that impulse down, remained where he was, and said, "I should be disappointed if you told me you were in the habit of listening to ill-natured gossip."

She did not look up angrily, as he half expected her to do; she did not even look up at him at all; she went quietly on with her work, smiling to herself, and said, "That would be a dreadful thing to do; wouldn't it?"

He was astonished at her meekness, as he had been astonished at his own temerity, and said rather tamely, "It would be very unlike you."

"Oh, I don't know," she replied. "I'm fond of gossip, because I'm interested in people, and because I want to find out all I can about human nature. But I don't think I should care to listen to ill-natured gossip while I was doing this work." She glanced at him with the quickest of smiles. "You see, I'm trying to stitch all manner of good wishes into this cloth."

He felt himself rebuked. "What I meant," he said weakly, but fightingly, "was that a lot of people are talking about Stephen because he has scored a big success, and most of them, so far as I can gather, don't understand his nature a bit. Stephen is one of the finest fellows living."

"You really and truly think that?" She resumed her work.

"Well, I hope you think so too."

"No, I've never thought that about him."

Hugh said, "Of course he has got faults, and faults that are noticeable simply because he's so tremendously alive and jolly. One sees them, I mean, because he is so interesting and attractive that one studies him more than one does ordinary people."

The sun went behind a cloud, the windows darkened, and the noise of trees shaken by the wind passed through the room like the sound of an aeroplane high up in the sky.

Susan moved her frame to get a better light for her work, and shifted the position of her chair, so that Hugh saw her now only in profile, mistily and indistinctly. She said, "I have never thought of Stephen as you think of him. I've always thought of him as one who would be made by his friends."

"Well, I've thought that, too."

"But you said just now that you thought he was one of the finest fellows living."

"So he is."

"But surely a person who can't stand on his own feet, and can't take his own way, is not to be called one of the finest fellows living?"

She turned her face to him, not smiling this time, her eyes trying to distinguish his face in the darkness.

Hugh, realising that his back was to the light, and that she could not see him, hardened his heart and broke out into a fierce and indignant championship of Stephen. He told himself that if he could make her angry with him, or if he could at any rate convince her that he was first, foremost, and before everything else, Stephen's most loyal friend, his own battle would be half-won.

It was a perfectly sincere championship, for in brooding over this method of defending himself against a possible dishonour under the spell of Susan's loveliness and sweetness, he had come to forget Stephen's bad qualities and to remember him only as the handsome and brilliant undergraduate who won honours so easily, led the way in all bouts of fun, and was ever the most commanding figure in the company of his contemporaries. His championship, then, had the ring of truth, and he spoke with an earnest anxiety because he felt that Susan ought to see only the good qualities in the man she loved, and because he feared she had been listening to foolish and malicious gossip.

Susan stopped working while he held forth in this impetuous way, so unusual with him, and sat with her head slightly bent, her eyes looking at the silks in her lap, her fingers resting on the scissors. And when he drew breath at last, she did not change this attitude, but remained almost perfectly still, and for a moment or two after he had done made no reply.

Then, still without raising her eyes, opening and shutting the scissors as she spoke, she said very gently, "I think it so much better to face truth than to let one's affections deceive one into delusions." She raised her head slowly, turned to him, and said with extreme quietness, "You know as well as I do that Stephen is weak, vain, and headstrong—all great defects; and you know, I'm sure you do, that he can be easily, most easily, corrupted by the world. Why shut your eyes to his danger? Isn't it better to see him as he is—that is, if you want, as I'm sure you do, to help him?"

Hugh, shaken by this appeal, found it impossible to sit still. He got up, walked to the fireplace, stood there with one arm resting on the mantelpiece, and considered what he should say. He thought that if he surrendered to her appeal he would be surrendering his defence against her fascination, and he decided that at all costs he must be Stephen's champion. "If I thought I could help Stephen," he said, "I should

think far less of him than I do. He is an altogether more powerful fellow than I am. He sees his way far more clearly than I can see mine. He knows what he wants, and he has got the will to get it. He's a tremendously brave fellow, a born fighter, a born leader of men, and I'm perfectly certain that he is merely using that fellow Leo Daga to serve ends of which Leo Daga hasn't the ghost of an idea."

Susan laughed softly to herself. "I hope you don't tell him all this!" she said quietly, half with amusement and half with rebuke.

"One doesn't praise a man to his face," replied Hugh.

"I'm glad of that."

"Or abuse him behind his back," added Hugh, and tried to laugh scornfully.

"But there's something between praise and abuse."

"Of course."

How strangely the light played its part in this scene, reflecting itself from Susan and the altar-cloth into Hugh's mind, revealing to him at one moment a beauty which almost made him hold his breath, at the next, a coldness, even a sternness, which puzzled him, shining, too, into his mind with all the tears of the rain in its glamorous radiance, and suddenly departing, as darkness entered the room, leaving a greater darkness there in his mind.

As he watched her in this alternation of misty light and stormful darkness, the wind sounding through the trees in the garden, he wondered to himself that he should so infinitely love a person whom he could so little understand, a person whose nature, unlike his own, was complex, mysterious, and mystifying. How was it, he asked himself, that instead of growing impatient with her he could have stood there for ever at the mantelpiece, looking at her, listening to her, even if this present misunderstanding eventuated in a quarrel?

"I'm so interested in Stephen," she said presently, going on with her work, "that I want to help him. To see how I can best help him I try to criticise him, because, you see, it's so difficult to help another person, isn't it? When I do that, I see that he is very weak, very easily influenced by bright people, and that his vanity is so unthinking, so reckless, that even his talents may not be able to save him from a bad end. That's how I see him, as a vain person very easily influenced by lively people. I'll be quite frank with you and tell you I should be far easier in my mind about him, because I'm very fond of him, if you were at his side. I think you are just the man to steady him, and keep him sane. On the other hand, I am quite certain that Mr. Daga is the very last man who should be in constant touch with him. And so it all comes to this"—she stopped working and looked at him—"I've been wondering whether you couldn't pay him a visit in the Easter holidays and see how things are going with him,

and if, as I think they are, things are going rather badly with him, perhaps very badly indeed, then you might use your power over him to make him see reason before it is too late."

He thought to himself, "She is unhappy because she loves Stephen, and thinks she may lose him. She is appealing to me to help her," and thinking this, he saw how much more easily he could fight his battle, however bitterly in the depths of his heart, if he allied himself with Susan to win Stephen's love for her, never telling her of his own deep love for her.

This notion, because he was of a chivalrous and heroic nature, gave a strong sense of exaltation to his suffering, and he felt more than ever that he was now delivered from the danger of an impetuous declaration.

He told her, as the room darkened and the wind rose higher and higher, that he disliked Stephen's friendship with Leo Daga, but felt confident it would not survive Stephen's success in the House of Commons, where he would be sure to make new and more powerful friendships. He explained that he could not pay Stephen a visit at Easter because David Ramsay and he had only just arranged to go to Germany for the holidays; and suggested that his own intervention just then would not be of any real value, and that he would defer action till the summer, when, he promised her, he would see Stephen and have a long talk with him.

"But," he concluded, "before then he is sure to come down here. You will see him, and your influence, of course, is far more powerful than mine. I'm perfectly certain that when the first flush of his success has worn off, and he has got over the excitement of being a member of the House of Commons, and comes down here at Easter, when the country is so beautiful, you will find he's the old Stephen, and you'll be able to do what you like with him."

To his surprise, her only answer to this rather long and stumbling harangue was a question concerning his holiday in Germany.

IV

A few days before term ended Hugh came to Silverton to say good-bye. It was a day of vigorous freshness and shining beauty, with primroses everywhere and daffodils bending and swaying in the breeze, and birds singing from every bush and tree and roof in the garden, one robin singing exultingly from the handle of the roller, which stood beside the iron gate leading to the stables.

The General walked on one side of Susan, and Hugh on the other, the General telling Hugh across his granddaughter how the bottle-tits were using his nest-boxes,

and how he had seen a pair of dippers that morning from the bridge over the river. He appeared to be in a cheerful and confident frame of mind, and every now and then made a little joke against Susan, who missed all these beautiful things in nature, he said, to blind her eyes indoors over that gaudy vestment of superstition.

He spoke of Hugh's holiday with high approval. The Germans, he said, were the only intellectual people on the Continent, and now that they were rid of that tuppeny-hapenny coxcomb of an emperor they would go straight ahead to the conquest of the world—not a conquest by the sword, but by the mind. He recalled visits in his youth to Heidelberg and Nuremberg, and related how he had written several letters to Huxley after conversations with some of Germany's leading physicists.

When they went in to tea, he pointed to Susan's frame and said, "Thank the stars that piece of folly is nearly done, and when it is done, off she goes to an aunt of hers in London."

Hugh turned to Susan and asked, "But won't you be here for Easter?"

"No, I shall be in London."

"Then you won't see Stephen!"

The General set his teeth and said savagely, "She's far more likely to see that heady young gentleman in London than down here. But I hope she won't see him at all."

Susan warned her grandfather with a mischievous smile that Hugh disapproved of people who listened to ill-natured gossip, and immediately changed the conversation to the topic of the plans for new buildings at the school.

The General fell silent, appeared to be perturbed, and waited on Hugh at tea with an almost distressing attentiveness; and when Hugh rose to go, with Susan's best wishes for his German holiday, the General took his arm in a bustling and nervous manner, and went with him to the stables, where Hugh had left his motor-cycle.

On the way he said to Hugh, "I'm sorry I spoke harshly of young Laslett. I forgot he was a friend of yours. Please forgive me. But there's something I want to say to you about him, following on our first conversation together, when you gave us the pleasure of staying here. I made a tremendous mistake that night. I led you to think, I'm afraid, that Susan was in love with young Laslett. She isn't. It was entirely a supposition on my part, an unwarrantable supposition, an old man's blunder, and I want you to put it clean out of your mind. She doesn't care two straws for him."

Hugh could scarcely believe his ears, and could scarcely breathe. He managed to jerk out incredulously, "Are you sure, sir?"

The General replied, "My dear fellow—but this is strictly between ourselves—

she's sworn it to me."

Hugh stopped before his bicycle with a fast-beating heart and a strangled throat. He did not know what to say, what to do. He only knew that he felt as if a tremendous weight had been lifted from his mind, and that his heart was bursting with an utterly unexpected happiness. He stood stock still, looking helplessly at the dusty cycle, wondering how he should deal with this entirely new situation.

It seemed to him that the natural thing to do was to inform the General there and then that he himself loved Susan, and to ask his permission to return to the drawing-room in order to tell her so.

But involuntarily he came out with a further expression of incredulity, as if it were beyond the power of his imagination to believe that Susan did not love Stephen.

Then the General said to him, "She not only does not care a hoot for that young man, but she is in love with some one else, and has been in love with this other man for a long number of years, ever since she was a schoolgirl, in fact. That, of course, is a secret which you will divulge to no one. I only tell you in order to convince you that she is not pining at the neglect of young Laslett. I don't want you to think that for a moment."

Hugh looked up at the old man's face, so stern and gaunt and implacable, and nodded his head, muttered a few words, and began to wheel his bicycle out of the yard. The two spaniels ran ahead of him, barking joyously.

"Have a good time in Germany," said the General, "and come back and tell us all about it."

V

During those holidays in Germany, the plans for the new school buildings arrived, and David and Hugh, with their pipes lighted, sat down together to consider them at a table in a very delectable beer-garden, full of sunshine and repose.

Provision was made in these plans for Hugh's quarters, in the form of a bedroom next to the new dormitory, with a study underneath: the bedroom measuring sixteen feet by fourteen, and the study twenty feet by fourteen feet six inches. David, rapping the plan in that place with a pencil, said that these quarters were too good for an assistant master, but not good enough for a partner. Hugh assured him that they would be far too good for him, even when he was a full-blown partner, as he certainly should be at the end of the year.

"But, what about when you're a married man?" demanded David, and sucked rather harder than usual at his pipe.

"Oh, we can leave that to the Greek Kalends," laughed Hugh.

"Not if my wife has her way," said David, with ominous significance.

"Does she want to marry me off?" asked Hugh.

"She and Tony Hellington have been laying their heads together for that purpose ever since you came to us."

"Tony Hellington!" exclaimed Hugh, almost aghast.

"I don't mean that they want to marry you to Tony," said the imperturbable David. "They both think, however, that they know some one who is made for you." He tapped his teeth with the stem of his pipe, still staring at the plans, and asked, "What about Susan Anstey?"

Hugh made no answer.

"Anyway, they're both convinced," went on David, "that you two are made for each other, and I'm bound to say I agree with them. What I should like to do, then"—here he once more rapped the plans with his pencil—"is to build you a nice little house at this end of the property, south-east aspect, view of the sea from two sides, and plenty of room for a garden at the back. I'm sure Susan would like it. What do you think of the idea?"

Hugh tried to say something, but succeeded only in producing a rather pathetic laugh. He lifted his bock, took a drink, and then managed to say that he was surprised a man of David's piercing perspicacity had not perceived that he was a born celibate.

David threw down his pencil, reached for his bock, and said, "My dear fellow, don't try to pull my leg. We've all seen from the first that you're over head and ears in love with Susan. Why not tell her so?"

What was Hugh to say? Had he not promised the General never to divulge the story of Susan's secret love?—and even if such secrets may in confidence be passed on to a very great friend, did he possess sufficient strength to acknowledge that truth, the acceptance of which he was still fighting so bitterly in the depths of his heart?

He leaned forward, picked up Ramsay's pencil, and pointed to his quarters in the new plans. "That is just what I should like," he said; "a bedroom with windows in two walls, and a study looking out on the cricket-field. But what are these new buildings going to cost? Let's have a look at the estimates."

Ramsay tapped his teeth for a moment or two with the stem of his pipe, and then said, "I feel myself rebuked; but I'm content to leave matters to my wife and Tony; you may make up your mind, my dear fellow, that you're as good as married. And now for the estimates. I'm glad you went to Cambridge. Cambridge men are always so good at figures."

CHAPTER VI

CHECK

I

Stephen woke one morning to find himself considerably perplexed. He had received a note from Susan, saying that she was in London, and expressing a wish to see him.

Did he want to see her? At one moment there was no one in all the world he wanted more to see; at the next, she seemed to him to be a menace and a nuisance. Never before had his feelings played quite such a dizzying game of see-saw.

He said to himself, "She's the most attractive thing in creation. I shall never love any one else," and remembered a score of blissful days at Silverton, when birds, beasts, flowers, and books played so chief a part in his happiness, and when to go nature-observing with Susan, treating her to an affectionate intimacy just deliciously more than brotherly, was an excitement to his senses as strong as anything he knew now. Then he thought of the rush and tear of his present existence, and her sweetness vanished into thin air, and he said to himself, "Why did she write me that impudent note about forgetting Hugh?"—and a certain fear of her took possession of his feelings, and he wished her a hundred miles from London.

Her note arrived at a time when he was not very happy about himself and his career. The sudden popularity of his election had evaporated before Parliament met, and he was now conscious of a good deal of loneliness at Westminster. The younger members of his party, who believed in heroic measures of social reform, and under the leadership of a young scholarly aristocrat were making themselves real experts in such dull matters as housing, sanitary reform, and factory legislation, altogether ignored him. The only acquaintances he had made were among easy-going middle-aged men from the provinces, who were entirely uncultured, and who were more interested in commerce than in politics. The leaders of his party took no notice of him at all.

He had enjoyed the first exciting days of the session, and the newness of everything, and the excitement of seeing famous men at close quarters, and the feeling that he was one of a great body. But in an incredibly short time this pleasurable feeling had worn away. He found that the green benches were

uncomfortable, the atmosphere of the House exhausting, the exasperation to his nerves of second-rate speaking almost unbearable. He had saved himself from the extinction of boredom by walking about the lobbies with his hands in his pockets, visiting the restaurant and tearoom, strolling into the library or the House of Lords, and entertaining his friends on the Terrace. The ringing of bells for a division had come to be an irritation to his nerves.

His real satisfaction lay far away from Westminster. He found an increasing pleasure in cultivating the acquaintance of Leo Daga's friends, a company of men and women who had no enemy save dullness, who were revolutionists in art and conduct, and who lived with a levity and an audacity which Stephen felt was delightful and life-giving.

He did go about among people in society who had their plans for him concerning their daughters, but he was never quite happy in their houses, and was always a little suspicious that they had designs upon him. He went to night-clubs and cocktail parties with the more forward of these spirits, and occasionally he took part in midnight motoring adventures with these people, which became a nuisance to the police; but no one in those circles ever quite succeeded in capturing his affections as did the more interesting friends of Leo Daga.

He numbered among these new champions of unorthodoxy-at-any-price sculptors whose work was generally either blasphemous or obscene, poets and painters who outraged all the ancient standards of beauty, and novelists who conceived of life only as a sex-complication. He met these people in Leo Daga's rooms, in studios, in cafés, and in clubs of an eccentric character. Prompted by Leo Daga he practised a generous charity among the shabbier of them by buying their unsaleable creations, and also by acting as their host whenever he was a member of their animated parties at restaurants.

These people never flattered him, never sought his favour, never borrowed money from him, and at first were inclined to treat him as a bourgeois incapable of understanding their ideas. It had been necessary for him, indeed, to fight his way into their good graces by the force of his wit, and it was not until they discovered that he was a man who could take care of himself in a discussion that they treated him with some show of politeness. He won their affections at last by leading the fun at a tipsy supper-party, when every piece of valuable glass and china in a famous artist's studio was smashed to bits, and the already scanty raiment of the ladies was forcibly reduced to rags and tatters.

Such liveliness was like a tonic to him after the miserable dullness of the House of Commons, and he felt that he was never his true self until he was among these

harum-scarum people who, in their sober moments, enunciated the most startling ideas about art and life with tremendous seriousness, and in their unsober moments behaved as if seriousness of any kind was even more offensive than delicacy or refinement.

It was only with these people, that is to say, that his feverish vitality and his passion for intellectual expression found a convenient vent. He was soon the most talkative of the most talkative set in London, relieving himself in their company of the eloquence bottled up for so many tedious hours in the humdrum atmosphere of the House of Commons.

Susan's letter happened to reach him after an evening spent with a lady novelist who had been the mistress of two well-known writers, and who was considered the most intellectual person in that particular circle of revolutionists. Stephen had gone to this assignation with a headache, and had returned from it with a certain feeling of incredulity in his mind as to the lady's intellectual powers. She had indeed not only bored him with her conversation, but failed to attract him in any other way. Something had gone wrong that night with her appearance. Her hair was too rigidly trim; her dress was not becoming, and, moreover, was rather soiled and shabby; her skin unfortunately reminded him of a plucked chicken, and her finger-nails happened to catch his eyes and to fill him with a feeling of dislike. Not one of her daring ideas, not one of her involved paradoxes, not one of her incessant epigrams, succeeded in making him forget his headache; and when it came at last to the professional embrace with which she bade him farewell, as she had bade so many other men farewell, Stephen made his response in such a perfunctory manner that he wondered she did not push him from her with rage and indignation.

It was from this rather exasperating event that he awoke to find Susan's letter, and perhaps his confusion of ideas and feelings on reading it was in some measure due to the sub-conscious memory of that distasteful adventure. He was certainly a little ashamed of himself just then, and a little out of love with his life. The world for him at that moment was strangely distasteful and discordant. Not until he had ridden himself into a good mood by a vigorous canter in the Park was he able to decide how he should deal with Susan's presence in London.

II

She was occupying the house of an aunt of hers, a widowed daughter of the old General, who had gone to Silverton with her two children to take care of him. This little house was in Marsham Street, Westminster, conveniently out of range of a

thriving fried-fish shop, but rather troublesomely near a tavern patronised by men and women whose hilarity at closing time sometimes developed into a loud and acrimonious discussion of each other's qualities and features on the pavement outside.

It was in the drawing-room of this little house, an L-shaped room which occupied the whole of the first floor, that Susan received Stephen—a charming small room characterised by a cultivated taste and yet plainly marked by the activities of vigorous and untidy children who liked to be with their mother.

Stephen laughed pleasantly as he entered this apartment, and at once began to chaff Susan for living in such a bandbox, and in such a slum. He behaved as if he had seen her only a day or two ago, and as if their delightful relations had never suffered anything in the nature of a check. He was on his way to the House, and was dressed in dark clothes, with a white flower in his buttonhole and white spats on his shoes. Susan noticed at once that in spite of his pleasantness and friendliness he gave himself all the airs of a man of fashion. The boy was as dead as a doornail.

For his part, Stephen was surprised to discover how quickly he came under Susan's spell. He was so conscious of this spell that he told himself he must be careful, lest she surprised him into a proposal. He was even a little suspicious at finding her alone, for like so many new-rich people he was never entirely free from the miserable suspicion that the world regarded him as an object of plunder.

After he had been talking to her for a few moments, and he had asked and obtained her permission to smoke, there came a sordid change into his thoughts. He looked at her with drooping eyelids, and found himself wishing that he could treat her as he treated almost every other woman he met familiarly, that is to say, make love to her. He would have liked above all other things in the world just then to make love to Susan, and he earnestly deplored the waste of such great beauty, and so many delicious charms, which an absurd Victorian standard of morality, he imagined, had imposed upon this quite exquisite girl.

Presently she said to him, "And now tell me, Stephen, have you quite forgotten Hugh Jodrell?"

He grinned at her. "Ah, that rebukeful little letter of yours!"

She laughed at him. "Which you never dared to answer, by the way!"

"Well, I thought you had stood me in a corner for the rest of my life. What made you send me such a cruel reproof?"

She raised her eyebrows, considering how she should answer him. It was not easy for her, direct and candid as she was, to utter her thoughts. She was, indeed, as fully nervous and conscious of strain as Stephen himself, who shrank from anything in

the nature of a heart-to-heart conversation. Both of them were aware of how difficult it is to be intimate, and of how something in personality seems to quiver and wince at the first approach to intercourse which invades character. "Because," she said at last, as he watched her with blinking eyelids and a smile which attempted to challenge her, "because I am your friend, Stephen."

He replied at once, "And a very desirable friend, too. And I quite understand why you sent me that note. I was angry with you only for two moments, and then I told myself"—he did not blush for this lie, or show the smallest sign of discomfort in uttering it—"that you wanted to steady me up for my life, and that there was no better way of doing that than by reminding me of old Jodder. By the way, how is he? I hear he has really turned schoolmaster. I expect you see a good deal of him now. Is he just the same dear old uneventful thing?"

She leaned forward to him. "Stephen," she said, flushing and smiling at the same time, "you are letting the world change you. You aren't resisting it in the least little bit."

It cost her something to say that, but when it was out her breathing became more regular, and she felt that a weight had been lifted from her mind. She looked him straight in the eyes now, without nervousness or fear, and more vividly than ever she saw how he had changed, and how all the fine promise of his youth was already soiled and perhaps even blighted.

He lowered his eyes for a moment, laughed as if he were amused by her presumption, and said airily, "Well, to begin with, I'm not an Athanasius to oppose myself to the world; and then, you see, I don't feel that the world is as black as it's painted. This is all very interesting. You are convinced that I'm going to perdition, and want to save me. That's charming of you, Susan. I'm immensely flattered. But I assure you that I'm much more a student of life than an actor in any of its various diversions, good or bad. I shall take my part presently, and I hope it will be one that my dear Susan will think entirely stunning, but at present, I assure you, I am only looking on at the human comedy, making acquaintance with men and women, sounding the shallows of human nature, and biding my time. Don't think that I am going headlong to the devil merely because I haven't yet taken off my coat and rolled up my sleeves. After all, I've been in the House only a few months, and moral earnestness in new members, let me tell you, is not a saleable commodity. New members are supposed to be seen and not heard."

He laughed as he came to an end, and leaned forward to her, and patted her hand, and begged her not to be anxious about him.

She said to him, "Now, look here, Stephen, I'll ask you a question, and you

must give me a perfectly straightforward answer."

"Go ahead," he said, and smiled at her.

"Do you discuss with Mr. Leo Daga the same subjects that you used to love to discuss with Hugh Jodrell at Cambridge?"

"Exactly the same subjects," he answered emphatically, very glad of the opportunity not to tell a lie. But before he could launch out into a vindication of Leo Daga's intellectual character she sprang another question on him, arising out of the first.

"And do you come to the same conclusions about them?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" he inquired anxiously, sheepishly, conscious of difficulty in meeting her clear eyes.

"Are Mr. Daga's views about life," asked Susan, "the same as Hugh Jodrell's?"

"My dear! Of course not. Good gracious, what a question!"

"You think Mr. Daga's views are more enlightened than Hugh Jodrell's?"

Stephen laughed at that. "How clever you are! You're trying to corner me. I feel like a witness undergoing the dreadful ordeal of a cross-examination. Well, dear Susan, I think that Leo Daga's range of thought is wider than Hugh's, and I think his opinions are more interesting than Hugh's; but whether he is more right in his tentative theories about life than Hugh in his fixed judgments, I'm not prepared to say —in fact, in the effective language of Marsham Street, strike me pink if I know."

He looked at his watch, and she said quickly, "You must go to the House, I suppose?"

"The modern Whip," he said, getting up, "makes the life of a Member of Parliament little more than an ignominious slavery."

She rose too. "I'll come with you to the door."

"One last dig at me, eh?" He laughed again, and turned to her as he stopped speaking, at that moment seeing how transcendently different she was from the epigrammatic lady novelist who had so fatigued him on the previous night. "One more dig at me, Susan; and no longer the same kind digs that prodded me so usefully as a schoolboy."

"Unfortunately," she replied, "my digs have no effect upon you now."

"Indeed they have! I'll do anything you ask me. Tell me where you would like a change in me and it shall be carried out at once."

"I want you to change altogether."

"Oh, my hat! That's a tall order. Can the leopard and the Ethiopian perform conjuring tricks in the face of Nature?"

"I want you to change back to what you were at Cambridge."

"But how have I altered since those days? I'm not conscious of any change in myself—except a little broadening of the mind."

"Stephen, you know you've changed, changed completely."

"Well, my dear, we all change a little as we grow older. That is what men of science call evolution."

"You do things now you would never have done a year ago. You listen to conversations now which would have disgusted you then. You have acts on your conscience now, troubling you not at all, which would have terrified you then. But there, you are not displeased with this change; you call it evolution; and you are in a great hurry to be off. I won't keep you. Come along."

"One minute, my dear," he said, and laid his hand on her arm, detaining her, and pressing her arm affectionately. "You must let me have my turn now." He laughed, raised his hand from her arms, and pointed at her a finger full of rebuke. "I observe a change in you; a change of the most terrible order; a spiritual change. You are intolerant. As Shakespeare might have exclaimed, raising hands of horror, So young, and so narrow! Don't be intolerant, Susan dear. Be charitable, broadminded, generous. Recall to your mind those lines about mercy in *Piers Plowman* which we learned together years and years ago now, and which I managed to work with great effect into so many of my compositions at Trinity. Can you say them?"

She shook her head, studying him with grave, affectionate eyes, seeing how handsome he was, how likeable, and yet how plainly marked already by soiling and coarsening depravity.

He quoted:

> "Have mercy in thy thoughts, and in thy prayers pray for it,
> For God's mercy is more than all His other works,
> And all this world's wickedness, that man can work or think,
> Is no more to the mercy of God than is a spark in Thames."

Then with a laugh, glowing with satisfaction at the neatness of his retort, he declared again that he must go, and turned to the door. But, making room for her to pass him, he said, "Think well of me, Susan, and so help me to be better than I am. Let me always believe that my wickedness is no more in your love than a spark in Thames."

She looked at him and said, "You are happy, Stephen, because you have put me in the wrong; but you've only done that, you know, by pretending that I am an odious prig and that you have not changed since Hugh Jodrell was your friend. Am I a prig?"

"No!"

"And haven't you changed since Hugh Jodrell was your friend?"

"Only in a manner which enables me to appreciate your qualities with greater discernment."

As they went down the narrow stairs, Stephen smilingly assured her that she exaggerated the change in him; and as he gratefully picked up his hat, gloves, stick, he gave her this same assurance, adding that he was at heart exactly the identical Stephen to whom she had once been so kind and stimulating a friend.

But when he looked at her, as she stood by the door with her hand on the latch, and prepared to take farewell of her, he saw her beauty, suddenly, in a light which revived in his mind memories still strangely sweet of their delightful companionship. He was staggered and sobered. For a moment he thought to himself that he would fling the world away from him, make this dear creature his adored wife, and get back to the cleanliness and joyousness which they had shared together in the fresh days of their youth.

Yet, when words came to his lips, and her hand was in his hand, he found himself speaking to her just as he was in the habit of speaking now to any pretty girl he met at a night-club or a rackety supper-party.

He told her that he should ring her up next day and propose a dinner and a theatre.

A week afterwards Mr. Shrimpton rang up Susan, and told her that Mr. Stephen Laslett greatly regretted that his duties and engagements had prevented him from calling Miss Anstey before, and that he now wished her to name a day on which she would be free to dine with him in the following week. Susan replied, "Please thank Mr. Laslett for his message, and tell him I quite understand what he means."

III

A fortnight passed away, spent in visiting picture galleries, in shopping, in going to concerts, in calling on her relatives and friends, and then Susan returned to Silverton with three new hats, two new dresses, and a number of presents for her grandfather, the Ramsays, and the old people in the village.

She learned on her arrival that Mrs. Laslett and Phillida were in the neighbourhood, and that Mrs. Laslett had twice telephoned to know whether she had returned from London. Susan smiled on receiving this message. Well did she know how Mrs. Laslett disliked her; and it diverted her now to think how her presence in London must have been a source of irritating anxiety to Stephen's

ambitious mother.

But when Mrs. Laslett came to Silverton, Susan was surprised to find herself in that lively lady's good graces, and was even more surprised when Mrs. Laslett entreated her to come often to see Phillida, who was still very low and depressed, and who wanted so greatly to see her.

The truth is that Phillida's illness had shaken Ella Laslett out of her slothful torpor, out of her luxurious self-indulgence, and had confronted her with the real facts of human existence which hitherto she had completely ignored. It may be said of her that she woke one morning to find herself middle-aged and the mother of two children well on the way to ruin.

Susan went to sit with the faded and neurasthenic Phillida on several occasions, and on each occasion Mrs. Laslett's affection for her was more marked, more earnest, and more natural. Then there came a day when Mrs. Laslett took her for a drive, and spoke of Stephen with great intimacy, frankly confessing her anxiety about him, taking Susan, as it were, into the very bosom of her confidence.

Finally, when Susan's influence on Phillida had worked a noticeable change in that poor child's health, the impulsive Mrs. Laslett said to her one day, "My dear, I've misjudged you. You are the very wife for Stephen. I have written to tell him so. Phillida and I both agree that he could find no one so perfectly fitted to save him from himself."

Susan replied, "You are very kind, Mrs. Laslett, but fond as I am of Stephen, to marry him has never once entered my thoughts."

Mrs. Laslett imagined that this was the rustic delicacy of a very simple girl, and exclaimed, "Fiddlesticks! Of course you'll marry him. You'll marry him and save him. Who else is there for you to marry?"

But, to Mrs. Laslett's consternation, Susan persisted in her refusal to marry Stephen, and very soon afterwards Mrs. Laslett, shaken but still incredulous, departed for London.

Stephen met the onslaught which his mother delivered immediately after her arrival in town with good-natured amusement. He told her that it diverted him to see her so virtuous in her old age that his habits shocked her and his friends filled her with alarm. He reminded her that it was entirely owing to her that he now enjoyed the friendship of Leo Daga.

Mrs. Laslett made no excuses for her changed attitude, because she refused to acknowledge that she had changed in any way. She spoke to her son as if she had always been mindful of his moral welfare, rebuked him sternly for the flippant way in which he dared to address her, and ended up an impassioned homily by telling him

that his conduct had cost him the love of the sweetest girl in the world.

Stephen asked, "And, pray, who is that?"

"One who could save you from making a fool of yourself, and throwing away all your opportunities."

"Name, as we say in the House of Commons!"

"You know very well who it is: Susan Anstey."

He laughed scornfully. "I've only to lift a finger," he said, "and she'll come to me at once—this sweetest girl in the world, whom you used to sneer at so contemptuously, calling her Simple Susan, a country bumpkin, a mere rustic, and yet a wicked and designing little minx."

She met this charge by ignoring it, and by pouring into his ears a scalding and a scolding summary of the things which people in London were saying about him, things which came to her, she said, from women whose opinions could make or unmake the careers of people in London society. She told him that he was regarded as a dangerous and depraved person, that no serious man in the House of Commons would have anything to do with him, that his reputation for intellect and wit was destroyed, and that unless he mended his ways, broke with Leo Daga, and became a respectable member of society, she should advise his father to cut off supplies and force him to earn his own living.

Stephen was not frightened by this threat, any more than he had been moved by her taunt that he had lost Susan's love; but he felt, and felt keenly, the intimation that he was regarded in political circles as a spent force. He told his mother that he would soon show people of what stuff he was made, and left her, although he concealed his true feelings from her, in a mood of burning indignation, even of feverish ambition.

There was shortly to be a debate in the House of Commons on Great Britain's relations with Soviet Russia, and Stephen decided that he would make his maiden speech on this occasion; he told himself that it should be a speech which men should remember.

He avoided the society of his rowdy friends for the next few days, took plenty of vigorous exercise, ate sparingly, and devoted his leisure to the composition of this speech. It must be a speech, he decided, that should first alarm his party and delight Labour, and finally end by delighting his party and discomfiting Labour. In other words, it must be an original speech, the first utterance of an entirely new mind in politics, and it must be delivered with the confidence which had characterised the first historic speech of Disraeli.

The day came, and the Chamber was crowded. Stephen felt no nervousness as

he listened to the big guns on either side of Mr. Speaker, and awaited his turn to speak with a perfectly calm assurance in his powers to hold the attention of the House. He was fortified in this feeling because the great guns took the dreary line expected of them, and because the atmosphere of the House, in spite of that platitudinous oratory, was sensibly an atmosphere of conflict and crisis. He sat in his place with a quiet heart and a rejoicing spirit, biding his time.

When that time came at last, and he rose in his place, several members, weary of the debate, walked out of the House; but Stephen, unshaken by this depressing reception, and ignoring the fact that both Front Benches were in amiable conversation, while a rustle of Order Papers seemed to fill the Chamber, turned to the Speaker, and began his speech in a voice that was firm and powerful.

He dissociated himself from his party in their wish to break off relations with Russia, contemning them for shortsightedness and cowardice, to the amused delight of Labour. He said that there had never been a time in English history when Russia was more necessary to England. The authentic spirit of England, he declared, was being strangled by the economic obsession which now monopolised the attention of all parties in the State. We needed the Russian spirit, with its creative passion for great music, for rich colour, for daring literature, and for riotous dancing, to deliver us from the coarse thumb and finger of the tradesman, and from the insolent tyranny of Board of Trade statistics. To break off relations with Russia would be a disaster of the first magnitude, not only to the art and literature of England, but to her spiritual vitality.

He then turned to Labour and denounced it with a cold ferocity of invective for conceiving that the only tie between this country and Russia was an economic tie, charging the Socialists with the ignoble crime of conspiring to sell the already exiguous liberty of the individual Englishman into the slavery which a handful of bloodthirsty aliens in Russia had imposed upon that nation. He told them that this madness of theirs arose from a fallacy which rendered all their thinking ridiculous to a trained mind. They imagined that the millions of densely ignorant, unwashed, flea-bitten, brutal, and half-Asiatic people of Russia were Russia itself. They refused to see that the only Russia worth a moment's consideration was composed of those few thousands of men and women to whom art was a passion and life itself the greatest of the arts. This blunder of the Socialists he characterised as an expression of the fundamental error in the whole theory of democracy, and laid it down that the nations could never hope to enjoy that true and manful liberty which comes of right thinking and individual self-reliance, until the older and more stimulating theory of aristocracy was restored to its sovereign place in the affections of mankind.

This speech, because of the tone in which it was uttered, failed either to amuse or to anger the House of Commons. After the first few delighted cheers of Labour, it was listened to in a silence which gradually changed to hardly-heard laughter which was quietly derisive, and finally there arose that murmur of conversation throughout the Chamber which tells a member that he has lost the ear of the House. The last of his sentences, indeed, were scarcely audible even to those members who sat on the bench from which he had risen so confidently.

Only a few of his friends in the House spoke to Stephen of his speech, and that chaffingly. The newspapers ignored him, and the caricaturist of *Punch* mercifully spared him. In those circles of society which discuss political matters, Stephen was impatiently dismissed as a conceited young poseur who had spoken with an insufferable assumption of donnish superiority—the one spirit which the House of Commons refuses to tolerate.

Stephen, perfectly satisfied with his performance, would not admit that his speech was a failure. He blamed the House for not recognising his powers, and denounced it to his artistic friends, most of whom were emotional Socialists, as a thoroughly bourgeois institution which was plainly dying of its own boredom.

But as the days went by he recognised that his maiden speech had been a failure, and acknowledged to himself that he had committed a blunder. However, he did not sink under this knowledge; rather did it rouse his fighting spirit, and stir his sobering mind into a new and more deliberate activity. He set his teeth, and laid his plans for recovery.

He told himself that he must let a considerable time go by before he addressed the House again. In the meantime, he told himself, he would write articles for the newspaper; also he would go down to his constituents and make speeches, in order to develop his powers and keep himself before his local public.

He found it more difficult than he had imagined to write articles for the newspapers; somehow or another, he had lost his knack of easy composition, and no quantities of cocktails seemed to make it any easier. He decided that the atmosphere of Belgravia was unsuitable to his Muse, and took a flat in Mayfair, which he furnished luxuriously and startlingly, hanging the eccentric pictures and setting up the repellent statues which he had bought at Leo Daga's instigation. But even in Mayfair, and with these aids, writing was a difficult art, and he worked for long hours, day after day, before he produced an article which perfectly satisfied his mind for its originality, its epigrammatic directness, and its scornful audacity.

Relieved at last, he dispatched this article to the great popular newspaper which had been the first to hail his advent into the political world; and immediately set about

the composition of another. Before he had finished the first draft of this second article, however, the first came back to him with the formal printed regrets of the editor.

This experience enraged him. He did not in the least degree lose heart, or feel for a moment that he must abandon this particular line of advance; but once more he set his teeth, and summoned up all his powers to deal with a rotten world which would dare to flout him. He had a fresh copy made of the article, sent it to another quarter, and after waiting for a week received it back with the wounding intimation that in future he must send a stamped and addressed envelope with his contributions if he desired their return.

His first speech to his constituents was a depressing experience. It happened to be a time when the local industries were working overtime and the flat-racing season was in full swing, so that the hall which his agent had taken for him was only half full, and the audience far too good-tempered to be roused by fiery politics. He complained to Shrimpton, who instantly became busy with subscriptions to all manner of charities, cricket clubs, bowling clubs, brass bands, music societies, and whist drives in that ungrateful town, and who also paid a visit to the agent and arranged for a second meeting to be held in a bigger hall before the holiday season made politics unthinkable.

On this occasion, thanks to a brass band and a choral society, perhaps also to a considerable expenditure of money by Mr. Shrimpton in a way not to be too roughly inquired into, the hall was full, Stephen had a triumphant reception, and his speech was pronounced a brilliant success. He returned to town in high spirits, convinced that he would yet win the ear of the House of Commons, and make his mark in the national life.

One morning as he sat at his breakfast, wearing an extravagant silk dressing-gown, and glancing through his private correspondence, Mr. Shrimpton entered the room and told him that Mr. Hugh Jodrell had called to see him.

Stephen looked up quickly from a note he was reading, and said, “Show him in.” Then he added, “And, look here, Shrimp: I want a Bible. See if you can find one on the premises.”

When Hugh entered the room, Stephen did not rise from his chair, but, wiping his lips with his napkin, glanced doggedly, almost angrily, at his guest, and exclaimed, “Hello, Jodder! Why the devil have you deserted your dear little boys? Have you also come to save my soul?”

He put out his hand, which Hugh took with a cheerful smile, disclaiming any intention of trying to save his soul.

"Well, anyway," said Stephen, "have some breakfast." This invitation being declined, he pointed to a box of cigarettes, and said, "Help yourself," and continued his meal.

"Every one," he complained, as he peeled an orange, "is trying to save my soul. Even my anonymous correspondents take a hand in the game. For example, look at this." He held up the note he had been reading when Jodrell entered. "All it says," he continued, "is, 'Job, chap. xviii. 11-12.' I'll bet it's a condemnation of my private habits. I'll bet anything it is. I've sent for a Bible to satisfy my curiosity. Of course it may be a tip for the Cambridgeshire, but I'll bet my boots it's a moral admonition."

He swallowed a division of the orange, and, looking up, demanded with derisive anger, "Why the devil do people think I'm a holy horror? I'm as certain as I'm sitting here that you have come to see me after months and months of neglect only because you think my soul is in a bad way. Now, isn't that the honest truth, old Jodder? Come; out with it, like an honest man. Susan has sent you. And if not Susan, then my dear reformed Mama. God, I'm amused by all this evangelical fervour for my poor lost soul."

Hugh said that he had come to see how Stephen was getting on, and that, as regards Susan and Mrs. Laslett, naturally they would be anxious about him, one being his mother, and the other, one of his oldest and truest friends. Was there anything offensive in that? What the dickens had come to Stephen that he should take umbrage at a friendliness so natural and affectionate? He had always been a fiery particle; but, hang it, he had usually made some use of his reason even in the highest flights of his tantrums. What had come to him? Hugh had never heard Susan say a word about saving his soul, nor had Mrs. Laslett ever made use of words in his presence which could possibly bear such a construction. As for himself, like the others, he wanted to know how Stephen was getting on, and how Stephen thought the future was shaping for him. Let Stephen put a sponge of cold water to the back of his head and endeavour to give Hugh a rational answer to these natural questions.

Stephen laughed, got up from the table, carrying the anonymous note with him, helped himself to a cigarette, and patting Hugh's shoulder congratulated him on having progressed from a merely traditional Anglo-Catholicism towards an advanced and finished Jesuitism. Then he went to an arm-chair, lighted his cigarette, and told Hugh that his political prospects had never been brighter, that his digestion was in perfect working order, that his blood-pressure occasioned his doctors no anxiety, that his overdraft at the bank was still of manageable dimensions, and that his conscience allowed him to sleep without nightmares of any kind.

Hugh said, "Well, that's splendid. What's your golf handicap now?"

"My only exercise," replied Stephen, "is riding and squash racquets."

"You look fairly fit."

"Only fairly? What do you see wrong with me?"

"Colour's not what it should be, eyes are a bit yellow, and you're getting fattish."

"Fattish be damned! I'm exactly the same weight as I was a year ago."

Hugh shook his head. "You're softer—much flabbier," he declared.

At this Stephen smiled, and invited Hugh to proceed with his indictment. "Get on to the moral question, Jodder; it will amuse me," he said.

"Don't be an egotist," replied Hugh. "What the deuce have I got to do with your morals? Don't you ever talk of anything else?"

Before Stephen could reply Mr. Shrimpton entered the room with a Bible. "I had to send and borrow it from a tradesman in Shepherd Market," he said, and grinned savagely; "the man who sends his bills in twice if you don't watch it," he added.

"Give it to Mr. Jodrell," commanded Stephen. "He knows his way about the Bible better than I do. Read it aloud, Jodder. Here you are, Job, chapter eighteen, verses eleven and twelve. I'll bet it's a scorcher. Shrimp, you'd better wait and hear what it says. One of my letters marked *Strictly Personal* refers me to Job. Look at it." He handed the note to Mr. Shrimpton. "Fire away, Jodder."

Hugh having found the place, looked up and said, "Yes, it's hot. You're quite right. Shall I read it?"

"By all means," laughed Stephen. "Go ahead."

Hugh read: "'Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet. His strength shall be hungerbitten, and destruction shall be ready at his side.'"

Stephen exploded with delight. "Here, give it to me," he cried, leaning forward in the chair to take the book from Hugh. He found the place and read the words aloud, slowly and powerfully, as if they pleased him. Then he looked up, holding out the book to Mr. Shrimpton, and exclaimed, "We'll have those words printed and framed, Shrimp. We'll hang them up over my bed. Damme, they're worth it, if only for that phrase, *his strength shall be hungerbitten*. It's magnificent. Hungerbitten, and I've just finished a man's breakfast!"

When Mr. Shrimpton had departed, Stephen entered upon a long, fierce, and scornful denunciation of people who presumed to be interested in his morals. He declared that half the world seemed to be in a conspiracy against him. He declared, too, that he had enemies who went about spreading false reports concerning him, making him out to be a monster of immorality. He said he resented the imputations of

his so-called friends, and was determined to discover his secret enemies and to smash them. He grew very hot, and violently indignant, as he proceeded, and ended by insulting Hugh, insulting him in such a way that only perfect self-mastery on Hugh's part saved Stephen from a castigation.

As it was, Hugh got up from his chair, quietly and imperturbably, but visibly pale, and said he would go.

"I've offended you," laughed Stephen. "But you never think of how your interference offends me, do you? Oh no: that's a sacred act of beautiful friendship!" He rose, and stood before the mantelpiece, feeling for the handkerchief in the top pocket of his dressing-gown, his eyes watching Hugh with secret curiosity.

Hugh turned and looked at him as he walked towards the door. "I remember that you once told me," he said, "that if you had a body like mine you'd conquer the world. Do you remember my reply to that rather flamboyant remark?"

"Flamboyant is good!" laughed Stephen. "No, I don't; do tell me. I'm sure it was wonderful."

"I said," replied Hugh, "that if I had a mind like yours I'd conquer myself."

Stephen said, "Ah, yes; you were a preacher even in those days, were you not?"

But Hugh had gone from the room before Stephen completed the sentence.

IV

Stephen was still encountering difficulties in fighting the world, and was steadily falling more and more into the habit of a savage moroseness, when the British nation, to its great annoyance, found itself suddenly subjected once again to that disturbing and expensive interruption of its business called a General Election.

In this fight, which was a short one and a dull one, Stephen came a cropper. He not only lost his seat, but lost it so ignominiously that no newspaper referred to him in speaking of the result. It was simply observed that this constituency "had reverted to its original allegiance to Liberalism."

Stephen returned to his flat in Mayfair with a sore head and a burning heart. He was baffled, he was indignant, and he was pathetically sorry for himself. For a man of his temperament suddenly to find himself in the position of not knowing what to do next is a very painful experience. The tremendous hurly-burly of his fight had ended in a silence and a stagnation which almost frightened him.

A few days after this discomfited return to London, and before he had picked up his threads with Leo Daga, he received a visit from his father.

Mr. Laslett, entering Stephen's flat for the first time, looked about him with

puzzled and slightly disapproving eyes. He saw pictures which he could not understand at all, and statues which he understood only too well. As Stephen happened to be in his bath at that moment, Mr. Laslett had plenty of time to observe his son's room, but after this first look about him, a frowning and a contemptuous look, he walked to the window, pulled aside a curtain, and stood there staring down on the activity of the street below.

Stephen entered the room in a dressing-gown, apologising for having kept his father waiting, and explaining that he had been up for some hours, and was taking a bath after a ride in the Park.

Mr. Laslett, walking slowly to an upright chair at a distance from the fireplace, sat down, and took a cigar from a top pocket in his waistcoat loaded with three others. After having pierced the end carefully, and examined his work critically, he asked Stephen what he knew of a young man named Lionel Olphert.

Stephen said, "You mean the fellow who's a son of Lord Dundermot?"

Mr. Laslett nodded his head. "Any good?" he asked.

Stephen considered, helping himself to a cigarette, and replied slowly, "No, I shouldn't think so. He's just the average little ferret sneaking about for prey. London's full of that species just now. I shouldn't think he had got any vices, but he hasn't got any of the virtues that would be useful to you. Why, is he asking you to take him into your office?"

Mr. Laslett shook his head. "Wants to marry Phillida," he muttered, and closed his lips firmly, looking down at the cigar smoking between his fingers.

"Oh, that's it!" exclaimed Stephen.

"Recommended by one of your mother's friends. No money, but no vices, and said to be genuinely fond of Phillida."

"And Phillida?"

Mr. Laslett shrugged his shoulders.

Stephen said that perhaps Lionel Olphert would make a decent enough husband, as husbands go nowadays, but he took it for granted all the same that he was after the Laslett millions.

Mr. Laslett winced, smoked hard, and said, "That's just it. Makes you suspicious, being rich, doesn't it?" He pulled his cigar from his mouth, looked at the point, and added, "I don't want to see Phillida let down." He pondered that aspect of the matter, his eyelids drooping more than usual, his eyes directed to the carpet, the cigar smoking thinly between the fingers of a hand resting on his right knee. Then, very slowly, the tired eyelids lifted, the green eyes concentrated in a penetrating glance at Stephen, and in a more energetic tone of voice, he demanded, "What

about you?"

"About me?"

"Not engaged to be married?"

"Lord, no!"

"I don't blame you."

There was a pause, in which Mr. Laslett smoked in silence and looked down at the carpet just in front of him, thinking wearily. After a moment, this time without raising his eyes to Stephen's face, he asked, "Going on with politics?"

Stephen said, "Oh, rather. I was ever a fighter, so one fight more—and a dozen after that, too. Oh yes, I'm not down and out."

Mr. Laslett said, "I hope you never will be," rather grimly. Then with more vigour he demanded suddenly, "Ever thought of the city?"

"No," said Stephen, wondering what his father was driving at.

"Plenty of fighting there for those who like it," said Mr. Laslett.

"Yes, I suppose so."

The disconcerting green eyes fixed themselves on Stephen as he said, "I can find you a place there if you care about it."

Stephen said he would rather stick to politics.

"Well, think it over," replied his father. He rose, and went to the window. "I'd rather see Phillida fixed up," he said, "with a man who had a few millions of his own. What am I to say to your mother?"

"She's in favour?"

"Well, you know her, don't you?"

"And Phillida, you're not sure about?"

"No. She says she likes him, and leaves it at that."

"I should wait till she says she won't marry any one else."

"I'll think it over. In the meantime, you think over my suggestion. Politics aren't every one's game. There's more life in the city, and more adventure too."

He paused on his way to the door and indicated the statues. "Any money in those things?"

"There may be some day," said Stephen, a little uneasily.

"Never buy anything you can't sell again," was Mr. Laslett's comment, as he opened the door and went out.

In the corridor he said, "I'm off to Paris next week. You might have a talk to this young Irishman and let me know what you think of him. Phillida wants some one to look after her. Something queer about that girl."

V

During the next few weeks Phillida became so fond of Mr. Lionel Olphert that she said she would never marry any one else. Therefore Mrs. Laslett took the matter into her own hands, and the announcement of the engagement was sent to the newspapers, with photographs of the future bridegroom and the future bride.

A day or two later Mr. Laslett telegraphed from Berlin that the marriage must not take place for at least a year.

Lionel Olphert accepted this ruling with a good grace. He was an inoffensive and rather nice-looking young man, whose Irish accent lent a certain sentimental charm to everything he said. He was fond of pictures and literature, and took little or no interest in sport. Old ladies were fond of him, and middle-aged ladies found him useful and amusing. He was extremely polite, danced rather well, listened sympathetically, laughed easily, and gossiped admirably. No one had a word to say against him, and he was credited with the jest that certain dancers "appeared to suffer from a posteriority complex."

Mrs. Laslett was delighted with him. When she received her husband's telegram, she told Lionel that she regarded it as "preposterous." She said that if Lionel cared to defy Mr. Laslett's ruling she would back him up, and see that all came right in the end. But Lionel, laughing at that, said he would far rather accept that ruling. "Mr. Laslett, I happen to know," he said, with a charming smile, "is making inquiries about me, and I must regard myself as on trial for the next twelve months. As long as I may see Phillida every day I shan't mind. I am not in the least apprehensive of the result of Mr. Laslett's inquiries."

Stephen had reported something more than favourably to his father concerning the young Irishman. He genuinely liked him, took him about, entertained him, and discussed with him his own future. Lionel suggested that Stephen should devote a great deal of his time to his faithless constituency, saying he was sure there would be another dissolution before the year was out.

This advice was the best that Stephen could have received just then. It delivered him from brooding on his defeat, and introduced the creative principle of activity into his dangerous idleness. Moreover, when he set about the task which Lionel had recommended to him he at once encountered opposition of a very serious nature, and this gave him something to fight, which was good for his nature.

It seemed that he had mortally offended some of his chief supporters in the constituency by his original newspaper article, and that these influential people—clergymen, employers of labour, and local editors—were determined to have nothing

more to do with him. He called at the headquarters of the party in London, and found that the officials had no encouragement for him. He asked for another constituency and received only an evasive answer. After waiting for several weeks, and paying many visits to headquarters, on which occasions he never saw any of the chiefs, he was offered a quite hopeless constituency in the West of England. This offer he scornfully rejected.

Then it was that he decided to fight for his life. He wrote to his agent announcing his unalterable determination to stand again, declaring that if the local bosses dared to flout him by choosing another candidate he would still stand and split the vote. At the same time he decided that he would abandon the Leo Daga view of Conservatism, and began at once to prepare himself for taking a serious part in the left-wing activities of his party.

Lionel Olphert went with him to confront the local caucus. Stephen was told on his arrival that another candidate had already been chosen, and that the local caucus did not want to see him. He replied hotly that he would form his own organisation and at once acquaint the newly-chosen candidate with that fact. Before he left the town he had taken a set of offices, engaged a staff of workers, and sent to the printers a letter addressed to the electors which made a fighting appeal for their sympathy and very neatly expressed his new faith in a courageous Tory Democracy.

He returned to London, fonder of Lionel Olphert than ever before, and found himself at once engaged in an altercation with Conservative Headquarters. Everything that power and prestige could do to subdue a young rebel was brought to bear against him, but Stephen, whose blood was now thoroughly roused, and who was in truth fiercely enjoying the fight, stood his ground and defied authority to overthrow him.

During these exciting weeks, although he frequently saw Leo Daga and occasionally took part in the frolics of Leo Daga's more lively friends, he was something like the Stephen of Cambridge days. He drank far less alcohol, was more regular in his habits, took plenty of vigorous exercise, and practised real restraint in his numerous flirtations, none of which was in the least serious.

Mrs. Laslett observed the change in him, and attributed it to the influence of Lionel Olphert, and wrote to her husband to tell him how wonderfully dear Lionel was steadying Stephen for a really great political career. Phillida observed it too, and wrote to Susan, saying that Stephen was himself again, inviting Susan to London that she also might rejoice over the returned prodigal.

But all was not well with Stephen, whose habits were extravagant, and whose fighting career consumed immense sums of money. He received one night a letter

from his bankers, drawing attention to the amount of his overdraft and requesting him to adjust matters before the end of the month. He was alarmed to discover how very greatly he was overdrawn, and rather shrank from approaching his father, who had disapproved of his determination to fight his old constituency again. He went to bed with no other solution of the difficulty than a decision to consult Mr. Shrimpton before he either replied to the bankers or appealed to his father.

Mr. Shrimpton shook his head over the bankers' letter, the tone of which struck his practical mind as extremely disagreeable, and suggested that before Stephen consulted his father he should try to reduce the overdraft by getting his mother to give him a cheque, in order "to reduce the inflammation." Mrs. Laslett was just then in Sussex for Goodwood, and Mr. Shrimpton suggested that Stephen should run down to see her, almost pressing this advice upon him, as if he regarded it as a particular stroke of genius.

Stephen considered the matter for the rest of the morning, and then told Mr. Shrimpton to telephone to the bank saying that the account would be put right in a day or two's time. "I am writing to my mother," he added, "by to-night's post, and I shall get her cheque the day after to-morrow."

The day after to-morrow arrived, and, as usual, Stephen was wakened by his valet with tea and newspapers at eight o'clock.

"Post not in yet?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir," answered the valet, and began to attend to Stephen's clothes.

Stephen was drinking his tea when a staring headline on the front sheet of one of the cheaper newspapers suddenly caught his eye. He uttered no exclamation, made no movement, and sat up in his bed with the cup of tea half-way to his lips, simply staring at this headline in the pile of newspapers lying on the quilt. Then he raised his eyes and stole a glance at his valet. The man was carrying Stephen's evening clothes to a table by the door, and apparently was wholly unaware of the news in the paper.

Stephen's eyes dropped again to the headline.

The valet asked what clothes he should put out, and Stephen gave his answer. The man went to the wardrobe and took out the clothes Stephen had chosen. "It's a beautiful morning, sir," he said; "I wonder you aren't at Goodwood."

Stephen drank his tea, set down the cup, and replied that he was too busy, leaning from his pillow to take a cigarette from a table at his side. The servant came to the bed for the tray, lighted Stephen's cigarette, and said that he would bring the letters directly they arrived. Then, bearing the tray before him, with Stephen's shoes in his hand, and taking up the clothes on the table by the door as he passed, this efficient servant withdrew noiselessly from the room.

Stephen, alone at last, took up the paper and read the headlines in full, headlines stretching across three columns, and occupying the chief place in the journal: "FLIGHT OF WILLIAM LASLETT. WARRANT FOR ARREST TO BE ISSUED TO-DAY. ALLEGED LOSS OF HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS. SEVERAL GREAT FIRMS INVOLVED. MEASURES TO PREVENT PANIC ON STOCK EXCHANGE."

The room was full of morning light. A ripple of air stirred the curtains of the open windows, through which the sounds of the street below entered with a note of subdued but cheerful friendliness.

Stephen looked up from the newspaper with a dry throat and a stunned brain. He put his cigarette to his lips, and smoked slowly, staring straight before him, conscious of extraordinary stillness.

This stillness, which seemed to hold him a prisoner, was presently broken by the sound of rushing bath-water in the next room, a tumultuous sound which, however, had this morning no pleasure for his ears.

He leaned out of his bed, laid the cigarette down on an ash-tray, and then sat upright, his hands at his side, his eyes staring before him, the newspapers sliding away from his knees as he stretched his legs under the clothes.

He was thinking, not of himself, not of what this thunder-bolt might do to him, but of his father hiding from arrest—Bread Winner, flying from the law and dreading every man's approach! His throat became drier still; his eyes clouded; and he could hear his heart knocking at his breast.

The servant entered the room, and Stephen at once changed his attitude, and tried to appear as if nothing unusual had occurred.

The man handed him a pile of letters.

"Seen the news?" Stephen asked, taking the letters from the salver on which they had been presented. He tried to speak lightly and carelessly.

"No, sir."

"You'll have to look about for another job."

The man said, "I hope not, sir."

"My father has lost his money."

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir."

"Things have gone wrong. He has had to leave the country. In fact, the law is after him."

The man looked incredulous.

"Here, take the paper, and read it for yourself," said Stephen.

The man took the paper, glanced at the headlines, and said, "Well, I couldn't wish for a better master, sir, than you've been to me, and if I have to leave you it will

be with real regret. I'm very sorry to hear about Mr. Laslett's trouble—very sorry indeed, sir. I hope it won't turn out to be so bad as the paper says. I do, indeed."

When he had gone, Stephen was suddenly overtaken by a convulsion of uncontrollable grief. He flung himself sideways down in the bed, pressed his face into a pillow, and sobbed like a child. "Oh, Bread Winner! Bread Winner!" he groaned, half in pity of his father, and half in reproach. He ground his teeth, fought back his sobs, drew his hands violently up and down his face, pressing his fingers into his eyes, and then jerked himself into a sitting posture, angry that he had given way to emotion.

There was a rustle of paper on the quilt, and he looked down and remembered his letters. One of the first which attracted his attention was addressed to him in the familiar handwriting of his mother. His sobs began to come again, but without violence. He opened the letter, sobbing softly, and saw through the mist in his eyes that it enclosed a cheque. He ground his teeth again, rubbed the water from his eyes, and glanced at the amount. It was a cheque for a thousand pounds. He burst out laughing, sobbing as he laughed.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," he called, with a sudden savagery in his mind.

His servant entered.

"Well, what is it?" Stephen demanded, frowning angrily.

"Mrs. Laslett on the telephone, sir."

CHAPTER VII

NEW BEGINNINGS

I

When Mrs. Laslett's handsome car, smothered in dust, arrived before her stately house in Belgrave Square, the door was opened to her by an anxious-looking footman, who appeared to be in nervous dread of the butler, standing behind him in the centre of the hall.

The butler regarded his approaching mistress with grave concern. His face was exceedingly pale, his eyes were watery, and the thin brown hair on his baldish head had a disordered appearance. If Mrs. Laslett had not been so preoccupied with more serious thoughts she might have considered that he was intoxicated.

He bowed as she came near him, and, drawing quite close to her, exclaimed in a confidential tone of voice, which had the sound of a suppressed sob, "I hope, ma'am, I pray, ma'am, they'll never catch him."

Taken aback for a moment by this surprising speech, Mrs. Laslett stopped dead in the centre of the hall, with its grand staircase rising to the top of the house, as if she realised for the first time that her husband was now a fugitive from justice and a topic of gossip for every Tom, Dick, and Harry. She drew back her eyelids, straightened her backbone, and looked at the delinquent butler with judgment and contempt, too proud to correct him for impertinence, too occupied with greater matters to charge him with drunkenness. Then she demanded of him in a voice perfectly under command, "Is Mr. Stephen in the library?" The tearful butler replied, swaying a little under her stare, that Mr. Stephen was in the drawing-room. She moved towards the staircase. "Is Mr. Shergold there, too?" she asked, without turning her head. "No, ma'am, he has not arrived." Mr. Shergold was the family solicitor.

As she went up the softly-carpeted staircase of this dignified house, with great pictures on the walls and beautiful flowers shining at her from the drawing-room landing, Mrs. Laslett wondered if Stephen had elected to meet her in the drawing-room because he considered that the library was now tenanted by a ghost, and decided that such an idea, if indeed it had entered Stephen's head, was finical and ridiculous. Not in any spirit of sentimentalism did Ella Laslett intend to grapple with

this domestic calamity which, if she let it do so, would overwhelm her.

She opened one of the tall double doors of the drawing-room, and entered that long and lofty apartment like a person who had left something there and has come to recover it before going out. Stephen, who had been restlessly walking up and down the room, and who looked half stunned and half-murderously angry, came to a sudden halt, and looked at her with dazed eyes. She gave him no greeting, but said bitterly, "Here's a pretty mess for us to deal with," and advanced up the room opening her vanity-bag and fumbling for her cigarette-case. "When is Shergold coming?" she asked, coming to a stop before Stephen, and flinging her bag to the seat of a neighbouring chair.

For some reason or another Stephen laughed. Perhaps it was because he had expected her to make some reference to his father. "He's not coming at all," he replied, striking a match. His voice was husky, and his face dark with passion.

"What do you mean?" she challenged, and lighted her cigarette from the match he held for her, noticing how his hand trembled.

"I had a very bad quarter of an hour with friend Shergold," replied Stephen, blowing out the match and carrying it to an ash-tray.

"How do you mean a bad quarter of an hour?" She walked to the mantelpiece, laying her arm along it and resting her foot on a low stool before the fender. She turned her head and stared at Stephen, somewhat shaken by his alarming manner and his look of tragedy.

"Shergold is one of the victims," Stephen replied.

"Well?"

"Don't you see what that means?"

"Tell me."

"Well, he's one of the creditors. He is one of those who are now raising the hue and cry. He won't act for us. He says he has been defrauded of thousands of pounds. He told me that he is a ruined man; he looked to me much more like a caged tiger. Anyway, he's out for our blood."

Mrs. Laslett considered that unexpected piece of information for a moment, and then, changing her position, announced with decision that they must get another solicitor, asking Stephen if he knew a man who could act for them.

Stephen shook his head, and began once more to walk up and down the room.

His mother seemed to be more offended by his fatalistic gloom than annoyed by the bankruptcy of his father. She walked to a chair, sat down, and said, "It's no use taking this thing as if it's the Day of Judgment. We've got to rouse ourselves up; we've got to do something."

"What can we do?" asked Stephen, and seemed to glare at her.

"I know very well what I'm going to do," said his mother. "I came from the middle classes, and I'm going back to them. My job is to look after Phillida, and I intend to do it."

"How?"

"I've thought it all out, coming up in the car. I shall open a shop."

"That wants capital," said Stephen.

"Well, I can get all the capital I shall require by selling furniture and things."

"That's just what you can't do."

"What do you mean?"

"Shergold said we can touch nothing. Nothing belongs to us. Look about you; look at all these great possessions; they belong to the estate of a criminal bankrupt. As for us—you, me, and Phillida—we're beggars."

"I never heard such nonsense!"

"What's the use of shutting your eyes to facts? We're up against it. We're down and out. We haven't got a bob we can call our own."

"Now, you get me a solicitor. I'll soon see whether Shergold isn't the rogue I've always thought him to be. Beggars! What rot you're talking! Why didn't you at once go to another lawyer when Shergold refused to act for us?"

"Because nothing can be done."

"Don't talk such arrant nonsense!"

"To begin with, we haven't six-and-eightpence between us. Who'd act for us?"

"Be so good as to tell me, then, what we are to do? Sit still and starve?" Mrs. Laslett stared at Stephen as if the contempt with which he inspired her had frozen those fine eyes of hers into an everlasting scorn.

"The first thing you've got to do," replied Stephen, "is to discharge all the servants, here and in Sussex. You'll have to explain to them that you can't pay them a penny of wages. Then we shall have to discover how many of our friends love us well enough to lend us money that they're never likely to see again."

Mrs. Laslett flung away her cigarette, and rose to her feet. She looked taller than usual, straighter, too, and even majestic in her outraged dignity. "I won't listen to a word you say!" she exclaimed. "Go downstairs and ring up some one you can rely upon and ask him to recommend us a first-rate solicitor. That's the first thing we've got to do."

"Ring up some one I can rely on! Who is that?"

"Well, Leo Daga for one." She stopped to put a cushion straight. "I should think he knows every rascally lawyer in London." Suddenly she looked up from the

cushion. “And what about Shrimpton?” she demanded. “Where is he now? That’s the man I want to consult. Get hold of him at once. Now, don’t stop talking. Go and do what I tell you. In the meantime, I’m going to my room. I’ll see whether there’s nothing I can put my hands on and call my own!”

Mr. Shrimpton, when he arrived, looked no paler than usual, and no more depressed. He entered the drawing-room with his habitual expression of watchful and suspicious gloom, and advanced slowly up to the fireplace, where Mrs. Laslett was sitting and Stephen standing.

Mrs. Laslett gave him no greeting, but at once fired off a scornful denunciation of Shergold and announced that she had sent for Shrimpton in order that he should recommend to her a lawyer who would look after her interests.

Mr. Shrimpton considered and replied in an even voice, “The best man for your purpose has been struck off the rolls, but he’s out of prison now, and might be useful. He’ll rob you, of course, as sure as a gun, if there’s anything to rob. You’d have to risk that. Still, he’d be useful to you.”

Mrs. Laslett regarded him with a keen scrutiny. “But do you mean to tell me,” she asked, “that I can’t sell any of the furniture here, or the pictures, or the china?”

Mr. Shrimpton looked at the furniture, looked at the pictures, looked at the china, and replied that he should advise Mrs. Laslett to touch nothing for the present, except any little thing, he added, that could be slipped into the pocket. “You may have to answer awkward questions,” he said, rather warningly. “I expect there’s an inventory of everything in the house, for the purpose of fire insurance.”

“I know there is,” Stephen said savagely. “Shergold took care to inform me of that fact.”

“Of course any little thing bought since the inventory was taken,” said Mr. Shrimpton, “might be slipped out of the house all right.”

Mrs. Laslett began to inveigh against the law, to question Mr. Shrimpton’s view of the law, and to denounce Shergold as a scoundrel and a traitor. She announced her intention of fighting the law, and once more began to demand of Mr. Shrimpton the name of a lawyer who would say exactly how she stood as owner of two big houses filled with expensive things.

Stephen broke into the discussion. “Isn’t it true, Shrimp,” he demanded, “that we are absolutely down and out?”

Mr. Shrimpton looked at him, and said calmly, “I’m afraid it is.”

“We haven’t a bob we can call our own, have we?”

“That’s how the law stands.”

Stephen turned to his mother. “So what’s the use of engaging shady lawyers,

and dreaming dreams of saving a few odd things from the wreck?" he demanded. "What we've got to do is to look for work, and that's a job that will take us all our time." He turned to Mr. Shrimpton. "Know any one, Shrimp, who'd take me on?"

"What as?"

"Any dam thing—chauffeur, secretary, or valet; I don't care what it is!"

"Why not try journalism?"

"Well, I will. Sound idea, Shrimp. Who'll take me on?"

"Well, there's Plunkett. He published two or three of your articles."

"What about *Daily Life*?"

"Well, you could try it. Of course that's the paper. Cartwright's the editor. Why not ask Mr. Daga for a letter of introduction to him?"

"Can't I stand on my own feet?"

"Well, people think a lot about Mr. Daga."

"All right; I'll try him. I'll ring him up now, and fix an appointment."

When he had gone from the room, Mrs. Laslett looked at Mr. Shrimpton, who looked at her as if he knew what she was going to say, and without any change in her attitude or any tone of anxiety in her voice, asked him, "What will this mean—seven years or longer?"

Mr. Shrimpton said that he thought it would be longer.

"Ten years?"

"More like fifteen."

She considered that information apparently without emotion, and then said to him, "I want some money—fifteen hundred or two thousand pounds. I want it to open a shop. How can I get it?"

"Only by borrowing from your friends."

"No other way?"

"None that I can think of."

"Then you mean I shan't get it at all?"

"Well, I don't know your friends."

"Friends," said Mrs. Laslett, and allowed herself the luxury of a brief laugh, very hard and cynical. "Who is your friend when you're in real difficulties?"

"What about the charities you've helped—distressed ladies and that kind of thing? They might lend a hand; they ought to."

Mrs. Laslett dismissed that suggestion with irritable contempt, and asked Mr. Shrimpton whether he did not know of some dodge whereby she could cheat the law of these great possessions in the house—possessions which really belonged to her and not to her husband.

Before Mr. Shrimpton could reply to this question, the door opened and Stephen appeared.

"Daga's voice sounded so different!" he exclaimed, with a smile of bitterness and a flash of anger in his eyes. "My teeth tell me that my father has eaten some singularly sour grapes. However, I've got an idea. I think I can raise money enough for present needs." He looked at his mother. "How much do you want for your shop?"

"Fifteen hundred would do, but I should like two thousand."

Stephen made a mental calculation, and replied, "I think I can manage fifteen hundred; perhaps a bit more. I'll go and see."

She called to him, "You had better stay and have some luncheon first."

He turned at the door and looked at Mr. Shrimpton with a smile. "Hark at the dear lady!" he exclaimed. "It's quite impossible to make a woman believe that she is ever down and out. Luncheon!" he added, looking at his mother. "Why, my dear, that sort of thing is for the rich."

She called to him again, telling him not to be ridiculous, but he took no notice of her and went from the room.

Stephen took a taxi to his rooms, and on arriving there asked his valet if any one had been to see him. The valet replied, sympathetically, that several newspaper offices had rung him up on the telephone, and that an officer from Scotland Yard had called, leaving word that he would be obliged if Mr. Laslett would ring him up on his return.

"Have I returned?" asked Stephen.

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

Stephen went to the telephone and rang up the garage in which he kept his cars. He told the proprietor that he was prepared to sell those three cars for two thousand pounds. The proprietor offered fifteen hundred. Stephen replied that he would take eighteen hundred, but not a penny less. The proprietor said he'd give sixteen hundred and fifty, and not a penny more. "Make it seventeen hundred," said Stephen, "and I'll inform your greatest rival he can't have them." That price being agreed upon, Stephen said he wanted to be paid in notes, not by cheque, and arranged to call at the garage for the money at three o'clock.

He then rang up the stable in which he kept his horse, and offered the animal to the owner for eighty guineas, which sum, he said, was to include saddle, bridle, and blankets. The owner replied that he had more horses than he could do with, and recommended Stephen to sell the animal to a friend. "Come on." said Stephen, "how much?" The owner replied that forty pounds was the most he could give for the

horse. “Then I’ll send it to Tattersall’s,” said Stephen. “I might go to fifty for it,” said the voice. “I’ll take sixty—guineas,” replied Stephen. “I’ll make it fifty guineas, but that’s my limit,” came the answer. “All right; call it a bargain. I’ll look in about three. Let me have the money in notes.”

With this business concluded, and elated by his success, Stephen made arrangements with his valet to see about disposing of the lease of his flat, and also for the sale of his furniture. He then departed to call upon Leo Daga.

The feeling that he was in action, that he was not letting the grass grow under his feet, and that he was a far better business man than he had imagined, strengthened Stephen for the wholly disagreeable business of an interview with Leo Daga, whose voice had sounded so strangely different over the telephone.

He rang the bell at the familiar door, and stood impatiently facing it, holding his stick and gloves in both hands at the level of his tie, standing almost tiptoe to enter, eager to get the interview over and done with before his present feeling of elation evaporated. He knew that Leo had unwillingly agreed to see him, and had more unwillingly said that he would give him a note to Cartwright of *Daily Life*, but he was prepared to encounter coldness without a word of reproach, and to endure, if necessary, even an affront, so long as he got that valuable note.

The door opened slowly, and Leo’s valet, occupying the whole of the doorway, confronted him with a nervous stare.

“Mr. Daga is expecting me,” said Stephen, advancing a step.

“Mr. Daga has been called out, sir,” replied the valet, without shifting his ground. “He waited for you till the last moment. He left a note for you.”

He turned to a table, and presented a note on a salver.

Stephen, whose heart felt turned to stone, took the note, imagining it to be a letter of introduction to the editor of *Daily Life*, and saw, first with misgiving and then with anger, that it was addressed to himself. He held it in his hands, looking at it; then, suddenly, he raised his eyes, looked hard at the valet, and asked when Mr. Daga would return.

“I do not know, sir.”

Two people, talking gaily, came up the stairs. Stephen turned to look at them, and almost at the same moment stepped into the hall of Leo’s flat, as if to be out of their way. The servant did not close the door.

Stephen opened the letter, standing just inside the hall, with his hat on his head, his stick and gloves in his hand. As he read it, the people who had been coming up the stairs passed by the open door, talking and laughing.

He read:

"Dear Stephen,—On thinking it over I'd rather not, for various reasons, all unconnected with your father's affairs. Nor do I think a note from me would do you any real good in that quarter. Why not call on Mr. Cartwright? I feel sure he would see you. My regrets at being called away.—Yours,

Daga."

Stephen glanced up from reading this note, and said to the valet, "I'll write him an answer," and walked forward to the sitting-room.

He opened the door, and was going to the red lacquer bureau at which he had so often written notes to Leo, when he stopped dead. No, he would not write. There was only one answer to such a note. He tore it in half, and flung the pieces on to a gold-tooled leather blotter lying on the flap of the bureau.

He turned to the valet, who was standing in the doorway, and said, "That's my answer to Mr. Daga. Tell him so when he comes in."

He remained where he was, breathing hard, looking about him, longing to swing his stick among Leo's delicate china and glittering ornaments. His eyes suddenly came to rest on a picture by Fragonard above the mantelpiece. It was the picture of a naked woman lying on a couch in an attitude of rather unpleasant indolence.

"That's something new," he said fiercely.

"It came two days ago, sir."

"Very suitable!"

The servant said nothing.

"I say it's very suitable," said Stephen, and glared at the man.

The man shrugged his shoulders, depressed his lips, and shot a glance at Stephen which expressed the utmost contempt both for him and his opinions.

Stephen, infuriated by that glance, took a step towards the silent servant, but checked himself, laughed, and looked at the man as if to say, "I'd like to wring your neck for you." Then he turned, glanced towards the bureau, and said, "Point that out to him, you understand?" and went from the room, with the valet at his heels.

He walked for an hour, choosing streets that were unfamiliar to him, and then, buying an evening newspaper, entered a cheap tea-shop, and ordered some food. The newspaper made the flight of his father the chief news of the day, giving an account of the application at the police-court that morning for an extradition warrant, and several interviews with people in the City concerning the consequences of William Laslett's gigantic failure. In the stop-press section of the paper there was a paragraph saying that the criminal bankrupt was believed to be in France with a

woman who had flown with him in an aeroplane from Croydon two days ago.

The newspaper set free in Stephen's mind its dominant thought, suppressed till that moment, suppressed ever since he had called on Shergold by his mother's orders, the thought which had provoked his paroxysm of grief when he first saw the news in the morning paper. He felt his heart swelling with grief for his father. He longed to be at his side helping him, ready if necessary to defend him against arrest. The fact that a woman was reported to be his father's companion did not affect this feeling of filial sorrow, rather did it intensify the pathos of his sympathy; for Stephen knew how little tenderness his mother had ever given to his father, and began to realise how his father had craved for tenderness during those last hectic years of the family's splendour.

When he had finished his scanty luncheon, he walked for half an hour in the streets, thinking of his father, and wishing he had been a better son to him, regretting now a hundred occasions on which his father must have felt that he was unsympathetic, regretting, too, that recent occasion when he had refused his father's invitation to go into the City.

He remembered now that his father had spoken on that visit with anxious solicitude about Phillida, and realised that he had desired to delay the engagement with Lionel Olphert because he saw the menace of his bankruptcy approaching. Phillida had been nearer to him than either Stephen or Stephen's mother. In his own mute way he had loved Phillida, and must have hungered to save her from the bitter disappointment of an engagement which had been made only by the bubble reputation of his millions. Poor little Phillida! So slight and frail a thing, so little fitted to stand up to an east wind, much less to the changes and chances of this mortal life. At the thought of her, Stephen's heart swelled with grief, which was only held down by a sudden feeling of ferocious anger directed towards Lionel Olphert, who would assuredly strike a deadly blow at poor little Phillida. "By God!" he exclaimed, "have we got one true friend in the whole wide world?"—and quickened his pace, and shoved into people whom he overtook on the crowded pavements, and glared at those who came towards him.

When he had collected the money for his cars and his horse, a business which he carried through with an affectation of joking amusement, he took a taxi and drove to Belgrave Square, talking to himself in the cab, for he was suffering from the suppression of many strong feelings, and wondering how Cartwright of *Daily Life* would receive him.

He asked the footman who opened the door to him if Mrs. Laslett was in the drawing-room. He was told that Mrs. Laslett was there, with a lady and gentleman.

He asked who they were, and the footman replied that he did not know, as he had not opened the door to these visitors.

Stephen ran quickly up the broad low flight of stairs, opened the door of the drawing-room, and looked in, rather than entered. The first person he saw was Hugh Jodrell sitting at the far end of the room, who looked up at the opening of the door, and then rose quickly to his feet and came towards Stephen. Then he saw Mrs. Callington sitting next to his mother on a sofa, talking earnestly to her. He entered the room, closed the door behind him, and said, "Hullo, Jodder!" advancing, and putting out his hand.

When he had greeted Mrs. Callington, who was none too friendly towards him, he turned abruptly to his mother and said that he wanted to see her alone for two minutes. At that, Mrs. Laslett rose impulsively, eager for news, and Mrs. Callington rose also, saying that she would go. "Be sure you let me know," she whispered to Ella, taking her hand, "if there is anything I can do for you."

Stephen rang the bell, and turned to Hugh and told him to wait there a moment. Then he followed his mother out of the room. Mrs. Callington descended the stairs alone, to the footman waiting for her in the hall, while mother and son walked forward to a smaller apartment beyond sight of the stairs and round a corner of the corridor.

With the door of this little room closed on them, Stephen took two envelopes from his pocket, and handed them to his mother.

"There's seventeen hundred pounds there," he said, "and fifty guineas here. Something to get on with."

"How did you get it?" she asked, staggered and delighted at the same time.

"Selling things. What did Mrs. Callington want?"

Ella Laslett, who was now thinking vigorously and hopefully of her shop, replied that Mrs. Callington had called to offer help, but in reality had probably come for news, useful for gossip.

"And Jodder?"

Mrs. Laslett said that Hugh had come for two purposes. He had come to see Stephen, and also to tell her that Susan Anstey had taken Phillida to stay at Silverton. "I shall stay here," she said, "until I know what is going to happen to us."

"Any news of Lionel?" asked Stephen.

"None at present."

Stephen exclaimed, "I'll break his head for him!" Then he opened the door, and said, "We must get rid of Jodder; I've got business on hand."

II

Hugh left the house with Stephen and together they crossed the square to the Green Park, entering it under the Quadriga, and going along the park side of Constitution Hill towards the Mall.

Stephen talked, and Hugh listened. Stephen was going to take up journalism; his mother and Phillida would run a shop. It was a change for the better. Nothing could be worse for women than idleness, and nothing so good for a man as earning his own living. He was not afraid of the future. To tell truth, he rather relished the idea of a stiff fight.

All this was uttered with a manful confidence, and Hugh, delighting in Stephen's change of mind and body—for Stephen's face was still bright with the victory of his bargaining, and he walked with a swinging energy—kept saying, "Splendid!" or "Well done, old man!"

Finally, when Stephen came to a pause, he said, "Miss Anstey sent you a message. She wants you to know that if she can be of any use to you, you are to be sure to let her know."

Stephen replied to that rather bitterly, "Very kind of her!" but checking a little in his impatient stride, he suddenly took Hugh's arm, and said swiftly, impulsively, "I oughtn't to have said that. Give her my love. Tell her I realise that she has always been my best friend. Thank her for looking after Phillida. You'll be sure to do that, won't you? And look here, tell her this; tell her, Jodder, that I'm going to try to make good for her sake. Ask her to have faith in me."

Hugh said he would certainly give Susan these messages, and added his conviction that they would make her extremely happy. At that moment, however, dismally remembering that Susan did not love Stephen as Stephen imagined she loved him, he wondered whether he had not gone too far and spoken too warmly, in uttering this conviction. He fell suddenly silent.

Stephen said, "I realise now that if I had proposed to her when you suggested I should, everything might have been different. She would have kept me from making a fool of myself. I might have been nearer to my father, and able to bear some of his burdens. However, all that's too late now. Still, one can recover something of the lost ground. If there wasn't that hope I should blow my brains out. But I shan't see her again, Jodder, till I've made good. Explain that to her, so that she won't misunderstand my silence. I know now—but for God's sake don't tell her this, or she'll think I'm appealing for her sympathy—that I love her better than anything on the earth. If she waits for me, I shall come to her one day, bringing my journalistic

sheaves with me; and if you aren't ashamed of me, old Jodder, you must be best man at our wedding. Tell her, by the way, that I think it is glorious of her not to visit the sins of the father upon the children. No, don't tell her that. No, by God! don't tell her that. I won't say my father has sinned. Tell her I think she is very sweet not to visit the misfortunes of an unlucky father upon his unworthy children."

They came under the Admiralty Arch, and almost at once Stephen lifted his stick to stop a passing taxi.

"Good-bye, Hugh old man," he said nervously, turning to Jodrell with a flushed face and feverish eyes. He put out his hand, and added, "Perfectly topping of you to come up to town to see me. I shan't ever forget that. You've bucked me up more than you know."

He turned quickly to the cab slowing up at the kerb, opened the door, and told the man to drive to the offices of *Daily Life*.

Hugh closed the door upon him, and said through the window-space, "Promise you'll let me know how you get on."

"Oh, rather," replied Stephen, and laughed as if in the best of spirits.

III

He was conducted into the presence of Mr. Cartwright sooner than he had expected, and received from the editor a welcome which surprised him by its friendliness. It was something more than pleasant to his jangled nerves, after anxiously waiting in a dusty room downstairs, and after having traversed noisy stone corridors crowded with hurrying people, to find himself in a luxurious and peaceful room, seated in a comfortable chair, smoking a cigarette with this powerful editor.

Mr. Cartwright inquired if Stephen had any news of his father, and when Stephen flushed and shook his head, asked him if the flight had taken him by surprise. Stephen said that it had. Mr. Cartwright, who seemed to be wonderfully well posted in the affair, then made some inquiries about Mrs. Laslett, Phillida, and Lionel Olphert, and remarked that it must be very awkward for the family that Shergold was one of the victims. As Stephen's replies to these various inquiries and remarks were not very informing, Mr. Cartwright asked him if he had come to make a statement or to give an interview. Poor Stephen, realising with this question why he had been so speedily and graciously received by the editor, summed up his courage and announced that he had come to ask for a job.

The editor's manner did not immediately or perceptibly change, but Stephen was conscious of a new expression in the restless light eyes as he came to an end of his

announcement.

After a few disjointed remarks about difficulties in the way of finding room for Stephen on his staff, Mr. Cartwright rang a bell on his table, and said that the best thing he could do was to hand Stephen over to the news-editor. He then lifted a telephone to his lips, and gave orders that he should be put through to the news-editor. The door opened and a secretary appeared. "Take this gentleman to Mr. Bringham," he said, and, changing the telephone receiver into his left hand, gave Stephen his right, without rising from his chair. Before Stephen reached the door, the editor was speaking down the telephone. "Is that you, Bringham?" he inquired.

When Stephen was shown into the news-editor's room, that gentleman was listening at the telephone, saying "Yes" at regular intervals, like a piece of clockwork. He cocked his eye on Stephen, turned his head to the secretary, nodded, to indicate that he understood and that the secretary need not wait, and then returned to his "Yes—yes—yes." Finally, with a drawled and rather American, "All right," he placed the receiver on its stand, and twisted round on his swivel chair to confront the standing Stephen.

"Seems to me," he said, "you might make a start in at journalism by earning fifty guineas right away."

"How can I do that?" asked Stephen.

"Why, by giving us an interview about your father's flight."

"I'd rather not do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't like the idea."

"What's wrong with the idea?"

"Well, I think it's a bit indelicate."

"I don't see that. You needn't make it indelicate. That would rest with you. We'd pay you fifty guineas for the story, and you could say what you like."

"I'd rather not."

"I'll make it a hundred."

Stephen shook his head. "No, really, I couldn't do that."

Mr. Bringham then proceeded to suggest the kind of thing that Stephen could say in an interview, urging the point that there was no indelicacy that he could see in saying that none of the family had a ghost of an idea about this impending smash, that it had prostrated his mother, and that she refused to believe the rumour that Mr. Laslett had gone off with a woman. "By the way," he ended, "have you any idea who that woman is?"

Stephen, utterly wretched, shook his head.

Mr. Bringham continued to fish for news, and every now and then urged Stephen to earn a hundred guineas either by giving the paper an interview or writing an article on the subject of his father's flight. But Stephen continued to refuse this suggestion, and at last the news-editor turned to his application for a place on the staff of *Daily Life*.

That, he said, was out of the question. They had no time to teach people the job of journalism. Besides, the staff was already too big, and wanted cutting down. The only thing he could do for Stephen was to send him to an experienced news-getter, an old hand, one who knew the ropes from A to Z, who might be able to put him in the way of writing for the Press.

With that he rang a bell, and, when a secretary appeared, inquired if Mike was on the premises. The secretary replied that he was not, and that she understood he was ill, laid up with bronchitis.

"Take down a letter," said Mr. Bringham, and dictated a brief note of introduction to this unknown news-getter named Mike. He then turned to Stephen and said, "If you follow this lady, she'll give you the note."

With no word of farewell he swung round his chair to the table, rang a bell in front of him, picked up a pencil, and began to write.

IV

Stephen walked rapidly away from the huge building, in which the hum of printing presses was now sounding as a ground-swell to the incessant scuffle of feet on stairs and in corridors, and to the clang of lift gates at the various floors. The letter he carried was addressed to "M. Bramley, Esq.," and the street in which this Mr. Bramley lived was one of which Stephen had never heard. But he did not ask any one in which direction he should go, being minded just then to escape to some place where he could fight down in solitude the tremendous sense of disappointment which overwhelmed him almost to the point of despair.

His swift pacing through crowded and clamorous streets in which hoarse-voiced newsboys were shouting to men engaged in the newspaper trade the result of horse races, brought him to the Embankment. He gratefully crossed the uneven road of that broad thoroughfare to the farther side, where gulls were wheeling in the air and the wind blew with a stormy freshness.

For some minutes he leaned over the parapet and watched the littered and choppy tide surging towards Blackfriars Bridge, with tugs pulling barges up stream, and a police-boat making its way to the central arch of the bridge. The sight of the

police-boat made him think of his father, and he remembered the message his valet had given him that morning from Scotland Yard. An ache of pity for his hunted and haunted father entered his heart, and he felt a moisture come into his eyes and knew that he could no longer see things clearly.

He became oppressively conscious of his unimportance, and tragically aware of the vast city as a machine which cared nothing for the individual. The roar of its traffic went over him, through him, and by him; he had the feeling of being abandoned, of being alive in a world which had no care for him, and which was hurrying on to business and to pleasure in which for evermore he would have no part.

He thought to himself, "I'll treat this letter of introduction as I treated Leo's letter this morning. I'll go back to that damned office, tear it to bits, and fling the pieces in the face of that blasted swine who wanted me to make money out of my father's suffering."

But as these angry thoughts rose from the depths of his desolation they seemed to rouse his fighting spirits, to call into action that vigorous pulse of life which had hitherto beaten so martial a strain of music to all his activities. He exclaimed aloud, with the wind of the river in his teeth, "No, by God! I'll fight 'em all. I'm damned if they shall down me!"—and he turned away from the parapet, crossed the road between tramcars, taxi-cabs, and motor-lorries, and plunged into the network of streets which run northward.

In one of these streets he stopped a whistling messenger-boy and inquired the way to the street in which Mr. Bramley lived. The boy confused him by his directions, and Stephen walked on till he came to Fleet Street. There he waited till an empty taxi-cab came by, and, hailing it, told the man to drive to this unknown street in the unknown neighbourhood of Theobald's Road. Not till he was seated in the cab did he realise that he was dog-tired and famished.

The cab stopped before a door in a terrace of small eighteenth-century houses, with charming doorways and long windows, but all smoke-begrimed, broken-down, and neglected-looking. Stephen saw that these houses were let off in offices, and supposed that Mr. Bramley conducted his business as a journalist in one of these rooms, living elsewhere. But he failed to find the name of Bramley on the side of the open door, or in the hall, and was standing there nonplussed when a clerk came down the stairs with a basket full of letters for the post. This clerk told Stephen that Mr. Bramley lived on the second floor, but whether he was in or not the clerk could not say; probably he was out.

Stephen went up the dark and dusty oak staircase, and arrived, breathless and

dry, on the second floor. Something in the atmosphere of this old panelled house seemed to choke him, and he told himself that it smelt like a tannery, and remembered reading an essay of Dickens' about the various smells of London's neighbourhoods.

He looked about him in the dim light of this landing, and discovered two doors in the panelled walls. He knocked on one of them and received no answer. He went to the second door and knocked on that, stooping his head to listen for a reply. A voice called to him gruffly, angrily. He turned the handle of the door and went in.

V

He found himself in a bed-sitting-room, dimly lighted by a smeared electric lamp hanging from a moulded ceiling. A tall man very shabbily dressed was seated in an old-fashioned grandfather-chair before the fireplace, with his long legs stretched out to rest on a small upright chair pushed against the fender. He was wearing a greenish-coloured and rather battered billycock hat, pulled rakishly over his right eye. The thick-soled boots resting on the chair by the fender were unlaced.

Stephen felt that in some queer way this Mike Bramley reminded him of Lord Kitchener, but a down-at-heel Kitchener, broken by drink and disappointment. He was conscious of a certain awe in his presence, and stood just inside the doorway, his hat in his hand, staring at the savage and scowling man, hesitating to go forward.

"What do you want?" demanded Mike huskily, peremptorily, wheezing audibly and glaring ferociously.

His face was the colour of paste, with little purplish lines sprawling over his nostrils. His mouth was completely hidden under a long, ragged moustache, dark red-gold in colour and burned black in places by the ends of cigarettes. Under thick eyebrows and shadowed by the brim of his shabby billycock, eyes of an astonishing greyness surveyed the hesitating Stephen with a sullen, ferocious, and yet sleepy stare.

Stephen replied that he had brought a letter of introduction from the news-editor of *Daily Life*.

"Bringham?"

"Yes."

Mike extended a weary arm, took the letter, looked about him till his eye rested on a chair, and said, "Sit down." He waited till Stephen had brought forward the chair and seated himself; then, staring at him with curiosity and interest, he invited his visitor to smoke, indicating a pile of loose tobacco and cigarette-papers on a table at

his side.

Stephen, more at his ease, attempted to roll a cigarette, and, doing so, took in the room out of the corners of his eyes—a room which had for him a mysterious fascination. It was panelled, and painted putty colour. On either side of the embossed iron fireplace were low bookshelves the height of the beautiful carved mantelpiece. Over the mantelpiece, in a black-and-gilt frame, hung an admirable engraving of a soldier of the time of Waterloo. Behind the wooden arm-chair in which Mike was seated reading Bringham's letter, and against the wall, was a bed; at the head of this bed was a chest of drawers; beyond the chest, a washstand.

"Very queer!" growled Mike. "I've been thinking of you ever since I saw the news in the paper this morning, and now here you are. Odd coincidence, very!"

Stephen, who dreaded any more references to his father, contented himself by an acquiescing nod of the head, but looked at Mike without resentment, being still in some awe of him, and endeavoured to express interest and inquiry with his eyes.

Mike stared at him, stared him through and through, Bringham's letter in his hand, his hand in his lap. Then he began to ask questions: What school did Stephen go to? Which was his university? How had he liked the House of Commons? What did he think of politicians? Stephen's answers seemed to please him. He related that he himself had been at Winchester, went up to Oxford, enlisted in a Dragoon regiment, then turned army crammer, and from that dismal calling drifted into eventful journalism.

Laboriously he lifted his unlaced boots from the chair by the fender, drew up his long legs, creakingly raised himself up from his arm-chair, and, wheezing audibly, stumped stiffly over to the chest by the side of his bed. Here he drew open a drawer, fumbled among its contents, and, after a moment, shuffled back to Stephen, carrying a pistol in his hand.

"That's a weapon," he said, "which might have put a stop to your career. Take it. Hold it in your hand." He sat down in the arm-chair, and helped himself to tobacco and a cigarette-paper. "Any idea whom it belonged to?" he demanded.

"None at all."

"It belonged to the man who made a haul of your mother's gewgaws."

"Really!"

"He gave it to me next day, being a bit anxious about a visit from the police. That drawer over there, let me tell you, is full of such souvenirs. You see, I'm on good terms with criminals. I like them. I share with them their dislike of people who succeed in the world." He named three or four notorious murderers of the past ten years or so, and said that the drawer from which he had taken the pistol contained

the pocket-knife of one, the cigarette-case of another, and the autographed portrait of a third. "Criminals," he concluded, "are very simple and sentimental people; give them your sympathy and they'll do almost anything for you."

He took the pistol from Stephen, slipped it into his pocket, and asked, "Any idea, by the way, who it was—the burglar who paid you a visit in Sussex?"

"No."

"He's out of the country now, so I can mention his name, which he has wisely dropped ever since that visit. Remember any one named Collerne?"

Stephen shook his head.

"Your father's valet for a couple of years."

"Oh yes, I remember."

"Clever fellow. Very. Pity he took to crime. But he's running straight now. Bookmaker in a country chiefly populated by gamblers. Your mother's jewels paid his fare and set him up in business. I'm sure, if she knew that, she'd be pleased. Nothing like helping lame dogs over stiles to impart a pleasing, glowing sensation to the heart and stomach. But that pistol would have finished you off if you'd interfered with Kiddy Collerne. He told me so. That's why I've been thinking of you to-day, remembering the pistol in the drawer."

Stephen said how interesting was this narrative, and waited for Mike to get to business, wondering in what way such a man could help him to become a journalist.

At last, putting up his legs again, and with his cigarette singeing his moustache, Mike lifted Bringham's letter to the level of his eyes, scowled at it, lowered it again, and asked, "So you want to turn journalist?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, I've got to earn money."

"Didn't your father put anything away for you?"

"No."

"What, nothing at all?"

"No."

"Very careless of him."

After thinking that over for some moments, as if it were William Laslett's main offence, Mike said that Bringham had sent Stephen to him because he was supposed to be able to choke inconvenient people off journalism better than any one else in the trade. "I'm reckoned," he said, "a pessimist, a gloomy pessimist, and a man who can break the heart of ambitious youth quicker than most. You must have offended him in some way, and this is his revenge. What did you say to him?"

Stephen, with a sinking heart, related his interview with Cartwright and Bringham, to which narration Mike listened intently, smiling cynically. At its conclusion he expressed the view that Stephen should have collared Bringham's hundred guineas, seeing that *Daily Life* would assuredly publish to-morrow an "inspired" statement concerning the family of William Laslett.

Then he surveyed Stephen again, brooding over him, and presently began to warn him against journalism, which now, he said, was the trade of a reporter, not the profession of a literary man. "When *Daily Life* started," he said, "it was a newspaper; now it's a circular. Financiers have come in; papers exist for advertisements. The mob that buys papers has no standards in its mind, and so can't criticise; it buys papers to scan headlines and to study advertisements. The financiers realise that, and modern journalism is their creation."

Stephen's expression of face was so dismal as he listened to this depressing account of journalism, that Mike Bramley, remembering his own literary ambitions twenty or thirty years ago, took pity on him. "Of course," he said, "I can teach you how to nose about for news, how to write paragraphs, and how to get 'em into next day's issue of the stunt Press; but you won't make a fortune at it, I can tell you that."

"As long as I can keep myself to begin with——" said Stephen.

"Not much money just now?" asked Mike, pondering him between closing eyelids.

"I'm down and out," said Stephen.

"Well, that alters things. I like men who are down and out." The eyes of Mike Bramley not only opened, but kindled. He studied Stephen with that kindling light in his formidable grey eyes, and said cheerfully, "Very curious thing, Laslett, I never realised the meaning of the two greatest words in the language till I got among the down-and-outs, got alongside of 'em, as the saying goes. Wonderful place, humanity's scrap-heap. Never knew anything about those two words while I lived with the respectable. Know what they mean now. Do you know what they are, those two words? Well, I call the two greatest words in the language Love and Brotherhood. It takes a lifetime to discover their meaning. And that meaning is the pearl of great price, or the key to an understanding of the universe. Take your own case. You must have made dozens of so-called friends in the days of your wealth. Where are they now? But if you had belonged all your days to the underworld you'd now have scores of broken men and loose women ready to share their last crust with you. That's a fact."

He paused, wheezing rather heavily, and began to roll himself another cigarette. "By the way," he said, "it's about time I showed you some hospitality. If you'll open

that cupboard over there you'll find some stout in it, and glasses. Stout's a meal, meat and drink at the same time. We'll share a meal together. Be so good as to bring two bottles and two glasses to this table."

When they had settled down again, he held forth for some time on the idea of Brotherhood, which evidently had a profound fascination for his mind. He said that rich men and successful men sinned outrageously against the Brotherhood of Humanity, and were therefore fair game both to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the burglar. Brotherhood meant helping other people, sharing freely, living with no sordid sense of Number One in the heart, but living for the side, the team, and living with the carelessness of a child. Prudence, he pronounced to be the very devil; and all forms of insurance flat blasphemy. "The only Man that ever lived," he said sorrowfully, "told us that harlots understand the secret of the universe better than millionaires; and of course they do; because they help each other, and treat the rich as enemies to be deceived and plundered. I've known harlots who laid down their lives for their friends."

In spite of his shabbiness, there was an impressive dignity about this man, and everything he said carried weight, because it was so sincerely uttered, coming from the heart and enforced by a genuine experience of life. Stephen, at first shocked by his opinions, came at last to understand his point of view and to sympathise with him, and to like him, and to wish to know more about him. He was conscious of the birth of idealism in his heart, a longing to live generously with very poor people, and to hate success, and to fight men like Cartwright and Bringham, who were, he felt, the degraded panders of unconscionable financiers.

There were moments when doubt invaded, and, remembering Susan, he wondered how on earth he was to make good and fight his way to fortune; but on the whole his disposition was to take up the rakish life offered to him by Mike Bramley, and to battle his way to the forefront of fame as some kind of revolutionist. The thing that most counted with him was activity. He had the feeling that idleness would drive him mad. He must be doing something, and what Mike offered him was at least a start. This broken-down gentleman, for all his shabbiness and all his gloom, was nearer to the affections of Stephen than either Cartwright or Bringham.

At the end of a long talk, when the clocks of the City had struck eight, Mike Bramley said to him, "Where are you going to live?" and looked at him with kindness in his eyes.

"I shall have to look for a room to-morrow."

"You'll find that difficult."

"Well, I shall have to get in somewhere."

“You can come here, if you like.”

“That’s extraordinarily good of you!”

“There’s room for another bed over there.”

“Yes.”

“Got one?”

“Oh yes; I can find a bed.”

“Well, bring it along. Look here; I’ve got an idea. I think we shan’t quarrel. I think we shall mix. I’ll take you about with me in rough neighbourhoods, shy neighbourhoods, and introduce you to real people—queer, if you like, but real. And if you can write, and every one can write nowadays, I’ll give you the plot of a murder story that will be a best-seller as sure as Scotland Yard’s in London. You can do the writing, and I’ll criticise. While we’re doing that in our spare time, I’ll give you the stuff for paragraphs, and we’ll keep ourselves that way till the book’s finished. I’m a freelance, let me tell you, and live as I go along, only working when I have to. The rule is, share and share alike—in all things. Agreed?”

“Rather. I should think so. I’m jolly grateful.”

“Well, then, I’ll expect you to-morrow.”

“Can’t you come out now and have a bit of dinner?”

“Glutton! Haven’t I had my dinner?” He pointed to the glass of stout.

Stephen laughed.

“But we’ll have some dinners together,” said Mike Bramley, “in rum places, surrounded by rum people, and the bill won’t bust us. You shall see a bit of life, I promise you. I know more about queer people than any man in London. You ask Scotland Yard. Well, till to-morrow.”

Stephen went down the dark oak staircase of that old house dreaming of the murder story that was to be a best-seller, and dreaming of himself as a novelist rich and famous, with Susan saying to him, “I always knew you’d make good.”

CHAPTER VIII

DELUSION

I

Hugh Jodrell had written to Susan from London, telling her how stoutly Stephen was standing up to the family disaster, and how gratefully he had received her message; but that was all.

On his return to Sussex, a few days later, he would have called upon her to amplify this letter, but for the fact that Phillida, overwhelmed by her father's tragedy, was occupying every moment of Susan's time. Moreover, another difficulty presented itself in the news given to him by Mrs. Ramsay that the General's wonderful strength was giving way at last, and that two of his daughters had just been summoned to Silverton from London on the advice of the doctor.

So Hugh, now a partner in the school, flung himself with energy into the work of Christmas examinations, reports, and final football matches, postponing the difficult day when he would have to tell Susan how confidently Stephen was acting on the notion that she loved him well enough to become his wife.

At last, however, the desire to see Susan overpowered every other thought in his heart, and soon after luncheon on the last Sunday in the term he walked across the downs to pay a visit to the manor-house in the valley below.

It was a day of hard frost, little wind, and bright sunshine, the air keen, the cloudless sky the colour of a dunnock's egg. Hugh walked swiftly, thinking hard, and yet conscious of the beauty and vigour of that wintry scene. Suppressed sorrow had given a look of sadness to his eyes, ageing him there, giving him, too, a look of general dignity beyond his years; and yet because he loved his work, played hard games, and was in constant communion with vigorous young minds, he had that expression and bearing of athletic keenness which is one of the unmistakable marks of youth.

He made the descent from the downs at a run, crossed the water-meadows by a footpath, and arrived before the manor-house with his mind made up as to how he should speak, his heart trembling a little at the pleasure before him in seeing Susan.

The door was opened to him by the parlourmaid, and he was at once taken aback to see that this nice and elderly person, usually so brisk, cheerful, and friendly,

was red-eyed, pale, and miserable-looking, as if she had only just recovered from a fit of weeping.

It struck him all of a sudden that perhaps the General was dead. He was so shaken by this thought that he was unable to greet the maid with any form of words, and stood staring at her with inquiry in his eyes.

But at that moment the General himself strode into the hall, white of face, dishevelled-looking, the lids of his eyes drawn back, the pupils staring at Hugh with a visible glare in the iris, his hands fluttering in front of him.

He strode up to Hugh on the doorstep, took his arm, dragged him forward, and whispered into his ear as they crossed the hall to his study, "Very glad you have come—very, indeed: not a moment too soon."

In his study, after closing the door with an air of mystery, and standing there as if listening for a footfall on the other side, he came to the bewildered Hugh, took his arm, went forward with him up the room, stopped suddenly dead, and exclaimed, "My dear fellow, can you help me? What on earth am I to do? Susan, my dear fellow, has gone raving mad."

Hugh stared at him.

"I can't get it into her head," the General continued, as if exasperated and hopeless, "that we are now, to all intents and purposes, beggars. What do you think, my dear fellow: in spite of this taxation, and my lost pension, there was bacon on the table at breakfast, and cold beef at luncheon! What do you think of that? When I came down this morning, I found a fire in this room! She's burning coals as if they cost nothing." He put his trembling hands to his head, drew a shuddering sigh, and then, walking away from Hugh to the window, and addressing a tree outside rather than his visitor, he continued in an anxious monotone, "I don't know what to do with her. What can I do with her? I can't put her into a mental home, and I can't put her under any other form of restraint. Besides, I haven't got the money to do it. But something will have to be done." He turned round and said to Hugh, with more vigour in his voice, "I've discharged both the indoor servants this afternoon, and the gardener, and the boy will be discharged to-morrow. I've told Susan we can't have this Laslett girl here any longer. And now there's a man with her. I suppose she's in love with him, and of course if he stays to dinner there'll be three courses at least, perhaps four. Well, it can't be done. It's not honest to the tradesmen. You won't mind, I'm sure, if there's only dry bread for tea. I've just told the maids to send the butter back to the farmer, and to tell him we want no more milk. But perhaps you'll see what you can do with Susan. She thinks a good deal of you. Try, like a good fellow, to get this man away. He'll eat us out of house and home if he stays. Besides,

I don't like the look of him. I feel pretty certain he's a Boche. In any case, get rid of him, and then come back here to advise me how I should deal with Susan. I'll wait for you."

Before Hugh could make any reply to this rambling and almost breathless statement, he found himself urged towards the door by the General's hand at his elbow. At the door, the old man put a finger to his lips, and whispered, "Go very quietly. Take them by surprise. They're in the garden, like Adam and Eve. Hush!"

Greatly distressed by this amazing interview, and not knowing what to make of it, Hugh crossed the hall, entered the drawing-room, and was moving towards one of the open windows, still in a daze, when he came to a dead stop, arrested by the sight of Susan out in the garden. She was leaning against the rail of the bridge over the river, and facing her, bending towards her, speaking earnestly, was a man he had never seen before.

It flashed into his mind that Susan was indeed in love with this man, who was no doubt the lover for whom she had been so quietly and serenely waiting for more than ten years. He forgot all about the General's raving incoherencies. He stood there with a sinking heart and a darkening mind, believing that at last the mystery of Susan was to be solved, feeling that both for him and for Stephen this solution meant a misery no words could measure.

In the slowly-falling dusk of that wintry afternoon, shadowed by the stretching boughs and naked branches of a beech tree etched against the fading blue of the sky, Susan leaned against the rail of the bridge, her face half hidden in the thick collar of a fur coat, her eyes never moving from the face of the man who was speaking to her with such obvious and dramatic persuasiveness.

Hugh could not see the face of this unknown man, which was turned away from him, but a feeling of dislike, suspicion and dislike, took possession of his mind from the mere attitude of the stranger, from his use of gestures, and his general appearance of fashionable elegance. He felt, even in the darkness of his grief, that it would be insufferable if Susan could love a dandified young man so fine, spruce, and mannered.

For a few moments he debated whether he should go forward or retreat, and perhaps it was detestation for the man addressing Susan, a detestation which made him determined to look that unknown in the eyes, which decided the issue.

He stepped from the room to the garden and slowly made his way across the lawn towards the bridge. Susan looked at him over the collar of her coat, but almost instantly turned to speak to the man before her, swiftly, as if she had something of importance to say before Hugh interrupted them. The man had also turned to follow

the direction of Susan's eyes, and Hugh saw in a flash that he had a pink-and-white skin, prominent light-coloured eyes, and that he wore a little moustache twisted up at the ends.

Hugh slowed down his pace to a saunter, and made a great effort to get control of his feelings—feelings now desperately wounded by Susan's apparent indifference to his existence, and even vexation at his approach. How cruel, he thought, to give him no smile, no hail of welcome.

When she did at last look up, and rest her eyes on his face, Hugh was startled to see how worn she looked, and how pale. She smiled when he was within a pace or two, and said, "I'm so glad to see you, at last!" making the reproachful "at last" very affectionate. Then, jerking up her chin, and evidently forcing herself to appear normal, she said more vigorously, "Let me introduce you to Mr. Lionel Olphert."

Hugh started at that name, his feelings now in utter confusion, and looked searchingly, critically, at the good-looking and gracious young man, who, on his part, looked admiringly at Hugh as if he had long been wanting to know him. "Stephen's friend!" exclaimed Lionel Olphert, putting out his hand. "I'm so glad to meet you at last."

Susan waited till their brief greetings were over, and then said to the immensely relieved but still bewildered Hugh, "It's getting cold, and we must be going in; but before we do, I should like to tell you why Mr. Olphert is here. He has come to see Phillida, and he has come to see her because he refuses to accept her letter releasing him from their engagement. But Phillida holds to that release, and begs to be spared seeing him because she does not feel well enough to tell him with her own lips what I have told him for her."

Lionel Olphert broke in upon this, turning to Hugh with the gentlest of smiles, a smile almost feminine, and addressing him in the softest of tones, his slight Irish accent adding a charm to his words. He said that Phillida was romantic, chivalrous, idealistic; she thought that by releasing him, because of her father's shame and her own sudden poverty, she was saving him from an unthinkable misalliance. But he must persuade her—and how was he to do that without seeing her?—that he could not bear to be parted from her, that to release him was to condemn him.

Susan interrupted to say that Lord and Lady Dundermot were both strongly against the match, and that Mr. Olphert in disregarding their commands was opposing himself to parents whom he loved very dearly, and also forfeiting the allowance which they made him. "I tell you this," she said, "not to praise Mr. Olphert, but to let you see that perhaps Phillida is right in her view of the matter."

"Ah, but that is because," said Mr. Olphert, with the very gentlest Irish

intonation, "that is because she thinks I am making a sacrifice simply to keep my word. It's nothing of the kind. I refuse to be sent away, because I love her."

Susan looked to Hugh for guidance. "What am I to do?" she asked.

Hugh did not hesitate. "Why, of course, Mr. Olphert is right," he said decisively. "I should have thought any other course was unthinkable."

Olphert laughed, shining with pleasure, and caught hold of Hugh's arm, pressing it, and exclaimed, "I'm so grateful to you for that! How splendid of you!" He turned to Susan. "Now you'll let me see her, won't you? You can't thinkably refuse me now, can you?"

It was arranged that Lionel should see Phillida in the drawing-room. Susan set off to fetch her, and Olphert and Hugh went into the dining-room, switching on an electric lamp as they entered, to wait till Susan returned. While they were there, Olphert related to Hugh that he intended to go on the Stock Exchange, but that before he began clerking it he was determined to help Mrs. Laslett with her shop. Delightful little premises, he said with enthusiasm, had been discovered just off Brompton Road, and he had persuaded Mrs. Laslett to abandon her first idea of starting as a milliner, and to go in for selling needlework, water-colours, lampshades, cushions, pretty notepaper, coloured candles and sealing-wax, and all that sort of thing.

He declared that Mrs. Laslett was perfectly magnificent: she had not merely accepted the sudden change from great wealth to absolute poverty without one word of complaint, but was literally rejoicing in this opportunity to prove her mettle.

Asked if he had seen anything of Stephen, the bright smile left Olphert's cheerful face, and he whispered with a confidential gravity which was again almost feminine that he felt extremely anxious about Stephen.

"None of us knows," he said, "where Stephen is living. He refuses to tell us. All we know is that he has taken up with a broken-down and, I am afraid, drunken journalist, and that he spends most of his time with very low and questionable people. He resents questions, however, and repels his mother's anxiety. It is more than a fortnight since she has seen him. I know this, he can't bear to think of his father in hiding, and feels his own position with terrible keenness."

II

It was of Stephen Hugh was thinking when he found himself with Susan; but the first words she uttered brought his thoughts sharply to her.

She said to him, "You have seen Grandpapa?" and proceeded to tell him that

the General had fallen into the delusion that they were now reduced to an extreme of poverty, and was producing havoc in the household by his orders. The doctor wanted Susan to have him removed to a nursing home, and two of his children, who had been down to see him, agreed with the doctor; but Susan could not bear to face so dreadful a step. She wanted to see whether sympathy would not cure him.

Her grief, although perfectly under control, moved Hugh very deeply, and he exclaimed, "I can't bear to think of you carrying this burden all alone."

"Can you advise anything?" she asked.

He told her that he had heard his mother speak of a similar case, and that the remedy applied in that case was to agree with everything the deluded person said, to provide him with some simple form of work, and to tell him that this work of his was producing money enough for the family's needs.

Susan caught at that. "I'll try it," she exclaimed. "Thank you so much for the suggestion." She thought for a moment, and said, "I could persuade him to prepare his scrap-books for publication—couldn't I?—and tell him that they are sure to bring in a great deal of money."

After some moments of discussing this matter, she spoke about Phillida and Lionel Olphert, saying that she thought Lionel's unexpected loyalty would complete Phillida's cure.

While she was speaking she moved slowly backward to the fireplace, mounted the stone curb, and rested her shoulders against the mantelpiece. She had loosened her coat of beaver fur, and stood with her hands in the pockets of her green jumper suit, a close-fitting hat of the same green shadowing her eyes.

Hugh drew a step nearer to her, but when his shadow fell across her face, he moved a little to one side, so that the light of the central lamp in the room might shine upon the softness of her round chin and the exquisite line of her lips.

He said, "Mrs. Ramsay has told me how splendid you have been to Phillida."

"Phillida has been adorably sweet," she replied. "I get fonder and fonder of her." She smiled, and added as if with a challenge, "She is a far better pupil than Stephen! She is now devoted to needlework; she plays Beethoven and Mozart; she never goes to bed without reading pages of my favourite anthologies, which are very restful, old-fashioned books, and she has quite abandoned cocktails and cigarettes. But please don't think I am boasting. I have had nothing to do with it. It is entirely her own idea, her own wish. Apparently she has always wanted to cultivate her mind, but circumstances have been against her. Here she has leisure and the right sort of setting, and so Nature has her way at last. And now, tell me about your work, the much more difficult work of befriending Stephen."

Hugh said that he had done even less for Stephen than Susan would have him believe she had done for Phillida. He told her that off his own bat entirely Stephen had decided to fling himself into journalism and so make his own way in the world. He spoke with quiet and effective admiration of Stephen's determination to succeed.

Then he said, "There's something I think I ought to tell you; in fact, he told me to tell you." He hesitated.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"Well, you are the spur of his ambition. He wants to make good not only to please you, but to win you."

"I see."

"The problem is, Ought you to let him go on in that delusion?"

She looked at him with searching eyes. "But do you think it is a delusion?" she said.

"Yes."

"How long have you thought that?"

"Oh, some time."

"That interests me. However, let us consider this new problem. Ought I to tell him? If I do, you think he may be disheartened?"

"Yes."

"And if I don't tell him, I shall be deceiving him?"

"That's how I see it."

"What do you advise?"

Hugh contemplated her, and realised what she must mean to the repentant Stephen fighting so heroically and desperately to recover his self-respect and to make a place for himself in a world which had suddenly collapsed about him.

He said, "I can't see a way out."

"From all Phillida tells me," said Susan, "his start is not so flourishing as he had hoped."

"Mr. Olphert has just told me something of the same sort."

Susan reflected for a moment, and then asked, "Are you quite sure that Stephen thinks I like him as well as all that?"

"Oh, he counts on you with absolute confidence."

"But I told his mother long ago that I had no designs on the Laslett millions. She must have reported that piece of news to him."

Hugh thought to himself, "If only you knew how lovely you are," and said moodily, "Stephen counts on you all the same."

"Well, you won't help me with advice?"

"I can't help wishing," he said, "that you could bring yourself to like him as he thinks you like him."

Her face hardened. Almost scornfully she said, "So that is your wish?"

"When I think of Stephen, it is."

"I see."

"It's my conviction," said Hugh, forcing the words from his lips, "that he'll need you soon as few men ever needed a woman."

"And I ought to sacrifice myself?"

"But you're very fond of him."

"Suppose I love some one else."

"In that case, of course, Stephen must go under."

"I'm glad you think that!"

He looked at her for a moment, steadying himself for the question, and then demanded, "You do love some one else?"

She smiled, resting her eyes upon him without a tremble of the lids, and then slowly looked down, still smiling but saying nothing.

Hugh moved away for a pace, and said, "Then we must think of some other means for saving Stephen. By the way, he must be saved. He's proving himself now what I always believed him to be, one of the finest fellows breathing. You love some one else; that's unfortunate, but can't be helped. The question is what you ought to do, knowing how Stephen has always counted on you. You can't, at any rate, throw him over altogether."

She was about to answer him when the door opened and Lionel Olphert, shining with happiness, entered the room. He looked at them for a moment with a puzzled expression in his eyes, as if suddenly he realised that other people besides himself had their troubles and difficulties, perhaps also their romances, as if he had blundered by the suddenness of his intrusion. Then, in a tone of apology, he said to Susan, "She wants you to go to her."

III

In one of the attics of the manor-house, fitted up as a bedroom and a study, the old General turned the pages of his scrap-books, and considered how he should set about the compilation which was to shatter superstition and enthrone science as the sole mistress of human progress.

He wore an ancient blue-and-red dressing-gown, brown list slippers, and a white silk muffler round his neck. He had not shaved for several days, nor brushed

his hair since he rose that morning to make his own bed, to light his own fire, and to eat his breakfast of porridge. In spite of his disordered expression, and the look of anxiety in his eyes, however, one saw that the old man was now solemnly and perhaps profoundly happy.

The door opened slowly and noiselessly, and Susan came softly into the room, carrying needlework in her hands. The General did not look up from his pages. She went on tiptoe across the room to the fireplace, used tongs to put a little coal on the fire, and then sat down in a chair beside the hearth, arranging her needlework in her hands.

After some minutes of silence the General sat back in his chair, heaved a deep sigh, and said, "It's an immense undertaking. I doubt my worthiness for the task. But it has got to be done, and, when done, it will shake the pillars of society to their foundations. Some of these cuttings of mine are more deadly, more shattering, than high explosive."

She replied, looking up from her needlework, "Isn't it wonderful that you should have saved them all these years?"

"Yes, my dear, yes: very providential, indeed. When I say providential, of course, I am speaking loosely, just as we speak of the setting sun, or of a steamer sailing to such and such a port. You may be sure I shall use no such careless phraseology when I come to write my book. By the way, there is enough money, is there, to keep us going till I have made a start?"

"Yes, I can just manage till the publishers pay us the first instalments."

"Orders will pour in, of course?"

"Oh yes."

"The book has only to be announced. For example, I heard this morning from the Khan of Khelat promising to send me a hundred thousand rupees."

"How splendid, Grandpapa!"

"That girl has gone, hasn't she?"

"Phillida? Yes, she has gone to London. She is quite well now, and is helping her mother."

"Any news of the father?"

"No; none at all."

"They'll never catch him. Let me see, why did he run away? Did he commit a murder or a burglary? I've so many great things in my head, I can remember nothing unimportant. That fellow Bergson, otherwise a shallow thinker, said rightly that memory is the faculty by which we forget. Everything is stored in the brain, everything, and memory is the faculty that selects for us what is necessary. Let me

see, are you engaged to Stephen Laslett, or was that broken off?"

"No; we are not engaged, Grandpapa."

The old man bent over his scrap-books, and muttered, "He could hardly expect you to marry him now. Son of a murderer, and you the heiress of the Khan of Khelat, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the Gaikwar of Baroda—the thing's absurd." He sat back again, rubbed his forehead with his hands, and presently turned to her, a hand on each side of his face, so that his eyes appeared to be in blinkers. He demanded, "What about that other man? You know who I mean. Tut, what's his name? Son of my old friend in the Khyber Rifles. Jodrell, to be sure. You aren't engaged to him, are you?"

"No, Grandpapa."

He removed his hands from his face. "Then you must go to London." He got up from his chair, and stood beside it, looking down on his scrap-books. "You are wasting your time here," he said, and shuffled to the window. "We must put a paragraph in the papers that the heiress of my old friend the Khan of Khelat is to be in London next week, and will be received by Their Majesties on the following Sunday." He turned to her, and asked, "In the meantime, where is Jodrell? I should like him to drive you up in a motor-car. That would save the railway fare, tipping of porters, and a taxi at the other end. Where is he? How is it he never comes near us now?"

"He's with David in Germany; they are spending their holidays together."

"Germany! Germany! Now, let me think. What were Schiller's last words? I remember you used to quote them very often before I lost my money."

"Calmer and calmer."

"Yes. That's it—calmer and calmer: a noble valediction! It's just a dropping off asleep. Very pleasant. No need to fuss. Perfectly preposterous that idea of extreme unction. Calmer and calmer—very comforting. But what's happening to the school all this time? If the masters are away, what happens to the boys?"

"The boys are on holiday."

"Wasting their time!"

"The school is a great success, Grandpapa. They are taking an extra thirty boys next term. Isn't that really splendid?"

"Yes; you ought to have married either David or young Jodrell. I always said that. And here you are wasting your time making altar-cloths for a religion which has been fatal to the dignity and progress of man's soul."

"Oh, the altar-cloth was finished long ago, Grandpapa!"

"What's that you're making, then? My winding-sheet?"

She laughed gently. “No, Grandpapa, no! It’s something for Mrs. Laslett to put in her shop window.”

He came quite close to her. “Tell me, my child,” he asked gently, and placed one of his shaking hands on her shoulder, “are you employing your needle to pay for my board and lodging?”

“Well, every little helps, Grandpapa, and I love needlework.” She put up her hand, took his from her shoulder, kissed it, held it between both of hers, and looked up at his troubled face with a smile of cheerfulness and affection. “I do love you so,” she said gently. “Dear Grandpapa!”

“We get on very well together,” he said, “but I mustn’t be selfish. Your place is in London. Now that you’ve got rid of that girl there is no reason why you should stay here. By the way, the dogs are poisoned, are they not? I told Manley to see about that before I discharged him. Of course if the Laslett girl took them away with her, that’s another matter. How is it, I wonder, they can’t catch her rascally father? That son of his, too. There’s a young swaggering scoundrel for you! I should have liked to have had him with me in the Army. I’d have made a man of him! Daring to speak about you to Jodrell as if you were his property, as if he had only to whistle and the heiress of the Khan of Khelat would have come to his heel! By God, girl, if I had him here I’d blast him to the earth!”

He walked swiftly to the table, took his seat there, and began hurriedly turning the pages of his scrap-book. “Go downstairs, child,” he commanded. “I must be alone. The inspiration has come at last. I feel myself quivering with magnetism, electric energy, radio-activity, and the terrible lightnings of intellectual scorn.”

He seized a pen, dipped it in the ink-pot, and, lifting it above the level of his head, exclaimed, “The soul of man is a myth. The mind of man is a reality. There is nothing great save mind.” Suddenly he threw himself back in his chair, looked over his shoulder at Susan, who was now standing near the door, and said, “That is not original. But it is a fine saying, and not one man in a thousand will know where it comes from.”

She went to him quickly, laid an arm along his shoulders, kissed his forehead, and suggested that he should begin his work by devoting the first volume to the errors of politicians rather than to the misfortunes of clergymen. “You see, Grandpapa,” she urged, “the politicians are so strong, and the clergy so poor, so hard-pressed nowadays, that no one wants to—well, it’s like hitting a man when he’s down, isn’t it?”

He considered the suggestion, weighing it solemnly, this suggestion which was made to prevent him from dwelling on a prejudice which had long ago crept like a

poison into his brain.

"If you think," he said at last, "that I should be more usefully serving science by exposing the cant of politicians, who with untrained minds presume to direct the fortunes of humanity, then I will certainly begin my labours, my labours of Hercules, with that subject." He passed a weary hand over his brow, and whispered to himself, "It is a great presumption to think that I can serve science even in the humblest capacity; but I feel the work laid upon me." He looked up at her, and said solemnly, searching her eyes, "Suppose I should die before the work is completed. Who would carry it on?"

She begged him not to let that doubt weaken his resolution.

"I am not thinking of myself," he rebuked her; "but, if I take this money from the Khan of Khelat, I must keep faith with him."

She said to him, "Now you begin, Grandpapa; no more excuses; and I'll go downstairs and see if I've got a few leaves of tea in the canister. If so, we'll have tea together. I'll bring it up to you. Isn't it a good thing that boiling water is so cheap?"

CHAPTER IX

DOWN AND DOWN

I

William Laslett pushed through a crowd of Spaniards in the vestibule of a small hotel in the business quarter of Barcelona. He made his way to the reading-room with the air of a man who had important work to do. He had just returned from the station, from saying good-bye to the simple and faithful woman who had accompanied him on his flight from England, and who had consequently shared all the anxieties and discomforts of the last three months.

The reading-room of this hotel was a narrow, thickly curtained apartment, with a highly polished floor on which it was easy to slip, a centre marble-topped table strewn with newspapers, and two flimsy desks between the windows supplied with cross-nibbed pens, ink as thick as mud, and sometimes with excessively thin and elaborately engraved writing-paper which curled over at the top edges. The flies in this room seemed to be too old and depressed to escape through the open door into the less exhausting atmosphere of the vestibule.

Laslett walked to one of the desks, which commanded a view of the vestibule, sat down at it, took a fountain-pen from his pocket, unscrewed it, laid it down before him, and sat forward in his chair, looking towards the hotel entrance and the busy street beyond its glass-panelled doors.

He told himself that the game was now up, and that the sooner he made an end of things the better. There was no fear in his mind, no self-pity, and no sentimentalism. Yet, before he made an end of his life, there was one thing he must do. He must write a letter to Stephen. He must tell Stephen how sorry he was that he had made no provision for his children, no settlement in the days of his prosperity; and he must also ask Stephen to take care of Phillida and protect her—as far as that was possible—from the suffering which his folly had brought upon them both.

After sitting for several minutes with his heavy-lidded eyes on the doorway of the hotel, occasionally brushing away a fly from before his face, he suddenly jerked himself into an upright position, took up his pen, selected the cleanest sheet of paper in the rack, straightened it out, making the desk shake by the ironing movement of his hand, and began to write, swiftly and with energy.

When this letter was written, he took it to the porter for a stamp, posted it, and walked into the coffee-room for luncheon. The waiter, who could speak a little English, inquired for Madam, and was told she had gone. "I go to-night," said Laslett, and ordered his food.

He decided, while he was eating, to hire a car and drive himself by easy stages to Toledo. By the time he arrived there, he told himself, he would be penniless, and then he could put an end to the business of life without feeling that he had missed any other way of escape. He might be stopped on the journey, but that was a risk he had faced all these months, and besides, before they could lay hands on him he would have time to wind up his estate in the shortest way open to a harassed man. Moreover, even an arrest might provide some stimulus to his failing faculties, some excitement to his starved brain. The journey in any case would represent movement, and movement helped him more than anything else to escape from the depressing sense of loneliness which sat on his brain, as he put it, like a lid on a saucepan.

He rose from the table, tipped the waiter, and walked to the door. As he entered the vestibule two tall Englishmen suddenly stood in his way. Before he knew what had happened they were on either side of him, and two ferocious-looking Spanish gendarmes were confronting him. The hotel porter watched the proceedings from the opposite side of the hall with animated eyes and lips that moved with a curious cat-like smile.

One of the Spaniards sternly and yet mechanically informed Laslett that he was arrested. Laslett smiled, and the Spaniard withdrew a pace. One of the Englishmen then whispered that, if Laslett gave them no trouble, and played the game, he would do his best to ease matters in Spain and make the journey to England as private and comfortable as possible.

Laslett thanked him for this consideration, and said that his packing would not take more than a few minutes. He added, "I suppose I mustn't offer you a bottle of Spanish wine before we go upstairs," and smiled as if to say that Spanish wine was a poor beverage to put before such fine Englishmen.

One of the Englishmen spoke to the Spaniards, and the Spaniards nodded their heads and strolled away in the direction of the porter's desk, satisfied to leave the immediate business of this arrest in the hands of their English confrères, ready to do their part in it when the prisoner came downstairs again.

"That's settled," said the Englishman, turning to Laslett, as if he had done the prisoner a good turn.

They went up the stairs to Laslett's room, one officer at his side—very close to his side—the other at his heels. When they entered the room, the man at his side,

glancing about him, said, "The lady left you this morning; we shan't have to bother about her; that's one comfort."

The two casement windows of the room stood wide open, admitting, with a fresh breeze from the sea, the gridding noise of the electric trams in the streets below and the constant hooting of motor-cars crossing and recrossing a market-square.

While the officer was speaking in this way, the other man at Laslett's back rapidly began to pass his hands up and down the prisoner's clothes.

"There's a pistol in my hip-pocket," said Laslett, realising what was happening and turning to look over his shoulder.

The police-officer took it out.

The other, facing him, said, "Any poison?"

Laslett smiled and shook his head. "I had the pistol only to defend myself against brigands. I've been in some nasty places, I can tell you."

The police-officer said, "You had better turn out your pockets, all the same."

Laslett cheerfully obeyed this order, and when he removed his note-case from his breast-pocket remarked that his supplies were now running rather low. "Not enough there," he said, with a grim smile, "to pay for my funeral expenses." The police-officers, feeling some sympathy with him at that, treated him with less suspicion; and the one who had spoken all through said in a kindly tone and with a friendly smile, "Very different, Mr. Laslett, from the day when you had a hundred hangers-on in Belgrave Square."

"Ah," exclaimed Laslett, "I suppose most of them are toadying some one else now."

"Way of the world, sir."

"I'm not complaining. All the same, the world's not much more appetising than a rotten orange. Shall I pack now?"

"If you please, Mr. Laslett. We'll lend you a hand. But first of all we'll shut these windows."

"In case I jump out?"

"It will be quieter with them shut."

The windows were closed, trunks opened, and the work of packing begun.

"I may tell you," said Laslett, "that I've been suffering from that Finished Feeling for some days. Something inside me has been saying, 'It's all U. P.,' for a week or more. So I'm not altogether sorry to see you; in fact, it's a kind of relief."

"That's right, Mr. Laslett," said one of the officers, sitting down and watching his prisoner at work on the packing; "always look on the bright side of things."

"I remember when I was a boy," said Laslett, pulling open a drawer, "we used

to sing a cheerful parody of a dismal hymn. It ran like this:

"Here we suffer grief and pain,
Over the road it's just the same.

It used to keep us from grumbling."

"Very good hymn, too, sir!" said the officer, getting up to take a look into that drawer.

"I shall try to sing it to-night!"

"Oh, we'll make you as comfortable as we can, Mr. Laslett."

"I'm sure you will. Phew, it's hot in here with the windows closed. Would you mind if I smoked a cigar? Perhaps you'll join me. They're good ones."

"Well, Mr. Laslett——"

"They're not poisoned! I'll give you the box and you can choose the one for me out of the bottom layer."

The officers exchanged glances, and one of them said, "All right, sir."

He went to an attaché-case on a table in the centre of the room, opened it, took out two boxes of cigars, and handed them to the officers who had followed him. "The top box are the best," he said, "but there are only a few left in that. Perhaps you'd feel safer," he added, with a smile, "if you sampled the other. They're all right, but not first quality."

"You're playing the game, Mr. Laslett?"

"I give you my word on that. But I suppose my word isn't worth much just now."

"Well, then, you shall have the best."

"I'm much obliged to you. You'll join me, of course; both of you."

"All right, sir. There's no immediate hurry. I suggested to our Spanish friends that they could do with a drink."

The officer examined a cigar very carefully, removed the band, and handed it to Laslett. The other officer picked up a cigar-piercer which had been removed from Laslett's pocket and put out his hand for the cigar, saying, "Let me prick it for you, sir." Laslett handed it over, and said, "Thank you very much for taking such good care of my health!"

They smiled, and he was given the cigar with a word and smile of apology. The box was then presented by one officer to the other, and while that other was helping himself, Laslett said, "I don't recommend Spanish matches. They don't seem to go well with Havana tobacco; I've got a lighter somewhere here." He turned to his attaché-case.

"I've got one, sir, warranted to light at the first snick."

"Petrol?" asked Laslett, still fumbling in the case.

"Yes, sir."

"Bet you a bob mine fires first," said Laslett. "We'll make a match of it." And at that he slipped his hand from the case, stepped back, and fired a small pistol into his mouth.

The police-officers were so near to him that they could catch him as he tottered on his feet, reeled, and uttered his last gasp. At the moment when he collapsed in their arms, like a boneless figure of straw, he threw up his head, opened his eyes very wide, and stared hard at one of them, either to mock him with defeat or to plead pardon for the trick he had played upon them.

II

A newsboy hurried through a noisy street in Haggerston, shouting in a hoarse voice, "All the winners! *News* and *Star*. All the winners!"—although the yellow bill plastered against his stumpy legs bore the news of Laslett's suicide in large staring black letters.

It was raining, and the boy's face and hands were covered with raindrops. When he was stopped by a customer in the street, he would give his head a vigorous shake to dislodge the raindrops from the peak of his cap, snuffling in the midst of his breathlessness, holding out his hand for the coin, still calling the news, with his little eyes, which were like bruises, darting glances to the other side of the street for possible customers.

He came presently to a turning, took it quickly, and proceeding a few yards at a trot entered the bar of a small public-house which had just turned up its lights and opened its doors.

Stephen, muddled by drink, was sitting on a bench in this tavern, listening, with eyes half-closed, to a shabby and jovial matron who made him smile by the raciness of her talk. He looked up when the breathless, perspiring, and soaking boy entered the bar, and by force of habit glanced at the drenched placard crumpled against his legs, as the boy slipped out a paper from the bundle under his arm and presented it to the publican. Stephen lurched suddenly to one side, and the woman ejaculated with a laugh, "Here, hold up, Douglas Fairbanks!"—moving her right hand away from him, in case the wine should be spilt from her glass. The boy snatched up a penny from the metal counter and stopped before Stephen, snuffling and panting, his little hand on the next folded paper in his bundle, ready to whip it out if Stephen,

who had now righted himself, would buy. “All the winners,” he said hoarsely, with the placard announcing Laslett’s suicide staring Stephen in the eyes.

Stephen shook his head, and the boy was departing when the woman called him back. “Here, my son,” she cried, opening her purse. She handed him a penny. “No, I don’t want a paper,” she said, and added, as the boy departed, “Poor little devil, he’s soaked to the bone.” The hoarse cry drifted back into the bar, “*News* and *Star*: all the winners!”

The publican stepped back from the counter, shaking out the paper, and rested his broad shoulders against the shelves behind him. Surrounded by bottles with bright labels, he turned to the latest racing news on the back page.

Stephen sat forward on the bench, staring straight before him with sobered and pathetic eyes. He said to the woman, “I must be off.”

She exclaimed, “Not yet, dearie! Why, I’m just beginning to like you.”

“See you some other time,” said Stephen, getting up, and setting down his glass on the counter.

She put out her hand as he returned and caught his sleeve. “Let me tell you something,” she said confidently, “so as you’ll know how to behave in future. No gentleman ever leaves a lady without offering her a second glass of port.”

“All right; I’ll remember that,” he said, and went towards the door.

She called after him, “See you some other evening. Don’t forget! The more we are together, the merrier we’ll be.”

Stephen’s thin grey clothes were soiled and stained. He carried neither stick nor umbrella, and wore neither overcoat nor waterproof. On passing into the street he pulled down the brim of his shabby hat, turned up the collar of his jacket, and with his hands in his trouser pockets, and keeping as near to the shelter of house walls as possible, walked swiftly through the heavy rain in the direction of King’s Cross.

He had learned from Bramley, among many other things, to respect shabbiness, and to detest fine feathers. Bramley had taught him that every man and every woman wearing the drab uniform of struggle and poverty has an inward reality which makes them interesting, however great their ignorance, however degrading their vices, whereas every man and every woman arrayed in the tomfool garments of worldly success should be ignored, because they are too vain, too pretentious, and too unreal for genuine experience to teach them.

Stephen had discovered that part of this gospel was true. In districts of London which shocked the refined by their aspects of sordid poverty or depressing vulgarity, he had met down-at-heel men and women who gave him a new feeling for humanity, and a new notion of English humour—men and women whom he got to like, and

with some of whom he drank hard and lived coarsely, convinced that at last he had stripped life of its thousand hypocrisies and discovered the reality of human existence.

He wrote about these people, kept himself by means of their sufferings and their jokes, and posted a notebook with particulars of the choicest of them, which particulars he intended to use when Mike and he came to write that murder story which was to be a best-seller as sure as Scotland Yard's in London.

As a rule, then, he walked through the broken-down neighbourhoods of London with a sympathetic and inquiring eye for all queer-looking people, and an instant frown, an instant aspect of contempt and hatred, for any prosperous-looking person who happened to pass him by in those dark streets of grinding poverty and desperate courage, striking a false note there. But on this particular night he saw neither man nor woman as he hurried through the rain, walking swiftly in a daze, his eyes on the ground, a sense of oppression over his heart, a feeling of strangulation in his throat.

He came to the neighbourhood of Theobald's Road and slowed up his paces as he approached the house in which he lodged with Bramley, wondering all of a sudden why he had hurried back to this lodging, and what he was to do when he got there.

Bramley had arrived before him, and was seated in the grandfather chair before the fireplace, leaning forward, his billycock over his eyes, his feet crossed under the chair, his elbows resting on its arms, his frowning eyes directed to the empty grate.

He did not look up at Stephen's entrance, but began shifting his feet under the seat of the chair and working with his lips at the stump of a cigarette between his lips which was audibly burning his moustache. Stephen took off his soaking hat, hung it on a peg behind the door, and came forward to the fireplace, his shoes squeezing out water on the thin carpet.

Bramley said to him, "Seen the news?"

Stephen leaned an arm on the mantelpiece and said, "Yes," looking down at the fireplace, his back to Bramley.

"It was the right thing to do; what Shakespeare would call doing things in the high Roman fashion," said Bramley.

The word *Roman* seemed to lift a weight from Stephen's mind. He raised his head, turned round, looked at Bramley, and said, "Anyhow, it's the best way of correcting a mistake."

"Yes. Going to see your mother?"

"She's the last person I want to see just now."

"What about your sister?"

"I'll see her later."

"Better change your clothes and go now."

"No, I couldn't face that." He took a crumpled packet of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Bringham suggested," said Bramley, shifting in his chair, "that I might write a personal sketch of your father—a study in psychology." What Bringham had suggested was that Mike should persuade Stephen, the ex-M.P., to compose that article and sign it, but Mike was too delicate for such a mission.

Stephen lighted a cigarette and said, "I'll give you some particulars. I'd like to. You can say the article is written by one who knew him."

"Right you are, lad."

"Tell the bloody world," Stephen said, moving away from the fire, "that everything William Laslett did in his life was inspired by contempt for its hypocrisies." He began to walk about the room, smoking hard, the hand that held his cigarette shaking violently. "I'll tell you what he was, Mike. He was a man of such infinite courage that he had to make his own dangers as he went along, the dangers of the world weren't big enough for him. He courted disaster. He began, you see, by taking risks, and the more risks he took the more he succeeded. But he didn't want success. He wanted struggle. So he turned from risks to grapple with danger. He loved danger because the penalty of failure was disaster. Nothing so wooed him in heaven or earth as disaster. He preferred it to the Victorian Order, to gin, to dope, to adultery. It was his harlot, the wife of his bosom, and that not impossible She of whom all men dream. He was a man who'd be happier in hell than in heaven. He looked on prudence as a mean form of cowardice. He looked on morality as a kind of impotence of the will. I never saw him in a passion, never heard him speak a hasty word. He was cold-blooded: pure intellect. Yet he had a heart. He amused himself with its sentiments. They were a sort of distraction to him. I never knew him refuse a kindness. He was boundlessly, immeasurably generous. And he loved the hills of Derbyshire more than all the luxuries that wealth could give him. He went back there again and again. The woman he took away with him came from Chesterfield, and sprang from peasant stock. I've found it all out from Shrimpton. I'd like the world to know the truth about him. He was a great man. Goodness is a relative term, but greatness is the same thing all over the earth. He was a great man, urged by forces little people know nothing about, driven forward all his life by the high winds of destiny. I've met scores of clever men, brilliant men, men whom every one praises for a little talent or a little dexterity; but I've met only one great man, and that was

my father."

Bramley bowed his head two or three times, and said, "Spoken like a Roman. You've done your filial duty, lad. Now take a drink, change your clothes, and forget all about it."

"No, I'm going out again. I'll leave you alone to write the article."

"Have a drink first."

"Later."

III

On that same day Hugh Jodrell and David Ramsay arrived in London from Germany. They were sitting in the lounge of the Grosvenor Hotel, waiting to go into the restaurant for dinner, when Hugh, glancing at the stop-press corner of an evening newspaper, saw the news of William Laslett's suicide. He read the information to Ramsay, and said that he must see Stephen before he returned to Sussex.

"The trouble is," replied Ramsay, "that no one knows where he lives."

"I could see his mother; perhaps she has found out by now."

"But the shop will be closed. Do you know her private address?"

"It's somewhere in Earl's Court. I could telephone to Miss Anstey and ask for it."

"Better wait, I think, till to-morrow, and call at the shop."

Hugh postponed his visit till to-morrow, as Ramsay advised, and after an early breakfast set out for Brompton Road. He was met at the door of the shop by Lionel Olphert, who was waiting there, fresh and debonair, for Mrs. Laslett to arrive. Olphert told Hugh that he had been with the Lasletts last night; that Mrs. Laslett took the news with no emotion of any kind; but that Phillida had felt it terribly. Asked if Stephen had appeared, Olphert replied that they had heard nothing from him for many weeks, and still did not know where he lived. "He is becoming a mystery, Jodrell; and practical people like his mother don't bother their heads about mysteries."

Mrs. Laslett, who had travelled from Earl's Court by bus, came briskly up the little side-turning, her bag open in front of her, her right hand feeling inside it for the key of the shop. She was beautifully dressed, and looked younger, fresher, keener, as though in the excitement of keeping shop she had not merely found herself but renewed her youth.

She greeted Hugh in a businesslike manner, handing Olphert the key of the shop, and said to Hugh, with an approving smile, "What a piece of luck you should be

here! I want to send Phillida to Susan Anstey. Could you take her down with you?"

Hugh replied that he wanted to see Stephen before he returned, but that David Ramsay, who was going back to Sussex that afternoon, would no doubt be only too glad to look after Phillida.

They entered the shop, and while Olphert was pulling up the blind, removing dust-covers, and making dispositions for the day's business, Mrs. Laslett completed her arrangements with Hugh for Phillida's journey to Sussex. "As for Stephen," she said, "I've no idea where he is hiding. I half thought he would turn up to see us last night; but, no: he never came near the place. Of course this death of his father is the best thing that could happen to all of us. It will be gossiped about to-day, and forgotten to-morrow; but a long trial in the law-courts, with all sorts of horrible exposures, might have ruined my business. I try to make Phillida take this practical view of the matter, but the poor child is not strong enough to see reason. However, she'll be all right with Susan Anstey. Lionel will stay up here to help me, and Phillida will come back to him when she is well again. She's marvellously improved. You'd never know her. But the suddenness of the news in the paper has upset her, thrown her back, and she'll be all the better for a change."

Before he left the brilliant and amusing little shop, Hugh inquired of Lionel Olphert if he happened to know the address of Shrimpton, and getting that address drove off at once to acquaint Ramsay with the plans concerning Phillida, and afterwards to see Shrimpton.

He found Shrimpton in a stockbroker's office, and explaining his mission was told that Shrimpton could not give Stephen's address to any one without first receiving Stephen's permission. However, Hugh pressed home his request with such quiet persistency that at last Shrimpton gave in, telling Hugh that if Stephen asked how he got hold of that address he must drop a hint that he got it by inquiring at the offices of *Daily Life* for Mr. Bramley's lodgings.

Hugh drove away in a taxi, and was soon asking for Stephen in the offices on the ground floor of the little house off Theobald's Road. He mounted the uneven oak stairs to the second floor, knocked at the door, got no answer, turned the handle, opened the door, looked in, found it empty, and withdrew.

For two hours he hung about the little street, never going far from the door, and every now and then climbing the dusty stairs to see if Bramley had returned. He was feeling tired and dejected, beginning to think he would leave a note in the room upstairs, when suddenly Stephen swung round the corner and came hurrying up the street, his hands in his trouser pockets, his eyes on the ground.

Hugh was dreadfully shocked by his appearance, not by the shabbiness of his

clothes, but by Stephen's total aspect—by the way his head hung, by the way he walked, by the lack in him of any signs of self-respect—the aspect, indeed, of a man who took no stock in cleanliness, the aspect of the ordinary down-and-out.

He got in Stephen's path at the entrance to the house, and before Stephen looked up, said, "Hullo, Stephen!" and put out his hand to him.

Stephen raised his head a little, stared at Hugh out of half-closed eyes, and exclaimed, "Hullo, Jodder!" taking his hand, looking away from him, and then suddenly demanding, "Seen *Daily Life* this morning?"

With this question he brought his eyes round to Hugh's face, looked hard at him, with challenge, and said, "There's a dam fine article there about my father; a little masterpiece in mental biography; tells the world what a man he was, my father; what a big man, what a brave man, what a heart he had for danger. You must read it. It will help you to understand him. You know why he shot himself, don't you? It wasn't fear of prison. He feared nothing. It was because his eagle spirit could not stoop to the indignity of having to answer questions put to him by a dam lawyer."

Hugh nodded his head, as if to say he understood that point of view.

"Been upstairs?" asked Stephen.

"Yes."

"Mike there?"

"The room was empty just now."

"Come up a minute."

In the room, glancing to right and left of him, at the unmade beds, the disordered table, the grimy furniture, and the disarranged bookshelves, he said to Hugh, "This is where we live, Mike and I, and we live dam well." He walked to the hearth, leaned his back against the mantelshelf, and folding his arms over his chest, continued in a fighting tone of voice, "We don't do a stroke of work more than is necessary to keep body and soul together; the reason for that being this, that we don't want to do other poor devils out of a job. What do you think of all these dam titled people writing for the papers, taking the bread out of the mouth of poor starveling journalists, and writing the greatest piffle ever printed in a civilised country? God, they're a rotten crew! They'd sell their souls for a guinea, and that would be too much for those same dirty souls." He used his shoulders to push himself into an upright position, and standing with feet apart, his arms still folded, he exclaimed, "Look here, Jodder old man, I've learned more in this room than I learned all the years I was at a school, and all the years that I was fluttering about the candles of Vanity Fair." He unfolded his arms, and used his hands to pull down his jacket in front of him. "My stable-companion is a man who has touched life at all points," he

said, looking Hugh in the eyes; "and, as he says, it stands to reason that there is no foothold of reality for a man till he touches rock-bottom. It's the bottom dog, Jodder, the man who stands firm and has nothing to lose, it's he who's worth knowing. Ah, that's a mighty truth, that is. It's the man who's down and out who can tell you the naked truth about life. I made the mistake at Trinity of thinking it was the other way round; but I know better now, and I'm going to write a book to tell mankind not to look up to the stars of the social firmament for truth, but down to the bottom of the well, where truth has always had her hiding-place, and where snobbish little Johnny-Head-In-Air never looks for her." He laughed, walked about the hearth uneasily, and said, "You wait a bit. The world thought it could down me, down me, dance on my body, and go on with its blasted selfishness as if I had never existed. But I'll let it know that I'm my father's son, and that I can put up a fight. You wait; you shall see. The world hasn't finished with me yet."

Hugh sat down on a chair by the window, and inquired if Stephen meant that he had turned anarchist, socialist, or bolshevist.

To this, Stephen made answer that he was speaking as a literary man, not as a politician, and that he intended to leave economics to look after themselves, and to concentrate his attack on the spiritual rottenness of the world. He didn't want, he said, to found a new state, but to destroy the present blithering spirit of civilisation. Commercialism was a filthy and repulsive thing only because this blithering spirit of civilisation outraged every idea of the human brotherhood. He was out for a new spirit, not for a new form of government.

"When are you coming to pay me a visit?" asked Hugh, after a pause. "I've got a lot of things to show you at the school. Numbers are up; we're flourishing like a green bay-tree. If that wouldn't offend your reforming soul I'd love to have you with me for a week or two."

Stephen, who had calmed down, took Mike's grandfather chair, lighted a cigarette, and replied that he must make his name before he showed himself in the neighbourhood of Silverton.

"Besides," he said, "I've got into the habit of drinking too much. I must cure myself of that before I see Susan. She'd never understand that alcohol is a way of escape from what is false and depressing into what is real and exhilarating."

"The bother about that," said Hugh, "is that it lets a fellow's body down so badly."

"I don't bother much about my body just now."

"We couldn't get on at school without the gym."

"Wouldn't it be a bit of a shock to you, however, if you read in the papers that

the lamas of Tibet and the ascetics of Buddhism were taking lessons in jiu-jitsu and going in for physical culture?"

"I don't know that it would," replied Hugh, after a moment for deliberate reflection. "I think I should say that it would do the old fellows a power of good. The curse of religion is introspection. It makes people morbid."

"Well, perhaps; but all our games, and all our efforts to keep physically fit, are rather ridiculous if you think of them from the angle of Almighty God."

"So is washing one's teeth and cutting one's finger-nails."

"A sane mind in a sane body, eh?"

"I always regarded that as a truism."

Stephen turned in his chair, and looked at Hugh with straightforward interest and curiosity. "And you're perfectly happy?" he asked. "That simple gospel works with you, does it? A sane body, a sane mind. You never feel uneasy, never know what it is to be unhappy, eat well, sleep well—all that sort of thing? Very interesting; a man flourishing on truisms! How is it, though, you aren't married? I should have thought a nice natural man like the famous international Hugh Jodrell would have had a hundred platitudinous sweet girls at his elbow, begging for a glance of his eagle eye and the honour of darning his socks."

Hugh laughed. "You're catching the hang of journalism," he said.

Stephen got up. "Look here, Hugh, let's be serious," he said, and advanced towards the window. "I want to tell you something," he added, coming to a stop. He took another creased and attenuated cigarette from a paper packet, lighted it, and sat down on a small chair opposite to Hugh, at the other end of the window. As he pulled at his cigarette, swallowing the smoke and holding it in his lungs with his mouth open, he let his eyes rove over Hugh, taking in Hugh's appearance, furtively, as though he had discovered in the details of Hugh's dress a clue to some secret problem which was troubling his mind, and which was not the matter he now proceeded to discuss.

He said that Mike Bramley was a tired man, had written so much that he hated the business, preferred talking to writing, preferred thinking to writing, preferred anything in life to writing. But Stephen wanted to write, was ambitious, felt he could write a great novel, felt he was wasting time in slaving for the stunt Press. When, however, he suggested to Bramley that they should make a start on the novel they intended to write together, Bramley put him off, told him that there was no hurry, bade him realise that man's first business is to live, and argued that until he had got the plot of the novel quite straight in his mind it would be folly to begin. "We are always discussing this novel," said Stephen, "but we never make a start at writing it."

The sight of Hugh had revived many attractive memories in Stephen's mind. He was saying to himself, "Jodder looks so nice; he doesn't look prosperous, like a stockbroker, or smart, like a dam grinning juvenile lead in revue; he just looks nice. His clothes are old clothes, but they aren't grubby like mine. His hair isn't smarmed down with scented brilliantine, but it's tidy. He looks clean, and his cleanness is not offensive." And saying these things to himself, he remembered beautiful gay mornings in his life, when the sun shone over the grey towers of Cambridge, and when he loved his bath, loved the feel of clean linen, and when he and Hugh walked together beside the Cam after breakfast, and he rejoiced in himself, in his vigorous clean body, in his mental response to the fresh sweetness of Nature, and, above all things, in the friendship of splendid and heroic Hugh.

He was thinking now, "Is it too late to climb out of the sewer into which I have fallen and to stand once more in the fresh air and to love life as I loved it then?" And as he asked himself this question he felt the grime of his shirt-sleeves at his wrist, smelt the stale odours ascending from his greasy clothes, saw the shame and ugliness of his broken shoes, and craved with a great dry thirst for alcohol.

Hugh said to him, "I would suggest, first of all, that you take a holiday. Come to me for a few weeks. We could talk things out, and then you could see this friend of yours, and tell him that if he's not ready to start his novel you must set out on one of your own. I agree with you, you're wasting time. I think, too, you're wasting tremendous gifts. I've never lost my faith in you. I'm perfectly certain that if you give yourself a fair chance you will write a book that men will think about."

Stephen got up from his chair, flung his cigarette into the grate, and came back to Hugh, a light in his eyes, a queer smile on his lips. "I don't want to boast, Jodder, but I've got enough stuff in my mind for fifty books. I have really. You've no idea how I've lived these last six months or so. I've been right down in the depths. I've explored every dark cave and every slimy corridor in the abyss. If I chose I could make Haggerston—ever heard of Haggerston, old man?—more real to people, more terribly real, than Mayfair or Belgravia. Oh, you've no idea of the richness of the spoils in my mind. I've met every character Dickens ever wrote about, and a hundred others besides. Haggerston is full of them, and so is Camden Town, and so is Dalston. By God! they're real people, the people of those places. But how can I come to you? Look at me: I'm like a tramp; besides, I can't get along without booze; and I've got no money; and if I was there, Susan would be bound to see me, however carefully I kept away, and then I might lose her, and if I lost her, I shouldn't want to live."

Hugh said, "What does it matter about clothes? If you don't like your own, you

can borrow mine. If you must have booze, you shall have it, as much as you want, but I'll see you work it off in one way or another. I'll tighten up those flabby muscles of yours! As for money, good heavens, man, I've enough and to spare for the both of us. You haven't heard, I suppose, that an aunt of mine has bought me a partnership with Ramsay, and comes down uncommonly handsome two or three times a year? I'm a very rich man now, being a bachelor of simple tastes."

"By God, how you tempt me!"

"Only because what I say is so simple and so reasonable."

"Aren't you afraid I should frighten your little boys?"

"No; but I was thinking, curiously enough, that the sight of them would do you as much good as swimming in the sea or playing golf in the heather."

"What about Susan?"

"Well, you're a man, aren't you? You must take your chance with her. If you lose her, you lose her. What were you telling me about your father just now? It sounded rather fine to me."

"Ah, but I know now I couldn't live without Susan. It's only the thought of her that keeps me from sinking, that makes me want to scramble out of this, and to climb into fresh air."

Hugh looked at him with an amused and reproachful smile. "That doesn't sound very fine to me," he said, laughing a little. "Tell Miss Anstey that, and you'd lose her for certain sure. She's not the lady, I should say, who cares for a weak man. She'd want to feel that you stand firm on your own feet."

"I shouldn't dream," said Stephen, "of telling her what I've told you; but, all the same, if she saw me as I am now and turned away from me, that action of hers would be equivalent to a push into the slime. I shouldn't try to swim. I should want to sink."

"And you call yourself your father's son!"

"Even he," said Stephen, "the greatest man I've ever known, came to a point where the only thing to do was to make an end; and he did it, like a man, in the high Roman fashion, as Mike said. By the way, I must give you that article in *Daily Life*."

After some more of this Hugh insisted on taking Stephen out to luncheon, and as they went down the stairs together they encountered Mike Bramley ascending. Hugh, after being introduced by Stephen, asked him to join them, and Bramley turned and went with them, slowing down their paces; for he walked heavily, leaning on an old ash stick, dragging gouty feet along the pavement, glaring at people, and pointing out odd things to the others.

When he heard at luncheon of Hugh's proposal he said that it was a good one,

and turning to Stephen told him to accept Hugh's invitation. Then turning again to Hugh, bending on him ferocious, frowning eyes, he said, "But he'll come back to me, all the same. He doesn't belong to your world any longer. He belongs to mine. You had better make up your mind to that."

IV

Stephen refused to go back with Hugh at once, saying he must stay in London until his father's affairs were settled, but he promised to come directly he was free from this responsibility.

Week followed week, however, and still he did not come, replying to Hugh's urging letters with one excuse after another, until Hugh lost faith in him, and ceased to write any more.

One evening towards the end of the summer term, Hugh, writing at the table in his study window, looked up for a moment and saw Stephen crossing the cricket field towards him, a grey, tramp-like figure in the falling twilight. He flung down his pen, sprang to his feet, and hurried out of doors to welcome his guest.

Stephen was drunk, but able to walk perfectly, and to talk distinctly. He told Hugh that he had come to stay with him for a night, and intended to return to-morrow. "I have come," he said, "chiefly to borrow money and to have a bath. I suppose you've got plenty of soap on the premises?"

Hugh took his arm affectionately, and led him indoors. He showed Stephen his study, switching on the lights that Stephen might see what a jolly room it was, with its bookshelves, prints, and photographs, and then bore him away upstairs. He pulled open drawers in his bedroom, took out flannels, linen, socks, and ties, laying them out on his bed, and that done, led the way to a cheerful tiled bathroom, turning on the hot-water tap. "Now, you go back to the bedroom," he said, "and I'll fetch towels and soap for you—coal tar, lavender, and old brown Windsor! Change as quick as you can. You'll find a dressing-gown hanging on the door, and there are slippers under the dressing-table."

They dined together by an open window, with shaded candles on the table, beginning their dinner with grape-fruit, proceeding to cold roast beef with potatoes in their jackets, pickled damsons, and salad, tankards of ale at their side, and concluding with cheese, strawberries, raspberries, and cherries. After this pleasant meal, they drew up to the hearth and drank coffee, smoking cigarettes and looking at old photographs going back to Eton and Cambridge days. Then they went out into the playground, crossed it to the edge of the downs, and stood there in the warm

night air, under the stars, looking at the wake of the moon on the sea, and talking of old days and men they had known at school and at the 'Varsity.

As they strolled back towards the school, Hugh asked what time Stephen usually went to bed.

"Any old hour after midnight."

"And when do you get up?"

"When we wake, which is about ten o'clock, as a rule."

Hugh said that he had caught Stephen yawning once or twice, and intended to pack him off to bed as soon as they got in, telling him he'd find plenty of books at his bedside if he couldn't sleep.

On the following day he woke Stephen at eight o'clock with a tray of tea, and told him he had arranged with Ramsay to take a holiday, proposing that they should have a bathe as soon as Stephen was ready, then return to breakfast, and afterwards go for a motor drive. "We'll take our luncheon with us," he said, "eat it in the open, and get back for tea and tennis. A game of tennis will do you good, give you an appetite for dinner, and another good night."

"But aren't I going back to-day, Jodder?" asked Stephen, very conscious of the pleasure of linen sheets and sea air coming through an open window.

"No; you're not."

"Well, it's very jolly down here, as long as we keep out of Susan's way."

When they returned that evening, after a day in the open air which neither of them was likely to forget, a day in which Stephen recovered something of his former brilliance, something even of his lost keenness for great things, while Hugh rejoiced once more in the feeling, in the conviction, that Stephen, who had suffered so terribly, was a splendid and lovable person who would certainly one day show the world the stuff he was made of—after this perfect and delicious companionship in the open air, Hugh drove his car up to the back entrance of the school, led Stephen to his own quarters by a way which did not go past the study window, and at the door stopped suddenly, saying, "I must see Ramsay for a minute. Just go into my study and wait for me. If tea isn't there, ring the bell."

Stephen walked into the study, and came face to face with Susan. She was standing before the mantelpiece; between them was a little table set out with tea, the spirit-lamp lighted, the water bubbling in the kettle. Stephen had stopped dead on seeing her, leaving the door open behind him. He stared at her, and could not move. She smiled, and came forward, saying, "Hullo, Stephen; this is jolly to see you again."

She closed the door, took his arm, and led him to a chair by the table, saying

that she had a hundred questions to ask him, and that he should have his tea in a minute.

He did not sit down, but standing by the chair, began feeling in his pockets, unconsciously, for a packet of cigarettes. He watched her as she went to the other side of the table and sat down, a lovely vision to his eyes, a perfectly beautiful girl in exquisite clothes of almond green, her skin shining with health, her eyes full of natural gladness, her lips twinkling with smiles. He said, "This is hardly fair, Susan." He found a packet of cigarettes, took one out, lighted it, and walked away to the end of the room, looking out of the window on the playground, where boys were practising cricket at the nets.

"I wanted to see you," she replied to him, "and so I insisted that I should come to you as you were so little likely to come to me."

"Who told you I was here?" he demanded, turning to look at her.

"David Ramsay."

"Not Hugh?"

"No; David Ramsay told me, over the telephone. As a matter of fact, I was coming up this afternoon in any case to see Grace Ramsay. She has just got another baby; a boy this time; and she's tremendously proud of him."

"Still Hugh must have been in the plot."

"Why call it a plot? Don't be so tragical. Come now, and let me pour out your tea."

He came back from the window, sat down in the chair by the table, flung his cigarette into the grate, and said to her, "Anyhow, it's not quite so bad as I expected."

She laughed at that. "Sugar?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Neither sugar nor milk," he answered. "That lemon there is meant for me. I'll slice it up."

For a few moments they said nothing to each other, and the sound of cricket bats hitting cricket balls entered the room with the occasional shout of the boys, or the creak of the roller going up and down the pitch of the first eleven.

"I hear you mean to write a novel," she said at last, passing him his cup.

"Yes, I've begun it already. It isn't shaping quite so delicately as the work of Leo Daga!"

"I'm glad of that."

"It's stark realism, my book—not the realism of chatter-boxes and dolls, but the realism of London's authentic *dramatis personæ*. Ever heard of Haggerston, Susan?"

"Yes, I think so. It's in the north of London, isn't it?"

"You ought to see it. Would you like me to show it to you one day?"

"Very much."

"You'll never sleep again without dreams if I do."

"Well, I'd risk that. But I hope, Stephen, you've got contrasts in your novel. It's not all Haggerston, I hope."

"Why not?"

"Because people don't like reading gloomy things."

"No, they like dope—the sort of dope Leo Daga serves out to them, epigrams, frivolity, lawlessness in boudoirs, pyjamas on the stage, well-dressed numskulls doing naughty little things with an air of heroic defiance."

"Oh, but there are other plays to see, and plenty of beautiful books to read. I think people are perfectly right not to read gloomy things. Books of that sort are bad for one's vitality. Besides, art is meant to make people forget their troubles."

"You're afraid of realism?"

She laughed, looked at him with amusement, and replied, "I don't call it realism, Stephen. I think fairy-tales are much more real than Ibsen. It's our stupid mundane life that's the illusion," she added, leaning over the table to hand him a dish of cakes; "it's the dream world that's the real world. I love that phrase of Robert Lynd's that art helps us to escape from the make-believe existence of everyday 'in which perhaps an employer seems more huge and imminent than God.' You used to like that phrase: don't you remember? Haggerston isn't real: it's make-believe. The only wise person in Haggerston, I am sure, is the child who refuses to believe Haggerston is true, and tells itself fairy-stories, and believes in the story of Sleeping Beauty, and in the little nut tree that only grew a silver nutmeg and a golden pear."

She laughed again, held out her hand for his cup, and said, "Come now, Stephen, you don't truly believe that Haggerston is a reality, do you? It's only the story you're writing about Haggerston that is real. Haggerston is make-believe, isn't it?"

He said, "It's awfully real to the poor devils who live there."

"Yes; but nightmares are awfully real to the people who dream them." She considered a moment, fingering the teaspoon in her saucer, and added, "My grandfather is quite sure his scrap-books are more real than the Fourth Gospel; and from what Phillida tells me I think your mother must regard her little shop as more real than the sonnets of Shakespeare."

"Anyway, Haggerston is just as real as Mayfair; but perhaps you think that the people who live there are also suffering from nightmares?"

She nodded her head.

"Well, I agree," he admitted. "Fashion is a will-o'-the-wisp; and most of its victims dope themselves with its illusions."

"I pin my faith to the child," said Susan, picking at the edge of the table with a finger-nail, and looking down at the finger as she spoke—"the child who sees that everyday existence is an absurd make-believe of grown-ups, and who lives in a world of its own creation. Remember, Stephen, there's horror, and terror too, in the fairy-world of the child. The child believes in ogres and giants. It loves the terrifying sound of Fe-fi-fo-fum. But it only uses horror and terror to accentuate the jolliness of everything else, particularly the courage of the giant-killer and the spell that frees the enchanted princess." She looked up, colour in her cheeks, and said, "Everything in a fairy-tale ends happily."

Stephen listened to this with a greediness which surprised himself, catching glimpses as she spoke of an art greater than he knew how to practise, and of a life too perfect, he thought, for his soiled heart and his darkened mind ever to live as a fact.

He was strangely unaware of her physical beauty and of the delightful tones of her voice while she was speaking to him across the little table that divided them, being so enrapt by the thought of her spirit that he could think of her only as one who had a truer hold upon life than his own, and who was perfectly happy with a happiness which had just escaped him.

But when she suddenly looked up at him, smiling with lips and eyes, he saw how lovely she was, and said, "You're the only person in the world who can save my soul."

She made no answer.

"If I had you always with me," he said, "I could do great work."

Still she made no answer, but moved her chair backward from the table, crossing one leg over the other, and looked down at her hands resting in her lap.

"I used to think," he went on, getting up, going to the mantelpiece, and feeling in his pocket for a cigarette, "that I would make good first, and then come to you. Now I see that I shall never make good without you."

She tried to smile, her head still bent over her hands, and said in a voice that shook a little, "That's the first really cowardly thing I've ever heard you say."

"Is it?" he demanded. Then he stopped dead, and looked at her in a new manner.

From the place in which he was standing he could see the lines of her body, and his eyes travelled over them, and rested at last on her beautiful feet and the delicate

elegance of her ankles.

"You mean," he asked, jerking the unlighted cigarette in his fingers, his eyes still gazing at her feet, "that you couldn't care for any one who wanted you to help him?" He raised his eyes to her face.

She was not looking at him; her head was still bent, and the lines of her mouth were grave. She began once more to pick at the edge of the table with a finger, and replied to him with a slightly nervous haste, "I didn't say that, Stephen. I care for a great many people who are not at all heroic. But I should certainly find it difficult to think of you as the Stephen of many happy memories if you ceased to be self-reliant and self-respecting."

She raised her eyes to his face, nervously, and yet with courage, setting her eyes to tell him that what she had said she meant.

"If you treat me like this," he said bitterly, "while I am wearing borrowed plumes, how would you treat me, I wonder, if you saw me as I really am?"

She was puzzled, and glanced at him with inquiry. "I don't understand what you mean, Stephen."

"Don't you!" he ejaculated, with scorn. "Let me explain then. These lordly flannels, so white and voluminous, these spotless tennis shoes, even the aristocratic socks I am wearing—all belong to Jodder. My own things are being fumigated or burnt, or something of that sort. I go about the world, Susan, not in purple and fine linen, but in the rather mournful livery of the down-and-out. In fact, my authentic appearance is that of a tramp. How would you like to see me, then, as I really am? If you are unkind now, how much more unkind would you be then! I tell you this, not to ventilate a grievance, or to bring a touching tear of sympathy to your proud eyes, but so that I should not appear to be masquerading before you."

He laughed, sat down opposite to her, and said, "How very smart you are; what beautiful fine clothes you are wearing; how temptingly, dear Susan, you dress yourself. A moment ago I was almost bowled over by your physical attractiveness. I very nearly, I am sorry to say, Miss Anstey, thought of making love to you—a most unpardonable frame of mind in a person of my low condition. But let me explain how that happened. I hope I shan't offend you by saying that in the old days I never thought of you as beautiful. I thought you were good-looking, of course, but I never felt dazzled by your attraction. I liked you for your conversation, your incomparable voice, and your general keenness about things. But just now, only two minutes ago, I saw you as a woman so beautiful that I was positively startled, and at that blinding moment what do you think happened to me, dear Miss Anstey? I hope I shan't shock you, but I wanted you like hell, I wanted you as a famished tiger wants blood.

As near as a touch I told you that I loved you; but just then the humility so becoming to a down-and-out stepped in and saved my crazy soul, and I stopped, only just in time; and now, in case I should forget myself again, I'm going out—not to drown myself, but to laugh at myself for being such a damned fool."

He was at the door when she called him back.

"Stephen!" she said, and looked at him as he turned.

"Why, what do you want?" he asked.

"I want you to come back here."

"God in heaven, why should I do that?"

"Because I want you to apologise to me," she said firmly, "so that we can get back to our old friendship again, and talk sensibly together."

He snorted his scorn, opening the door.

"Stephen! Come back to me."

"You are too dangerous, beautiful lady. Your legs are too significantly shapely. It's safer for me in the open air, and, by God, it's safer for you, too!"

He went out, banging the door behind him, and Hugh did not see him again till nearly midnight.

V

A week later Susan came down one night to the manor-house drawing-room, after seeing her grandfather to bed—who was now suffering from the delusion that he was going blind, and could no longer write. In order to rest herself after her trying exertions with the old man, she went through the open window of the drawing-room into the moonlight of the garden, half hoping, as she came into the warm softness of the night air and into the hush of the sleeping garden, that a nightingale would sing to her.

She was very tired. Her nerves were almost on edge. The gospel of fatalism, in which she had put her faith with such perfect contentment, seemed now to be failing her. She harboured a doubt concerning the wisdom of passivity, and was conscious of a wistful desire to take a more militant part in the affairs of life. While she waited for something to happen, everything seemed to go past her. Her life was becoming more and more a routine of small duties, and, moreover, nothing she could do for the grandfather she so sincerely loved could avert the approaching hand of death. And when that hand touched the old warrior, Silverton would go, and she would have to begin life anew. Where should she go, and how live?

She walked to and fro on the lawn, sometimes looking up at the stars,

sometimes stopping to listen for the nightingale, enjoying the perfect serenity of nature, the tranquillity of the stars, the stillness of the tall trees, the tinkle of the shrunken river over its gravel bed, after the confused turmoil of her grandfather's mind, and yet conscious of unrest and a profound sadness.

She began to think of Grace Ramsay and her new baby, and to wish that she, too, had a baby to whom she could devote all the love of her heart. That would make life perfect, she told herself, and fulfil her faith in the gospel of determinism. The thought of Grace Ramsay led her to think of Stephen Laslett. She wished she could have helped him. She sorrowed to think how far he had fallen. It was too late now for her to help him; he had gone back to London that afternoon, and David Ramsay had told her over the telephone how glad they all were to see the last of him. But if Hugh had failed to help Stephen, he might have told her, so that she might have made at least one more effort to revive in him those gay and spirited ambitions which had made his youth so delightful.

She went towards the bridge, and stood for a moment under the deep shade of the beech, listening to the tune of the river, and hoping for a last song from the nightingale before he flew away. There were many distant and faint sounds moving on the whispering rustle of the night air—the hunting cry of the owl, the boom of a beetle, the falling of a twig between the branches of a tree, the scurry of small padded feet over dead leaves in the hedges, the sudden dive of a vole into the river.

But there was another sound on the night air, and a sound which troubled her, which made her hold her breath, and gave her suddenly the sensation of fear. She kept perfectly still, and strained to hear every accent of that guilty and creeping sound as it moved, more like a thief than a ghost, on the night air.

Presently there came from the neighbourhood of the stableyard the long-drawn and subdued sound of alarm which a wakened rooster gives to his hens. Susan drew farther back into the shadow of the tree, and set her eyes to watch the gateway in the wall leading from the stables to the lawn. The gate stood open. A group of elms rising beside the river at that point threw the brick pillars with their square stone tops into grey shadows; but beyond this shadowed gateway the moon made a patch of silver in the yard bright as snow. Susan watched this patch of light, wondering if the servants had gone to bed yet, considering how she should act if a thief made his appearance, regretting that she had sent the General's spaniels to a keeper so that they might not tell him by their barks that they had not been killed.

Presently a nightingale, far away in the valley, began lazily and doubtfully to sing, and almost at that same moment, a dark figure passed over the patch of moonlight in the yard, moved into the shadows of the gateway, and then emerged on to the lawn,

walking across it without any attempt at concealment towards the open window of the drawing-room.

As soon as this figure appeared in full moonlight Susan saw that it was Stephen, and was conscious of a swift reaction from alarm to indignation, and walked out from under the branches of the tree, and called to him, just as he was nearing the window, "Is that you, Stephen? What do you want?"

He stopped at the first sound of her voice, and stood looking towards her over his shoulder. She advanced steadily in his direction, conscious that the nightingale was singing his loudest. He hesitated for a moment, and then said in a low voice, "I thought I should find you in the drawing-room, at your needlework as usual," and came towards her.

When they met, just outside the dark shadow cast by the old house on the dew-drenched lawn, he added, "I've come to say good-bye. I thought I could go without doing that; but I found in the end I couldn't."

"David told me," she replied, "that you had gone by the five-thirty train."

"So I did. However I got out at the junction and walked back."

"Walked back!"

"Yes, all the way—to see you."

"But what are you going to do? Mr. Jodrell will be in bed by the time you get up to the school."

"Is that your only comment on my romantic gesture?" he asked. "What do I care whether I sleep in a barn or against a cow's warm belly in the fields, so long as you say good-bye to me with a little feeling."

Her heart began to beat with nervousness, and she laughed uneasily, and tried to say something about the inconvenience of romantic gestures to practical young women engaged in nursing invalid grandfathers. But he suddenly broke into this, exclaiming close to her face, "I mean you to take a good look at me. No, don't draw back. Well, if you do, I'll advance on you again. You see it's no use. Besides, I can do this." He suddenly snatched at one of her wrists and held it fast. "Now, look at me," he said, between his teeth. "Look at me, Susan, as I really am. Get the smell of my clothes into your nostrils. How do you like me now?"

She said nothing, looking him straight in the eyes, telling him by that look of hers how shamefully he had affronted her.

"Aren't you going to speak?" he asked her.

"Yes, Stephen. When you will listen to me."

"I'm listening now."

"Not as I intend you to listen."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You must let go of my wrist."

"Well, then, now?"

Freed from his hold, and nursing the wrist which he had grasped so roughly, Susan said to him, "What has moved you to insult me?"

He straightened his body, smiled at her, and replied, "Come down from your pedestal! Let me show you what you really are. When the sun shone upon me, and I was heir to many fabulous millions, too fabulous, as it turned out, you were ready to smile on me, to lead me on, to coax me to your side, to sow your spells in my heart. But when I tumbled, when the ground went from under me, and I took a toss into the abyss, you donned your most beguiling clothes, pulled on your most beguiling silk stockings, and set yourself to sow those same spells in the heart of my friend. I've found it all out. Don't give yourself airs. Don't talk to me about insults. You threw me over at the first hint of a crash, and bent all your wiles to seduce my friend. Oh yes, you did. And now I am hateful and loathsome in your eyes; but, fine lady, you sowed the seed in my heart and you've got to reap the harvest."

She was very white, breathless, and trembling with mortification; but she mastered her feelings and said to him steadily and coldly, "You have offended me, Stephen, very deeply. I can't tell you how deeply. You have offended me because our friendship is such a perfect memory in my life, and you've almost destroyed it. I am going to try to forget this evening. I shall try to think it right out of my mind and to remember you only as you really are when you are true to yourself. I will now ask you to go."

She moved away from him, passing into the shadow of the house. In a moment he was at her side, walking with her, his lips close to her ear. "Good Lord," he cried in a menacing, half-strangled voice, "do you think that I am to be tamed by such poor film-drama stuff as that? Why, you talk like an old-fashioned finishing governess!" He caught her roughly by the arm, swung her towards him, and said with his face right against her face, "I'll show you how to say good-bye——" and in a moment she was in his arms, with his mouth pressed against hers, subjected to the unforgettable sacrilege of his desire.

She threw back her head from him, pressed against his chest with both her hands, and said, half-suffocated, "Go away, you brute, you brute!"

But he held her firmly and fiercely, and when he was not kissing her, mocked her, challenging her to call out and wake the servants, suggesting that she should give him in charge for a horrible offence. And, breathing hard, his face black with passion, his words coming from him with all the force of the madness working in his

brain, he would beg her to love him, beseech her to give herself to him, tell her that he could not live without her; and at the next moment taunt her with faithlessness, call her brutal names, subject her to actions which froze the blood in her veins, and curse her for corrupting the purity of Hugh Jodrell with her harlot's wiles.

Then, of a sudden, he fell silent, and held her strongly in his arms, looking into her eyes, searching their depths with anxiety and alarm in his own, staring down into her soul as if he realised that it was only there that he could see the harm he had done to her.

Then he said, in a strange and ghostly voice, "I'm your Adonais, Susan; you'll no longer think of Keats when you listen to the nightingale; you'll think of me: for evermore on beautiful summer nights you'll think of me, and it will be with horror and loathing, knowing what I have destroyed for you."

His face drooped forward to hers, and as he pressed it to hers, silent and still, she was startled by the feeling of tears on her cheek, and by the sound of a sob in his throat, and by the feeling that he was no longer holding her in a fierce embrace, but almost clinging to her for support. She was about to break free from him, when his head dropped to the level of her breast, his shoulders heaved with sobs, and he caught up her hands and pressed them to his lips. Then, letting her stand free from him, and after looking at her for a moment through his tears, he turned away and walked with great feebleness and weariness across the lawn towards the shadows of the gateway.

Trembling in every limb and shaken by this dreadful experience so that she was still dazed and sick, Susan covered her face with her hands, crying softly, and unable to think or act with decision, moved towards the open window, shuddering at every shuffling pace with a horror that seemed to overwhelm her with its degradation.

VI

On the following day Hugh Jodrell called at the manor-house to say good-bye to Susan before starting on his holidays. It was a day of rain, and Susan was sitting in the drawing-room with the windows open, her chair close to one of these open windows, her hands busy with needlework.

Just as Hugh entered the room the sky darkened with dramatic suddenness, and the rain ceased to fall and a strange stillness seemed to descend upon the garden. He asked her if she was sitting there to see the first flash of lightning, and she replied that she had chosen that place because it was almost impossible to breathe anywhere else.

"Thunderstorms don't upset you, do they?" he asked, sitting down by her side.

"No; why do you ask that? Because I am superstitious?"

"No; because you aren't looking well."

"How do I look?"

"Rather pale, and what people call drawn. If I may be allowed to say so, I think you want a holiday. I think you ought to send for one of your grandfather's daughters and go off for a change. Nothing takes it out of one so much as nursing."

She said quietly, "I had rather a shock last night."

He thought she was speaking of her grandfather's delusions, and said, "You ought not to be alone with him."

"Shall I tell you about it?" she asked, and laid her needlework in her lap, and looked at him.

At that moment there was a flash of lightning which made them both jump.

"I wonder if that is a sign from Heaven," she said, "telling me to hold my peace."

"I'm quite sure it wasn't."

"Why?"

"Because Heaven likes us to help each other, and if you tell me about this shock I may be able to help you."

Far away, beyond the still trees in the garden and beyond the downs which looked like smoke against the copper edges of the storm, sounded the slow, surly, and momentous rumble of thunder.

"I can't help you with your needlework," said Hugh, "a fact which always distresses me; but I might be able to help you in a matter that worries you."

She turned quite round to him, and although her face was against the light he could see that her eyes were strangely grave and that her lips had the slightly trembling appearance which tells of feelings stirred to their depths. Startled, and a little afraid, he met her eyes with sympathy and inquiry, his face very serious, and said, "Do tell me about it, Susan."

"Stephen came here late last night."

"But I saw him off to London by train!"

"I know; he told me. But he got out at the junction and walked back."

"Walked back! Good heavens, what time did he get here? Weren't you all in bed?"

"I was up with Grandpapa, and Stephen arrived just when I came downstairs."

The room suddenly blazed with dancing white light and then fell into instant gloom which for a moment was like blackness.

"But what did he want?"

She considered that question, and then replied, “I think he must have been drinking. I should have liked not to say that, but in some ways it is his best excuse. What he wanted, apparently, was to say good-bye to me, and to say it in such a way as would tell me that he has chosen definitely to live another life from the ordinary kind of life we all know.”

“You mean, he insulted you?”

“That doesn’t greatly matter, I think; the important thing for you to know, because you do like him so and can perhaps help him, is that his condition is now really serious. In fact, I think it is desperate.”

Hugh said, “I haven’t told you, but he made things pretty difficult for me the last few days he was at the school.”

“David told me something of that.”

“I’m afraid he was really rude to you last night.”

“I think he wanted to horrify me.”

“I know he felt pretty certain, after you had had tea with him in my room that day, that you didn’t care for him as he had always hoped you did. He turned rather savage after that.”

“I begin to wonder whether he is quite right in the head.”

“Well, I think the smash of the Laslett fortune and the suicide of his father have been rather more than he can carry.”

“Do you think we’ve got to say that no one can help him now, that he must dree his own weird?”

“That was my feeling for the last few days he was with us.”

A flash of lightning jerked eccentrically across the leaden skies at that moment. They both looked up, and saw that the copper edges of the clouds were the colour of fire. Great drops of rain fell with a splash on the leaves of the still trees. More quickly this time, and much nearer, came the shaking vibrations of thunder.

Without changing her attitude, she asked him, “Then you won’t go to see him?”

“Would you like me to?”

She brought her eyes to her needlework, and moved her chair a little farther into the room. “I wonder,” she said, “whether a really strong appeal to his self-respect mightn’t save him. Have we tried that? I’m not sure; I don’t think I have.”

Hugh said, “Neither have I. One rather shirks that.”

“Yes, I know; it seems a form of blatancy, doesn’t it?”

“Well, I fancy there’s something in most of us that tells us that sort of thing is unnatural. It seems less arrogant, and certainly more simple, at any rate, to act indirectly.” He smiled, and added, “Perhaps it is cowardice on my part, but I always

seem to shirk face-to-face conversations, and heart-to-heart talks, with my fellow-creatures." His face became serious again, and he said, "But if you think that I could do Stephen any good by going for him rather strongly, I'll certainly have a shot at it."

"Well, have one last shot at it."

She looked up at him as she said this, and he nodded his head, and replied, "All right, I will. I'll do my best."

She went on with her needlework again.

"By the way," he said, watching her hands, "it's rather splendid of you to take such an interest in old Stephen after last night. It must have been a horrible shock to you. I hope he wasn't very drunk. How did he get in, by the way? Did he ring the bell at that hour of the night, or tap on the windows? I'm afraid he's capable of anything now."

"He came in through the stables."

"What, he knocked humbly at the back-door? Poor old Stephen, I'm afraid he begins to fancy himself in the character of a tramp. I don't like the way he talks about it. After all, it's a form of egoism, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said, "I'm afraid it is."

CHAPTER X

BUT FOR YOU——

I

Mike Bramley looked up as Stephen entered. "I knew you'd come back," he said; and, after assuring himself that Stephen's appearance was satisfactory, once more directed his gaze to the fireplace.

"But I've come back to work," said Stephen, who looked haggard and worn-out, and whose sorry clothes were markedly travel-stained, as if he had been sleeping in a hedge. He walked forward, took a chair, dragged it to the side of the fireplace, and sat down with a bent back, feeling in his pocket for a cigarette. "No more idleness for me," he continued. "I'm going to write a book; and I'm going to make a beginning to-night."

Bramley raised his eyebrows, smiled grimly, snorted with amusement, and after a moment for cogitation laboriously turned his head over his shoulder and supplied himself with tobacco and a cigarette-paper from the table at his side.

"I notice in you still, Stephen," he said gruffly and sorrowfully, "regrettable vestiges of gentility. You're not yet a convinced, a converted, and a saved disciple of the Way. You want to get on. You want to climb above your fellows. You can't yet say from your heart, What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue! I suppose you had marmalade for breakfast, and a cloth on the table, and dessert after dinner; and so you said to yourself, I'll write a book: I'll become famous: I'll make money: I, too, will have marmalade for breakfast, a clean cloth on my table, and dessert with my dinner. Is that how it happened?"

Stephen replied, as Bramley lighted the cigarette he had rolled, "You're miles out. I want to write a book because my head's bursting with something or other that plays the devil with my peace of mind."

"There's thunder about," said Bramley.

"Thunder be damned! What I've got in my head is an idea. It's an idea that has got to be born or my skull will split. I can't go on with this cursed journalism. It makes me sick. I'll do my share of the housekeeping by dealing with publishers, not with editors."

Bramley said, "Well, I'll be glad if you'll make a start, lad, for I particularly want

a bit of money just now."

Stephen felt in his pocket, pulled out a roll of eight notes, and handed Mike seven of them, pound notes, putting a ten-shilling note back into his pocket.

"Is this what the publishers call advance royalties?" mumbled Bramley, looking at the notes with great pleasure and relief, while his cigarette spluttered in the hairs of his moustache.

"I borrowed a tenner from my host," Stephen explained. "I'm sorry to say I blew nearly two quid on the road."

"This comes in handy for the Brotherhood," said Bramley, putting the notes in his pocket. "A poor little devil is coming to see me to-night who wants help, Stephen. The police have got a down on him; he can't find a job, and he's expecting every minute to be nabbed again on the humbugging charge of loitering with felonious intent—married man with five children, skilled engineer, reads the poets, thinks he understands Browning, and owes a lot of money for rent."

Stephen asked, "How much are you going to give him?"

"Why, the lot," said Bramley.

"Anything in hand for us?"

"Oh, a little loose silver, I expect. Why? Are you hungry?"

Stephen thought for a moment, sitting forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his hands raised, the fingers of his right hand holding his cigarette near his lips. He was feeling the full squalor and depression of this room after the fresh air of Sussex and the happiness of Hugh's surroundings. "I wonder if we can go on much longer like this?" he asked quietly.

"How do you mean, like this?"

"Living from hand to mouth."

"How else ought a philosopher to live? Damn my soul, Stephen, you don't want to take a villa in Kensington, go to church on Sunday, and pay your insurance premiums before they're due, do you?"

"No," cried Stephen, getting up with sudden impatience from his chair, "but I want to blow up the world, to shatter it to bits, and I don't see myself doing it from here!"

There was a knock at the door, and at the same moment the dark, low-ceiled room quivered with the dazzle of lightning, the same lightning which was startling Susan and Hugh in Sussex.

"Come in," bawled Bramley, and said to Stephen, "What did I tell you? I knew there was thunder about."

A man of small stature, grey of face, with intelligent bright eyes, and a thin, firm

mouth, entered the room, removing his cap from his head as he closed the door behind him.

"Well, any luck?" demanded Bramley.

"No, no luck," replied the man.

"Times are bad for engineering just now," said Bramley, and his words were almost drowned by a crack of thunder over the roof.

"Couldn't be worse," said the man; "bad here, and bad up north; shocking!"

"Well, look here," said Bramley, feeling in his pocket, "I've managed to borrow seven pounds, and they'll help you for a bit. Here, take 'em. And help yourself to a cigarette." He got up heavily from his chair, and standing uncertainly on his feet asked the man if he could mend a broken watch. The man said he thought he could do something in that way, on which Bramley stumped over to the chest by his bed, pulled out a drawer, and began raking among its contents. "By the way," he said, "whenever you lose your faith in Mr. Robert Browning I've got something here, named after him, which might come in handy to end your disillusionment." He held up the pistol which had been used by the burglar who went off with Mrs. Laslett's diamonds. "My friend over there," he said, "could tell you something about this toy." He put it back in the drawer, picked up a gold watch that was lying there, and brought it over to his visitor, a flash of lightning dancing over his face as he advanced. "If you can't mend it," he said, "sell it as it is. It's worth a fiver, perhaps more. You needn't be afraid. It isn't stolen property. It belonged to a gentleman who ended up his life at the end of a string. It was given to him by his mother, a very godly old lady, and I'm sure she'd like you to have it."

When the man got up to go, Bramley got up too, and said to Stephen, "I'm walking part of the way back with my friend; I'll see you later."

Stephen, whose hand was in his pocket, feeling the ten-shilling note, his mind uncertain whether to give it or not to their departing guest, nodded his head, and asked whether Bramley would come back to dinner.

"Tell the cook," said Bramley, "to have it ready at eight o'clock, seven courses, and no damned nonsense about it being a close season for soft roes. Soft roes for the savoury, tell the cook; that's not an order, it's a ukase. Come along, my friend."

II

Two days later Stephen was leaving the house at eleven o'clock in the morning when Hugh turned in at the entrance.

Hugh's face was set and stern. Stephen, imagining that Susan had told him of his

romantic gesture, visibly quailed. He pulled up short, and looked at Hugh without a word, waiting for Hugh to speak, fearing what he would say, dreading physical violence.

Hugh, who was nervous and shrinking from his task, said sternly, "Look here, Stephen, I want a word with you. Where can we go to be quiet?"

"Come upstairs," said Stephen, who wanted a friend at his side.

"Is the other man out?"

"No, he's there; but you needn't take any notice of him, and he's not working just now."

Hugh hesitated. "All right," he said, deciding that it might be a good thing to fight Bramley as well as Stephen, seeing that Bramley exercised so evil an influence over him.

On the way up those dusty dark stairs to the room whose stifling and acrid smell haunted him with disgust, Hugh warned Stephen that he had come to talk about his soul, that he meant business this time, and that he wasn't going to be put off by humbug of any kind.

"Here's Jodrell," said Stephen, entering the room; "he has come to talk about my soul. I thought you'd like to hear him. He's marvellously eloquent at times."

"What!" cried Mike, almost with vivacity for him; "has he saved his own?"

Hugh had not come to split hairs or to bandy words on small points. The hateful task before him, as he saw it, was to shock and startle Stephen into awareness of his desperate plight.

He therefore ignored the ironic question of Bramley, and taking up his stand by the window, for the sake of fresh air, turned to Stephen and said, "I've come to say this to you, Stephen. You once wanted, and not so long ago either, to make your mark in the world. You didn't want to sink in those days, you wanted to rise. Whether you went the right way about it isn't the question, nor whether circumstances have been against you; the thing is, that when you wanted to rise, when you felt yourself to be a fighter, you were moved by a natural impulse. And what I want you to see is this, that your present state of mind—a surrendering, a caving-in state of mind—isn't natural, but unnatural. You're living now an utterly unnatural life. You're throttling down your natural impulses. And one of the consequences of doing that is a state of morbid egoism, in which you imagine that every man's hand is against you, and that your old friends are all false to you. That's absolute bunkum. Your friends believe in you: they want to help you: they believe that if you give yourself a real chance you can make a name and do useful work in the world. But if you shut yourself up in this attic, live from hand to mouth by work

that's beneath you, avoid your friends, cultivate untidiness and cynicism as a sort of pose, you'll commit moral and intellectual suicide—you'll perish, and you'll perish without having done one stroke of the work that is in you to do."

Stephen, walking up and down the room, stopped as Hugh ceased speaking, and said to Bramley, "What do you think of that, Mike?"

Bramley replied, without shifting his position, "I like the young man's earnestness, but I think his argument stinks of Samuel Smiles."

Hugh walked over to him, and said, "You wrote a thing in the paper about Stephen's father."

"I believe I did."

"What would you write of Stephen? What sort of a biography is he making just now?"

"You aren't suggesting," said Bramley, "that he should turn to high finance; are you?"

"No; but you made out that his father had a sort of greatness because he strove, because he battled."

"That's quite true," replied Bramley. "But you're forgetting, are you not, the end of that particular striving?"

Hugh replied that he had not forgotten that end, and proceeded to say that while he saw a certain fineness in William Laslett's fight for fortune he saw nothing to marvel at in his success. That was a point he wanted particularly to make. He wanted Stephen to see that his father's success had been won by breaking rules, and that the only success which counts is success won within the limitation of rules. Rules were necessary. They were necessary even in games. Take footer, for example; any one could score goals who came on the field with a machine-gun and mowed down the opposite side. Rules represent the wisdom of long experience. "What I am suggesting," he concluded, "is that Stephen should use the fighting qualities of his father to win the really great prizes of life, fairly and squarely. That's what I want him to do. I want him to pit his powers against law-abiding men, to observe the same rules of human society that they do, and to go on fighting for victory in a spirit that will take defeat without a whimper of self-pity."

Stephen was about to speak when Bramley suddenly lifted his head, throwing it back so that he could see Hugh from under the brim of his hat. His bushy eyebrows twitched over his frowning eyes, and in those eyes there was a stare of stern judgment. He said to Hugh, "There's only one rule of life, young man, that's worth a damn, and that's the rule which enjoins us to think of the human race as a brotherhood." He sat well back in his chair, his elbows on the arms, his long legs

stretched out before him. He shook himself together, and said, "And so long as men struggle one against another, and talk about prizes, and seek honour and glory as if they weren't the same old bloodstained bubbles of every battlefield since history dawned, so long will man's profession of religion and his antics of philanthropy be nothing more dignified than the vapourings of hypocrisy. You can't love your fellow-man if you try to climb over his shoulders to an extra slice of bread. There's only one reputable way of loving your fellow-man, and that's helping him. If the rules you speak about were the rules of brotherhood, then I should like to see Stephen keeping them, and I should like to see him striving to be the best man in the crowd, because then the road he'd have to take to reach that end wouldn't be the same road that leads to the Mansion House, Downing Street, or Westminster Abbey; it would be the same hard and stony road that led a better Man than any of us to a gallows-tree. What it comes to is this, young fellow: you believe in self-assertion; Stephen and I believe in self-sacrifice. Between those two beliefs there is a gulf as wide as heaven and as deep as hell."

Hugh had listened intently to these muttered words, which rumbled through the room like the sleepy growl of a caged bear, and as he listened he began, for a moment, to doubt his own faith, to wonder whether he had firm ground under his feet, and to cast about in his mind for an answer that would deliver his own soul from bewilderment as well as save Stephen from social suicide.

Before he could speak, however, Stephen came forward to him. "It's a hard gospel, isn't it, Jodder?" he demanded. "It shakes a man up when he gets it fair and square between the eyes: makes him see stars: takes the wind out of all his flapdoodle." He turned round to Bramley, and said, "Well spoken, old cock, well spoken. I think you've saved my soul. I rather fancy, in fact, that this is my Pentecost. I seemed to feel a mighty rushing wind as you were speaking, right through my soul, arctic cold it was, very cleansing." He turned about to Hugh. "You see what it means?" he asked. "Not up, up!—but down, down!—down to the bare bones of truth—down, down to the solid granite foundations of reality. Haven't you read, my Jodder, how one Francis embraced Poverty with an ecstasy? Haven't you heard that the Son of Man had not where to lay His head? How would you teach the little Francis and the little Jesus, if they were born again and came to your nice clean school, with its gym and its swimming-bath and its cricket-field? Would you teach them to try to beat the other fellows, to try to outstrip them, and outshine them? Would you teach them to regard the public-school boy as the perfection of manhood, and the ragging, swaggering, ignorant young pup of an undergraduate as the fine flower of Christian civilisation? Can't you see that the whole fabric of

civilisation is crazy rotten? Can't you see that it wants smashing? By God, man, you're walking about with your eyes shut!"

He turned on his heel and went up the room breathing hard, his face shining with a genuine enthusiasm.

Hugh said, "I think I see the fallacy in all that. Isn't it rather poor stuff, after all?—isn't it, when you come to think of it, little more than fustian?"

"Put us right, then!" challenged Stephen, wheeling round on him.

"Let him speak," growled Mike.

Hugh said that their point of view was characteristic of the loafer's mind, if they would let him use that phrase. They not only wanted to make life easy, but to make the kingdom of heaven easy too. Their idea was to take the bones out of life and to leave only the stuffing. But the one thing about life which made it worth while was its difficulties. As he saw religion, its glory also lay in its difficulty, and its difficulty lay in just this, that it had to be fitted into a structure; it wasn't meant to overturn that structure, or to make a new one, but to fit in and transform the structure there from the beginning of time.

"What structure are you talking about?" demanded Stephen.

"Human nature," replied Hugh.

"Go on, young fellow, I'm listening," said Bramley.

Hugh proceeded to say that civilisation was the structure of human nature inspired by religion. It wasn't what it should be, not by a long chalk, but it was a good deal better than it was, and it was getting better every day. To turn the earth into a monastery wouldn't solve problems, but create problems. To emasculate humanity would not be to transform it, but to destroy it. The game of life implied struggle, effort, zest, the passion for victory; religion stepped in with the rules of that game—the struggle was to be a fair struggle, the effort a noble one, the zest honourable, the passion for victory unselfish.

He said he did not like the present condition of things any more than they did, but he should think more of their discontent if they were doing something to better that condition of things. Here, indeed, was the whole purpose of his call. He wanted Stephen to take a real hand in the job of improving the conditions of life. Couldn't Stephen do that if he took a bath, wore clean clothes, exercised his body, practised temperance, and avoided the back-streets of journalism?

This direct onslaught, all the more effective for the quiet tone of voice in which it was delivered, shook Stephen, and drove him to throw a glance in Mike's direction, as it were for succour. Mike did not see that glance. His head was down, and his eyes were set on the cigarette he was rolling between his blackened fingers. But he

had heard every word of Hugh's onslaught, and, after a moment, he delivered judgment.

"What you advocate so eloquently, young man," he said slowly and heavily, and, as it were, with an unwilling scorn in his growl, "is compromise. It's the delusive dope, that same compromise, which keeps the world as it is, and multiplies the parasites preying on the body of humanity. It justifies the curate in looking out for a vicarage, the vicar in keeping his weather-eye open for a deanery, and the dean in toadying politicians, aristocrats, royalties, and the dirty Press in hope of a bishopric. It justifies the company promoter, the trust magnate, and the usurer, who now calls himself a joint-stock bank. It explains Chicago, the Rhondda Valley, and Wigan. Our battle-cry, on the other hand, is No Compromise. We won't admit that a man can serve God and Mammon at the same time. We say the honest man can have only one master. And if you call us loafers, idlers, mere talkers, I answer that it's better to loaf on the narrow way than to go hell-for-leather on the broad way of compromise which leads to destruction."

Stephen was exhilarated by this pronouncement. He felt that Hugh must now respect him, and that Susan, hearing of this heroic gospel from Hugh, would see that he was a finer fellow than she had imagined. At the same time, he did not mean that Hugh should go away with the odious notion in his mind that he, Stephen Laslett, was anything in the nature of a prig. And so, when Bramley ceased speaking, he broke into a long, rambling, and rather incoherent discourse on his contempt for morality, declaring that he neither mortified the lusts of the flesh nor bothered his head to imagine what any inconceivable God might think of his soul, but simply concentrated on sharing his life with others, giving and taking as he went along, but never sneaking an advantage over any one.

In the course of this flamboyant statement he spoke of women, the women of the slums with whom he now forgathered, so frankly, brutally, and repulsively, that Hugh lost patience, turned sick, and walked to the door in the midst of Stephen's sentences.

"You're going, then?" asked Stephen.

"You don't expect me to stay, do you?" Hugh countered, turning at the door.

Stephen laughed. "What, I've shocked you, have I?"

"I feel," replied Hugh, "that I've been standing over an open drain."

Bramley growled, "Well, I rather agree." He began to roll another cigarette, saying, "Stephen still talks at times a little through his hat; but he'll make a great man yet."

Stephen walked up to Hugh, looked him in the eyes, and said, "I'd rather smell

like an open drain than like a whited sepulchre. You can go to hell. Don't ever come near me again. I've done with you."

He turned on his heel and walked up the room. Hugh, who was very white, looked after him for a moment, and then opened the door and went out, unable to trust himself to speak another word.

III

Some weeks after this, when their fortunes were running rather low, Bramley said to Stephen, one day, "The papers are full of Leo Daga's new play, which is to be produced next month. Why not go to see him? An interview would fetch us ten guineas. We could write another one from the same material for the Yanks. In fact, we could live on a talk with the clever little devil for quite a long time."

Stephen shied at the idea, but Bramley persuaded him to envisage it as an amusing adventure, and profitable withal. Stephen then said that Leo Daga would probably refuse to see him. "We won't tell him you are coming," answered Bramley. "I'll ring him up and say I'm sending a representative of *Daily Life* and the *New York Observer* to ask a few questions about this play of his, and about his philosophy of life in general."

Stephen began to be bitten by the idea. He felt that he would like to see Leo Daga again, like to confront him in his new character of a journalistic apache.

He said to Bramley, "I remember he once told me never to refuse a Press interview. He recommended me to receive any journalist who came to see me, however common and stupid, with an expression of face which would say to him, 'Good gracious, I never expected them to send me such a charming and intelligent person.' I was at once to offer cigarettes, a little later drinks, and then to talk to him as an intimate and understanding friend, a fellow-craftsman, a brother artist. And when he got up to go, I was to hold his hand, to look at him affectionately, and to say, 'But, look here, you and I mustn't lose sight of each other; we must meet again; you must come to dinner some night.'"

Bramley listened with a knowing smile of great appreciation, and said with a relish, "He's a clever little devil, even if he has got the mind of a courtesan and the soul of a pimp."

The interview was arranged by Bramley over the telephone, and Stephen set out for Mayfair late one afternoon to see Leo Daga for the first time since the crash of the Laslett fortune.

He had made some efforts to tidy himself, visiting a public lavatory for this

purpose, spending a few pence on what is called "a wash and brush up." But his clothes were worn threadbare, were grimy and stained, and his shoes were down-at-heel and out of shape, their soles worn to the thickness of parchment.

He was now something more than thin; he was emaciated. His cheeks still kept their high colour, but that high colour no longer had the sheen of health. His eyes retained their look of sullenness, but a furtiveness was now added to them which gave them a disagreeable appearance. In some strange way he still maintained a look of boyishness, but it was a boyishness gone to ruin and sicklied over with all the vices of the worst manhood. People who noticed him in the street, as he slunk along close to the houses with his hands in his trouser pockets, thought to themselves, "There's a nice young waster for you!" or "That's a degenerate if ever I saw one!"

The door of Leo Daga's flat was opened by a valet new to Stephen. This valet looked at the visitor with suspicion; but, on being told by Stephen that he was the representative of *Daily Life*, who had an appointment with Mr. Daga, admitted him, opened the door of the sitting-room, and announced, "The gentleman from the newspaper, sir."

Leo Daga was writing at his red lacquer bureau, with his back to the picture by Fragonard over the mantelpiece. He was wearing a purplish grey suit, lilac-coloured linen, and a tie of shining dark blue silk. He got up at Stephen's entrance, but did not immediately look round, stooping over the desk of the bureau hurriedly to blot the envelope he had just addressed, saying cheerfully, "Sit down, will you?—I've just finished."

Then he glanced up with one of his engaging smiles, and saw Stephen, a vagabond Stephen, looking at him with a grin of sour amusement. The smile left his face, his chin dropped a little, he stared, glanced aside, stared again, and said, "Why, it's Stephen!"—coming forward with one of his little pudgy hands extended, his eyebrows quivering, his eyes twinkling, his lips smiling again. "What! have you turned interviewer?" he inquired, almost as if such an idea had a touch of the comic.

"That's how I live now," replied Stephen.

"Sit down." He moved a chair towards Stephen, and walked away for a step or two, smoothing the hair at the back of his head. "Well, you know, rightly done," he said, throwing himself into a very big chair with an affectation of great weariness, "an interview is a form of art. I should think it must be a very interesting life—seeing all sorts of people, getting at their psychology, and making their personality live for the reader in the form of chit-chat. Have a drink, by the way." He got up from the big chair, and rang the bell. Then he came to the table by Stephen's side, opened a gold box with a monogram in diamonds on the top, and moved it close to Stephen,

saying, "Have a cigarette."

Stephen said, "It's a damned interesting life: you're quite right. I'm getting quite a master at disembowelling the great of this world. I hang my library with their guts and amuse myself when I'm not writing by looking at them, and seeing what a dam lot of humbugs they all are."

"Oh, but that's surgery, not art!" corrected Daga.

"Surgery is an art," replied Stephen, lighting his cigarette, "when it's performed by a master."

The servant appeared and was ordered to bring drinks.

"Well, here I am," said Daga, throwing himself once more into the big chair, and bringing the tips of his fingers together, "at your service, to be disembowelled, as painlessly as possible, I hope—on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That I see a proof."

"Afraid of me?"

"Just a little."

"Why?"

"Because," said Daga, "perfect sympathy is essential to the understanding by one person of another."

Stephen grinned. "Well, what makes you think that I don't sympathise with you?"

"I never felt," said Leo Daga, "that you understood me."

"But you taught me nearly everything I know!"

Leo Daga sat forward to jerk down his coat by the lapels, and said, "However, let us get to the business of our interview."

"One minute: am I to begin my article by saying that the great and brilliant Leo Daga, apparently so care-free, so gay, so volatile, so jesting, nurses a sublime sorrow at his heart, namely, the tragic conviction that no one understands him?"

"I haven't said that."

Stephen laughed, but winced a little at the very straight and serious look which Leo Daga was directing to his eyes. "I like that idea, that I never understood you!" he exclaimed. "Why, we walked hand in hand in the days of my prosperity. You haven't forgotten that, have you? We were Romulus and Remus, Castor and Pollux, David and Jonathan, Marshal and Snelgrove. Who else was my fidus Achates if it wasn't you?"

He laughed again, flipped the ash from his cigarette into a tray, and still laughing a little said, "However, let that go. I'm here to make a grubby guinea or two out of

your lordship's notorious lubricity. Be so good as to tell me something about your new play. Is the subject still adultery in high places, and what is the name of the milliner who supplies your leading lady with pyjamas?"

Leo Daga smiled, waiting to answer these questions till the servant, who just then entered the room with a tray of drinks, departed.

"I am afraid," he said, getting up to attend to the drinks, "that I cannot let you into the secret of my plot, nor disclose to you the profound mystery of the clothes to be worn by the leading lady. But I can tell you, and you can tell the readers of your paper, that the play is concerned with an aspect of modern life which interests intelligent physicians."

He brought a tumbler to Stephen, and returned to the tray to look after his own needs. "It is not by any means a serious play," he said, conscious that Stephen was studying his clothes and movements with a cynical amusement, "except in so far as all art is serious; it is simply an observation of contemporary society; all the same, there is a central theme, and that theme," he continued, resuming his place in the big chair, tumbler in one hand, cigarette in the other, "is a theme which interests physicians."

He sat very upright in the big chair, a cushion at his back, his whole attitude suggesting formality and business.

Stephen said, "What rot it all is, isn't it? God, what appalling, mucky rot it is!"

Leo Daga's face was like stone. He surveyed Stephen with a sort of Asiatic spitefulness attempting to masquerade as scornful haughtiness. After a moment of staring, he said with a snap of his lips, "I do not follow you."

Stephen mimicked him: "I don't get your drift; snow again!" Then exasperated and yet amused, he said more sternly, "I mean, what rot it is for you to take yourself seriously. Why, Sophocles and Æschylus were not so serious as you, nor Euripides either. Come to think of it, Leo, you're more serious about your little dexterity with a degenerate stage, about your skill in dabbling with the Improper and making smut a delicacy for grown-ups, than Socrates was in searching for truth at the height of Athens' glory." He took a drink from his tumbler, pulled violently at his cigarette, and continued, "You know dam well why you write sex plays. It's because they pay such handsome dividends. Besides, it's easier in that line of business than in any other to shock people and startle them and set them talking. Your trade is violating the decencies. You do it dam well, you do it amusingly; but you do it because it pays. And when you publish these exquisite comedies of the Improper at a guinea a time you write a little elegant preface to each volume, your tongue in your cheek, about the modern spirit, its freedom from paralysing restraints, its determination to

express itself, its faith in lawlessness; why?—because you want to cloak yourself as a philosopher and prevent people from seeing you as a vendor of indelicacy and a trader in smut."

Again he drank, and after drinking, pulled at his cigarette, threw it into the grate, took another from the box, and said, "We needn't say all this in the paper, but for God's sake don't put on literary airs with me." He laughed, lit the cigarette, and asked, "I suppose we ought to say that your favourite authors are Bunyan and Julia Horatia Ewing, and that you are never so perfectly at your ease as when you are talking to Dean Inge about Plotinus or the Master of Trinity about the majesty of stellar space." He put the cigarette to his lips, looking about him, taking in all the richness of the room, with its silk hangings, its lacquer furniture, and its bowls of deep-scented flowers, finally resting his eyes on the Fragonard over the mantelpiece. "What about saying something, under the head of art, on your taste in pictures? Oughtn't I to remark that the luxurious splendour of your apartment is dominated by a particularly lascivious Fragonard, whose work you consider far more satisfying to the higher emotions of the human spirit than the work of Velasquez, and the presence of which in your drawing-room makes conversation with ladies so much easier for you?"

Leo Daga sat looking at him, the right hand holding the tumbler on that arm of the chair, the other hand resting on the other arm of the big chair, holding his cigarette upright between the motionless fingers. His face was still like stone; but the spiteful flash in his eyes had given way to a dark and smouldering contempt, while his lips, which moved every now and then, expressed an unmistakable rage and indignation.

Stephen, ceasing to speak and ceasing to look about him, glanced over at Leo Daga, saw the burning anger in his face, and, answering it with anger in his own eyes, set himself to stare Leo Daga out of countenance.

For a moment or two they remained like that, quite motionless in the silent room, and then the tension was softly and mysteriously snapped by the muted bell of a telephone on a small table beside the red lacquer bureau. Leo Daga got up from his chair, and drawing at his cigarette and fingering at his tie, walked across the room to the telephone. Stephen sat back more easily in his chair, emitted a low laugh, shook up the contents of his glass, threw away the end of his cigarette, drank, and then sat forward, looking down at the carpet in front of his feet, smiling to himself.

"Who is it, please?" asked Leo Daga coldly, with annoyance. There was a pause, and then, "Oh, my dear, how charming of you!" he said, with a ripple of delight in his voice. "Really, that's too delightful of you."

Stephen got up with a laugh, and went clumsily to the decanter with his empty glass.

"What? Ah, yes, but then one doesn't expect illustrious beauty to keep its promises."

He laughed, and Stephen laughed too—a bass and mocking echo of Leo Daga's polite ripple of treble amusement.

"Sweet of you, my dear; but, alas, I can't accept. No; I wish I could. But, look here, I can manage next Thursday. Would that suit you?"

Stephen squirted a little soda-water into half a tumbler of whisky, laughed to himself, and said under his breath, "Ah, the familiar voice at last!—the dulcet tones of the practised seducer!" He tasted the mixture, and walked back to his chair.

When he had put down the telephone receiver, and made a note in his book of engagements, Leo Daga walked to the hearth, took up his stand in front of the mantelpiece, facing towards Stephen, one hand on his hip, a cigarette between the fingers, the other hand raised to smooth his hair.

"Then you do not write shorthand?" he asked.

Stephen, looking up at him, laughed, drank, and said, "Dives looks down on Lazarus! But you don't think you can make me wince, do you?"

"I was wondering how you will remember all I have said to you."

"Ah, that's clever, too! I've talked too much. But as for remembering, I remember better than you do. By God! your memory has got so many holes in it that old friends can drop right through into black oblivion and leave not a trace behind them in your convenient heart."

Leo Daga lifted his left arm, and glanced at a watch on his wrist.

"You want me to go?" said Stephen. He finished his drink. "All right; I won't keep you." He looked round, took a cigarette, and got up from his chair.

"May I ask you a question!" asked Leo Daga, and dropped the end of the cigarette into the grate which Stephen had already littered.

"I should think so; why not?"

"Will you let me lend you a little money?"

"No, I'm damned if I will!" Stephen threw up his head and glared at him. He breathed heavily for a moment, swayed on his feet, and said, "But, wait a moment, when you say a little money, what do you mean? How much?" He laughed bitterly.

"I was going to suggest twenty pounds."

"You were! That wants thinking over. If you don't mind, I'll consider it with the help of a little whisky." He picked up his glass, and went across the room to the decanters.

Suddenly he stopped. “Why do you suggest it?” he asked, and glanced back over his shoulder, a scowl on his brows.

“Oh, we are all hard up at times. I thought it might be useful to you. That is all.” Daga stepped forward a pace, took a cigarette, lighted it, and backed to the hearth.

Stephen helped himself to whisky and soda. “No, I don’t think I’ll take it,” he said. He drank, his back to Leo Daga, and said, “There’s a catch in it somewhere.” He drank again, his back still to Leo Daga. “No,” he said, “it wouldn’t do.” He finished the drink, set down the tumbler on the tray, and turned round, walking to the door. Arrived at the door he paused, and muttered something to himself. Then he turned round, and said aloud, “If it hadn’t been for you, Leo Daga, I might have ____”

He cut off the end of the sentence by suddenly shutting his mouth, as though startled by an idea which had just flashed into his mind. He looked at Leo Daga with dreadful rage in his eyes, his fast-closed lips expressing a hatred that was overmastering him. “No, by God!” he burst out: “not one penny of your dirty money!”—and went lurching from the room, leaving the door open behind him.

IV

Bramley waited for Stephen’s return hour after hour. He had already planned in his mind how a second article about Leo Daga could be written for America, and he was ready to put Stephen on to that while he himself wrote from Stephen’s report the more difficult article for *Daily Life*. Stephen could describe the man, his gorgeous rooms, his expensive habits, his aristocratic friends, all that sort of stuff; Bramley himself would knock off the article about the new play, limiting himself in the matter of personalities, hinting at something sensational in the play.

But Stephen did not return.

The atmosphere of Leo Daga’s room, the feel of the carpet under his shabby boots, the feel of the luxurious chair through his thin clothes, the glitter of ornaments, the sheen of the hangings, the scent and colour of the flowers—these things had revived memories in Stephen’s sodden consciousness of his own splendour and his own social and literary ambitions.

He did not wish to recover those former things, as he had wished with Hugh Jodrell to recover the healthier life at Cambridge; on the contrary, he realised in Leo Daga’s room how easily he had fallen to seductions of a mean and trivial character, and hated himself for unpardonable stupidity. This was why he had suddenly started their conversation by insults and derision. He was not angry with Leo Daga, but

angry with himself. In every insult directed at Leo Daga he was chastising himself for a folly which had no excuse and a madness which was contemptible. He had let a rotten world entice him; he had allowed trumpery ambitions to possess his affections.

But when he stood at the door, debating with himself whether he should take Leo Daga's money, reflecting, too, how utterly life had changed with him since those days when he spent money, lavishly, on Leo Daga's pleasures, suddenly, as if explaining how that great change had come about, he told himself that Leo Daga had dissuaded him from going to Susan Anstey with his proposal of marriage.

"If it hadn't been for you, Leo Daga, I might have——"

What?

He was going to say, "I might have escaped the hell in which I am now living."

This idea it was—Leo Daga's part in breaking the strongest tie with his old life, breaking it lightly, scornfully, as a mere absurdity, a boy's romance!—which drove him from the house, drove him into the rain of the streets, drove him in every other direction save that of Theobald's Road. He walked to St. James's Park, stayed there for an hour, walking round it; then he made his way to the Houses of Parliament, past those familiar buildings with his head down so that he should not see them, and on to Millbank, following the Thames, the rain soaking into him, till he came to Vauxhall Bridge. He crossed it, turned into Lambeth, entered a public-house, drank whisky there; then made his way to Southwark, where he sat in a public-house till closing time; from there he slouched and reeled his way through the steady falling rain to London Bridge, crossed it, and presently, wet through, footsore, feverish, entered the offices of *Daily Life*.

He went up to a reporters' room, sat down in his drenched clothes, and began to write. Some one who saw his condition mentioned it to Bringham. Bringham came up to the room, went to the table at which Stephen was writing, tapped him on the shoulder, and said, "What's up, Laslett? What's the story?"

Stephen raised his head, not his shoulders, and replied hoarsely, "I'm writing an interview with Leo Daga, giving him hell, and I don't want to be interrupted."

Bringham said, "Don't waste your time."

"What do you mean?" said Stephen, sitting back and staring up at the news-editor with an irritated frown.

"That story won't be wanted," replied Bringham. "You'd better get home."

"What do you mean, not wanted? I wish you wouldn't speak in enigmas, and I wish you wouldn't interrupt."

Bringham said, "Leo Daga rang us up five or six hours ago. There'll be no interview. The best place for you is bed. Take my advice, and quit."

He turned on his heel and walked out.

V

Stephen did not wake next day till eleven o'clock. He looked about him with baffled eyes and a confused mind. Where was he? What had happened to him? Bramley was not in the room. He reached out for a packet of cigarettes, and lay back on his thin and grubby pillow, smoking, wondering why he was so weak, why he was breathing so noisily, why he was alone.

He could not think clearly. There was a voice in his brain telling him to walk in his father's footsteps, saying that the way was narrow and stony, that it led to a gallows-tree, but that it was the rule of the road to honour one's father and mother that one's life might be long in the swimming-bath and gymnasium prepared for those predestinated to go to a public school before the foundations of the world were laid.

He said to himself, "I'm not yet properly awake," and tried to put all this nonsense out of his mind; to think, however, was the last thing he could do apparently; he appeared to have no power to do anything but listen to the rambling of a still sleep-ridden brain. This impotence began to fret him, and he determined to fling himself free from it.

He got out of bed, staggered on his feet, feeling that the room rocked, and thought, "I must have been very drunk last night." He caught hold of furniture and made his way to the cupboard, took out the last bottle of stout that was there, and went back to bed. He looked at the bottle, puzzled and confused; then he laid it down in the bed, got up again, and went cruising round the room for a tumbler and a cap-lever.

Bramley came into the room just before one o'clock, waking Stephen from a stupor that was full of dreams. He walked over to the bed, regarded Stephen with grave eyes, and asked, "What happened yesterday? What did you say or do to Leo Daga?"

"I gave him hell," said Stephen.

"You told me that last night, but no particulars. What did you do to make him so angry?"

"I gave him hell," repeated Stephen.

Bramley walked slowly and thoughtfully from Stephen's bedside, sat himself down in his grandfather chair before the fireplace, and stared with heavy anxiety into the grate.

He had spent ten minutes with Bringham, ten very lively minutes, and he was

disposed now to think of those lively ten minutes as perhaps the most unpleasant in his life. Bringham had told him never again to presume to make appointments for important interviews without first consulting him; had told him that Stephen Laslett was never again to enter the offices of *Daily Life*; had told him further that, unless he, Mike Bramley, could pull himself together and make a more decent appearance, his services would not be wanted on the paper.

Up till this time Bramley had been a privileged person in journalism, one of the old school, a rare news-getter, a man who knew the ropes and could be trusted never to let an editor down. He had lost many regular jobs, but had always maintained a friendly relation with news-editors as a free lance, and could walk unchallenged into the offices of more than one newspaper as freely as those on the staff. Of late years, however, growing more and more lazy, he had limited his efforts to the service of *Daily Life*; and now, the result of his ten minutes with Bringham was this—that he had lost that valuable connection.

He asked himself, staring into the grate, whether it would not have been better to accept Bringham's dressing-down with meekness, instead of going for him, telling him he was a sewer-rat, and bidding him do something which is rightly considered to be an excessively humiliating act of penance.

He asked himself, too, what Stephen could have said to Leo Daga to make that old friend of his ring up the editor of *Daily Life* and forbid the interview to appear.

Into the midst of his wondering questions came the voice of Stephen from the bed, "But for Leo Daga, Mike, I should never have come to this."

Bramley said grimly, "Nor I either!" and turned to the table at his side and took up some tobacco and began to roll a cigarette. He was about to wet the gum with his lips when Stephen suddenly burst out with a fierce and blasphemous denunciation of Leo Daga, the sound of his voice even more than his wild words startling Bramley into a new anxiety, so that he turned his head swiftly, leaving the ungummed cigarette raised in his fingers at the place where his lips had been.

Stephen was sitting up in bed, leaning on an elbow, the hand of his other arm clutching at his hair. His eyes were directed to the window, and he was pouring forth a stream of horrible language in that direction, as though he could see Leo Daga looking in at him through the smudged panes.

Bramley got up, still holding the unfastened cigarette in his fingers, and walked over to the bed.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

Stephen continued to hurl abuse at the window, as if Bramley was not there at his side, as if he were unconscious of anything in the world except the face of Leo

Daga at the window.

Bramley licked the gum of the cigarette-paper, pressed it down with his fingers, and put it into his mouth. Then he laid a hand on Stephen's shoulder, and said, "Lie down, my son. Stop talking. Leave me to settle with him."

Stephen looked up at him, staring with perplexity, and said, "Why is that window so dirty? Get it cleaned, man, get it cleaned." Then he gasped out, "Don't think I'm off my head. Don't think I'm drunk. Don't think I'm dreaming. I know damn well who you are, and where I am. You're Mike Bramley, the friend of sinners, and I'm in the fell clutch of circumstance, having a hell of a time. My head's bloody, Mike; I know that; but, by God, it's unbowed!"

VI

Nursed by Bramley, and by the charwoman who attended to their room every evening, Stephen surprised the doctor by the speed with which he threw off his fever. Before winter had arrived he was able to leave his bed.

One of the things which had most perplexed him during the later stages of his delirium was the industry of Bramley. Whenever he opened his eyes, Mike seemed to be working at the table, looking more like a broken-down Kitchener than ever, his billycock on his head, his huge shoulders bunched about his ears, his lips muttering and mumbling the words he was writing.

When Stephen was well enough to understand matters, Bramley explained that he was establishing connections with new papers, and in his spare intervals getting on with the murder story which was so assuredly to be a best-seller. Later, Stephen learned what had happened between Bramley and Bringham in the affair of the Leo Daga interview, dragging out the facts from Bramley, who was very reluctant to tell them, and indeed only did so because Stephen talked about getting up and writing for *Daily Life*.

The thought that he had brought this disaster on Bramley, and that he himself was now a heavy encumbrance to his faithful friend, preyed upon Stephen's mind. It became his dominant thought. It reduced his ebbing vitality to a state of depression which became almost unendurable.

One day, when Bramley was out of the room, unable to bear this awful weight of crushing misery any longer, he decided to end his life. The means were ready to his hand. He had only to open the drawer in Mike's chest, take out the Browning pistol which had been used by the burglar who stole his mother's jewels, and then Mike would be free of him, and he himself free of a world which had taught him to despise

it.

With this decision in his mind he went to the chest, took out the pistol, examined it, loaded it, and put it under the pillow in his bed. He then sat down at the table and wrote a long and melodramatic accusation against the world, winding up with a high-flown and sentimental farewell to Bramley. In writing this document he omitted all reference to his mother, whom he had long come to think of as responsible for the Laslett misfortunes, and concentrated his main personal attack on Leo Daga, whose influence he pronounced to be the most evil and destructive in his life.

This document completed, and with perspiration thick on his forehead, he prepared for death.

He undressed, got into bed, and pulling the clothes clean over him, took the pistol from under the pillow. He lay there, holding it in his damp hand for several moments, his brain racing, his heart thumping, whimpering a little in an extreme of self-pity. He began to be suffocated, and panted for breath, gasping with sobs. Suddenly he lifted his hand and placed the muzzle in his mouth. At once the taste of metal filled him with nausea. He hurriedly snatched away his hand, striking the back of his teeth with the end of the barrel, and threw back the clothes and lay there gasping and afraid.

He remembered his father. What thoughts had occupied that daring mind when he decided to kill himself? Had he, too, tasted metal and felt sick? Perhaps; but he had not quailed.

He was conscious of the jar he had given to his teeth, and began to press a jarred tooth with the tip of his tongue, which still tasted of metal. He felt that he must drink or be sick. He got out of bed, leaving the pistol there, and went to the cupboard by the fireplace. He drank, saw the tobacco on Bramley's table, rolled himself a cigarette with trembling fingers, and, rolling it, decided to read over his farewell to the world before he made an end of himself.

The first lines of this document pleased him. He sat down in Bramley's grandfather chair to read it at leisure. He was moved by his own eloquence. He thought of Chatterton. He felt that men would remember him because of this piece of writing, and speak of him as one whose genius had been blighted and destroyed by a cruel and undiscerning world. Certain passages seemed to him as sure of immortality in future anthologies as the work of Shelley or Keats. Here and there certain words displeased him, and he went to the table, took pen, scratched them out, and sat there thinking of better words to take their place.

He became conscious of cold. He suppressed a shiver, finished his drink, and decided to postpone his suicide until he had perfected his farewell to the world.

He went to the bed, put the pistol back in the drawer, returned to the fireplace, provided himself with tobacco and a cigarette-paper, and got into bed with his farewell to the world under his arm.

Bramley came into the room to find him smoking and reading.

"What are you up to?" he asked. "Early to bed is good, but it's far too early for you to start writing."

Stephen said, "I've made up my mind to write that book I told you about. It's time I began."

He went to sleep with this lightly uttered lie in his mind, and it worked there through all the nightmares which made him sweat and groan till daybreak.

VII

He woke, mastered by the thought that he should write a book which would make him immortal. It was to have the same effect on the twentieth century as Rousseau's *Social Contract* had had on the eighteenth. Like that book, it was to be brief. Like that book, it was to quiver on every page with the lightnings of genius. He decided that he would live until this work was completed.

He wrote like a man inspired, taking no exercise, eating little food, sleeping for only four or five hours at a time. He read passages aloud to Mike Bramley, and the old journalist, sitting in the grandfather chair before the fire, praised them in order to encourage him. He went over and over his pages, cutting out, adding, working in quotations remembered from his days at Cambridge, extending here, curtailing there, making the whole work hum with the energy of a frantic mind. He changed the title a dozen times, and kept himself awake by ranging over all the great books he had read to find a quotation for his title-page which would, as it were, consecrate his own genius. By the time the book was finished he was purged of all his lusts, felt himself to be a Savonarola, and declared physical privation to be the highest of the spiritual ecstasies.

Bramley advised him not to waste time by going from publisher to publisher, but to entrust the work to a literary agent who would know at once the right publisher for such a book. He mentioned the name of Serviton, and Stephen went off to see this prosperous agent, the immortal work under his threadbare arm.

Little Mr. Serviton, spectacled, clean-shaven, dapper, and low-voiced, was sympathetic, in his own quiet way even enthusiastic; he assured Stephen that he liked working for men who had their spurs to win, because he earned their gratitude and therefore kept them as clients. He mentioned three or four impressive names, and

said that these people had come to him utterly unknown and even disheartened by their own experiences with publishers. Further, he said, "A book like this ought to have a considerable sale in the United States. I take it you'd like me to look after your interests over there?"

Stephen returned to Bramley from this encounter with Mr. Serviton in a state of high excitement, giving Mike a dramatic and word-for-word account of his interview with the knowledgeable agent. Bramley muttered his congratulations, and growlingly recommended Stephen to go easy for a month or two after such exhausting labour. Stephen replied that it was now time for him to lend Bramley a hand in journalism, and tried for some days to descend from the mountain peaks of literature to the pavements of journalism.

Before, however, these difficult and really heroic attempts at journalism had contributed to the housekeeping expenses of the firm, Stephen's manuscript came back from the agent with the following letter:

> "Dear Mr. Laslett,—I have carefully read your MS., and regret to say that I cannot hold out a hope to you that any publisher would take it. I should only be doing you harm, besides giving myself a great deal of useless trouble, if I hawked it about. I suggest that you put it away for six months and then read it again, when I am sure you will feel that my judgment is right. In the meantime, I hope you will let me see your next book, which, I recommend, should not take quite so hopeless a view of civilisation, nor blow up humanity with quite so shrewish a note!—Yours truly,
>
> "A. C. Serviton."

Stephen read this letter only once, and did not show it to Bramley. He tore it up with a vicious movement of his hands, threw it to the ground, and picking up his manuscript went out of the room. He walked to Lincoln's Inn Fields, sat on a bench, and with his shoulders humped, the manuscript on his knees, read through his rejected book with the shrill clamour of children in his ears and the rumble of London's traffic rolling like distant thunder through his mind. At the end of this breathless reading, he marvelled at the inspiration of his genius and hated humanity with a rage which was like a prairie fire in his brain. The world was determined to ignore him. The world had made up its mind to do him in. There was a conspiracy against him, a conspiracy begun from the first moment when he entered Parliament and carried on relentlessly from the dark hour of his father's fall. And this world that

was opposed to him, that was conspiring against him, and that was determined to destroy him, was a world of rotten hypocrisies, a misbegotten and mongrel world so ignoble, trivial, contemptible, offensive, and foul, that to think of it was to turn the soul sick.

He sat for a long time on that wooden bench, with the manuscript in his lap, looking at grimy and obese pigeons waddling like ducks in the grass, and listening to the coarse shouts of untidy and unwashed children calling to each other from near distances.

Slowly and achingly his great anger against the world died in his so sorely wounded heart, and he was left with nothing in his mind but an overpowering sense of his failure. He sat with his eyes on the ground, his hands resting on the manuscript, his mind stunned by that sense of failure, yet clinging to the idea that the whole world was in a plot to destroy him.

People passing across that open space turned to look at the tramp-like figure, resting his hands so pathetically on a packet in a big envelope; children, observing his lost look, nudged each other with whispers, and dared each other to go up to him and ask him the time; an old beggar woman with a red nose and a broken bonnet on her grey head, who was carrying a bagful of odds and ends in front of her, stopped before him, bade him cheer up, and went on her shuffling way singing, "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

He began to realise that he was an object of curiosity to the people in the Fields, and got up hastily from the bench, and walked off in the direction of Bedford Row.

He felt neither hunger nor weariness, though he was using up the last stores of his energy. He was conscious of nothing in all the universe save the sense of failure and the plot of the world to hold him down. The magnitude of London came about him in those loud and unquiet streets, and overshadowed him with a sense of impotence which seemed to break his heart.

He walked till the manuscript slipped from his arm and fell to the pavement. Before he quite knew that it had fallen he found himself sprawling on the stones, with the manuscript under his body. Something came rushing up to him, enveloped him in flame, and passed on, leaving behind it a hissing in his ears, like the noise of the steam of engines in a railway station. Some one was holding him up; some one else was speaking to him; in a moment the whole world seemed to be surrounding him. He felt money pressed into his hand, and heard a voice say, "Come along, old chap; what you want is a bit of food and a cup of hot coffee." He walked forward, strangers on either side of him, the crowd melting away in front of them.

A policeman came up and looked him over, the men at his side saying something

about hunger. The policeman seemed satisfied, and went off.

He found himself in a coffee-house, seated before a table, and opened the palm of his hand and let the money which had been given to him fall on the table, noticing that his manuscript was there. One of the men at his side said to him, "That's all right, chum; put it away; it will come in useful another day," and picked up the silver coins and dropped them into his jacket pocket, saying, "I'll see we aren't locked up for not paying the bill."

He drank coffee, ate food, and tried to speak. Presently he could speak, but the words which came to his lips were not his own. He tried to stop, but found that he couldn't. He looked from one man to the other, still speaking, and both of them nodded at him, as if they understood what he was saying, and one of them said, "That'll be all right, chum; don't you fret yourself about that."

He saw that these men were treating him as if he were an invalid, and made a greater effort still to stop himself from speaking. Presently he discovered that the words which were pouring out of him against his will, took the horrible form of a boast—a boast that he knew Leo Daga, had given Leo Daga many of his best ideas, and had spent hundreds of pounds on the famous playwright. With this discovery, which terrified him, he fell suddenly silent, glowered on his hosts with suspicion, drank more coffee, began to eat greedily, and told himself that he had almost betrayed his great secret.

He knew then why he had been born into the world, and what was required of him. But this knowledge must be kept from the whole world till the deed had been done. At all costs, even if he had to kill these two men, his secret must be kept.

He wondered whether he had betrayed it. Had he, before he pulled himself up, let fall a hint which would give these men a clue? Who were they, these two strangers who had led him on to talk against his will? He looked at them under the lowered lids of his eyes, and told himself that they were detectives. These men had tracked down his father, and now they were tracking him down. Had he let them know his secret?

Out of the corners of his eyes he stole a glance at the manuscript on the table, and then looked quickly away, pretending he had not seen it. He realised with a transfixing poignancy of terror that his name and address were on the envelope, and that these detectives possessed in his masterpiece a damning clue both to his identity and to his purpose. He drank the rest of his coffee, set down the cup, and, pointing to the manuscript, said, "What is that?" They told him it was something he had dropped when he fainted. He answered, "It's nothing to do with me. I've never seen it before." One of the men said, "Well, it was handed to me, and the party what

handed it said you had dropped it." "He made a mistake," said Stephen, and looked away as if the subject had no further interest for him.

Almost at the same moment he felt in his pockets for money, and one of the men promptly told him not to do that, as he was paying the bill. Stephen said, "I insist upon paying." He produced a two-shilling piece, a shilling, and a sixpence, and put them down on the table. "Take 'em up, mate," said the man; "I asked you in here, and I stand the racket." The other man picked up the coins and passed them across the table to Stephen.

"I have my reasons," said Stephen, "for leaving that money on the table. The die is cast, and the muezzin has called from his tower, *Rien ne va plus*." He looked at the man on the opposite side of the table, tapped the manuscript very significantly, and said, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.* Do not forget, either, that for thirty pieces of silver Judas made his name execrable for ever and ever; amen."

He felt, in saying this, that he had told the men he knew what they were after; and also he felt that he had, as it were, put them on their honour not to arrest him till the deed was done for which he had been born into the world. He rose with an assumption of great dignity, looked from one man to the other with rebukeful eyes, and said, "It is the will of God that I should execute justice, and he who attempts to hinder me shall be broken on his own doorstep."

They endeavoured to keep him with them a little longer; they begged him to take up the money on the table; they offered to go with him to his home and see him safely into the care of his friends; but he said, "A vision has been given to me; I know what is in your minds," and went out of the place, leaving his manuscript on the table, and those two honest men, who had been so good to him, utterly bewildered.

VIII

Wonderful to Stephen was the appearance of the crowded streets as he came out of the coffee-shop. Nothing, he found, was to be seen there in any substance, because of the transfiguring glory which filled the whole earth. The houses and shops glittered, burned, and quivered with the transparency of molten glass. Vehicles passed through this divine brightness like luminous smoke. People were nothing more than faint trembling lines of pencil in the midst of a nimbus. Sounds, too, were changed by this descent of God's glory to the earth; they were no longer loud, jarring, and discordant, but moved like ripples of water through the transplendency of the air.

With no surprise Stephen heard the song of heaven above his head, and with no surprise saw angels descending in a great host to the earth. With no amazement he saw these bright spirits moving unharmed in the midst of the traffic and passing through walls of stone and brick, singing as they went. To him it was natural because it was explicable. God had brought this fire of glory to the earth, not merely to blind the two detectives following him from behind, so that they might lose themselves in the flaming mist, but because a deed was to be done in which the whole of heaven would rejoice, a deed fore-ordained, from all time, a deed to which he had been predestinated before the foundations of the world were laid.

An angel approached him with a smile of blessing, took his hand, and walked at his side. He knew now that he need not plot and plan to do this great deed which God required of him. He had only to go forward, and all would be well with him.

Side by side with this bright spirit he arrived at the street in which he lived. He was approaching the door of his house when the angel checked him, drew him aside, and at that moment he saw Mike Bramley issue from the house accompanied by the two men who had sat with him in the coffee-house. When they were out of sight, the angel said to him, "Go up now; I will wait for you."

He went up the stairs, entered the room, saw without surprise that his manuscript lay on the table, took the pistol from the drawer, loaded it, and descended to the street. The angel was still there, but the glory had departed. He could see quite plainly now the gloom and grime of houses, the crowds of shabby people hurrying through the lamplight, and hear the clangour of incessant traffic. The angel said to him, "You are set in the midst of many and great dangers."

He walked forward, the angel at his side holding his hand, and came to a place where church bells were ringing a hymn. He tried to remember the name of the hymn, but it eluded him, and his heart was troubled. The angel said to him, "Peace, perfect peace," and at once the trouble left his heart and he could hear the words of the hymn in the bells high above the roofs of London. The angel led him to the church, and he knew it, and went up the steps, entered the porch, and looked at the crowded congregation waiting for a service to begin, and stood there saying to himself, "Their prayers shall be answered."

It seemed to be quite dark when he came from the church. He stood looking towards Trafalgar Square, and could see dimly the figure of Nelson high up in the darkness, but nothing else. The angel had departed. He descended the steps of the church hoping that the angel would come to him again. He waited there for some moments, and then saw the angel ahead of him on his right, above the flood of traffic in the street. He went forward, walking quickly, but when he raised his eyes again he

saw that the angel had given place to Nurse Cavell, who looked at him with a smile, and seemed to tell him that he must follow the same hard road which she had travelled, and travel it alone.

He became exalted, and walked forward knowing that the angel would not come to him again because his deed was to cost him an extreme of anguish.

IX

Leo Daga's motor-car drew up at the house in which he lived, and Leo Daga got out from it. He spoke a few words to his chauffeur, feeling in his pocket for his latchkey, and moved to the door. As the car glided away, Stephen came up to him, and said, "I must speak to you."

He came so suddenly and silently out of the shadows that Leo Daga was startled, and said, "Who are you? What do you want?" But seeing at that moment who it was, he said, "Oh, it's you, Stephen! Well, what do you want?"

Stephen made no reply to this question, and his silence, as well as the look of suffering in his eyes, shamed Leo Daga into bidding him come indoors. As they went up the carpeted stairs together, Leo Daga saw the emaciated condition of Stephen and the extreme poverty of his clothes, and felt troubled in his heart, feeling that he must do something to help this poor creature, even if he were a waster and a degenerate.

"You are not looking very well," he said.

"I have been ill," Stephen replied.

"I am sorry."

They said no more till they reached the landing. Leo Daga opened the door with his key, stood on one side, and said, "You know your way in." Stephen went forward into the sitting-room, and Leo Daga, who had switched on the lights in that room, took off his coat and hat, leaving them in the hall.

Stephen stood in the familiar room, looking at nothing, saying to himself, "He was at our table when the man went up the ladder with this pistol in his pocket: that is something more than a chance coincidence." He put his hand into his pocket and ran his fingers along the barrel of the pistol, remembering how he had once tasted that metal and shrunk from suicide.

Leo Daga entered the room fingering the butterfly ends of his tie with both hands. "You would like a drink, I expect," he said, with an affectation of cheerfulness. "Help yourself to cigarettes." He rang the bell, glanced at his reflection in a mirror, smoothed his hair, and turned about to look at Stephen.

Stephen was standing in the centre of the room, looking down at the carpet, trembling. He wanted to hate Leo Daga, but found that he could not do so. Something in Leo Daga's voice, something in the ease and friendliness of his manner, revived memories in Stephen's mind which were kindly and undramatic.

"Here are the cigarettes," Leo Daga said, and opened a box, presenting it to Stephen. Stephen replied, "I do not smoke," without raising his eyes from the floor.

The servant entered the room, started on seeing Stephen, and went out again to obey Leo Daga's order. Leo Daga moved about the room uneasily.

Stephen, who was still standing, raised his eyes and looked at the picture by Fragonard. That seemed to help him, and he said, "Why do you hang such pictures in your room?"

"Don't you like it?" Leo Daga asked, and took a cigarette from the box.

"It is evil," said Stephen.

Leo Daga laughed, and replied, "Have you turned Puritan?"—and lighted his cigarette.

Stephen said, "It is unhealthy, like that Barcarolle of Offenbach which they play in restaurants and tea-shops."

Leo Daga laughed softly. "You are very exacting, then, in music as well as in painting?"

Stephen sat down, looked at a bowl of orchids on a table at his side, and said, "These flowers are also evil."

"There was a man," said Leo Daga, standing elegantly in front of the fire, "who did not believe in God. He was taken through a hothouse full of orchids. When he came out he believed in a devil."

Stephen said, "Why do you smile at that?"

"Isn't it amusing?"

"Do you believe in God?"

Leo Daga shrugged his shoulders.

Stephen said, "You daren't."

"What do you mean?"

"You dare not believe in God. If you did, you would not dare to take the devil's wages."

Leo Daga laughed again. "Come," he said; "you once accused *me* of taking myself too seriously! What's come to you, Stephen? You begin, my dear fellow, to take yourself as seriously as the Pope."

Stephen looked at him and said, "Aubrey Beardsley drew evil pictures. The publisher had to examine them with a microscope for hidden and disguised

obscenities which would have got him put in prison. When he came to die, Aubrey Beardsley was afraid. He implored his friends to get hold of all those beautiful but evil drawings and burn them. Your plays are more evil than Beardsley pictures. One day you will be ashamed that you have written them, and afraid when you consider what corruption they have spread in the world. Why aren't you ashamed now, and afraid?"

"Well," said Leo Daga, smiling, "I am always, I assure you, trying to do better. An artist, you know, is never satisfied with his work."

The servant appeared with a tray, which he carried to a table in a corner of the room and set it down there.

"Would you like some sandwiches?" asked Leo Daga.

Stephen shook his head.

Leo Daga directed a meaning glance at his servant, and asked, "When does Mr. Burlingham call to-night?"

"In a few minutes, sir," replied the servant.

"Show him into the other room when he comes, and let me know."

"I will, sir."

Leo Daga walked over to the table in the corner of the room, and asked, "What may I give you? Whisky, or cognac?"

"Nothing," answered Stephen.

"Oh, come; a little whisky?"

"Nothing."

Leo Daga shrugged his shoulders, and said, "This is very unlike you; but do tell me what has happened to change you so thoroughly. That should be interesting."

He crossed the room to the big chair, threw himself into it, and regarded Stephen with a quizzical smile.

Stephen answered this bantering look with darkness on his brows, and said, "I am here to give you a message. You have been weighed in the scales, Leo Daga, and found wanting. It is the will of God that you should no more corrupt the world. Because you have trafficked in evil, and evil to enrich yourself, and embraced evil to make yourself famous, and because you have mocked at all that is good and noble in the heart of man, corrupting thousands, spreading the contagion of your evil soul among the young of this generation to their immortal hurt and to the danger of the world, because of these things, Leo Daga, your soul is to go down this night into hell."

Leo Daga's eyebrows had quivered above the bright dancing light in his eyes during the first part of this utterance. Towards its end, however, the expression of his

face changed to one of annoyance; and finally, at the last words, a look of alarm flashed into his eyes. He sat up more straightly in his chair, put down his cigarette, and looked at Stephen with that look of alarm in his eyes, his brain working rapidly to discover a way out of this unpleasant and perhaps perilous encounter.

"I asked you in here, Stephen," he said presently, speaking gently and reproachfully, "because I thought you looked as if you wanted help, and because I was, and of course am still, so very willing to help you. Won't you let me do that, instead of bringing charges against me which, without vanity, I hope, seem to me rather unfair?"

Stephen asked him, "What help could you give me?"

Leo Daga said, "The help that one friend gives to another."

Stephen leaned forward in his chair and said, "You have never helped man, woman, or child except to the devil. How would you help me? As you helped me when we first met?—by advice which drew me from the one man I loved in all the world, from the one woman in all the world who could have saved my soul from destruction? How else would you help me? With money?—but money, how earned? With food and drink?—but food and drink, how paid for? Is there any other help you can give? Can you help the soul that is perishing of sin, or the heart that is breaking with remorse? If the Magdalen came to you in tears, what could you do for her? Would you point her to that picture?—or would you give her a cigarette and a drink, and tell her not to take herself too seriously? And you speak of giving help to me!—I, who have been down into hell, but this day have seen the angels ascending and descending, and have walked with an angel's hand in mine, carrying in my soul the commission of an outraged Heaven to execute justice!" He was swept away by his own words. With a blaze of anger in his eyes he cried out, "Leo Daga, you trifler with human souls, you mocker of all things high and holy, you poisoner of the wells at which alone humanity can drink the water of life—your hour has come!"

In saying these last words, Stephen sprang to his feet, drew the pistol from his pocket, and cried, "Shut your eyes till they open in hell!" Then he fired, and Leo Daga, who had leapt from his chair, and who was advancing upon him, fell to the ground, striking the table before the fireplace and bringing it down with him to the ground.

At the report of the pistol, Stephen shuddered from head to foot, the corridors of his brain echoing with its dreadful noise; at the fall of Leo Daga to the ground, that fevered brain reeled and he knew what he had done. A look of terror crossed his ashen face, twitching all his features convulsively, and then gave way with an appalling swiftness to an expression of ferocious cunning. He was possessed now by

a single idea—to escape capture.

The door of the room opened with sudden violence, and the servant looked in.

"Your master has shot himself," said Stephen. "Attend to him while I go for a doctor."

The man wavered, but as Stephen came towards him, decided that it would be safer for him to affect belief in this statement. He entered the room, and Stephen, going to the door, which he had left open, closed it, swung suddenly round, raised the pistol, and said, "Hands up!"

The man turned deadly white, and put up his hands, backing away from Stephen.

Stephen commanded him to sit down, covering him with the pistol, and went to the bureau, drew a chair to the telephone, and sat down. "Move an inch," he said, "and I blow your brains out."

He looked at Leo Daga, lying so still beside the overturned table, with cigarettes scattered on the floor, the gold box lying open, and a bowl of flowers broken against the grate. He saw blood on the carpet where Leo Daga's face pressed on the ground. He lifted the telephone and gave the call for the police. When it was answered, he said, "I am Stephen Laslett, Member of Parliament, speaking from the flat of Mr. Leo Daga. Mr. Daga has been murdered by his servant. I've got him here as my prisoner. Come at once and arrest him."

The servant said nothing, his one overmastering fear being that Stephen would shoot him before the police arrived.

Stephen hung up the telephone, walked to the centre of the room, looked down at the body of Leo Daga, and said to the man, "You have brushed his clothes for the last time. How trivial now is all his finery! Look at him, the man of fashion, lying in the dust, of less value now than a dead pheasant." He looked up suddenly, with a black frown in his eyes, and said to the servant, "You'll swing for this unless you square me. If you like to say that your master was trying to kill you and that in your struggle to take the pistol from him it went off and killed him, I will say that that is the truth. Will you agree?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you can put your hands down."

The man put down his hands.

"You can say," said Stephen, "that your master became infuriated with you because you were attempting to remove that offensive picture from the wall." He looked at the picture. "I will say," he added, "that you were taking it down because it is a wicked picture. And it is a wicked picture. It is too wicked to live. I will kill it

myself before the police come. We don't want things like that produced in court and photographed in the cheap newspapers. They do evil, pictures of that nature. To treat woman as a courtesan and not as a mother is to poison the headwaters of human life." He raised the pistol and fired two shots into the picture, smashing the glass and ripping the canvas. He laughed with satisfaction. "That's good, is it not? That's work that counts. I'll light such a fire in London to-night as by God's grace shall never be put out. Have a drink, valet? You look pale, man. We'll both have a drink. When the police come we'll make them drunk too. This is a night to be celebrated with joy and thanksgiving."

He went to the table where the decanters and glasses stood, poured out half a tumbler of neat whisky, and handed it to the trembling servant. He went back to the table and helped himself to whisky, drank it, helped himself to brandy, drank that, and laughed with great pleasure, turning from the table in order to take a cigarette. But as he advanced he saw the body of Leo Daga on the floor, the cigarettes heaped all round his body, and he stopped, and frowned, and said, "Why did you do that?"

The valet said, "Because he tried to kill me, sir."

"See how he has upset the cigarettes on the floor. Why did he knock the table over?"

"That fell, sir, when we were struggling together."

"Is he dead?"

"I think so, sir."

"What, quite dead?"

"He hasn't moved, sir."

"No, he hasn't moved. We mustn't touch him, of course. There may be finger-prints. He lies very still. I never saw a man lie so still as that. There's such a stillness about him as almost makes him sacred. He can't move a finger now. He can't smile. He can't whisper a single word. Just look at him, how very still he lies. Why, he's not breathing. The very breath has gone out of his body. Well, if he's dead, his soul's in hell; you've only got to look at the picture of that naked woman to see that. Certainly, his soul is in hell. Listen!"

The servant said, "They've come to take me away."

Stephen said, "Go quietly; it's far the best way. I'll arrange that you have flowers in your cell and plenty of good books. I will come to see you. If possible, I will go bail for you."

He went out of the room, and opened the door of the flat. An inspector of police, two constables, and three or four people dressed in evening clothes were

standing there on the landing, the police near the door, the people by the stairs. Before Stephen had recovered from his surprise at seeing people there in evening dress, the police entered the flat, shut the door, and surrounded him.

The inspector said to him, "Who are you?"

At the same moment one of the constables seized the pistol and wrenched it from his hand. "Arrest him," said the inspector. Stephen found himself held on either side by the two constables. He said to them, "Who are those people outside? What are they doing there? How do you know they are not angels in disguise?"

The inspector walked forward to the open door of the drawing-room. The valet, who was standing just inside, called out, "Have you got him? He has murdered Mr. Daga, and he's still armed."

The inspector said, "All right: keep quiet."

Stephen saw the inspector looking at the body of Leo Daga, and exclaimed, "You can't call it murder. You can't call it manslaughter. All you can call it is an execution." The inspector turned and glanced at the two constables who were holding Stephen, and at the next moment he was handcuffed.

Stephen looked down at the handcuffs, and then directed his gaze to the body of Leo Daga. "But for you," he said, "this would never have happened to me."

CHAPTER XI

MEMORIES

I

Hugh Jodrell chanced to be in London at the time of the murder of Leo Daga, summoned there by a telegram from his father: the aunt who lived in Herbert Crescent was dying, and desired to see Hugh before she passed away. He was with her when Stephen was walking through the streets of London with the rejected manuscript under his arm.

He found this amiable old lady, who had always been so kind to him, perfectly placid, perfectly able to talk to him sensibly, and even disposed to be a little humorous. She inquired about the school with great interest, warned him against "mollycoddling" the two hundred boys now under his charge, and informed him that he would inherit the bulk of her money, the house in which she had lived ever since she was married, and all her furniture. She recommended him to sell the house, because small houses in London just then were "fetching a quite ridiculous price," and advised him to get married as soon as possible to a sensible, nice woman, and to furnish his home with the furniture she was leaving to him, "which was Early Victorian and therefore good." She was speaking of this matter of marriage, rather teasing Hugh about it, at the time when Stephen was with Leo Daga.

Hugh slept that night in the house which was so soon to become his own. At five o'clock in the morning he was called by the nurse and told that his aunt was dying. He hurried to her room in his dressing-gown. She rebuked the nurse for disturbing his sleep, took his hand, smiled at him, and closed her eyes. After a few moments she pressed his hand, and, without opening her eyes, said gently and lovingly, "A nice true English boy." With the last word she passed away, a smile on her lips that seemed to express both affection and amusement.

At eight o'clock Hugh went to his father's new town house, in Lower Seymour Street. After talking about the peacefulness of his aunt's death, and discussing the arrangements for her funeral, he reported to his father and mother, while they were at breakfast, what his aunt had said to him about making him her heir. Lady Emily Jodrell said, "I am very glad to hear it, dear Hugh, but not surprised: she loved you from the time when you were quite a baby." Mr. Jodrell looked at his son with

paternal satisfaction, and said, "I can tell you, old man, within two or three thousand pounds what you will inherit." He paused to make a mental calculation, and added with authority, "Sixty-five thousand pounds."

At that moment the door opened and one of Hugh's sisters hurriedly entered the room, a newspaper open in her hand. She said to Hugh, folding back the paper, "There's something here you ought to see, but it will distress you dreadfully." Her father started up, saying with annoyance and agitation, "What is it?—what is it?" Hugh put out his hand for the paper. While he was taking it, his sister said to her father, "Stephen Laslett has shot some one."

Hugh saw in a swift glance at the headlines what had happened, and who was the victim. He looked up at his father, putting the paper down on the table, and said, "He has shot Leo Daga, the playwright." His voice was perfectly under control, but his body had gone ice cold, and his heart felt as if it had been struck a violent blow. He got up from the table, dazed by this dreadful news, hardly able to breathe, and said, "I suppose they won't let me see him; but I must certainly go and make inquiries. What are the formalities in cases of this kind? What has one got to do?"

His mother, who had possessed herself of the newspaper he had laid down, looked up from her reading, still holding the paper before her, and tried to deter him from going to Stephen, saying in a rather off-handed manner that as he could do nothing why should he go. Her eyes were studying her son's face anxiously. Mr. Jodrell agreed with Hugh's idea, and said solemnly that he would go with him to the police-station, and see what could be done in the matter.

At that, Lady Emily lowered the paper to her knees, looked warningly at her husband, and said, "Hugh is not well enough to go. I'm sure he's not. Just look at him!"

As she spoke, Hugh turned sick, felt himself on the edge of a faint, caught hold of a chair, and sat down. He said, "I shall be all right in a moment."

It was decided, half an hour later, that Hugh should go first to Stephen's mother, and inquire from her what he could do to be of help to Stephen. If there was any hope of seeing Stephen, he was to return to Lower Seymour Street, pick up Mr. Jodrell, and drive on to the police-station. In the meantime, Mr. Jodrell would attend to the affairs of Herbert Crescent.

Hugh arrived at Mrs. Laslett's shop to find Lionel Olphert in charge of it. Olphert was utterly cast down and dejected by this fresh disaster to the Laslett family. He said that he agreed with Mrs. Laslett that it would ruin her business. "People have been extraordinarily kind to her," he said, "backing her up because of the courage with which she met her sudden poverty; but murder is such a horrible

thing: we shall have crowds of morbid people staring in at our windows for days and days, perhaps weeks; and of course our real customers will keep away."

Hugh suggested that Olphert should pull down the blinds, lock up the shop, and go with him to see Mrs. Laslett. He said he thought it would be rather unnatural to keep the shop open during Stephen's trial. Olphert agreed, and said he had tried to persuade Mrs. Laslett to take that view, but Mrs. Laslett had insisted on "keeping open," saying that she lowered her flag to no disaster.

However, Olphert took Hugh's view of the matter, and none too soon, apparently, for people began just then to stop in front of the window and stare into its interior. Olphert at once pulled down the blinds, and said to Hugh, "Isn't it dreadful, how there is always a crowd of idle people in London to gloat over misfortune?" As he drew dust-sheets over the goods in the shop, he said, "People fly to the scene of a murder or a burglary, like so many vultures. I am always astonished, too, by the mob of women who surround a church when a so-called fashionable wedding is to take place there. Haven't they any duties? And why should they want to see a fashionable bride more than any other bride? Is it all a part of the snobbishness in which newspapers seem to glory? I expect you have often been just as astonished as I am to see the photographs of people in the illustrated papers of whom one has never heard, all labelled as 'fashionable.' Poor Mrs. Laslett, I'm afraid this calamity, this incredible calamity, will be too much even for her."

It seemed to Hugh, who himself always took things quietly, that the most incredible fact of this calamity was the cool way in which Lionel Olphert could talk about it and Mrs. Laslett think about it. To him it was the most awful and staggering thing the mind could hold. He was thinking of Stephen as he had known him so affectionately for all the purest years in their two lives, and he could not begin to understand how this brilliant and joyous creature, shining with his gifts as a banner shines in sunlight, could have come to be a murderer.

Then there was in his mind, gnawing at his peace and preying on his vitality, the oppressive thought of his failure to save Stephen from disaster. He felt certain that he had not done enough; he was convinced that he might have done more, and ought to have done more. Had he not lost his temper at their last encounter, and to lose one's temper about a friend, is that not a form of treachery? He was overwhelmed by a sense of depression, and found a favourite verse of a modern poet running in his mind, running there like the sound of a mournful burn in the Highlands, rebuking him with failure, and yet in some way, some morbid and egotistic way, helping him to accept that failure:

"A lost thing could I never find,
Nor a broken thing mend;
And I fear I shall be all alone
When I get towards the end.
Who will there be to comfort me,
Or who will be my friend?"

Olphert continued to chatter on the drive to Earl's Court, but more usefully. He told Hugh that Stephen had been going down and down for the last year—right down, down to the gutter. There was little doubt in his mind that this murder must have been committed in a drunken frenzy. Stephen, in fact, had been a dipsomaniac for well over a year, and before that he had got into the mad habit of drinking cocktails at all hours of the day and night, taking no exercise, mixing with thoroughly low people, women as well as men, priding himself on a sort of Byronic contempt for the decencies of life.

He said, "Of course my people will now urge that it is impossible for me to marry Phillida, the sister of a murderer; but I shall hold out against them still. Nothing can alter my opinion that she is one of the sweetest girls in the world."

Hugh inquired how Phillida bore this last dreadful blow.

"She is prostrated by it," replied Olphert. "I did not see her this morning, but her mother told me. Mrs. Laslett said that she would like to send her to Miss Anstey in Silverton, but that she supposed Miss Anstey would not now wish to receive her. I never have seen Mrs. Laslett so—I won't say crushed, but so completely daunted. I think it is a blow which will leave a scar in her nature for the rest of her life. What a shame it is! I don't know that I have ever met a woman who can hold a candle to her."

They were shown into Mrs. Laslett's sitting-room, which she had made cheerful and friendly, defying the vulgarity of the architect and the inquisitive gloom of that depressing street to defeat her insistence on brightness and beauty. There were vases full of rather strident tulips, trumpet daffodils, and pots of pink, mauve, and white hyacinths. The cushions in the chairs and on the sofa were of a challenging brilliance. Scarcely a table there but had its photograph of distinguished-looking people in ornamental tall frames of shining gilt.

She came to them in a few minutes, dressed to go out—pale and awed, but not in any way broken. She greeted Hugh with a certain coldness, and turned to Lionel Olphert with a kinder look, inquiring whether he had left any one in charge of the shop.

She spoke of the murder in an even and business-like tone of voice, taking for granted that Stephen would not be hanged but sent to a lunatic asylum. She said that the effect of this horrible notoriety on her business would be, of course, fatal; that effect, however, did not so much concern her, she said, as the effect on Phillida of this monstrous and deadly act. What to do for poor Phillida, she did not know. She had sent for the doctor, and must wait till he came before going to the police-court. She understood, she said, that Stephen would be charged at about eleven o'clock, that the proceedings would take only a few minutes, and that she would be allowed to see him afterwards.

"What to say to him," she exclaimed wearily, going to a chair by the window, and sitting down with her back to the light, "I do not know; I haven't the least idea. What does a mother say to her son," she demanded, with asperity, "when he has committed a murder?"

There was a knock at the door. She rose quickly to her feet, saying, "Here is the doctor," and called out, "Come in."

The door opened, and a little shabby maidservant entered with a telegram on a china plate.

Mrs. Laslett opened the envelope with disappointment, and said, as she took out the message, "I can't think what is keeping the doctor." She walked to the window and read the telegram. "There's no answer," she said in a voice that trembled.

The maid went out, and Mrs. Laslett sat down, reading the telegram again. Slowly she raised her head, and held out the message to Olphert, signing to Hugh that he also was to read it.

Hugh drew to Olphert's side, wondering what had happened, and Olphert moved the telegram so that they could both read it together. It ran: "Please let Phillida come to me at once. I am getting her room ready for her. Wire her train and I will meet it. Give her my dearest love.—Susan."

Olphert was the first to speak. He exclaimed at the sweetness and goodness of Susan Anstey, saying that Mrs. Laslett should go to Phillida at once with this most welcome news, which would do more to cheer her up than anything else.

Mrs. Laslett said, "If Stephen had married that girl, this would never have happened."

She rose, and went from the room with Susan's telegram in her hand and with tears in her eyes.

II

It was some weeks before Hugh was allowed to see Stephen, and up till that moment he had to content himself with Mrs. Laslett's report on his condition. She told Hugh that Stephen had quite evidently lost his reason, that he had fallen into a most morbid state of mind, and that, although he was committed to take his trial on the capital charge, it was certain he would escape the extreme penalty of the law and be sent to an asylum. She didn't say so, but Hugh could see from her manner that Stephen had repulsed her, and had perhaps forbidden her to come near him again.

With the memory of this conversation uppermost in his mind, Hugh set out some weeks afterwards to find the suburban jail in which Stephen was now imprisoned, waiting his trial. He wondered if he, too, would be repulsed, and if this was to be the last time in his life when he would see Stephen, and if they would converse together in the presence of a warder and separated by a fence of wire.

The warder on the gate, hearing his name, gave Hugh a friendly smile, and himself went with him across the yard—where a party of prisoners with brooms and wheelbarrows was at work—chatting pleasantly, and telling Hugh he had often seen him on the football field. There were sparrows just ahead of the prisoners, and flowers in distant beds, and bright sunshine on the prison walls. Hugh thought he had never seen men so abject and yet so terribly grotesque as those miserable little prisoners sweeping in the yard. The proud warder stopped at the entrance to the prison-building, called to another warder standing on the top of the steps to take "this gentlemen" to Dr. Ladd, and with a cheerful smile, and a respectful salute, returned hastily to his gate.

Hugh was conducted to a comfortable room in the main building, and on entering it was greeted by a young, dapper, and alert man, who rose briskly, put out his hand, and said, with a boyish smile, "I don't suppose you'll remember me, but I once or twice played football against you when I was at Guy's." He explained to Hugh, offering a chair and presenting a box of cigarettes, that on hearing he was to pay the prison a visit he could not resist the pleasure of a few minutes' talk with him.

They talked for a little of the men they had known, and of certain matches memorable to both of them, Hugh all the time very dazed and discomposed, and then the young doctor, who was an enthusiastic and most sympathetic student of the criminal mind, began to speak of Stephen.

"He wants to see you," he said, "and I'm very glad you have come, because I think you may do him real good. We want, if possible, to revive in his mind memories of the days when he took a healthy interest in life, before he let the world get hold of him. His mind is badly damaged, but I don't think hopelessly. He'll go to Broadmoor, and if he makes the effort, he'll be able, I'm certain, to recover his

reason. Come along, I'll take you to him."

They went through long stone corridors, in which the doors of cells stood open, and where numbers of prisoners were engaged in polishing, cleaning, and scrubbing, with warders in charge of them. The warders saluted the doctor, and looked at Hugh. One of the prisoners touched his mate and whispered, "That's Jodrell the footballer," and Hugh caught that whisper just as the warder called angrily, "Silence, there!"

They crossed a small yard, and entered another building. The doctor paused, and, lowering his voice, said to Hugh, "These are the observation cells. Laslett is in the third. We'll walk through the place and you can take a look at him before we go in."

Hugh's heart began to thump against his breast, and he felt that he was suffocating. He had to make a real effort at self-mastery before he could go forward after the doctor.

At the iron gate of the first cell an old man with a long white beard was sitting on a low stool, his melancholy face pressed against the iron bars, his dark eyes staring into the corridor, seeing nothing. Hugh shuddered at the sight of him. In the next, a middle-aged, portly, and bald-headed man, with his hands clasped behind his back, was walking rapidly to and fro, his eyes fixed on the ground. In the third, Stephen was sitting slackly on a small upright chair in the centre of the cell, his face to the corridor, his back to the light, reading a book, one leg crossed over the other, his whole attitude one of slackness and dejection. At the sight of him behind that iron gate Hugh felt that a dagger had been suddenly driven into his heart, and yet at the next moment he was conscious of a sense of relief—for these cells were like rooms, and Stephen was dressed in good clothes, and looked clean and healthy, and appeared to be interested in his book in spite of his lassitude and dejection.

The doctor whispered to Hugh when they got to the end of the building, "Talk to him quite naturally, as if nothing had happened, and don't be in the least afraid of him. He's quite harmless now—a tremendous talker, very egocentric, but entirely harmless."

They went back. At the opening of the gate by a warder, Stephen slowly and rather resentfully raised his head, a heavy frown in his eyes. "I've brought an old friend to see you, Laslett," said the doctor cheerfully; "at least, an old friend of yours, but an old enemy of mine!"

Stephen said, "Hullo, Jodder, old man!" and got up wearily and gave Hugh his hand, smiling rather guiltily, like a schoolboy, and then looking about him for a chair.

The doctor said to Hugh, "How do you think he looks? We're rather proud of

him, you know. He's very nearly our prize patient."

Hugh said hoarsely, trying to smile and trying to appear at his ease, that Stephen looked far better than when he last saw him.

Stephen replied to Hugh, indicating the doctor, "These fellows think they know all about me. They know nothing."

The doctor laughed. "None of your nonsense, Laslett! We know at least something about you, and if we don't know any more than that, it's only because you won't tell us."

"You wouldn't understand if I did," said Stephen.

"Well, you might at least give us a chance."

Stephen said to Hugh, "He's not a bad fellow, and I'm grateful to him for many things; but he knows as much about the workings of the human spirit as a plumber mending a leak in a pipe knows about the flooding glory of God. It's pathetic, I assure you, to hear him speak. So well-meaning, and so distressingly limited!"

The doctor laughed with real pleasure at this, and said, "Well, I'll leave you to talk with Mr. Jodrell, and I hope you'll forget all about me and my limitations directly my back's turned."

"I didn't like to ask you to go," said Stephen, "but I'm very glad that you are going!"

The doctor's pleasant laugh sounded with the click of the lock in the iron gate, and Stephen turned to Hugh, pointed to a chair, and said quietly, "Sit down, Jodder. There's a lot I want to say to you."

Hugh sat down in the comfortable cell, and tried to appear at his ease, tried to forget that he was locked in with a murderer, and that all about him were men on the borderline which separates sanity from madness. He was gratefully surprised to find that he could at any rate look at Stephen without betraying the deep emotion which possessed him, and also that he could think of Stephen as Stephen, and not as a prisoner locked up like a wild beast on account of a heinous crime.

Stephen drew his own chair close up to Hugh's, and said, "To begin with, I should like to ask whether you have ever noticed an odd mistake in the Collect for Grace. I have only just discovered it." He held up the book in his hand. "This is the official document of the Church. It is Phillida's first prayer-book. She sent it to me. It's rather pathetic. Let me show you. All the pages of the morning and evening service, you notice, are thumbed quite brown at the bottom; that's where her little hot hands must have held it when she was at school. And instead of George the Fifth, or Edward the Seventh even, the name here is that of our most gracious Sovereign Lady, Queen Victoria, taking one back almost to the days of Methuselah.

What a long time we've all lived, Jodder, and what evil we have known. But this is what I want you to see. Look here: it runs like this: *O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day*——Now, that amounts to congratulating the Almighty on His skill in bringing us from one day to another, doesn't it?—as if we were a lot of delicate glasses which He was carrying on a tray over some very slippery ground. What the prayer means to express, of course, is our gratitude that the Almighty has brought *us* safely to the beginning of a new day."

He closed the book and said, "It's a small point, but important. For, my dear fellow, if you were to suggest that the phrase should run, *who hast brought us safely to the beginning of this day*, it would take a hundred years before you could get a hearing. Revision, even revision necessary to make sense, is the one thing the Church cannot stand. It talks about revision, meaning revision in matters which are of no interest to the howling world of sin and evil, but even that revision never comes; and in the meantime the hosts of youth outside the Church multiply every year, dancing, laughing, singing, and sinning their way to destruction, while the congregation within dwindles to a party or sect of the old, the infirm, and the bigoted, clutching their official document to their hard hearts. It is very tragic. The Church is more guilty than it knows. However, I may have done something to awaken it. Life is a war, Jodder, and war involves killing."

He fell into a muse for some little time, and came out of it suddenly, a slow strange smile in his eyes. "It is really one of the most amusing experiences I have ever had in my life," he said quietly, "to talk to the chaplain here. Nothing on earth can make him see my deed in its true light. He takes the official view of it. The official view of the Church is that I have broken the sixth commandment. There it is as plain as plum-pudding, *Thou shalt do no murder*. The good fellow cannot take any other view of it than that. I say to him, 'But can you explain why I refused to plead guilty? I am not a liar. How is it, then, I have never once pleaded guilty to the charge of murder?' He shakes his head at me, talks about repentance, and says that God cannot forgive sin until the sinner confesses his sin, repents of it, and implores forgiveness. What a terrible thing it is, Jodder, to have an official mind!"

He put the prayer-book down on the ground at the side of his chair, sat up, folding his arms slackly across his chest, and said wearily and sorrowfully, "I executed Leo Daga, not because he had led me into the abyss, and left me there to perish, but because an example had to be made for the whole world. I was chosen for this great deed because I am the least of men, and it has ever been God's way to confound the wisdom of the world with the meanest weapons He can find. He hath

put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek. Poor little Phillida must have sung those words many times before my mother led her into the dazzling lights of a corrupt and godless world."

He sighed heavily, and continued, "This deed of mine is intended to force upon the attention of a flippant and insolent generation one of the supreme facts of human life, namely, man's responsibility to man. I hope you will teach the boys at your school to realise that they are responsible for their effect on other people. Every word we utter, every act we perform, even every expression on our face, sets up a vibration in the ether which reaches other spirits and influences them, either for good or for evil. It may be that in centuries to come there will be some memorial of my act erected to serve the higher life of the human race, some statue, perhaps; and if so, I should like no other words engraved on the plinth than those unlocking words of Jesus, *Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil*. They stand thinking about, those words. They'll last longer than the mocking and trifling epigrams of Leo. They'll outlive all the obscenities and levities of the modern spirit. And one day they'll be understood. Then the world will be saved. Humanity will be a brotherhood. The influence of thought and word will be to help, not to destroy."

He drew a sigh, clasped his hands together between his knees, bowed his head on his chest, and, after a pause of some moments, told Hugh that he had seen Mike Bramley, and that Mike had promised to write his biography, so that the world might clearly understand why it was expedient that Leo Daga should die. That was a most important point, the reason for Daga's execution.

He said that Leo Daga was no worse than other men, and that his devotion to sexual immorality was no greater than that of many other degenerate writers and painters; but he had committed the unpardonable sin of using his wit to deride honour, chastity, and moral effort as the dull imaginings of Puritanism, and that, of course, was to imperil the progress of humanity from ignorance to understanding.

He shifted on his chair, examined the palm of his right hand, as if seeking there for some clue to his own mental confusion, and muttered rather than said, "The Puritan exaggerated, but Leo Daga lied. The Puritan ignored art, but Leo Daga used it to serve the ends of iniquity. The Puritan was a fool, but Leo Daga was a scoundrel."

He sat back in his chair, stretched out his legs, crossing one foot over the other, and said wearily, impatiently, "To talk about art for art's sake is an absurdity so preposterous that only a madman could entertain the idea for a moment. Good God! we cannot move an inch without influencing some one else. We cannot think without

disturbing others with the vibrations of thought. How, then, can art be for itself? He who is not with me is against me. Either the influence of art is healthy or unhealthy; either it is serving the processes of evolution or opposing them. That is the lesson this age has got to learn before it can recover the ground lost in the war—the responsibility of man for everything he says, does, and thinks, because he can say, and do, and think nothing without influencing another."

All the time he was speaking in this way, unemotionally, without emphasis, sadly and sorrowfully, as if he felt that no one could understand him or share his vision, Hugh for his part was thinking of the doctor's injunction, that he should endeavour to cheer Stephen up, and remind him of the old days when he loved life and took an interest in all its healthy pleasures.

He said at last, "You and I, Stephen, often talked of these things at Eton, didn't we, and at Cambridge too? What happy days those were!"

Stephen replied, "They came back to me with greater force than you realised when I stayed with you at your school. They tormented me. They mocked me. They drove me at last to do a thing for which I shall be eternally sorry. Indeed, it is the one act in my life for which I feel an agony of remorse." He looked at Hugh, searching his eyes, and asked, "Has Susan ever told you about that?"

"What was it? I don't think so."

"Tell her," said Stephen, "that I can never think of the farewell I then took of her without shame and remorse, bitter shame, burning remorse. Ask her to forgive me. Ask her to send me word that she forgives me. She will understand what I mean."

Hugh said, "I'm quite certain she never thinks one single hard thought about you. She always speaks of you with the utmost affection."

"I would rather not speak of her any further. But please give her my message."

They were silent for several moments, moments of great awkwardness and distress for Jodrell, and then Stephen said, with a sudden and rather disconcerting cheerfulness, "I wish you could meet the chaplain here. He is really worth studying. He is far more interesting than the doctors. I should like to write a book on the official mind in religion. Take, for example, this fact. Every parson prays for truth —*granting us in this world knowledge of Thy truth*—but the parson is no more capable of receiving truth than an oyster. Why? Because he starts out with the assumption that he has got it already. Auto-suggestion has done its work in that little, hard, narrow, official mind of his. And so it comes about that when a prophet arises, and says to the Church, Your documents are full of untruths, full of errors, full of a gross darkness which obscures the continual revelation of God to man—the clergy all get together in a stew of indignation, and cry out, Alter our documents?

reconsider our tradition? Never! And next Sunday they kneel down as cool as cucumbers and say, *granting us in this world knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting*."

He turned suddenly to Hugh, a look of earnestness and astonishment in his eyes, put his hand on Hugh's knee, and exclaimed, "I'll bet you anything that there isn't a single parson in England who sees that my execution of Leo Daga was ordained by God, and will do more for religion than a century of their official services. Isn't it amazing?"

Hugh nodded a sympathetic head.

"A great inspirational act like that," continued Stephen, "shakes people up, startles them, enables them to see the world as it really is, and helps the few enlightened to perceive how vigorously God can act when His purpose is not merely challenged but actually imperilled by the mad insolence of a trivial generation."

"Yes."

"It was not easy for me, as you can imagine, to act as God's agent. It is not easy to kill another man, I can assure you. But when I look back upon that moment, which almost unseated my reason, I thank God I did not fail. And if I have to die for the deed, because the official-mind of the Law can no more understand the ways and methods of God than can the official mind of the Church, I shall go to the scaffold, humbly, but without one moment's uneasiness."

Hugh said, "You must not talk of dying, Stephen. That's not going to happen. You're coming back to us soon, and we're going to be very happy together."

Stephen lifted his head, a bright light burning in his dazed eyes, and exclaimed, "What, coming back to you and Susan? Do you suppose, my dear Jodder, I could bear to see you two together, man and wife, perhaps with children about you? Come, my dear fellow, after all I am but human. There are limits to my power of endurance. You mustn't think that because I have done this great deed that I am superhuman."

Hugh did not know what to say to this, and he was a little alarmed by the frenzied look which had come into Stephen's eyes; but he made an effort to smile, and said presently, "I do not think that is ever likely to happen, Stephen."

"You cannot deceive me. You love her, and she loves you. It is the Will of God that you two should marry, just as it is the Will of God that I should suffer and die in order to rouse this generation from its torpor. And by God's help I will strive to bear the knowledge that you and she are happy; but to look upon that happiness, to see it, to stand outside of it, like a homeless man looking in at a bright window, no, Hugh, no, that is more than I could endure."

He got up from his chair, took a turn up and down the room, returned, sat down, and said in a more natural tone of voice, "One thing I am very pleased about. This great deed of mine has restored Mike Bramley to the good graces of *Daily Life*. My biography is to appear in those columns directly my trial is over. It will do an immense amount of good, and as a side issue it will repay Mike something of the great debt I owe him. I see him very often. He is, I think, the only man in the world who understands me."

A warder, jingling his keys, came to the gate and unlocked it, the young doctor entering with a brisk step and a cheerful smile.

"Well, how have you got on?" he asked, looking from Hugh to Stephen.

Hugh said, "I hope very well."

Stephen looked at the doctor, and asked, "Suppose you had a patient with a cancerous growth; what would you do for him?"

The doctor said, "I should have it cut out for him."

"That is how God acts," said Stephen, "when the madness of the world threatens the sanity of mankind."

He turned to Hugh, gave him his hand, and said, "Tell Phillida you found me reading her prayer-book. Good-bye: we are not likely to meet again. I hope, I know, you will be very happy. Good-bye."

The doctor said cheerfully that he was sure Hugh would come many times to see Stephen; but Stephen replied, "I do not wish to see him again. He revives a memory fatal to my peace. He understands that." And he picked up Phillida's prayer-book from the floor, and sat down, opening its pages.

CHAPTER XII

THE IDOL

I

It was half-term, and a perfect summer day. The fathers and mothers who had come to visit their boys brought a sense of something new and stirring into the beautiful playing-fields of the school.

But there was considerable anxiety among the masters and boys congregated round the cricket-field when the fathers, sturdily defying all the bowling that the school could bring against them, passed the century with only five wickets down. This anxiety was aggravated when the score of these defiant fathers stood at a hundred and fifty with only two more wickets gone.

There was this to be said for the boys, those very little boys playing against those very tall fathers, that the wicket was as true as a billiard table, and that among the fathers there was a young fellow of thirty-eight who played for the famous Roundabout Cricket Club, and an elderly grey-haired gentleman over six feet in height who had played for Charterhouse forty-three years ago, and who had spent most of his spare time, to judge by his conversation on these occasions, in watching such great giants of the game as W. G. Grace, C. T. Studd, Arthur Shrewsbury, George Lohmann, and Tom Hayward.

Ramsay, fielding at point, was thinking of calling Hugh Jodrell in from the long-field to try his hand at bowling, when one of these fathers opened his middle-aged shoulders to a long-hop bowled by little Woodford, and hit it such a tremendous crack as made him sore and stiff for a week afterwards. Up went the ball into the blue sky, the sun blazing behind it, up and up, but straight as an arrow to long-off. Long-off was Hugh Jodrell. He saw the ball going up into the air, ran forward six or seven paces, lost sight of it as the sun hit him in the eyes, staggered on his feet, saw through his tears the ball descending rapidly in front of him, ran, threw himself forward, stretched out an agonised arm—and missed it.

Susan Anstey, sitting between Grace Ramsay and a particularly sparkling young mother who was furious with the fathers for making so many runs, saw how angry Hugh was at missing that catch. She made this deduction from certain impatient movements of Hugh's right knee as he stood with his back to her only a little way in

front of the spectators—a constant "giving" of that right knee, expressing vexation, mortification, and remorse, as though he could never forgive himself, never again respect himself, for letting the school down so unpardonably.

It amused Susan to think that this famous and heroic young man, with five or six thousand a year of his own, and engaged in work which satisfied every desire of his mind, should be so visibly angry with himself just because he had missed a most difficult catch, and that, too, in a match which was, although a very jolly festivity, surely *pour rire*. But that, she told herself, was like Hugh, who took everything seriously, and never gave himself to anything without putting his whole soul into it.

She was glad of this diversion for her thoughts. A fresh grief had befallen her, soon after Stephen's trial, and this new grief had been followed by an anxiety concerning her own future which was now definitely an affliction. Her grandfather had died just after Stephen had been sent to Broadmoor, and then had come a family conclave to decide about the future of Silverton. It had been left open, this important question, till yesterday, and yesterday it had been decided that Silverton should be sold.

A shout disturbed her thoughts. The sparkling mother at her side exclaimed, "Thank goodness for that!"—and Grace Ramsay, leaning forward in her chair and looking at the score board, said, "Nine wickets for——" while a little boy just behind her said, "A hundred and ninety-two." He was only one out: the score was a hundred and ninety-three.

The last father hit a lucky two, and then was caught at third-man, the spectators clapping very cheerfully as the players came in from their warfare, the boys running and leaping, the grown-ups walking at a more leisurely pace with a good deal of jesting between them, the two batting fathers rather noticeably stiff.

Hugh Jodrell pulled on his sweater, talked to some fathers for a few moments, and then, filling his pipe, walked towards Susan. With a glance to right and left of him, he took possession of the sparkling mother's chair, who had gone off to watch her son drink ginger-beer in the refreshment tent.

He said to Susan, putting away his tobacco pouch, "I've been thinking about you out there, all the time, worrying about you."

She replied, "I hope that wasn't why you missed that catch!"

"No," he said, lighting his pipe, "that was entirely my own stupidity."

"Won't you lay a little blame on the sun?"

"Not a scrap," he replied; "we've seen far too little of him this year." Then, more seriously, throwing away the match and stooping forward to pick a blade of grass between his feet, he said to her, "What have the family decided? May I know that? I

hear that some of them came down yesterday."

"They have decided," she said quietly, and apparently without regret, "to sell Silverton. I don't see how they could have decided anything else."

"All the same, one can't bear to think of you leaving it."

"No, I shan't like that. By the way, I heard from Phillida this morning. She says it will break her heart if we sell Silverton. She loves the place as much as I do. She wants me to live with her in London, which sounds rather difficult, especially as she is marrying Lionel Olphert next month."

"I know. How's the shop going?"

"Thanks to Lionel it seems to be doing better than ever."

"He appears to have altogether abandoned his idea of going on the Stock Exchange."

"They find a man is essential to the shop. Phillida says that Lionel uses his popularity in society, and every one likes him very much, to bring them customers. The shop, in fact, is becoming quite a fashionable rendezvous, rather like the studio of artists and the workshop of cabinetmakers in the eighteenth century."

"Hullo, our side's going in! I hear from my father that a good number of people are beginning to say that poor Stephen had a real idea in his mind when he went to Leo Daga that day."

"One can't help seeing," she replied, "however much one may deplore his action, that he did a certain amount of good. I mean he has set people thinking."

"He's ever so much better now."

"Phillida says that he seems to her perfectly normal, and perfectly content. He's writing a book."

"Yes, I know."

The boys who were not playing, and some of them who were, clustered behind Hugh's chair and began to talk boastfully of what David Ramsay would do to the bowling of the fathers.

"He'll easily knock up a hundred," said one.

"They'll never, *never* get him out," said another.

Then Hugh was dragged into the discussion. "Do you think we shall beat them, sir?" "When do you go in, sir?" "It was hard lines, sir, that you had the sun in your eyes when Mr. Phillimore hit that skyer."

Susan thought to herself that Hugh's life must be one of the happiest on earth, surrounded by all this healthy and adoring boyhood, spent in this beautiful place so characteristic of English scenery in its vigour and gentleness, with long holidays, too, ample means to travel abroad, endowed with a body that rejoiced so naturally in

games, and with a mind that went so naturally to the best and happiest literature for its pleasure.

She was amused presently to find how completely she was forgotten. The school lost its first wicket for five, its second, a really good bat, for twelve, and when David Ramsay went in, tremendously cheered by the school, the two defeated batsmen had spread the defeatist news all round the field that Mr. Gough was bowling *terrifically* fast—indeed, that you simply couldn't see some of his fizzers.

Hopes rose a little when David Ramsay glanced the first ball he received from this intimidating Mr. Gough to the boundary, hit the second to long-on for a three, and getting the first ball of the next over, sprang out at it and smacked it over the trees for a six. Loud were the cheers of the little boys in red-and-white blazers and straw hats with red-and-white ribbons; and Parker, the school captain, who was in with Ramsay, hearing those cheers of hope and courage, set his teeth and dreamed the dream of staying in with the Head till victory was won.

But, alas, for such romantic hopes, David Ramsay, county cricketer and peerless bat, was bowled by a slow ball from Mr. Mather, a little old gentleman with a bald head, gold-rimmed spectacles, and a grey beard and moustache, whose name, famous enough in Mincing Lane, has never yet been heard of in any field of sport, much less in the field of cricket. The Head out for only thirty-two! And the score a mere miserable fifty-seven!

"I say, sir, isn't this awful?"

"It is, Monckton."

"When do you go in, sir."

"Sixth wicket."

"I think you ought to have gone in first wicket, sir, instead of Painter. Fancy, only fifty-seven for three wickets, and Mr. Ramsay out. We can't win now, sir, can we?"

"Oh yes, we can," replied Hugh. "The fathers are getting tired. They're feeling the heat. Mr. Gough has bowled three wides in the last two overs. Look how beautifully Parker's playing."

Susan glanced round at the congregation of little boys in red-and-white blazers, and saw in their young faces exactly the same expression as she had been watching in Hugh's face. She glanced up the line of spectators and saw much the same expression in the faces of masters and in the faces of quite small boys of nine and ten squatting on the grass. How earnest they all were, how ardent, how seriously anxious! The honour of a Prep. School was the beginning of all honour, the seed that grows into heroism on the battlefield, into self-sacrifice in the midst of a selfish world, perhaps into strength in the hour of temptation.

Ramsay came over to Hugh, putting on his blazer, smiling and ashamed. "Rather a bad stroke of mine, what?" he asked, and laughed with pleasant scorn at himself, fishing in his pockets for pipe and pouch. Then, glancing towards the wicket with sharp attention, he said, "Isn't young Parker batting well? I've not seen him make a mistake yet. Hullo, Susan, what do you think of my middle-aged cricket?"

"Oh, Lord!" cried Hugh, with vexation and consternation.

"Jones out!" exclaimed Ramsay. "Dear me, this is pretty awful! I say, Hugh, you'd better be putting on your pads."

"I'll get them, sir," cried a red-and-white blazer.

"No, I will. Let me get them."

There was a scurry of feet among the boys clustered behind the chairs, and a flash of red-and-white blazers towards the pavilion.

Sixty-two for four wickets.

"I don't like the look on the fathers' faces," said Ramsay, filling his pipe. He was standing bareheaded behind Susan's chair. "They look far too jolly cheerful to please me. Fathers nowadays are much too fit at forty and fifty. I suppose it's golf."

The next bat, Arnold, hit freely for a glorious if uncertain ten minutes, and then retired, caught at the wicket by a father so proud of his unexpected achievement that he laughed, walked about, and talked excitedly to the other fielders long after the next batsman had come in.

Sixty-eight for five wickets.

Susan observed that while he was buckling on his pads Hugh's head was raised, and his eyes set on the field, watching everything with the eye of an eagle. She told herself with some amusement that she had never seen him so serious.

The new batsman, a tiny boy with broad shoulders, a red face, and a snub nose, was a daring hitter, a born swiper.

"We can't hope to win now, sir, can we?" Ramsay was asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Parker's still making runs, and Mr. Jodrell hasn't been in yet."

There was an ominous silence among the boys behind the chair. Jodder was worshipped, Jodder was the finest Rugger player in England, the most stylish runner in the whole world, but as a cricketer——

The last batsman made a risky nine, and came out, panting hard, very flustered looking, almost crying, convinced that his bat was grounded when the wicket-keeper snicked off the bails.

Six for eighty-two. One hundred and fourteen runs to make, and only four wickets to fall. A dismal prospect! There was clapping, of course, when Jodder

walked towards the pitch, but there was no heart in it. Susan watched him go with a smile in her eyes, still marvelling at the intense look which had come into his face as he got up from his chair with bat and gloves in his hand, a look, she told herself, which might, perhaps, have been justified if he was playing for England against Australia with the world looking on.

It is true that Jodrell was not a brilliant cricketer, but he was a really great games player, and for the last half-hour he had been watching this match with close attention, directing all the energies of his brain to see how it might yet be saved. Ramsay, who had taken his chair, said to Susan, tapping his teeth with the stem of his pipe, "It wouldn't surprise me in the least if he saved the match for us."

Susan saw Hugh pass the wicket at which he was to play and go towards the other wicket, and she saw Parker suddenly start forward to meet him. They met midway between the wickets, and Susan thought to herself that she was looking at something as characteristic of England as anything she had ever seen. First there was the beautiful green field, with its trees, and its distant view of the sea; then there were all the players in white flannels spread out round the yellow stumps; and finally there was the tall, broad-shouldered, and long-legged Hugh talking with grave earnestness to a boy of fourteen, fairhaired and slight, who was evidently as gravely earnest as himself. What were they saying?

"Look here, Parker, are you feeling blown?"

"Not a bit, sir."

"Well, then, let's steal runs."

"Right you are, sir."

"I've been looking at the enemy, Parker. They're getting a bit done. We can fluster them."

"Good, sir."

"You're batting splendidly. Mr. Ramsay's awfully pleased with you."

"The bowling isn't really bad, sir."

They separated, and Ramsay, smiling with great knowingness and beating a thoughtful *andante* on his teeth with his pipe stem, told Susan with tolerable accuracy what they had been talking about.

The captain of the fathers decided that Hugh was a mighty hitter, and as Hugh took his centre from the school professional in a nice white linen coat with a sweater over his arm, this master of strategy scattered his field, beating them back and back with his hands, saying to those about him, "Look out for catches."

Hugh glanced about him, frowning with concentration. He knew that he must risk nothing. He had one great merit—an eye—and he decided that first and foremost he

would watch the ball. He wasn't thinking that he must wipe out the disgrace of that missed catch of his, or of the great odds against his side, or of what he could do to help Parker; he was simply concentrating every faculty he possessed on seeing the ball he intended to hit. And the ball that he hit was not to go into anybody's hands if he could help it.

As it happened, the first ball he received was a ball which Ramsay would have slapped out of the ground; but Hugh, thinking so keenly of seeing the ball, contented himself with a tap and a single. Parker treated the next ball in the same fashion. And Hugh followed suit with the third. That finished the over.

The captain of the fathers beckoned right and left of him and his field closed nearer in. "They're going to poach singles," he said; "look out; and throw in smartly."

The first ball of the new over was off the wicket, and a loose one. Hugh saw it, saw also his chance, and drove it with a crack that sounded like a pistol shot into the tea tent. Great cheering at this, and renewed hope in the hearts of dismal boys. The field spread out a little. The next ball Hugh tapped into the middle of the pitch, and he and Parker flashed past it while point, mid-off, mid-on, and the bowler were colliding in a frantic effort to get hold of it. This brought shrill laughter in a glad chorus from the red-and-white blazers, laughter unheard by the two earnest batsmen, but heard with evil effect on their self-control by eleven fielding fathers. Parker hit the next ball straight to long-off, and called Hugh. Hugh was in the middle of the pitch almost at the moment he was called. Long-off tried to pick up the ball with professional quickness, failed, and fumbled it. Hugh sprang forward for another run. Exasperated long-off flung the ball he had at last got hold of at the wicket, missed it by yards, and the batsmen ran again, amid tumultuous shouts from the blazers. The hundred was on the board.

There is no doubt that from this moment the fathers were flustered—blown and flustered. The sun was exceedingly hot; the breeze had dropped; the more elderly of the fieldsmen were obliged continually to take out their handkerchiefs, dab their foreheads, and wipe their spectacles. Nothing is perhaps more lowering to the moral of a fathers' side than the derisive laughter of their sons, and the visible smiles of their cool and detached wives in beautiful silk dresses, eating ices.

Hugh and Parker met in the middle of the pitch between overs.

"Getting done?"

"No, sir."

"Like a drink?"

"Not yet, sir."

"I think we've got 'em beat, Parker; but don't take liberties."

"No, sir."

"I may have a swipe or two presently, but don't you; I want you to carry your bat."

Parker flashed up a grateful look for that compliment, his keen young face expressing all the seriousness of a grown man engaged in a great task, and went off to his wicket as proud as any emperor on his throne.

He kept his word, and played beautifully, exercising wonderful patience, perfect control, seldom making a stroke which brought a shadow across the delighted eyes of David Ramsay. The thunders of applause which greeted Jodder's terrific swipes, which began now to come with a very startling rapidity, never for one moment tempted the mind of this fourteen-year-old boy to play for applause. Father after father was tried against him, only to find, all of them, that straight bat of his perfectly meeting every ball they sent down. As one of them said indignantly, "It's like bowling against Jack Hobbs! No fellow can stand that long, after forty."

Hugh's eye was in, the bowling feeble, the fielding ragged. He began to hit with a ferocity which surprised even Ramsay. The score mounted and mounted, the boys behind the chairs keeping an eye on every run, hungering for Hugh to make his century. A cut by Parker brought the score to a hundred and fifty, amid a roar of cheers that continued for two minutes. Hugh felt himself to be inspired. Bang—a 4 to the off: bang—a 4 to leg: bang—a 4 over bowler's head: bang—a 6 right over the chairs and almost into the perambulator containing Mrs. Ramsay's last baby.

The score was now 168: Parker, 42; Jodder, 75. As the fathers appeared to have abandoned all hope of getting either batsman out, it seemed to the excited and enthusiastic spectators that the school would win, and win with four wickets in hand. But, to the grief of every one, including even some of the fathers, and to Hugh more than any one else, Parker, in playing forward to a ball, mistimed it, and was easily caught in the slips.

At this disaster, the hopes of the school diminished, and the fathers told each other that they really must pull themselves together. Mr. Gough had had a rest, and informed the captain he was quite ready to bowl if wanted. The captain decided that he should bowl the next over. But before the terrible Mr. Gough was called on, the eighth wicket fell, the newcomer having endeavoured to hit the first ball he received into Mrs. Ramsay's perambulator. One hundred and sixty-eight for eight wickets.

Out came Harper, a general favourite, loudly cheered, blushing like a girl, grinning like the Cheshire Cat, four feet four inches, red-haired and freckled. He missed the first ball he received, and grinned up at the wicket-keeper with much

delight as the over was called.

On came the terrible Mr. Gough. Hugh concentrated his mind on seeing the ball, patting the ground impatiently with his bat as Mr. Gough tore up the bowling crease like an infuriated turkey-cock. Wide! A second ball. Wide again! A third ball. Mr. Gough just succeeded in ducking his head in time or he would have been a case for the sick-bay. Crack went the ball against the screen, and Mr. Gough, hearing that crack, turned pale, and felt his age, and looked at Hugh Jodrell as if he considered him to be a very dangerous, malicious, and possibly criminal young man. At the end of the over he said to the captain, "I've strained a muscle, I think; if you don't mind I'll come off."

Harper stopped the first ball of the next over. The next he snicked into the slips and Hugh called him. Luckily for the school, the ball was thrown at the wicket to which Hugh was speeding like a flash of lightning, while little Harper, looking over his shoulder, and much impeded by pads too big for him, was waddling to the other end. Hugh liked this bowler—any one would have liked him—and he hit three fours and a single off the rest of his over, bringing the score to 184 and getting the next over.

The captain decided that he would now try the wicket-keeper and himself take wicket. There was, therefore, a pause, and during that pause Hugh walked over to the other end and told Harper that he must never look back over his shoulder when he was running. "We've got to make twelve more runs," he said, "and I want you simply to stop the ball and run like a Wiltshire hare whenever I call you."

The wicket-keeper, relieved of his pads and armed with the ball, tried his hand for a moment or two, sending up a nice slow, round-arm ball as innocent of tricks as an unborn monkey. Then he signified that he was ready, and, taking a run of only three paces, sent down his first ball to the watchful Hugh. Hugh was boggled. For a fatal tenth of a second he failed to decide whether to hit the cover off that innocent slow ball or to play it safely back to the new bowler. He missed it, and by only the breadth of a blade of grass did that ball miss his off-stump.

Harper looked up at the bowler with a grin, and the bowler, sharply conscious of a sense of crisis all over the ground, felt himself to be one of the greatest men on earth.

Ramsay said to Susan, "If that has rattled Hugh's nerves, we're beaten."

The fathers were smiling with delight. They were also employing every gesture known to fielders for conveying to the batsman the information that they are on their toes, that their eyes are skinned, that they are ready to catch him if necessary, but that they are confidently expecting to see him bowled next ball.

Hugh was saying to himself, "I ought to be kicked." He was also saying, "I must keep this fellow to myself: no singles: he'd bowl Harper first ball." Then he took up his stance and waited for the new bowler to do his deadliest. This time there was no hesitation. Out he sprang, like a real old-fashioned batsman, converted that slow, long-pitched ball into a half-volley, and hit it clean over a group of elms behind the pavilion.

Ramsay let himself go back into his deck-chair, chuckling with laughter, while the boys behind him, those who were not running to retrieve the ball, set up a yell which went right through Susan and jarred every nerve in her body.

One hundred and ninety. Five to equal, six to beat.

The ball was found, and the new bowler, a little shaken, sent down a curious and indefinable ball that bumped and bumped from a few feet in front of him, slithered, bumped again, and then almost stopped in front of Hugh's bat. Hugh tapped it back to the bowler. The next was off the wicket, but too dangerous for a stroke, and Hugh let it go. The next promised a perfectly safe two past mid-off, and Hugh sent it in that direction. Harper, however, was dreaming; he started late, tripped, and the two was only a single. The next ball, very like the one which had puzzled Hugh, seemed to Harper so providentially arranged for him to hit a boundary that he slogged at it with shut eyes, was bowled, the stumps remaining perfectly upright, only the off bail, after hesitating for a moment, dropping slowly and unwillingly to the ground.

Sir Walter Todwinter, Permanent Under-Secretary in a great Government department, watched with a strange emotion the progress of his youngest son to the wicket. He had never played a game in his life, having been in his boyhood a great hand at passing examinations, but he knew enough about cricket, and about this game in particular, to realise that the honour of the school was now very largely in the hands of his son. He felt a dim misgiving in the smooth mechanism of his mind, and behind his gold-rimmed spectacles his eyes blinked to the full extent of his emotions.

This son, ten years of age, was one of the many London boys at the school who, on their arrival, have to be taught to throw a cricket-ball, and also (Sir Walter was an agnostic) the elements of religion. He was a thin, pasty-faced, sad-looking boy, with a permanent perplexity in his forehead, as if it had received a blow in infancy, and a permanent dullness in his eyes, as though everything went past him too quickly for him to see it.

Hugh, watching little Todwinter's weary approach, thought to himself, "I must knock off the wanted runs this over."

He was, perhaps, too anxious. But, let it be remembered, the local ether at that moment was radiating anxiety with an intensity which only a mind of clockwork could have failed to receive. Every blazer was a transmitter, every master, every mother, and Susan the worst of the lot. In any case, Hugh scored a two off the second ball of the over—a perfectly controlled shot, a perfectly safe two—and he made certain of another two off the next ball directly it had left the bowler's hand. "We've won," said David Ramsay; but he forgot, and Hugh forgot, that Todwinter ran as if he hated running. Alas, that safe two was only a single, and—Todwinter was run-out.

The fathers laughed with a great and exceeding joy, and a dreadful silence fell upon the crowding boys at the back of Ramsay's chair.

The school professional said to Hugh, "You made a mistake that time, sir."

"I did," said Hugh.

He overtook Todwinter, and apologised for running him out. Todwinter said, "I don't mind, sir."

Hugh went to Ramsay, ignoring Susan, and very stern and very cold apologised for his criminal stupidity. Then he walked away, surrounded by adoring red-and-white blazers, to take off his pads.

Susan saw him a few minutes afterwards striding away to his quarters.

"He'll be all right," said Ramsay, with a laugh, "when he's had a bath and changed his clothes."

II

After dinner there was a school concert, conducted by a music master enthusiastic for old English rounds and glees, and after this concert the parents assembled in Mrs. Ramsay's drawing-room and dining-room, drank tea and coffee, ate cakes and sandwiches, and then departed in their cars to neighbouring hotels, or to London.

Most of the parents had gone when Hugh walked over to Susan, who had stayed to help Grace Ramsay with this entertainment, and inquired how she was going home. She replied that David had arranged to drive her back.

"It's a perfect night for a drive," Hugh said; "but a superlative night for a walk over the downs."

She laughed. "A little late for that, isn't it?"

Ramsay came up to them. "Car's at the door, Susan. Where have you left your wraps?" He turned to Jodrell. "Jolly good concert, wasn't it? I never get tired of

hearing 'The Running of the Deer.' Young Thompson's coming along wonderfully, isn't he? Grace says she thinks he never sang better than he did to-night."

He was called away. Hugh walked out of the hall, and down the corridor. He found Susan near the door. "David's just coming," he said. "I'll start her up for you."

She went with him into the night. There were two cars in the court, Sir Walter Todwinter's drawn up at the door, Ramsay's standing on the other side of the court, its bonnet to the drive. Hugh walked a little ahead of her to Ramsay's car, opened the door for her, wrapped the rug round her, and closed the door again.

The moon stood just above the elms behind the pavilion, bathing the stretch of playing-fields in a light of extraordinary softness, making the whole scene vivid and yet leaving every detail in mist.

"I keep thinking of Silverton," he said, his hands on the door. "Can't we talk it over together, and see if something can't be done to save it?"

"It's very sweet of you to bother about it," she answered; "but I don't see how we can prevent it from being sold."

"We could," he replied, "if you made it easy for me."

"How do you mean? I don't quite follow."

"Well," he replied, "if you treated me as a sort of old friend, some one you can trust, and said, Look here, I want you to buy Silverton, and let it to me for a peppercorn a year——"

She laughed. "That's sweeter still of you. It's so sweet a thought that I can't find any words to thank you for it. But, you see, I've got to go away in any case, and so you'd have to find another tenant."

"But that's just what I want to avoid."

Out from the house came Grace Ramsay. She peered about her, shading her eyes. "Is that you, Susan? Ah, there you are!" She came across the court to them. "My dear, I wonder if you'll let David off. Hugh will drive you back, I'm sure: won't you, Hugh? David very much wants to have a talk with Sir Walter Todwinter. I think it's something rather important. You won't mind, will you?"

On the drive to Silverton, the car being Ramsay's and not his own, Hugh drove with great slowness, and as the car descended from the high ground to the valley in wide sweeping curves, Susan spoke about the events of the day, and said that she thought Hugh must be a very happy person, in spite of occasional disasters on the cricket-field.

He told her that he was, at any rate, a convinced schoolmaster. He said that when he went to London and met lawyers, politicians, merchants, stockbrokers, bankers, and officials, he always felt himself to be a particularly fortunate man.

"Of course," he said, "I'm extra lucky in having David for my partner. He feels in his bones that the schoolmaster's job is a great one. Look what he has made of the school! I don't know one of the public schools with a better feeling, a sharper edge to it. And we shall have two hundred and fifty boys next term. And our boys are going to make their mark. David's giving them something that will tell in every school they go to. He said to me only yesterday, 'If we can send them on with a love of English in their minds, and the heart to play every game with keenness, they'll turn most of life's corners without a spill.' I never quite realised before what faith he has in the power of the English language to shape a fellow's character."

Susan said something about David Ramsay in answer to this, and they talked of him for the rest of the drive, and Hugh appeared to be perfectly content that they should talk of nothing else.

At the door of the manor-house he got down to let Susan out of the car, and when she was standing at his side, suggested that she should let him take a look at the garden in the moonlight before he returned to school.

"I think your garden's the most beautiful in the world," he said. "That's what we miss at the school. We've got flower-beds and paths; but we're too high up for a garden."

When they had passed through the drawing-room, and were walking slowly on the lawn towards the bridge over the river, the song of which came to them with a haunting sweetness in the silence and stillness of the place, he stopped abruptly, and said, with an impetuosity she had never known in him before, "I want to say something to you that you may think rather odd, but it's dragged out of me by the beauty of this place. I can't help myself. Has it ever occurred to you to ask yourself why I have never told you that I love you? You've known, of course, all this time that I love you more than anything else in the world; but have you ever wondered why I haven't told you? Why haven't I told you so?"

"You must tell me that," she replied, watching the moonlight in his face and thinking he was beautiful as well as handsome.

"First of all," he said, "I thought you loved Stephen."

"Yes, I know."

"I found out that I was wrong."

"I think I told you so myself."

"But it wasn't you who told me that you had been in love with some one else for over ten years," and she saw how he suffered as he said it.

"Who told you that?" she asked gently, curiously.

"Your grandfather."

She reflected for a moment. "Yes. I remember. I did tell him that."

"And now, as I understand it," said Hugh, breathing rather hard, "you are going to London, not to marry this man, but to earn your own living. At any rate, that's what I gather. You never quite tell one anything, you know; you only drop vague and mysterious hints which have to be thought over and pieced together weeks afterwards. However, this is what I want to say to you. Now that I've told you I love you, you can surely treat me as I want you to treat me, as a friend who'd do anything in the world for you. I mean it must make some difference in our relationship for you to know from my own lips that I love you. And so you can let me buy Silverton, and let me do something or another that will enable you to live here, so that I shall be able to see you. This isn't a chivalrous suggestion on my part; it's pure selfishness; in fact, I was never so selfish in my life as I am just now. The truth is, I don't see how I can carry on without you at Silverton. I love my job, which I owe entirely to you, by the way, but the soul would go out of it if I couldn't sometimes come down here and see you, and listen to you, and think how great and good a thing it is to love you even if you can't love me. Can't you"—he took one of her hands—"hit on something that would solve the problem?"

"Surely," she said, jerking up her head and smiling into his eyes, "I could only stay on here if you married me! How else could you possibly provide for me?"

He was bewildered for a moment. He raised her hand to his lips, kissed it, and said, "If you could tell me that your love for this other man can never end in marriage, and that it isn't so big a thing in your life as it was, and that——No; that wouldn't do. If you love another man, you'll never marry me, and even if you did, I could never be happy with that thought in my heart. No; that won't do. But, Susan, I can't let you go out of my life altogether, you're so altogether the best thing I've ever dreamed of. You must hit on something. I implore you to. Don't be conventional. Don't be stand-offish and prudish. Help me to make a plan. Suggest something."

"I don't want ever to go out of your life," she said, and walked on towards the bridge.

"You love me well enough to say that?" he asked, wondering where her words might lead.

"Oh yes; I love you, Hugh, quite well enough to say that."

He would have stopped her, but she walked on, determined to cross the bridge to the other side of the river, remembering what Stephen had said to her about destroying her joy in that garden.

"To hear that you love me at all, Susan," he said, with a fierceness in his voice which seemed to her the very tone of tenderness, "makes me dream that the greatest

dream of my life may come true after all."

"Great dreams come true," she told him.

"An angel can make this dream of mine come true, and then I should be in Paradise."

"Give me your hand," she said, and led him across the bridge.

When they were on the farther side of the river, standing in the shade of beeches and chestnuts, she came quite close to him, lifting up her face as if she expected and wanted him to kiss her. She gazed up at him, holding his hand firmly, her lips half parted. Then while he looked at her, enchanted by her loveliness, bewildered by her mood, shaken by her nearness to him, she sighed out to him like a whisper, "Oh, Hugh, Hugh, how long do you think I have loved you, and loved you more than any man that ever breathed—loved you, my dearest, and known that one day I should have you for my own?"

He did not stop to answer this astonishing question, which scattered all his thoughts and sent the blood burning and leaping through his veins; he did not even stop to think about it. He took her into his arms, kissed her upturned lips, and held her to him as if he feared that even now another would come to take her from him.

She drew back from him a little and said, "Ever since I was a girl of twelve, almost always alone in this garden, I have loved you."

"But, Susan, my angel, my darling, how could that be?"

She looked at him, and, in his arms, told him that Stephen had come back from his first term at Eton talking of no one but Hugh Jodrell, and every holidays it was the same; always Stephen had been creating in her own heart the image of his hero—the hero who had won the ardent love of that generous and impassioned nature; and he had brought back photographs of Hugh, given them to her, and she had them now; and she had been to Eton and seen him run; and she had treasured everything Stephen had told her of Hugh when they were at Trinity together, cross-examining Stephen until she seemed to know all the thoughts in Hugh's mind; and she had gone with one of her brothers in London to see Hugh run at Stamford Bridge and play football at Twickenham; and always she had told herself that Hugh was the one man she could love in all the world.

"Stephen gave me his idol," she said, "and I bowed down and worshipped at his side. And when you came here, and Grandpapa was so angry with Stephen, and wanted to send me to London to marry me off, I told him, because I wanted to stay here and be always near you, that I had been in love with some one for over ten years. It was true. Oh, how true it was, Hugh. Because a girl, all alone with an old man, lives in a world of dreams, and creates romances for herself, tells herself stories

about love, dreams about her love, believes that her love will come true. Oh, my dear, if I could tell you what happiness flooded my soul when at last you came to stay with Stephen, and I met you, and I saw that my dream had made you love me."

He said to her, "Have I been very stupid, or have you been a lot too mystifying for a very dull man?"

"Neither," she said, shaking her head at him, throwing it back from him the better to know the joy of gazing into the face of love; "neither, Hugh, because it has all come so beautifully true—not one moment too soon, not one moment too late."

THE END

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The Author of "LITTLE MOUNTEBANK" is a girl of eighteen years of age, and comes of talented stock. Her father is Mr. Malcolm Sterling Mackinlay the well-known musician and composer, and her grandmother was the late Madame Antoinette Sterling, of world-wide fame and reputation. "LITTLE MOUNTEBANK" is a story of the stage and is a remarkable piece of work for so youthful a writer. It is a straightforward love story, and is told with considerable freshness and charm.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Laslett Affair* by Edward Harold Begbie]