

# THE PEST



*By*

W. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE

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BY

W. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE

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# The Pest



## CHAPTER I

PAVEMENTS and roadway slippery with greasy, black mud; atmosphere yellow with evil-tasting vapor; a November afternoon in London; evening drawing on, fog closing down.

George Maddison, tall, erect, dark, walked slowly along, his eyes, ever ready to seize upon any striking effect of color, noting the curious mingling of lights: the dull yellow overhead, the chilly beams of the street lamps, the glow and warmth from the shop windows. Few of the faces he saw were cheerful, almost all wearing that expression of discontent which such dreary circumstances bring to even the most hardened and experienced Cockneys. For his own part he was well pleased, having heard that morning of his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy, a fact that gratified him not as adding anything to his repute, but as being a compliment to the school of young painters of which he was the acknowledged leader and ornament: impressionists whose impressions showed the world to be beautiful; idealists who had the imagination to see that the ideal is but the better part of the real.

Maddison paused before a highly lighted picture-dealer's window, glancing with amusement at the conventional prettiness there displayed; then, turning his back upon it, he looked across the street, debating whether he should cross over and have some tea at the famous pastry cook's. A tall, slight figure of a woman, neatly dressed in black, caught his attention. Obviously, she too was hesitating over the same question. In spite of the simplicity and quiet fashion of her black gown, her air was elegant; her head nicely poised; her shoulders well held; the lines of her figure graceful, lithe and seductive. Though he could not see her face he felt certain that she was interesting and attractive, if not beautiful; also, there was a something wistful and forlorn about her that appealed to him. Warily stepping through the slippery mud, he crossed over and stood behind her for a moment, marking the graceful tendrils of red-gold hair that clustered round the nape of her neck and the delicate shape and coloring of her ears. As she turned to move away, she came full face to him, instant recognition springing into her eyes.

"George—!" she exclaimed.

"Miss Lewis!"

There was immediate and evident constraint on each side, as though the sudden meeting were half-welcome, half-embarrassing.

"Were you going in to tea here?" he asked. "I was. Let me come with you? It's an age since we met. It's horrid and damp out here."

"It is," she replied, slightly shivering. "Yes, I should like a cup of tea."

They went through the heavy swing doors, opened for them by a diminutive boy in buttons, into the long, highly decorated, dimly lighted, discreet tea room, which lacked its usual crowd. A few couples, in one case two young men, occupied the cozy corners, to one of the more remote of which Maddison led the way, and settled himself and his companion in the comfortable armchairs. He ordered tea and cakes of the pretty, black-eyed waitress, dainty and demure in the uniform of deep, dull red.

“You sigh as if you were tired, Miss Lewis, and glad to rest?” he said, trying in the dim light to study her expression.

“I am tired and I am glad to rest. It’s very cozy in here. I’ve never been here before.”

She laid her hand upon the arm of the chair next to him and he noticed that she wore a wedding ring.

“I called you Miss Lewis. I see——?”

“Yes—I’m married. I don’t suppose you remember much about Larchstone—I recognized you before you did me; I saw you across the road. But just possibly you do remember our curate, Mr. Squire—you used to laugh at him. I’m Mrs. Squire. He’s still a curate, but not any longer in the country. We live at Kennington; what a world of difference one letter makes! Kennington—Kensington. Have you ever been in Kennington?”

Maddison remembered Edward Squire distinctly: a tall, gaunt enthusiast, clumsy in mind and in body. He leaned back in his chair as a whirl of recollections rushed across his mind: the red-roofed, old-fashioned village of Larchstone; the old-world rector and his daughter, a pretty slip of a country girl, who had grown into—Mrs. Squire. He remembered the summer weeks he had spent there, painting in the famous woodlands, and the half-jesting, half-serious love he had made to the rector’s daughter. Since then until this afternoon he had not met her, though the memory of her face, with the searching eyes, had come to him now and again.

She watched him as he dreamed. He had changed very little; how distinctly she had always remembered him; the swarthy, narrow face framed in heavy black hair, the deep-set black eyes, the thin nose, the trim pointed beard and mustache hiding the sensual mouth, the tall, well-knit figure. Far more vividly than he did she recall those summer months; in her life they had been an outstanding event, an episode merely in his.

“Do you still take three lumps of sugar?” she asked, as she poured out the tea.

“You remember that? Yes, still three, thanks.”

“You see, I hadn’t very much to remember in those days.”



"It's five years ago—" he hesitated.

"Five this last summer, and a good many things have happened since then. My father's dead—three years ago—and I'm a good young curate's wife. And you? But I needn't ask; the newspapers have told me all about you. Are you still full of enthusiasms?"

"I suppose so. I think so, only they're crystallizing into practices. As we grow older the brain grows stiff, and we're not so ready to go climbing mountains to achieve impossible heights."

"You've climbed pretty high. A step higher to-day—A.R.A. Fame, success and money, that's a fairly high mountain to have climbed—at least it looks so to me."

The forlorn tone of her voice confirmed the impression his first sight of her had made upon him. He looked at her keenly as she sat there with her eyes fixed upon her tea which she was stirring slowly. She had become a very lovely woman and a poor curate's wife.

"Lonely?" he asked almost unintentionally.

"Did I say lonely?" she asked looking quickly at him. "We were talking in metaphors. I suppose that way of talking was invented by some one who didn't want to blurt out ugly truths."

"Or who fancied that commonplace ideas become uncommon when divorced from commonplace words."

"It's strange, isn't it, sitting here, chatting like old friends—after all this time? You didn't answer my question: have you ever been in Kennington?"

"I go down to the Oval now and then to watch the cricket; that's all I know about Kennington."

"And that's nothing. You might as well judge West Kensington by an Earl's Court exhibition, or a woman's nature by her face. I think it would do you good to see more of Kennington. I can believe that to anyone who has lived there any other place on earth would seem heaven."

"Heaven?"

"Even the other place would be an improvement."

"You're rather hard on Kennington, aren't you?"

"It's very hard on *me*! It stifles me. I come up to town—you see, I speak of coming up to town—every now and then, just to escape from the horrible atmosphere. There; just to breathe freely for a bit, to look at the shops, to see faces with some thoughts in them, to escape from—Kennington."

"And do you escape?"

"Not altogether. The atmosphere there is saturating."

“Does your husband like it?”

“He doesn’t know anything about it. Souls to save and bodies to feed, that’s his simple want in life. There are plenty of both in our neighborhood. I suppose you wouldn’t come down to see us?”

“If I may——?”

“You may,” she answered, laughing softly, almost to herself, and he noticed how her smile lit up her whole face for the moment. “You’ll seem so queer down there.”

“Why?”

“Just think—but no, you couldn’t realize what I’m laughing at; you’ve never been in Kennington, and—even more likely—have never seen yourself as I see you.”

Resisting the temptation to ask her in what light she saw him, he in turn laughed as he looked down into the provocative face turned toward him.

“You’re getting better,” he said.

“Yes, thanks; the tea has done me good, and the meeting with you.”

She spoke quite frankly.

“I’m glad,” he answered, “and glad I was lucky enough to meet you.”

“What a pretty, empty phrase,” she said, with a little sigh and a droop of the corners of her mouth. “Sayings like that are the threepenny bits of conversation; they’re not worth sixpence, but they’re better than coppers. Now, I must be off.”

“It’s quite early.”

“Yes, for you. But for me—Kennington and high tea; but you know neither of them.”

“You’ve asked me to come——”

“Not to high tea. Come some afternoon or evening. Drop me a post card so that we shall be sure to be in. My husband will be so glad to see you again.”

“And you?”

“I *have* seen you again.”

“Very well, I’ll drop you a line of warning. And how are you going home?”

“By a clever and cheap combination of penny bus and halfpenny tram. Now, good-by, and thank you.”

They lingered a moment in the shop entrance, warmth and coziness behind, the darkness and the thickening fog before.

“I don’t like you’re going alone. The fog’s getting very thick.”

“Please don’t worry about me; if the tram can’t get along I shall walk. Good-by, and, again, thank you.”

Nodding in a friendly manner, she walked quickly away, leaving him irresolute.

But he soon determined to follow her.

“You really must let me see you home,” he said, as he caught up with her; “it’s going to be bad.”

“So am I, and insist on having my own way. Don’t spoil it for me. I don’t often have my own way with anything or anybody.”

Again she walked quickly away into the darkness.



## CHAPTER II

ACACIA GROVE, Kennington, was once upon a time, and not so many years ago, the home of snug citizens, who loved to dwell on the borderland of town and country. It is a wide road of two-storied houses, all alike: three windows to the top floor; on the ground floor, two windows and a hall door, painted green and approached by three steep steps; a front garden, generally laid out in gravel with a circular bed of sooty shrubs in the center and a narrow border of straggling flowers along each side, spike-headed railings separating the garden from the pavement. Few of the gates are there that do not creak shrilly, calling aloud for oil. In one of these houses, distinguished only from its neighbors by its number, lodged the Reverend Edward Squire, occupying the front "parlor," a small den at the back of the same, and the front bedroom and dressing room on the upper floor. The furniture throughout was plain, inoffensive, somber, entirely unhomelike; faded green curtains with yellow fringe hung at the parlor windows, by one of which Marian sat in the gloaming two days after her meeting with Maddison. The fire shed a flickering light over the room and on the weary face of her husband, who lay back asleep in a heavy horsehair armchair. She glanced at him now and then, each time comparing his commonplace features with those of George Maddison, her meeting with whom had stirred tumult in her already mutinous blood.

Rousing himself at length, Squire looked at his watch.

"Half-past four! I must be off, Marian. Don't you find it dismal sitting there in the dark?"

"You can dream in the dark."

"Dream?" he said, standing up and stretching his lanky limbs, stamping his heavy feet as though cold. "Don't you dream too much, dear? I wish parish work had more interest for you; there is so much to do, and——"

"I don't do much!" she broke in sharply.

"I wasn't going to say that. Wouldn't it make life brighter for you if you spent more time in brightening it for others? However, I mustn't stop to talk now. There's a meeting of the Boot Club at a quarter to five, and several things after that. I can't get back till about half-past six: will that be too late for tea?"

He stood beside her, feeling clumsily helpless to express his sympathy with her evident discontent, and unable to help her.

"No, I don't mind what time," she answered, turning her back toward him, and looking out at the dreary prospect of leafless trees and dim gas lamps.

He stooped to kiss her, but she pushed him away.

“Don’t be silly, Edward; everyone can see into the room. If you don’t go, you’ll be late.”

With a sigh he turned away and went out.

For months past hatred of her home life had been growing in her, and it had been intensified, brought to fever heat, by her meeting with Maddison. His prosperity had emphasized the dunness of her own career. Why had he ever made love to her, giving her a glimpse of brightness, and then left her to be driven by circumstances to accept her husband’s dogged love, to accept this life of struggle, to accept this daily round of distasteful tasks and hateful duties? In the country days she had accepted without energy to protest against the routine work of a clergyman’s daughter; but here in London, her blood had caught afire, the devil of revolt was astir, her whole heart and soul rebelled against the wasting of her youth and beauty. In the old home there had been none with whom to compare herself; but in town hundreds of women, with smaller gifts of body and mind than her own, led a full and joyous life. She raged to think that she should bloom and fade, never knowing the glory of living.

She rose slowly, let the heavy venetian blind run down with a crash, drew the curtains close, and lit the gas. She stood before the glass over the mantelpiece, looking at her reflection. Then with growing disgust she turned and glanced round the meager room. In a basket was a pile of accumulated mending waiting for her; on the small writing table—above which hung a crucifix—several account books, which would have to be made up this evening. She stood there, tall, fair, throbbing with rebellion, longing to escape. Again the question that she had so often asked herself during the last two days came to her: was it possible that George Maddison would offer to free her? He had nearly, if not quite, loved her once; were there any means by which she could lure him to her again?

A sharp knock at the house door startled but did not interest her, the caller doubtless being for Edward, and his visitors did not amuse her. Her conjecture was wrong. The neat little maid servant, who feared her master and adored his wife, opened the parlor door, stammering out—

“A gentleman wants to know if you’re at home, mum. He wants to see *you*, mum.”

“Are you sure he wanted to see *me*?”

“Yes, I do, if I may,” said Maddison, appearing in the doorway; “or are you not ‘at home’?”

“Of course I’m at home; we don’t indulge even in conventional fibs in Kennington. Do come in; I’m so glad to see you. I didn’t think you’d really come.”

“Why not?” he asked, shaking hands with her. “Could I resist such a persuasive

description as you gave me? It was so alluring that I walked the whole way, and, upon my word, I declare you have done the neighborhood an injustice. I've been in worse."

"Very likely it's my fault."

They sat at either side of the fire for some little while silent; he noting the room, and furtively examining her face as she stared into the fire. He could see the tears that hovered in the corners of her eyes.

"Your fault?" he said at length. "You look fagged; you want a change."

"A change!" she exclaimed, laughing hardily.

She stood up, leaned her arm upon the mantelpiece, and looked down at him.

"A change! You don't know the irony of what you've said, Mr. Maddison. A change! Do you realize that each day drags along just the same as the days before have been, and the days after will be? Never a shadow of a change! And so all the life is being crushed out of me. If I'd only known; but what's the good of talking this way, and why on earth should I trouble you with my worries?"

She was a splendid rebel and Maddison's pulse stirred with sympathy and attraction. She looked to him like some fine, wild animal, caged, eating out her heart for freedom.

"I almost wish I hadn't met you the other day," she continued. "I know that sounds rude; what I mean is, it's bad enough to be here, but it makes it worse, ever so much worse, to realize what I've not got."

"I wish I could help you," he said.

She sat down again and again looked into the fire, which she stirred into a roaring blaze.

"It would have been better had I stopped on in the country; I was only half alive there. I just vegetated. Edward, my husband, had what he thought was a 'call' to come up and work among the poor in London, so he brought me here. I wonder do you know the kind of man he is?"

"I can guess."

"He's good, because he never has any temptation to be anything else. He's content, and works, eats, drinks, sleeps; he tries to be kind and sympathetic, and—nearly drives me mad. Don't you think it strange," she asked, looking at him eagerly, "that I should be talking to you like this? I must—must talk to some one."

"I'm glad you look on me as a friend. I wish I could help you."

"You are helping me by letting me talk to you. I wonder do you understand a bit of what's the matter? Can *you* understand? You've always been free, and could make your life for yourself. I'm strong, but I mayn't even try to use my strength. I

hate all this cant about women's rights; every woman can have her rights if she only dares to take them. But we're all bred up to be dependent cowards. Now, I suppose you're shocked?"

"Why? I think I understand what you mean—what you feel. Does—your husband know?"

"He? He couldn't understand! He would try to, and would advise me to go out and work here with him. I did do some work with him, but it only sickened me. And the people he works with! Gossiping, chattering, self-important humbugs. So now I sit all day with my hands in my lap and cry like a baby for a moon I *could* have if I dared take it. I'm young—and—what's the use of not saying it?—pretty, and——"

She clenched her hands on the arms of her chair and set her teeth firmly. The fire shed a warm glow over the handsome, alluring face; he watched her with admiration. A picture ready to his hand. The dull, stupid room; the woman, splendidly rebellious. What was she going to make of her future?

"I'm going to ask you to help *me!*" he exclaimed. "Let me paint your portrait; not an ordinary portrait. The subject has been in my head for a long time, but I've never been able to grasp it until just a moment ago. I shall call it 'The Rebel.' Will you come up two or three times a week to my studio and sit for me?"

"Shall I?" she answered, looking doubtfully at him—"shall I? And then when it's over, come back here—*here!*"

He had his thoughts and she had hers, but neither expressed them or guessed the other's.

"It would only make me more angry with things," she said; "no, you *don't* understand me a bit. It must be all—or nothing. A sweet to-day and bread-and-butter every other day? No, no. Understand? It has been so bad with me that I stood on Westminster Bridge the other night after I left you, and looked at the water; I am such a coward that I came home to this."

"So—you won't help me to paint my picture?"

"I'll think about it, and let you know. When shall I come?"

Maddison took out his engagement book and turned over the pages.

"You have to find time between one engagement and another," she said, watching him; "I'm free every day."

"To-day's Tuesday; would Thursday, eleven, suit you? We could go and have lunch somewhere afterwards."

"I can't decide. Will you leave it open? I'll just come, if I'm coming, and, if I don't come, it will mean I'd rather you didn't come here again."

"I won't worry about that. I'll just hope you will come. Now, I must be going."



Good-by, and—again—I wish I could help you.”

As Maddison drove home, he was in doubt as to what course he should pursue in this adventure so suddenly thrown his way. Marian greatly attracted him, both by her beauty and her brains, but he did not as yet feel disposed to face the scandal that must come if he took her away from her husband, should she care to come to him, and should he care to ask her. He felt certain that if he saw much more of her he would fall under her fascination, yet, weakly, he had given her this invitation rather than run the risk of not meeting her frequently, rather than have to meet her in the dismal surroundings of her home.

During the last few years he had drilled himself into not yielding to his every impulse. When he had first met her the desire bred in him by her country comeliness had almost led him into marrying her; its renewal urged him strongly to ask her to be his mistress. He believed that she would yield. What would be the outcome of such a course? She was evidently trembling on the brink of revolt, undecided whether or not to dare all. Should he tempt her? There could be no question as to her beauty, which was of a type that had always appealed to him. Tall, lithe, well-proportioned; elegant in face and figure—how lovely she would look daintily dressed! No mere animal, but a woman.

Between now and Thursday he must decide with regard to her.

Then the fear shot into his mind that perhaps she would not come.

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When he had left the room, Marian sat down again by the fire, her face lit up by a smile of complete satisfaction.

She was not trembling on the brink of revolt. When she had met him that foggy afternoon she had been so, but only because she felt helpless. Now succor had come. She felt certain that she could win Maddison to her will, that she would be able to use him as the stepping-stone to the luxury and power for which she lusted. He had almost loved her in the old days, he nearly loved her now after these two brief meetings; at any rate he was sorry for her. She would tempt him and he would fall.

Again she looked at herself in the mirror; she was made to conquer. This man, and others, should be hers. She held the two most powerful of weapons, beauty and heartlessness, and would use both without scruple.

She laughed as she thought of her upbringing in the little country village, of her ever having believed that she could live content as a curate's wife. Whence came this unruliness in her blood? She could understand the discontent with the physical conditions of her life, but her desires went far beyond that. It was not merely for love

and luxury that she longed, but for power—power over the body and mind of men of power.

Maddison would not satisfy all her cravings; but he could take her away out into the world, and there she knew she could win.

She had in her the confidence of a conqueror.



## CHAPTER III

ON Thursday morning Maddison waited impatiently for Marian, though he never for a moment doubted but that she would come.

Absence from her had made her influence the stronger; each hour the recollection of her face had grown more clear—the droop of the eyelids, their sudden lifting and the keen, searching look of her eyes; the dainty poise of her head, the masses of red-gold hair, the little mouth with its moist, tempting lips; the tall figure, the clean, determined movements.

He paced up and down the studio waiting for her.

Many pretty women had sat to him there, some of whom had tempted him and to a few of whom he had fallen willing captive for a time. But Marian held him by a stronger spell; it was not merely her beauty that called so, imperatively to him. She was a complete woman, body and brain, and to touch her heart, to win it, to keep it, to be able to hurt it—that he must do.

But she did not come and the hour was past. Was she fooling him, luring him on? He could not credit that; he had watched her keenly and it had seemed to him that she was ready to rebel but did not dare revolt, and that it remained for him to decide whether or not she should attain her freedom. To him this world was a delightful dwelling place, in which wise men gained all of pleasure upon which they could lay hands. To make her his own would bring him complete satisfaction, at any rate for a time. As for the future, only fools toted up bills that might have to be paid. There was one cost, however, which he would have to pay, the thought of which had at first given him pause. Doubtless Squire would sue for a divorce, and, though the case would be undefended, nevertheless it would cause considerable scandal. Afterwards, would she ask him to marry her? That he would not do, for it was a part of his creed that a woman who has left one man had best be left free to desert the next.

As he waited impatiently, the question came to him more forcibly than it had done before: did Marian care for him? Their two meetings had been brief, and there had been no hint of love making. He thought that she was desperate enough to grasp at any hand held out to her, that she would be easy to win. The idea of the picture had suggested itself opportunely, and he had seized on it as a convenient and plausible excuse for their meetings. He fancied that she would accept the chance eagerly, yet she had not seemed to do so, had hesitated, and now—he laughed angrily at the state of irritated disappointment into which he was working himself.

Perhaps she had been delayed, or detained at the last moment. Probably she

would write, or maybe come up in the afternoon to explain.

He had arranged to lunch in the studio, luckily, so would not be out if she did arrive later. He looked at the pretty white table, which stood so daintily in the broad alcove before the wide hearth, with the quaint colored glasses and old silver. How delicious she would look against the dark oak of the fireplace!

A ring at the door!

The housekeeper announced "Mr. Mortimer," and Maddison fumed that he had forgotten to say that he expected a sitter, and was not to be disturbed.

"Well, George," said Mortimer, putting up his eyeglass as he walked into the room. "I'm extra busy at the office, so it's jollier than ever to come up and waste an hour with you. It's no fun lounging when there's no reason why you should not do so. Ah! you were expecting some one—me, of course!"

He glanced at the luncheon table, quizzically. He was short, sturdy, with a somewhat bullet-shaped head, covered—though thin at top—with crisp, curly black hair. His features were Oriental in cast, with a tendency toward coarseness, and his voice somewhat thick and heavy.

He sat down on the steps that led up to the broad, deep bow window, laying down his glossy hat and natty stick on the rug beside him.

"I had meant to stay at least half an hour, and possibly to carry you off to lunch, but——"

"But you think I don't want you," answered Maddison, laughing. "I don't think I shall mind much. I was expecting an old friend, whom I met the other day for the first time for years. She's going to sit for me——"

"My dear fellow, why explain? Who would suspect you of being foolish enough to lunch alone when good company was procurable? I notice you say you *were* expecting?"

"Mrs. Squire was to have been here at eleven; then two hours' work, then lunch. It's now half-past twelve——"

"Did you fix any time for lunch?"

"Have a cigarette and don't be cynical. You forget that pose don't pay with me. How people would laugh if they found you out! Not a cynical old bachelor, but just as romantic and soft hearted as man could be."

"They won't laugh, because they never will know. Even if you told them, they'd not believe you. Is it a portrait or a picture you're starting out on?"

"Picture. I won't talk about it, though. As you know, I can't talk about my ideas; they must just boil over, and then, if possible, or as far as possible, I get them on canvas. What a painter I should be if only I could make facts of all my fancies.

There's the blank canvas, and in my mind the picture. I wonder will you ever see it?"

"I wonder are you as impressionable as you used to be? And—it's a beastly word, but there is no other—and as romantic as you still appear to be? As far as I know, you've never really been in love, George: perhaps it's better that way for a painter or a poet, never to feel very deeply. He should understand deep feelings, but never experience them. What do you think?"

"I don't think about art. Art's in us, and comes out as well as it can. That's all there is to it. There's only one rule of art: don't lie, don't make up things; and if you can hit on a new truth, or can tell an old truth perfectly, you're a genius. That's all."

"What are you?"

"How can I know?"

"You're not in love, George?"

"What the deuce makes you say that? Who said I was?"

"Nobody. But I thought you were at first—with Mrs. What's-her-name, who should have been here. But you can't be, or not badly, or you would not have talked 'shop' so enthusiastically."

"That's no proof. I don't think I could ever love a woman as much as I do my work. I can't believe that, if ever I had to choose between my work and a woman, I should choose the woman."

"Touch wood, old chap, touch wood; though even that powerful magic won't make you safe. Just wait till 'she' comes along, and then, Lord preserve you! You—I can see you just mad for a woman."

"You're wrong. No woman I've ever seen has made me forget myself."

"No woman—yet. That doesn't insure the future."

"No; but I haven't any fears."

"That's what I used to say, once upon a time."

"And——?"

"I've grown older and wiser. But that's a story too stupid and too common to be worth telling. You—you're capable of sacrificing everything for a woman, for *the* woman; and, after all, it's the only thing worth making sacrifices for. Venus is the only goddess worth worshipers."

"You romantic old cynic!"

"Cynic! I wonder how that ever came to be a term of reproach? A cynic's simply a man who has learned that impulses should be restrained by reason. Most men find that wisdom when their impulses have ceased to be temptations. Good Lord! George, I came up here to lounge, and you mislead me into talking art and philosophy. The least compensation you can offer me is—lunch. I'm hungry."

Mortimer went off after luncheon, and Maddison was once more free to study the problem that faced him. Mortimer's belief that he could ever be induced to throw all else aside for the love of a woman had amused him and instilled into him a spirit of dare-deviltry, of intense desire to make hot love to Marian, for whom his longing grew keener and keener—just to prove that he could play with fire without burning his fingers.

Wonder at her not coming to him was now being supplanted by anxiety lest some accident should have befallen her.

If he walked down to Kennington he would not be there until after three o'clock, not too early an hour for a call in so unfashionable a neighborhood.

He walked slowly, surprised at the keenness of the anxiety he was now enduring. Had Marian, already, after two brief meetings, become so much to him that the fear of any hurt having come to her filled him with rage? How clearly he conjured up his last sight of her, as she stood back to the fire, whose light glinted through her hair. How graceful and gracious she had looked. Yes, he feared love unfulfilled, not love unrequited.

The gate creaked dismally as he pushed it open. He walked quickly up the gravel path, looking sharply up at the parlor window, through which in the dusk he could see the firelight dancing on the ceiling.

"Mrs. Squire was not in. Would he wait?" said the little maid.

Curiously the chance that she might not be in had not occurred to him, and he drew his breath sharply at the news.

"Is she likely to be in soon?"

"I dunno—shall I ask master?"

He told her not to trouble and turned away. He could not run the risk of having to face Squire, bearing in mind the errand on which he had come.

Apparently nothing unusual had occurred. Why had she not kept her appointment? Or, if unable to do so, why had she not written or telegraphed to him? Had it meant so little to her that she had forgotten it?

The best thing for him to do was to put the matter on one side, to wait awhile, to watch. Perhaps she had written and the letter had been delayed.

He walked some little distance before he could obtain a cab, and so, home.

There came no letter.





## CHAPTER IV

THAT afternoon Marian had gone out, thinking it possible Maddison might call, and she was pleased to hear on her return that he had done so. He was anxious then: waiting makes the heart grow fonder.

But it had not occurred to her that he might stalemate her by adopting similar tactics to her own. Several days went by and he neither made any appearance nor gave any sign, so that she began to fear that she possessed either little or no influence over him.

If he failed her she could think of no means by which she could effect her escape from the life which she so loathed. Merely to leave her husband would be cutting herself off from the security of respectability without gaining any compensating advantages. To go to Maddison would be different; through him she would make friends and acquaintances, whom she did not doubt she could use to her advantage.

In the country the growth of her mind had been stunted, though, on the other hand, to those years of fresh air and simple life she owed her superb health. Her education had been scanty, with the one exception of music—singing and the pianoforte having been taught her by the church organist, an enthusiastic old bachelor of small means but of fine taste and accomplishment. She was not an expert performer; she had not a voice which could be coined into guineas; but to her own accompaniment she sang with feeling and effect simple ballads, sometimes those of her own countryside. Of literature and art she knew little and was content in her ignorance. Innate good taste enabled her to dress to advantage. In conversation she had the knack of making such use of the small knowledge she possessed as to hide deficiencies. With curious acuteness and minuteness she had taken stock of her capabilities and defects, realizing fully that on the whole she was well equipped for the world of adventure.

Two rules she had laid down for herself; never to lose control over her emotions and always to remember that the most powerful woman is she who seems most weak. She understood clearly that her chief handicap was lack of experience, but she believed that in a woman instinct takes the place of knowledge. She would feel her way carefully, step by step, watching and probing, but the first step and the most difficult was to free herself and to obtain a footing in the greater world. She had almost despaired of ever doing this, when so unexpectedly she had met with Maddison. She had watched his career with interest and with admiration of its brilliant and rapid success, and now she upbraided herself because it had never entered into her calculations that she might be able to utilize him in the attaining of her

ambitions. She ought to have remembered how near to loving her he had once been.

So far, in her dealings with him, she did not think that she had made any error. She had shown no interest in him, which she believed was the best way to pique him into feeling interest in her. She had talked of herself, had told him enough to enable him to see clearly how dissatisfied she was with her present lot. She now felt that all that remained for her to do was to persuade him that she was worth winning, not merely for her beauty, but because she could add to the attractiveness and pleasure of his life. She, however, did not know anything of his way of life, and did not even know whether any other woman held the place she wished to obtain for herself.

He had vaguely said that he was willing to help her; he had shown anxiety by at once calling when she had failed to go to him; but, since then, silence. The next move was left to her, and with all her care she might make a false one. She knew that he was emotional, and conjectured that, once roused, no scruple of conventional morality would be a hindrance to him in achieving his desire.

If she were to approach him again now, without any reasonable excuse for doing so, she feared that she might fail to gain his help, and such a failure would mean lasting defeat. There was no means that she could think of by which she could bring him to her. To wait indefinitely was not only dangerous but repugnant to her daily intensifying longing for escape from her present life. So far, she had considered only two of the three factors in the case—herself and Maddison. It remained to be proved whether or not she could work her will by the instrumentality of her husband.

She knew his intense devotion to her, but that, great as it was, it weighed nothing against his sense of right and wrong. She did not hold the first place in his life: that was given to his work. Love, health, comfort, success—all were nothing in the scales against duty. Further, even if he were willing to give up all for her, he could neither help her ambitions nor satisfy her longings, the chief of which, indeed, was to be free from him.

More than once he had spoken to her almost sternly of her idleness and unwillingness to assist him. Was it not possible in this connection to bring about some breach between them? In some indefinite way she felt a desire to quarrel with him. At this very time he was constantly urging her to join the small band of women who, under his guidance, were laboring to bring something of decency and comfort into the lives of the wretched dwellers in some notorious slum property in the parish. She steadfastly refused. It was not work which she could or would do.

When this thought came to her, she was engaged upon some accounts, which he had asked her to have complete for an important meeting in the evening.

She closed the books almost untouched, feeling fairly confident that this

remissness would lead to remonstrance on his part, which she could make an excuse for defiance.

Coming home late in the afternoon, Squire found her, as often he had done of late, sitting idly in the dusk by the window, looking out at the dreary prospect. The fire had sunk low, and the glowing coals shed but a dim light over the room.

He was tired, physically and mentally, and a stir of anger came to him to find her sitting there thus, knowing that she knew that he considered this idleness wrong.

He sat down heavily in the worn armchair, and began to unlace his boots; his feet would be rested by an hour or so of slippers.

“I’m very tired,” he said; but she made no answer.

“How have you got on with the accounts?” he asked after a pause. “I suppose they were all right?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t touched them.”

“Not touched them!” he exclaimed, aghast, and turning sharply to her. “Not touched them! You—knew they must be ready for to-night!”

“Yes, I knew.”

She stood up, let the blinds down, pulled to the curtains viciously, and then went over to the chimney-piece for the matches. She struck a light and turned up the gas, which blazed up into a shrieking flame, and, in turning it low, she turned it out. She lit the gas again, and then stood leaning against the table, watching his face of amazement.

“I don’t understand,” he said, looking at her with puzzled eyes. “You knew they must be done, and you haven’t touched them? You’re not ill?”

“No, quite well. It’s just this, Edward, this life is killing me; you must change it. I’ve done my best to stand it, but I can’t go on with it any longer.”

“Change it—change it! How can we change it, even if it was right to?”

“Right! Right! Right!” she repeated fiercely. “Who made *you* the judge of what is right for *me*? You’re my husband, but that doesn’t make you my judge. You live your own life, and I must live mine; and this life you try to make me lead is not mine. Stop!—listen to me first. You’re so blinded with self-satisfaction, so obstinately sure that you’re right, that you’ve forgotten all about me. I’ve become just a mere item in your existence, a part of yourself. You’ve forgotten that I’ve a self, or you couldn’t really believe that this life would satisfy me. I’m young. Am I to have no fun in life? No amusements, no gayety, no pleasure, no friends? Am I to go on living here, seeing nobody worth seeing, going nowhere, just drudging along in this dismal hole?”

She stopped, panting, and he broke in——

“I can’t listen to you, Marian. Do you understand what you’re saying?”

“Yes, yes,” she interrupted, “I understand; it’s you who can’t. Can’t? Won’t—won’t! I sometimes wonder if you’re a man or a mere machine?”

“If you knew how much you are hurting me, Marian, you’d know how much of a man I am. Don’t you think I’ve seen how discontented you are, but you wouldn’t take my advice; you wouldn’t try to do what I know would make you happy. You’re—you’re so selfish; you criticise everything by whether it brings happiness to you. You have everything that I have, and could share everything with me, and be quite content and happy. But you do nothing; you keep outside my life and won’t let me help you.”

“I’ve heard all this before! What’s the use of preaching to me? Keep your sermons for those who agree with you. You’ve talked like this at me till I’m sick of hearing you.”

“Why not do as I ask you—work?”

“Why should I work?” she asked fiercely.

“Is it really you, Marian? I thought you so different.”

“I was different when you married me; I was a baby then, an ignorant fool of a girl. I’ve grown into a woman, but you haven’t noticed it.”

“A woman has more heart——”

“Copy-book platitudes won’t help us.”

“Don’t you love me?” he asked, straining eagerly toward her for the reply.

“No. I never did.”

“You never loved me?” he stammered, standing up and leaning heavily on the back of the chair. “You said you did—why did you marry me?”

“I suppose I thought I loved you—because I was lonely, poor; because I didn’t understand what love was; because I didn’t love anyone else; because I didn’t know any other man. If we’d gone on living down there in the country, I daresay I should have gone on vegetating. But you dragged me up here, and I’ve woken up. You said I was selfish. What about you? You knew what you were bringing me to and never stopped to think whether it would be good for me, this dull, stupid life, with nothing to care for, nothing to hope for, nothing to do.”

“You never really loved me? Oh, my God, why am I punished like this?”

He dropped his arms helplessly, standing before her, looking at her bewildered, as though struggling to shake himself free from some oppressive dream.

“Selfish again,” she said. “Your punishment! What about mine? You’ve often preached that there is no real happiness in life but to do your duty. Haven’t you done yours?”

“I can’t have.... What can I do?”

“Free me from this existence. Go away from here; somewhere there is life——”

“You know I can’t leave my work.”

“Others can do it.”

“If we all said that? You know I can’t leave my appointed work.”

Marian sat down and beat with her clenched fists upon the table.

“Can’t you see anyone’s life but your own?” she exclaimed fiercely. “You make me loathe you when you talk that way. Can’t you be a bit practical? Don’t you understand that things can’t go on like this? That you’re killing me? You’ve no pluck; I believe you’d be quite content to live all your life in these dingy lodgings. You say you love me——”

“I do—I do——”

“And won’t do a thing to make me happy! We can’t go on living together like this. Can we? Don’t you see we can’t?”

“What do you mean?”

“That something must be done to change it.”

“Wait, wait, let me think!” he said, tramping about the room; “let me think, let me think. No, Marian, I can’t go away; I must stop here and go on with my work. You see, dear, you’ve never really tried my way; if you worked hard all day like I do you’d have no time to be unhappy.”

“Why should I *work*?”

“Why shouldn’t you? That’s what we all have to do. And there’s so much work. You don’t know, I didn’t like to tell you, how it handicaps me, people knowing that you do nothing to help me. How can I urge them on when my wife does nothing? Then—what is it you want?”

“If I told you, oh! I know what you’d say. The same old sermons—the things I do want wouldn’t make me happy, the things I don’t would. You’ve made up your mind what I ought to do and you *are* so certain you’re right.”

“It’s not what *I* think——”

“Yes, yes, it *is* what you think; what others believe is right when you agree with them. I don’t agree with you. Your beliefs don’t make me happy.”

He sat down opposite her and began idly tracing with his finger the pattern on the shabby green cloth. She waited, wondering what he would say. So far there had been little more than a repetition of previous scenes between them. At last, after what seemed to her an interminable silence, he said—

“Don’t you see how you are breaking my heart? I believed you loved me. You deceived me. Then—do you think my work is easy to me? Don’t you know I would like to give you everything you want? But I can’t leave my work, and you—you do

nothing to help me.”

“How can I when I think you’re all wrong?”

“Wrong in what way?”

“In everything. You preach about a merciful, just God! Is there any mercy or justice in allowing people to be born to live the life you are working to save them from? Nonsense!”

“Do you know what you’re saying?”

“Quite well.”

“It’s blasphemy”—he stood up, looking down on her with the light of fanaticism in his eyes—“blasphemy! Pray to God you may be forgiven for it. Do you ever pray—truly?”

“What’s the use? I’ve prayed for what I want and can’t go on believing when I don’t get it. Of course you’ll tell me I pray for what wouldn’t be good for me! Praying doesn’t alter things, so what’s the use of it?”

“It’s because you don’t believe.”

“Yes, that’s religion all over!—Argue in a way that would be simply idiotic if you applied it to real life.”

“Marian! Marian!” he said, leaning across the table toward her, “God help you!”

“Soon, I hope,” she answered, turning away with a gesture of disgust.

He sprang up, but bit his lip, stopping the rush of words that came to his tongue. She looked up at him, laughing bitterly.

“Will you ever realize that our marriage was a mistake? We weren’t made for one another, that’s all about it. And we’re so poor we can’t afford to separate.”

“Separate!”

“What’s the use of stopping together? I tell you I *can’t* go on with this life; you must change it; you must.”

“I can’t. Marian, won’t you try once more?”

“No, I won’t. I’ve one life to live and I won’t be driven into wasting it. I’m young, full of life; you’ve often told me I’m beautiful, and you want me to go on living here and sharing your miserable work. I won’t. You must make a change.”

“I can’t,” he repeated doggedly. “You know I can’t. Not even you can tempt me to do that. I’ve listened to what you said, horrible as much of it was. I’ve felt hopeless about you for some time; you were so out of touch with me, you were becoming a stranger to me. I’ve asked you to try my way once more. I’ve often asked things of you. I begin to think I’ve been weak. I’ve tried to make you my true comrade and I’ve failed. Now, I must—must—make a change.” There was a tone in his voice that compelled her to stand up face to face with him. “I must make a

change. Instead of our ruling our house together——”

“House! Lodgings!”

“I will be its master. I blame myself for not having been so sooner. Your life and salvation were intrusted to me and I should not have let my love for you interfere and tempt me to make life easy for you. Life is not easy and you must face it. Remember, I’m God’s minister.”

“So you say. You never give me a chance of forgetting it, with your continual preaching. So, now you can’t bend me, you’ll break me?”

“I must try to teach you that God must be obeyed.”

“How do you know His commands? But it’s no good talking this way any more. I shall leave you to-morrow”—her voice trembled, half with fear, half with defiant anger as she repeated—“I shall leave you to-morrow.”

“Leave me?”

“Leave you.”

“Where are you going?”

“What does that matter to you? You think divorce sinful, so my future address doesn’t concern you.”

She walked quickly out of the room, leaving him dazed.

For some moments he seemed scarcely conscious, scarcely able to breathe. Then, slowly, heavily, he kneeled down at the table, and, burying his face in his hands, prayed for forgiveness, the while he shook with sobbing and his heart ached.





## CHAPTER V

MARIAN locked herself into the bedroom and sat down before the glass, laughing at her flushed, angry face. She was too astute to try to cajole herself into believing that Edward had really done or said anything to justify her leaving him. But in her present mood it pleased her to behave like a spoiled child. When Edward knocked at the door, asking for admission, she did not answer. She laughed again as she listened to his heavy, weary footfall going down the stairs. He would have to work out the accounts for himself, she had done with them.

She pulled out from beneath the bed her old-fashioned leather trunk and began to pack such clothes as she meant to take with her.

He sat down wearily to the books, checking them mechanically, while his mind was almost numb. He had never hesitated in his faith; it was not in him to do so; but never before had he felt so helpless. Prayer had brought softness to his anger, but as yet there was no light on the dark path ahead.

Before he left the house he went upstairs again, but, as before, obtained no answer to his knocking. From sheer habit he wrapped himself up closely, and, taking the books, went out.

Marian heard the door shut behind him, and knew that it closed on her married life.

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This same day Maddison worked until the light failed, early in the afternoon, and then stood before the fire in the darkening studio, undetermined.

Marian's intrusion into his life had rendered him dissatisfied, made him at one moment feverishly anxious for activity, at another full of longing for solitude and silence. As it chanced, the first was his present mood, but he had no engagement and did not know where to go or what to do.

It was only four o'clock. He could pay a visit to one or other of the many friends who would meet him with quick welcome, but this prosaic prospect did not allure him, nor did an afternoon of gossip or argument at the club.

It occurred to him to go and see Marian, but he resisted the insistent temptation. She had thrown him over without a word, either not wanting to see him, or wishing him to woo her; both pride and wisdom told him that he had best leave the next move to her. But if she made no move? Were there not other women equally desirable! Another Marian?

The ringing of the telephone bell broke in on his thoughts. The call was from Mortimer.

“Hullo! Is that you, George?”

“Yes.”

“I’m laid up with a sprained ankle. Can you come round for a chat? I’ve no woman for you—only tea.”

“All right.”

“At once?”

“Yes.”

A hansom bore him down quickly to the Adelphi, where Mortimer lived in a snug set of chambers overlooking the river. Maddison found him stretched out on the sofa before the fire, reading a prettily-bound, daintily-illustrated, wittily-written volume of French essays on cookery.

“Good man!” he exclaimed. “Come round to the fire. I’ve had a most lucky accident which will prevent me being able to go to the office this abominable weather and will get me out of several engagements I don’t want to keep.”

“You know you love going out!”

“No, I don’t. And as a matter of fact I don’t go out much. I used to, but I’m growing up. For one thing, people are so stupidly flippant; at best flippancy doesn’t sit well on English shoulders. You see I’m lucky: I’m an Englishman with foreign parents and a Jew for a grandfather. Do you mind ringing the bell?”

The servant brought in the tea table, which he set down beside the sofa; a bright, copper kettle was put on one trivet and a dish of hot cakes on the other.

“You old maid!” said Maddison, laughing, as he watched the trim preparations.

“That’s a compliment. An old maid is usually delightful. She has the ripeness of years without the rottenness of experience. And she’s free to do what she likes.”

“Because she hasn’t been able to do what every woman likes best; so she has to put up with the details of life.”

“Are there any details in life?” Mortimer asked.

“Yes; most important things are details.”

“I suppose you would call tea-making a detail? Three and a half minutes exactly. I hope you always drink China tea, George!”

“I never thought about it.”

“An unhappy old age is before the man who does not consider the tea he drinks? No doubt you are Vandal enough to take sugar? Art and sensibility of palate seldom go together. By the way, West’s back from his honeymoon. I had a line from him this morning. What a beggar he is for writing! He gets through more work in a day than the average man does in a week, and still has time to be married and write letters. He wants me to go down for a week-end.”

“What’s she like?”

“You saw her at the wedding.”

“Saw her. I know what she looks like—an empty-headed plaything. But you know her well, don’t you?”

“No man ever knows a woman.”

“Don’t be platitudinous.”

“I can’t always be lying. She—I really don’t know. I used to think her a devilish little flirt; in fact she was; but women do change so after they’re married. Besides, I may have been quite wrong, quite. Everyone else thought her just a simple little maiden—who *knows*?”

“And after all, it doesn’t really much matter. But it will take a clever woman to manage West. If she is just a doll he’ll soon grow tired of her—as he has of other dolls, whom he didn’t need to marry.”

“That’s so. We shall see. I like West. He’s such a delightful contrast to myself. How have you been jogging along? Anything new? Is the picture getting itself upon canvas?”

“Not begun!” answered Maddison, putting down his cup and lighting a cigarette.

“Refractory model, or what?”

“Just can’t get a start, that’s all. I can see it in my mind’s eye, Horatio, but—” he broke off abruptly.

They chatted on about matters indifferent, but Maddison, feeling out of tune with his companion, went away with an unwonted consciousness that he was out of tune with his life.

He lingered for a few minutes on the Terrace, looking at the picture spread before him: the blackness of the gardens below; the lamps on the Embankment and of the passing cabs and carriages; the dim mystery of the river; the black line of the railway bridge with its green and red lights; over all, the gloom and glamour of London.

Then he walked up Adam Street and so on along the noisy Strand to Charing Cross. As he walked, unconsciously directing his steps homeward, there came over him that intense feeling of loneliness that must fall at times upon any man who lives alone in London. He longed for some one, some woman, to whom he could go, with whom he could stay, in whom he could confide, from whom he could obtain the satisfying sympathy which only a woman can give to a man. There never had been one who had in any reality shared his life; he had never before suffered from the lack of such a one. But now he was hungry for intimate, human companionship and there was no one from whom he could obtain it. His thoughts turned to Marian. He

realized that he did not know anything of her nature; she attracted him physically; she interested him. It did not appear unreasonable that a woman of her temperament should rebel against the circumstances of her dull, insipid life, but he wondered if it were solely against that existence that she was revolting, or was she one of those women who rebel against all restraint? Was she simply a man-hunter? A woman who lusted for pleasure, excitement, change for change's sake? How greatly she had altered from the simple country girl she had been when he knew her first.

Or had she qualities in her which would enable her to become devoted to one man, to be happy with him? To be his comrade and ally? He must not permit sensual impulses to overthrow his reason. He must not allow Marian to become part of his life, only to find that he was not part of hers.

It is a long walk from the Strand to St. John's Wood, and it was considerably after seven when he slipped his latchkey into the door and went into the dark studio, turning up the light as he entered. Still the sense of loneliness held him; the room, despite all its luxuriousness, appeared comfortless.

He sat down and stirred the fire into a flame; sat there, smoking and thinking.

Strength had gone out of him. During the last few days his work had failed to satisfy him: it had been labored and dull. He had never before suffered in this way. Painting had hitherto been the supreme thing in his life, but now a woman's face was always flitting between him and the canvas. If she were with him, would it still be so? Or would she strengthen and inspire him? It was the uncertainty that disturbed him; to have and to hold her, then to find that she injured and did not aid him—that would hurt, but the wound would quickly heal, he felt sure. It would be wiser, then, to act promptly, to put an end to this state of doubt.

Supposing she rejected him? Probably she had not come to him because she did not care whether she met him again or did not. Or—it might be—she wished so dearly to see him that she could not bring herself to come to him.

He drove down to Acacia Grove.

As he strode up the crunching gravel path he saw that the parlor was in darkness, or else the curtains were very closely drawn.

If her husband were with her his visit would be in vain, save that it would show her that he was anxious to see her. His hand trembled as he knocked, and he waited anxiously for the maid's approach.

"Is Mrs. Squire at home?"

"No, sir. She's just gone away, sir, in a kebab, with her boxes. She was a-goin' on a visit, she said."

"Where to?"

“I dunno.”

He hurried away, shocked, angry. What silly trick was fate playing on him? He must write, cautiously, perhaps to find that she was gone out of his reach.

What an unutterably dreary part of the town was this in which he found himself pursuing the more or less romantic! Dinky vice and dreary respectability inextricably mingled, punctuated by blazing public houses. He hurried through the continuous stream of wayfarers, wondering if any of them knew the meaning of love. It startled him to find how intense had grown his longing for Marian, whom he thought at first he held in his hand, but who now eluded him so persistently.

A man passed him, walking rapidly in the opposite direction. Despite the dim light, he recognized Edward Squire. Then the thought came to him that perhaps Marian had come face to face with the great act of rebellion and had found her courage fail, had fled for safety. He did not believe that she would find safety; once her thirst for the fullness of life had been excited she would quench it. If he did not win her some other man would. He wanted her and would not leave anything undone to possess her.

Again and again the echo of her voice rang in his ears as he hurried along; again her face appealed to him. How glorious it would be to loosen her red-gold hair around her shoulders, to hold her close to him, looking deep into her eyes, his lips on hers; she and he alone.



## CHAPTER VI

BOTH in situation and in itself, Stone's Hotel is respectable and dull. Desperately so, Marian found it, as she stood looking out of the drawing room window on the sunlit, colorless street. She was alone.

It was an Early Victorian room; heavy, dingy red curtains hung down starkly before the window from a heavy, gilded cornice. The carpet also was dingy red, with faded roses of huge proportions displayed thereon; the walls were covered with dirty gold-and-white paper, chastened by oleographs in clumsy gold frames; over the mantelpiece there was a fly-blown, gilt-framed mirror; the furniture was upholstered in well-worn red velvet, and over the backs of the chairs and sofa were draped dirty white crochet antimacassars; in the center stood a huge round table covered with a green and black cloth and adorned with a careful selection of assorted hotel guides and photograph albums, among which a stray Tauchnitz volume looked sadly out of place; over the whole lay the blight of dust and dreariness.

Marian had dressed carefully in black, the single touch of color being a gold brooch at her neck.

She turned, with a gesture of impatience, away from the empty street to the empty room, and sat down by the fire, the one spot of warmth and brightness.

Her brows knit as she thought over the situation in which she had placed herself. She was ready to cross the Rubicon; had gone so far that return was unthinkable. It now depended upon Maddison whether her first fight would be a victory or a disastrous defeat. But she felt stronger now that she was free, and determinedly put aside all thought of what would face her if she failed to win.

The sharp pulling up of a hansom and the ringing of the house-bell made her listen eagerly. The subdued maidservant threw open the door and Maddison came in.

"It is so good of you to come!" Marian said, rising and holding out her hand. "I hope you didn't mind my writing to you, but I've—no one else."

The weariness and despondency in her voice and attitude hurt him.

"Of course I don't mind—why on earth should I? Is—what's happened?"

She sat down again, her back to the light, and he took the chair on the opposite side of the hearth. He could not see her face very distinctly in the dull room, but this very dimness gave an added charm to her beauty. She did not answer his question immediately, though her lips parted as if she were anxious but unable to speak.

"Now you're here," she said at last, "I'm frightened. I'd no right to ask you to come, but—I'd no one else, and I'm——"

Tears came into her eyes, rolling slowly down her cheeks. Then she covered her face with her hands, watching him very keenly between her fingers.

He rose quickly and came over to her, resting his hand upon the back of her chair and only by an effort restraining himself from catching her in his arms.

"I'm so sorry," he said, "so sorry, and so glad you did send for me. Don't—don't cry."

"I'm so helpless!" she sobbed.

She dropped her hands on her lap disconsolately; he took them in his, as he stooped over her.

"Come, come, you're not helpless," he said, "because you're not alone. Tell me, what has happened?"

She drew her hands slowly from his, as she answered—

"You must forgive me—crying; I'm not often so silly, but I couldn't help it. If you hadn't come, I don't know what I should have done. Please sit down again and I'll tell you."

She paused as though she were trying how best to begin her story.

"I've left home. Left it altogether. I couldn't stay there any longer. I tried hard to get used to things, but they got worse and worse. Then yesterday afternoon Edward was wild with me because I couldn't—*couldn't* help him in his work. I broke out and—there was a regular scene between us. We quarreled—and—I came away here—what am I to do?"

"Why here?"

"It's the only place I know. My father brought me here years ago; it wasn't like this then, or didn't seem so."

"Have you no plans at all?" he asked.

"No, none. I must earn a living somehow. I've no money, and no friends, except you, and I've no right to bother you. I suppose you think I'm mad to run away like this—but the life there—it wasn't life—it was killing me.

"I don't set up to judge people; don't talk like that. The first thing is—you mustn't stop in this dingy hole."

"Where else can I go?"

"We must hunt up some decent rooms somewhere. This place would kill you."

"Decent rooms—with a decent rent! You forget I'm a working woman. The first thing to do is to find a way to earn my living."

He hesitated for a moment; was she playing with him, or talking in innocent earnestness?

"What about your husband?" he asked abruptly.



“Edward? I left a letter for him, telling him I had gone away and that—nothing on earth would persuade me to go back.”

“Are you sure of that?”

Her hands clinched as she answered: “Nothing could ever persuade me to go back to him. What would be the use of it? To begin it all over again? There would be no change; he couldn’t change, and I couldn’t—not as he would want me to. He’ll be miserable at first, but soon he’ll be all the better for my being away. He never loved me really; it’s only his work he loves.”

“Won’t he search for you?”

“I dare say. But he’d only preach again if he found me.”

“Did you—did you—care for him?”

“Love him? I thought I did when I married him, and didn’t know what he was. I was a girl then and knew nothing. Gradually I came to hate him. I couldn’t help it; you don’t know how heartlessly cruel a *good* man can be—they’re so utterly selfish. But don’t let’s waste time on what has been. When I shut the door there last night, I shut it on the past. Now—what am I to do now? Can you help me? Do you know of any work I could do? Or how I could get it?”

“Let me think,” he said, walking slowly up and down the room. “Why—why did you not keep your promise to come and see me at my studio?”

“I—can’t tell you.”

“Can’t tell me?” he said, surprised.

“No; please don’t ask me. I could make up an excuse—lie to you, but—I shouldn’t like to tell you even the most innocent fib. So please don’t ask. All I can tell you,” she said, looking up at him as he stood beside her, “is that I had a very good reason.”

Their eyes met fully, and she dropped hers quickly and turned away.

“I went down to see you last night—just after you had left,” he said. “I—well, I wanted you to help me.”

“To help you? How could I help you?”

“We’re a helpless couple,” he answered, laughing nervously. Then he drew up a chair close to hers, so that he could see her face. “Yes, you can help me, and it’s just possible I can help you. You remember when I came down to see you that afternoon, and you told me something about your life and how—bad it was for you. I’ve never forgotten what you told me. It’s made me a good deal unhappy.”

“I don’t know why I told you,” she said doubtfully; “I suppose because you were the only person I knew who I thought could understand. I didn’t mean to worry you.”

"I'm very glad you did tell me. But something you *did* worried me very much—your not coming to see me. It made me angry at first and then miserable, especially as you didn't write to say why you hadn't been able to come."

"I tried to write but I couldn't."

"Couldn't? What do you mean?" he asked keenly.

"Just, I couldn't. Don't ask me any more."

"You *couldn't* come to see me—you *couldn't* write to me? I don't understand."

"I—can't explain. But—you were telling me about yourself?"

"You care to hear?"

"Of course I do."

"When I went down to see you last night it seemed as if it would be so easy; now, somehow I can't say what I want."

"Is it something I can do for you?"

"Yes—yes—look here, come down to the studio now. I'll start that picture, and while I work you can talk. Then we'll lunch there, and talk some more and see if we can't put things a bit straight. Will you come?"

Little as he had said, his manner had conveyed an assurance to her that she would quickly gain her object, and it required all her self-restraint to enable her to conceal her relief and triumph. She did not reply to him immediately, looking into the fire as though she were thinking over what he had said, in reality waiting until she felt sure of her voice and eyes. The conversation of the last few minutes had shown him to be her captive and that the life she had been dreaming of was now about to become a reality.

She stood up as she answered him——

"I'll come; it will do me good. You've been awfully kind to me."

While waiting for her, he paced quickly up and down the room. All hesitation and all doubt had vanished; his pulse beat quickly; he longed to be away with her: to see her seated before him, the rebel whom he hoped to tame. Yet with this certainty there mixed a last remnant of reason: before he gave himself he must be sure that she was his. He could not bring himself seriously to mistrust her, but he realized that he was holding out a rescuing hand to a lonely, desperate, possibly cunning woman. She might clutch at it in helplessness; he longed that she should clasp it in love.

Though the drive was long it seemed only too short to him. She scarcely spoke at all, but looked straight ahead, wistfully, as it seemed to him, as though she were watching a world of men and women in which she only was sad. He, too, was silent, content to look at her, noting every beauty of her face, the graceful carriage of her head, the evanescent loveliness of her hair.

“Here we are!” he exclaimed, as he led the way into the studio. “Shan’t I just make a nuisance of myself! You’ll have to sit still, though you can talk. I can listen while I work.”

“What a lovely room!” she said, looking round at the deep archway before the carved oak fireplace; the opposite arch, the recess with the daïs and the wide expanse of latticed windows with the clear lights above; the parqueted floor, strewn with rugs and skins; the carved chairs and the luxurious settee—the display of somber, costly, beautiful things. “What a lovely room! I couldn’t work in a room like this—but then I’ve never found a room in which I could work, since I left the country.”

She threw off her wraps and flung them with her hat—recklessly—on a couch, and then stood warming her hands at the fire.

“I don’t think you were made for working,” he said, standing close beside her, looking down upon her as she bent to the blaze, which shed a warmth of crimson over her face. “You were meant to help others to work.”

“You?”

“Ever so much, I fancy.”

“Tell me what I’m to do, and I’ll try.”

He brought over to the fireside an old-fashioned, plain wooden chair, with high, stiff back and broad, flat arms.

“There—sit there—straight up—I shan’t keep you like that for long at a stretch; grip the ends of the arms slightly—and look into the fire; look like you did, as far as you can, that afternoon when I called you the rebel.”

She took the position he directed, while he sat down on a stool at a little distance and began to sketch rapidly upon a block on his knee.

“I want to rough it out,” he said, as he tore off a sheet of the paper and flung it on the floor, “until I’ve caught the pose, and then I’ll start to get it on a canvas.”

At first he worked quickly, the while she watched him with keen interest. She knew that if she had aroused deep emotion in him, he could not continue this make-believe of absorption in his work, could not long keep up this semblance of looking upon her simply as a model.

It was partly hatred of the surroundings in which he had found her this morning, partly fear of precipitancy that induced him to act as he was doing. If he spoke too soon he might not only lose her, but lose also—he loved her too sincerely not to dread it—the opportunity of helping her in her distress. But strive strongly as he could he was unable to concentrate his mind upon the work. Every time he looked at her and found her gaze fixed upon him it called for all his powers of control to keep

him from throwing discretion aside at once and for all.

“You’re watching me,” he said with a touch of impatience that troubled her; “look at the fire, please.”

“I’m afraid you bully your sitters,” she replied, doing as he bade her. “I’m *so* tired of being told to do things. There are such lots of things I should like to do—but nobody ever told me to do any of them.”

“What things? May I know?”

“You’ll only laugh at me. They’re the kind of things that a woman with nothing a year and not much hope of earning anything much has to do without and had better not even think about.” She spoke slowly, wondering which of her ambitions it would be discreet to name to him. “I should like a lot of friends, clever people who can talk and be jolly and make me jolly too, if I haven’t forgotten how to be; and pretty rooms. I should like to read and to see pictures, and to go to the opera—and I want sympathy—and—and——”

As she broke off there was a catch in her voice that routed the remains of his discretion. He threw away his pencil and went quickly over to her, standing beside her chair.

“Look up at me,” he said eagerly. “What else do you want? Sympathy—and—what else?”

Instead of looking up at him, she turned away, clasping her hands in her lap.

“Look up at me,” he repeated. “Why don’t you?”

“I can’t.”

“Can’t again! Is it—is it for the same reason that you didn’t come here; didn’t write me? Tell me!”

“Yes.”

“I’d like to guess—but I daren’t, for if my guess was wrong, you’d never forgive me. But—I’ll risk it. I can’t wait any longer. It’s because you care more for me than you care for a mere friend. If that’s it, it’ll be all right and you shall have all your wishes.”

He noticed the quick heaving of her bosom and believed that it was love for him that stirred her.

“It’s just this: I love you, Marian, and if you’ll trust me I’ll do all I can to make you happy. Let me try.”

The revulsion from doubt to certainty was too great for her strength, and she burst into hysterical sobs as she hid her face in her hands.

“Marian, Marian,” he said, kneeling beside her, “just tell me—do you love me? Tell me, do you? Do you?”

At the moment she almost felt that she did love him.

“Tell me—do you?”

“You really love me?” she asked, turning her tear-stained face to him.

“Really love you?” he exclaimed, seizing her hands and covering them with eager kisses. “What’s the use of telling you? Let me prove it.”



## CHAPTER VII

EVEN in winter time the Manor House at Chelmsurst is a cheerful abode; the garden is no mere waste of promises kept and made; the two great yew-trees on the lawn behind the house by their spacious graciousness prevent any sense of void, nobly supported as they are by the splendid laurel hedges and the evergreen shrubberies. The long, low house, with warm red-brick walls, tiled roofs, haphazard gables and chimney-stacks, strikes rich and cozy to the eye. Behind the garden, barely divided from it by light iron railings, lies a broad meadow, with a pond and a confining belt of elms. Before the house, clearly seen over the low wall, stretches the gorse-clad common with its graceful clumps of ash-trees.

Thin wraiths of country mist strayed about the common, hanging in the tall trees that surround it on almost all sides, and there was a bitter winter sting in the air, as Philip West and Fred Mortimer drove up from the station one afternoon late in November.

With his long, lanky limbs, thick shock of black hair, which he had a habit of tossing from his forehead, dark blue eyes, which at times appeared to be the abode of dreams, but on occasion flashed with abundant energy, his thin, almost cadaverous face, West contrasted markedly with his companion. As ever, he was smoking a cigar, which he fidgeted between his thin fingers when it was not cocked up at the corner of his mouth.

"I'm sorry Maddison could not come down; I find him a refreshing contrast to my restless self," West said. "Besides I should like him to meet Alice Lane. She's the sort of woman you don't meet half a dozen times in a life. I wonder how they'd get on together."

"Are you matchmaking for others, now you've made your own match?"

"Not a bit, Fred. That's the one line of business I shouldn't care to tackle. It'd do him a deuced lot of good to get married to the right woman."

"I fancy he fancies other men have generally married the right woman—for him. Which is convenient, and does not land him in lifelong responsibilities. There are so many right men and so few right women."

"Don't agree with you a bit. The average man rubs along all right with the average woman. It's when you get a man above or below the average that the trouble begins."

Mortimer wondered if his companion were thinking of his own recent marriage. Strikingly beautiful he knew Mrs. West to be, and in a quaint, childish way, fascinating. But that would not suffice West for long. He had tired of similar charms

often enough already.

The victoria swung briskly in through the gate on to the short drive, and before it had pulled up West leaped out and sprang up on to the veranda to greet his wife.

“You see, Fred,” he said, laughing—“you see we haven’t forgotten our honeymoon ways yet. We haven’t arrived at the silly stage when we’re ashamed of people knowing we’re fond of one another. You’ve met Fred before, Agatha; make the best you can of him, and let him do exactly what he likes, or he’ll never come again.”

A pretty blush lingered on her cheeks as she held out her hand to Mortimer in welcome.

“I try to keep him in order, Mr. Mortimer, but he’s just a great big baby—at home, at any rate.”

It was she who looked a child; her figure was girlish, supple and delicate, shown to perfection by the clinging soft silk gown; her face, too, was girlish, tender in every contour, set in a frame of unruly golden hair, the hazel eyes alone giving it distinction. Neither husband nor wife made any attempt to conceal their admiration of and affection for each other, and Mortimer could but question how long West, man of the world, would rest satisfied with the constant companionship of such a woman. Perhaps, however, she was exactly the helpmeet he needed, one who would catch him away from the serious work of life.

The chief characteristic of the interior of the Manor House is the long, low hall into which the front door opens directly; cozy, comfortable, half drawing room, half billiard room, the Wests used it constantly, Mrs. West working there in the morning and receiving visitors there in the afternoon; in the evenings the house-party assembling there before dinner and after.

“Here we are!” exclaimed West to a tall, graceful woman, who sat reading by the roaring fire. “Here’s Mortimer, and here’s me, so now you have some one to entertain or be entertained by, instead of reading all the time while Agatha insists on spooning with me.”

Mortimer considered himself quick at seeing whether a new acquaintance would prove to his liking, and immediately decided that there was not much chance of there being any real goodwill between Alice Lane and himself. She was not of a type that appealed to him; too sedate, too cool; stately, well-proportioned, almost robust, with a breezy, blunt, direct manner of speech, gesture and look.

“Why are you so late?” Mrs. West asked. “We waited lunch ever so long for you, and now it is almost tea time.”

“It’s partly my fault because I was so busy; partly the fog’s.”



“Chiefly his fault,” said Mortimer; “he kept me waiting in his room for two solid hours. Gave me *The Times* and a lot of cigars to keep me quiet.”

“You must be famished. Poor things! I’ll ring for tea at once. How can you be so naughty, Phil?”

“If you pull my hair like that I shall kiss you, and you know how that disgusts Alice. I *should* like to see her in love with some emotional young man like me——”

“Young!” exclaimed Mrs. West, with a merry laugh. “Young! Dark, thin and forty, you mean!”

“Like myself,” he continued, ignoring the interruption. “I wonder whether he would thaw her or she freeze him?”

“Don’t mind him, Alice.”

“I don’t. He’ll grow up some day.”

“There, Mrs. West,” he said, striking an attitude of triumph; “you see, this sensible young woman realizes that I am young. Profit by her example.”

Darkness was closing in, but Mrs. West protested that it would be far more pleasant to sit, chat and drink tea by the firelight than to have the lamp brought in.

“What a quaint quartette we are!” said West. “I, sedate and elderly; Alice, sedate and quite young; Agatha, the child; and Fred—well, all cynics are old.”

“*Are* you a cynic?” asked Mrs. West, handing him his cup.

“What do you mean by a cynic?”

“I always think cynics are—disagreeable and——”

“*And* you ask me if I am one!”

“Had you then, Aggie!” laughed her husband.

“I don’t care a bit. Mr. Mortimer knows I didn’t mean anything nasty. I’m always saying shocking things, and no one minds a bit.”

“Any more than when a kitten scratches,” said West.

“A kitten’s scratches hurt, and mine don’t. It’s mean of you to sit the other side of Alice, so that I can’t pull your hair. We have her here, Mr. Mortimer, to keep us good, and to make her better.”

“Aggie trying to make epigrams! What next! Heaven defend the poor man whose wife makes epigrams.”

Quite mistakenly, Mortimer counted himself an onlooker at life, delighting to sound the characters of his friends and when possible, to understand their doings. This night, as he lay awake, his thoughts dwelt upon the company of three with whom he had passed the evening. He had known Philip West for years, and considered him a strong, determined, pushing man. From small beginnings inherited from an uncle he had built up vast Stores known over London, indeed all the world

over, thanks to skillful and persistent advertising. He was a man of considerable culture and refinement, one who, so Mortimer believed, would look for much in his wife, for much more, at any rate, than he would obtain from any pretty, overgrown schoolgirl. Agatha certainly was beautiful and her baby ways charming, but were they not likely soon to pall upon such a man as West? There was a further point: was she not simply a fair-weather mate? Would he not find her hopelessly wanting in any time of stress and storm? Could she shake herself free from her love of dress, luxury and excitement? Mortimer felt sorry for her; she was lovable, but helpless. To see her suffer would be as bad as to watch the pain of a pretty pet animal.

The third of the trio—Alice Lane? Mortimer tried to set aside his innate distaste for her and his suspicion that she despised him as a trifler, endeavoring to judge her justly. He had watched her closely, and had discovered that she in turn was closely watching West and his wife. She was obviously on intimate terms with Philip and apparently was entirely trusted by Agatha, but Mortimer had learned to mistrust the continued harmony of such a trio. A wrong note was sure to be sounded sooner or later. If Agatha failed or palled upon him, West would certainly turn to some other woman. If he held out his hand to Alice Lane, would she take it? Mortimer thought not, for he recognized that there was a great deal that was noble in her. But, then, she might hold that it was a noble part to help, in defiance of the world's opinion, the man she loved. That she did love West he had so far seen no cause to believe, but he fancied that more than once when Agatha and her husband had indulged in open display of their affection she had shrunk back with some stronger emotion than mere distaste.

To Mortimer this openly displayed fondness was amusing and even grateful; it pleased him to meet a couple in their position whose refinement had not blunted their impulses. He felt himself old beside them, sighing as he thought that such innocuous sweets were insipid to him.

With that sigh he closed his eyes and fell asleep, leaving the future to expound itself.

Billiards and conversation helped the Sunday hours to pass rapidly, until at length Mortimer found himself late at night sitting alone with West.

“One more cigar and one more whisky,” said the latter, suiting the action to the word.

“Oh, yes, I know what that means. I grant you’ll probably be content with the one drink—but—several cigars. How do you manage it?”

“Manage what?”

“To burn the candle at both ends without burning out?”

“I don’t do it. I’ve several candles and I burn each at one end only. Work all day and rest down here.”

“Rest! You’d go mad if you ever tried to do it. You’re always at something, and as for sleep, it doesn’t seem to matter how little you have of it. You eat and drink everything you shouldn’t——”

“But I don’t worry. That’s my secret. I never let anything or anybody worry me. I sacked one of my head men the other day because he was developing a habit of trying to worry me.”

“Never worry! Lucky devil!”

“I’ve never done so. I’ve just worked straight ahead for what I wanted. I never stopped to consider whether I was a saint or a sinner, a beauty or a beast. What’s the good? We *are* what we *are*, that’s all. And—I’ll have what I want if I can get it, but I shan’t worry if I don’t get it—that’s all.”

“Again, lucky man.”

“You, Fred, you—your delight in life is to weigh in delicate scales one thing against another, and then choose by applying certain rules which you fancy you obey. But you don’t obey them, not you. No man could. We’re all creatures of impulse. Reason is only useful for getting us out of scrapes which are the result of our own or others’ mistakes. Why should I *worry*? I’ve got everything I want; money, power, a comfortable house, a pretty wife. Good Lord, what would be the use of deliberately shoving a fly into my own honey?”

“Yours is a fair-weather philosophy.”

“It’s brought me through a good many hours of foul weather. You know something about business, though your father—luckily for you—knows more. You know I’ve not built up my business without nearly running on rocks sometimes. Last year it was almost a toss-up whether I came a colossal smash or not.”

“Last year!”

“Last year.”

“But last year——”

“Oh, yes,” West broke in, “I know what you’re going to say. Last year I gave ten thousand pounds to a Royal charity fund. People said I did it to buy a knighthood. I did it to set my credit above suspicion. It saved me.”

“I’ve never heard you talk about business before.”

“Very likely not. I don’t often talk ‘shop.’ Does it bore you?”

“No, I like hearing men talk shop.”

“I wish I had been married then,” West said, lying back on the sofa and watching the smoke from his cigar as it drifted across to the fire. “A business man ought to

have a home that keeps him—so to speak—out of his office.”

“And a wife to share his anxieties?”

“H’m—I don’t know that. Perhaps it would help.”

He knocked the ash off his cigar, got up and began pacing slowly up and down the long room.

“That’s just the difference between us, Fred. You’d weigh the woman you thought of marrying in those silly scales of yours, and if you found her short weight in any particular would fight shy. I’ve human impulses and follow them. When they get me into a mess I get out of it as well as I can. You spend so much of time in avoiding messes that you’ll never get into anything else.”

“I don’t seem to have many impulses left.”

“Rats! You don’t know anything about yourself—you analytical gents never do. Or else, which I suspect is more true, you don’t want anyone else to know you have just ordinary, human impulses. I believe you’re a sentimental old humbug. Come to bed.”



## CHAPTER VIII

MARIAN understood that if her bargain with Maddison was to last, it must be made satisfying to him as well as to herself. She did not think that because the first skirmish had been won the remainder of the campaign would be easy and necessarily victorious. She rejoiced in having won her freedom from the shackles of matrimony, but did not overlook the fact that her foothold in her new world was precarious, and that a single false step might bring her to trouble far worse than that from which she had escaped.

Inexperience was her chief weakness. Intuition, impulse and insight she possessed in high degree, but these alone would not suffice her, would not enable her to make her new position unassailable. It was certain, once the first rush of pleasurable emotion was over, that Maddison would begin to weigh the consequences of what he had done, that he would question whether stress of circumstances had not driven him to act foolishly in tying himself so closely to her. He would study her keenly to find out whether she was really charming or only appeared so to him. The woman desired is so often more desirable than the woman won. It must be her unremitting task never to disappoint him in any way, and in this the chief difficulty would be to know where to draw the line between the utter submission to his will which might lead to rapid satiation and the making it difficult for him to gain his every point without feeling that he was not being given all that he was paying for. She must make her hold upon him so tight that there would be no chance of his easily loosening it before she herself might desire to be free. She determined that no avoidable rashness or haste should endanger the future.

Maddison acted as she expected. After the first outburst of passion he was strongly impelled to draw back, to survey critically the situation into which he had been drawn almost against his will, and certainly against his better judgment, and to ask himself repeatedly if there could be any continued content for him in this liaison.

He settled Marian in a pretty flat not far from his studio, and the first test to which he put her was to watch carefully her taste in the decorating and furnishing of her new home.

"I want everything to be just what you like," she said to him, as they surveyed the bare, unpapered rooms. "It is so lovely to start with everything to do and not to have to put up with what other people have put up. Everything must be just what you like, George."

He laughed.

"What *I* like?—What *you* like."

“Perhaps we shall both like the same things! Though it’s cheeky of me to imagine that my taste could be as good as yours. I don’t think I shall want anything you will consider dreadful, but you must teach me what are the best things. Only, do let everything be pretty and quiet—and not too many things. And don’t let’s go to one shop and get everything there; I’d much rather do it bit by bit. I want a home—our home—not a gimcrack shop or a ready-made bandbox as if I were a new hat—a real *home*.”

She spoke the word almost sadly, and turning away from him, went across the room and looked out of the window at the canal, the noisy road, the vast vistas of houses and the dun-colored sky. Her tone touched him, as she had hoped it would; there rushed in on him a sudden realization that he had taken into his keeping a human soul, a lonely soul that had called to him for help.

“Don’t think I’m ungrateful—talking like this,” she said, going back to him and laying her hands on his shoulders; “but—I do love you so much, and I do want to be what you want me to be—so that you will go on loving me. Teach me. You’re so strong and I’m so weak. You’re able to do so much for me and I can do so little for you. I’ll try hard to make you so happy that you’ll—never be sorry.”

He took her face between his hands, looking into her deep, eager eyes, then drew her close to him, kissing her again and again, eagerly, passionately. She lay passive in his arms, her head on his shoulder. Then forced herself quick apart.

“Don’t, don’t, George! We mustn’t be too happy—it can’t last.”

“Can’t it? Why not? We’ll just see. But at any rate we must try to be comfortable as well as happy. And for comfort, more than bare walls and boards are needed.”

“The Nest,” as Marian called the little flat, was quickly put into habitable order, though in accordance with her wish only essentials were bought *en bloc* and details were left over for gradual treatment. It was a cozy nest: a tiny drawing room where the prevailing colors were gold and green: a brown and red dining room; the bedroom a bower of blue and white; a neat entrance hall, which Maddison had fitted up with dark wainscoting which he had bought from an old farmhouse.

Meanwhile Marian stayed at an hotel, spending long hours every day with Maddison, at his studio or shopping with him; watching the progress made at “The Nest”; dining with him every night at various restaurants, reveling in her luxurious freedom. But he soon tired of this vagabondish life, which had not any novelty for him, and she discreetly made pretense of sharing his desire for quiet and of rejoicing with him when the day came for her installation in her new domain.

It was with a sense almost of nervousness that he dressed on the first evening

that she was to be his hostess. The night was dark though the sky was full of stars; the air was keen and frosty. As he walked along, the feeling of shyness grew stronger; it was almost as if he had been a lover going forth to woo. How great a part of his life Marian had become! It was not merely her beauty that he loved: there was so much of refinement and, as he believed, such utter sincerity in her, that she had caught firm hold of him. He must not hurt her by word or look or deed.

The drawing room was empty when he entered it, and he glanced impatiently at the clock, thinking that women are always late. He stepped across toward her bedroom, but again the sense of shyness took hold on him; he stopped. There seemed to him now to be something gross about such familiarity. Then the door opened and Marian came quietly in, radiantly lovely in a soft, clinging gown of dull crimson and flame-color, a red chrysanthemum in her hair; a bright flush on her cheeks, a look of glad welcome in her eyes.

“Isn’t it nice, George?” she said, taking his hands in her own and looking up merrily. “*Our* little nest. I’ve been exploring it all day, as though I didn’t know everything in it; trying all the chairs, strumming on the piano, tasting everything as it were—and doesn’t it taste sweet? Thank you—thank you—thank you——!”

He held her face close to his; the scent of her hair, the warmth of her breath intoxicated him as he kissed her and pressed her close.

“You do love me, really love me, George?”

He kissed her again.

“I do, my dear, I do. You’re a witch. I often thought I should never love any woman really, though I very nearly loved you when you were a little country girl. Then you come along and just wind yourself into my life and make me forget everything except you.”

“Everything except me,” she repeated dreamily, “and I forget everything except you. I feel just like Cinderella must have done when she met the prince, only this is all real, real, all real. Now, come along; you’re a man, and—dinner is ready. Come, give me your arm and lead your hostess in.”

The dining table was plainly but daintily furnished; pretty flowers, simple china, cheap green German glass, a homely dinner, light Rhine wine, red and white, good coffee, mellow liqueurs. There was nothing to remind him of the garish restaurant life they had been leading, no touch of meretriciousness or hint of sham.

When the servant left them, Marian drew her chair close to his, filled his glass and her own.

“Have you no toast to propose?” she asked.

“Yes, but no wine in the world is good enough to drink it in, dear. You—*you!*”



"I've a better toast—and it's the wish, not the wine, that counts—We. We!"

"You're right! We! Though I should be nothing without you. We!"

They clinked glasses and drank.

"How nice and quiet it is here!" she said. "Just you and I, and all the rest of the world shut out. I wonder——"

"What?"

"Should we have been as happy if you had quite loved me then?"

"We were different then."

"Yes, how different!" said Marian; "I at any rate. I daresay you haven't changed much. You were grown-up then, but I was merely a child. I don't know that I am very much more now, am I?"

She laughed lightly as she spoke, and glanced at him; then laughed again as she leaned back in her chair and nibbled a *marron glacé*.

"A child!" she went on. "Am I anything more than a mere grown-up child? I don't think I can be much more. I don't want to really grow up. Just a Cinderella, whom you found sitting among the ashes. I'd never met a prince before, so—I let you carry me off in your fairy hansom. So—they lived happily ever afterward. I wonder, did they?"

She leaned forward, her elbows on the table and her chin resting on her folded hands.

"What a way to talk on our first night here! What nonsense!"

"It's nice to talk nonsense sometimes."

"Yes, but only jolly nonsense. I'll tell you something that will make you laugh. Do you know—I felt quite—nervous coming here to-night."

"Quite right. Any man going to dine with a lovely lady should feel nervous."

"I was rather glad I felt that way," he continued. "I don't want——"

"What don't you want?"

"It's rather awkward to say. I'll tell you another time. Let's talk about something else."

"To-night—anything you like and only what you like," she answered, curious, however, to know what he had in his mind.

"Now I'm going to be serious," she went on after a moment's pause; "I want to say something straight out. I know what people think of me; I know that I can only have a part of your life, that is, if you're going to be happy. I don't want you to give up anything for me, or any of your friends. Don't think I'm a baby and will cry if I can't always have what I'd love to have always. We can never be anything more to each other; we can't marry—Edward won't let us: he thinks divorce wicked. You

understand? And now—come along into the next room; I'll graciously permit you to smoke. It's nice and cozy there. You sit in the corner of the sofa—poke the fire first—and I'll snuggle up against you."

---

He woke toward dawn, the late winter dawn, when gray light was furtively peeping through the curtains. She lay with her cheek on the pillow, her hair straying over in gorgeous cords. He watched the gentle rise and fall of the lace upon her bosom, the beating pulse in a blue vein. He wondered at her loveliness; he marveled at his love for her.

She stirred; slowly opened her eyes; smiled at him; then slipped her arm round his neck and drew his head down upon her shoulder.

For the moment she was self-forgetful.



## CHAPTER IX

THE picture made good progress, Maddison working at it with his whole heart. As her nature blossomed out before him, her joy in pleasure, he realized clearly and more clearly how unbearable must have been her life with Squire. His passion for her quickly settled down into an absorbing love; his power and reason soon returned to him; he knew that he had bought a beautiful and expensive toy; how long he could keep it, how long he would care to keep it, he did not ask. Sufficient for the day was the delight thereof.

“What are you thinking about?” he asked one morning, as she sat by the studio fire while he painted.

“About you.”

“What about me?”

“I was thinking—I often think—that I am keeping you a great deal from your friends. You’re with me almost every evening, and except when you’ve a sitter I’m with you almost every day. I don’t want to be a tie, a drag on you.”

“Don’t you know I’m happy that way?”

“Yes, George, I do. But it doesn’t do to try one’s happiness too hard.

“I won’t. Trust me. It’s partly accident that I’ve been nowhere lately, partly my habit. People used to ask me everywhere, but gave it up when they found I didn’t go anywhere. There are just a few houses always open to me, and a few pals come along here whenever they choose. I used to have jolly little informal suppers on Sundays last winter. We must start them again. A few men and women——”

“But——” she interrupted, raising her eyebrows and expressing by a motion of her hands that the women would consider her taboo.

“Oh, not that sort of woman, Marian. Good sorts, who believe that the world was made for men and women, not men and women for the world. We’ll send a line round to some of them: ‘Suppers begin again Sunday next. Come whenever you don’t want to go anywhere else.’ Everything’s put on the table and we wait on ourselves. Fred—Fred Mortimer—you’ll like him—is a dandy man with the chafing-dish, and when he comes we indulge in extravagant luxuries.”

“You’re quite sure about me?”

“Of course I am. Quite sure and quite proud. It’ll be awfully jolly having a hostess. Hullo! I wonder who this can be—don’t move.”

The door opened and the servant announced Mr. Philip West.

“I beg your pardon——”

Marian rose.

“Mrs. Squire,” said Maddison, “let me introduce Mr. Philip West. Mrs. Squire is helping me to paint a picture.”

“Helping!” she exclaimed. “I’m the fly on the wheel.”

West examined the picture and Marian critically.

“Have you a name for it?” he asked.

“Yes. ‘The Rebel.’”

“It’s good,” he said slowly, “very good; it’ll be the biggest thing you’ve done. May I commission it? I’d like to have it”—he looked straight at Marian as he spoke. “That reminds me why I came here this morning. If you’ve time and inclination—I know what a particular cuss you are—I should be glad if you’d paint my wife’s portrait. I should think she might suit you. You remember her?”

“I am a particular cuss,” Maddison answered, smiling grimly at the remembrance of various commissions rejected. “Have you said anything to Mrs. West?”

“No.”

“Then don’t, till I know whether I can paint her or not.”

“Too late, coward, too late. She suggested it herself, and sent me here to bear her—commands. You and she may settle it as you like. She’s lurching at the Carlton with me—I wanted you to come, if you’re not engaged.”

“Engaged, no; but I’m in the mood for work. Are you dining in town?”

“We weren’t, but we will, if you’ll join us. I know there’s no persuading you to leave your work when you begin to talk about moods. Settled—dinner then?”

“Yes, when? Where?”

“The Carlton will do. Eight. Good-by. Good-by, Mrs. Squire. I used to know a parson of that name down in Kennington—an enthusiast——”

“My husband.”

“Really? Lucky man. Good-by.”

Maddison went with him to the front door, and when he returned found Marian standing before the canvas.

“Yes! I’m a rebel!” she exclaimed. “My husband! Do you know, George, I’d clean forgotten all about him; absolutely. All that life is just like a dream, and I’m awake now. Even when you called me Mrs. Squire it did not recall him to me. Yes, I’m a rebel! But they don’t call you rebels, do they, when you’ve revolted successfully? Why didn’t you go to lunch?”

He slipped his arm round her waist as he answered——

“I didn’t like rushing off from you, so I told an artistic lie. I don’t want to go to the dinner, but West’s a goodish fellow, and was wise enough to buy my pictures when no one else would. So I’m a bit in his debt.”

“Who is he?”

“He is *the* West. ‘If you want to get the best—go West,’ you know.”

“Oh, West’s Stores. He’s a millionaire, isn’t he?”

“Awfully, horribly, disgustingly rich. But he doesn’t do as much harm with his money as most rich men. He hasn’t bought pictures wholesale, or built a gimcrack mansion in Park Lane. He gave tons of money once to a royal hobby and then refused a knighthood. When I congratulated him, he laughed and said it was good advertising. I believe he dabbles in politics; he’s a socialist—only rich men can afford to be—and talks about running the Empire on business lines. It’ll take a greater man than even he to make politicians capable of any business transaction, except buying votes with promissory notes. Chiefly notes blown on their own trumpets.”

“There must be something fascinating about politics. I should love to rule men!”

“Isn’t one enough?” he asked, holding her at arm’s length and looking into her eyes.

“One like you—yes.”

As she sat alone that night, lazily smoking by the fireside, the thought of Philip West was greatly in her mind. His strange, dark blue eyes had looked at her searchingly and she had felt that behind them was power. Had she any chance of knowing more of him?

She was tiring already of the luxurious sameness of her life. Maddison was kind, thoughtful, attentive, and a sufficiently entertaining comrade, but she desired more than that. To rule one man did not satisfy her.

The odds seemed against her meeting West again, especially as he was married. Maddison would doubtless tell her what the wife was like, and it was rather upon her than upon West himself that the success of Marian’s vague ambition depended. To win West in any circumstances would doubtless be difficult; to win him from his wife would be a triumph.

Maddison came in late and threw himself full length upon the hearth-rug, a favorite position of his when tired.

“Had a stupid evening?” she asked, sitting down beside him, and brushing the straggling hair from his forehead.

“Fearful. I hate those big hotels at any time, but it was more than usually deadly to-night.”

“I thought you liked Mr. West?”

“Oh, he’d have been all right alone; but his wife is an empty chatterbox, insipidly pretty, and he adores her in a fatuous way. How men of sense can—well, I suppose reason doesn’t count in such matters.”

“So you are not going to paint her?”

“Not for worlds. I should turn out a chocolate box cover. I must have a soul as well as a body. They were just a couple of honeymooners. Disgusting.”

“It’s always disgusting to see other people in love.”

“Perhaps that has something to do with it. He’s simply lost his reason for a while; he’ll grow sane again some day, soon probably, and then, likely enough, she’ll cry her eyes out for a day or two, and then will be quite happy for the rest of her unnatural life with her jewels and dresses. She’s just a material little doll.”

“It must have been stupid—no one else?”

“Only another woman, a tall, sedate person; I didn’t quite understand her.”

“Then you weren’t altogether bored?”

“She was too much of a puzzle. Either intensely dull, or dangerously clever. At any rate, if I were Mrs. West I would not often have Miss Lane by my side. I rather fancy she’s a woman a man might love absolutely. And when West gets sick of his wife—Lord, what silly gossip I’m talking. Do be a dear and make me a cup of chocolate; you know how, and then we’ll talk about something more interesting than the Wests.”

When she came back with the steaming cup, she found him fast asleep. She stood looking down on him, lithe, slender, well-formed, the neatly trimmed beard, the heavy black hair, the long, delicate hands. She wondered if she would grow to hate him. She believed that she could not long keep from disliking intensely, or at any rate despising, a weak man. He had been too easy a conquest, unable to withstand the subtle flattery of a woman’s weakness and call for help.

He stirred uneasily as she watched him; then slowly opened his eyes.

“What a dull dog I am!” he exclaimed, springing up. “Why don’t you tell me so?”

“Because I don’t think so. You’re tired, and you mustn’t think I only care for you when you are doing something to amuse me.”

She sat down on the sofa, motioning to him to sit beside her, and while he sipped the chocolate, she went on:

“You’re like all other men in one way. You fancy women are silly, restless things, who either aren’t worth amusing or must be amused always. If I’m only a child, just fit to be played with, what good can I be to you? There are lots of pretty toys in the world. I thought you thought better of me.”

“So I do, goose. Don’t fish for compliments, though I will pay you one upon your chocolate. Is it too late for a song?”

“No, not for a quiet one.”

“Then turn out the lights and sing, will you?”

Her fingers ran almost aimlessly over the keys before she began to play, softly, the melody of an old country song—a haunting, melancholy air. Then she sang quietly, with a touch of tears in her voice, a simple ballad of a country maid and her false lover. When it was ended her hands dropped listlessly and there came over her a sudden gust of hatred of this mumming—this making believe to love a man who was a mere tool in her hands. But, until the work was complete, the tool must not be thrown aside.

“There are few people who sing like you, Marian; very few I care to hear. They’re mostly musical boxes, absolutely soulless. You—you sing a jolly song and people feel jolly; a sad one—and make me sad. How do you do it? What an inane question! As if you knew. There’s nothing in life worth having except emotions.”

“What about painting?”

“Art? All art is the expression of emotions—that’s the beginning and the finish of it, has been and ever shall be till the world’s end. Don’t turn up the light. The glow of the fire is quite enough to chat by.”

“What emotions do you feel when you’re painting ‘The Rebel’?”

“Disappointment. I see your face at the tip of my brush, but every touch I give is wrong—wrong.”

“I like it—Mr. West liked it.”

“Yes, but neither of you know what I mean it to be, or how far I am from expressing my meaning. It’s little better than a dolly anecdote daub. I’ve a good mind to paint Mrs. West after all; it would be fun.”

“How?”

“Why, this way. I’d just paint her absolutely true to life, show her empty soul peeping out of her dolly eyes. And everybody would say: ‘What a sweet, innocent face!’ Innocent! How many women are innocent because they’re impotent even to desire to be wicked.”

“Then paint her, and we’ll enjoy the joke.”

“But I can’t let West pay me for it. I’ll make it a belated wedding present.”

Marian made no comment, but marveled at the quixotry of man.





## CHAPTER X

MADDISON being engaged to lunch and tea on the following Sunday—the first of those on which he expected his suppers to commence again—Marian was left to herself the whole day, spending it in lounging discontent.

The gilt was wearing off the prize she had won, and each day she grew more impatient for change. It was not in her to wish that she were otherwise gifted and that she could rest content with present conditions. She desired more than she possessed, spent no effort in endeavoring to drill herself into being satisfied with what she had, but kicked against the pricks.

Of Maddison's friends she had met only Mortimer and West. She was to all intents alone in London with Maddison.

She was free to act, eager to do so, but as yet she had found no outlet for her energy or ambition. Also, she was not a little lonely; whenever, as on this day, Maddison was not with her, she was thrown back on herself. At times even, it seemed to her as if she had only freed herself from the active and pressing annoyances of the past, and that in reality she was no more free now than then. She had but flown from one cage to another, and was again beating her wings against the bars in angry endeavor to escape for a stronger and farther flight.

After luncheon she sat down before the fire, trying to read a volume of Rossetti that Maddison had given her. The rhyme jingled through her head but made no impression, and conveyed neither sense nor beauty. Throwing the book aside on the floor, she lighted a cigarette and lay back dreamily in the soft, deep chair. The cigarette finished, she closed her eyes and soon fell asleep.

She awoke with a start and a shudder; the fire was nearly out, the room was chilly, the afternoon was quickly closing in. She shivered, wondering what sound it was that had aroused her. The maid came in, turning on the electric light as she entered, followed by a tall, elegantly-dressed woman.

"Mrs. Harding," the maid announced.

Marian struggled out of the deep chair and looked inquiringly at the stranger.

"No, you don't know me," said Mrs. Harding; "I'll tell you who I am in a minute. I'm afraid I woke you out of a snooze? So sorry. It's almost the only thing one can do on such a beastly afternoon—sleep and drink—and both are stupid by yourself. So I thought I'd trot downstairs and see if you were blue too."

A vague recollection came to Marian of having passed Mrs. Harding on the stairs once or twice.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "I'll ring and have the fire made up, and it must

be tea time.”

She was anxious to learn the real meaning of this intrusion. Any diversion was welcome.

“You’re jolly snug here,” Mrs. Harding remarked, after a survey of the room while the maid had stirred up the fire and set the tea table ready. “Mine are rather frowsy, but then my old man’s a bit of a screw. You’ve had better luck than me. Hope it’ll last. That’s the worst of the jolly ones, they get tired so quickly, and if you hold the reins tight they simply kick up and bolt. *I know.*”

As it dawned upon her what was the character—or rather the want of it—of her visitor, Marian examined her face more critically. The woman was insolently handsome; masses of blue-black hair set off to perfection the almost dead-white of her face; the forehead was low and broad, the eyes dark and deep-set under heavy brows; the mouth large and sensuous, showing, when open, a perfect row of teeth; the chin alone was weak. She was expensively dressed, her tight-fitting tailor-made gown showing to advantage the bold outline of the figure.

“Now the girl’s gone we can chat cozily,” continued the visitor. “I never talk before my maid, because I don’t want her to talk over me and my doings with—say yours. I’d rather tell you myself what I want you to know. You’re not so careful. Your maid talks to mine, mine to me, so indirectly you’ve told me a good deal about yourself.”

“I’m much obliged to you,” Marian said quietly; “Anne shall leave to-morrow.”

“I thought it only pally to tell you, but I shouldn’t sack her—they’re all the same. I don’t let mine know more than I can help, though that’s more than safe if I annoyed her and she told the old ’un about—the others. You must have a pretty lonely time of it?”

“It’s a rest to be alone sometimes.”

At first Marian had felt inclined to be angry at this woman having thrust herself upon her, but curiosity succeeded. She had never spoken to one of her class before—of her own class, it flashed upon her—and to do so might prove interesting, possibly also instructive.

“Rest? Oh, yes, I suppose so, but I hate resting. That’s the worst of being kept by an old josser, he neither gives you any fun himself nor gives you much chance of getting any with anyone else. But I don’t do so badly. The certainty of it is the decent part of it. Thank God, he goes away sometimes, and then I just make up for lost time, *don’t I!* Your George——”

“My——!”

“That’s his name, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“He’s all right, just enough and not too much, I should say. You’re only a beginner, and don’t know yet what we have to put up with and what we become. Oh! We’re a lively lot, some of us, regular devils. I steer clear of them as much as I can, but one must talk to a woman sometimes. At least I must. I hope you don’t mind my coming in this way?”

“Not a bit. Another cup of tea?”

“No, thanks, but if I could have a B. and S. I’d not say ‘No.’”

Marian rang and bade the maid bring the necessaries.

“I liked the look of you,” Mrs. Harding continued, “and it’s pleasant to have a friendly neighbor; it’s a nuisance to be always going out. It’s a sickening life sometimes, but I wouldn’t change it for any other. Not to be a duchess! I did try to settle down once with a man who wanted to marry me, but it nearly drove me crazy. The love of it’s in my blood. Yours, too, from the look of you. There’s plenty of fun too. You meet good sorts as well as bad, and take my tip, when you meet a good sort, treat him well. It’s funny our living here; I believe everyone else in the house is straight. Judging by their looks, they can’t have had much temptation to be otherwise. Their wedding rings ain’t make-believe like ours. A cigarette? Thanks: This is brandy! Jolly good,” she said, tasting it; “it’d be a sin to put water in that. Here’s luck!”

She drank the brandy neat, with evident relish.

“What are you going to do to-night? Care to come out with me and dine somewhere?”

“I’m afraid I can’t. I should like to, but I’m engaged to supper.”

“Lucky girl, I ain’t. My old man went off all of a sudden and left me in the lurch. If I’d known he was going I’d have fixed up some fun, but he didn’t tell me till after breakfast this morning. He’s just cussed sometimes, and never let’s on when he will be away. Well, I must trust to luck. Come some other night; and do come up to see me—he don’t mind feminine friends.”

“I’d like to come.”

“By the way, my dear, while I think of it, you’ll do well to look about you before he leaves you in the lurch. Funny thing, a year or two ago I used to see a good deal of Georgie. He don’t stick to anyone long. He soon got tired of me and I wasn’t too much cut up about it; he’s too finicky for my taste. I shall never forget his face when he found me a bit fuzzy-wuzzy with fizzy wine one night. I always called him old blue ribbon after that.”

She laughed quietly, a deep, low, melodious note. Then she got up and walked

about the room, looking at the pictures and ornaments.

“I must say he’s fixed you up as if you’d caught his fancy strong. He only took a furnished place for me. But don’t put all your trust in any man’s pocket. Do you play?” she asked, sitting down to the piano. “Here goes for a hymn.”

She played a catchy air and then sang the first verse and chorus of a drinking song that then held the ear of the town.

“But there, I’ll be off, my dear. Georgie might catch me here and not approve. I shan’t come to see you again till you’ve been to see me. I’ve a sort of idea we shall be pals, I want one badly. I can put you up to a wrinkle or two; I’ve one or two to spare,” she said, looking at her reflection in the glass. “Oh, don’t worry to ring, I’ll let myself out. I’m never proud, except when it pays me to be so. Good night; be good and you won’t be happy.”

There was a frank *bonhomie* about the woman that attracted Marian. Their aims were different, perhaps, but their methods seemed much the same. Moreover, it seemed not unlikely that she might prove helpful, and that in some matters and on some occasions she might be a useful adviser. Further, there was a growing lawlessness in Marian’s blood that made her thirst sometimes to taste degradation, and this woman could lead her to it.

It was now nearly six o’clock. She had promised Maddison to go round early to the studio. She wished now that she had been free to accept Mrs. Harding’s invitation, and made up her mind to do so some night soon, if it could be safely arranged.

The housekeeper opened the door to her, and told her that a gentleman was waiting in the studio to see Mr. Maddison. Marian nodded and went in, expecting to find Mortimer or one of the other men who had been summoned. The big room was dimly lit. She shut the door behind her and went toward the fireplace, in a chair by which a man was sitting with his back toward her.

He rose at the sound of her approach. It was her husband.

“Marian!”

She stood stock-still as he came quickly toward her, with his hands outstretched.

But the eager joy in his eyes was met by anger in hers.

“How dare you come here?” she asked. “Keep away from me. Don’t touch me!”

He stopped, bewildered.

“How did you know I was here?” she went on.

“I didn’t know. I’ve searched and searched for you, walked the streets in the hope of catching a glimpse of you. Then Ellis told me he had seen you with Mr.

Maddison, so I came straight here, thinking he would perhaps know your address. But I can hardly speak—I'm so glad."

"You'd better go back and sit down again. I've something to say to you. You—don't understand."

The tone of her voice chilled him as if an icy finger had been laid upon his heart, but he did not move.

"What is it?"

She went past him over to the fireplace, and stood there looking at the glowing logs. So he knew really nothing! Should she tell him everything? She quickly decided not to do so unless driven to it. Turning round sharply to him, she said:

"You don't understand. I left you because I didn't want to see you again. Coming after me like this won't make any difference, won't do a bit of good. I've left you and I won't come back. You'd better forget me as quickly as you can."

"I can't, I can't," he repeated. "I *can't*. And why should I? I want you to forgive me. I did try to be good to you, but I must have failed miserably to have driven you away from me. I've been thinking over what you said about my being selfish. Come back. Try me once more. Won't you?"

"No. I won't. I can't. You don't understand. I *hate* you. I hate everything you think and do. We're utterly different."

With a gesture of helpless despair he turned away and began to pace up and down.

She could not help pitying him.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but it can't be helped. It was a stupid mistake our marrying—but I didn't know myself then. You don't know me now. It would be a worse mistake, though, for me to come back."

"God help me. I've thought of nothing but you since you went away. Is there nothing I can do?—nothing I can say?"

"Nothing. Nothing," she broke in vehemently. "Nothing, I tell you. Why can't you believe me? It's no use talking about it. You'd better go."

He stood looking at her, but could read in her eyes only stubborn defiance. For the first time he noticed the new brightness in her beauty and the richness of her dress.

"Where are you?" he asked; "what are you doing?"

"I'm quite happy, or rather should be if only you'd leave me alone," was the answer.

But he persisted, there coming suddenly into his mind a suspicion of the truth.

"Why are you here? The servant must have told you Maddison was out, and—"

you came in as if you were at home.”

“I won’t answer any more questions. I told you you’d better go.”

“You needn’t answer. I know. I can see it in your face. You’re this man’s mistress. You—come to this. But it’s not too late. Come away, with me—we’ll go away—anywhere, far away——”

“Oh! why don’t you *go*?” she interrupted, stamping her foot, and clenching her hands as if she would have liked to strike him. “I *am* his mistress. Now, go.”

“Not without you——”

“You must. You’re simply making a fool of yourself. I’m alive and free now—do you think you can get me back? Save as many other souls as you can, but let me do as I like with mine. Haven’t you any pride? I’m through and through what you call a *bad* woman. I’m wicked because I enjoy being wicked. Even if I tired of it, I’d not come back to you.”

She rang the bell, and before he could find his speech the servant came in.

“This gentleman has left a message with me for Mr. Maddison,” Marian said; then bowing coldly to Edward, added: “Good night.”

The servant held the door open.

Squire hesitated, and then let his eyes drop before hers and slowly went out.

When she heard the outer door shut, she sat down and began slowly to pull off her long gloves. He might come back, even to-night. She knew how persistent he could be and felt sure he would not leave any effort untried to take her away from the life she was leading, even if he could not persuade her to return to him.

She folded the gloves mechanically and laid them on the table beside her. Then took off her hat and sank back in the chair, her hands gripping the arms tightly.

The position seemed impossible, and she was angry that she had not foreseen and provided for it. Either something must be done to prevent her husband coming here again, or she must only meet Maddison elsewhere. Was not this last the solution? If she only saw him at her flat—or elsewhere—anywhere but here—it would free her sufficiently from him to allow of her pursuing other ends and other pleasures, while she could hold him to her sufficiently closely and for a sufficient length of time to obtain all she required from him.

Then the thought struck her that Edward would probably be waiting outside and might waylay Maddison and make a scene. This must be avoided. The only chance of leading him away, if indeed he were waiting, was for her to leave; he would follow her. She hastily made ready and went out.

She looked cautiously up and down the dimly lit street, but could not see him. She walked quickly, and as she turned into the main thoroughfare, glanced back and

saw that he was following her. She hastened on, sure that he would keep her in sight. An empty hansom cab came along; she got in, bidding the driver go to Piccadilly Circus.

No thought of the agony Squire was enduring came into her mind. She was angry, excited, possessed by a spirit of malicious mischief. A bend in the road enabled her to look back: there was no other vehicle in sight. She pushed open the trap door above her head, told the driver that she had forgotten something, and bade him drive to the studio. Then she opened the lamp that was behind her, blew out the light, and then huddled as closely as possible into the corner nearest that side of the road along which Squire would most likely come.

She looked eagerly, and soon passed him, walking slowly, bent and bowed.

When she reached the studio Maddison was there.

“What’s up?” he said. “You rush in, I hear, have an interview with a mysterious stranger, rush away and rush back again. But give me a kiss before you answer. Now, sit on my knee and ’fess.”

“George, my husband’s been here.”

“The devil!”

“The devil would have been easier to manage; he doesn’t want to save souls.”

She then told him most but not all of what had taken place.

“It *is* awkward. Do you think he’ll come again?”

“Sure to, that’s the trouble. Nothing I can say—or you—will stop him. You don’t know what he is. We’re safe for to-night, so you needn’t worry about that, but what can we do? There mustn’t be a row, for your sake. Hullo! there’s somebody, and not a thing ready.”

“All the better—all the more like a picnic. It’s Fred. Come along, we appoint you chef. Marian shall be kitchen maid. I’ll lay the table.”





## CHAPTER XI

MADDISON was not surprised at a visit from Squire early the next morning; and if not armed he was at any rate forewarned.

He offered him a chair and a cigarette, both of which were curtly refused.

“As you will,” Maddison said, seemingly careless and supercilious, but in reality closely watching his opponent’s face. “I hope you will not mind my both sitting and smoking; both are conducive to comfort, and what’s life without comfort?”

“It will be better,” Squire said, shuffling awkwardly, “to talk simply and without any remarks which are likely to be offensive. You know why I’ve come?”

“Unless you tell me I shall never know. This visit seems as useless as it is unpleasant. I can’t think what you have to say which wouldn’t be better unsaid.”

“No, I suppose you cannot. I suppose we look at almost everything from a different standpoint. I’ve come to say——”

“You are presuming, Mr. Squire, that I am willing to listen to you.”

“Naturally. You allowed your servant to show me in.”

“I beg your pardon, you’re *quite* right. But I do wish you’d sit down; it makes me feel so awkward to see you standing up.”

“I saw Marian last night,” Squire said, taking no notice of Maddison’s remark; “I suppose she told you.”

“Yes. The meeting annoyed her very much. It was natural for you to assume that I let you in because I was willing to listen to you. As a matter of fact, it was because I must absolutely refuse to do so. But, unless *you* refuse to hear me, I’ve just this much to tell you. The lady you mentioned is living under my care, and I will protect her against annoyance. If you have any communication to make I will send you my solicitor’s name and address. Now—you’d better go.”

“Even if she were not my wife, I’ve a right to do all I can to rescue her from a life of sin.”

“Please don’t platitudinize to me.”

Squire reddened with anger and clenched his fists: recourse to brute force suggests itself instinctively to the fighter who is mentally weaker than his opponent.

“What right have you to say that?” he asked vehemently, “what right? I believe what I say and do my best to act up to my beliefs.”

“Then live in charity, with all men, even with a sinner and a publican like me, and judge not that ye be not judged. I don’t shove my beliefs on you. You live in such an unpractical world that you do not realize the stupidity of forcing yourself upon me. I’ve really no more to say. The law gives you your remedy, but it won’t assist you to

trespass here or to force yourself upon your wife. Good morning.”

Squire realized that he was helpless against Maddison; denunciation would achieve no good end; it would be equally useless to base an appeal upon grounds of morality. But for Marian’s sake he was ready to humble himself in a last endeavor.

“As man to man——”

“Oh, my dear sir!” Maddison exclaimed, “don’t talk that way. If you tried to knock me down I could understand, if not respect, you. In these affairs men don’t argue, they act, according to the law of nature or preferably of man. Don’t let us indulge in a vulgar, unprofitable brawl. Good morning.”

“Then I’ll go to her. Give me her address.”

“Certainly not. She does not wish you to know it.”

“Then I’ll watch.”

“As you please. But remember, you’ve no right to persecute her; though many husbands think otherwise—that is not one of the privileges of matrimony.”

Squire checked an angry retort and then abruptly went out.

Maddison spoke truly when he said that to him comfort was one of the saving graces of life, indeed to him it was almost the only one. This entry of Squire upon the scene and this turning a comedy into a domestic drama vexed and annoyed him. It had not occurred to him that any man would act so unconventionally as Squire had done. Marian had told him that her husband would not divorce her, looking as he did upon marriage as a sacramental bond which no man had a right to break; so Maddison had thought that there might be an appeal to Marian if Squire discovered her whereabouts, an angry scene very likely and then peace. But it had not entered into his calculations that Squire would be so persistent; this type of man was new and unknown to him, of a kind that he did not understand how best to tackle. To discuss the situation with Marian would be distasteful; there remained only Mortimer to whom he could speak frankly, relying upon the good common sense of any advice he might obtain from him.

At this hour of the morning Mortimer should be at his office, and there Maddison rang him up.

“Is Mr. Mortimer in?”

“Which one?” was the brusque reply.

“Mr. Frederick.”

“Don’t know. Who is it?”

“Tell him Mr. Maddison wants to speak to him for a minute.”

“Hold the line.”

Mortimer gladly accepted Maddison’s invitation to lunch.

“But why on earth come down to this dreary part of town?” he asked. “Don’t deprive me of a lovely excuse for leaving here early and coming back late—if at all. Meet me outside the Palace, and I’ll take you to a tidy little French restaurant I’ve just discovered and haven’t yet found out. One o’clock—all right!”

Both were punctual, and Mortimer guided his friend through several small and unsavory streets to a narrow court at the far end of which was situated the humble restaurant bearing the high-sounding name La Palais.

“It’s not much to look at,” he said, as they went in through the swing door, “like an ugly woman with a pretty wit. *Bon jour, Madame.*”

Madame, a stout, jolly-looking woman, greeted Mortimer cordially, and nodded genially to his companion.

“Now, Madame, I’ve brought a friend with me and I’ve told him—well, I’ve told him the truth about you. So don’t shatter my entirely undeserved reputation for veracity. We’ll have this snug corner and leave the menu to you. You know the kind of thing I like.”

The room was long and low; clean, neat, with little attempt at decoration; the walls covered with plain, dark gray paper, the electric light pendants severely simple; flowering shrubs stood upon the pay desk near the entrance, and similar plants or cut flowers upon the tables.

“I can’t make out how this place pays,” said Mortimer, “there are never more than a handful of people here. I suppose it will suddenly become popular and then rapidly deteriorate. That’s the history of all these places. Meanwhile let us rejoice. We’ll have some Chianti, but will not drink it neat as do the barbarians, but judiciously tempered with Polly.”

Lunch finished, coffee and cigars produced, Mortimer announced that he was ready to talk seriously.

“What’s up?” he asked. “You shall have all the advice I can give and I shan’t be in the least hurt if you don’t follow any of it. Your mind’s sure to be made up already and you simply ask for advice in the hope that my view will be your view.”

“No, I don’t, Fred. Not such an ass. I’m in a bad corner and I’m damned if I know how to get out of it. I don’t know whether you know that Mrs. Squire has a husband?”

“I didn’t. I imagined the prefix to be entirely ceremonial.”

“He’s a parson.”

“The devil!”

“Worse, a saint. He doesn’t believe in divorce and is obstinately determined to persecute Marian. He says he won’t leave a stone unturned to save her. Please

laugh. There's a comic side to it, I know, but it's turned away from me."

"I know the type. I've met one or two of them," said Mortimer, reflectively watching the smoke of his cigar; "I bet he'll give you a deuced lot of trouble. Unreasonable people are most difficult to deal with, they never know how unreasonable they are. And a man who doesn't play according to the rules—But, tell me all about it."

Maddison told him all that he knew of Squire and of Marian's and his own meetings with him.

"Beastly awkward!" was Mortimer's comment.

"You can pretty well guess I'm stumped," said Maddison. "I don't know what's best to do."

"Excuse my asking, I must know all the facts of the case: you don't want to break off with Mrs. Squire?"

"No!"

"All right! Don't blaze up, we're talking politics, not poetry. It's not one of those cases in which you can sit still and let fate play your cards. The man will stick at nothing. Eventually he must meet her again, even if she doesn't come to your place. He'll haunt you. Perhaps catch you together in some public place and kick up—the saints' own delight."

"Yes, yes, I can see all that. I know what I've got to face—but I don't want to face it."

"I was mentally marking time. If I knew what to suggest I would have told you at once. Let's be practical; there are three parties to the business: you—she—he. The question is how to avoid you and she, or, at any rate, you, being brought into contact with him. Could you both go away for a while?"

"Easily."

"In a time you and she would be safe. What would he do? Hunt after you—find that you had left town——"

"That's all very well, but we can't stay away forever."

"Forever!" murmured Mortimer, gazing sadly up at the ceiling. "Easy! Easy! Leaving out of the question the possibility of your tiring of her—he can't spend the rest of his life chasing after you. Even if he could, he wouldn't. You don't know the man as well as I do, although I've never met him. It's love—fleshly love—as well as duty that's urging him on now. Duty will regain the upper hand, and he'll argue that he has no right to leave undone the work that is *merely* duty, in order to pursue duty *plus* personal interest. He's actively engaged in trying to save one particularly attractive soul now; he'll soon swerve round and work again on the multitude. As far

as his wife is concerned, he'll fall back upon the masterly inactivity of prayer. I may be quite wrong, but unless you can hit upon a better plan, I don't see that you can do better than—hook it. I have spoken.”

“I've still got the cottage down at Rottingdean; we could run down for a month.”

“Where the stormy winds do blow! Poor, dear lady.”

“I can't work in a racket.”

“Well, it's as easy to leave as to go there. Three o'clock! by Jove, I must get back. I've some letters to sign, and I'm going down to West's for dinner. She tells me you're going to paint her portrait.”

“She tells the truth—although she draws upon her imagination. West suggested my doing so, but I haven't agreed yet.”

“Have you met Miss Lane?”

“Once, at dinner.”

“She's worth studying. Worth painting too.”

“Oh!”

“Not I. I don't even like her. A man never falls in love with a woman he studies, but with the woman who studies him. I *must* be off. See you again soon. Let me hear from you if you run away.”

As he walked homeward, Maddison pondered over the problem, oblivious of people and places. Squire's intrusion into his life had brought home to him that Marian and the joy of life were one for him. He had entered into this intrigue to a certain extent deliberately, but had not contemplated the possibility of Marian's attraction for him becoming anything stronger than a mere physical appeal to his sensuous nature. He had always believed that art was the only impulse in his life, that in all else he was governed by his reason. He did not drink too much, because reason and experience told him that after a certain point wine became a tasteless stimulant. He did not permit any woman entirely to captivate him. Experience and reason—so he thought—taught him that women were like wine.

But Marian had won a place in his life that no other woman had ever approached. For a moment, the night before, Squire's attack had made him think that a temporary separation between himself and Marian might be necessary, and the mere notion had struck him with a chill, sick fear. Everything in his life belonged to her. All that he attempted or accomplished in his daily round or in his work centered on her; she was his motive power. Another matter had recently come home to him; he had never been extravagant, but had always lived fairly up to his means. His support of Marian had made heavy demand, not only upon his income but upon the small amount he had saved, and he was now face to face with the necessity of

adding largely to his earnings.

He had never condescended to force his art, never painted for money alone. Inspiration, not necessity, had been the mother of his invention. Even in the painting of portraits he had held himself entirely free to refuse any commission that was not entirely to his taste. Now, however, he was no longer free; he must paint for money or curtail his expenditure. To do the latter would mean depriving Marian of certain pleasures and luxuries, the doing of which would be abhorrent to him. Not for an instant did it occur to him to question Marian's loyalty; could he offer her only a cottage and country fare that would suffice her. When she first came to him, he believed that his chief claim upon her was that he offered her freedom. But he now felt assured that as his love for her had grown deeper and deeper so had hers for him.

Therefore for more reasons than one, the idea of a country retreat appealed to him strongly. While there he would be altogether with Marian; he could at the same time work strenuously, he could live inexpensively.

When he reached the flat he learned that Marian had gone out, but would be home to tea, and he decided to wait for her return.

Smoking cigarette after cigarette, he paced up and down, from room to room. Every detail seemed to bear the impress of her personality. He stopped more than once before the pastel on the easel by the drawing room window. He pulled back the curtain as far as it would go so as to let in the full strength of the waning light. Striking as was the likeness, he felt that he had failed to catch the whole charm of her face; the beauty was there, but not the pleading fascination. He tried to imagine how much he would suffer if she were to die. Drops of perspiration broke out upon his forehead as he realized overwhelmingly that perhaps he might have overestimated her love for him, and that perhaps she would one day again take her freedom. The thought of it was agony. He stood before the picture wrought into a tumult of emotion. She came in, stood beside him unheard, until she spoke:

"What a loyal lover! When he can't worship the original——"

"I do worship you," he exclaimed, turning fiercely, seizing her hands and crushing them between his own. "I do, that's the only word for it, that's the very truth. Look at me—straight—you're everything to me; what am I to you?"

"You're hurting my hand——"

"*I* hurting you!" he said, loosening his hold, "and I am ready to do anything to save you one moment's pain. You haven't answered me; am I everything to you?"

"Do you need to ask?" she answered, looking boldly back at him, so that as he gazed into her eyes, he seemed to see deep into her soul. "I never asked you. You

show me how much you love me, and I've tried to show you. I suppose"—she faltered and turned away—"I suppose I've failed."

"You're right, Marian," he said, catching her in his arms, turning her face to him, and kissing her passionately again and again; "but I do like to hear you say it. Would you like it if I never *told* you how much I love you?"

"No, no, dear, of course I shouldn't. Somehow it's not my way to *say* it; I'll try to sometimes, but don't make me do so now. Let me say it when it comes to my lips."

"All right, dearie, you're right."

"Now, come along. We'll have tea. I felt sure you were coming to-day, so I ran out to get some of those cakes you liked so much."

It was a fancy of his that she should always make the tea herself. The room was growing dark. She looked very graceful, tenderly delicate, as she knelt on the hearth-rug, the firelight playing hide-and-seek in her hair and the folds of her dress. Her eyes looked dreamy as she stared into the blaze, waiting for the kettle to boil up, which she had set on the fire, too impatient to wait for the spirit-lamp to do its work.

It was not until she had settled herself cozily into the deep armchair that he broke the silence.

"How would you like to spend a month or so down at Rottingdean? I've got a small cottage there; very comfortable, very lonely and very quiet."

The unexpected question startled her. The proposal upset all her schemes, and the call for an immediate reply tried her skill.

"What made you think of it?" she asked, temporizing.

"Well, I thought it might be—pleasanter, if we kept out of sight for a while."

"Oh, I see! I see! Do you like the idea?"

"I rather do. I'd like anywhere with you; best of all, anywhere, we should always be together."

"Until——"

"Until what?"

"Until you're tired of me."

He did not answer, and she went over to him and sat down at his feet, her head resting on his knee. It was preferable to her to sit so, her face hidden from him; eyes are traitors oftentimes.

"Always together," she went on, "how good that would be for me; for me. But, George, I don't think it would be good for us both."

"You mean what?"



“Why this, dear. The woman depends upon the man, always wants him near her if not actually with her. Men, I think, are different; they only depend upon us sometimes, and then they come to us.”

“Then you don’t know what I know, dear. You’ve taught me to depend upon you—always, altogether, all day long. While I was waiting for you just now, I was mad because the thought entered my head that perhaps you did not really love me very much, after all.”

“What a silly thought! But I’m glad it hurt you; isn’t that horrid of me?”

He leaned down and kissed her upturned face.

“Well,” he said, “what about Rottingdean?”

“George—before I tell you what I think—tell me right out, what put the notion into your head? You think we should be safer there than here?”

“Why, of course——”

“I don’t agree with you. Your being there is sure to get into the papers one way or another. He will see it there, or some dear, kind friend will tell him, and he’d come down.”

“It’s funny we didn’t think of that!”

“We?” she asked quickly. “Who’s we?”

“Why, I—er—met Mortimer. He’s often done my thinking for me, so I chatted my difficulty over with him.”

“Two great, clever men of the world, and one, wee, little foolish idea! Why didn’t you come and talk it over with me?”

“Somehow—I didn’t like to.”

“Well, let’s forget clever Mr. Fred. Don’t you agree with me, it wouldn’t do?”

“Ye-es, I do. We could go abroad?”

“That would only make his journey after us longer. He’s a saint, which means one part of lunacy to nine parts of obstinacy. It’s this pig-headedness that makes them martyrs. Who was it said that a ‘martyr is a persecutor who has got the worst of it?’ Edward will persecute me until I give in, or he dies.”

“He shan’t!” Maddison interjected angrily.

“Oh, no, he *shan’t* indeed,” she continued, laughing, “because—I won’t let him. Now, while you two wise men of the West End have been talking, I’ve been thinking. Part of your plan fits in with mine. You must go away——”

“Not without you!”

“If not without me, you may as well stay here. Don’t you want me to be happy?”

“Of course I do. That’s the only want I have.”

“Then you must make me unhappy for a little while, so that I may be quite happy

by and by. If you go down to Rottingdean alone, I'll manage that Edward shall hear of it. He'll watch you, find out that I'm not with you, and leave you alone. I'll stay here; I shan't bother to hide away; I don't mind if he does find me out, and come to see me. I don't think he'll do it twice. Besides, obstinate as he is, he must have some pride somewhere, and some other woman may catch hold of him: I never believed the story St. Anthony told. And there's this hope too: he may begin to think he's neglecting his real work in hunting after me."

"That's what Mortimer thought."

"Did he? Now—don't you see that my way is the better?"

"It doesn't make any difference. I won't leave you."

"Don't you know I hate the mere thought of it? But, George, I won't sacrifice the future to the present, as you're so ready to do. It isn't as if you were going millions of miles away. You can easily run up to town every now and then—you needn't go near the studio, just stop here a night or two. I can run down to Brighton. You mustn't be obstinate."

"I shall hate it."

"So shall I!" she exclaimed, jumping up, "so shall I. But it's the best way. Do you love me so little, George, that you don't know that I'm only thinking of how we can be happiest in the end? We must buy the future at the expense of the present."

Then, sitting on his knees, she took his face between her warm hands, looked into his eyes, slowly put her lips to his, slowly kissed him.

"You witch!" he said. "You always have your own way!"

"How untrue! But, George," she added quickly, laying her head on his shoulder, "don't misunderstand me, *don't*. I want you, want you always, and I shall be miserable while you are away. I shall just count the days. But you'll come up to see me and I'll come down to see you; it might be worse. And how lovely it'll be when you come back."

Maddison was dining out that night, and she made him resist the sudden temptation to telegraph to his hostess, pleading illness as an excuse for not keeping his engagement. They talked on until at the last he was compelled to hurry off, the leave-taking abruptly ended by her laughingly pushing him out.

Then she danced back to the drawing room, overjoyed that fate had played so well into her hands, offering her the opportunity for which she had been longing, of being free upon occasion to go whither she liked and to do what she willed.

"If only all men were as easy to fool!" she thought; "perhaps they are, when one knows them and they don't know us."

She picked up her hat which she had flung on the sofa, and pinned it on quickly.

Then she went out, closing the hall door quietly behind her, but instead of going down, ran upstairs to the top floor, where Ethel Harding lived, as she said, nearer heaven in this world than she was likely to be in the next.

“Hullo, it’s you!” she said, answering herself to Marian’s ring. “Come along in. The girl’s out and I’m all alone and lonely.”

She led the way into a small sitting room, comfortably but somewhat gaudily furnished and decorated; a bright fire burned in the small grate; an incandescent gas light glared on each side of the overmantel; on the round table in the center were a dilapidated flower in a crimson pot; an ash tray, full to overflowing with cigarette ends and ashes; and, on a dirty cheap Japanese tray, a half-empty siphon of soda water, a bottle of brandy three parts full, and a tumbler.

“I’m in an awful mess, I always am!” Mrs. Harding exclaimed, as she picked a newspaper and a novel out of an armchair and flung them on the sofa. “There, do sit down. Look at me too, but this old tea gown is comfy. I hope you’ve had your tea?—Eh?”

“Just finished it.”

“Good, for there isn’t a drop of hot water ready. I’m not much of a tea fighter myself—a B. and S. is more in my line. Have one? No? Well, smoke anyway. Here’s a new sort the old man brought along: they’re not bad; they’re like him, not bad but might be better. Though I mustn’t grumble at him now, for he just ran up to give me these and to say he’s off for a week.”

“Is he? Then I’m in luck, for I’m alone too. Can’t we go out and dine somewhere?”

“Why, yes. We’ll go to the Inferno, as I call it; we’re sure to meet some pals; at least I shall, and I’ll introduce them if you like.”

“Of course I should. I haven’t been there for an age, and I do want some fun.”

“Getting tired of Georgie? He is a bit serious.”

“Well, I think I shall appreciate him all the more if I don’t see too much of him.”

“And he’ll like you all the longer if he don’t see too much of you. That sounds jolly rude, don’t it? But men are all alike in some things, and one of them is that they’re always singing ‘When *other* lips.’ And just you beware when they begin to protest that they can’t get on without you: that’s always a sign of the beginning of the end to my mind. Right-oh! Have a B. and S.? No—well, daresay you’re right. I’ll have one more and then I’ll dress and we’ll be off. The Inferno’s crammed always and I hate sitting at a table with other people, unless I’m one and *he* the other,” she added, laughing.

There was something bold and free about the figure of the woman as she stood

beside the table with her hand raised to put the glass to her mouth, the clinging folds of the slight tea gown showing clearly the outline of her stalwart figure, her broad shoulders and shapely breasts. Marian felt slight and fragile by comparison.

Something of the difference between them had evidently struck Mrs. Harding at the same moment, for she said as she put down the empty glass:

“We make a good couple, we shall never interfere with each other’s game. I suppose you’re just about as tall as me, but you’re slight and I’m big—quite big enough; I’m black and you’re golden. Are you going to change? I shouldn’t if I were you—that’s right—we can chat while I get on my togs. Where’s Georgie off to?”

“Only dining out.”

“Oh! Coming along later on?”

“I expect so.”

“What a nuisance; you’ll have to be back early, and I was counting on having some fun and perhaps bringing a couple of boys home with us. Well, you must make the best of a short time and hope for better luck.”

Marian made no response, though she was disappointed and wished that she were free for adventure, any that would break the dull monotony of her present way of living. The license of this woman’s life made hers by comparison all the more strait.

Pausing for a minute at her flat to put on her furs, Marian and her new friend went down.

“Shall we bump it in a motor, or go comfy in a hansom?”

“Whichever you like,” Marian answered. “I’ve not much choice, but I feel rather ‘hansomy’ this evening, don’t you?”

“I always do. I was born with the itch of spending. The only thing that I shall do cheap will be my funeral, and I don’t worry about that. Here’s one, with a horse that don’t show too many of his ribs. Jump in and I’ll climb sedately after—not that there’s anyone about who’d admire my tootsies if I did show ’em and a trifle more.”

Comparatively early as they were, the big grill room was nearly full, and they had to content themselves with a small table in a far corner, where, however, they could see, even if not much seen.

“It does make me laugh,” said Mrs. Harding, as she rolled back her gloves, “to see the calm cheek of some fellows. See that bald-headed old Jew just over there? That’s his wife with him. Last night he was sitting at the same table with Florrie Kemp. You don’t know her?”

“No.”

“She’s a devil. Drinks like a fish. Now what are we going to eat and drink?”

For a short while Marian seemed out of tune with the scene and with her comrade, but the heat of the room, the swirl of the music and the buzz of voices, the rich food and the wine warmed her, and she fell in with the spirit of her companion.

“Hullo! There’s Nosey Geraldstein staring at you as if he’d like to eat you. He hates me, so let’s have him over. He’s mean as Moses, and it’ll be fun to make him pay the bill and then say ‘Good night’! He’s coming! He’s the ugliest man in London and—always gets any girl he wants. So, look out for yourself. Hullo, Sydney, you tried to look the other way; yes, you may join us, if you promise to behave nicely. Let me introduce you to Mrs. Squire.”

Marian thought that the description of Geraldstein as the ugliest man in town was, at any rate, no gross exaggeration; his heavy, dark face, black and lusterless eyes, lusterless, lank, black hair, and gross, prominent chin, were far from prepossessing. To her surprise his voice was soft, pleasant and refined; she almost laughed, it was so unexpected: a voice that to a handsome man would have been an added attraction, came as if contrary to the course of nature from one so grotesquely, almost bestially, ugly.

“I never look for anyone here,” he said. “If a friend sees me and says, ‘Hail, fellow,’ all right, but in a crowd I’m lost. This is a nice, secluded haven of refuge you’ve found, and it’s very good of you to let me share it.”

“These are his ‘just-introduced-to-a-stranger’ manners, Marian. Sydney’s got more soft soap at his command than all the washerwomen in London.”

“But not enough to cleanse the reputations of some of my friends,” said Geraldstein. “Why drink Burgundy? It’s a dull, stupid wine. There are only three wines worth drinking: Rhine wine when I want to be inspired; claret when I want to be stimulated; and champagne when I want to remember the days when we were all young and innocent. So—shall we have a bottle of—fizzy wine?”

“It’d take several bottles to make you forget yourself,” said Mrs. Harding, who had flushed uneasily under his open sneer.

“Ah, Ethel, you’ll never make a conversationalist; you should learn to give and never take. Here’s Francis—I call all waiters Francis, it reminds me of the Boar’s Head—he’s one of my tame waiters. It pays to have a tame waiter everywhere.”

The time went by quickly, Geraldstein exerting himself to please Marian, who for her part enjoyed herself thoroughly. The good talk, the good wine and good food, the atmosphere of gayety, the sense of freedom, intoxicated her senses, and Geraldstein congratulated himself that he had thought it worth while suffering Ethel Harding for the sake of an introduction to the pretty woman with her. He wondered who she could be and what—evidently not an ordinary woman of the town.

The wine heated Marian, who usually drank sparingly, calling a splendid glow to her cheeks and brilliancy to her eyes; many of the men there envied Geraldstein. She listened to his gay chatter and to Ethel Harding's coarser talk, joining in gayly herself, not caring what she said, uttering every quip and innuendo that came to her lips, and taking the meaning of his delicately-veiled impudences with laughter and railing rejoinders. A woman to go mad about for a time at any rate, thought Geraldstein. But a peculiarly broad remark of Mrs. Harding's grated on her, and chilled her spirit. She suddenly realized that Geraldstein was examining her points as he would those of a horse or a dog the purchase of which he was considering. She seemed to hear the chink of his gold as he bid for her favors, and the thought sickened her. She could understand the drunkenness of indiscriminate passion or the joy of purchasing power by the pretense of passion, but cold-blooded bargaining with coins disgusted her.

It was now past ten o'clock, and she made the hour an excuse for moving.

"Don't let me break up the party; you're in no hurry, Ethel!" she said, using the Christian name as Mrs. Harding had used hers, "but I must be off."

"Off?" said Geraldstein. "What a pity! It's quite early."

"Yes, quite early," Marian answered. "I like being quite early. You settle the bill, Ethel, and I'll square up with you to-morrow."

"You'll let me see you into a cab?" Geraldstein protested.

"No, thanks. I can look after myself quite well."

Geraldstein did not press the point, and Marian went away alone.



## CHAPTER XII

It was on one of those warm, sunshiny mornings with which Londoners are sometimes startled in mid January that Maddison drove down to Victoria Station *en route* for Brighton. So glorious was the weather that, despite his heartache at parting with Marian, he found himself looking forward eagerly to his holiday by the sea.

The platform was crowded, and having run himself rather close for time, he found there would be difficulty in securing a comfortable seat. As he made his way along through the din and hubbub a hand was laid heavily on his shoulder and turning round sharply he faced Philip West.

“Hullo, Maddison, off to Brighton? Come along with us, I’ve got a compartment—lots of room, and the missis and Miss Lane. Mrs. West’s not been up to much lately, and the doctor says ‘Brighton.’ Might be worse; some pokey, invalidy place down in the South. I can manage to amuse myself in Brighton, and it’s convenient for town anyway.”

“Nothing much the matter, I hope?”

“Oh, nothing at all, probably; translated into brutal truth, the doctor said she ate too many sweets and nonsense and too little food. Run down.”

Maddison thought West’s manner rather callous, and wondered what Marian would feel if he ever came to speak so lightly of her. Was West already finding out the emptiness of his house of love?

Mrs. West greeted Maddison effusively, and Miss Lane did so quietly; a minute later they were rushing along Southward Ho!

“What brings you out of town, Maddison?” West asked.

“Work. I’ve got some work I want to do and don’t seem to settle down to it in town.”

“But is Brighton any better for work?” Mrs. West said, as she snuggled down into her corner and drew her furs closely round her. Maddison thought she looked all the prettier for her frailty.

“I’m not going to Brighton,” he answered; “I’ve got a cottage over at Rottingdean, two rooms and a kitchen. I’m going to settle down there for a bit.”

“How nice! We can run over in the motor, and you can begin my portrait right away. Will you?”

West laughed, hoping that the direct question would embarrass Maddison, who replied promptly:

“That will do splendidly, if you’re stopping long enough.”

“We *will* stop long enough. I’m so glad to have an excuse for not going back too



soon. The country's stupid in the winter and Brighton's jolly, although Philip did try to grumble about coming."

"'Try' is the word," rejoined West, biting the end of his cigar; "try! When you get married, Maddison, you'll remember that little word 'try.'"

"Don't be naughty, Philip," said Mrs. West, pouting. "You know you always have your own way, except about grumbling. Life's too short for grumbling, isn't it, Mr. Maddison?"

"Much. Your husband as a business man ought to know better than to waste his time."

"What a prosaic view to take!" Mrs. West answered. "He ought to leave business behind him in the office and just waste his time when he's at home. But all men are prosaic, I think."

"And all women are—?" asked West.

"Just what you like to make them," his wife replied. "That's the worst of it—what *we* are depends on what *you* are."

"What do you say to such views, Alice?" West said, appealing to Miss Lane, who was looking out of the window at the miles of dreary suburbs flying by.

"Nothing!" she answered. "You know I never theorize about things. What's the use of it?"

"Practical, steady, unemotional Alice!" laughed Mrs. West; but Maddison knew better, for he caught a glimpse of a look of contemptuous scorn before Miss Lane turned away again to the window.

"Where are you going to put up?" Maddison asked.

"At the Metropole, it's amusing," answered Mrs. West. "You must come in and dine with us."

"Maddison hates big hotels," said West.

"Big anything," interjected Maddison, "except when Nature provides them. Most of men's big things are vulgar failures. London, for example, you needn't go farther."

"Is a bad example," rejoined West. "That example won't prove your point: just the opposite. On the whole, London is a success; it's the most comfortable, most luxurious and most beautiful city in the world."

"And the most comfortless, most squalid, and most ugly," said Maddison. "That's where London is such a dismal failure; she's just like a horse with an uncertain temper: one moment an angel, the next a devil."

"Or you can put it another way and draw another conclusion; London has just that charm which belongs to a woman—you're never quite certain of her—at least if

she's worth bothering about. It may be a scratch, it may be a kiss."

"I don't like your talking that way, Phil," said Mrs. West; "you know you don't mean it."

"It'd be too stupid if we only said what we meant; most of us mean such commonplaces."

Mrs. West picked up a magazine, and neither of the men feeling inclined to talk, the conversation dropped.

West was glad of Maddison's company and pleased that he was to be a neighbor. The portrait-painting would occupy some of that time which Agatha found weighing so heavy on her hands, and would relieve him from being always called upon to lighten her burden and to listen to her complaints. He had been accustomed for years past to have his own way with those around him, and the women with whom he had chiefly mixed had been those who must please to live. Now and again he had felt the need for a settled home and had vaguely contemplated matrimony. But the idea had not crystallized until last spring he had met Agatha, who seemed to offer him all that he wanted in a wife—good looks, good temper, good nature. The love-making had been quick and strong; the engagement brief. Now, a few months after their marriage, he was beginning to understand the nature of his acquisition wholly he thought, forgetting that a man has never yet entirely understood a woman any more than any woman has entirely understood a man. We set out to judge others by their motives, which we hope to trace from their actions, but half of what we do in life is purposeless, merely impulsive, and the other half unintentional. It was West's dangerous pride to feel convinced that he owned the gift of seeing into the hearts and souls of men and women. He had come to the conclusion that good looks were all his wife's endowment, and that the good nature would not stand against the test of self-sacrifice in any degree however small, and that the good temper was not proof against disappointment and contradiction. Once or twice lately she had asked him for extravagances which he told her he considered unnecessary, which when she pressed him he said he could not afford, his means not being limitless. He did not add that at the moment it would have been more correct to say that his income was by no means so large as the world believed it to be, one or two speculations having turned out considerable losses. He was not embarrassed as yet, but the next few months would be full of anxiety, with another brilliant success or a startling failure at the end of them. He had never before felt any desire to share his business worries with anyone, had never, in fact, had anyone with whom he was tempted to do so, but now to a certain degree it irritated him to know that if he had desired to confide in Agatha it would lead to no good result; the mere fact that she was not his

helpmeet made him wish for such an one.

Maddison parted with the Wests at Brighton Station, and having confided his luggage and paraphernalia to the carrier who had driven in to meet him, set forth on foot for Rottingdean. The air was crisper, fresher here than it had been in London, and as he strode along the broad pathway on the edge of the cliff, drinking in the salt breeze, he felt that he would have been perfectly content had only Marian been by his side.

Then his thoughts turned to the Wests. The man was strong and could take care of himself, but he was sorry for Agatha. There was to him something pathetic in her foolish, pretty helplessness, the pathos that there is in a dumb beast's futile efforts to understand a world that is beyond his ken. He knew now that he could paint her portrait, not in the jeering spirit he had intended, but so that he would show in the pretty face the struggling of a soul unborn. Would it ever see the light of life? Perhaps better not, he thought; souls suffer more keenly than mere clay.

He paused when he had left the houses some way behind, and looked out over the white-flecked sea, boundless, apparently, save for the distant bank of mist that crept treacherously along; away to the right the dun cloud of smoke over the town; behind him the rolling downs; to the left, Rottingdean, nestling down in its cradle; and before him the white-flecked sea. No living being in sight, yet thousands so near. He felt lonely, and there swept over him a passionate longing for Marian, to have her standing with her hand in his, looking out with him over the white-flecked sea; they two together, what would it matter then if there were no other living soul in the world? It took all his will to master his impulse to retrace his steps, and to go straight back to town. Could he endure the staying down here? Could he wait even the few days he had promised to remain before going up to see her? Where was she at this moment? What was she doing? Was she, perhaps, thinking of him?

He remembered so well the building of the cottage—how clearly its white walls stood out against the green background of the downs, and how pleasantly the months had slipped away when he stayed there the last summer; he almost dreaded now to go on and to cross its threshold; it would be so dreary and so empty.

With a half laugh, he shook himself free from these oppressive thoughts, and hurried along down the chalky road into the village, where many homely acquaintances greeted him warmly, expressing surprise at his visiting them at such a time of the year.

Mrs. Witchout, who "did" for him, stood on the doorstep ready to greet him. She was an abnormally tall, abnormally thin, abnormally pinched-faced and red-nosed woman, which beacon was a libel upon her teetotal principles and practice.

“The fire’s burnin’ nicerly, and your luggidge’s all piled upinaheap,” said Mrs. Witchout, in her piping voice, which came startlingly as would the note of a penny whistle from a lengthy organ pipe. “I didn’t like to sort it out not knowin’-whatswhat.”

Mrs. Witchout’s most remarkable gift was a breathless way of running two or three words into one, which was not only astonishing but often perplexing.

“That’s all right, Mrs. Witchout. How are you?”

“I’m myself, which comes to the same as sayin’ I’m middlin’; w’en I ain’t got a cold in the ’ead I’m sure to have a blister on my ’eel, but I managesterfergigit by not thinkin’ abart myself. Ain’t you ’ungry, sir? I do ’ope so. I’ve got two sich nice chops, pertaties, cabidgeanda cheese.”

“Hungry! I should say I am! The walk across the cliffs is better than any pick-me-up in the world. So on with the chops and out with the cheese.”

The north end of the cottage was occupied by one large room, lit by a long lattice window and a skylight above; a passage ran from the front door right through to the back, and on the south there were two floors, the lower half kitchen, half sitting room, the upper a bedroom reached by a narrow stair from the passage. A snug nest Maddison had thought it, but despite the bright fires in studio and kitchen and Mrs. Witchout’s warm welcome, there was a sense of desolateness about the place that hurt him. He carried his portmanteau up to the bedroom, unstrapped it, then sat down on the edge of the bed and looked out of the open window, through which the breeze came cool and crisp. There lay the sea, spread out like a great, gray drugget, and in the distance the gathering fog. It *was* dreary.

“Chopson the table!” Mrs. Witchout called up the stairs. “Wat’llyoudrink? Beer?”

“Beer will do A1!”

Again Maddison tried to shake himself free of his oppression, and ran down the stairs.

“You’re a brick, Mrs. Witchout: chops and cheese and beer! Here goes!”

Mrs. Witchout tucked her hands under her apron and looked on approvingly as he set to vigorously.

“Brick!” she said meditatively. “Now I wonders could you explain w’ytheycall pussons ‘bricks’? It’s meant a complimentapparently, but I don’t see ’ow: bricks bein’ ’ardandangular, which I ’ope I ain’t either. Perhaps it alludes to being full baked. Wot do you think, sir?”

“I think it’s a very interesting question and that this is excellent beer. I hope it doesn’t ruin your reputation as a teetotaler your purchasing beer?”

“It’s a poor sort of reputation as wouldn’t stand a dozen of bassordered for someone else. Not that people don’t talk when they’ve got no reason for to do so. If people only opened their mouths when there was somethin’ worth comin’ out to come out most folks would go about wi’ their mouths shut. We didn’t expect you down afore the springtime anyway, but I keeps everything ready, as you told me to, and pleasant nice work it is lookin’ arter ’m. Stoppin’ long, sir?”

“A month or so, if you don’t get too tired of me.”

Mrs. Witchout smiled broadly, as who should say that the impossible had been mentioned.

After lunch, leaving Mrs. Witchout to wash up and set things tidy and ready for tea, Maddison devoted his energies to unpacking and putting everything in order. He took “The Rebel” from its packing-case, and set it up on an easel, and sat down before it. It was a good picture and he knew it, but he knew also how much better he had meant it to be. In the waning afternoon light the unfinished portions scarcely showed; there sat Marian, the rebel, the queen of rebels, bright, beautiful—his, “The Rebel!” Should he paint a companion picture?—Marian sitting by the fireside—here in his cottage studio—the light of love in her eyes. He looked across at the empty chair, a fellow of one that she often sat in at home—there she was visible, to his mind’s eye, sitting there, gracious and lovely—his and his only.



## CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning all trace of mist on the distant sea had vanished, but though the sun shone splendidly, the air still bit shrewdly. West rose with the spirit of discontent in him, breakfasted early and alone, then set out to walk to Rottingdean. Maddison, palette in hand, answered the knock at the door.

“Hullo! The early bird does the work,” said West. “May I come in and talk while you paint?”

“Come along. You’re a fairly early bird too. There are cigars and cigarettes over there, and an unopened bottle of whisky and a siphon in the locker by the window.”

West took a cigar, and then wandered aimlessly about the room, while Maddison worked at “The Rebel.”

“Ah! *My* picture!” exclaimed West, looking over his shoulder. “It’s the best thing you’ve ever done, Maddison. Won’t the critics fight over it. You hit on a thundering good model for it.”

“Your picture! I didn’t promise to let you have it. I’m doubtful if I shall sell it at all.”

“Oh!” said West, with a queer intonation, “I didn’t know you ever felt that way about your work. I thought you laughed at art for art’s sake, and all that damned nonsense, and preached that the laborer is worthy of his hire—eh?”

“As a rule. But—somehow this has got hold of me.”

“Or—the pretty model—eh? Well, I envy you; you’re a lucky devil. What’s the poor curate say? Or is he guilty of the ignorance which is bliss?”

Maddison bit his lips; this raillery which before would have amused him, now made him angry. He felt that the best way to put an end to it would be to speak outright and to show that he did not like West’s tone.

“Her husband does know. The facts are just these, West. Mrs. Squire has left her husband; it was a far from happy marriage. He’s High Church or something and won’t give her a divorce. So—we have to make the best of it. I think it right you should know exactly how matters stand, as she may, in fact, will, be coming down here, and your wife may chance to meet her with me.”

“Oh, Agatha isn’t a prig. Nor is Alice.”

“Alice?”

“Miss Lane.”

“Oh, yes, I forgot that was her Christian name. So now you understand why I may not wish to part with this picture. If anyone has it it shall be you, if you don’t change your mind.”

“Change my mind! It’s not a thing I used often to do, but I seem always to be at it now. I meant to go up to town this morning, but didn’t. If I’d intended to come here, ten to one I should have run up to town. I’m too young to be growing old, but I feel deuced old all the same, at times.”

He was again strolling vaguely about the room, now pausing to look at a sketch, now glancing out of the window at the undulating stretch of green down.

“You look just as young as the first day I met you,” he continued; “haven’t changed a hair. I suppose it’s care that kills men as well as cats. There’s more real care in a successful career than in a failure. A small shopkeeper can’t lose much, and doesn’t run many risks. Now I—why, good Lord! I may go bust—sky high—any day. Big business is all a big gamble, the margin between a huge profit and a huge loss is so small—a puff of wind, and over you go on the money side. Now you—you’re above fate now; you’re known; competition can never touch you; the speculation is entirely on the part of those who buy your pictures. In a hundred years they may be worth thousands or nothing. Yes, you’re a lucky devil.”

“Luck. Do you believe in luck?”

“Luck? It’s the only real thing in the world. It rules the world! Believe in it? Of course I do. I shouldn’t ever have been anything more than a small shopkeeper if I hadn’t been lucky. I inherited a tiny corner shop in a back street; fate—or the Metropolitan Board of Works—decided to drive a new thoroughfare past my place. Wasn’t that luck? Isn’t marriage all a matter of luck? What man can know anything at all about his wife, until she is his wife and free to show him her real self? Luck! I never trust the man who sneers at luck and talks about the reward of honest labor; he’s a liar or a fool, both equally bad to deal with in business.”

“I don’t believe in luck. Which am I, knave or fool?”

“Oh, you’re an artist, and the artistic temperament covers a multitude of eccentricities.”

The hooting of a motor-horn drew him to the window again, from which a glimpse of the road could be seen.

“Hullo! Here’s Alice and Agatha, early birds too. But she’s come to bully you into starting the portrait. Are you going to do it?”

“Yes. Why not?”

He put down his palette, took the picture off the easel and set it in a corner with its face to the wall, and then went out to welcome his guests, followed by West.

“Oh, Mr. Maddison, I do hope you don’t mind my having come,” said Mrs. West, leaning from the car, and holding out her small, daintily gloved hand. “May I come in? I want to talk business.”



“Delighted, Mrs. West. Good morning, Miss Lane.”

“I guessed you’d come here, Phil,” Mrs. West went on, as Maddison helped her to alight, “but you’re not to stay. You take Alice for a spin and then come back for us. Perhaps Mr. Maddison will come back to lunch with us?”

Maddison accepted the invitation, and West climbed into the car.

Mrs. West and Maddison watched them till a turn in the road put them out of sight.

“Now, Mr. Maddison, do take me into your studio. I want you to tell me, seriously, will you paint my portrait? Phil tells me I should look on it as a great compliment if you do. I like compliments, don’t you?”

“Of course I do, everyone does; even when I know they are undeserved; it’s pleasant to be able to please people, and only people who are pleased pay compliments worth having.”

“What a jolly room!” Mrs. West exclaimed, as she sat down and looked round critically. “There doesn’t seem to be anything really unusual about it, except the swords and daggery things on the wall, but it looks quite different to other studios. Now, will you paint my portrait, Mr. Maddison?”

“I will, with pleasure, if you’ll let me paint it my own way. I always make that condition.”

“I want to be painted just as I am. I don’t want to be flattered: I really mean that.”

“I’m glad you do, for—that’s my way. Please sit straight up in that chair, and look at me, so—yes, that’s it. I shan’t keep you in that pose long at a time, and I shan’t do much this morning, just rough in the head and figure if I can—if I’m in the mood. I never know whether I am or not till I begin to work.”

“May I talk?”

“Not for a few minutes—just look straight at me—so.”

For some ten minutes he worked rapidly and surely, pausing every now and again to examine her face intently. Only in the eyes lay anything of character, and from them looked out, so he thought, not only the struggling soul he expected to see, but a rebellious discontent.

“Now you can do what you like for a time, Mrs. West, and talk to me if you’ll be so good—but you mustn’t expect me to answer much—I’ll go on working.”

She did not, however, leave the chair, but relaxing her upright attitude, sank back, and watched him steadily.

“Have you known Phil long, Mr. Maddison?” she asked suddenly.

“Yes, off and on, for years.”

“Has he changed much since you first knew him?”

“No, I don’t think so. He was always much the same.”

“He seems to me to have changed a lot since—we were married. Or perhaps I knew nothing of him then—and am only getting to know him now. I suppose everybody knows all about me the minute they meet me. I know you won’t want to answer—but isn’t that so?”

“It’s a common mistake to think that one can know much about anyone until one has known them intimately a long time—and then the much—isn’t much. I’ve sometimes thought—at least I used to do so—that I had put all a sitter’s character upon my canvas, but now I know better. The face tells everything, if only one can read all its lines.”

“I wonder what you read in my face?”

“What I think I see there, I shall try to paint—and then, why, then, no one may be able to see in my painting what I have tried to put there.”

“Not even I?”

“Probably you least of all.”

“Perhaps you’re right. I do fancy I don’t know much about myself. I used to think everybody liked me—” she hesitated and then turned toward the window, keeping silent for a time.

“I suppose you look at people’s faces in quite a different way to what other people do, Mr. Maddison?” she said after a while.

“At any rate I think I do. If a face seems to have a story to tell, I like to read it. But most faces are masks to empty heads.”

She again kept silent, then stood up.

“May I come and see how you’re getting on?”

“Not yet, please—I’d rather you waited until I’ve finished; I can’t work if I’m watched.”

She wandered aimlessly about the room, her thoughts evidently intent upon something of which she desired but hesitated to speak.

“Is Alice Lane’s face a mask to an empty head?” she asked suddenly, looking at him keenly.

The question startled him, and he hesitated how he should answer it, making absorption in his work his excuse for not immediately replying.

“Miss Lane’s—eh? Oh—no, I should say she has a very decided character.”

“A strong character, you mean?”

“Ye-es—you might put it that way.”

“She loves my husband.”

“Mrs. West!”

“Oh, of course that’s an extraordinary thing for me to say to anybody, especially to you, who I don’t really know. But I must speak to someone, and I’ve no relations and no real friend—unless you’ll be one.”

Maddison left the easel, and went across the room to where she was standing by the window.

“Mrs. West, take my advice: don’t tell me any more, and don’t ask me anything. I—don’t see how—I know that I can’t help you——”

“You won’t help me?” she asked, disappointment in her tone. “You won’t? I—thought you would.”

“Not won’t—*can’t*.”

“How can you tell? I’ve not really told you anything yet.”

“You’ve told me enough for me to be able, more or less, to guess the rest—and I’m sure that there is only one person in the world that can really help you—you must help yourself.”

“That’s so easy to say. I don’t know how. I don’t know how.”

She sank down upon the window seat, burying her face in her hands, and sobbing in a quiet, childish fashion. Intense pity for this helpless, weak woman touched him, but he knew that her only real chance of salvation in this world was for her to find herself through suffering, and that if she continued to depend upon any other for support, she would never be strong enough to stand alone. He did not speak until she raised her face, and her sobbing had almost died away.

“Of course you will think me very hard-hearted and brutal, Mrs. West,” he said, “but I must risk that. If things are going wrong, you must help yourself. The only thing I can do is to tell you that from what I know of your husband, he would love his wife to be as strong and self-dependent as himself. Now, please go back to your chair, and sit as you were at first.”

His heart was full of sympathy for the weak, little woman, so pretty, so vain, so helpless. There was little chance, he felt sure, that she would ever develop into strength, or that she would retain her husband’s affection, if Alice Lane—quiet, determined, and very passionate as he believed her to be—were bent on winning it. West’s restless manner and talk had shown that something was amiss. The old story—the vessel of porcelain and the vessel of iron. She a joy to him so long as she continued to amuse and please, but thrown aside broken, when her charm had gone. Maddison had foreseen some such event as this, but had not thought that she would suffer greatly, or at any rate, for a length of time, taking her to be one who would be content with luxuries and pretty things. But he realized now that there was a depth of

affection in her, childish perhaps, but none the less deep, which might lead to tragedy, if West turned her out of his life. But he knew that he was helpless to assist: West was masterful and ruthless; the pity of it was that he had been so blind as not to see that this simple child could not long content him.

He scarcely dared look at the pitiable face that he must truly reproduce upon his canvas. Could he allow anyone save herself to see this portrait of an unhappy woman?

Then it occurred to him that perhaps he was unduly apprehensive; that after all, his first surmise might be correct, and that when she had ceased to cry for her lost toy, she would dry her eyes and be happy with something more costly and less valuable than human love. At any rate, there was no aid that he could render; the tragedy, or the comedy, must play itself out, with himself among the spectators.

Before he had released her, the other two returned.

“Come along,” shouted West; “it’s getting late. We won’t come in.”

As they were leaving the studio, Mrs. West held out her hand to Maddison, saying:

“Thank you. You said you couldn’t help me—but you have.”



## CHAPTER XIV

PROBABLY Maddison alone knew that Mortimer was not the empty-hearted cynic that he wished the world to believe him to be. Mortimer's terrible handicap was that his character was for the most part a compound of tender-heartedness and shyness. A jeer, a jest at his expense, a snub, a misunderstanding, a rebuff of proffered sympathy cut him to the quick, and he had gradually schooled himself into presenting to his friends, even to those with whom he was intimate, an exterior of callous carelessness, not realizing that while by so doing he would save himself from much pain, he would inevitably also deprive himself of some of the highest joys a man can experience. A true-hearted woman's love would have rescued him from his error, but the woman he had loved had sold herself to a Jew for diamonds and a house in Park Lane. Living so self-centered as he did, or rather so self-contained, Mortimer's friends were few, while his acquaintances were innumerable. The one he knew best was George Maddison, to whom he was attached, and attached not so much because he found in him any true comradeship, but because he felt for him a certain pity. He knew how much there was of splendor in Maddison's nature and he knew equally well how much there was of weakness. He looked upon him as a fair-weather sailor, a man who delighted to rove over sunlit, peaceful seas, who loved to listen to the voices of the sirens and who, if caught by Circe's enchantments, might sink down among the beasts. Indeed, he counted him very much as a brilliant, passionate, wayward child. So far Maddison had met with no storms, the wind had always been fair, the sun unclouded, the sirens more attracted by him than he by them, but this attachment, this passion for Marian, frightened Mortimer. An absorbing love for a good woman might have been Maddison's salvation, but Marian was utterly bad in his estimation, and he could not perceive ahead anything save misery. That Marian would not rest content with Maddison's love and protection he was assured; already she might be playing false to him; when Maddison discovered—as discover one day he must—that he had adored and sacrificed himself to a false goddess, what would be the outcome? If Maddison had been strong, the stinging lesson might prove a purifying trial; but—Maddison being weak in all save his art and his passion, what could possibly be the upshot but tragedy? The greater the hold she gained upon him the greater the disaster. It delighted Mortimer that Maddison had left town; at any rate he would not constantly be under Marian's spell; he might find that Marian was not, as he thought, entirely necessary to his happiness; absence might enable him to see in her faults to which the unbroken charm of her presence blinded him; he might gradually shake himself free,

gradually waken from dreams of heaven to the realities of common sense. This was only a hope, however, and Mortimer felt impelled to do anything that in him lay to enable Maddison to regain his freedom. Things were bad, and the lapse of time might, of course, make them worse instead of better. Cruel as would be the cure, the best and surest way to liberate Maddison would be to open his eyes to Marian's real character. For her Mortimer had no sympathy or pity; she was merely one more of those mortal pests born to kill men, body, heart and soul. Maddison was worth saving from her poisonous influence. It was not as a prude that Mortimer judged the matter. He enjoyed to the full the pleasures of the world and of the flesh, but Marian was a devouring devil. "Religion must have been invented by women," he once said, "for the devil is always represented as a man."

The single point was this: Maddison firmly believed that Marian loved him; that belief must be shattered; he must be shown, with proof and above doubt, that Marian loved herself only and cared for Maddison simply because he had enabled her to shake herself free from her husband, and had provided her with money and pleasure. Marian so far had been very guarded in her conduct, but Mortimer judged that there were two temptations, to one of which she would succumb, if not to both: a love of power, and a quickly growing, and in the end probably overwhelming, desire for gross pleasures. She was now alone; probably eagerly searching for temptation. The matter was simple; she must be watched.

So the day of Maddison's leaving for Brighton, Mortimer went to see his solicitor, who could probably, he thought, tell him to whom it would be best to apply for the work he wished done.

"You want some one watched, carefully and discreetly. Man or woman?" asked the placid, well-groomed man of law, who looked more of a prosperous city merchant than an astute, busy lawyer.

"Does that make any difference?" asked Mortimer.

"A great deal. Set a thief to catch a thief—a man to catch a man—a woman to catch a woman."

"Well, it's a woman."

"H'm," said the lawyer, meditatively looking at his client. "What kind of woman? You mustn't mind my asking all these questions. I can't help you if I don't know something of the circumstances."

"The fact is," said Mortimer, "I'm interfering in a business that has nothing to do with me. A friend of mine is entangled with a woman whom *he believes* to be sincerely fond of him. *I believe* her to be a thoroughly reckless, bad woman. I want to know."

“I see. I think Davis will be the best man for you to go to. Mention my name. Here’s his address.”

“But you said a woman?”

“Yes—Davis will get you one. I should not tell Davis *anything* more than that you want this woman watched and to learn exactly what she does, where she goes, whom she meets, and so on.”

“Very well. Thank you.”

Mortimer was surprised at the address: Henry William Davis—Pall Mall East; still more surprised when he was asked to wait in a cozily furnished sitting room, which had every appearance of being occupied by an ordinary man about town; still more surprised by the entrance of a slim man of middle height, quietly but fashionably dressed, fair-haired and blue-eyed.

“You asked to see me? I’m Mr. Davis. The servant gave me your name as Mortimer. You discreetly did not trust me with your card.”

“My name is Mortimer. Mr. John Battersea—my solicitor—advised me to obtain your—help—but—” Mortimer looked doubtfully at Davis, and then round the room, with its elaborate grate and overmantel, the white wood dado, the monochrome olive-green walls, the heavy green plush curtains, the admirable etchings and engravings, the few pieces of choice silver and china.

“Not exactly the kind of man or room you expected to see, Mr. Mortimer? Well, please sit down; you may be sure Battersea would not have sent you to the wrong place. Won’t you have a cigarette? There are matches beside you. Now—to business. You needn’t tell me who you are, I know you well by sight and reputation. Well?”

He spoke in a slow, soft voice, which was not in any way weak, but on the contrary impressed the hearer with the conviction that he was a man of quiet, firm determination.

“My business is very simple, and I was told you could get it carried out for me. I want a woman watched; I want to know what she does, where she goes and with whom—in fact all you can find out about her.”

“That’s simple enough. What kind of woman? Respectable, or apparently so, or disreputable?”

“Disreputable, I believe. Her name’s Marian Squire; she’s living apart from her husband; there’s her address.”

“Very well. I’ll have her watched and report to you daily or weekly, as you prefer. That’s all?”

“Yes.”



“And as I said, very simple. Do you merely wish for information? Or for evidence as well? I mean, will the case be likely to appear in court?”

“No. I merely want trustworthy information for my own use,” Mortimer answered.

“Very well. I can promise to obtain it for you. You want me to tell you all I can find out about this woman. That’s the long and short of it. Nothing more? Then—good morning.”

For a few minutes after Mortimer had gone, Mr. Davis stood before the fire, quietly smoking his cigarette. Then he rang the bell and told the sedate manservant to ring for a special messenger. He sat down at a small writing table standing by the window and scribbled a note which he folded with deliberation and then put into a thick envelope which he carefully sealed and addressed to Mrs. Ethel Harding.

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Maddison had persuaded Marian to breakfast with him at the studio on the morning of his departure. They had not heard or seen anything more of her husband, and Maddison had more than once hinted his doubts as to there being any need for the separation, suggesting that she should go with him to Rottingdean. The mere thought of this had irritated Marian beyond endurance, though she concealed her feeling from him, only urging that no real change had taken place in the circumstances which had caused them to decide upon their plan, and she felt grateful to Mortimer when she heard that his advice and opinion accorded with hers.

The delight with which she saw Maddison’s luggage-laden cab turn the corner of the street soon gave way, as she walked homeward, to a sense of inability as to how she could best make use of her new liberty. Pleasure at any cost was her first aim and requirement. In addition to Mortimer she had casually met a few of Maddison’s more Bohemian friends, but she neither desired nor dared approach them. Mortimer was wealthy, but it would be too risky, she counted, to ask him for anything, though anything he cared to offer she was prepared to accept. Then there was “Nosey” Geraldstein, who, Ethel Harding told her, was most anxious to know her, but she did not like him, and she had not yet plumbed that depth of callousness which makes a woman readily render herself to any man who will purchase her material pleasures; she could not yet content herself with the mere prose of lust; she still asked for some remnant of poetry, however ragged. There remained Ethel Harding.

Passing by her own door, she went on up to her friend’s, where her knock was answered by the maid, who said that Mrs. Harding was not yet up. But the door of the bedroom standing ajar, Marian’s inquiry had been heard, and Mrs. Harding called out:

“Come along in, Marian. I’m lazy and having breakfast in bed. Come in.”

Marian went into the stuffy room, which was dimly lighted, the curtain being only half drawn from the window.

“Find a chair, my dear; throw those things on to the floor. My head’s aching like the devil. I had a wild night of it. Have something? I tried a cup of tea, but it tasted like sand and water, so I’m indulging in a B. and S. Have one?”

“No, thanks, I couldn’t!” Marian answered, laughing apologetically.

“Couldn’t? Well, I used to say that once upon a time,” Mrs. Harding replied; then stretching out her shapely, strong arms and yawning desperately: “That’s the worst of taking a bit too much; one feels dead beat, but can’t sleep a twopenny wink; and you dream and toss about, and your mouth and tongue get so dry that they feel as if they were cracking all over. But the first drop in the morning pulls one together a bit. It makes a lot of difference what’s the lotion. Never get squiffy on phiz, my dear, it’s poison. Stick to brandy, it doesn’t hang about so much. So Master George is off to the country and you’ve got a holiday! What are you going to do with it?”

“That’s just what I don’t know. I’m running down to Brighton in a few days, but I don’t want to go to sleep till then. I came up to see if you could suggest anything. Are you free to-night? Couldn’t we go somewhere together?”

“Lots of places if you have any coppers. I’m cleaned out. My old man’s away, I’ve spent all he left me, so I’ll hunt for rhino while you hunt for fun; sometimes you can manage to haul in both, but it’s generally the stupid beasts who have the cash. Never mind, we’ll trust to luck, and if none turns up you shall liquidate the bill. Now I’m going to turn you out; just pull the curtains to, like a dear, and I’ll indulge in some more beauty sleep. I’ll look you up about tea-time, and we can talk over the plan of campaign. Ta-ta!”



## CHAPTER XV

THE days passed slowly and disagreeably for Maddison, the monotony broken only by Mrs. West's sittings.

He worked occasionally at "The Rebel," but dared not touch the face or hands. Marian's absence, however, served to increase her influence over him greatly; he longed with painful intensity to return to her; he wrote long letters to her daily, and chafed at the brevity of her replies, though he had not any fault to find with their tenor; she wrote affectionately, warmly, sending messages of love and again and again expressing the delight with which she was looking forward to seeing him again.

It had not heretofore been Maddison's habit of mind to weigh the wisdom of any of his acts, or to analyze any of his emotions. He had been frankly pagan, the joy of life was his while it was his with little if any alloy of pain or doubt; questions of present action or future conduct had not occurred to him. His emotions with regard to women had not been deep; they were a beautiful provision of nature for adding beauty to an already beautiful world; their voices, their graces, their loveliness, their caresses had charmed him, but had never absorbed him; not one of them had ever attained to any influence over him until his renewed friendship with Marian. In fact, nature had been his real mistress; when last at Rottingdean, for many weeks together he had led practically the life of a hermit, working in the studio and rambling far and wide across the country or along the coast. It was absolute joy to him to lie on his back, watching the panorama of the sky; to stand on the edge of the cliff, looking out over the sea, noting its subtle changes of color. Everything in nature, big or little, was lovable to him; the vast glory of a blood-red sunset; the minute perfection of a weed; the tumult and splendid power of a storm-smitten sea; the dewdrops upon a spraying fern; the cold, clear tones of sunrise or the trembling mystery of midday heat. No season came amiss to him: winter, spring, summer, autumn, there was no sameness in nature, save that of unadulterated beauty.

But he understood now that a change had come over him; between him and nature had come one woman.

The weather was cold, with days of biting, searching east wind; he could not saunter about the countryside, but would stride along at a great pace. What was it that had come into the foreground of every picture upon which his eyes rested? It seemed to him as if he were never alone now—Marian was always with him, persistently whispering in his ear: "You love me—you love me!" She had taken entire and sole possession of him; round her centered his every desire, every hope, every ambition.

One bright morning he stood at the edge of the cliff, some little distance from the village, the gentle murmur of a calm sea far below, and in his ears that weird muttering of vagrant winds which comes before the breaking of a tempest. He stood looking down on the rocks and shingle far below, thinking of Marian, counting the number of hours that remained to pass before her approaching visit, for it had been arranged that she should come down soon for a few days. Suddenly the thought came into his mind of the horror of her standing there beside him, of her being giddy, of her reeling, and clutching at his arm, missing her hold, falling down—down—a shapeless mass on the stones below. The horror of it sickened him.

Why had this woman come into his life? She had given him a supreme joy, the like of which he had never even dreamed of before; but might not that joy be too dearly purchased with the price of the contingent agony her love might bring him?

One evening he went down the village street, down through the gap to the edge of the sea, where the tumbling waves were bursting with sullen roar and crash upon the shingle. The storm that had raged all the day and the previous night was dying away, slowly, as if reluctant; the wind blew in fitful gusts; the clouds scurried across the moon, which shot down intermittent beams upon the tossing waters. His life, he thought, had hitherto been calm; but now a tempest raged within him, rising in strength day by day, hour by hour, so that there was but one thing in his being—love of Marian, that first, that last, that all in all. Away from the thought of her and his passion for her he could never tear himself; it was always with him. When he painted, there was her face before him, dim but insistent. Something of her features seemed to creep even into the portrait he was painting of Agatha West. When he read, the words conveyed no thought, no sense to his mind; he was thinking of her, wondering where she was and what she was doing, with whom if not alone. She possessed him, heart, soul and body; he was all hers.

More than once a frenzy of jealousy had attacked him: did she truly love him? Or was she just play-acting, fooling him, deceiving him, betraying him, laughing at him and his blind love? The impulse came on him strongly to go up to town, without warning her, and to watch—watch, unseen. But he dared not; in such a case, he thought, ignorance would be bliss compared with knowledge.

At last dawned the wished-for day on which Marian was to come. He had lain tossing awake all the night. Hours yet remained to be gotten through somehow before he could set out to walk to the station. After breakfast at nine, he set about tidying the studio, filling the vases with flowers, and setting "The Rebel" in a place of honor by the window. Then in the sitting room he cleared up the litter of pipes and books, and helped to decorate the table for luncheon.

At length he felt that he could linger no longer indoors, and started out to walk slowly along the cliffs toward Brighton. There was no stir in the air, the sea lay placid, the sun shone down as if with a promise of spring. He went slowly along, his heart light as a lad's when going out to meet his first mistress. He knew how it would throb when he caught sight of her face. Would hers do so likewise? He knew how words would fail him, and how he would stammer out some stupid commonplace. Would it be so with her? He knew how anxiously he would await the train's arrival, how eagerly he would scan the alighting passengers, seeking her. Would it be the same with her? Would she look on with indifference at one and another until her eyes met his? Then—would hers light up with the fire of love?

He reached the station half an hour before the train was due, and paced impatiently up and down through the throng, cursing the clock, the hands of which seemed to stand still. The train at last came in; out of one of the first compartments stepped Philip West, who caught hold of Maddison as he rushed by.

“All right, old chap, don't be in such a hurry. I've had a fellow-passenger, who knows you and wants to speak to you.”

Maddison checked himself impatiently, yet afraid to show his anger at the interruption. He shook West's out-held hand; and then looked, and there was Marian.

“I met Mrs. Squire at Victoria, and took charge of her as she was all alone. I got her heaps of magazines and papers, and books, and—she did nothing but—talk all the way down. I never knew before how near Brighton is to London.”

Marian laughed merrily, returning the close pressure of Maddison's eager hand. How deliciously pretty she looked, he thought; how wildly aggravating that West should be there.

“Now I'm off, I've no luggage to worry about,” said West. “Good-by, Mrs. Squire, and thank you for a very pleasant journey. Good-by, Maddison, see you soon.”

West strode off through the bustling crowd. Then everything vanished for Maddison save Marian.

“My dear, my dear,” he said, taking her hand in his again. “My dear——”

The tears started into his eyes as he strove in vain to speak.

“My dear old boy! It's jolly to be together again, isn't it? Come along. Take me out of this. We can't talk here.”

Soon they were driving along through the brisk air, he seated opposite her so that he might see her the better.

“It was luck meeting Mr. West, wasn't it? He'd been up for the night, and it was

much nicer than traveling alone.”

“Bother West,” said Maddison. “He’s nothing. What about yourself? Tell me all about yourself.”

“All? All? Where shall I begin. From the moment you went off?”

“Till this minute! A few days ago! It seems years to me. It was all I could do to keep from rushing up to town to see you.”

“You know I missed you dreadfully,” she said, leaning forward and resting her hand on his knee. “It was just as bad for me as for you. But now we’re together, don’t let’s worry about what has been; I’ve come down to be happy, dear, to be happy.”

“Look here. We shall be out of the town soon. If you’re not tired, let’s get out and walk along the cliff. The fly can take the traps along. Shall we?”

“It’d be jolly. I’ve been sitting all the morning. What a lovely day! it was foggy and horrid in town.”

So intense was Maddison’s happiness that he was content to be silent, as he walked along by her side, as was she, for she went in fear of letting him see that her pleasure at the meeting was not so great as his. Moreover, the journey with West had given her food for thought, and the knowledge that he was staying at Brighton had altered altogether the plans she had made. A day or two alone with Maddison was all that she felt she could endure, but with West near by it might be foolish to return to town so soon.

Suddenly Maddison stopped and took her eagerly by the hands; stood close to her, looking down into her eyes.

“I wonder if you know what this meeting means to me, Marian? I thought I knew how much you are to me, but I didn’t—not till I came down here and was without you. You’re all the world to me, Marian, just all the world. There’s nothing else in the world for me but you. Are you *glad*? Very glad——?”

“Very glad!” she answered softly.

“I used to laugh at men who went mad after a woman; but I’m mad for you, Marian; crazy as can be! And you—I wonder, have you suffered as much as I have done? I hope *not* for your sake, but I’m selfish, and really hope that you have. Have you?”

“How can I tell, dear? I know—I missed you very much, ever so much. But, oh, why, George, worry about that? Isn’t the present good enough to make us forget all about it?”

“You’re right! By Jove, you’re right. Let’s get on—I want to have you all alone—in my arms, and to hold you so tight that you can never slip away again.”

“That’s all right!” she answered, laughing, “but I’m not a man with seven-leagued legs, so unless you want to get there before me, don’t rush along like that!”

He slackened his speed, and they went along, he thinking of her, and stealing look after look at her. She was wondering if she would have the skill and the strength to play her game so that he should not discover that what was so earnest to him to her was only make-believe. She consoled herself with the thought that perhaps did he love her less his penetration would be more keen and that the very excess of his ardor would make him blind. Nevertheless, there was great need for care upon her part, which would indeed have been unendurable to her had she not known that the visit was to be brief and that in a few days’ time she would be back in town, free. She was consoled, too, by the remembrance that West had asked permission to call upon her.

When they reached the cottage Mrs. Witchout stood in the doorway, anxiety writ large upon her wrinkled face and her nose more than usually rubicund.

“Good mornin’, ma’am,” she said. “I was beginnin’ to worrit about the food. Cookin’s cookin’, I always says, and doin’ things to rags is ’nother thing. But you’re justin time, which is more than Mr. Maddison usually is.”

“Mrs. Witchout keeps me in grand order, Marian, and if you want anything while you’re here, don’t ask me for it—I’m not boss of the show.”

“That’s the way he always runs on; don’t take anynotice of him, I don’t. Would you like to go up to your room? It’s upstairs—if you can call these stepladdery things stairs. This way, m’m.”

Mrs. Witchout led the way upstairs, Maddison holding Marian back a minute to whisper to her:

“By the way, you’re my *sister*! I’ve had a bed made up in the studio for myself. Don’t give the show away.”

Marian laughed as she ran up, and Maddison turned into the living room. Everything was ready, the table neat, cozy and pretty, a covered dish and the plates warming by the fire, which blazed up cheerily; the lattice windows were thrown wide open and the sun streamed in warmly.

“You don’t look much alike,” said Mrs. Witchout, coming in. “If you takes arter your father she must take arter her mother, and a ’andsome couple they must ’ave been, I’m thinkin’.”

“Don’t try to flatter me, Mrs. Witchout,” Maddison answered, with a laugh, as he sat down on the window seat, watching her picking up the dish with the assistance of her apron. “It’s no use your coming over me and you mustn’t spoil her with compliments, though the biggest would have been to have told her that she is



nearly as good-looking as I am.”

“Lawks!” was Mrs. Witchout’s comment.

“What a jolly little room!” exclaimed Marian, pausing in the doorway and looking round. “And what flowers! And the windows, wide open, just as if it was springtime. It feels like it.”

“Yes—and termorrer you’ll have east winds and wet to bring out yer rheumattics, leastways my rheumattics, beggin’ pardon.”

“Come along; I’m sure you’re hungry, Marian, everybody always is here. And Mrs. Witchout, you just be off! We’ll look after ourselves and won’t make your life a burden to you.”

“I’ll go when I’m ready, Mr. Maddison, not afore.”

“There, Marian, what did I tell you? You see what you can do.”

“Don’t show him up my first day here, Mrs. Witchout; let him have his way, *for once!*”

“For once! They always do say it’s your own fam’ly who knows least about yer! For once! He always do ’ave it.”

So saying, Mrs. Witchout hustled from the room with a pretense of anger that was transparent.

“At last!”

Maddison strode across the room, laid his hands on Marian’s shoulders, holding her at arm’s length while he gazed at her. Then he drew her close to him, feverishly kissing her again and again, kissing her lips, her hair, her eyes.

“Haven’t you a kiss for me, Marian?”

Their lips met, and his heart beat as though it would burst.

“Oh, Marian, Marian, we must never part again!”

For the moment his passion overcame her, and she lay close in his arms, panting, forgetful.



## CHAPTER XVI

ALICE LANE walked quietly along the pier toward the sea, having left West alone with his wife, who was suffering from one of her racking headaches that formed the chief symptom of her illness. Sedate, tall, well-proportioned, with ample movements and strong, straight, alert gaze, more than one man turned to look after her as she went by, thinking that this was a woman upon whom a man could rely for sufficient help in time of trouble. But calm as was her outward seeming, her brain was busied over the problem which had become the great question of her life, and which she believed would soon have to be answered. She did not think that West had guessed the secret of her love for him, the secret which she had so jealously guarded, but she feared that Agatha had discovered it, for she had noticed lately a coolness in her manner and a watchfulness that was new. She had noticed, also, a distinct change in West's bearing toward his wife, for which she was puzzled to account. She had all along felt that he would not be able to find abiding content in the companionship of Agatha; that to win his lasting affection something more was needed than mere prettiness and winsomeness, but the change had come sooner than she had expected, and she fancied that perhaps there might be some external influence at work, perhaps another woman. Had Agatha contented West and made him happy, Alice Lane would have suffered silently, have made no sign, would never have attempted to win his love. But if Agatha had lost him, she felt free to take him if she could gain him, no matter at what cost to herself. Her love for him was unselfish, and if by any sacrifice she could achieve his welfare, she would gladly make it.

Both Agatha and he pooh-poohed any suggestion on her part that her visit to them must come to an end, but she had decided that it must do so, and at once. She could no longer bear the strain of guarding her every action, look and word for fear that either of them should see into her heart. That she had some way betrayed herself to Agatha she was assured, but she must keep her secret from Philip until such time as he should have a secret to confide to her. Leave them then she must, returning to town and the companionship of her brother.

She watched from the end of the pier the soft glitter of the sunshine upon the broken water. She tried to puzzle out her future course, but the way was not plain to her. There was this added to her concern, that apart from the breaking up of his love for his wife, West was restless and evidently worried by some business care. It hurt her to think of him alone with his trouble, with no one who, even without understanding, could give him nourishing sympathy. She would have sacrificed her soul to have been free to link her arm in his and to offer to walk the difficult way by

his side, not supported by him, not supporting him, but mutually confident, comrades, allies.

She was suddenly aware of some one standing close beside her, and turning slowly found that West was watching her with evident amusement. Taking his cigar out of his mouth, he said:

“A penny for your thoughts!”

“Not for sale,” she replied. “I did not know you were coming out.”

“Neither did I. But Aggy was—out of sorts,” he said slowly, “out of sorts. So I sent her off to lie down and rest; and came along here at a venture, knowing how fond you are of drinking in the fresh air. Not that you seemed to be doing so just now in any great quantities, for your mouth was close shut, and you looked as if you were wanting to fight somebody. How do you feel for a sharp walk? Let’s go along to Hove and back, it’ll brisk us up; at least I want brisking up. You never seem to vary, like a weatherglass fixed at ‘set fair.’”

“Blessed are good appearances,” she said, tacitly accepting his suggestion; “I fancy it’s best not to show your emotions; so few people know how to sympathize. Most of them talk, and that’s the least part of sympathy—at least I think so.”

“Do I show my emotions?”

“I can only guess whether you do or not. I might think I knew what you were feeling, and I might be quite wrong.”

“What am I feeling now?”

“Glad to be out in the fresh air; glad to be moving; hoping by talking to me to be able to forget for a while—your worries.”

“My worries?” he asked, looking at her keenly, and wondering why she turned her face away and gazed steadily out at the sea. “My worries? H’m. I don’t think much of you as a thought-reader; you might say that to any busy man, who has had a hard day and most of a night working in town.”

“Yes—but you don’t usually carry your business worries about with you, as you have been doing lately.”

“Oh! Lately. Those quiet gray eyes of yours are keen. Well, it’s quite true, I am unusually worried just now, and you’ll be surprised to hear that I hate having to bear my worries alone. I used not to mind that when I was alone. You see, Aggy doesn’t understand business; it isn’t her line exactly——”

He stopped short, for it occurred to him that it was an awkward thing to discuss his wife with another woman, however intimate a friend she might be of them both.

“Besides,” he went on quickly, “it isn’t fair to worry her just now; she’s seedy and out of sorts and wants cheering, not depressing.”

“Depressing?”

“Well, so it would be to tell her I’m worried, for she knows I don’t fidget about trifles. I must go up to town again to-morrow and tackle a lot of old fossils who are driving me to exasperation.”

“I suppose you’ll be going by the early train?”

“Yes—why?”

“If you could wait till a bit later—you might escort me.”

“Why, what are you running up for? Can’t I do it for you?”

“I’m running away altogether. Now, don’t interrupt. I must go; I told you I was going, and you wouldn’t believe me. So now you must both accept your fate and make the best of me at a distance.”

“I jolly well won’t. Your brother said I was to take care of you and how the doose can I do that if you won’t stay with us? Besides, I must be away a good deal at present, and Aggy will be lonely——”

“She has other friends. And—I don’t think Aggy is quite so fond of me as she used to be.”

“Oh, nonsense. She’s not quite herself now; you mustn’t mind her when she’s a bit off color.”

“That’s not why I’m going; I merely mentioned it to show that there was less reason for my staying than you supposed. It’s very good and very kind of you—of you both—to have had me with you so long, and not to have got tired of my sober-sidedness. But don’t you know yet how obstinate I am?”

“Obstinate? I should hardly put it that way. Firm, I should say. Yes, I’ve observed it; you generally have your own way.”

“I didn’t mean that. And how can you tell? Perhaps I’m wise enough only to let my wishes be known when I feel pretty sure of getting them, and to bottle them up tight when I know they’re hopeless.”

They walked along some way in silence. Alice had become a habit, and to learn that she was going to leave them made him realize that the absence of her quiet influence would make a real change to him. His wife had almost suddenly grown to be nothing to him but a burden which he had taken up and which he must carry with as good an outward grace as he could assume. He believed her emotions to be so shallow that she would not long moan over his dead affection and that she would be reasonably content so long as he could provide her with luxuries and amusement. But now he was brought definitely face to face with the fact that he was bound to a companion who was becoming every day more distasteful to him and with whom he would have to spend many days alone. There are people whose influence though

strong is so quiet that we do not value them at their true price until they are taken from us; such an one was Alice Lane. Her suddenly announced departure showed plainly to West that she had become almost a necessity to him; that she had helped often to smooth away asperities and to cover over Agatha's deficiencies, and that she could give him that comradeship which he had learned the need of by discovering his wife's inability to give it to him.

Comradeship only, he believed, for he did not, in any usual sense of the word, love her. She had become a quiet, steady, soothing influence, a mental support and sedative. It was not her strange, placid comeliness that appealed to him; it was not the feminine in her: she was almost to him what a man friend would be, save that, as a woman, he had to treat her with respect, and with self-respect. She had not come between him and his wife, but, on the contrary, by complementing her deficiencies, had made her the longer endurable. He had grown accustomed during the last few months to her companionship; he had not, indeed, talked much to her, or in any degree sought her confidence, but her mere presence had acted soothingly upon him; and to be with her had been restful and pacifying. Her return to her brother's house would practically mean that she would go out of his life, except for occasional visits and meetings. But he could think of no compelling reason that he could urge for her staying longer with them, and, as she had accused him of being, he was well aware of her firmness in carrying out any decision to which she had come. He had been accustomed to having his own way with those around him, but instead of irritating him, it added to his respect and admiration for her, to find that what she thought right to do, she would do, and that no persuasion of his could move or stay her.

"Tell me why you are going?" he asked, as they turned to go homeward, and faced the eager wind. "And why you think that Aggy doesn't care so much for you as she used to do?"

"If I were a man I suppose I should be expected to give a reason for my doings. But you see, I'm a mere woman, and of course act on impulse."

"Not at all a mere woman. And much too clever, not to know that generalizations are always untrue. I conclude that a man's an ignorant ass when he says that something or other is 'just like a woman.' Though it is rather like a woman to avoid answering a question by making an aimless remark. Why are you going home?"

"Why should I have stayed so long? Why shouldn't I go away? Why—why—lots of 'whys.'"

"Don't you enjoy being with us?"

“Of course I do,” she answered, no sign of the pain the question caused her showing in her tone, though she ached to be able to tell him how exquisite was the torture to which he was putting her. “Of course I do. I *did* think you knew that; you’re not the sort of man who needs to be told everything every day.”

“Well, I won’t make use of an old friend’s privilege of worrying you. But, look here, when’ll you come to see us again?”

“When Aggy asks me, if she doesn’t ask me too soon.”

The words sprang to her lips in such haste that she could not stay them. She repented them bitterly, for she realized at once that they might lead to disaster for Agatha, who might refuse to ask her again to visit her; who might, rendered brave by jealousy, oppose her husband’s wish, who might, in a moment of anger, give her reason for so doing, thereby perhaps making an inevitable breach in her married happiness. But the words being said, any attempt to withdraw them might stimulate dangerous questioning on his part.

“When Aggy asks you!” he answered, throwing his head up and laughing gayly. “Well, you may as well not go away at all, then. Does she know you’re going to-morrow?”

“I told her yesterday.”

“Funny she didn’t tell me. What did *she* say?”

“Asked me to stay.”

“There you are!”

She bit her lip and looked away from him, but he could see the expression of trouble that was upon her face, and felt compunction at having so over-eagerly pressed her.

“What an obstinate tease I am!” he said. “When I can’t have my own way, I’ve a beastly habit of plugging away till I get it, quite forgetting what it may cost the other chap to give it. What a clumsy boor you must think me; I deserve to be kicked. I ought to know well enough that you always have a real reason for what you do.”

She dared not reply, for fear her voice would betray her.

When they reached the hotel he went up to his wife’s room, hoping to find her physically better, and less querulous for her rest. She was lying on the bed, covered with a thick eider-down quilt, and turned slowly to look at him as he came in tiptoe.

“I was just going to sleep, and now you’ve roused me up,” she complained, and turned away again.

“I’m so sorry, dearie; it was clumsy of me,” he said, going round the bed, and sitting down on the side. He took her hand, which she let lie passively in his.

“Don’t feel any better?” he asked.

“My head’s not aching so much, at least not quite.”

“That’s fine. ‘Once on the mend, soon at an end.’”

“Where did you walk?”

“Just along the front with Alice, nearly to Hove. The wind’s jolly cold.”

“Jolly? It’s horrid; Brighton’s horrid: too cold to go out, and the hotel is so stuffy.”

“Is it? I hadn’t noticed it. But I do wish you would go out more. You know what the doctor said—lots of fresh air.”

“But he didn’t tell me to go out when it was so cold it gave me neuralgia all over my head.”

“Let me ring and we’ll have tea up here. It’ll cheer you up.”

“I do wish you wouldn’t always treat me like a child!” she said pettishly; “so long as you give me pretty things or feed me with sweets you think I’m happy.”

“Aren’t you happy, dear?”

“No, I’m not!” she answered sharply.

“Not?” he repeated, as he stood up and started to walk about the room. “I thought you were, dear. What can I do? I’ve always tried my best to give you what you wanted.”

“Please don’t walk about like that, you don’t know what a headache is. You—don’t understand things.”

“Don’t I?” he asked, standing with his back to the fire; “then why not try to teach me?”

“You always think you know everything, and are always right and that I’m always wrong. But I’m right sometimes.”

“Why, Aggy, what on earth have I done to deserve such a slating?”

As she did not make any reply he went across to the bedside, and, stooping down, kissed her, upon which she turned impatiently away.

“If you don’t want me to treat you as a child you shouldn’t behave like one,” he said, and, after a moment’s hesitation, walked out of the room.





## CHAPTER XVII

WHILE the sun was shining cheerily at Brighton the rain was pouring down drearily in London, Acacia Grove looking its very worst under the leaden sky; the roadway a sea of mud, the leafless branches of the trees dripping and streaming, the evergreen shrubs in the scrubby gardens none the less dirty for their washing; even the sharp rat-tat, rat-tat, of the postman as he went from house to house sounding dismal, as if all the letters he bore must announce death or disaster.

Squire had finished his frugal breakfast, and stood, newspaper in hand, looking aimlessly out of the window. The trouble through which he was passing had left no trace or mark upon his face, but there was a restless misery in his eyes. Sighing heavily, he held up the paper and glanced at it without purpose, almost unconsciously. "Sunshine at Brighton" was the heading of an article down which his eye ran without comprehension until Maddison's name fixed his attention:—"Another well-known face occasionally seen on the King's Road is that of Mr. George Maddison, the A.R.A., who is staying at his cottage at Rottingdean."

He crushed the paper angrily and threw it aside. They were at Rottingdean, then; that was why his watch upon the studio had been vain. They had gone away, trusting to his not being able to trace them.

Since his interview with Maddison, Squire's life had been a restless dream; every purpose had left him save one, the finding of Marian. Despite the upshot of his last conversation with her, he still felt confident that he could rescue her from the terrible life she was leading. Hour after hour, sometimes by day, sometimes by night, he had watched the studio in hopes of meeting her. He had seen Maddison several times, but had avoided him; it was Marian with whom he desired to speak. He had tried to track Maddison more than once, but one accident or another had baffled him. Then Maddison appeared no more, and he had had to wait upon "the skirts of happy chance," and now fate had helped him. Still he hesitated, for by several incidents it had been borne in upon him that to save one soul he was neglecting many others intrusted to his care—sinners, some of them, greater even than Marian. Could he feel assured that he was pursuing the right course? That there was no element of self in his eagerness to find Marian and to save her? Would he have been so eager had she been a stranger to him? He was torn this way and that by the doubts which assailed him.

In the efficacy of prayer he had absolute faith, and consternation had assailed him when he found that prayer brought no relief to his agony or solution of his difficulty. He had asked for guidance, and God had not granted him any. Heretofore

prayer had always brought him peace; not realizing that he had never before been in distress or difficulty, it shocked, then stunned him, that no response apparently was to be made to his faithful pleading for assistance. It is said that the extreme terror caused by an earthquake arises from the failure of the one last resort of safety when all else is crumbling, by the trembling, the shattering beneath the feet of the solid earth itself; when that fails no refuge is left. It was thus with Squire now; misery might be his lot, but not terror at any disaster or misfortune, for “God’s in His heaven, all’s right with the world”—that had been his faith. But was God in His heaven? He had raised his voice to heaven and had prayed for succor, but there had been no answer: had God forgotten him? There was no sense of rebellion or of protest in his heart, only piteous helplessness and loneliness. His spiritual pride had died; humility had taken its place, but mingled with it was an almost insane dread that unwittingly he had sinned so heinously that God had cast him away. As he had knelt this morning, words of prayer had refused to come. He had striven to say “Our Father Which art in Heaven,” but his trembling lips had stumbled; in agony he had buried his face in his hands and wept.

There was a friend whom more than once he had thought of consulting, but a sense of shame had restrained him. Now in this crisis of his affairs, he felt that no other course lay open to him, and that if it was in any way possible he should act upon whatsoever advice should be given him.

He wrapped himself in his heavy mackintosh, pressed down his soft felt hat closely, and set out to walk toward Dulwich through the wind and the rain. The raw air at first chilled then stimulated him and he made his way along rapidly. Gradually the ferment in his mind was allayed, and when he arrived in sight of his friend’s house, he almost hesitated as to going in; the physical exercise seemed to have cleared his mental horizon. But the half-hesitation brought back the feeling of helplessness from which he was trying to escape and he hurried on.

“Why, Edward! You! It’s an age since you came my way; I thought you’d forgotten me. Give the girl your things—so—come along in here and warm yourself by the fire. You don’t know how glad I am to see you. But—you’re not looking well, though you’ve got a color.”

The speaker was a middle-aged, thin little woman, with a sharp face, stamped deeply by the hand of pain, with deep-set, kindly gray eyes and a mouth that seemed formed so as to be able to give utterance only to words of kindness or of consolation.

She sat down opposite him.

“Aren’t you well, Edward?”

“Yes, yes, thank you, I’m quite well in body. I see—you haven’t heard?”

“Heard? Marian’s all well, I hope?”

He did not answer, and after a searching look at him, she went on:

“She’s not ill? If she is, why *didn’t* you send for me, or come for me?”

“No, no, no, it’s not that,” he broke in, vehemently; “it’s something far worse than that. I scarcely know how to tell you. She’s—gone away—away from me.”

“Gone away? What do you mean, Edward?”

“We weren’t happy together; at least, she wasn’t happy; she went away and she’s living a life of sin with another man. Oh, what am I to do?”

“This is terrible. My poor boy, my poor boy.”

She went quietly over to him, and putting her arm round his shoulder, drew his head gently to her. Then his pent-up suffering broke its bonds, and he sobbed bitterly as he rested there, near that kind heart to which no one in sorrow had ever appealed in vain.

“My poor boy, why didn’t you come to me sooner?—instead of fighting it out all alone, though not alone, for I know you have faith in the great Comforter.”

He held her hand tightly as he began, at first brokenly, to tell her all that had happened. She knit her brows as she listened, and when he ceased speaking, drew her hand gently from him, and drew back.

“What am I to do?” he repeated.

“Let me think a minute. But first, Edward, let us pray.”

They kneeled down side by side at the table, and she prayed simply, uttering the petition of a helpless child to her Father, asking that this sorely-tried man and herself, his weak friend, might be guided rightly in all they should do and that the way might be made plain to them. The words brought comfort to him.

“Now, Edward,” she said, “I know you do not expect me to say anything except exactly what I believe to be true. I did not often see you and Marian together, but I sometimes wondered if in your own strength you did not sometimes fail to make allowances for her weakness.”

“I’ve tried to see my own faults. I’ve no doubt I am much to blame. But does the knowledge of that help me now? It would help me if I could bring Marian back to me—but it’s not that which has made me come to you for advice. What am I to *do*? Am I to go down to Rottingdean, see Marian and make another appeal to her? And if I do and if I fail—am I to try again and again? To do that means that I should be neglecting my work. Don’t you see?”

He then went on to tell her, what he had not yet mentioned, of the horrible terror that had struck him when he found that God, as he believed, was deaf to his prayers.

“Now,” he said—“now you understand all. Can you help me?”

“I don’t know. One thing I know we must do if we are to help her. We must try to forget all about you and to put ourselves in her place as far as we can. Strangely enough, I fancy perhaps I can do that better than you could. I know you better than you know yourself and so can possibly see you more as she sees you; then I’m a woman and so, though I don’t know half as much about her as you do, it’s more than likely that I understand her a great deal better. You say she changed greatly, after you had been some time in town, from what she had been in the country?”

“Yes, yes; she seemed to me to become utterly different.”

“Just so. But of course she didn’t change at all—she only found herself. She had been simply an artificial, vicarage-bred girl; she became a woman. She never did anything very wrong at the vicarage—there wasn’t any temptation. In town she picked up some of the fruit of the tree and began to nibble at it and found it sweet. She never really loved you—I’m sorry, but I must hurt you if I’m to help you—it wasn’t till she came up here that she realized that she was a woman; she had no love for you, no interest in the life you set before her, no faith; she is young, beautiful, full of life and energy and strong emotions—so far all’s simple enough. But what further? Is she really wicked or only a sinner? If she’s really through and through bad, I know no power on earth can help her or save her. If she’s only a sinner she will save herself. At any rate what *can* you do or say that you haven’t tried? She knows you love her and would forgive her—I don’t see, Edward, what can be gained by your going down to Rottingdean. I daresay you think I’m talking hardly, but I’m not. I’m only being practical, and there’s no reason I’ve ever heard of why one shouldn’t be truly religious at the same time. God doesn’t love fools.”

“Perhaps that’s why He doesn’t love me.”

She did not answer, but for a moment a smile hovered at the corners of her mouth.

“You good people are so very difficult to help,” she went on; “you’re always so utterly other-worldish that when you’ve got to worry out some worldly trouble you don’t know what on earth to do, and that being the case—pray for help, instead of for strength to help yourself. What to do? It seems to me your way is plain: go back to your work; work hard; work yourself sick if you like, and instead of praying so much for yourself, pray more for her.”

He turned away from her, and looked out at the gray rain. She had spoken almost sharply, but the soft tenderness in her eyes as she looked pityingly at him betrayed that the sharpness lay only in the expression of the comfort she had offered him.

“I feel that you are right,” he said, going back to her and holding out his hands, into which she gave hers; “thank you. I’ll try.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

THESE days were almost unalloyed joy to Maddison, and full of pleasure to Marian, only checkered by the difficulty which she saw before her of persuading him to allow her to return to town while he remained where he was. The fear of Squire molesting them was now, she felt, an insufficient excuse for their separation, not sufficient, at any rate, to compel Maddison to forego his decision that he would not be parted from her again. At any rate this motive alone was not strong enough, and she searched in vain for some further argument to support it. Determined she was to free herself partially from him, but she did not wish to break entirely with him yet; indeed, he was essential to her still. She would not run any risk she could avoid or foresee, but equally she would not leave any effort untried to obtain her own way.

“The Rebel” was quickly completed, and he had no other work on hand. Mrs. West had learned from her husband who this friend was, and therefore accepted the excuse. But West himself came over one afternoon in the motor car, and was told by Marian, who came to the door, that Maddison had walked into Brighton, and that she was alone, nursing a headache.

“I’m awfully sorry,” West said, thinking how extraordinarily pretty she looked against the dark shadow behind her. “If it’s not a real bad one, come for a spin in the car: the air will blow it out of you in no time.”

“I believe it would, but——”

“Oh, I know; never mind Maddison. Leave a note pinned up for him to tell him where you’ve gone in case he’s back before we are. Now, do come; I’m sure it will do you good.”

“It’s awfully kind of you. Very well. I must just run up for my hat and coat. I shan’t be two minutes.”

“Two minutes! I’ll give you five!” adding to himself: “she’s worth waiting for.”

West laughed at Marian’s coat, “which might,” he said, “keep a few flies out,” and wrapped her in rugs, until little of her could be seen save her face, peeping out beneath the natty fur hat which she had tied down with a thick brown veil.

“By Jove, you look like Mother Christmas,” laughed West. “All snug? Right! Furrard!”

“It’s glorious!” she said, as they sped along a short piece of broad, level road. “I don’t wonder men go mad over it.”

“Don’t you ever go mad over things?”

“I? No, I don’t think so. I’ve never come across anything which tempted me quite enough to make me go mad over it. Perhaps I was born hopelessly sane. It



must be rather nice to feel real mad sometimes.”

“Yes, it’s intoxicating, just that. Don’t be scared, I’m not going to do it now anyway, but I sometimes feel horribly tempted to turn on full speed, let her rip, put my hands in my pockets and see——”

“But then—you’d never be able to get intoxicated again. I prefer something less final than that. A big business—to be at the head of it—a sort of king—with every other king’s hand against me—that would intoxicate me. If I were a man, I should like to be a speaker and make thousands drunk with my words.”

“An actress?”

“Yes; that must be intoxicating too—just to play on an audience—but—I can’t do any of these things, so I must content myself with watching other people—getting intoxicated. You men have most of the good things in the way of power.”

“Except power over ourselves. That belongs to you.”

“Does it? Perhaps to some of us. I haven’t got it—at least—I want to persuade George to do something sensible and I can’t.”

“Perhaps he’s intoxicated?”

“He can’t afford to be every day. He’s not done a stroke of work since I’ve come down here—or rather for the last two days, not touched Mrs. West’s portrait, and won’t—I’m afraid—till I go away, and he won’t let me go. I came down on condition that I only stayed three days; I’ve been here five now. I daresay you think it queer my talking to you—but you see I haven’t got any friends, and you’re George’s friend too. Couldn’t you—couldn’t you—just give him a bit of advice?”

“Oh, lots, heaps, tons!” West replied, laughing; “and couldn’t he and wouldn’t he refuse to take an ounce of it? Of course he would, even if he didn’t tell me to go to the—to go to, forsooth!”

“Probably,” said Marian, smiling; “but you wouldn’t mind that, would you? You needn’t go. Don’t you see, it’s this way: he might pay a little more attention to *my* advice if he found that you gave him just the same.”

“Perhaps. But he’s got an obstinate little way of his own, has Master George. Besides, do you really think that if you can’t get a thing from him by yourself you’ll be able to do so with my help?”

“You’re so strong,” Marian said, in such a matter-of-fact tone of voice that West laughed out loud, though this very tone flattered and pleased him.

“I think I must stop the car, get out and bow to the ground in gratitude,” he said. “It isn’t often a pretty woman pays a pretty compliment in such a tone that there’s no doubting its genuineness.”

“Are men any better? I should hate to pay a man false compliments, but I never

expect him to do anything else. When a man thinks a woman pretty he calls her lovely, and when she's ugly he says she's pretty, and—we—oh, we're just weak fools enough to love a pretty lie and to hate an ugly truth."

"Are you?" he asked bluntly.

"Present company always excepted."

"Do you think so? When anyone says that I at once conclude that present company was particularly meant. Yes, it's wonderful what you can do with soft-sawder, especially in business. Only you must be careful to deal with each man as an individual: some like their compliments hot, some cold, some spoken, some implied, some like to be taken for saints and some for sinners. Here's the whole art of big business in a nutshell—'play high, play low,' high stakes and a low estimate of the strength of human nature; every man has his price, though more often than not it isn't money."

"You're a cynic!"

"I don't believe in labels; I try to flatter myself that I'm a practical man of business, while all the time at the bottom of my heart, I know that I'm what every man and woman really is—just a mere emotional creature of impulse. Oh, yes, I've met those cold-blooded, calculating, anaemic-looking men, but they're just as impulsive, only they hoodwink themselves by finding reasons for their impulse, and very often by the time they've found them it's too late to act on their impulse. Study history; you won't find any really big man who didn't act on impulse at all the important moments of his life; impulse unconsciously checked and guided by the intuition which makes a man a genius."

"How is it there are no great women, then? We've got impulses and intuition."

"The average woman has more intuition than the average man, but almost all women are just average. Then you let your emotions run away with you more often than we do, and you run away so far that you generally can't get back again."

"That's true. It comes back to what I said: men have most of the good things."

"We have to work hard to keep them. Then—it isn't till we're old and worn out that we know what's worth having; life's a long chase after knowledge, and when we've caught it up—if we ever do—we've no time left to use it in."

"But meantime you've thoroughly enjoyed the chase?"

"Yes, that's true; by God, that's true. If life was a certainty and not the wild speculation it is—it wouldn't be worth living."

He stopped short, slowed down the pace of the car almost to a crawl, as he turned and looked searchingly at her.

"You're—what shall I call you?" he asked—"a witch or a fairy or what? You've

made me talk more than I've ever done to any woman, or man, for the matter of that. There are so few people worth talking to."

"Because there are so few who know how to listen."

West greeted this retort with a shout of laughter.

"A hit!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I suppose that's horribly true—you're kind enough not to have shown me how I bored you, and so—I've thoroughly enjoyed myself."

"It's not that at all," Marian retorted, putting a touch of anger into her voice. "That's rude of you; it's calling me deliberately insincere and also pointing out that what I've said might just as well have been unsaid for all you heard or noticed it."

"Mrs. Squire, 'pon my honor you're taking things—seriously; you're not really angry——?"

"Yes, I am. I am. I was enjoying myself, and you suddenly—Please drive on, quick, quick. You can't talk if you go quick, and then shan't *I* bore *you*."

"But really, Mrs. Squire, I——"

"Please drive on—quick!" Marian interrupted.

"She's a masterful little devil," West thought, as he obeyed her orders, and he also decided that Maddison was a lucky devil. A woman who is difficult to win or a man who has won is usually likened to the greatest of the fallen angels. The devil has many unconscious admirers and there are many who envy him.

West slowed down again when they were nearing home.

"There! Wasn't I good?" he asked. "I obeyed orders like a lamb. Have you forgiven me?"

"No, I haven't," Marian answered, with a catch in her voice as she went on: "it's not easy to forgive anyone who smashes up a pleasant time——"

"But, Mrs. Squire, really I didn't do anything much——"

"Much! You said the wrong thing and it jarred; that's all, but it's a good deal when you're really enjoying yourself. Here we are home, and there's George. Don't forget your promise, if you get a chance of speaking to him."

"But I didn't promise——"

"Well, keep it all the same—just to show you're sorry for what you've done. I was going to thank you for the ride, but I shan't now."

Maddison helped Marian to alight, and welcomed West warmly.

"Go and put your box of tricks up at the garage and come back here to tea? Good! Then we'll expect you in a quarter of an hour at most; don't stop down there discussing motor mysteries."

"I hope you didn't think it horrid of me to go out for a run with Mr. West; I thought the blow might do my head good."

“And has it, sweetheart?” he asked, as he nestled her head against his shoulder and kissed her. “I do hope it has. I hate you having any pain.”

“Yes, dear, it’s quite gone away—but—you asked Mr. West to tea and there won’t be any for him if—you insist on going on in this way!”

She broke away from him, laughing merrily, and slammed the parlor door and locked it in his face as he ran after her, calling to him:

“Cook won’t have you in her kitchen! I must attend to the kettle and not to you for once!”

She took off her heavy coat and then set about preparing the tea things, and as she busied herself with them, thought over the events of the afternoon. She was certain that West was to be caught only by making him feel that he was pursuer, not pursued; by no art of coquetry on her part, but by a show of absolute indifference to him, which would lure him to win her out of pride if not for love. Once she could rouse his interest in her, she was confident the game would be in her own hands. She was pleased at the way in which she had made the most of West’s innocent speech, and made up her mind that merely pleasant friendliness must be her attitude toward him, until he sought to make her change it, and even then he must find anything further difficult to gain.

West was in the studio when she carried in the tray, and insisted on taking it from her, while Maddison drew up a table to the fireside. Cakes were set close to the blazing fire to keep hot. Maddison drew the curtains and struck a match.

“Don’t light the lamps yet, George,” said Marian, “unless you and Mr. West dislike blindman’s holiday. Stir up the fire and make a big blaze and we’ll have tea by firelight; it’s much more cozy—and artistic too, so there!”

The rough cottage fireplace, with old-fashioned blue tiles and broad grate; the rich blaze; the dark background of the studio; Marian, her red-gold hair gloriously lit by the dancing flames, graceful, lithe; Maddison, with his dusky, refined face and his midnight eyes; West, long, lank, angular, with his shock of dark hair and his eyes of deep blue: the man of art, the man of the world, and the woman; each man wishing that the other were absent.

“Now, Mr. West, open the door,” said Marian, after tea, as she put the cups and saucers together on the tray. “Please open the door—I’m off to wash up. I always wash up the tea things, because it secures a lecture from Mrs. Witchout in the morning, which is always delightful. You and George can talk high art and smoke.”

Maddison lit a pipe, while West contented himself with a cigarette.

“When you told me about yourself and Mrs. Squire, I naturally thought you’d made a fool of yourself or been made a fool of, Maddison,” West said, as he

prowled about; “but you’re a lucky devil. She’s a clever, interesting woman. No wonder she couldn’t stick to the curate—I wonder how she ever came to marry him. Hullo! Here’s ‘The Rebel.’ Can’t see by this jumpy light—is it finished?”

“Yes—as far as *I* can finish it.”

“If you can’t, who can? Anything else on hand beside the portrait of the missis?”

“No.”

“You’re getting lazy. You’re enjoying yourself too much. I must tell Mrs. Squire to buck you up and make you work. Don’t forget, old chap, that I want ‘The Rebel’ if you’ll let me have it. I don’t mind your doing a replica for yourself, provided you never part with it. Think it over. You haven’t much more than three months before you’ll have to send in—I forgot you’re a blooming A.R.A.—but buck up, it don’t do to rest on your oars nowadays, competition’s too keen and you must keep yourself before the public if you don’t want to be forgotten.”

“That’s shop talk, West.”

“All the world’s a shop, my boy; always has been, always will be. Why, even the socialist idea is to turn the country into a universal provider. Don’t think it would help matters if poets and painters were endowed by the State and hadn’t to work for a living. You can’t tell me of any rich man—any man born rich—who has ever done any art work worth talking about. If it weren’t for women and money the world would die of inanition.”

“What rot you do talk sometimes, West; I suppose you find it a useful habit in business; when a wise man can disguise himself as a foolish, he’s sure to get on.”

“And the reverse also holds good, from which, logically, it must be deduced that to appear other than you are is the first law of existence! But as a matter of fact you know I’m not talking nonsense. If I were to say to you: ‘I’ll give you an annuity of three thousand a year, on condition that you give me all the pictures you paint, but you’ve only to paint when you feel inspired to do so,’ why, my dear fellow, you know as well as I do that your career would be over. Thank your lucky stars you’ve got to work for your living. Well, I must be off, Aggy will wonder what on earth’s become of me. She’s always expecting me to smash myself. Do you think I may ‘walk into the parlor’ and say ‘good-by’ to—cook?”



## CHAPTER XIX

HAD Maddison known that West's advice had been inspired by Marian he would have set it aside angrily, but in his ignorance he looked on it as curiously coincidental with much of what she had said to him, when she had urged upon him the necessity of their separating again. The fear of Squire's persecution had been thrust into the background, and he had tried also to shake off the feeling that had gradually been growing upon him, that his love for her was interfering detrimentally with his work. "The Rebel" he believed, in fact he knew, to be the finest picture he had yet painted, and the portrait of Mrs. West would, he believed, be good; but beyond these two canvases he could not see. Marian seemed to stand between him and his inspiration, upon which he had never before called in vain, upon which, indeed, he had never before been compelled to call, for it had always come unsummoned.

Many difficulties faced him. He could not bring himself to sell "The Rebel," even to West—it seemed like parting with Marian. The portrait would bring him in a large sum, but not sufficient to meet the expense of the coming year. His resources were low; he had always lived close up to his income, saving scarcely anything, and that little had now been drawn upon to the full. All this would not have mattered had he been alone, with only himself to care for; though fond of luxury, he was not a slave to it. But he had taken Marian into his charge, was responsible for her well-being, not only now, but under compulsion of honor and love not to leave her penniless if anything ill should chance to come to him. The fact that faced him was that he must set to work at once, must work rapidly and well. It was not essential that his pictures should be exhibited at any of the spring shows—the dealers were always ready to welcome and able to dispose of any work he could offer them. Nevertheless time pressed, unless he borrowed upon work undone, so mortgaging the future, of doing which he hated and feared the thought.

With Marian as model he could doubtless paint more than one picture, but strive as he would he could think of no subject; it was Marian as Marian who occupied him entirely, and to paint her portrait in this, that and the other attitude would be not merely banal, but distasteful to him. Further still, with her beside him, near him, within call, there seemed to be no room in his life for any other desire than to be with her, just to see her, to love her, to please her. On the other hand, if they parted, did the experience of the short separation through which he had gone hold out any promise of greater ability to work? Not much. But this new separation would be different; it would be caused by the necessity of work so that they might be together; the better, the quicker the work, the shorter the separation; surely that great incentive would

spur him on to success? It was Marian alone whom he must consider. To go on as he was meant being forced to ask her to make sacrifices, and that idea he put behind him at once and finally. To go away for a while, with only occasional meetings with her during the next few months, was her own suggestion, based, indeed, upon other reasons than those upon which he would act, and he appreciated what he believed to be the loving unselfishness that inspired it, for to her, as to him, the parting and the separation would be full of pain. But did not love for her demand of him that he should pursue this course? After all, would not the resultant reward be great? It seemed to him that it refined and purified his love for Marian the making of this sacrifice for her sake. So far his passion had been entirely selfish; he had thought so little of herself and so much of himself; so much of what she gave him, so little of what he gave her; so much of his future with her, so little of what might come to her. It was hot passion at first, overwhelming passion for a beautiful, desirable woman; this passion had not decreased, had not in any way been satiated by possession, but added to it now was the other part of love, which is as unselfish as passion is selfish. Her happiness, her peace, her delight, how could he best secure them? It shocked him at first when he tried to reduce this vague wish to practicality, to find that the first thing he must do was to work for money. There was no escaping from that—he must make money; he must work. He could not work with her beside him—at least he could not do so now; perhaps the time would come when he could not work apart from her—perhaps that time had indeed come, though he did not know it—perhaps—perhaps—; so round and round in this circle his thoughts flew, and the one thing that came forth clear to him was that he must agree to Marian returning to town and to his not seeing her for some weeks.

He saw her off; stood looking after her, almost dazed, then turned away like one blind, and walked slowly home to the empty studio and the empty life.

Far different were Marian's feelings on parting with him. His decision had taken her by surprise, until he had put fairly before her the reasons that were his motives. She had feigned willingness to share any degree of poverty with him, well knowing that she did not risk anything by so doing, but on the contrary fixed more firmly his determination to ask her for no sacrifice. Of Squire they had not spoken. She was not so inhuman as not to feel any touch of gratitude, or any spark of pity for the man who loved her so truly and so unselfishly; she almost wished she could have loved him; but being what she was, these emotions did not make her for a moment hesitate to pursue the course she had mapped out for herself. The love of power, which had once been her strongest motive, was growing weaker day by day; the love of luxury and pleasure growing in intensity; the world declining in its attractions; the flesh and



the devil in her increasing in their sway over her wishes and actions. Philip West now attracted her chiefly as a rich man, only in the second place because of the satisfaction it would be to reduce a strong man to her command; Sydney Geraldstein appealed to all that was basest in her. She had not seen West since he had driven her in his car, but she knew that he would hear at once of her return to town, for Maddison had decided to call on Mrs. West, in order to arrange for the resumption of the sittings for the portrait. How soon would West come to see her? Would he come at all?

She had taken the precaution of telegraphing the hour of return, so found tea waiting ready for her, and the rooms looking very cozy. There were a few letters, bills chiefly, which might wait, as she didn't want to bother Maddison with them just at once, and the dressmaker's was for a considerable sum. Also a note from Geraldstein asking her to dine with him, curiously enough, this very evening; he would call for her at half-past seven, if he did not hear to the contrary.

Should she accept? He had asked her once before, but she had refused, chiefly because he appeared to be so assured that she would accept. Something in his dogged sensuality appealed to her; of course, acceptance would be taken by him, and must be meant by her, as the first sign of capitulation on her part, though she had no intention whatever of surrendering at once, if at all. The thought of West gave her pause. Geraldstein would leave and forget her very quickly—variety was the essence of his pleasures. West, if she secured him, might be a lifelong friend—but—was not variety growing to be a fascination to her? West was at Brighton—she would run the risk.

Geraldstein was shown into the drawing room, being told that Mrs. Squire would not keep him waiting more than a few minutes. An incredulous smile flitted across his heavy face, as he glanced impatiently at the clock, which pointed exactly to the half hour.

"It's lucky," he thought, as he lit a cigarette, "that we want women for pleasure, not for business. Time means nothing to them."

He picked up the bills which Marian had left lying upon the mantelpiece, and looked at them quizzically. Then he glanced at a photograph of Maddison, and wondered how long the painter chap would be able to stand the racket. After a moment's hesitation, he folded up the dressmaker's account, and put it in his pocket. There was nothing else in the room that had any interest for him, save that he glanced at the music on the piano, and was surprised to find that it was not music-hall or musical comedy songs. Most of these women were such coarse brutes; there was something piquant and appetizing about Marian's daintiness and culture.

She came quickly in, with a pretty plea for forgiveness.

“You’ve only kept me three minutes, but it seemed like an hour,” said Geraldstein restraining himself by an effort from giving way to the strong impulse to take her in his arms. “You’re evidently not an epicure, or you would know what a crime it is to keep dinner even three minutes late. However, with luck and a good horse we shall be in good time. I’ve booked my pet corner table at Goldoni’s, my pet waiter, ordered my pet dinner and my pet wine—all—in honor of you. Have you ever been to Goldoni’s?”

“Never; I’ve only heard wonderful tales of it—fairy tales, I always thought them.”

“Well, come along to fairyland.”

The few who can afford to dine at Goldoni’s seldom care to dine elsewhere, or rather when they are elsewhere they sigh for Goldoni’s. Marian was curious to see for herself what manner of place was this famous restaurant, and was duly grateful to Geraldstein for taking her there; she had feared that he might choose one of the less reputable haunts of merriment by night, which in his company might have proved distasteful.

Everything at Goldoni’s is refined except the company, which has but one common virtue, money. Outwardly, however, even the most gross conduct themselves there in seemly fashion. On one occasion only it had not been so, and the peccant guest had been politely but firmly refused a table when next he had desired to dine there. The warning had acted efficaciously and at the same time had vastly enhanced the renown of the place. With the exception that instead of one large there are many small tables in the dining room the effect aimed at and achieved is that of a wealthy private house; in fact, it is a private house in every way; there is no sign above the ordinary hall door, sedate green with ponderous brass knocker. Faultless footmen relieve the men of their coats and hats, and then usher them into the fine reception room where they wait for the ladies who are being attended by equally faultless maidservants. The dining room is a long, finely proportioned room, broken into halves by two graceful pillars; the fireplaces are exquisitely designed—the whole indeed is an admirable example of Adam’s best work. Along the top of the cornice, hidden from sight, runs a row of electric lamps by which, reflected from the ceiling, a cool light is shed on the apartment. The table appointments are perfectly simple, just those of any rich and refined household, and the attendance is—silent. For the cooking and the wines, “they are not perfection,” M. Goldoni frankly admits, adding: “but we strive after it.”

Though Geraldstein was not personally acquainted with any of the other diners,

he knew many of them by sight and reputation.

“There—you see that thin little man over there, with the full-blown wife and half-ripe daughters—that’s Markham, the American millionaire, who has more money and less digestion than any man in the world. He never eats anything but peptonized biscuit and drinks warm water.”

“Why does he come here, then?”

“To see and be seen. One of the girls—the least unripe—is engaged to Lord Kent. That woman at the next table to us is a mystery; nobody seems to know for certain who she is, whether she’s a Russian spy, or the natural daughter of a Grand Duke—or both, or neither.”

Geraldstein chatted while Marian quietly but entirely enjoyed herself. There was a spice in the knowledge that her companion admired her, and that, boor as he was in many ways, he was sufficiently refined to appreciate her and to like to see her in a worthy setting. Her costume became her, was a perfect support to her beauty; the luxury around pleased her; for the time being she was content, and she did not permit any doubt of the future to depreciate the sure delights of the present.

The wine Geraldstein had chosen was one of those Bordeaux for which M. Goldoni’s cellar is far famed; a mellow, tender wine, whose subtle flavor passes like the vanishing of a dream, an innocent wine to the taste, but insidious, full of the warmth and languor of the sunshine that ripened the grapes from which it is crushed. Marian drank it slowly, fully appreciative; it fired her blood, brought added color to her cheeks and softness to her eyes. The subdued hum of conversation, the quiet light, the silent waiters, the delicious flavor of the foods, the wine—induced a gentle intoxication and a sense of unreality. She scarcely heard half of what Geraldstein said to her. After a while he too became almost silent, watching her with ever-increasing delight in her beauty.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” he asked by and by.

“Very much. Did you think I wasn’t because I didn’t talk? I am enjoying myself—very much. I’d heard a lot about Goldoni’s, but it’s even better than they said it was. Everything’s perfect, so are most of the people. What a lovely woman that is—nearly opposite me—with the black hair and eyes.”

“That’s the Duchess of Bermondsey and the Duke. They’re a regular young Darby and Joan, always together and always looking happy.”

“Perhaps they are happy——”

“Why not? There are many varieties of happiness. I was amused looking over a woman’s confession-book once, to find that no two of her friends had—or confessed to having—exactly the same idea of happiness. I wonder what yours is?”

She turned quickly to him, his question jarring on her present mood.

“I’m a woman and change my mind every five minutes.”

“But *now*,” he persisted. “If I could satisfy any wish you had—what would you wish?”

“I don’t wish for anything—I’m quite content.”

“Quite content? That means you’re miserable. Life wouldn’t be worth living if there wasn’t something left we want and can’t have. I always seem to be wanting something. I shall look on it as a sign of old age when I begin to be content. That’s the one drawback to this place—it’s perfect. There’s only one perfection I’ve ever found that I wouldn’t have altered.”

“What’s that?”

“You.”

“What an elaborately led-up-to compliment!” Marian said, laughing consciously. “How often has it done duty? Do you pay it to everyone who dines with you here?”

“Not—quite everyone,” replied Geraldstein, who behind his exterior heaviness hid a diplomatic readiness, which was sometimes near akin to wit. “No, I haven’t used it for a long time. Not since I met you.”

“Not since you met me?”

“No, for you’ve altered my standard of perfection.”

“That’s very nice, but perhaps that’s been said before too?”

“I don’t remember saying it to anyone else. But are you quite fair? If I didn’t do homage you would think me a fool, and when I do you call me a frivol. It’s not much of a choice for a fellow, is it? Ah! Happy interlude! Coffee. Goldoni’s coffee, and Goldoni’s *fine champagne*, I give you no choice. And a cigarette? It is allowed.”

Marian leaned back in her chair, supremely content; lazily happy, idly watching the other diners, satisfied with herself, kindly disposed even to her host.

“I hope you don’t mind my not having asked anyone else,” he said after a while. “I knew how much more I should enjoy myself this way, and—I’m nothing if not selfish. Have you enjoyed yourself?”

“Need you ask? Can’t you see?” she replied, looking at him with half-closed eyes. “It seems like a dream—don’t wake me from it.”

“Don’t let us wake from it till—to-morrow.”



## CHAPTER XX

THE next few days were to Marian days of tumult. Her abandonment of herself to Geraldstein had wrought in her a far more serious and far different change to that which had resulted from her leaving her husband and going to live with Maddison. The latter loved her, Geraldstein did not, indeed made no pretense of doing so, and her feeling toward him was simply one of desire for physical excitement and abandon. With Maddison it was, though of course she did not consciously argue it out as such, an illegal marriage; with Geraldstein she stood merely on the footing of a woman with a price. She now felt utterly adrift, floating upon the ferocious stream of sensual pleasure, intoxicated with excitement, and, as is always the case with every form of intoxication, the hours of recovery, of struggling back to sobriety, were hours of pain, half-regrets, half-formed resolutions toward future restraint, and of deep depression and reaction.

She realized fully that she had sold herself to Geraldstein when she received a letter from him inclosing her dressmaker's bill receipted, and an apology from him for having ventured without first asking her permission, to take this care off her hands. Her first impulse was to be indignantly angry; then with a half laugh, half shudder, she threw the bill aside. As she had sold herself she would be foolish to reject any portion of the price.

Very quickly all regret for what she had done, and for having committed herself irretrievably to the life of a common woman, faded away. The sensation of physical intoxication, of delight in the delirium of yielding to every sensual impulse, was fresh and keen, and had not yet lost anything of its savor. Momentary hesitations, indeed, came to her, but arising solely from the fear that perhaps she might have jeopardized her chances with West. She had not yet lost all ambition, though mere love of pleasure was rapidly assuming imperious sway over her deeds and thoughts.

Physical reaction and depression came to her now and again, as it must come after all pleasures which are themselves entirely physical. Lassitude, tiredness, irritability assailed her, and more and more frequently she felt compelled to seek in stimulants an escape from *ennui* and weariness. She talked freely and with frank confidence to Mrs. Harding, in whose companionship she no longer felt any restraint. Hitherto this woman, with her outspoken brutality, had half amused, half offended her; but now there was full community of aims and practice between them; their lives were alike, so were their pleasures and their longings.

She laughed with her over her dealings with Geraldstein and joked over the gross deception she was practicing on Maddison. She canvassed with her the

schemes she had formed with regard to West, and the difficulty and possibilities of accomplishing her aims. All this and more that she observed for herself, Mrs. Harding reported fully to her employer Davis, who in turn communicated it to Mortimer, who in turn kept his counsel, believing it to be best to wait until a fitting opportunity arose for opening Maddison's eyes to the real character of the woman for whom he was sacrificing so much of the present and perhaps all of the future.

Early one evening, about a week after the dinner at Goldoni's, West called upon Marian. Although it was only a little past six o'clock he was in evening dress.

"I'm so glad to find you at home," he said. "I'm all alone and have been working like a nigger never does. I wonder will you take pity on me and come and dine with me? We could go on to the theater or a music-hall afterward, whatever you like best. I do hope you're not already booked up—and will take pity on a lonesome grass-widower."

Marian had not hoped for any so early an opening as this, and felt that she must be guarded in taking advantage of it. West, she felt assured, was not a man who cared to buy his company cheaply.

"I should like it very much," she answered. "I don't often go out—George doesn't like my going about much while he's away. But—I'm sure he wouldn't mind my dining with you. I'm a bit lonesome, too; it's rather dreary sometimes when he's not here."

"Well, let's cheer each other up and be sociable. I got a regular scare this afternoon; for the first time in my life I felt not young, and I'm blown if I'm going to grow old yet—not me. But work, work, work and——"

He broke off without finishing his sentence and stared gloomily into the fire.

"You old!" said Marian, laughing, "I can't imagine you that. I thought you were one of those men too full of energy ever to grow old. I expect you're tired."

"I guess so, but I shall stay tired, unless I have something to stop my stewing over business. I've had a tough fight for the last few days, but I've downed a man who tried to down me; but he fought well and has tried me. Young men ought to feel all the fresher after a fight."

"Fight! It must be good to be a man and able to fight. A woman's just an onlooker—a silly, helpless onlooker. Oh! How I should love to be a man and to fight! It's sickening," she exclaimed, pacing angrily up and down the room, her fists clenched, her cheeks glowing, all for the moment forgotten except the fiery ambition which had been smoldering and not yet extinct. "It's sickening to have one's hands tied. A woman can't *do* anything, she's not allowed. She's just a doll, an ugly doll or a pretty doll, and she squeaks the words she's expected to say."

“You’re not like that, though,” West said, watching her with undisguised admiration.

Here for the first time he was in contact with a woman both beautiful and intellectually gifted. He envied Maddison, who, he felt assured, could never call forth all that Marian could give a man. Maddison did not deserve her, and if he could he would win her away from him. He thought of his wife, the pretty doll; he looked at Marian. This was the woman who could stir his pulse and who would spur him on to fight.

“You’re not like that,” he repeated; “you forget one thing. A man fights for himself; a woman may not be able to do that, but she can make a man fight for her as well as for himself. That’s the fight worth having. Often and often, do you know, when I’ve scored heavily, I’ve just dropped my hands and wondered what on earth I was working for. Ambition? That’s not worth a damn. Money? I’ve got more now than I know how to spend; I just spend it, risk it, for the sake of making more—a regular wild gambler’s risk very often. But—well, be a good soul, pop on a pretty frock and come along.”

“I’ll come. Would you like a drink? A B. and S., or anything—well, not anything, for my cellar’s jolly low at present.”

“Not for me, thanks. Appetizers spoil my appetite, and I’ve a rattling good one at the present moment. How long’ll you be—half an hour—or an hour—eh?”

“Half an hour, really not more. I won’t keep you waiting.”

“Right. Well, I’ll be back in half an hour, sharp.”

“But won’t you wait here?”

“No, thanks; I’ll go for a stroll and a cigarette. *Au revoir.*”

They were both punctual, in fact, Marian was waiting for him.

He held out a spray of green orchids.

“I went out to get you these—do wear them.”

She looked magnificent, he thought; a conqueror.

Under Maddison’s guidance she had cultivated her innate taste for Oriental color and magnificence; gold and silver embroideries, touches of brilliant flaming orange and scarlet seemed to defy, but in reality enhanced, the splendid richness of her red-gold hair.

She stood before West in a strange greenish-blue cloak, with heavy gold tassels and braid and with a hoodlike drapery of sable round her shoulders. An antique Oriental silver comb, studded with green and blue stones, held her hair.

“How strange,” he said, as she fastened the flowers in the corsage of her amber gown, “how strange! If I’d known what you were going to put on, I couldn’t have



chosen the flowers better.”

“There’s one great pull you women have over us,” West said, as he looked round the restaurant with its over-gorgeous gilding and its over-fed crowd of men and women, “you can dress; men merely wear clothes. Just look at all these silly black coats and blank white shirt fronts. What a difference it would make if we weren’t afraid of colors and dressed for effect!”

“It tempts women to wear what doesn’t suit them, though.”

“Either you’re not tempted, or you’re very clever and strong-minded. Brave too—there are not many who could stand those colors you have, and no one else I know who could wear them as if any other colors would be wrong. You forget that among my many businesses I’m a man milliner. It’s the most difficult job I’ve had to run that department. Men are easy enough to content, no matter what they want to buy—clothes, cigars, wine; they’ve no scope for choice, it’s just a question of good or bad; but women—and dresses! My goodness! Now, I wonder if your taste in dinners is—well, I was going to say as good as your taste in dress, but what I really mean is—the same as mine. No soup; just fish, a bird and a sweet and one wine?”

“I’m not going to give myself away. You’re my host; the guests don’t choose but take. But I’ll tell you candidly afterward whether I’ve enjoyed it or not. Unless you’d rather I’d say nice things whether I mean them or not.”

He laughed.

“It’s difficult to know—difficult to choose between pretty insincerity or candid—cold water.”

“I should have thought you would always choose candor.”

“Why?”

“A woman’s why; I’ve no reason, but I sort of feel it. Aren’t I right?”

“Do you really expect me to answer—candidly? To confess being fond of being humbugged, or to tell a story and say I like candor always? Of course I don’t; I like being made a fool of, so now you know and can act accordingly.”

“I? You’ve handicapped me. It’s no fun being humbugged when you know it, is it?”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said West, critically examining the *sole à la Marguery*, which the waiter submitted for his inspection; “I fancy it rather depends upon the humbugger. It’s funny in business to know a man is trying to ‘do’ you, and to know that he doesn’t know you suspect him. And—I think most men are rather pleasantly tickled when they find a pretty woman who thinks it worth while getting round them. That’s where you have a man; the greatest compliment you can pay a man is to flatter him by trying to lay hold of him.”

“Doesn’t that depend upon the motive? A rich, ugly man must get rather tired of being run after.”

“No, it’s one of the pleasant powers that money brings with it; there’s compensation in thinking that the handsome poor fool longs in vain to have what you can command.”

“You talk as if you were—” Marian broke off short.

“I *know* you were going to say,” exclaimed West, laughing, “that I was the rich, ugly man. You’re quite wrong,” he added, his eyes still twinkling with fun; “I’m one of the exceptions: I’m rich, *and* young *and* handsome. Don’t think me conceited, but I can’t bear mock modesty.”

“And yet I’m sure you’re ready enough to call a woman conceited if she’s pretty and shows that she knows it.”

“Not a bit; it’s part of the charm of a pretty woman that she cannot hide her self-consciousness. Do you know I haven’t enjoyed a dinner so much for ages.”

“They do cook well here.”

“Cook! Cook!” he answered, looking at her quizzically. “Do you really think I referred to the food? Of course you don’t. You’re too sensible; I can buy food of the best every day, but I’m sorry to say I—can’t have you opposite me always. That’s very badly put, isn’t it? Never mind, a compliment prettily paid is generally a stock one, trotted out on all proper and some improper occasions; but joking apart, it is a treat to meet with a woman who can keep up her own end in a game of conversation. Especially if she’s——”

“I *know* what you were going to say——”

“Then I needn’t say it. People are so desperately stupid, or if they’re not then they’re so desperately in earnest. A clever woman who can frivol is delightful.”

“So is a clever man.”

“Let’s drink our mutual admiration, then,” said West, looking at her over his glass of sparkling Rhine wine; “let’s form a mutual admiration society, strictly limited to two; the only rule being that we shall dine together at suitable and short intervals. At present the club’s confined to one member, myself; will you join it? And consider to-night the first meeting—of many?”

“It would be very jolly. But I think you’d better wait till the evening is over before you decide whether I’m a properly qualified member, don’t you?”

“No—I don’t, and I guess that what you really mean is that you’re not so sure about me. We’ll pass a new rule then at once: any member tired of any other member is to confess candidly and to retire from the club. Now you’re safe——”

“And—so are you.”

After due consultation with Marian and an evening paper, West had telephoned for a box at the Empire, luckily securing one that had been returned at the last moment, the house being otherwise full, it being the first night of a new ballet. Marian was passionately fond of music and sat behind the curtain of the box, feeling almost as if she were alone in the vast, crowded theater, listening intently to the swinging rhythms of the orchestra. West sat close beside her, watching her face in the glow reflected from the brilliantly-lit stage. She looked singularly lovely, her beauty soft and refined, a glow of quiet content in her eyes; he noted the delicate molding of her arms and her tapering fingers as she held up her opera glasses; he saw the gentle rise and fall of the ruby star nestling in her bosom; she intoxicated him. He old! No, young, young, young—an impassioned youth in love: his mistress a goddess whom he scarce dared approach! Half unconsciously he laid his hand on hers as it rested on her lap.

She drew it gently away.

“Don’t, please don’t. Please don’t spoil things.”

He did not speak for some time, while she apparently again became absorbed in the *spectacle*.

“I suppose you’re very fond of Maddison?” he asked by and by.

“Fond of him? What a curious question to ask! Of course I am. Very.”

“Somehow—I thought you weren’t. I—hoped you weren’t.”

“I am.” Then turning full toward him, she said earnestly: “Why must you spoil things by talking this way? What can you think of me?”

“Think of you? You make me afraid to tell you what I think of you. I—won’t say anything more—I’ll be good.”

To a crash and uproar of applause the curtain fell and Marian quickly rose.

“I don’t want to see anything more. That was beautiful. Will you put me into a hansom?”

“Let’s go on to supper somewhere. We needn’t really have supper if you’re not hungry. We can just pretend and have another chat.”

“I thought ours was a dining club,” Marian replied, smiling. “No, thank you very much. I’ve had an awfully good time, but I’m tired.”

When she arrived home she was surprised to see that the dining room was lit up, still more surprised to find Geraldstein ensconced there, smoking a cigar, and a brandy and soda on the table beside him.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, turning round. “I believe I was half asleep. I hope you don’t mind my having made myself at home?”

“I mind your being here at all,” Marian answered, angry at the thought of what

would have occurred if West had returned with her. “You shouldn’t have come in when you found I wasn’t here.”

“My dear girl, what nonsense. Why not?”

“Because—I don’t like it.”

“You handsome little tyrant,” he said, laughing and lazily stretching himself. “You look uncommonly like Cleopatra, but I can’t flatter myself I’m an Antony. Don’t be cross.”

“I am cross. It’s late. Good night.”

“You’re alone, aren’t you?” he asked suspiciously.

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, don’t pretend to be young-missish. If you’re not alone, I won’t leave you alone, that’s what I mean.”

The reply stung her as would a lash from a whip; he had a right to make it, a right given to him by her—in that lay the sting. It was a mere question of buying and selling now with her; and this man had bought and demanded payment.

“Where have you been?” he asked.

“It doesn’t concern you,” she replied fiercely. “I don’t belong to you. Go away.”

“Go away! Don’t be rude, and don’t tempt me to be rude and remind you of facts.”

“There is nothing to compel me to keep you here to-night. Will you go?”

He stood up, yawned, stretched his arms and then stood looking at her insolently.

“You’re deuced pretty, as you know, and look splendid in those clothes—but clothes cost money and money can’t be got for nothing.”

“You beast!”

“Beauty and the beast, capital!” Then he seized her by the wrists and looked her up and down, as if she were something offered for sale of which he was trying to appraise the value. “You little fool, you’re young and pretty now, but in a few years you won’t be so proud. All right. There are others in the market besides you, and they do pretend, at any rate, to be glad to see me. But mind, she that will not when she may. Well, I’m off. Ta-ta!”

She did not move until she heard the outer door shut behind him. He had frightened her, and what was worse had driven home to her the fact that she was for sale. For sale to any man who chose to buy—unless West should rescue her.



## CHAPTER XXI

IN the early days of their acquaintanceship Mrs. Harding had felt very favorably disposed toward Marian, but gradually appreciation had given place to envy, and liking had been displaced by dislike. She understood that Marian was her superior not only in beauty, which she would have forgiven, but in education and social standing, which deeply galled her. She realized how badly she compared with Marian in conversation and the amenities of life. At first she laughed, shrugged her sturdy shoulders, consoling herself with the thought that after all men do not fall in love with a tongue; but gradually, as she realized that pretty speech is an excellent support to a pretty face, she began to hate Marian's dainty ways and facile talk. More than once, too, Marian had shown by some little gesture or some uncontrolled look that Mrs. Harding's coarse coarseness annoyed and jarred upon her. The latter's treachery also filled her with the spite that so often comes to a mean spirit, who has wronged another. It was not the first time that Davis had called on her to spy upon a woman with whom she was upon terms of familiarity, but in other cases the victims had always been those to whom she had not made any pretense of real friendship and whose confidence she had not sought. But Marian had trusted her, and the betrayal of this trust, combined with jealousy, drove her for refuge from compunction to hatred and malice.

A further point was this. Some of the practices to which Mrs. Harding was addicted were obviously distasteful to Marian; it was a temptation to her, therefore, to reduce Marian to her own level, and to this temptation she now yielded. The episode with Geraldstein pleased her, as a step in the direction to which she desired to drive Marian.

One of the practices which was at present abhorrent to Marian was over-indulgence in drink. Once she had been spending the evening at a rather noisy restaurant with Mrs. Harding; they had met there two young fellows, of that age when women and wine are temptations all the more deadly because the yielding to them is held in reprobation by those from whose authority they have but recently been released. Marian was utterly bored by the pointless and often indecent jests, and watched with disgust the quantity of wine which her friend drank and its influence upon her.

Mrs. Harding saw that she was being watched.

"Don't mind her," she said to the youth who sat beside Marian, pestering her with his plain-spoken attentions. "She's young and is afraid of being jolly. Some night she'll get a bottle of fizzy inside her, and'll be all over the place before she knows

where she is. Once bitten, never shy again. Drink up, Marian, it won't hurt you. Let's have another bottle, boys."

Marian left the party, her departure not meeting with any real protest, and the next morning received a visit from Mrs. Harding, whose skin was unwholesome to look at and her eyes blowzed and bloodshot.

"I suppose you'll tell me it serves me right," she said, "but my head's aching fit to split. I wouldn't have come down, but I've run out of brandy; don't preach, dear, but just be good and give me a B. and S."

For a week or so after the dinner with West, Marian's life was very quiet outwardly. Inwardly she lived tossed this way and that by a turmoil of contrary desires. She realized with terror that she was losing grip upon herself; that her physical emotions were daily growing more and more imperious. When she had sundered herself from her old and had plunged into this new life, she had fully counted on using her bodily gifts to procure her the ends for which her soul thirsted. But this life was different to what she had expected it to be, and now her mental desires were rapidly growing weaker, and the lust of mere pleasure and excitement was usurping their place.

Her visit to Maddison at Rottingdean and her friendship with West had stayed for a while this degeneration, and now she had come to look upon the latter as the one bulwark remaining between her and a life of promiscuous debauchery.

The time, too, was approaching for her to go down to Rottingdean again, and the thought of seeing Maddison was very distasteful. His letters came regularly, full of love and devotion, telling how much he missed her, how often he thought of her, how difficult he found it to stick to his work, how dissatisfied he was with the result, and how he counted the hours to the day when he should see her again. She wrote at less length and less frequently than he did, and each time the effort was more laborious to her. She was anxious that he should not discover her discontent, still more that he should not obtain any inkling that he was not as dear and as necessary to her as she was to him. Now and again dread came to her when she thought of what might happen when she dismissed him.

Her loneliness rendered all these thoughts the more distressing to her; she was unable to escape from herself, and herself was the very worst and most hurtful company that she could have.

Broken sleep, which quickly became night-long sleeplessness, was the inevitable result.

One night she lay awake, restlessly shifting her position from time to time; striving to rest her mind by fixing it upon matters of indifference, but without success. Then

of a sudden there swept down upon her a terror that had often stricken her when a child, but from which she had not suffered of recent years. What if this sleeplessness should prove incurable and kill her? Or the beginning of a dangerous illness? She turned cold and faint with the horror of the thought of death. Not of the physical pain with which it might be accompanied, but of the thing itself. She could not lie there any longer in the dark; turning up the light brought no comfort, only rendering the idea of death more real. She imagined herself lying there, a nurse in the room, Maddison, perhaps, by her side. She knowing, they knowing, that Death stood outside the door, his grisly knuckle sounding for the admission that could not be denied. There was added an oppressive sense of being alone; she refrained with difficulty from shrieking, just for the sake of hearing some living response.

She recalled how once, soon after their marriage, her husband had suffered from a long spell of sleeplessness, brought upon him by over-work, and how she had told him again and again that if he would only exert his will he could overcome his trouble. She remembered, too, that the doctor had ordered him to set aside his teetotal scruples, and drink each night before going to bed a glass of brandy and water, and how much she had disliked the smell of the spirit.

She slipped out of bed, shivering, for the night was bitter cold, and having wrapped herself in her dressing gown made her way to the dining room. She poured out about a wineglassful of brandy into a tumbler, added water, and drank it hastily. She shuddered as she put the glass down, but the quick warmth of the liquor comforted her, running like heat through her frame.

After a while she slept heavily, wakening late in the morning, parched and unrefreshed. She was not hungry, but drank her tea eagerly, feeling refreshed for a time.

The following night she placed the decanter of brandy and the water carafe on the table by her bedside, and as soon as she became restless had recourse to them. This time the spirit did not soothe but excited her; wild, aimless thoughts chased one another rapidly, until it seemed as if her brain would burst. She drank again, pouring out a larger amount of the brandy than before; stupor, then restless slumber resulting.

The thought of each approaching night came to be a terror by day. She sat up late reading—reading until her eyes fell heavy with sleep. Then to bed and to sleeplessness.

She saw no one; Geraldstein had dropped her; West did not come, and she did not see anything of Mortimer. Mrs. Harding came in once or twice, but her presence was an irritation.

Then came the appointed day for her going to Maddison, and, to her surprise, it



was with a sense almost of relief that she found herself in the train, speeding away from London.

He met her at the station, and although he said little, she could not but discern in his face the intense joy it was to him to see her again. He looked tired and troubled; even the light of love that sprang into his eyes as they rested on her did not dispel from them the curious look that shows in them when a man is eagerly searching after that which he cannot find. As it was raining they drove the whole way to the cottage, not talking much as they went, he seemingly content to be quiet, holding her hand tightly in his own.

Mrs. Witchout greeted Marian cordially.

“You don’t look as well, though, as when you went away,” she said critically; “does she, Mr. Maddison? I do hear as rosy cheeks ain’t the fashun in Lunnon. But, there, Lunnon fashuns ain’t the only ones worth follering. Lunch is ready; Mr. Maddison says I ought to call it luncheon, but I don’t see that it matters what you call things so long as people know what yer means.”

“And how’s the work getting on?” Marian asked, as they went into the studio.

“Lamely. Only hobbling. I’ve finished Mrs. West. What do *you* think of it?”

“What does she is more to the point?”

“No; what do you?”

Marian looked long at the portrait before she answered. It was evidently very like the original, but there was something in the face that puzzled her.

“You told me she was a doll!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, but I’ve discovered that dolls have hearts as well as sawdust in them.”

“Oh!”

“Is that all you notice?”

“Ye-es, I think so,” she answered. “I like it.”

He laid his hands on her shoulders, and moved her so that the light fell full upon her face; then scanned her features closely.

“I’m right,” he said, “right. Go and look in the glass there, then look at the picture again, and see if *you* don’t find something of yourself reflected in what I meant to be a portrait of another woman.”

Marian looked closely again at the picture; it was true; as he said there was a distinct semblance of herself, a fleeting likeness which it was impossible to define, but unmistakable.

“You see, Marian, I’ve tried doing without you and I cannot; we must never leave each other again—why should we? We love each other—you do love me still, dear, don’t you?”

“Yes, George, of course I do.”

“Of course you do! That sounds so cold. It seems to me this way,” he said, sitting down, drawing her on to his knee and resting his head against her shoulder; “life’s so short, and there’s only one thing in it worth having; your love’s just all to me. So why waste any of our time by being apart? We can go away and live quite quietly somewhere, or live here—it’s cheap enough; and if I only paint a picture a year we shall be well off, even if they’re not my best,” he added, sighing and looking at the portrait.

She did not answer him, but fondled his hair and pressed him close to her, which she knew would speak to him more eloquently than any words she could put together. Never before had she felt quite so helpless to deal with this love of his, which had grown so much more intense than she had counted upon its becoming. At any rate the time was not yet come for her to show him anything of coldness, and her cool fingers ran through his thick dark hair and he was comforted.

“I must put you into another picture; make myself immortal by painting you always; you must be my Emma. What shall it be next? As a Bacchante? Your eyes wild with excitement and your cheeks glowing like red roses? Your lips just parted and your little teeth peeping out between? I *could* do it; by Jove, I will do it. We’ll begin to-morrow; we mustn’t work to-day. That’s my mistake! I ought never to have tried to paint without you as my model.”

“You’re forgetting me!” she said, an idea coming to her, which held out promise of sufficient excuse for leaving him again soon.

“Forgetting you—do you think that I ever forget you for a single moment? You know—I often used to think myself in love, but it never lasted. Then I began to believe that love wasn’t very much after all, and that people were fools or ignorant who said it was the only thing in life worth having. You’ve taught me better, dear. But what did you mean by saying I’d forgotten you?”

“You’ve—left me out of your plans!”

“Left you out? Why, you’re just everything!”

“Not quite. You couldn’t go on loving a woman who had no pride, could you?”

“I could love you whatever you were.”

“But that’s not right, George. When I—came to you, you were a great man, but not nearly so great as you were going to be. And now I have spoiled all your future and you don’t seem to have any ambition left. No,” she said, forcing herself away from him and with a gesture forbidding him to follow her, “I’m *not* going to spoil your life. If I come between you and your work—I’ll—leave you.”

“Leave me!”

The agony in his voice startled her.

“Leave me!” he repeated, striding across to her and holding her fiercely to him. “I think I’d kill you before I’d let you do that.”

“Don’t, George, don’t,” she gasped; “you’re frightening me.”

“I’m so sorry, love, but—why do you say such horrid things to me?”

“What I said was right. If I can’t help you with your work, George, I’ll do this; if in a few days you can’t begin a picture without me in it, can’t prove that you can work with me near you—I’ll go away and I’ll stay away until you can tell me that I can come back safely to you.”

“So that’s your plan! But it will take two to carry it out, and I won’t make the second. I simply *won’t* let you go. So that’s settled.”

“You don’t want me to be happy? Is your love so selfish as all that?”

“So selfish!” he said, freeing her, dropping his arms, standing amazed. “Selfish! Oh, my love, you’re right, right. It was damnably selfish; I was just thinking of myself. But—are you happy when you’re not with me?”

“You know I’m not, George. But—I’m so proud of you, and I should hate myself if I knew I was standing in your way. I should be unhappy with you then. Besides, dear, is—is——”

“Yes?”

“Is it right to love me like that? Love ought to help you, not harm you.”

“Help me! It has helped me to understand what happiness is. I didn’t know that before.”

“Well, George, you mustn’t kill my pride; keep me proud of you, proud of having helped you, proud of myself. There, we’ll talk no more about it now, and tomorrow, or the next day, you shall start another picture, only I will not be your model.”

“But——”

“No! We’re not going to argue the first day we are together. Look, the rain’s over and the sun’s trying to come out. I’ll run up and put on my country boots and hat, and we’ll go for a walk over the downs.”



## CHAPTER XXII

FOR the first time West hesitated in his dealing with a woman. Partly it was that Marian puzzled as well as attracted him, partly it was that the precipitancy of his marriage with Agatha and its failure gave him pause before he took the step of trying to win Marian away from Maddison. He admired her, but he was by no means sure that the admiration was mutual; indeed part of her attraction for him was that she had not in any way, so far as he could see, endeavored to bring him to her side. Hitherto the women whom he had met had made little effort to conceal the fact that his money rendered him a welcome suitor.

It was his custom every morning to walk in Hyde Park before going to business; it was usually the only hour in the day which was not interrupted and in which, therefore, he could think clearly. This mental constitutional was broken up one day by meeting Alice Lane. They came suddenly face to face at a sharp turning close by the Serpentine.

"You're most unfashionably early!" he said, falling into step with her.

"I'm unfashionable in everything, I think. I didn't know you were in town."

"Is that a kind of way of reminding me that I ought to have called? I've been awfully busy."

"How's Agatha? Is she still at Brighton?"

"Yes. She's much better and beginning to enjoy herself. What have you been doing?"

"Just nothing."

"I can't believe that of you. You'd go crazy if you hadn't something to do."

"Why, I stopped weeks with you and didn't do a single thing the whole time."

"That's true," he admitted, laughing; "but you always manage to give the impression of being busy. Like one of my men, whom I had to fire out the other day—he was always awfully busy and didn't get any work done."

"I've no work to do."

West felt curiously constrained; not that anything in her tone or manner jarred upon him; she was frankly kind as she always was to him. He did not feel that he had anything to say to her and small talk failed him.

They walked on for some little distance without speaking.

"My brother's engaged to be married," she said suddenly.

"Really! That's good. I must write and congratulate him. But it'll be a nuisance for you, won't it? I suppose it will be the customary 'two's company.'"

"I shan't try to make it anything else. It wouldn't be fair to her."

“Fair to her! That’s like you; that’s you all over. I’d bet anything you haven’t bothered to think about yourself. What a show up you good women make of us men!”

“Don’t say things like that about me,” she answered, so fiercely that he stared at her astonished, “*don’t*. It’s so utterly untrue. What on earth does a man ever know about a woman? I’m hateful to myself, and I’d be hateful to you if you knew me.”

“I’m sorry—something’s wrong and I’ve touched you on the raw; I’m sorry. Not that I believe you a bit you’re worrying about something that wouldn’t give me a twinge. I—suppose I can’t help you any way?”

“You—no, no, thanks.” She clenched her fingers tightly inside her muff. “No one can help me and I can’t help myself.”

“I’m sorry,” he repeated. “You’re such a good sort, I hate to see you suffering; I’m afraid it’s something pretty bad.”

“I’d rather not talk about myself. Tell me about yourself. Don’t you feel lonesome up here without Agatha?”

“Oh, we’re settling down into conventional married life. Quite pleased to be together, but not inconsolable when we’re apart. Aggy’s growing up and finding other amusements in life besides honeymooning.”

“And you?” she asked, not looking at him, but fixing her gaze straight ahead.

“I? Didn’t I tell you I’m very busy?”

“And that’s all you care about?”

“I’m beginning to think so. It’s really the only game worth playing. Now, here we are at Hyde Park corner. Shall I take a turn back with you and be late at the office? Or be a good boy, remember that work’s first, pleasure second?”

“Be a good boy,” she replied, holding out her hand.

She stood still, watching him as he strode rapidly away, and when he was out of sight, still stood there, her lips tightly pressed together, suppressing the cry of hopelessness that tried to force its way from her heart.

West telegraphed later on in the morning to Marian, saying that he would call in the evening on the chance that she would be free to dine with him and go on to a theater afterward, and Marian on her arrival from Brighton found the telegram awaiting her and welcomed it. Her stay at Rottingdean had rested her, had done good to her physically, but had sent her back thirsty for amusement. She had intended to write to West, but good fortune had brought him to her uncalled.

She dressed herself with peculiar care, and was ready for him when he arrived.

“By Jove, this is luck,” he said, “unless you’ve dressed to go out somewhere else? Don’t tell me that and turn a lonely man out on a lonely world.”

“No, I didn’t know what I was going to do with myself when I found your wire here. I only came up from Brighton to-day.”

“You’ve been down there? Well, where shall we go?”

“Anywhere, only somewhere where there are lots of people. I went down there for a change; I’ve come up here for a change.”

“Aren’t I change enough? There’s conceit! Here, slip on your cloak, and we’ll discuss our destination in the cab as we go along.”

Marian had chosen to go to the Gaiety and West had telephoned to the theater, being lucky enough to secure two good stalls. The first act was well under way when they entered the darkened theater, slipping quietly into their seats, amid the more or less skillfully disguised annoyance of their neighbors.

When the curtain fell, Marian looked round the well-dressed house, with its atmosphere of well-to-do-ness and good dinners. West noted the graceful curves of the arm as she held up her opera-glasses, and when she laid them down on her lap and turned to him, noticed, too, how brightly her eyes shone and how well her flushed cheeks became her.

“You do love pleasure, *don’t* you?” he said.

“I do. Don’t you?”

“Yes. But somebody told me the other day that I was getting old. Perhaps that explains why I don’t seem able to let myself go as I used to do.”

“Doesn’t that depend a good deal upon who you are with?”

“Yes, I’ve been keeping dull company lately, chiefly my own.”

“That’s not a pretty compliment to me!”

“I said ‘lately,’ not to-night. I don’t think even a plaster saint could be dull with you.”

“I can be dull with myself.”

“That may be; it takes flint and steel to strike a spark.”

“Which am I?”

“Does it matter—so long as the flame comes?”

He was looking vaguely round as he spoke to her, but suddenly his eyes rested on Alice Lane sitting in a box with two other ladies and her brother. She saw and recognized him at the same moment. He felt uncomfortable; he did not mind who else saw him, but he would have preferred not having been seen by her in Marian’s company; he knew that she would understand the character of the woman he was with, even if she did not already know her by sight and reputation. Though after all, why should it worry him? Women did not seem to take any account of such things nowadays. But it did annoy him, argue as he would, for he was sure that Alice was

not one of the many.

“Have you found some friends?” asked Marian, following the direction of his eyes.

“Acquaintances. One always meets some one one knows here.”

The electric bells were ringing for the beginning of the next act, and in the bustle made by men returning to their seats, and the striking up of the orchestra, conversation dropped, though Marian scanned curiously the calm, strong face of the woman in the box, who, instinct told her, was the one who knew West.

He had made up his mind to put his fortune to the touch with Marian this evening, feeling fairly certain from her manner toward him at dinner that she liked him and would desert Maddison for him. He had decided to take another flat for her, it not being his taste to keep his lady-bird in a nest that another man had feathered. At any rate, no real harm could come of the experiment; if she proved difficult or dull, a check would cut him loose.

He watched the performance without interest. The sight of Alice Lane had stirred something in him that had taken away his relish of Marian’s company. He could not but compare the two. Alice so strong, so trusty, such a good, true comrade. Marian pretty, bright, empty-hearted, ready to sell herself to anyone who could assure her luxury and pleasure, or even luxury alone. Then his thoughts ran on to his wife, a nonentity to him. What a difference it would have made had he not married her, had he really known Alice first, and been able to make her love him. There would be no tiring of her, he knew. Or if Marian were Alice—there had been such women, or scarcely exactly such, but rather women like Alice, who counted the world’s opinion as nothing, and were ready and happy to throw aside every other joy in life, in exchange for the men they loved. But Alice was not like that, and did he love her? Of that he did not feel so certain. He was very fond of her, but surely not in love, or he would have missed her more than he had done. He felt rather that, if he were free to love her, he could and would do so, would do so passionately and forever. But she was not for him; it was sheer folly to let his thoughts stray toward the impossible. The possible sat beside him, and with that he must try to content himself; try to be content with pretty make-believe instead of a beautiful reality.

He would wait, however, until to-morrow or the next day. Marian would not run away, and perhaps would behave all the better for finding that he was not easily caught.

So as they went out of the theater he said:

“I hope you won’t think me very rude not asking you to supper, but I’ve an appointment at my club I must keep.”



“I think it’s awfully kind of you to have given me such a jolly evening—that’s all I think.”

But he knew well enough from the dark look that she could not keep out of her eyes, that she was disappointed and angry. It amused him, and assured him that he had only to ask and she would give.

She clenched her teeth angrily as the hansom spun along homeward. She had meant that he should ride by her side this night.



## CHAPTER XXIII

THE next morning West walked as usual through the Park, and to his surprise again met Alice Lane, who greeted him cordially.

“You offered me the chance of a talk with you yesterday,” she said abruptly, “and I was rude enough to refuse. Will you give me another chance?”

“Why, of course you know I will,” he answered, eyeing her keenly, wondering if after all she were about to tell him that he could help her in the difficulty created by her brother’s engagement; hoping, indeed, that it was so.

He had walked home the night before, and had sat up late over the fire, thinking the whole while about her. It had been borne in upon him that in reality he did love her; not as he had loved other women from mere physical attraction, but with a strong, deep affection that made her necessary to him, as he now understood. So long as she did not care for anyone else, so long as he could have her frequent companionship and sympathy, he would, he hoped, be content. So far as anything else could be, he had given a hostage to fortune; his wife stood between him and the one woman who had raised his desires above mere sensuality.

“You were at the theater last night,” she said.

He laughed as he answered:

“So were you. I saw you and you saw me.”

“Yes, it was a stupid remark. I was going to say that I know who was the woman with you.”

She spoke nervously, hesitatingly, in strong contrast to her usual quiet, serene way of speaking.

“I saw her at Brighton with Mr. Maddison, and Agatha told me about her. But even if I’d not heard anything about her, I should have known *what* she is. Are you disgusted at my talking like this? Are you going to tell me—quite kindly, I know—to mind my own business? I think it *is* my business. I’m your friend, and with me friendship doesn’t mean sitting by and watching a friend—lowering himself.”

“You’re a real friend,” he said, holding out his hand and pressing hers—“a real friend. But friendship’s blind as well as love. You put me higher than I am; I’m not lowering myself.”

“Not higher than you were once, at any rate. And what you were once, you can be again. You don’t love Agatha, then?”

He hesitated a moment before replying.

“No, and I see now I never did,” he answered. “I didn’t know anything about her when I married her, or about myself either. I thought I could go on loving her and

that we should be happy together. We aren't. I can't make her happy and she can't make me. You knew that when you asked me, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I wanted to hear you say so."

"Why?"

"You don't care for that other woman?" she asked, ignoring his question.

"You know that too. You know I don't."

"And—you can't live alone?" she spoke almost in a whisper so that he could scarcely catch her words.

"That's just it. I can't bear being alone now. I used not to mind it a bit, but somehow I seem to have been changing lately—since I found out that Agatha couldn't be a real companion to me. I never wanted one before; I suppose thinking I had found one and finding I had not, has made me long for one. So—don't blame me too much."

"I'm not blaming you," she said fiercely almost. "You don't think I'm preaching to you?—don't think that. How little you know of me! I suppose you imagine I'm a cold-blooded saint? I'm not. I'm a woman. I can forgive any man, or any woman either, anything that they do for love, real love. But—women like the one you were with last night I can't forgive—they're pests, beasts themselves and making beasts of others. Is that the kind of thing you expected *me* to say? I can see it isn't."

West did not answer. He was utterly amazed at his complete ignorance of one he believed he knew well.

"You've never—really understood what love means," she went on; "I sometimes think that only women do."

"You're wrong there, Alice. I, for one, know. Only—only, I found out too late. I did not find out until after I was married and the woman I love—well—you understand. I've got what I don't want and I can't get what I do."

"You're not a coward?"

"A coward? I hope not. One never knows."

"But isn't it rather cowardly because you think you can't have what you long for, to go and play at love—with such women as that?"

"It means nothing. No more than a good dinner or a beautiful picture or a play. Just passes the time."

"It means more than that," she said, speaking very earnestly and quickly, "ever so much more than that. It means that you are degrading love, by taking part of it and making it common and vile. That's what it means, and you see it clearly enough when a woman does it. Don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

“You do, you *do*,” she exclaimed, standing still and looking straight at him; but he dropped his eyes before hers, and ground his heel into the soft gravel, “you do! I don’t care what a man or a woman does for love. I’m not talking unthinking nonsense about the sanctity of marriage—there’s just one thing in the world, and everything done in its name is forgivable.”

“You mean——?”

“Love.”

He looked at her now.

“Love?” he said. “My God, there’s no man in the world worthy of you. Alice, I thought you were really in trouble yesterday, and I wanted to help you—is it that?”

“Is it—what?”

“Are you in love, and—are things going wrong? Perhaps I can’t help you really, but at any rate I can sympathize.”

“Yes,” she answered, still looking at him. He had never realized fully the beauty of her face, softened now from its wonted passivity, or the deep splendor of her eyes. “I do love, so I *can* understand.”

“I’m so sorry,” he said, angry with himself at the downright incompetency of his words.

“You needn’t be. I didn’t know how incomplete my life was until—I loved. It’s made me happy. Doesn’t it help you, too? Even though it must be hopeless?”

“Yes, it’s strange; I didn’t know until last night that I really did love anyone. When I said good-bye to her—at the theater—I walked home, and I sat alone by my fire and thought. A lot of things I hadn’t understood came clear, and now—I hardly think I’m the same man I was yesterday. But—I know myself too well; I shall soon drift back to what I was. If she loved me—it would be different. Now, don’t talk any more about myself. Tell me—can I help you in any way?”

“Yes, you can.”

“How? I’m so glad. You’re such a thundering good sort that—I’d give a great deal to be able to do you a good turn. What a fool the fellow must be!”

“You can help me a great deal, by helping me to honor and respect the man—I love.”

“Why,” he asked, puzzled and surprised, “how can I do that?”

“By remembering what I’ve said about not lowering yourself.”

Still she looked straight at him, and he at her. Gradually he came to understand what she meant.

“Alice—it’s me you love! No, don’t answer me till I’ve spoken. I told you that I found myself last night, and found out that I loved a woman, really and truly loved

her. You're the woman, Alice, but I never dreamed that you could care for me. Tell me now—is it me?"

There was no necessity for her to speak. The light in her eyes was more eloquent than any words could have been, and careless whether anyone was watching, he seized her hands in his.

"Alice, you do love me?"

Then he drew himself apart quickly, saying:

"I forgot."

"What is it?"

"Agatha."

"I don't pretend not to know what you mean," she said slowly. "Do you think I haven't thought of her? If she had loved you, or been able to love you, you should never have known. But as things are—there's only one way—we love."



## CHAPTER XXIV

MARIAN was very angry at West's unexpected desertion after the theater. When she reached home she sat down by the bright fire in the drawing room, which she had told the servant to keep up well, and gave full rein to her disappointment.

It would soon be time to go down again to Rottingdean; Maddison had written to say that work was progressing fast and well, and calling on her to keep her promise to return to him when he could truly report that things were going satisfactorily. She hated the very thought of him now—without any reason, as she admitted to herself. She had looked to West for rescue, and now he seemed about to fail her.

A ring at the outer bell surprised her, and, knowing her maid to be in bed, she went to answer it herself.

"Hullo," said Mrs. Harding, as Marian opened the door and looked inquiringly out. "Are you alone?"

"Yes, come in."

"Only for half a shake. I've got two boys upstairs, and I thought if you were alone, you'd like to come up for a bit. They're both pretty oofy, and I can spare you one of them. Come along. You look spiffing."

The angry blood in her jumped at this unexpected opportunity.

Mrs. Harding's room reeked with cigarette smoke and the smell of spirits. Two well-dressed young men lounged one on each side of the fireplace, in front of which stood the sofa on which Mrs. Harding had evidently been lying.

"Here, boys," she said, ushering in Marian. "Now we shall be a four. Two's company, so's four, when they split into twos. I'm not good at introductions: Bobby Williams and Chawles Brewer, who never gets quite so intossicated as his name suggests, and this is Marian, though I can't call her Maid Marian. Now, you sit down that end of the sofa and keep your eye on Bobby or he'll run you in before you know where you are. Have a drink? I've only got B. and S."

"Yes, thanks, I'm thirsty. I've been at the Gaiety, and theaters always make me dry."

Bobby, as a rule, was not at a loss for conversation in such society as the present, but Marian's beauty and style overawed him at first. As for her, she was mad with the spirit of dare-devilry and threw away all remaining sense of decency. She drank eagerly at the brandy-and-soda, soon handing the glass to Bobby to be replenished.

"Say when," he said, holding up the tumbler and the spirit decanter.



“When!” said Marian, stopping him when he had poured out a stiff allowance, “and not too much water. And then you may mix quite a mild dose for yourself.”

She laughed gayly as she took the glass from him, and Mrs. Harding was not so engrossed in her companion’s talk as to fail noticing Marian’s wildness.

“Been dining too—eh, Maid Marian?” she asked.

“Yes, so I’m not hungry, only thirsty. Now, Bobby, amuse me.”

“What shall I do?”

“Talk, tell stories, anything except be serious. I daresay Ethel told you I was a serious young person, but I’m not. She don’t really know me.”

“Nor do I,” said Bobby; his eyes adding that he would like to do so.

“That’s a misfortune that can be mended.”

Her color heightened and her eyes grew brighter as the brandy warmed her blood, and a stray tress of hair fell deliciously down her neck. She put up her feet on his knees as she repeated:

“Bobby, amuse me. I want amusing badly. You look full of fun. Look here, Ethel, you play us a tune and we’ll dance. I must do something!”

She sprang up and was pushing the table aside with Bobby’s assistance, when Mrs. Harding stopped her.

“For the Lord’s sake, no. We shall wake the people below, and they’re goody-goody and will kick up a devil of a fuss.”

She tried to push Marian back on to the sofa, but she resisted.

“No, I won’t. You said the four had better split up. So we will. Come along, Bobby, we’ll trot downstairs to my place and leave these two to canoodle by themselves.”

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The next day her head ached rackingly, and she had but dim recollections of what she had done the night before. She remembered getting out a bottle of wine, which she and Bobby had drunk together; remembered having become uproariously merry; then quarrelsome over something he had said or done; then madly merry again; she dimly remembered his embrace and his going away in the dim gray of the early morning, making some excuse about having to go back to his rooms to dress as he had to be at the office early. Her head ached and her eyes were heavy and hot. Her clothes were wildly tossed about the room and one of his white gloves stared at her ridiculously as it lay on the dark carpet. Several sovereigns lay on the dressing table. She rang the bell and the maid brought her tea, which seemed tasteless, and a letter from Maddison, which she threw impatiently aside, unopened.

The day seemed endless.

Mrs. Harding came down to her in the afternoon.

“Well, you’re a nice cup of tea, you are; you demure little monkey, do you often carry on like that?”

“If I did, I suppose I shouldn’t have such a beastly headache.”

“Don’t know so much about that; I’m a pretty hardened vessel, but a drink too much always gets back at you in the morning, I find. I don’t feel too bright myself, and I don’t look much of a beauty,” she said, looking into the glass. “This life knocks spots out of one, there’s no doubt, but it’s the only one worth living—merry if it is short. Had a hair of the dog that bit? If not, why not? I’ll have one too, he bit me a bit.”

“Help yourself; you’ll find it on the sideboard in the next room.”

“Feel so cheap as all that? Buck up! Have one with me, and you’ll soon feel spry again.”

Marian did not refuse.

“What are you doing to-night?” asked Mrs. Harding. “I’m dining out with my old man, who’s just wired me he gets back this afternoon, or we could have had a lark together somewhere.”

“I’m not doing anything.”

“How’s your young man? George’s been away a long time. Wouldn’t he be wild if he knew what a rollicking time the mouse has when the cat’s away. It’s just like men; they expect us to be jolly when they want us, and we jolly well have to be—but as for being jolly when they’re away—oh, Lord, no, that’s shocking. My lord may carry on with as many as he likes, but one woman one man. Thank goodness, they’re easily bamboozled.”

Mrs. Harding did not remain for long. She did not care for dull company, which Marian undoubtedly was this afternoon. She felt a trifle mean, too. She did not know for what purpose Davis desired the information he had asked her to obtain, but believed it to be for Maddison, and knew that if such was the case, Marian’s next meeting with him would not be pleasant.

Marian did not go out that day or the next, spending her time reading and dozing over the fire. She hoped to hear from West, but no message of any sort came from him.

On the third day, she dressed early in the afternoon, and went in the omnibus down to Regent Street. As she stepped on to the pavement at Oxford Circus, she knocked against a man who was passing. He did not notice her, but she recognized West, and with him the woman she had seen at the Gaiety. They were evidently absorbed in one another, so much so that he did not apologize to Marian for an

accident which was more than half his fault. Her first impulse was to walk up to him and speak to him. Then a sickening sense of the difference between the other woman and herself stopped her; they could not be rivals. She had set her wares before West, and if he did not wish to buy them, she could not force him to do so.

She went slowly on past the shops, to look into the windows of which was usually a pleasure to her, but now she saw nothing except a vague throng going to and fro; she heard vaguely the roar of the traffic; she was looking vaguely straight ahead at her future, and listening to its call. This was then the end of her ambitions? Well, after all, did it matter so much to her? There were other joys in life, and while she retained her beauty, she need not want for luxury and ease. The future called to her and her vicious blood soon answered almost gladly, almost eagerly; she had sipped already at the cup of unruly pleasures, she would drink deep of it now. The thought of reckless, unrestrained, unlicensed enjoyment intoxicated her. As she passed a painted, over-dressed Frenchwoman, she thanked God that she was not such as that one. Not such to look at; but the very relics of decency in her seemed to drive her on to acting like the lowest of them all. As for Maddison—she would write and tell him she was tired of him. He would probably make a scene, but that would not hurt her, and then she would be free.

She turned up a side street and went into a public-house to which Mrs. Harding had once taken her late at night and which had then been crowded with men and women. The saloon bar, with its pretentious decorations, was empty and looked seedy and shabby by the light of day. She ordered a liqueur of brandy and sipped it slowly, listening the while to a heated controversy between two cabmen in the next compartment. As she went out of the heavy swing doors, a man passed quickly by; he looked at her surprised—she recognized Mortimer. She watched him as he walked on and round the corner into Regent Street, and then followed in the same direction, but did not catch sight of him again.

She was utterly at a loss what to do to while away the afternoon. Later on she intended to dine and then go to a music-hall. Meanwhile, the hours would hang heavy on her hands. The spirit she had drunk, too strong and none too pure, filled her with spurious energy that a sharp walk soon dispelled, leaving behind a feeling half of nausea, half of faintness. She laughed as she remembered Mrs. Harding's invariable remedy on similar occasions, and went into another public-house, but this time did not drink the brandy neat. A man was leaning over the bar talking familiarly with the barmaid, and he turned to look inquisitively at Marian. When she raised her glass to drink he did the same, looking at her insolently, and followed her when she left the place.

“Well, my dear, where are you off to?” he asked, slipping his hand through her arm. “If you’ve nothing better to do—and what could be better?—take me to tea at your place. Here’s a hansom; let’s jump in.”

For a moment she hesitated. Then, with a laugh and look, stepped with him into the cab.



## CHAPTER XXV

THOUGH the days were lengthening out toward the spring, there were many hours during each when the light was not clean and clear enough for painting; these Maddison found unspeakably dreary. He was greatly tempted often either to call Marian back to him or to run up to town to see her, but he did not give way to the impulse, for he had determined to test this plan of hers to the bitter end. He did not much believe that she was right and that separation would enable him to do better with his work. Rather to the opposite opinion he inclined, that constant companionship would make them become one, all in all to each other, so that no longer would her presence disturb him, but on the contrary would inspire and spur him on to greater things than he had ever achieved before.

The new picture, a view of the downs and the gray sea beyond, progressed apace, but he was not satisfied with it. There was no defect in it that he could name or which he felt he could amend, but there was something lacking. The outward semblance was right; it was the inward spiritual grace that was lacking. Probably no other than himself would notice it, yet it hurt him. He felt as if some power had gone out of him, and that he painted no longer with gusto or firm, imperative inspiration. His skill had not deserted him, the coloring and the drawing satisfied his exacting taste and his intimate knowledge of nature. But it was only the outside of nature that he had caught and fixed; the heart of her was not there, as it had been in the pictures that had brought him name and fame. This was a dead thing—there was no life in it.

He could not understand why his love for Marian should have affected him in this way or to so great an extent. Why should the absorption in her of all his hopes in any degree depreciate his insight into and love of nature? Surely a man might serve a woman and nature too? But though he could not trace its working or even fix in what it lay, he knew that some change had come over him, and that since he and Marian had been together he was a different man. This love that he had fully counted on to elevate and ennoble him, seemed to restrain him from reaching to that which had before been easily within his grasp.

Perhaps, he sometimes thought, it was that he was not altogether free from anxiety concerning her. To her this separation had not appeared to be so miserable a thing as it was to him. She had suggested it, had argued for it, had not admitted any of the drawbacks which he had seen in it, and had absolutely refused to be shaken from her determination. On the other hand, she might have felt it as deeply and as keenly as he had done, while for his sake and to make it bearable for him, she had just put on a brave face, smiling when tears would easily have come. If this were so,

how brave she had been and how cowardly he.

This thought had come to him one morning when he had found work difficult, and was about to leave it for the day. It invigorated him; he would not be outdone by her, or he would ever have to reproach himself for not having faithfully abided by his word to work with all his might. Work! Yes, not for himself, but for her. If that did not drive him on, if that failed to inspire him, he was weak indeed.

Again and again, however, fears and doubts assailed him. He would wake suddenly in the night, aroused by no apparent cause, and would start thinking about her, wondering if she were well and happy. At first he had written to her almost daily, until she had forbidden him to do so any longer, urging that it was nearly, if not quite as harmful for him to do this as to have her chattering and laughing by his side. Her letters to him had grown more and more infrequent, shorter and shorter; mere little messages now, that stimulated a hunger they did not do anything to satisfy.

A curious change had come over his imaginings. In the early days after her going away he had found no difficulty in conjuring up her face before his mind's eye. Gradually the image had grown vaguer and more vague until at last, if he would think of her as she was, he had to look at "The Rebel." What memories the picture called back to him! The meeting with her that foggy afternoon in Bond Street; years ago it seemed, but in reality only a few brief months; the afternoon he had first gone down to visit her at Kennington; the thought that he had then that she was deliciously beautiful, and that he would love to have her for his playmate; the birth of a better feeling, the growth of his deep love for her; the finding her alone and lonely in that stuffy Bloomsbury hotel; the long days and nights of delight that they had passed together since. Again and again he reproached himself for little attentions that he had failed to pay her, and for the few bitter words that he had spoken to her once in a moment of irritation. He was so utterly unworthy of her that in good truth he should have done for her all the little that was in his power. He had kept her apart from his friends selfishly, with the result that she must be very lonely now. He had written to Mortimer asking him to do anything he could to relieve the monotony of her existence. What a dear woman she was, he thought over and over again, to put up with all the troubles and worries he had brought upon her—all for love of him.

So whenever any slightest shadow of doubt of her entered his mind, he gave it no resting-place there, but chased it away as an insult and a deep wrong to the woman who had intrusted her life's happiness to his poor keeping.

As the picture drew near completion he worked every minute that the sun gave to him, for when it was finished he would be free to go to her. It was his letter telling her that but a few more days, a week at most, kept them apart, which she had

tossed aside unopened and had afterward thrown upon the fire unread.

He had been painting patiently all one morning, almost angrily sometimes because he could not exactly translate his thought to the canvas, when he was surprised by a knock at the door of the cottage. Mrs. Witchout had not yet returned from her morning's marketing, so he went to the door himself, expecting to find some casual visitor from Brighton who had heard of his being down here. He was astonished to see Mortimer.

"My dear Fred, is it you or your ghost?"

"I don't suppose any ghost ever had such a thirst on him as I have; show me the way to the pump; I could drink buckets even of water."

"Oh, we're not so primitive as that—but, rot! you've been here before. Come along, there's whisky and a siphon in the locker here. Drink, smoke and chat while I paint, only don't mind if I don't hear a word you say. I'm at a ticklish point. How are you and what brings you down? Spread your answer out as long as you can, so that I needn't say anything for at least five minutes."

"I'm well. Came down because there was a rush of work in the office and I was afraid I might be in the way," Mortimer answered, with a chuckle.

He then lighted a cigarette, sat down on the window seat and looked aimlessly out over the broad down. The sun was shining brightly, a lark was singing somewhere high up in the blue, through the open window drifted the keen, fresh air, full of the salt fragrance of the sea; the world looked young down here to the eye of the Londoner. Then, stealthily, he watched Maddison. At first he saw no change in him: he appeared well and hearty; but later he noticed a tired, nervous look about the eyes, and that every now and then he bit his lip as if impatient at some difficulty he could not immediately overcome. He had often before watched him at work and had always wondered at the vigorous joy Maddison found in his labor.

"May I look?" he asked.

"Yes, I don't mind your looking; you don't imagine you really know anything about pictures and so you don't chatter bosh and think it criticism."

Mortimer stood in front of the easel, looking keenly at the picture—a great stretch of the downs and the gray sea beyond, overhead a splendid tumult of rain cloud.

"Well, say something, however idiotic!" exclaimed Maddison, after impatiently waiting for Mortimer to speak.

"My dear boy, what's up? Have I interrupted you at an awkward moment? Why didn't you tell me?" said Mortimer, turning quickly, surprised at the tone in which Maddison had spoken.



“No, no, of course not.”

“It’s the first time I’ve heard you speak as if you were put out about something. Nothing’s wrong?”

“No, no!” Maddison answered, laying his hand heartily on Mortimer’s shoulder, “not a bit. But—what do you think of it?”

“And this is the first time you’ve ever *asked* my humble opinion. I like it.”

“That sounds rather dubious. Speak out—you mean you don’t like it.”

Mortimer looked again at the picture hesitatingly.

“You *don’t* like it,” said Maddison again.

“Yes, I like it. But there’s something wanting; it doesn’t seem to me quite you. It’s the only picture of yours I’ve ever seen that somebody else might have painted.”

Maddison turned sharply away and strode over to the window.

“Oh, rot, old chap, you mustn’t mind what I say,” protested Mortimer. “You hinted just now that what I don’t know about pictures would set up half a dozen critics, and here you are getting the hump over my nonsense.”

“It isn’t nonsense. You’ve seen straight off what I’ve been trying not to see. You’re right, damnably right. It’s as dead as can be—not a touch of life or light in it.”

He threw down his palette and brushes impatiently, crossed once again to Mortimer and stood behind him, gazing gloomily over his shoulder.

“The critics will probably say I’ve eclipsed myself, all except Tasker, who will say that, but mean total eclipse. But so long as it sells well, what does it matter?”

“Look here, Maddison,” said Mortimer, sharply, “there *is* something wrong, or you couldn’t speak like that. This hermitizing down here don’t suit you. Lock up the shop for to-day at any rate, and come into Brighton for a blow off. Now, I know you’re going to say ‘no,’ but I say ‘yes,’ and if you’ll give me a shake-down I’ll bring my traps over to stay the night here.”

Maddison hesitated a moment, then consented.

They drove back after dinner at the Metropole, where Mortimer had intended to stop. The night was bitterly cold, and the huge fire which Mrs. Witchout had made up in the studio was grateful.

“Now, I want to have a real yarn with you, George,” Mortimer said, as he stretched his cold hands toward the warmth. “I told you a tarradiddle this morning—I came down simply because I’ve something I want to talk to you about.”

“There’s nothing wrong with Marian, is there?” Maddison asked, leaning forward eagerly and speaking anxiously. “It’s not *that*?”

“She was quite well when I last saw her.”

Maddison sighed with relief and sat back again in his chair, puffing steadily at his

pipe.

“But tell me first,” Mortimer continued after a pause, “what’s wrong with you? I know there is something; I saw it in your face this morning, and though you’ve been as jolly as jolly all day, you’ve not been quite your real self. What is it?”

“So I look different, and seem different, and my picture’s not mine. There’s nothing wrong, Fred, nothing that I can lay a name to, but you’re right. I’m changed. It’s this beastly separation from Marian that doesn’t agree with me. I’ll come up to town with you to-morrow and fetch her down here, or settle into the old place again.”

“You’re very fond of her,” Mortimer said meditatively, staring at the blazing coals. “I was in love once, and I know what it means, old chap.”

“I never knew that——?”

“You’re the only one beside myself that does. She wasn’t for me. I’ve told you this because I’ve something—very difficult to tell you, and I want you to understand that—I understand.”

“It *is* something wrong with Marian then?” Maddison exclaimed, starting to his feet.

“Sit down, George, sit down. I’ll walk about in the dark while I tell you; that’s why I asked you not to light the lamps. Sit down, and hold on tight, grit your teeth, George; I’m going to hurt you.”

Mortimer paced slowly up and down, while Maddison sat down again, awed into obedience.

“I’m going to hurt you, George; I needn’t tell you that I’d give a lot not to have to do it. But you’d better hear it from me than find it out for yourself.”

“Quick, quick, don’t beat about the bush. What is it?”

“It *is* about Mrs. Squire. I knew it was no good talking to you until I had facts to tell you. She’s—she’s—my God, it’s hard to tell you!—she’s utterly worthless. She’s \_\_\_\_\_”

“Don’t say another word, or I’ll kill you, on my soul I will!” Maddison shrieked, leaping up, his eyes blazing with anger, his hands clenched.

“I must, I *must*,” said Mortimer, standing quietly before him, “and you must hear me. It’s not suspicions, it’s facts. More than one man has been with her while you’ve been down here. I suspected it; I had her watched and there’s no room for doubt. I think you know Geraldstein—he’s been with her; another man was with her only the other night. I saw her myself come out of a disreputable public-house with a man and drive off with him. It was sheer accident I saw her; I didn’t follow—I knew enough already. I’m putting it brutally: there’s no good mincing matters. If she was

merely your mistress I wouldn't have worried, but——”

Maddison turned away, leaning against the mantelshelf, his face buried in his arms; Mortimer went up to him.

“George, old man——”

“Don't—don't touch me! Leave me alone for a bit.”

Mortimer sat down. Not a sound broke the silence except the loud ticking of the clock. It seemed to him hours and hours, though it was barely more than a minute, before Maddison spoke.

“What a fool I am, and what a beast,” he said, turning fiercely, “to believe a word of what you've said. It's all some mad mistake. It can't be true.”

“Do you think I'd have told you if I weren't absolutely certain?”

“You don't know her as I do. She couldn't. She loves me. Now look here, I won't hear another word, and to-morrow I'll go to her. I'll never leave her again, open to such filthy suspicions. You know your room. I'll stop here. Good night.”

“Here are the reports from the agent,” said Mortimer, ignoring Maddison's anger and holding out a bundle of papers. Maddison snatched them from him and flung them into the fire.

“Do you want me to murder you? Can't you leave me? For God's sake, leave me.”

Mortimer realized that it would not avail anything to press matters at that moment, so without another word he went out of the room.



## CHAPTER XXVI

THE instant the door had shut behind Mortimer, Maddison plucked the scorching papers from the fire; they had by sheer chance fallen on a mass of black coals out of reach of the flames. They were hot and crackled in his fingers as he opened them. Then he sat down, and leaning forward read them by the dancing firelight. They contained a cold, bloodless account of all that Mrs. Harding knew of Marian, and by their very lifelessness carried conviction. It was not without a struggle, however, that he allowed himself to believe the accusations brought against her; for long his heart refused to be subservient to his reason.

He sat motionless and intent; the fire waned and the room grew darker and darker until at length there was only the glow of dying embers left in the grate; the papers had fallen to the floor unheeded; his hands lay limp and his head hung heavily. His eyes stared blankly; he saw nothing, felt nothing, was numb, crushed, stricken.

The striking of the clock roused him. There were hours still before the starting of the first train for London. Should he go there? To what end? He knew that what he had been told was true. What was the use of seeing her? She would only laugh at him. It was nothing to her; it was the shattering of life to him. God! How greatly he had loved her, did love her still. How he had trusted her, believing that she greatly loved him. How easily she had played with him; all this pretense of separation for his welfare, the reality being that she wished to be free to follow her lusts. Could such a woman be such a mere beast? Why, yes, it was only an old tale retold; no new thing in it; the devouring woman, the hoodwinked man. There was nothing to be done. No hope, no hope.

Once again her face came vividly before him: its splendid oval, the deep eyes, the glory of her hair, the half-parted lips, with a little smile hovering round them—how lovely he had often seen her, and yet she was a mere beast, who had sold herself to him and was selling herself to others.

But nothing that she had done or would do could kill his love for her. A dry, choking sob broke from him; he staggered, drunk with misery, across the room, pulled aside the curtains and looked out on the cold, moonlit night. Was there nothing to be done? No smallest ray of hope? No hope, no hope.

He lit a lamp and set it on a table before the easel on which stood "The Rebel." Yes, there she sat, as she had been when first the desire came to him to have her for his own. His own! His shout of laughter filled the room. His! Any man's who cared to pay her price. Just a mere beast, no more. And yet, there she sat, the beautiful rebel who had caught him body and soul. He picked a dagger off the wall and

slashed the canvas to tatters; that lie at least was dead. He looked at the white blade as if there ought to be blood upon it.

He had killed that lie; it was agony as if he had killed part of himself. But life was the agony now for him. She had taken from him everything that made the world worth having; killed his art, killed his love. There was no hope, no hope.

He looked again at the white blade as if there ought to be blood upon it.

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Mortimer woke early, roused by Mrs. Witchout knocking at the house door. Wrapping himself in his dressing gown he went down and let her in, briefly answering her exclamations of surprise at seeing him there.

He wondered why Maddison had not heard her. He listened at the studio door, there was no sound within. He knocked—there was no reply.

The dead do not answer the living.

Before the easel on which stood the tattered remnants of “The Rebel” Maddison lay dead.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.  
Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained.

[The end of *The Pest* by W. Teignmouth Shore]