JOSHUA'S VISION

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

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Title: Joshua's Vision
Date of first publication: 1928
Author: William J. (John) Locke (1863-1930)
Date first posted: Mar. 16, 2018
Date last updated: Mar. 16, 2018
Faded Page eBook #20180317

This ebook was produced by: Marcia Brooks, Al Haines, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at http://www.pgdpcanada.net

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JOSHUA'S VISION

by

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

First published in 1928

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

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CHAPTER I

JOSHUA FENDICK wandered about his drawing-room looking absent-mindedly at the pictures that had been specially selected as pictures befitting a gentleman's drawing-room by the firm who had selected and supplied all the furniture and equipment of his new house at the spacious end of Eaton Terrace. They were all water-colours, each good of its kind, but, as a collection, of a depressing and lifeless harmony. Of their value or effect, however, Joshua Fendick was only vaguely conscious. They were the things he was supposed to have in his drawing-room, just as he was supposed to have mezzotints in the hall and up the staircase, oil-paintings in his dining-room, and colour-prints in his library. Thus had the young Expert of the Eminent Firm decreed; and Joshua had been in the habit of obeying Decrees from his youth up.

He turned away and looked around the over-harmoniously furnished room—"modern, with an Empire feeling," in the words of another enthusiastic expert. On the whole he liked it. It was a gentleman's room, satisfying, if not his æsthetic tastes, at least his social requirements. The whole thing had cost a pretty penny; but the cost he did not mind. He could afford it. Meanness was the vice most dreaded and loathed by Joshua Fendick. Many times inherited instinct had made him hesitate between a halfpenny and a penny as a bounty to be dropped into a beggar's palm, until the revolt of reaction had drawn forth a silver coin.

He lit a cigarette, and almost immediately threw it into the fire. He was expecting guests to dinner, ladies. . . . He was not sure whether the smell of tobacco-smoke might not offend them when they entered the room. He had never before given a dinner-party on such a scale of magnificence, with a butler—his own butler—to attend to the service, and an expensive cook—his own cook—to serve up a meal of many courses, and with London people—some of them with titles—to sit at his table. Robina Dale had suggested—or was it again a Decree?—this house-warming. She was a masterful woman, a sculptor, a new and perplexing factor in Joshua's life. He had been sitting to her for his head. He couldn't reconcile the business-like, masculine figure in the stained white overall, frowning and screwing up her eyes and doing magic with her fingers on green wax amid the gaunt surroundings of the studio, with the flashing, beautifully dressed woman of the world whom he met on other occasions. Why she wanted to make an effigy of his head he couldn't determine. There were heaps of handsome young men about, like the fellows you saw as heroes in the cinema. Why worry about his middle-aged,

commonplace mug? Joshua was a man who had never crossed the frontier of the Land of Illusion.

He was a stocky man, in the mid-forties, just under medium height, with thickly-growing, dark-red hair, short cropped to prevent unruliness, and a little scrubby, red moustache. A horizontal crease across his forehead deepened according to the degree of anxiety from which he was suffering. He gave the impression of a man physically strong and hardily trained. For a short and glorious period of his youth he had been a professional footballer, a member of the famous Trenthampton Wanderers. His little blue eyes were pathetically alert, like those of the footballer intent on a ball which he could not find. The two middle fingers of his left hand were missing.

Joshua Fendick was not a self-made man. He had not achieved greatness. Whatever greatness there was about him had been thrust upon him by his father.

The first manifestation of paternal influence occurred when he was a few weeks old. His father, operative in the great boot factory of Swan & Co. in Trenthampton—who hasn't heard of Swan's Boots?—called one evening on the curate of St. Peter's to arrange for his son's christening. He was an unsmiling, dour and bearded man. The curate, who received him in the sitting-room of his modest lodgings, was, on the contrary, a young man of cherubic countenance and urbane demeanour. He sat with pencil and paper to make the necessary notes.

"Of course, Mr.—er——?"

"Fendick."

"Yes, yes. Do forgive me. Your full name?"

"John Nunn Fendick."

"And you want the child, a son, you said, to be christened——?"

"Joshua."

The curate smiled. "Son of Nun."

"My mother's maiden name was Nunn."

"Obviously Joshua," said the curate. "I hope he'll have the success of his illustrious predecessor."

"Dunno what you mean," said Mr. Fendick.

"Perhaps you haven't heard the old rhyme:

“ ‘Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh,
Were the only two
That ever got through
To the land of milk and honey.’ ”

Mr. Fendick clutched his cloth cap in an angry grip.

“Sir,” said he, “I have no dealings with folk who make ribald jests on sacred subjects. Good evening.”

He went out and forthwith joined an obscure but irreproachable sect of dissenters to which his wife belonged, and had Joshua baptized in their little tin chapel which was situated on a forlorn bit of waste land on the outskirts of the town.

As for the curate, he quarrelled with his vicar over the loss of a staunch parishioner, and resigned; and eventually throwing off his orders, became a stockbroker, made a fortune, and thanked Heaven for the faculty of a misapplied sense of humour.

Joshua, looking back on early memories, found them scantily irradiated with joy. For many years he seemed to have his domestic being in a cold kitchen, an adjoining wash-house and a bleak back-yard. In one of the three there were always signs of household washing. In the kitchen he slept; he had measles and whooping-cough there, most uncomfortably. When old enough, he went to the County School and did what he was told to do and learned what he was set to learn, according to Decree. But who can take much interest in a Decree? On Sundays he accompanied his grim parents to their depressing tin tabernacle, to which, after dinner, he returned for Sunday-school.

Truancy from the latter afforded a few golden hours in those dreary years. In a hollow not far from the Bethel was a festering refuse-heap whence, here and there, wondrous prizes could be excavated. Once he and two or three fellow-sinners found a three-quarter filled box of sardines. The food of the gods compensated the pains of the damned that afterwards beset them. But—all honour to the Spartan youth of England—not a boy of them could give anxious parents a clue to the fount and origin of their ills.

The only item in his school curriculum that interested him was the poor course of drawing. He won a prize for freehand—a copy of some antique plaster plaque. He had no notion of what he was doing, or why he could do it, while his friends created abortions in pencil. His master saw he had considerable talent. His father thought him a fool for wasting his time over things which girls were supposed to do in elegant Academies for Young Ladies. The end came swiftly. As soon as the Education Authorities could liberate Joshua from compulsory attendance at the County School, he was

thrust into the factory of Messrs. Swan & Co., and started on his career in the atmosphere of boots.

Thenceforward, during his young life, it is only in terms of boots that Joshua can be comprehended and measured.

There were two short stretches of burning fever when boots seemed to have no significance; but, after each, boots claimed him irrevocably.

He had been but a few months in the factory when he became aware of domestic upheaval. There came the MOVE. Instead of living on the ground floor of a workman's cottage—one of a dismal row—the upper floor of which was let to lodgers, the Fendick family occupied the whole of a superior residence, one of a line of villas, Rosemary Villas, with a little garden in front, and Nottingham lace curtains in the front parlour window, so draped as to disclose to the passer-by a geranium in a flower-pot. For the first time in his life he found himself in a bedroom of his own. It was uncarpeted, bare and austere. The most zealous young monk might have said of it: "I'm all for subduing the flesh, but still self-sacrifice has its ordained limits." Yet Joshua, aged fourteen, who had slept since babyhood on a mattress spread on the stone floor of an evil-smelling kitchen, wallowed in the sudden luxury of a bed with real legs. He became aware that his father, foreman for many years, had been promoted to the supervision of a department, and that the dignity of Swan's compelled this entry into a genteel residence.

Yet life went on very much as before. His father, a man with a full beard now growing grey, took it into his head to mark his rise in the world by shaving his long upper lip, and thus became of grimmer aspect than before. Joshua had scarcely ever spoken to his father. At meals he was too interestingly occupied, in the factory he was too busy, and the main concern of his leisure hours was to move as far as possible from the paternal presence. His mother, with whom he had more in common, was a stout and prayerful woman, terrified of her husband, and entirely at a loss to know what to do with her son. Now and then, in a frightened way, she allowed him a little pocket-money out of the wages he contributed to the family fund.

During the few succeeding years Joshua developed a genius for Association Football. At nineteen he was offered a paid position in the Trenthampton team. In the world of Swan's this was dazzling honour and glory. Whenever the Trenthampton Wanderers played in Cup Ties, fifty thousand people flocked to see them from all parts of Great Britain. The team consisted of heroes. Their names were household words in a million homes. Eager eyes scanned the reports of their individual doings in the evening papers of Land's End, Hackney, Birmingham, North Berwick . . . North Pole. . . . The firm placed no obstacle in Joshua's path, and John Fendick was so far under

the influence of class tradition as to send him forth into the football field with a proud father's blessing. His mother only hoped that no one would kick him hard and break his leg. At the only game at which she was present, she saw him dexterously pass a ball with his head. She grew white thinking that he should have been slain, as from the impact of a cannon-ball. She could not believe that he wasn't hurt. Her protests were of no avail, for Joshua only laughed. From that time onward he paid for his board and lodging at home, and kept the rest of his money. He bore his glory modestly; and, though girls hung ripe for his plucking like cherries on a tree, he was seldom tempted to put forth his hand. No one, he said, could mess about with girls, were it only to the extent of stuffing them, and incidentally himself, with chocolates at picture-theatres, and keep fit. And to keep fit became his religion. Joshua was an earnest soul.

His glory, however, only lasted a couple of seasons, for there came a day when his father addressed him more or less in this wise:

"I have to tell you that a great change is about to take place in our social conditions. You're a man now and can appreciate what I mean. I've been offered a partnership in the Firm, with the position of Managing Director. I've been working towards this for upward of thirty years. As you're my only son, it isn't fit that you should be a professional footballer in the winter and a boot-and-shoe operative in the summer. You must take my place when I'm dead, if you've got the brains to do so. Therefore you must go into the Counting House and take up the administrative side of the business. This will keep you occupied all day and every day; and for the next year or two you'll have to attend evening classes at the Technical School and learn book-keeping and Commercial Theory and the scientific part of the trade—things I've had to pick up as I've gone along during a lifetime. So there's no time left for professional footballing. That's over. And you'll have to wash your face and hands, and wear a clean collar and tie and a hat and a decent suit of clothes every day, weekdays and Sundays. Here are five pounds to go to Sutton's and get a rig out. I don't know many young fellows who have had such a start in life."

The above, it may be remarked, is but the concentrated essence of what, in itself, was a concentrated hour's discourse, during which many things dawned on Joshua's somewhat obscured mind. Not the least of them was the influence and importance of his father in Swan's that had been gradually widening and intensifying from the day that they had moved to Rosemary Villas. He realized, with almost a shock, that for years past his father had abandoned the cloth cap of the operative for the hard felt hat of the manager—it was a hideous flat-roofed hat which toned in with the grimness of his shaven upper lip.

Joshua was torn in twain between the fear of death and the hope of life. To resign the glory of the Reputed Best Centre Forward of England was signing a death-warrant; the entrance into the hierarchy of the bosses of Swan's gleamed like the path to Elysian Fields. . . . His brain was also smitten by the sudden conception of his dour, penurious, unapproachable father as a great man.

"I've taken a house in Redesdale Road," said John Fendick, "and we move in next week."

Redesdale Road! Those were houses standing all alone in their own grounds; houses inhabited by folks who kept servants, trim maids in white cap and apron. Why, yes . . . he remembered one of the trim maids—Annie. He had done his best to respond to her amorous, though perfectly irreprehensible advances, but had failed lamentably. She was in the service of the Suttons—the Suttons who owned the great drapery establishment in the High Street. His brain whirled.

He sought an elderly mother whose brain he found was whirling even more vertiginously than his own.

"Your father never consults me," she wailed. "He springs things on me like dreadful Jack-in-the-boxes. It seems he has bought all the furniture for this new house, and engaged servants, and when I asked him what was to become of poor Tommy the cat, who would never accustom himself to fresh surroundings, he got impatient and said I could make him into a pie."

And Mrs. Fendick wiped away the tear of the uncomprehended woman.

Thus Joshua entered on the collar, tie and hat phase of his existence. The Decree went forth, and he obeyed unthinkingly. Needing exercise and mild interest outside the offices of Swan & Company, he joined the County Territorial Artillery. He also became a sound middle-weight boxer. Beyond such conscious intellectual cultivation as was necessary for the business of boot-making, it never occurred to him that he had a mind. By no one was its possession suggested. His literary and æsthetic interests found full satisfaction in the sporting news of evening papers and printed matter relevant to the Higher Boot-making in the "Leather Trades Review." Fate decreed that a common snobbery for which no one was to blame should set up a social barrier between him and his late uncollared and cloth-capped associates. Shyness prevented him from making new friends.

At three-and-twenty he married Arabella (otherwise called Bella), one of the many daughters of Trenthampton's most flourishing linen-draper, in whose house, almost contiguous to the Fendicks' in Redesdale Road, once lived Annie, now long since departed into the limbo of departed housemaids. Bella

was a pale, lymphatic girl with mouse-coloured hair and a drooping manner, whom he had met first at a whist drive, and afterwards, by curious chance, on most occasions when he trod the trim pavement of Redesdale Road. The force of character which enabled her to secure as a husband the young ex-gladiator son of the Managing Director of Swan's was expended in the terrific effort. She was a flabby, foolish woman, who brought sickly and short-lived children into the world. Only one, the first-born, survived her death, which occurred when Joshua was thirty-three.

During those ten years, owing to his father's master-grip and his own sedulous attention to business in hand, fortune had conferred on Joshua considerable favours. He reckoned his yearly income in increasing hundreds. He had lived in a little house of his own with the flaccid Bella. Looking on the married estate of his father and mother, on that of Mr. and Mrs. Sutton, his wife's parents, he had accepted his own, without conjecture, as normal. A man's concern in life was threefold: to keep himself fit; to carry on his business to the best of his ability; to conjoin himself with a woman and make her the mistress of his household for . . . for . . . well, for God knows what—not for any peculiar merriment of his own. Such was the Decree.

Meanwhile his mother had died, frightened out of a life too complicated by idleness for a hard-working woman who had striven in a stone-flagged kitchen most of her days. Old John Fendick said piously, by way of requiem: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," and went on making his fortune in Swan's boot factory, in which he was now a principal shareholder.

The widowed Joshua, on his father's urging, sold up his home and came to live with his little son, Sutton Fendick, so called after his maternal grandfather, in the uninspiring house in Redesdale Road. Little Sutton went to the Trenthampton Grammar School, and spent most of his spare time with his mother's people, who adored and spoiled him. He loved his shy father in an animal fashion, but was scared to death by Grandfather Fendick, the living personification, according to his childish imagination, of an unsympathetic and relentless Jehovah. Dogs and children always got out of old John Fendick's way. In his opinion, it was the only reasonable thing they ever did. He was a man of fierce, narrow aims and restricted sympathies. Now and then he betrayed human weakness. When he became a partner in Swan's he abjured the tin tabernacle on the outskirts of the town and re-entered the fold of the Established Church. He had been a churchwarden officiating on Sundays in a frock-coat for many years. In sins of commission, his life was blameless. He was certain of salvation, oblivious, like many men of his kind, of the Recording Angel's *per contra* account of things omitted. Perhaps his undemonstrative love of Joshua was the only human sentiment in a needlessly

austere and (were it not for that sentiment) a stupidly ambitious life.

Thus, what with Joshua's acceptance of Decrees and his father's decretal authority, dissension never marred their relations one with the other. Mutual pride consolidated their friendship. By 1913 John Fendick had risen from a factory hand, living in squalor, to the supreme head of Swan's Boot Factory. Of such a father what dutiful son should not be proud? Also, what father should not be proud of a son of such achievement? Had he not been Centre Forward of the Trenthampton Wanderers, bribed in vain by illustrious football organizations to forswear his allegiance? Had he not cast away his laurels at the call of duty? Had he not forced himself into the social citadel, one of whose gates had been held by Sutton the Magnificent, thrice Mayor of Trenthampton? Had he not so thoroughly absorbed the spirit of Swan's that he was now a Director, with a goodly set of shares behind him? . . . Eventually Joshua would take his place. He had not lived in vain.

Then came the war. Joshua, Battery Sergeant-Major, went into training with his brigade. He had often been urged to apply for a commission, but his obstinate shyness had kept him in the ranks. The officers belonged to a class with which he came seldom into contact. They had been to Public Schools, the Universities; they were members of professions; or, if only in business, like himself, they or their families lived in the higher social sphere of what he vaguely called the Gentry. They spoke a language of their own; had friends, pursuits, sports in common. They hunted and played golf. They visited the great houses of that part of the county, and, to their women-folk, his father-in-law, Mr. Sutton, was at the most a highly respectable and polite linen-draper, whom convention forbade to salute them if he passed them in the Street. Joshua, feeling that he would have been an unsuccessful subaltern, was proud of his non-commissioned rank. He was efficient. His officers knew it from the Colonel downwards, and his men knew it. He was as contented a sergeant-major as ever rode out to war with a crack Territorial Brigade of Artillery.

Less than a year afterwards he was sent home minus two fingers on his left hand, and a couple of toes on his left foot, and with odds and ends of shrapnel in his body.

It was then that he had to settle down to his real job in the war—the making of boots for armies. It soon became less of a job than an obsessing slavery. The contracts of Swan & Co. were world-wide. Millions of men must have boots. Each man of each million appeared to need a million pairs. New buildings covering acres were hurriedly erected and equipped with machinery for the making of boots. Millions of tons of hides were dumped into the factory, to say nothing of the millions of tons invoiced that never arrived. Joshua's life grew to be a nightmare of boots. Of the same nightmare did his

father, a man of seventy-four, soon die. Joshua, awakening for a short period from a boot-dream, found himself the undisputed head of Swan & Co., with the vast responsibilities of shoeing myriads of men. Once he had heard some one recite Kipling's Boot poem of the Boer War, ". . . forty thousand million Boots, boots—boots—boots—moving up and down again. . . ." The jingle got on his nerves. There they were in the factory, forty thousand million pairs of them, in staggering figures on the pages of documents of European Governments, papers, books, ledgers innumerable. The once quiet office became a swarming hive of accountancy, accounting for nothing but boots in every stage from contract to delivery; for the receipt and expenditure to a penny of hitherto unimagined sums of money. There were forty thousand million pairs of them to be seen through the works. . . . Joshua, the old Centre Forward of the Trenthampton Wanderers, and the efficient sergeant-major, was an efficient maker of Boots. He had passed his life in the making of boots. He knew everything there was to be known about the making of boots, from the quality of raw material to the finish of an eyelet-hole. He thought in terms of boots. He dreamed of boots. Whenever, as an important contractor, he went to London, it was to discuss boots with War Office and other Committees. . . . Boots, always Boots.

For the first time since his football days of glory and popular adulation, he found himself a person of some importance. Generals all over gold and red tabs and decorations, and politicians whose pictures he had seen in the back illustrated page of the "Daily Mail," listened to him deferentially when he told them what he knew about Boots. This surprised him exceedingly. What surprised him even more was the discovery that the buzzing Accountancy Hive at Trenthampton turned, as it were, automatically, colossal sums of money into his own private banking account.

Now Joshua had never loved the Counting House. He hadn't his father's curious vision, that of the great master of industry which not only sees the panorama as a whole, but is eagle-eyed for minute detail. Almost unconsciously he had specialized on manufacture. His brain boggled at the infinite intricacies of the financial side of the business. He must direct a policy, as Chairman of the Company; that was simple: to make as many boots as possible within a given time. But of figures he had never acquired the great manufacturer's mastery. He left them to the acute paid official who knew. He was more at home in the multitudinous whirl of the machines and the rank smell of leather—that rank smell that would never leave his nostrils till he died.

Not inheriting his father's ambition, he had never attached great importance to the making of money. It had been pleasant to lie soft and eat

more or less succulently and to bestow a half-crown here and there in alms without thinking of the weekly budget. On the other hand, he could never appreciate the exact difference in comfort and convenience between the trams, which passing the end of his road at five minutes' intervals landed him at his factory gates in strict, scheduled time, and the private automobile, which convention ordained as the only means of transport for the Chairman of Swan & Co. It was also pleasanter and more comfortable to have his clothes made to order, fitted more or less to his body by Jenks & Son, the famous Trenthampton tailors, who traded on the fact that for generations they had made riding-breeches for the nobility and gentry of the county, but disguised the fact that their noble and genteel riding-breeches patrons wouldn't have been seen dead in one of their lounge-suits—the which Joshua didn't know—than to buy them ready-made, he being too muscularly built for stock size, from the meagrely equipped clothing department of his father-in-law's emporium. Financial ease mattered little to him beyond such minor amenities. On odd occasions, Municipal Festivals—his father had been Mayor of the town, and he himself was a member of the Municipal Council—at the annual Masonic banquet of his Lodge, at family functions celebrating the christenings or marriages of the Sutton family, he had drunk champagne. But it had never entered his head to buy a bottle of the fantastic wine for his own domestic consumption. Wine was a thing apart from his habit of life. His cellar contained the current barrel of good Trent ale, and a few bottles of whisky sent in by the family grocer.

Wealth, with a capital W, had held no place in his philosophy. When he found himself inevitably acquiring it, he grew frightened; then smothered his vague fears in the welter of the factory. It was only when the war came to an end and the Government rewarded him with a C.B.E. for services rendered as an honest manufacturer of boots, and he awoke from the four years' nightmare of intensive production, that he took intelligent stock of his fortune and found himself a wealthy man.

A nervous breakdown brought him for the first time in his life—apart from war-wounds—into the doctor's hands. It was a bad breakdown. Boots, forty thousand million pairs of them, swarmed through his brain. The doctors packed him off for a rest cure in an expensive nursing-home. Thence he was shifted on to a steamer, accompanied by a nurse, on a Pleasure Cruise round the Mediterranean. Having the uncomfortable feeling that his fellow passengers might suspect a sound young man accompanied by a trained nurse of being wrong in his head, he made as few acquaintances as possible. In other ways the cruise did not vastly interest him. The nurse realized with dismay this wealthy manufacturer's singular lack of elementary education. Historic places

like Genoa, Naples, Athens, had no reaction on his mind. Would he go on shore with the rest and see the Parthenon? What was the Parthenon? An old temple? No, he would lie on his deck-chair in the sun.

The sunshine, however, and the wonder of blue sea and sky—they had halcyon weather—cured him. He returned to Trenthampton, to the stuffy villa in Redesdale Road, to the factory.

He drove through the stone-flagged courtyard amid its busy clatter of vans and lorries, entered the side-door leading to the counting-house; and even there his nostrils were assailed by the smell of boots. A while afterwards he went over the still humming factory—for, war or no war, populations have to be shod—and the familiar smell grew into a nauseating stench. . . . For nearly a year he fought his loathing for everything that had to do with boots. Then suddenly one day an imp danced in front of him and laughed and put to him the amazing question: What bond woven by God or man bound him to the making of boots? He could find no answer. If he wanted to retain his health and reason, he must give up the making of boots. He was a free man. Again he obeyed, as he always had done, the mysterious Decree.

He went to the Isle of Man. Ever since his father's rise to power, the Fendicks and the Suttons had spent their month's annual summer holiday in the Isle of Man. There, in the peace of his accustomed boarding-house—it was not the tourist season—he worked out the details of his retirement from active interest in the business of Messrs. Swan & Co. And, while thus consciously engaged, he suffered from the curious affliction of the subconscious mind. Pictures of the Lion of Gibraltar, the rock of Monaco, Vesuvius, the high arcaded frontage of Algiers, emerged, sun-capped, from the dense fog of his memory. They had no relation with Redesdale Road. They were elusive visions awakening an unknown nostalgia: a craving for a purer and diviner air—an air not impregnated with the smell of boots. . . .

In the dismal bamboo-and-wicker-work furnished lounge of the boarding-house he was idly turning over the pages of a three months old illustrated weekly—one of the startling differences between Palace Hotels and Boarding-Houses lies in the fact that the periodicals in the luxurious lounges of the former are quite a month in advance of those in the latter—when he became aware of a sudden interest in the photograph of a street scene in Yokohama. He passed it over to his son, Sutton, now a boy of twenty, whom he had brought with him for company.

"I should like to see that."

Sutton yawned. He was bored with the Isle of Man. Only because this holiday was surcease from the daily mill of Swan & Co., into which he had

been destiny-driven two or three years before, after completing his education at the Trenthampton Grammar School, did he forbear to regret severance from the more pleasurable delights of his native town.

“Why don’t you?” he said. “You can afford it.”

The crease in Joshua’s forehead deepened.

“Yes. I can afford it. Would you come with me?”

The boy stared incredulously at his father for a second or two. Then he leaped to his feet.

“Would I come? Would I go to Japan? Would I have the time of my life?” He drew a cigarette from his case, stamped the end against the metal cover, and threw it away. “You’re not serious, Dad, are you?”

Joshua caught a spark of his son’s excitement.

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t be,” he said.

Thus, from this glimpse of conical-hatted men and kimono-and-comb adorned ladies, did the subconscious self of Joshua Fendick, stimulated by his boy’s enthusiasm, cast off its veiling clouts and spring into being as a self vividly conscious. Thus did the real romance of Joshua Fendick have its origin.

Joshua retired with his fortune from active participation in the doings of Messrs. Swan & Co., sailed round the world with Sutton, under the personal conduct of a great tourist agency, having first given instructions to an Eminent Firm to find him and furnish him a suitable house in London against his return.

And thus it happened that Joshua Fendick, whose childhood had been passed in a dank and smelly kitchen, stood by the fire in his water-colour hung drawing-room, awaiting his guests—all friends and acquaintances of travel, invited to the house-warming of his brand-new and, in some ways, disconcerting house.

CHAPTER II

THE door opened and a manservant announced Mrs. Dale. She came forward smiling, hands outstretched, like an old acquaintance.

"I know I'm first, but I came early to see if you wanted me for anything."

Joshua thanked her. "The butler seems to think everything's all right."

"That's good," she said brightly. "You'll forgive me if I feel a qualm of responsibility." She sat by the fire and warmed her hands. "Can I have a cigarette?"

Joshua offered his case. "I've been longing for one," he said.

She flickered a swift, ironic glance at him. He was new to her wide experience of the artist and the woman of the world, and sometimes puzzled her both by his queer reticences and his unconventional frankness. Why should he have longed for a cigarette in his own house? Being a woman of subtlety, she did not ask him the direct question. She would find out sooner or later.

"I'm awfully grateful to you for helping me, Mrs. Dale," he said, bending over her with the lighted match. "I shouldn't have known how to arrange all these stiff-uns round the table——"

She laughed. "The stiff-uns will be very useful to you and the young man Sutton. They'll open doors for you"—she put up a hand—"oh, no, I know what you were going to say. I don't mean doors of dukes and duchesses. Let us say the park gates of attractive avenues leading to places of human interest. You must join a club, mustn't you? Not any old Noah's Ark, but a club where you'll get to know decent men. You were talking of golf the other day——"

"I suppose I'll have to come to it," said the old football gladiator and East Anglian champion middle-weight boxer.

"Of course you will," she decreed. "And you'll have to find people to put you up for a decent Golf Club. Same with racing, as you're fond of it—Sandown and so forth. There are also attractive women in this little town of London."

"I'm an old codger," said he. "You can cut 'em out."

She rose and laughed in his face. And, when Robina Dale laughed, it was a very frank and merry laugh. She was a tallish, big-boned woman, with a sufficient covering of flesh to save her from awkward angularity; swarthy, large-featured, with dark brown eyes, both piercing and humorous, and beautiful teeth set in a generous mouth. Her black hair was cropped behind

according to the fashion of the day. A woman by no means beautiful; but gifted with an arresting personality, all feminine in her scrupulously tasteful and rich though unostentatious attire, and in the unexpected curves of her big-boned frame and in the adroitness of her mind and in the soft contralto of her voice, and yet masculine in her impression of independence and efficiency, and in a physical attribute or two, notably in the large hands with their spatulate finger-tips. She prided herself on never having been manicured in her life. One of the sayings of Joshua that had attracted him to her, in the course of the voyage to Colombo, was his artless criticism of the vermilion-nailed ladies on board:

"I hate to see women with sharp-pointed finger-nails who seem to have been scrabbling into live babies and pulled their fingers out all covered with blood, and with the fat sticking under the quick."

She had laughed in her open way.

"Every woman does it—I'd do it if I hadn't to puddle about in my trade."

"So much the better," he had replied stolidly. "I never look at those women's nails if I can help it. They make me feel sick."

The majority of normal men are of Joshua's blatantly expressed opinion, and not a coward of them all dare give it forth in his home.

Joshua's life at Trenthampton had been lived for many years apart from women. Those he had met had bored him exceedingly. For the most part they had been stencil reproductions of his wife, Arabella, who had no more thought of employing a manicurist than a beauty surgeon who should cut away skin and lift the muscles of her face. Practically, on his second Odyssey, he had entered a new world.

"Cut out women?" she cried. "In some ways I should like to, but not in the way you mean. If you think you're going to lead the idle life of a perfectly young and well-to-do widower in London, and be remote from interfering women, you're mistaken. We can't cut 'em out, my poor friend."

"Of course if they were all like you——" cried Joshua.

Whereupon she laughed again.

"After dinner is the time for making declarations. Before dinner there's the danger of their being taken as serious."

"You know what I meant," said Joshua, somewhat embarrassed.

She touched his shoulder. "Of course I did. You've remembered the cocktails, haven't you?"

He tapped his forehead. "Yes, I wrote it down——How stupid of me! Have one now?"

“We can wait,” she said, checking his movement to the bell-push. “Let everything be done decently and in order.”

“It’s this damned order that worries me,” said Joshua with a grin. “If you hadn’t put it into my head I shouldn’t have thought of it. The big things I can do all right—at least I think so. I’ve been accustomed to ’em. It’s the little things. How was I to know, until you told me, that one didn’t wear a pin in the knot of one’s tie? I’d worn it like that from the day I was married—a diamond pin—a wedding present from my wife’s people. How was I to know?”

“You’ve got eyes, haven’t you?” asked Robina Dale.

“Yes; but not trained eyes,” he replied. “That’s the devil of it.” He spread himself out before her. “I hope I’m all right in this kit?”

She approved smilingly. “Immaculate evening dress.”

“I wonder,” he said thoughtfully, and made a half-turn and back, and threw the end of his cigarette into the fire. “I wonder why a woman like you should put herself to all this bother about me.”

Her face darkened and hardened, not understanding.

“What personal advantage I’m going to get out of it?”

“Good God, no!” he cried, scared by her look and her tone. “What on earth could you get?”

For a second her judgment had run astray, had skidded, as it were, like a motor-car. His question had been so easily open to intuitive interpretation: that of the suspicion of the self-made man, with bulging money-bags, thrown suddenly on society. What was she playing at? What did she want to get out of him?

His protest, blatant in its sincerity, cut her like a whip. She felt mean, realizing that his question had been put not in suspicion, but in humility. It was all a matter of seconds, during which she suffered considerable psychological readjustment.

“What could I get?” She smiled. “The friendship of an honest man.”

His momentary scare passed. He was mollified by her charming answer. The dark, little cloud between them vanished.

“I’m honest enough,” he said with a pleasant seriousness. “I don’t think I’ve done a dirty trick in all my life. My old father saw to that. He wasn’t very fussy or affectionate—demonstrative, if you know what I mean—but he brought me up in the fear of God and——” He passed his hand across the crease in his forehead—a gesture with which an amused and interested Robina was becoming familiar. “I’m getting his exact words—I’ve heard them since I was so high—‘The pointing finger of the world’s contempt.’ That’s a good

saying, isn't it? It sort of runs in one's head. 'The pointing finger of the world's contempt.' So I've done my best to keep clear of it. But I can't see there's anything more to me. Looking at it by and large, it's just the pride of the class I sprang from. But, otherwise, I know nothing about anything except making boots, and I'm sick of that. That's why I wanted to know why you should worry about me. I've been all round the world, and the more I've seen the less I know. I only know how to make boots, and that can't interest anybody on God's earth."

Robina, who during his outburst had sat down again and lit another cigarette, looked up at him.

"You can do much better than that, my dear man."

"What?"

"You can make friends," said Robina.

"I'm afraid I haven't made many," he said ruefully.

"Because you haven't taken the trouble. Neither boots nor friends are made by just sitting down and doing nothing."

Joshua was assimilating the truth of this apophthegm when his guests began to arrive. Sir John and Lady Baldo, he an ex-Sheriff of the City of London, and both irradiated by an air of rosy prosperity; Mr. Fenton Hill, who hunted foxes and collected miniatures, and Lady Evangeline Hill, a pretty woman who took life humorously; Miss Sadie Groves, the light comedy actress; Victor Spens, a shrivelled, youngish man, with a puckish manner, ex-diplomatist and man about town; Sir Gilbert Illington, eminent architect, Lady Illington and their pretty daughter; the Archdeacon of Haxton and Mrs. Rogers, his wife; and young Sutton Fendick, home late from the leather-broking firm in Mark Lane in whose office Joshua, wishing to set his son within the wide horizon of London, had lately placed him.

Robina Dale, sitting in the place of hostess, smiled with satisfaction on the gathering which had obeyed her vicarious summons. She had imagined the banquet. She had prescribed the form of invitation: "I have now settled down in my little bachelor house in London, and I can think of no more—to me—delightful a house-warming than that which would be given it by my friends of the 'Carynthia.' Will you therefore do me the great pleasure of dining with me on the 17th at 8.45? It will be an entirely 'Carynthian' gathering in which I hope we may all revive the pleasant memories of our travels." Joshua (*Robina duce et auspice Robina*) had sent out eighteen invitations to scrupulously selected fellow travellers. Eleven had accepted: an eleven representative of the decent and influential in modern English life. They were fourteen at table, an ideal number for a dinner-party not over-ostentatious. Joshua, between Lady

Baldo and Lady Evangeline, was happily engaged in talk. Everybody seemed to be pleased to meet everybody else. Robina felt the pretty thrill of one who has achieved a minor artistic masterpiece. All these diverse personalities met on one acknowledged common ground—in fact many grounds, including the deck of the “Carynthia” which had carried them all happily round the world. Joshua could exchange reminiscences with his neighbour of the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo, the dizzying streets of Yokohama, the surf of Honolulu, and the crude habits of unsympathetic fellow passengers.

Every one of the guests could be useful to Joshua in the ways which she had indicated; to Sutton too, from whom the voyage had knocked off many rough corners. Left to himself Joshua would never have thought of such an opportunity of shaping not only his social existence, but of reshaping any kind of existence at all. He knew nobody in London, not even people in the class into which he had married, and thenceforward had his provincial being. It was the pathetic loneliness of father and son on board the “Carynthia” that had first attracted her to them. She had frightened Joshua out of his life on the fourth day of the voyage by marching up to him and practically asking him what he was doing in that galley. Within an hour she had found an answer to her question. She had gone to Lady Baldo, in whose party she was travelling, with the news that she had found a pet lamb whom she was going to mother. The fact of her being about ten years younger than the lamb didn’t matter. She tied a blue ribbon round his neck and led him bewildered into the Baldo circle. Sir John vaguely remembered having met him during the war on some committee, and, with a mingling of jocularity and respect for the late head of a great business, introduced him to somebody else as a Captain of Industry. Thus, thanks to Robina Dale, he made his entrance into pleasant society. Sutton followed, with modern youth’s keener sense of values, in his wake. The boy had read, even in the past few months, more books than his father had read in his life. He had ambitions of which his father had never dreamed. He was acutely and self-consciously observant of the manners of the big world that lay calm in the assurance of its social perfection, far above the defiant yet uneasy conventions of Redesdale Road.

The boy, Robina judged, could look after himself; just a hint here and there sufficed for his guidance. But the father presented a different problem altogether. Why, in his own words that evening, she should take all that trouble about him, she scarcely knew. She was a woman given more to instinctive action than to thought. She loved management. Victor Spens had once said to Joshua: “When Robina Dale goes to heaven she’ll see to it that the poor little cherubim have hinder parts to sit upon.” Such criticism, of course, never reached Robina’s ears. She was aware, however, of the vast inefficiency of

mankind and of her own practical grasp on human affairs. The state of the stray Joshua offered irresistible temptation. He was a man to be remade; a task which promised both interest and amusement. Just as her strong, capable hands could mould clay to the expression of her artist's vision, so could she mould the dead yet plastic Joshua.

She looked down the table. Yes. This cheery and successful gathering was her work. . . . She had wasted more time than she could afford over a silver painted clay model of the "Carynthia," which lay anchored on the length of the table in sea of gauze. She wished that she herself, and not the experts of the Eminent Firm, had taken in hand the decoration of the house, and wondered whether others would notice its bleak lack of personality, of love, of intimate touches, of things obviously cherished. Her architect neighbour, Sir Gilbert Illington, answered her thought.

"All this doesn't seem to fit in with our host," he said.

"What do you think would?"

"Something more Victorian. Bigger, friendlier, more comfortable. A snowy table-cloth, red damask wall-paper, with an oil portrait or two of portly gentlemen and insipid ladies and some dark studies of still life."

"And plush curtains edged with little pompoms?"

"The mid-Victorians had very good curtains, my dear Robina. They lasted. Their furniture was solid and expressive. All this is excellent of its kind—the whole house—but psychologically in relation with our host it's gimcrackery. I've been puzzled ever since I came in."

"It's his house and his taste, anyhow," said Robina.

"Is it?" His tone was that of the man unconvinced. "How much had you to do with it?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Well, I give it up," he said.

She smiled ironically, loyal to Joshua, in that she would not betray his childlike faith in the Eminent Firm. The more enigmatic the qualities that Joshua seemed to display, the greater were his chances in the social world. He was a man so unassuming, so devoid of any touch of the war-profiteer's blatancy, and yet vouched for by Sir John Baldo as one of England's Great Industrial Leaders, that the "Carynthian" circle had overlooked his abysmal ignorance of the things that to them were household words, and comfortably took for granted hidden intellectualities that had made him a man of note. That was why Illington wondered how the man who had never heard of the Taj Mahal had managed to furnish an impeccably "period" house.

“You’re not a self-made man, on your own showing,” Robina had said to him during the early days of their friendship, when he had artlessly related to her the main outline of his life. “If you weren’t born with a silver spoon in your mouth, you had one shoved into it as soon as doesn’t matter. The self-made man can always get away on his stunt. He can say: ‘I started by selling papers in the street, and now, without anybody’s help, I control the biggest group of newspapers or fried-fish shops in the country,’ and people think what a wonderful fellow he is, and dukes ask him to do them the favour of marrying their daughters. But you can’t do that because it wouldn’t be true. You succeeded your father, in a perfectly natural way, as the head of a great business. That’s quite enough for anybody. So just take your stand on that and you’ll be all the happier, and it’ll certainly be better for your son who has got to start from where you leave off. This is sense and not snobbery.”

“I quite see your point,” he had replied. “You’re perfectly right. But I can’t help feeling such a fool among all these people.”

She had shrugged amused shoulders. “If you go about with a placard hung round your neck—‘I feel a fool’—they’ll naturally take you for one. By advertising you can make people believe anything. But, if you go among them just for what you’re worth—and, as I’ve said, you’re not worth the self-made man stunt—they’ll just take you at your face value and won’t worry about you except as a human being.”

He had made one final objection during this illuminating discourse of his newly discovered Egeria. He had had no education. How could he hide what was obvious?

“Don’t talk of things you know nothing about,” she had said oracularly, “and people will think you know far more about them than they do.”

And Joshua, who, for the first time in his life, had come under the influence of a Feminine Force, regarded her in a mentally blinking way as the most wonderful woman in the world, and had done his best to carry out her counsels. There grew quickly the legend around him of the man who had made all the stout and honest boots in which all the Allies had marched to Victory. He was kindly, pleasant-mannered and stimulatingly reticent. As he never talked of boots, of which his knowledge equalled that of any living man, how were folks to guess his ignorance on other matters concerning which he maintained an equally profound silence?

He had done his bit in the war. His two missing fingers gave credence to his admission of German unkindness. An athletic second mate on board, who fancied himself as an amateur boxer, had produced a set of gloves; whereupon Joshua had varied the usual games and entertainments by the institution of

boxing competitions and had himself, though somewhat elderly and out of condition, scientifically defeated on points a leading stoker whose claim to be ex-middle-weight champion of the Mercantile Marine had been allowed by Joshua, expert in pugilistic literature.

Thus Joshua, in spite of himself, or because of himself—he maintained the one proposition, Robina the other—had been found pleasant in the eyes of the "Carynthian" inner circle, eleven of whom came in a friendly way to his house-warming.

He was well placed between Lady Baldo and Lady Evangeline Hill. With the one he could discuss the exotic food of strange lands; with the other he shared a common interest in the Turf. The prowess of young men in the delicate conduct of a big inflated ball with their feet, and the relative speed of highly trained horses, always occupied, apart from considerations of earning a personal living, the deepest thoughts of most inhabitants of Trenthampton. They were matters of national, vital, intimate concern. Did the men of the County Regiments in the first frozen, muddy, bloody trenches of the war curse the slackers who stayed at home and played football? Not a bit of it. They tore, one from the other, the faded pink local evening newspapers, sent by their friends, in order to learn the fortunes of The Wanderers, the really glorious. It was only afterwards . . . well, nothing happened; for the really glorious were pitched themselves into the trenches, and acquitted themselves no less gloriously. But in a Trenthampton man's heart of hearts war wasn't a serious matter. Football was. And next to it in importance, paramount over human affairs, was horse-racing. Any child of eleven could tell you a likely one for the 3.30 at Gatwick, to say nothing of the Derby, the Leger, the City and Suburban, and such-like Holy National Celebrations.

No one can live his life in this mephitic, intellectual atmosphere and remain a man of free and independent intelligence. To Joshua, Newmarket, Downing Street and Buckingham Palace were co-existent and equal symbols of England's greatness. A prudent man—most Trenthampton men are prudent—and by temperament no gambler, he rarely put more on a horse than a pound each way, less as a financial venture than as a backing of his own considered judgment; but he was an almost unconsciously fine authority on form. He took it for granted that a knowledge of the life-history and varying kinetic achievements of a thousand four-legged animals, which, from the point of view of those not financially or otherwise personally interested in the enormous and fascinating Racing Industry, appears the most futile and idiotic of human concerns, must be, of necessity, the mental equipment of a reasonable man who has the privilege of being born on English soil. Only

England and her queer *enfant terrible*, Australia, can produce such a fantastic psychological phenomenon. Except for his artilleryman's days, when horses were horses and beings to be loved and cherished and trained in gallantry, for they meant men's lives and shared men's deaths, he had never had anything to do with horses. He had never owned a hack, far less a race-horse. He had never met—as far as he was aware had never seen—the owner of a race-horse. His bets were as trivial as his tossings for drinks. He had attended less than a dozen race-meetings during his busy and sequestered life, and yet . . . and yet he talked to the delighted racing Lady Evangeline with the authority of an editor of "Form at a Glance."

"We must go into partnership, you and I," she laughed. "What with your knowledge and my instinct, there's a fortune in it."

"I'm afraid there isn't," he said bluntly, raising his maimed hand in an Englishman's clumsy gesture. "I only bet in half-crowns."

She was blonde, pretty, thin-faced and shrewd. She gave him a swift sidelong glance, and decided that he must be intimately involved in Higher Turf Finance; a subtle and silent man to be carefully tended.

In such unconscious ways did Joshua acquire Reputation.

As acting hostess Robina bade farewell to the departing guests, among murmurs of thanks and congratulations. Joshua beamed. He had made several pleasant, informal engagements during the evening. He was to dine soon with the Baldos, to lunch on Thursday at the St. James's Club with Victor Spens and to find a seat in Lady Evangeline's box for the Grand National. Sutton, too, had received invitations to more frivolous entertainments.

"A great success," Robina declared. "A perfect dinner. Perfect service. Everybody enjoyed themselves."

Joshua agreed. It had been far pleasanter than he had anticipated. For one thing, he hadn't known what these brand-new servants were capable of. And then——

"And then, what?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. Sutton was lounging on the arm of a sofa.

"Dotley was with the Earl of Petersham for ten years until the old rip died," said the young man. "So as far as buttling goes that's good enough for me—I didn't worry."

"Neither did I," said Robina. "Nor about anything else."

She lingered awhile in idle talk; then announced her departure. Sutton moved to the door.

“I’ll see about a taxi for you.”

“I’ll do that,” said his father. “You get off to bed.”

The boy laughed, took leave of Robina, as he held open the door for the two elders to pass out. They went down the soft-carpeted stairs. A servant stood in the hall.

“Taxi, madam?”

“Not just yet,” said Joshua. “You don’t mind, do you? Just a quarter of an hour’s peace and a quiet drink in the library?”

She assented graciously. It was early and she had nothing to do. She entered the formally though comfortably furnished room and took up her position on the high, leather-covered fender-seat, while he busied himself with the mixing of whisky-and-sodas. She glanced around.

“I suppose you know you’ve got some quite good Morlands here.”

“I didn’t know. What are Morlands?”

“Morland was the great genre painter from whose pictures all these coloured prints were taken.”

“Thanks,” said Joshua, handing her a glass and pushing a little table within her reach. “I’m deadly ignorant. I don’t let it out to other people, but I do to you. Morland.” He scanned one or two close by for some moments. “You say he was a great fellow. Well, do you know, I like ’em. By gum, yes! I hadn’t bothered to look at ’em before.” He sat beside her. “Do you really think the dinner was a success?”

She smiled. “Of course I do. Why not?”

He passed a hand over his thatch of short, red hair, and the furrow deepened across his brow.

“I suppose it was, in a way. Anybody with money and good-will and a friend like you can give people enough to eat and drink and pair them off properly. . . . It’s not that. . . . It’s something to do with myself. I’ve been to a good many men’s dinners. When the host’s a dud, the thing falls flat. When he’s alive and has his touch on everybody there it goes with a swing. . . .”

“It went like a whole combination of swings and roundabouts,” she assured him, whereat he laughed.

“Well, I wish I could say what I mean.” He pondered for a moment. “I’m with these people, but not of them. When once we get off our narrow common track, I feel lost. They have something which I haven’t. It isn’t the three B’s—birth, breeding and brains. I can muddle along without them. It’s something else.” He rose with an impatient gesture. “And I’m damned if I know what it is.”

Robina lit a cigarette. “How long have you felt like this?”

“Ever since I saw that white palace in India which I’d never heard of and everybody talked so much about—wait a bit—the Taj Mahal.”

The woman and the artist suddenly felt cold and drew a short breath, as at an inspired thought.

“Look at those Morlands again.”

“Eh?”

“Look at them.”

He obeyed mechanically.

“What do you think of them?”

“I’ve told you. They’re lovely.”

“So is the Taj Mahal, and Michael Angelo’s *Pietà*—the Virgin with the Dead Christ on her knees—in St. Peter’s at Rome, which you didn’t seem very interested in, and the sea-gulls flashing over that bit of cobalt blue I remember pointing out to you in the Indian Ocean. That’s one thing all these people, or most of them, have got instinctively, which you don t seem to have—an ordinary sense of beauty. A sense of beauty as necessary to decent life as air, or water, or pity, or fear. . . .”

“I’ll have to think that out,” said Joshua seriously.

She laughed, and, being a woman of tact, turned the conversation to more comfortable topics until she took her leave. When she had gone, Joshua had one more scrutiny of the Morlands and then lit an old pipe and sat down before the fire until it was long extinct, reviewing the forty-odd drab and colourless years of his life and seeming to stand half-baffled on the brink of a new and rosily nebulous world.

There had always been a deep, inner dissatisfaction with existence; a dim subconsciousness of something unknown towards which he had groped. . . . He remembered he had tried in vain to find it at a hectic revivalist meeting many years ago. Beauty . . . the Taj Mahal . . . white wings against a blue sea . . . These warm old prints of the great fellow, Morland. He spent half an hour looking into them. Yes, by God! There was something about them that hit him somewhere. Why hadn’t he been hit before? Then there rose up from the mists of Time a queer fact. He had won a prize at school for Freehand Drawing. . . . Surely there was some connection. . . .

Shivering with cold, he went up to bed, not knowing what to make of an unprecedented experience.

CHAPTER III

WHAT prompted him to begin to play about with a lump of moist clay he never knew. Sheer instinct, perhaps, to relieve boredom by doing something. Robina's studio was austere, business-like and even messy. The cold light of a glass roof fell on a vast, shapeless mass perched on a revolving table and covered by a sheet: her uncompleted masterpiece on which she had been working for years. Other stands with smaller works, a few tables laden with the implements of her craft, a chair or two, an oak settee with tapestried seat, a model-throne, a screen, took up the linoleum-covered floor. Around the walls hung plaster-plaques and photographs of various past achievements. None of the expensive rugs and divans and fastidious appurtenances of your fashionable painter's studio. Rather a grim place, relieved only by a moss-filled basket of thick purple hyacinths in a corner. A soiled book or two lay about. But Joshua didn't care about books.

Robina was late. He was there by appointment, 10.30, for the last sitting, she hoped, for his bust. A maid had conveyed Madam's apologies. Called out unexpectedly, she would be back as soon after 10.30 as possible. Would Mr. Fendick mind waiting? Mr. Fendick, having nothing in the world to do, waited. The maid, expressing a hope that he wouldn't feel cold, replenished the cast-iron stove and went out. Joshua wandered idly about the studio, looked at his own vigorously moulded head and once more wondered why Robina Dale had asked him to sit. She had, from the outset, disclaimed all commercial motive. "To ask people to sit to you, and then plant the result on them, as if it had been a commission, is a dirty trick."

What she was going to do with this thing in dark-green wax he didn't know. . . . It was ridiculously, yet, after all, flatteringly, like him. His eye missed the familiar colouring reflected by the mirror—his dark-red hair and moustache and florid cheeks. This dark-green made him look too noble. . . . He would speak to Mrs. Dale about it. But the features were those which he was accustomed to see every day. There was the twist at the corner of his lip where a bit of shrapnel had got him on his last day of warfare when nearly the whole of his battery, and odds and ends of himself, had been wiped out. Yes, the twist was peculiarly lifelike. . . . A modest man, however, can't put in much time contemplating his counterfeit presentment, no matter how arresting it may be. He took out his watch. He had been there five minutes.

Suddenly his eye fell on something he did not remember having seen before. It was a rough clay study of a half-draped nude. The back was towards

him. He turned it round on its pivot and the front was practically formless, being buried in the mass. But, turned again, the back was complete enough to strike him with a curious sense of beauty. There were the delicate curves of the upper body, the slanting line of the spine melting into the round daintiness of the hips, and the indication of slender limbs. He stared at it for a long time. An insane idea passed through his mind. It was perfect as it was. Another touch would spoil it.

He sat down on a straight-backed chair and scratched his head. He was a practical man, and, unconscious of a vague introspective habit, instinctively sought the why and wherefore of unusual emotion. The female figure displayed with all frankness in skin-tight bathing costume was as familiar to him as to any man of his epoch. In all probability his virtuous male ancestors had never seen such a thing in their lives. A virtuous wife concealed her form modestly even from her husband, and for night-attire wore a shroud of long-cloth or flannel reaching from her neck to her toes. But to the eye of the modern man, be he never so seclusive, the female form is as commonplace as a rose or a lily. Joshua had seen thousands of them on the sands of the Isle of Man—to say nothing of photographs in the illustrated papers. Besides, he had been round the world. . . . What was there, then, in these roughly-moulded contours of shoulders and reins and hips that held him fascinated? He was greatly puzzled. Perhaps it was something of the same quality as Robina Dale had revealed to him in his Morland colour prints. There was something of uncanny tenderness, wistfulness, in the exquisite back.

He took out his watch. She was now twenty minutes late. What on earth could he do? He took up the soiled books. Two were in unintelligible French, the other a volume of modern English verse, a page of which was equally unintelligible. His ideas of poetry were derived from his County School memories of “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” and “Friends, Romans, Countrymen.” He had thought it either a silly or a highfalutin, and, in any case, an unnecessary medium of expression.

Half an hour. The lady was very late. She, most punctual and business-like woman. As a general rule, her working days were regulated by schedule. What on earth could he do?

It was then that his glance fell on the nice little block of damp clay. It was then that he said to his stupid self: “It can’t be so difficult to make things out of it.” It was then that he took a lump in his fingers and began idly to fashion a crude little man. It was then that, happening to look towards the fascinating back of the nude study, he felt a sudden extraordinary shiver running from the roots of his hair all down his spine. And it was then that, kneading the clay with his strong hands, in spite of missing fingers, he began idiotically to try to

copy the thing of beauty that stood before his eyes. Time passed.

Robina blew in like a whirlwind.

“My dear friend! Do forgive me. I couldn’t help it. . . . But what the devil are you doing?”

He turned sheepishly, holding out helpless, clay-soiled fingers, and grinned.

“I hope you don’t mind. I was putting in time. I don’t think I’ve done any damage.”

“Except to yourself,” she laughed. “Go and clean yourself up.”

When he returned from the little lavabo of hot and cold water hidden behind the screen, she jerked her chin towards the clay he had been moulding.

“When did you learn to do that?”

“What?” he asked.

“That.” She pointed. “It’s utterly wrong, of course, and the way you think you can do it is idiotic. But there’s something in it. . . . You’ve got a feeling. . . . Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I never tried before,” said Joshua.

“You’re a queer man,” she said. “What made you try now?”

“That girl’s back. It sort of struck me that I’d like to try to copy it.” He looked awhile at the statuette. “There’s something about it that knocks me.”

Robina threw hat and fur coat on a chair.

“That child’s back, if it interests you, is the cause of my being late. I thought she was ill yesterday afternoon, and bundled her off after she had been sitting for ten minutes. She almost wept, swore she was all right and would come at nine this morning. She didn’t come. At half-past somebody rang me up—her landlady—from a public telephone office. She couldn’t come, was taken ill, and they’d had to send for the doctor. Well, there was this girl who had been sitting naked here, in this beastly, cold studio yesterday afternoon—a dear girl, I’ll tell you about her, if you’d like to know—down with something. So I went to her place, not far away, one of the streets off the King’s Road, and found her in a beastly, icy, little top room with a raging temperature. Luckily the doctor was there, about to get her to St. George’s Hospital. So I had to cart her off in an ambulance to a nursing-home. That takes time with the only telephone available in a shop at the end of the Street. And there she is with pneumonia. That’s why I’m late.”

She crossed the room and unhooked her brown Holland smock from its peg.

“Let’s get to work.”

“If you’re feeling upset, please don’t worry about me,” said Joshua. “My time’s yours. Any old hour . . . any old day . . .”

Robina dropped the garment on the floor. “Perhaps you’re right. I could force myself to concentrate if there were any necessity. But I’d rather not. It didn’t occur to me that you’d understand.”

“I don’t think I’m such a fool as all that,” said Joshua. “I can tell when people aren’t fit for their job. I’ve had to do with ’em in thousands. Oh, yes, my dear,” he went on, noticing a quick little frown on her dark brow, “I’m quite aware that making boots by machinery and making things like these”—he waved a hand around—“are two entirely different things. But if I can order a boot-operative with something on his nerves to go away and play for a bit and come back to the machine when he’s better, how much more reason have I to say it to you? This fellow has a trained touch on his wheel, but a mechanical touch. Yours is a touch from God knows where.”

She sat down and regarded him with a humorous gleam in her eyes.

“You’re always springing surprises on me nowadays.”

“How?” he asked.

She replied obliquely. “Your argument is perfectly logical. I should only potter about nervously with your head and perhaps wipe out of it the one thing that’s right. What that one thing is, God knows, I don’t. It’s all luck or, as you say, instinctive touch. But for goodness’ sake don’t let us get on to the psychology of artistic creation.”

Joshua stuck his hands in his trousers’ pockets.

“Say that again.”

“The psychology of artistic creation.”

“Yes. Sounds all right. But what does it mean?”

She did her best to put what, even to her an artist, was but a vague, transcendental concept into plain, almost school-child terms. The Infinite Unimaginable Instinct that inspired God—taking the first chapters of Genesis as a basis of argument—to create the world; the no less infinite instinct of all forms of life to procreate—practically recreate—their species; the instinct of man, definitely separating him from the lower animals, to create something, not of his material body, but of that intense consciousness within him which the philosophies of thousands of years have sought in vain to define, and in despair have called by the universally accepted and comfortable term, his immortal soul; the instinct of that soul to copy Jehovah’s impulse before the beginning of verse I, chapter i, of the Book of Genesis to create something out

of nothing. But, the creative impulses of the human soul being limited by the resultant of those of the originally postulated Jehovah, we couldn't get away from conceptions possible to humanity. The artist therefore had within him just a flick of Jehovah. The nearest material analogy was Radium, the one apparently indestructible Inorganic Element—the only apparently Infinite Element in the known world. Here and there infinitesimal specks of it were discovered and applied to the material solace of humanity. So were the Jehovah-specks in the soul—or whatever you liked to call it—of the artist.

"That's dammed interesting," said Joshua, with a deepening of the furrow across his forehead. "I never thought of thinking about things in that way." He pulled out his watch. "Gosh! it's past twelve. Come out and have a bit of lunch with me somewhere—wherever you like. We can carry on this talk. Besides, I'd like to know some more about that poor little girl with the back!"

But Robina couldn't lunch. She had an engagement at 12.30 and work to do as long as the light lasted. He could stay ten minutes longer if he liked. The sick girl? There wasn't much to say about her, after all. Her name was Susan—Susan Keene. She made her living as a programme girl at theatres. For extra pocket-money she sat now and then as a model.

"That sort of thing?"

"Why not? But, as a matter of fact, she doesn't. The professional models for the nude are a race apart."

"I'm glad of that," said Joshua.

"Good Lord, why?" she asked, with a laugh. "Do you think her back belongs to you?"

He reddened. "No. But the thing's so innocent and childlike. I shouldn't like to think——"

"But, my dear man," she cried. "You're talking like your grandmother. Don't you know that the standard of virtue among artists' models is certainly equal to that among marchionesses?"

"That may be taken two ways," said Joshua.

"Now you're talking like a wicked grandfather."

As Joshua had met neither of his grandfathers or heard much about them, he remained silent.

"How old is the poor kid?" he asked after a pause.

"About three or four-and-twenty."

"Can't I do anything for her while she's ill?"

"No," said Robina. "You can't. I'm doing all that's necessary."

The front door bell rang sharply. Robina picked up her smock.

"That's my appointment."

Until this Episode of the Back of Susan Keene, life in his brand-new house in London had been dull and monotonous. Although the little circle of acquaintances into which he had entered showed signs of widening, yet whole days from rising in the morning till retiring at night passed without his speaking to a human being. The flat-racing season had begun with Lincoln. This meeting he had attended in forlorn solitude. The Grand National Steeplechase, whither he had been bidden by Lady Evangeline, had been an oasis in a lonely desert of days. At Newbury, a little later, he met some of her party who seemed to regard racing as a means of livelihood. The elegant bookmaker who took their bets in tens and ponies and hundreds was too majestic a being, so he thought, to accept his customary modest ventures. He, too, to save his new social face, bet in tens and ponies and hundreds, according to shrewd advice, and lost a great deal of money; which, to Joshua, seemed the most idiotic folly in the world. The next time he went to a race-meeting, the elegant bookmaker came up to him with a familiar smile, note-book in hand.

"Well, Mr. Fendick, what can I have the pleasure of doing for you to-day?"

And Joshua felt inclined to tell him to go and drown himself, or cut his throat, or, in any old way, withdraw himself from the world of men. But, as this would have been unwarrantable impoliteness—and there was no reason to be rude to the elegant man who, according to his lights, was carrying on a perfectly honourable business, in a perfectly pleasant manner—Joshua contented himself by saying that he was taking a day off from betting, that he was there for the fun of the thing, and turned away with a good-humoured nod. After that the conscience forced in the little tin Bethel hot-house of his childhood prevented him from carrying out his original intention of going surreptitiously round a lowlier ring and placing his ten-shilling bets. And, on this occasion, he had the dreary satisfaction of seeing most of his studied fancies successful without having staked a penny on a race.

Thus the glamour of race-going, as a steady social occupation, vanished gradually, as does the steam on a mirror in an over-heated bathroom before a current of fresh air.

He found himself a man always at a loose end, staring into nothingness. In the dressing-room next his bedroom he had installed a little gymnasium, all punching-balls and things like stirrups at the ends of broad India-rubber bands, and mechanical rowing apparatus. He could put in a morning hour keeping himself fit. He could always put in another half-hour over the "Sportsman," perhaps another twenty minutes over the Daily Something or the Other. The

need of fresh air always drove him forth for a solitary walk—generally across the Park and back. There were lonely meals punctually served—Sutton, of course, lunched in the City, and, as often as not, dined out with his male and female contemporaries. During many hours of the working day Joshua was the most bored man in London.

And here it is that the significance of Susan's Back came in.

He went away from Robina obsessed by the dream of melting curves; obsessed, too, by the idiot desire to make such curves with his own hands. He was certain that he could do it. His finger-tips still tingled with the deliciousness of the magic yielding of the clay. All through his solitary and unappreciated lunch, he made strange grasping movements with his hands, his eyes fixed at a point in infinity, greatly to the discomfiture of the butler, who had not the key to behaviour so enigmatic. At last he said:

"Dotley, do you know where one can get clay?"

"Clay, sir?" The butler touched a puzzled lip. His primary mental association of clay was with damp graves.

"Yes, clay that sculptors use. They make all kinds of figures and things out of it."

"Oh!" sighed Dotley with relief. "I see, sir. I should think you'd get it where they sell artists' materials. There are shops in the neighbourhood, sir. I believe you'll find some in the King's Road."

Joshua bade him tell the chauffeur to gather immediate information as to such shops and come round with as little delay as possible.

Thus it came about that, before it was dusk, Joshua returned to his house with a car full of objects which he had been assured were essential to the pursuit of the modeller's art. They were of all shapes and sizes: calipers, compasses, dividers, queer instruments with wooden handles and wire tops shaped like the things used for opening bottles of Perrier water, all kinds of odd flat bits of wood, a plumb-line, a bust-peg—a whole armoury of strange weapons. He was peculiarly pleased by the newest kind of plastic clay that never dries up in the hottest of rooms or needs the tiniest spray of water; and he could use it over and over again. There were also a business-like, up-to-date modelling-stand and a plain modern table on which to lay his tools, and a couple of blouses wrapped up in a neat parcel.

In his prim library, with its new green leather chairs and soft Oriental rugs, this paraphernalia struck an untidy note. Besides, the echo of Robina's exclamation—"What the devil are you doing?"—reverberated faintly in his ears. It would be embarrassing to reply to every visitor's instinctive and similar question when he or she entered the library. He shrank from exposing himself

to the cynical raillery, say, of Victor Spens, or even of Robina herself. Wherefore, supervising the physical activities of butler, footman and housemaid, he transformed into a studio a forlorn guest-room, with a north-east aspect, lent a hand himself to the dismantling of the bed and disposal of the bedding, and being left alone surveyed his arrangements with honest and unhumorous satisfaction.

There were cubes of delightfully prepared clay. There were all the tools laid out on the deal worktable, which Dotley had insisted on covering with a blue embroidered tea-cloth, like surgical instruments before an operation. It was then that it occurred to Joshua that he had nothing whereon to operate. You can't go and model a girl's back unless you have a girl with a back in flesh or clay or stone to copy. Besides, Joshua had the humble idea that, now he was beginning, he must begin modestly. His hand was less than that of an apprentice. He must copy something. He scratched his red thatch and looked around the wrecked bedroom. The expert of the Eminent Firm had not thought of decorating it with examples of famous sculpture. Suddenly he snapped his fingers as one inspired. The expert of the Eminent Firm had neglected nothing. There, guarding the fantastic fireplace, was a majolica cat sitting on its haunches with its tail neatly coiled round its fore-paws. Joshua picked it up and set it on the bedside table, which he wheeled into a convenient light. There was his model. A fine, sturdy, business-looking kind of cat, none too meek of expression. It had a fascinatingly malevolent eye. He laughed and fell artistically in love with the cat.

Well, there was the model, there was the clay, there were implements, metal and wooden, and there were his itching fingers. Why not begin? He remembered somewhat ruefully that the first thing Robina did, when she had him for a model, was to measure his head carefully all over with the funny bowed compasses which the shopman called calipers, and to make many notes and calculations on paper. As a practical man, he knew he ought to measure the cat, and measure his clay, so as to get the proportions. He also had a vague idea that the process of modelling clay was the reverse of that of carving marble. In the latter you chipped a figure from the block; in the former you built up dab by dab. But all this, though scientifically necessary, was finicking. He longed to get his fingers into the soft and malleable material. He dumped a lump of clay on the modelling-stand.

The darkness came. He switched on the electric light and went on with his work.

Presently the door burst open. The young man, Sutton, a slim, fair and pleasant-looking youth, burst in.

"They told me I should find you here. But, my dear Dad, what the devil are

you doing?”

The hateful question hit Joshua like a hammer. He swung round angrily on his son.

“Can’t you see, you damned young fool, that I’m making a cat?”

“Oh, my God!” cried Sutton.

He did not stop to shut the door. There being a draught, Joshua banged it to with his foot, and returned to his work. But the spell was broken. He looked from the malevolent-eyed majolica model to the result of three feverish hours of intense artistic struggle—a concentration of the soul, such as he had never dreamed of experiencing—and muttered:

“The boy’s right. It’s a bloodiosity.”

And he dashed the thing of hideous disproportion on the elegant Axminster carpet and stamped on it.

CHAPTER IV

THIS was by no means the end of Joshua's artistic career. It was only the beginning.

"And a very good beginning too," said Robina, when she heard of the cat's destruction.

She listened to him sympathetically. Interests outside the Turf and the Boxing Ring were essential to the making of Joshua. Besides, if a human being had received so evident a call from the Spirit of Art, it would be sacrilege to allow his ears to be deafened. Deciding that severe elementary training in the modeller's craft would be excellent for Joshua's soul, she entrusted the task to one of her own most conscientious pupils, Euphemia Boyd, who had passed through her studio after a bright career at the Slade School.

"She'll never do anything particularly brilliant on her own account, poor dear," said Robina, "because she never knows when to throw over the rules. She thinks God made them. Perhaps she's right," she added after a pause. "Anyhow, it's the rules you want, and the rules you'll get."

At first Joshua made a faint objection.

"As I'm having lessons in my house, don't you think perhaps a man . . ."

Robina interrupted him with a laugh.

"There's no danger of your falling in love with Euphemia. At least, I hope not. If you think I'm going to fill your house with Houris, you're mistaken. I'm not such an accommodating woman-friend as all that."

"I wasn't quite looking at it in that light," Joshua replied unhumorously. "It's the servants—and Sutton, you know—and——"

"And whether she'll fall in love with you. Oh dear! Will you forgive me for saying something? You're in London now and not in Trenthampton. Here we have a different set of values."

Joshua scratched his head. "Look here, everywhere I turn I hear that word, and I don't know what it means. Does it mean that the value of anything—say modesty—is worth twenty shillings a pound in Trenthampton, and only twopence in London?"

Her unexpected contacts with the provincial in Joshua always delighted and at the same time irritated her. Now she was hung up for a definition.

" 'Values'," she said oracularly, "is a term in painting meaning the relations between light and shade. And so it's applied to all other arts. It has the same general meaning when applied to life generally. It isn't a question of

the absolute worth of any particular idea. . . . Oh, Lord!”—she passed clay-stained fingers over her brow—she was putting the last touches to his bust. “How can I explain? In Trenthampton you have the same kind of virtues and vices and safeguards we have in London; but the relative, the proportionate values are all different. Modesty! what would your grandmother have said if she saw every woman showing her legs above her knees and her back to her waist and smoking cigarettes?

“I see,” said Joshua. “Thank you. That word ‘values’ has worried me more than I can say.”

In a day or two he once more set his Egeria down as a woman of practical usefulness and clear intelligence. The comings and goings of Euphemia Boyd, her long sojourns, seemed to cause no moral ripple on the serene waters of his household. Even Sutton took her for granted. He had met her coming down the stairs and afterwards said to his father:

“How’s little Art for Art’s sake getting on? Personally, I prefer ’em plumper—and I like ’em to powder their noses.”

And he had never given the lady another thought.

She was very earnest and thin and untidy and wore, against all modern canons, steel-rimmed spectacles. She flitted up the stairs to the north-east room like a wraith, conducted herself there like an iron-hearted, impersonal task-mistress, and like a wraith flitted down the stairs again out of the house. In the room converted into a studio she did all sorts of things. She banished remaining bedroom furniture and such amateur appurtenances. She hung the walls with plaster-casts. In front of the window she ordained a table at which Joshua must go back to the far-off days when he had won a prize and re-learn to draw from the round. She fitted up a shelf of elementary text-books. She made him begin, like a child in a primary school, at the very beginning of things. When she had passed his first relievo of an ivy leaf, he contemplated it with the pride of an artist who recognizes the perfect accomplishment. Euphemia Boyd also sent him, marked text-book in hand, round the British and South Kensington Museums. Now and again, at his ingenuous invitation, she accompanied him and delivered scrappy lectures on æsthetics; the subjects of these visits she had pre-ordained and set him the schoolboy task of getting up their history beforehand. He never questioned her authority. Once before the Elgin Marbles, he said to her suddenly:

“You’re like an angel leading me along heavenly paths.”

She flushed deep red and cast him a frightened glance; but he was looking not at her, but at the newly-revealed magic of the frieze.

Thus did the god of Beauty unfold himself within the man’s soul like the

awful rose of dawn of the poet's metaphor. And thus did the dream of lovely forms, which his fingers tingled to mould, begin to find some sort of material expression. A new wonder, and yet a meaning, began to inform his life. In great humility he attended evening classes at an Art school, sitting among eager youths and maidens who paid scant attention to their elderly neighbour. He took the New Wonder seriously, as, in days gone by, he had taken the making of boots. Lessons in elementary anatomy fascinated him. It delighted him to learn that the two contours of an ankle, for instance, one hard and one soft, were matters of anatomical fact. He bought books and made drawings.

He kept Robina, his Egeria, conversant with his progress. She admitted him into a little brotherhood of artists, male and female, who supped with her occasionally on Sunday evenings. To Joshua they were so many Gamaliels at whose feet he sat. They, in their turn, invited him to their studios.

"But, for God's sake," Robina counselled, "don't go and buy their pictures and things, out of the kindness of your heart, unless you're really hit by them—hit by them as you were by the back of my poor little model."

"I've never seen the back of your model—worse luck!" said Joshua. He had an elementary sense of humour.

"And you're not going to," said Robina, "until you've passed through a Life School."

The main point of her argument, however, remained fixed in his mind. He visited studios and stayed there awe-stricken; but he resisted the daintiest blandishments of hopeful vendors of works of modern art.

The eventual transformation of the house in Eaton Terrace, picture-hung by the Impeccable Expert of the Eminent Firm, had a vehement beginning.

He rushed one day into the studio of Robina forewarned by telephone. He had seen a picture in a Bond Street art-dealer's window. It was an old mill, water in the foreground; bits of red roofs peeping through brown trees; lovely trees, oaks. Mild sort of afternoon sunshine. An autumn effect. He made the bald statement.

"Well?" she asked, amused.

"I'd like to buy it."

She drew a little breath. Joshua was, indeed, progressing. It was the first time he had indicated a desire to buy anything beyond the paraphernalia indicated by Euphemia Boyd.

"Who's it by?"

Joshua couldn't remember. They wanted a terrible lot of money for it. And it was only about that size—he indicated something about eighteen inches by

eight. But a gem. They were real oaks. And a flat country. He had once been to Norwich on business—it reminded him of Norfolk.

"You can't be talking about an Old Crome?" said Robina.

"Yes. That's the name they told me," cried Joshua, hitting his head with his knuckles. "How the devil did you guess?"

"Never mind. I'll look at it for you. I suppose that's what you've come for?"

During the course of that afternoon several things happened. There was a minor massacre of innocent water-colours in the drawing-room. The exquisite Old Crome was hung in the right light—Joshua being a handy man with workmen's tools, and therefore needing no base assistance. Robina, impatient of hats, had thrown hers off on entrance, and stood in bare-headed, earnest supervision. The late May sunshine flooded the room, and glorified the dark face and the keen strong features and the glow in her intent and widely-set brown eyes as they looked at the little painting in its old gold frame. But Joshua looked at her, and, floundering about in a welter of new sensations, blurted out a suddenly revealed truth:

"I'm hanged if you're not much more beautiful than the picture."

She turned on him swiftly, the woman of the world, ready to cope on the spot with ill-breeding. But her heart melted at once. His blue eyes fixed on her held nothing but an artist's ascetic adoration. It was a tribute of which any woman might be proud. Her quick sense made her realize her pose.

"Rubbish," she laughed. "You've been taken in by a trick of sunshine, like many other people. A haystack can look beautiful in sunshine. Take a course of Claude Monet and find it out."

She moved away into the shadows of the room.

"You're still the same," said Joshua. "The sunshine told me."

Robina rang a bell by the chimney-piece.

"Let's have tea or something."

The unconscious grace of her little domestic act defeated her own object. It stimulated rather than repressed the awakening of the New Joshua.

"Do you mind?" she asked.

"Good Lord, no! I ought to have thought of it before."

There was a pause during which they both awaited the imminent arrival of Dotley. Robina was surprised to find herself oddly worried by Joshua's words: "The sunshine told me." Whence had he dug them out except from a brand-new consciousness of things? Months ago, when the gulls, flashing white

against the indigo of the sea, aroused in him no more emotion than he would have felt at the sight of dead flies on an arsenical brown fly-paper, he had been no more capable of saying those words than of re-writing Lessing's "Laocoon." She was a woman of swift and allusive thought. Supposing she, a female Frankenstein, had called into being a semi-artistic monster!

The stocky, red-haired, almost common and completely uneducated man regarded her still with eyes of undisguised admiration. She wasn't beautiful, not gifted with the beauty that burns topless towers of Ilium and plays the devil generally in the world. She knew it. She held men in a secret disesteem because they had ever been slow to recognize the best in feminine attractiveness which she sedulously made of herself. She had not even been able to keep her own husband. God knew why. She was not one of those asexual women, idiot bees who think that the making of honey, artistic, political, commercial, or what-not, is the main aim of existence, and hold in contempt the prolific queen-bee and the disgusting, yet necessary, drone. Far from it. Such a concept of herself would be a pollution of all the springs that vivified her being. . . . If she had chosen to descend from her assured pinnacle of modest fame and worldly possessions to the unworthy in the market-place of modern social life, she could have done so without anyone being a whit the wiser. But Robina was proud. If she exercised no physical fascination over the men who mattered, they could go to the devil. That was her attitude towards them; one of almost pugnacious don't-care-a-damativeness. Joshua's tribute was novel, a bit disconcerting. . . .

Dotley came in. Joshua asked:

"Tea or cocktails?"

"Oh, cocktails. Bring in the tray with the things, Dotley, and I'll make them."

"Certainly, madam."

"They sling them together any old way downstairs," she said apologetically.

"I don't know which I like seeing you do best," said Joshua, with his hands in his pockets. "Messing about with silver teapots and things, or shaking up cocktails."

"Pouring out tea is a very womanly occupation."

"Yes, but when you shake a cocktail"—he waved a thumb as he had seen her and Euphemia Boyd and all his artistic friends do—"there's a pose."

She laughed, mimicking him. "Lots of line?"

"Just so," he replied seriously. "But there's something else to it all the

same.”

Her voice sharpened a little. “What’s that?”

“Whatever you do here leaves a picture in my mind—and then it sort of goes out and I want it back again.”

“It’s a great pity,” she said, “that you’ve been left with an only son instead of a daughter.”

“Why?”

“She could have given you all the feminine *poses plastiques* you seem to want about the house.”

She hurriedly developed the theory of the grown-up daughter, until the tray was brought in. Then she made the cocktails somewhat self-consciously, facing him as she handled the silver shaker, so as to obliterate thumb-indicated lines. Glass in hand, he made a little awkward bow and sipped.

“I don’t think a daughter would quite do. Sutton’s quite a good boy and he looks fit and healthy, but you can’t call him handsome. As a girl he’d be dreadfully plain. I shouldn’t like a plain daughter with a heavy face and thick ankles always about me. No. I suppose I’ve been too much domesticated—or perhaps too little.”

Robina took a cigarette from a box and lit it.

“What is it, then, that you do want?”

She would have it out with him then and there, too direct a woman to find pleasure in philandering.

“Tell me,” she commanded. “Then we’ll know where we are.”

He went to the window, looked into the eye of the sunset and turned.

“I suppose I’ve made a discovery—you’ll laugh at it. But when you’re here it’s light, and when you aren’t it’s dark. I’d like you to stay here for ever.”

“As what?”

“I don’t know,” said he, standing on the edge of a swirl of elemental things. “Just as yourself. You’re the only woman who has ever mattered a damn to me . . . in that sort of way . . . the only woman who has gripped me, and got hold of me altogether and meant something I never dreamed a woman could mean to a man. I know I’m a fool, but you’re letting me talk, aren’t you? You had me the first quarter of an hour you were good enough to speak to me on the boat. . . . I didn’t know how you had me until a few minutes ago.”

“When the sunshine told you?”

“Yes. That was it. So I don’t know what I want—except you. And that’s the end of it. It would be impudence for a man like me to ask you to marry me

____”

Robina stubbed her unconsidered cigarette on the silver tray.

“That would be absurd, my friend,” she said, quite gently, “seeing that I’m married already.”

“You have been married—I know that.”

“But my husband’s still alive.”

He fell back and the crease on his brow deepened.

“I thought you were a widow.”

“Good Lord, no. Who told you that? I didn’t. You must have taken it for granted. My husband’s quite a good fellow in his funny way. He lives somewhere in Africa. I haven’t seen him for years. We correspond occasionally, of course. . . .”

“But what a brute!” cried Joshua in amazement.

“A question of definition,” she said calmly, taking another cigarette which he lighted for her, mechanically. “Many people’s idea of a brute is a man who flaunts mistresses all over the place and gets drunk and beats his wife. Humphrey’s not that kind at all. I told you he was a good sort. Most people love him.”

“I don’t understand,” said the practical though confused Joshua.

“Whose fault it was?

“If it comes to that, yes,” said he.

“I’ll tell you. It’s best you should know. Our friendship—really—I’m an honest woman—is a thing I value. It’s a new touch I feel in my life. I shouldn’t like you to misunderstand me. Well . . . I fell in love with Humphrey because he was the most beautiful being God ever made. He had the most charming manners and ways in the world. But he had the brain of a rabbit and the instincts of a sweet-natured tiger. All he wanted in life was to go about and kill things. He left me before the war, to go out to East Africa to kill things. One would have thought he had had enough of killing during the war. But he rather looked on the war as a childish interruption to the slaughtering that ought to be done by a grown man. Now, I’ve never taken the faintest interest in exterminating lions and rhinoceroses, and he hasn’t the vaguest interest in anything I do—so there you are. He likes creeping about jungles. I like living in London. We decided amiably years ago that we were bored stiff with each other and would live apart.”

“I shouldn’t say that was a happy way of living,” Joshua remarked.

“Tell me a better, in the circumstances.”

“I don’t know much about it, but people seem to be able to get divorces pretty easily these days.”

She arched her eyebrows pathetically.

“I thought you the one friend I had who wouldn’t make that suggestion. Everybody’s been rubbing it in for years.”

“It’s quite sensible,” said Joshua. “He ought to have thought of it for himself.”

“For one thing,” said Robina, “he’s a devout Catholic, and so far from giving me technical grounds for divorcing him, he wouldn’t divorce me if I openly started practice in the oldest profession in the world. Besides, if he gets half-eaten by a hippopotamus, he might want to come back and be looked after.”

“Would you do it?”

“Why not?” she laughed. “I love looking after people.”

“I thought that was my only chance,” said Joshua ruefully.

“What?”

“That, being a sort of helpless stray dog, you might have been induced to come and look after me.”

“And now it’s all off?”

“As far as that’s concerned, I suppose it is.”

“Doesn’t it strike you,” she said, with irresistible mockery in her brown eyes, “that you’ve a long, long way to go before you become the perfect lover?”

He replied, with his Midland bluntness: “I’m an honest chap, and don’t go making love to other men’s wives.”

“What are we going to do about it?”

She was very sorry for him, seeing that, in his unsubtle way, he was in earnest. The revelation of her married estate had revolutionized his conception of her, and revolution always involves pain. She regretted her gibe at the unperfected lover, and felt anxious lest he should cast down his crude image of her and stamp it into shapelessness as he had done to the clay image of the cat. So she smiled on him with all that was kindly and pitiful in her nature.

“I suppose I’ve got to do whatever you say,” replied Joshua.

“Well, we’ll do a bit of forgetting, and carry on just as usual. Is that a bargain?”

“No question about it.”

“Then there’s two bargains in one day.” She went to the Old Crome. “It’s

delicious, and you've got it cheap."

She picked up her hat from the sofa and clamped it on her head before a mirror. Joshua bent his brows.

"All the same," said he, "a man must be a mere fool not to see that you're beautiful."

"If you go on talking like that, I'll begin to agree with Carlyle. Come to dinner and meet the old Baldos to-morrow night. He'll be the next but one Lord Mayor. Lord Mayors of London are useful people for artists to know. . . . I'll do a bust of him in robes and chain and you'll do Lady Baldo, robed or otherwise. Good-bye, dear friend. Don't worry."

But Joshua did worry. Hatred clouded his candid soul. He hated the hippopotamus-hunting dog-in-the-manger who stood guard over what to him was an undesired and unnecessary Robina; what to others, having the eyes of men and not of dogs, was the perfect woman, infinitely desirable and essential. In her careless way, she had left her gloves behind on the sofa. They were very large gloves, for her hands were big and long-fingered. But they were a woman's gloves with just a bit of woman's dainty fragrance. He looked at them for a moment and then stuffed them into his pocket. He would keep that much of her, at any rate, away from the hippopotamus-hunting dog.

With a lonely evening before him, he dined at his club. He had a club, by now, a new proprietary club, The Cock-Pit, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, agape for members, to which Fenton Hill, Lady Evangeline's husband, had secured his election. There were two others of older standing, and of sedater repute, with his name on a page of their respective candidate books. But the wheels of sedate clubs move slowly, and Joshua must wait. In the meanwhile he must content himself with The Cock-Pit. It was comfortable, in spite of hearty noisiness in the bar. The dominating note of the coffee-room was Burgundy, of which the proprietors had bought a famous private cellar, and they specialized in red meats and red game (when in season) and had engaged a chef who had learned the secret of "Poularde à la Bourguignonne" in the kitchen of the Hôtel de la Poste at Beaune. The rooms were adorned with a fine collection of old sporting and especially cock-fighting prints. There were regular members, too, who curiously resembled the spectators around the cock-pit in the pictures.

"At any rate, my dear fellow," Fenton Hill had said apologetically, "the beastly place has character."

He was half-way through dinner, which he was eating with indifferent appetite, an evening paper propped up in front of him, when Fenton Hill came into the coffee-room and, with a wave of greeting and a "May I?", sat down at

Joshua's table. He liked Fenton Hill, a bluff, prematurely bald-headed, fox-hunting county gentleman. He, too, had been an artilleryman in the war, and knew all that was to be known about horses. Those were links of common interest. Fenton also professed a fervent admiration of Robina Dale. A chance reference during their dinner talk caused the shy Joshua, his head full of Robina, to burst forth into unexpected eulogy. A great woman and an exquisite artist, he declared. All the strength and beauty of Rodin. . . . Had Hill seen the beautiful Hylas, the fellow who fell overboard and was dragged down by sea-nymphs? No? She was just putting the finishing touches to the marble now—just this lovely face and an elbow above the waves. . . .

Hill looked at him with a puzzled smile.

"I never knew you cared about that sort of thing. Do you like miniatures? I've got rather a good collection."

"I like anything," said Joshua. "I can't say I know anything about miniatures; but I'd like to."

"Come round and see mine this evening, if you've nothing better to do. My wife's away."

"Delighted," said Joshua, "if I'm not intruding."

Fenton Hill smiled at the provincialism. "No, I'm at a loose end. I thought I'd get a game of bridge here, but the place is empty. You'll be doing an act of Christian charity. We'll have coffee and some of the club's old brandy, and then get along."

Joshua felt much happier than when he had entered the club, a lonely man; and he liked Fenton Hill more than ever. He yielded to a temptation to tell him about the Old Crome, feeling sure he would understand. The fox-hunting collector of miniatures understood at once. Joshua, encouraged, told him of the afternoon's Bond Street adventure with Robina Dale. And this brought back the talk to Robina.

Now it is one of the curious quirks or twists in the network of human inter-relationships that not having heard of a man for twenty years, you see his name mentioned in a newspaper, and then in a day or two there come personal twitches along all kinds of lines recalling to you his existence.

Until that afternoon Joshua had never heard of Humphrey Dale. He was to hear more of him before he left The Cock-Pit.

"Why she doesn't get rid of that husband of hers," said Fenton Hill, "none of us can understand."

"He's away shooting big game," said Joshua.

"Big game be damned. That's only to save her face. If he saw a rabbit, he'd

find it striped pink and green. He’s the rottenest little drunken swine alive, and he hasn’t got a bean . . . and she works herself to death to keep him on a mismanaged estate in Kenya Colony where he leads the filthiest life you can think of.”

Joshua’s face puckered up. “Why does she do it?”

Fenton Hill drained his glass of old brandy and set it down.

“If you want to know why women do things—ask me another.”

CHAPTER V

JOSHUA went about for some time in a subdued frame of mind. The more he saw of Robina the more did she appear to enfold within herself the insoluble mystery of woman. The knowledge of the real secret of her life increased his adoring admiration, but it also kept him dumb. His moral instincts still threw back to the Little Bethel of Trenthampton and its strict morality and inelastic sanctions, according to which there was no difference in heinousness between breaches of the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments. There had also been rubbed into his religious consciousness the uncomfortable Gospel extension of that seventh commandment to a pure and simple affair of the eyes. The general disregard of this awful and almost heathenish tabu of his tradition, as a tabu, and the acceptance of the principle merely as a convention keeping the body social together, was one of the phenomena of the new polite world into which he had been thrown. Robina was a married woman. Therefore she was tabu. But why she supported the rotten little drunkard in East Africa, who had afforded her a hundred clear grounds for perfectly respectable divorce, he couldn't make out. He forgave her generous misrepresentation of her conjugal affairs. That came naturally from her character. She did things greatly; or, at least, so thought Joshua.

He saw a good deal of Robina. He was transparent enough for her to divine these elementary workings within him, and she found it safe to mother him all the more. It was not only the mothering of a middle-aged babe discovered tossing on the waters of strange social seas; it became the fascinating task of developing the artistic germ that had been darkly latent for more than half a lifetime in a human being. Frankenstein though she might have been in desire, the growing artistic monster was none of her creating. . . . The purchase of the Old Crome was but the beginning of the gradual transformation of the soulless house into a place of beauty and comfort. To have ordained, taking things in hand after the manner of the original Expert of the Eminent Firm, would have spoiled the charm of mothering processes.

"I want something here, Robina," he would say. "What would you suggest?"

And she would answer:

"You've heaps of time. Run about and find a bit of self-expression."

A year ago the term would have conveyed as much meaning to him as an undistributed middle or a quaternion or pailletted tulle, but now he understood. So he hunted about London, like a dog in search of truffles, and having found

one to his sense, laid it at her feet. Whereupon she either praised or condemned; counselled acquisition or rejection; in which way she retained command.

Robina was a rock to which he always returned after floundering in strange waters. His floundering was inevitable. Now and then he was lost in a welter of unfamiliar and frightening emotions.

He performed many actions, after which, sitting alone in his house still in its stage of creation, he wondered whether he, Joshua Fendick, or some other fellow who had crept in under his skin, had been the performer. The man of lifelong routine had fallen into an existence of ramshackle hours. There were days when awful loneliness oppressed him; when he could think of nothing to do; other days when he worked through the daylight at his newly found art; other days when the perfection of the plaster model of some masterpiece eluded his prentice craftsmanship, and he lived in a despair by no means divine (though perhaps, indeed, it was), but of hellish agony, racking his soul with the proclamation of imbecile incompetence; other days when he could sweep along perfect roads to a race-course and see horses glorious not only in their speed, but in his newer vision of their beauty; other days when he lunched and drank and dined and supped and danced (coming home at all hours) with his gradually growing acquaintance; other days of rain, of wanderings about the house, of half-hearted work in his studio, of dreary lunches at an unsympathetic Cock-Pit, of uninspired visitings of picture-shows; days of solitary afternoons at theatres; days when he cursed July for not being December, so that he could draw the curtains, sit before the fire and dream like a dog. And the nights the same.

The young man, Sutton, was no companion. The boy’s serious thoughts were atavistic. Business was business; a solemn matter; the acute scent on the main chance; the making of money for the sake of money-making. A boy who would go far. Of his ambitions and his strenuousness Joshua had no doubt. That was one extreme view of Sutton. In the middle distance, he appeared a pleasant courteous youth, who blessed his father for lifting him from the provincial horrors of Trenthampton, but at the same time regarded his excursions into the realm of art as the meanderings of a harmless lunatic. At the other extreme, he was the modern young man of queer modern pleasure. He had his own by no means disreputable life to lead, perhaps the least disreputable life that a young generation in search of sensation has led for centuries. A hundred years ago Sutton would have been the boon-companion of Corinthian Tom and his abominable friend, Jerry; later he would have got drunk with Captain Costigan and bawled obscenities at Colonel Newcome.

Later still he would have haunted the Promenade of the Empire, and supped with venal ladies at the Continental. Sutton spent most of his spare time in crowded, blaring, beastly places, it is true; but in the company of young men and women of his own respectable class. They drank a certain amount of champagne by necessity; a vaster quantity of orangeade and such liquid innocuities by choice; danced until they were dog-tired, and then crept virtuously home to bed.

It was not a course of life for Mentor to recommend to Telemachus, but it was not such as could incur Joshua's stern disapproval, although he met his son at dinner in Eaton Terrace about once a week.

The fact remained, however, that, in spite of living under the same roof, Joshua and Sutton moved in separate spheres. So for a hundred different reasons Joshua was a lonely man. . . .

And the devil of it was that if he had been a dull dead dog of a lonely man, it wouldn't have mattered, even to himself. But within him was stirring the newly awakened spirit of a very vital man. A man suddenly confronted with the spiritualities, the colours, the fascinations of existence which he ought to have discovered a quarter of a century ago. He was restless, frantically impelled to make up for lost time. But how to do it, even under the auspices of Robina, Lady Evangeline, and Victor Spens, he didn't know. He was like a water spaniel running up and down a spring-board longing to dive into the sea, yet unable to choose the spot for taking off.

Now and then other people, for reasons of their own, gave him a push and over he went. A wealthy, healthy, young-looking man of five-and-forty, of ingenuous countenance and ingenuous modesty, carries about with him no veil or emblem, such as a Lama's robe and begging-bowl, rendering him sacrosanct to a predatory sex. . . .

There was the affair with Mrs. Reggie Blackadder, for instance, a widow called by the old-fashioned but significant name of Dora. Gifts. She lived by them. She also gave in return. That's why her friends, in her own queer social circle, regarded her as an honest woman. Joshua met her at a country-house party near Newmarket, during one of the late meetings. The lady had but to turn a propeller and set whirring the unsuspected machinery of God knows what artistic cravings, reachings towards beauty, vital impulses within Joshua, and Joshua sailed up heavenwards. It was a wonderful experience, breathless, exhilarating; but he crashed very badly when there swam before his eyes a moneylender's account for fifteen hundred pounds which, if left unpaid, would bring immediate disaster to his companion in Cytherean airs.

"It's too terrible," said the lady. "A bolt from the blue." He didn't quite

know what a bolt from the blue was—nor does anybody else. “Only came this morning. And with it a letter from my stockbrokers.”

She spun the usual tale of confidently expected dividends from suddenly depreciated shares.

He said in his honesty: “This is only a bluff. Leave me those sharks’ letter. I’ll deal with ’em.”

“But I must have the money to pay them with, my dear.”

“Not a bit of it,” said Joshua. “Here’s the very man that will help us.”

Victor Spens, precise, dark, saturnine, passed across the terrace in front of the morning-room by whose open French windows they were standing. She seized his wrist, stared at him in agony.

“Nobody but you must see that.”

“Two heads are better than one. Victor’s a sound chap. Trust to us.”

He went out. “Victor!”

Victor Spens halted and strolled to the window. The lady called to Joshua:

“You damned fool, come back!”

“What’s up?” asked Victor Spens.

“Mrs. Blackadder’s in trouble, and, seeing you, I thought I’d consult you, as a friend and a man of the world—but it seems——”

“It seems,” cried the lady, “that you’re no more use than a sick headache. Give me the letter and don’t you dare say anything about it until I tell you to. Promise?”

“Of course,” said the bewildered Joshua, giving her the paper, which she snatched away.

“Word of honour?”

“Word of honour.”

“I’m in no kind of trouble at all, Victor. Joshua belongs to the middle of the last century and has discovered a mare’s nest.” She laughed, and quickly reconstituted herself the amazing courtesan, and lightly smacked Joshua’s cheeks.

“You silly old idiot. Who has got a cigarette?”

Victor, more nervously quick than Joshua, supplied her needs. She changed the talk for a moment or two, and with a secret menacing glance at Joshua went away, leaving the two men on the terrace.

Victor Spens watched her pass through the far open door of the morning-room and turned to Joshua.

“How much this time?”

Joshua cried in sudden indignation: “What do you mean?”

“A couple of thousand? The moneylender stunt?”

Joshua gaped. “Stunt? How did you know? There’s no stunt about it. Mrs. Blackadder’s in a tight corner and she came to me for advice—I saw you——”

“You said so before, my dear fellow,” said Victor Spens. “But if you’ll allow me to say so, without any danger of fisticuffs”—Joshua was regarding him angrily with hands tightly clenched by his sides—“for you’re a noted amateur boxer, and I’m not—if you’ll listen quietly, I’ll tell you, that the last thing the dear lady wanted was advice. She wanted money.”

“Naturally—to pay the moneylender.”

Victor Spens, dry and immaculate in grey flannel suit and Old Etonian tie, sat on the low parapet of the terrace and lit a cigarette.

“You called me into this business, my dear friend. I didn’t butt in. Why the lady should have asked your advice in her financial concerns is no affair of mine. But she did. You said so. Would you still like me to give you what’s loosely called a friendly lead?”

Joshua reflected. The lady had called him a damned fool, in a peculiarly unpleasant tone. No woman on earth had ever called him a damned fool. Never had he seen such hard hatred and threat in a woman’s eyes as he had caught in hers the moment before her exit. He passed his hands over a perplexed brow. For all the darkness and inhibitions of his life, Joshua was not a fool. The calm, cool, ironical man sitting on the low parapet before him, his bust outlined clear against the green and sloping lawn, in the limpid summer air, the man whose life was passed in dealing with the singular relations of England with Poland and China and Mexico and God knows where, had been, from their first meeting on the “Carynthia,” consistently his friend. Why, he couldn’t make out. Joshua was a modest soul. But there it was. Victor Spens, C.B., C.M.G., and everything else but K.C.B., to which eminence, in the natural course of promotion, every one said he would rise six months hence, had, as far as he, Joshua, was concerned, no axe to grind, no fish to fry. Victor just liked him as a human being. It was funny, but he couldn’t assign any other reason for Victor’s continued little acts of friendship.

It was one of those moments that mean much in a man’s life. To Joshua an explosive moment—a silly sort of explosive moment suggestive of the puffing flash of magnesium while being photographed at a public dinner. He almost shook his head and blinked and blew the smoke from his nostrils.

“Friendly lead? Yes. . . . Anyhow, I’ll believe what you say. You’re trying to tell me that the moneylender’s letter wasn’t genuine.”

Victor nodded. “You’ve got it right, if not first time, at least soon enough. She worked it off on Charlie Woolff, who ought to have known better. Anyone can get note-paper printed with a correct-looking letter-heading. Anyone can type a communication. And anyone can sign a fictitious name. Anyone can have a letter posted to herself. Did she show you the envelope?”

“No.”

“You weren’t even worth that trouble, my dear fellow.”

“But the woman’s a——”

“Whatever you like to call her,” said Victor, calmly interrupting.

“But if so,” cried the scandalized Joshua, “why is she here in this house? Why am I here? And, damn it all, why are you here?”

“You think the last question’s a poser, don’t you?” said Victor with a thin smile. “It really isn’t. Listen. I’m going to be damned impertinent. But it’s for your good. You can kick me into the middle of the lawn if you like, and I shan’t resist. . . . Will you?”

“Oh, get on,” cried Joshua.

“Well. . . . To answer your three questions. One. Dora Blackadder’s here because it’s here that she belongs. You must have seen for yourself. . . . Our hosts, the Etheringtons, are charming enough people in their way. But the crowd round them is corrupt. The tainted end of the society joint. Have you heard anything in this house that hadn’t a gamey flavour? You must see for yourself that you don’t find such people at houses like Fenton Hill’s, although he and Evangeline seem to do nothing else but hunt and race. I mention them because they’re common friends. With them, as with the enormous mass of decent folk, everything’s clean and sweet. Think it’s clean and sweet here? No. Reason for Dora Blackadder’s presence. Question Number Two. Why are you here? Because you’re supposed to be rich and they think you a mug. A specializing mug. You know far more about racing form than anyone of them could take the trouble to learn. You don’t bet yourself, but you can give them valuable information. They also regard you as a nice sort of fellow to live upon. They’ve been trying to persuade you to buy a yacht and take ’em all on board, haven’t they?”

“They have,” said Joshua.

“You’re the most potentially useful thing they’ve come across for a long time. So that’s why you’re here.”

“And you—knowing all this——?”

Victor rose and threw away his cigarette. “Question three. That’s a bit difficult.” His dark lined face grew serious as he looked directly into Joshua’s

candid blue eyes. “They had the infernal impudence to ask me down. They try to rope in anybody they can. I’ve refused heaps of times. Then I heard you were coming. So did Lady Evangeline. She said, ‘For God’s sake, go.’ So I accepted. . . . I’m glad I did. . . .”

Joshua walked up and down the flagged terrace, his arms behind his back. The past hour had been an amazement and a bewilderment. Oh yes, he thought, he had crashed right enough. The lady who had carried him heavenwards belonged, beyond human doubt, to the race of which “The Scarlet Woman” of his religious childhood had been the awful prototype. He had been inveigled into her snares like any callow stripling. He had been a mere mug.

He pondered over Victor’s last words, and thanked him. All the while he had been uneasily aware that Victor wasn’t of the same class as the rest of the house-party. . . .

“It was damned good of you—and damned good of Lady Evangeline to have thought of it. I’ll never forget.” He made one or two paces. “At the same time, why didn’t you give me a hint?”

“There are some things a fellow can do, and others he can’t.”

Joshua met Victor’s smile. “I see,” said he. “And now what shall I do?”

“Get your traps packed; order your car, write the most grateful and regretful of notes to your hostess, and clear out—called away on sudden business.”

“But Mrs. Blackadder?”

“A bit of jewellery from Bond Street has been known to have its elegant consolations. Do you remember the exiled king in Daudet’s book, who always settled these little affairs by sending the lady a ouistiti? She’ll sell yours at once and bear you no malice.”

“That sounds rather beastly and cynical,” said the perplexed Joshua.

“This is a beastly and cynical atmosphere we’ve got ourselves into,” replied Victor. “I’ll cut the racing—it’s the last day—and motor up with you if you like.”

“Splendid,” said Joshua.

Thus came to an end the affair with Mrs. Reggie Blackadder. She wrote a charming letter of thanks for the Bond Street gewgaw, calling it divine—a word which Joshua, in spite of his illiteracy, had begun to shiver at, and the next time she met him—in a London restaurant—cut him dead; and in that kind of death Joshua found soothing of a troubled spirit.

There were other occasions, of course, when unexpected pushes sent him over. But he learned to walk warily. He learned to distinguish the decent folk, with whom, in the words of Victor Spens's harangue, everything was clean and sweet, from the small tainted crew of degenerates and blood-suckers who are supposed to be the ordinary types of English society. All the same, what it matters to record is that Joshua discovered a new zest in life, and felt within himself the youthful impulse towards many adventures. He longed to see again the world which he had but lately beheld with unseeing eyes. So he spent the summer in travel. Against the attractions of a pair of sparkling eyes and trim legs encased in flesh-coloured stockings may be set the no less vehement attractions of cold immortal beauty in marble before which he could stand in wonder in the galleries of Rome and Florence. Trenthampton and Swan & Co. and the Redesdale Road and boots and the pallid, lifeless Bella seemed very far away.

He got into the habit of dashing to places, by aeroplane as far on his way as he could, and filling himself full of them for an excited week, and then dashing back again, so as to digest them in his home in Eaton Terrace.

Robina had once told him of Anatole France's definition of criticism: adventures among masterpieces. Why not, she had said, include Life with Art? Why not adventures among masterpieces of humanity? Joshua, in his sober way, thought it sound doctrine. It extended imaginatively the lesson taught by Victor Spens. It was his nature to ponder seriously over such suggestions. When he had asked where human masterpieces could be found, among which to have the aforesaid adventures, she had replied, perhaps rather platitudinously—for every word that drops from an Egeria's lips can't be a priceless pearl of wisdom:

"Any old where, from a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace to the crowd round a fried-fish stall in the Whitechapel Road."

"I'd have to get introductions to both sets," said he. "To say nothing of all in between. But I do see what you're getting at," he added hastily, lest she should be hurt by his unusual flippancy. " 'The rank is but the guinea-stamp.' Who said that? Shakespeare?"

"Burns."

"I'll remember it," said Joshua.

He remembered many things, having the tenacious memory not only of the highly trained man of business, but that of the newly awakened man eager to store his mind with facts and sensations.

In the meanwhile, during all this search for adventures among masterpieces both of art and humanity, he became vaguely conscious of a craving to create

some masterpiece of his own. In his untrained mind issues became confused. Criticism was one thing, Creation another. In a dim way he haggled with a Truth. If criticism was an adventure among other people’s masterpieces, creation of one’s own masterpiece must be the Supreme Adventure.

Then one day the semi-lunatic thought electrified him. Why shouldn’t he be a creator?

CHAPTER VI

It was many months, perhaps a year, afterwards—a period at any rate inspired by dreams and materially filled with stolid, conscientious work at his craft—that Susan Keene, new planet, swam into his ken; swam, that is to say, in all her plenitude. Hitherto he had been conscious only of her as adumbrated by the moulded curves of her back in Robina's studio. It had been a sign and a portent, setting him on paths of speculation, which he had instinctively followed to a hundred wonderful discoveries.

One of them had been the fascination of Dotley, the butler's, head; plump yet austere, authoritative yet pliant, suave yet secretive. There was no hairiness, the sculptor's horror, to worry him. Dotley was clean-shaven and bald. Dotley had sat to him. Under the anxious supervision of Euphemia Boyd, Joshua had created in green wax a Dotley more like Dotley than Dotley's mirror revealed when he was shaving. Robina criticized, though admired, his first study from life. Indeed, she felt a thrill of pride as she pressed both his hands in congratulation. It was her doing, her inspiration. She had awakened the artist that had slept within him all these unfruitful years. She never gave a thought to the back of Susan Keene.

Yet Joshua, holding in mind the tenderness of those melting contours, had on various occasions asked for news of the living model whom Robina had carried, stricken with pneumonia, to the nursing-home. And Robina had given casual answer to his questions. The girl was well again; had resumed her work as model by day and programme-seller by night. She herself had had no further use for her. She had lost sight of the girl, possibly for ever. Such things happened every day. The thing he had admired was but a sketch in which she had so far lost interest that she had broken up the clay. Once he said:

"It was one of the jolliest things you ever did."

She laughed and, with a wave of the hand, dismissed the young woman's back from the region of conversation.

For a man who could inform green wax with the spiritual butlerdom of Dotley, an upstairs bedroom became an absurd sphere of artistic effort. He took and furnished (with Robina's aid) a well-lit Chelsea studio, one of a nest in a funny little sham Queen Anne Street. There, Euphemia Boyd having taught him all he could learn from her, he set up on his own, with his name, "Mr. Joshua Fendick," on a brass plate outside the door, and the head of Dotley, cast in bronze, occupying a proud position in the studio, in the midst of a medley of other creations. Models knocked at his door. . . . Joshua stood

agape on the brink of happiness.

His first meeting with Susan Keene was the most commonplace occurrence in the world.

It was a spring afternoon of pouring rain. At five o'clock, the appointed hour, Joshua's car drew up before Robina's steps. Manifold, the chauffeur, dashed up to ring the bell. The door was opened by Robina herself. Joshua scudded through the downpour and found in the vestibule, not only Robina, but a strangely beautiful girl.

"My dear Joshua, don't send Manifold away. Tell him to wait."

"Of course he's going to wait," said Joshua.

"You've come like an angel from heaven," said Robina. "This silly child has been wanting for the last half-hour to swim to Bloomsbury and I've not allowed her. . . . Oh, Joshua—this is Miss Keene—Mr. Fendick."

They exchanged bows.

"Why, of course, Manifold can take Miss Keene anywhere she wants to go," said Joshua.

"Oh, I couldn't—thank you so much," said the girl.

There was a contralto quality in the girl's voice that set Joshua wondering. It suggested something. Was it the notes of a wood-pigeon he once cherished in his boyhood? He said:

"Why not? It'll amuse my chauffeur far more to drive about than to sit still in the rain."

"Do as you're told, my dear," said Robina, her hand on the latch of the door.

The girl looked from one to the other.

"It's awfully kind of you, sir."

The "sir" shocked his ears for a second. Then a swift glance showed him a modesty, almost a poverty, of neat attire, uncharacteristic of Robina's friends; it also made him aware of unusual beauty. She was fairly tall, and beneath the cheap coat and short skirt he could, with his new vision, divine a lithe body of supple curves. Her features were classically regular; her lips were slightly reddened according to the present universal fashion; but she had no colour on her pale cheeks, and in her dark eyes there seemed to lurk a perpetual timidity. She gave the impression of impersonal, almost animal gentleness.

Joshua opened the door and called to the chauffeur, who came up the steps with the car umbrella.

“Drive this lady wherever she wants to go and come back for me.”

She threw a look of scared thanks over her shoulder, as she turned on the steps.

“Who’s your pretty young friend?” he asked Robina.

“Susan Keene.”

The name conveyed nothing to him. He asked for further enlightenment. Robina explained. He stared at her.

“The girl with the back?”

She laughed. “Yes. The girl with the back.”

“Well, I’m blowed,” said Joshua.

They went down to her pretty little drawing-room and had tea cosily over the fire. He had come to discuss the affairs of the young man, Sutton, who appeared to be enamoured of a young woman of high degree. Her father was a thirteenth baron in uneasy circumstances; still, she was an Honourable, the Hon. Victoria Pelling. Joshua was somewhat perplexed by the possible mingling of the Fendick stock with the aristocracy.

“I don’t know her personally, but I know all about her. A good little girl,” said Robina. “If Sutton gets her, he’ll be in luck.”

They discussed modern youth and the dangerous conditions of their present upbringing, after the way of elders, until the topic was exhausted. It was Robina herself who set the real talk of the afternoon on the track of Susan Keene.

“There’s a girl who’s rather a problem. What’s going to become of her? She’s able to look after herself all right. She’s full of sense and character; besides, she confesses to a horror of men. And it’s from men that comes the danger to a pretty girl like that—unless she marries, and she says she won’t. But what’s going to happen when she’s too old to be a model and too unattractive to sell programmes in the stalls of the Trafalgar Theatre? And now she’s afraid of being thrown out by a new management—a dreadful crew who are known to put their own people in all over the house. That’s why she came to see me this afternoon.”

Joshua agreed that it was jolly hard lines on the poor girl. Then he asked suddenly:

“Why do you say she has a horror of men?”

“Well, you see, she had a stepfather——”

“Oh God!” cried Joshua.

She interposed quickly. “I don’t think it was as bad as that. . . . It may have

been. He was a dreadful creature. . . . She has told me, of course, all about it. Besides, it was in all the papers at the time—about three years ago—so there's no harm telling you. Her mother, it seems, owned a small farm near a little town called Withering. . . ."

Joshua rose, and swept his red thatch.

"Withering—that's my county—it's near Trenthampton. You're not talking about the Withering murder by any chance?"

"Yes. Do you know about it?"

"Don't I? One of my foremen was caught for the inquest—jury, you know. Good Lord! Is that the poor girl in the case? The people's name"—he snapped a finger—"wait a bit—was Burrows."

"That's right," said Robina.

"And Keene? Why, I knew her father—same Lodge—Freemasons. He died, and the widow married Burrows. Of course—of course. No wonder she looks scared."

They pieced together, Robina from Susan Keene's narrative, and Joshua from his memories of the reports of local newspapers, and of his foreman's gossip, the main facts of an abominable tragedy.

The Keenes had owned a small farm near Withering, on the Trenthampton side, for two or three generations. They were capable, honest and God-fearing folk, and attained such prosperity as allowed them to send their children to private schools where they did not mingle with the children of their farm labourers, who underwent the compulsory County School education. The last of the Keenes, one Roger, married the daughter of a respectable tradesman in the little town of Withering. Susan was born. In the course of time she was sent to the genteel boarding-school where most of the Withering girls acquired such culture as should suffice them for the rest of their natural lives. In the course of time, also, when Susan was sixteen, her father died. The farm became her mother's property, and Susan was taken away from school to help her mother in the management. Now, one must have farmer's blood and farmer's tradition in one in order to manage a farm. Mrs. Keene was of urban descent. Things went badly. Mrs. Keene appointed as manager an experienced man, George Burrows, who came from the south of the county. He devoted himself to the Keene interests. He devoted himself, also, to Mrs. Keene, still a youngish, personable woman; and being himself a fresh-faced, hearty, lusty fellow, he eventually found such favour in her eyes as to make her consent to marry him. That is how Susan, a slim, dreamy-eyed slip of a girl of eighteen, got a stepfather.

Neither Robina nor Joshua was able to trace shade by shade the gathering

horror that overspread the lives of Mrs. Burrows and the girl. The curtain was only lifted for them two years after the marriage. The two years had left in the child's mind almost inchoate impressions of a male brute in all its aspects of male brutality; impressions of quarrels, demands for money violent and imperious, drunkenness, physical cruelty, wide-spread infidelities, satyr-like suggestions to herself. . . . Once he brought a woman into the house, and Mrs. Burrows had to summon a couple of farm-hands to throw her out.

Why had she not divorced him long before? Even under the unamended law of those quite recent days, she had every ground. Who can say? Susan maintained to Robina that, in spite of all, she loved him. Why, her inexperience could not tell. Robina, perhaps with riper knowledge of queer and sensitive feminine chords (hadn't she herself a drunken little swine of a husband whom she was content to keep in Kenya Colony?), opined that, now and again, the man, in the dominant way of the handsome and lusty male, got hold of a woman by the flesh. That is as may be. Susan, Robina, Joshua, the newspaper reporters, the coroner and his jury—none of them knew. The psychology of the matter was a subject for speculation, interesting, but unprofitable. They had only hard and undeniable fact for guide.

The climax came the night after the throwing out of the stranger woman.

The joint memories of the two reconstitutors of the tragedy set the scene. It was an old, rambling farm-house, with one large living-room on the ground floor, the upstairs a rabbit-warren of small bedrooms on different levels, as the place had been added to during the unremembered centuries. That, they agreed, was important. An elderly maid-servant slept somewhere up in the attics and could not be expected to hear anything that went on in the great stone-flagged living-room where the family ate and sat and drank and generally had their being. Robina imagined a primly furnished parlour off this, where the family gathered on days of marriage, christening and funeral, and pictured a plush-covered table in the middle whereof were set the brands of cake and wine symbolical of the respective events. Joshua, with knowledge, applauded her imaginative accuracy.

The bedrooms were on the first floor. The main bedroom into which so many Keenes had led their brides, in which so many had been born, in which so many had religiously given up the ghost, was over the great living-hall. Mrs. Burrows for some months had abandoned this, giving it over to her husband, and had taken refuge in a room near by on a different level, next to her daughter's.

It was a night of howling storm. The man Burrows had left the farm at five o'clock that afternoon. At ten-thirty he had not returned. Mother and daughter went to bed, Susan having stayed awhile in the outraged and agitated woman's

room. She heard her mother lock her door. She herself undressed and went to bed, and, exhausted by more than twenty-four hours of misery, fell asleep.

Soon afterwards—the old Dutch clock in the living-room stood at half-past twelve when she went down—she was awakened by a sudden crack like the noise of a firearm. She sat up, confused, in bed. After quite an appreciable time—it seemed to her not to be a matter of seconds, but of minutes—she heard a second report. Then she sprang from her bed, instinctively seized a wrap hanging on the foot, and, turning on the landing electric switch, rushed downstairs. On the flagged floor of the dining-room she found the bodies of her mother and her stepfather sprawling and motionless, some six or eight feet apart, with a pistol lying midway between them.

She knelt by her mother, who still made convulsive little movements with her fingers; but a moment afterwards a wheeze came from her throat, and her body sagged. She had been shot through the heart. Susan turned to her stepfather. He was motionless, apparently with a bullet through his brain.

She ran screaming for the elderly servant, who, coming down, kept wits enough to tell her not to touch the bodies or the revolver until the arrival of doctor and police. These, summoned by telephone, took over the respective tasks.

The woman was in her night-dress; the man in his usual day-kit, loose jacket, breeches and gaiters. There had been some sort of struggle. A chair was upset. A rug kicked away. The man reeked of whisky. . . .

Up to this it was plain sailing for the joint memories of Robina and Joshua. Then things became intricate. An ordinary murder and suicide are common occurrences for a coroner to deal with, when it is obvious who committed the murder and who committed suicide. But the fact which gave the inquest a notoriety, especially in the local press, apart from the exposed details of a miserable home, was the doubt as to the respective acts of the two personages in the drama. Both were dead when Susan Keene came down. But which of them shot the other? Medical evidence tended to prove that the wound through the head of Burrows could not have been self-inflicted. Also, though perhaps physically possible, it was scarcely probable that a woman should shoot herself, straight from the front, and not obliquely, through the heart. People shooting themselves in a second of despair instinctively put a pistol to their heads. Joshua remembered that in Trenthampton folks argued this way and that, and demonstrated, with fountain-pens or dessert spoons, how the shots could have been fired. The verdict, after all, was that which mattered. The jury found that George Burrows had been killed by his wife, who had then committed suicide by shooting herself through the heart. And that was the end of it as far as the public was concerned.

But to Susan it was the beginning of an existence desperate in many ways. The farm had to be sold to pay off heavy mortgages consented to by Mrs. Burrows in order to meet her husband's crazy and brutal expenditure. When lawyers and Income Tax authorities had arrived at a final settlement, only a derisory heritage was left for Susan Keene. She must earn her living. So she came to London to get the horror of Withering out of her mind.

"Judging from her eyes, she doesn't seem to have got rid of the horror yet."

"Can you wonder, poor child?" said Robina.

"It's a beast of a world for some people," he said sententiously; "we're lucky ones—and don't let us forget it."

That evening Joshua dined early at The Cock-Pit, and drove to the Trafalgar Theatre, a quarter of an hour before the advertised time of the play's beginning. The box-office keeper handed him the ticket for the stall for which he had telephoned. The vestibule was as lonely as a catacomb. The commissionaire solemnly took his counterfoil and directed him downstairs to the left. At the foot of the dimly lighted staircase stood two programme-girls, one of whom was Susan. In her neat uniform, black dress, black apron, and great black bow in her hair, she looked rather commonly demure. He handed her his ticket. She threw open the swing-doors leading to the stalls and followed him into an almost empty theatre. The play had been a failure and was at its run's expiring gasp. There was no one in the stalls and only a few scattered oddments of folk in the pit beyond. The boxes yawned emptily. Even the orchestra had not arisen from the under-stage. It was a depressing and noiseless vault.

Susan preceded him to the second row.

"The fourth seat. Programme, sir?"

He looked around and shivered.

"I don't think I'll stay. Besides, I didn't come to see the show. I came to see you. My chauffeur do you all right?"

"Perfectly, sir, and I'm glad to be able to thank you again for your kindness."

"That's nothing. Now look here—I know you can't talk to me in this place for more than a minute or so. . . . I'm a very great friend of Mrs. Dale. You could see that. She told me what you did for a living. I heard about you last year when you had pneumonia. Mrs. Dale tells me you're losing your job here . . . I'm a sculptor . . ."

He couldn't help pausing. It was the first time in his life that he had deliberately called himself a sculptor, and the proclamation charmed his ears.

“Yes, sir,” said Susan.

“Well, I want a model. Very badly. Do you think you could come and see me to-morrow with a view to business?”

Her lips moved in a faint smile. From an artist the phrase seemed odd. Artists had never asked her to come and see them “with a view to business.” Still, his honest eyes and his obvious intimacy with Mrs. Dale gave her confidence.

“At what time, sir?”

“Eleven o’clock?” He slipped a card from his waistcoat pocket into her hand. It was a prepared card, the Eaton Terrace address having been carefully inked out, and “5, Glebe Studios” substituted. “Now I’ll go,” said he. “And I’ll make an excuse.”

He turned outside the swing-doors and for the benefit of the other dismal-looking programme-girl said in simulated anger:

“If I’d known it was the fag end of a dud show I’d never have come. Good night, miss.”

Then he realized that he had over-acted—perhaps reverted to type. Habitués of the stalls don’t call programme-sellers “Miss.”

He passed through the still ghostly vestibule rather angry with himself; still more angry when he realized that the excellent Manifold was not waiting for him with the car.

But when he reached his house in a taxi, he found solace till bedtime in the patient drawing of an ear from a plaster cast.

CHAPTER VII

THE white marbles and plaster casts and green curtains and chair-coverings of the studio gleamed gay in the clear light. Joshua surveyed them admiringly. Besides various copies from the immortals and the bronze bust of the smooth Dotley, there were sufficient testimonies to his own activity to give the place a professional air. He lifted the cloth from a half-finished boyish head and looked at it with some satisfaction. He was getting on, getting the hang of the thing. He had accentuated ever so little the puckish smile at the corner of the model's lips, having at the back of his mind the little Laughing Faun in the Louvre. Laughter and youth and happiness: that was what he wanted to express. It was going to be jolly good. He wished the model was coming for a sitting, as he would like to have worked at it in the mood of a spring morning. But he had put the boy off, having given Susan Keene the boy's appointment.

Following his gospel of keeping fit, he had walked to the studio through the sunny streets in a state of mind half-blithe, half-dubious. What was he going to say to the girl when he got her there? Robina had told him she had horror of men. No wonder, after her domestic experiences. But perhaps, with a mild, easy-going chap like himself, she might feel at her ease.

He put on his smock, glad that the woman attached to the Glebe Studios, who looked after him, had not put out a clean one. A few clay finger-marks made the kit more business-like. The grandfather's clock in the corner marked five minutes to eleven. He took up a stick and began to fiddle with the boy's hair. At eleven o'clock the studio bell rang. He went to the door and admitted Susan. He smiled.

"You are punctual."

"People won't employ you if you're not, sir," she said.

"Come in and sit down." He placed a chair, and took another. "I want to talk to you."

She bowed her head slightly and regarded him with dark, timid eyes. She had the touch of red on her lips, as yesterday, but she had lost last night's demureness. She looked far prettier, far more interesting in her cheap, conventional day costume than in the smart uniform of the programme-seller. The great black bow on her head had given her an incongruous air of coquetry. The little beige hat, coming not too far over her eyes, brought her down to a natural modesty. Again he was struck by the pallor and delicate modelling of her face.

“What do you sit for?” he asked. It was best to start in a professional way.

Her shoulders moved in the tiniest shrug.

“Anything.”

“That means——?”

“Everything.”

“Of course I knew you sat, over a year ago, for Mrs. Dale, but I thought that was rather a favour.”

“Perhaps it was at the time,” she replied in her low, unemotional tones, and without a flicker of interest on her face. “She was the first I posed for in the nude. Head and shoulders and arms was what I was accustomed to. But I’ve posed two or three times since for the semi-nude, to serious people.”

Joshua rose abruptly and crossed the studio to the diamond-paned lattice window, which he threw open. He looked out on to the trim little garden running along his side of the studios, at the silent, freshly made street, at the trim little gardens running along the fronts of the sham Queen Anne cottage-houses across the way, struggling with a brand-new set of emotions and inspirations. The Powers of Little Bethel fought with those of the Temple of Art in Joshua’s soul. He could not bear the thought of this tragic child stripping herself naked before the common eyes of a man; and yet beneath those garments of convention her form must be exquisitely beautiful. Must be? It was. He had vicarious knowledge of it through Robina’s sketch. Her technical word “semi-nude” mitigated his sense of profanation. That wonderful curved back which he had so idiotically attempted to copy. . . . The houses before him grew into a blur.

He saw before him a tender woman’s body cast up on a beach, face downwards, waves covering her half-way to the curves below her waist, her arms spread out beyond her head, her fingers gripping something, the thin water of ebb just lapping the under-part of the arms. She wasn’t dead. She was alive, but at the point of death, with one last grip on life.

The blur faded. The perky houses opposite shone clear. Something of the vision remained. He felt cold all over, as one who has seen the uncanny. By God, he thought, that must be the girl’s history! The Powers of Little Bethel fled helter-skelter. He lit a cigarette, inhaled a few great puffs and turned.

“Do you think you could sit to me for the semi-nude?”

“I think so.”

The furrow deepened across his brow.

“This is what I’ve got in my head.” He went to his table, and with a bit of charcoal roughed out the scheme of his vision. “You see, I should only want

that much of your back and your arms—you can—well, arrange things otherwise, as you like. I don't know yet whether I'll have a big wave coming over you, in which case I'd have to have a model set up and you'd get underneath it—sort of cubby-hole." He laughed, and she responded with a faint movement of her lips. "Of course," he added, "we could find you something nice and soft to lie on."

"It would be quite an easy pose," she said quietly.

"It's fixed up, then?"

"As you like, sir."

They descended to the lowlier levels of finance. To offer her the ordinary model's wage per hour seemed an outrage. And yet the offer of a fee in keeping with her beauty might incur misrepresentation of motive. She mentioned what she had recently received from Sir Haddo Thwaites. At the mention of the great name he shrank into insignificance. Who was he to compete in the production of beauty with the Master? He ought to pay the girl a fine for his impudence. On the other hand, to outpay Haddo Thwaites would be worse than impudence.

"Would that be—enough?"

"Quite enough."

"Then that's all right," he said cheerily. Then, rubbing his red thatch, "I'd like to begin to-morrow; but this idea of mine is a tall order. It needs a good deal of preparation. I'll have to rig up a special platform for you—a big one—and a modelling-stand of my own. I was thinking of something about a third life-size. Important, you know. There would have to be an armature of sorts. So I couldn't begin with you till next week. Would that suit you? I'll drop you a line to fix the time."

She acquiesced in her impersonal way, and rose. He felt a little qualm of disappointment; within him there was arising the sensitive film of an artist's vanity. Neither by change of expression nor by word did she show any interest in the artistic creation of which she was to be the central figure. The young woman who sold him clay was far more enthusiastic over what he was going to do with it. He took up his charcoal scrawl and appealed to her somewhat ruefully:

"If we can get away with it, it'll be rather a jolly thing, won't it?"

"I'm sure I hope so," she said.

After she had gone he walked about the studio in some perplexity. Impersonal: that was the only word to describe her attitude. She didn't seem to care a damn about anything; except, of course, earning enough money to carry

on a modest existence. Whether it was her own body or a cardboard wave that he copied was all the same to her. She was as remote from him as the washed-up woman who gripped at the bit of rock or what-not projecting out of the sands. . . . So much the better, perhaps, more in keeping with the passionless, half-spent figure of his dream. There would be nothing to take his mind from those contours of abstract beauty. On the other hand, knowing all about the girl and her history, he was aware of a curious interest in her future development. As a practical man, he wished she were more human. Then an almost humorous idea occurred to him. As his model for a laborious piece of work she would be thrown in touch with him for a long time. Why not experiment? Why not try to make her more human?

Then he began to wonder what Robina would think of it.

Robina, of necessity, must be told both of his artistic conception and of the engagement of Susan. Not that she ran in and out of his studio. She was far too busy a woman. But as Egeria, she claimed knowledge of all that went on, and paid periodical visits of inspection. She had found dreadful fault, for instance, with his first attack on the boy's head, and, as it was a Decree, he had to scrap it and begin all over again. To hide work and model from Robina was unthinkable. And why, in the name of common sense, should he hide them? Yet he shrank from the possibility of a familiar ironic gleam in Robina's eyes and an ironic twist of her lips. Even Joshua's not over-sensitive mind could register certain sex vibrations.

It did register them, more or less as he had anticipated, when he made what almost seemed to be his confession to Robina.

He began shrewdly with the exposition of his ambitious scheme. There was the girl, he said—it could happen to any girl—modern girl out swimming, caught by a heavy flood-tide and knocked half senseless and cast up just in time to clutch something so as to resist the suck-back. . . . He had prepared a drawing to show her—a little more elaborate than his original charcoal design.

"I hope you're not going to give the young woman a bathing-cap and a maillot," she said.

He protested against her flippancy. The thing he had in mind must be done in the grand manner or not at all. The figure would be nude, her hair loose and swept across her shoulder. Eventually it would be in marble. He had already begun carving, as she knew. By the time the modelling was done to his satisfaction, he would have learned to tackle hammer and chisel.

"Don't you think you're taking on rather a big thing?" she asked, seriously.

"I do. But why shouldn't I? I haven't got to earn my living at it. I can take my time. Years if I like. I know I've got to study hands and arm muscles and

hair, to say nothing of the sea. It's going to be a big thing in my life—perhaps the biggest thing yet."

"If you feel it that way, go ahead."

"Of course I feel it that way," he declared.

She studied his pencil drawing. Yes. It was an artist's conception. Perfectly executed in marble by a man of genius, it would be a masterpiece. But, although Joshua had revealed a disconcerting talent, he had as yet shown no signs of genius. She dreaded his disappointment. It was so easy to outline in pencil a tremendous plastic conception; so difficult to carry it out in the round. And this conception of his lay in a prickly thorn bush of difficulties. The thing would be horizontal, not upright. It would not be altogether in the round; but of the highest kind of high relief. The mutual yet disproportionate yielding of sand and body would be a job which she herself would not undertake lightly. Judging from the drawing, and indeed, unless the woman lay perfectly prone, an ugly pose, there would have to be the indication of a crumpled up breast, a beast of a thing to get right. She pointed out these brambles in his path. Not that she would discourage him. Heaven forbid. But it was her duty to tell him what he was in for.

"Your heart's too good to be broken," she said kindly.

He laughed and proclaimed a solid old heart. It might be different if he were looking for fame, like a lot of these young people, their friends, who were wearing away their souls in order to get there—wherever "there" was. He just wanted to do the darned thing for its own sake, and he would do it if it took him the rest of his life.

Robina looked at the drawing again. Suddenly it struck her that she had been somewhat obtuse in dealing with the idea solely from the point of view of technique. That indicated curve of the back was peculiarly familiar. She passed her finger over it.

"You're a bit of a copy-cat, after all, aren't you?"

"I thought you'd have seen that at once," said Joshua. "It's what started me off. I've been wanting to do it ever since. I feel I must do it." He paused for a moment and, reddening a little, blurted out, "I've engaged the same model—Susan Keene."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Robina. Then, conscious of the unworthy feline, she added quickly: "I thought she never posed for the nude—at any rate to men."

"She has been sitting to Haddo Thwaites."

"So she told me the other day. But I didn't know it was for the undraped

figure.”

“I don’t think she tells anybody anything unless she’s questioned,” said Joshua; “and then she answers like a what-d’ye-call-it?—an automaton.”

“If you treat her as an automaton, all will be well,” said Robina, with one of her ironical smiles.

Joshua rose, in some indignation. “What do you suppose I’m going to do with the girl?”

She rose too, and there was a hard look in her eyes.

“I haven’t the faintest idea. But whatever else it is—don’t.”

Joshua went away perplexed, repeating to himself the question he had asked Robina. What did she think he was going to do with the girl? She couldn’t possibly think he had evil designs on her. That would be monstrous—unlike Robina. Did she fear he would fall in love with her, with honourable motives, like a silly youth? Preposterous. Perhaps Robina was hurt at his having made all these arrangements unbeknown to her. He owed much to Robina; indeed, everything that made his present life a joy and a delight. But if he hadn’t interviewed Susan, he would never have had the inspiration of the Great Work. Robina was kicking at something—so ran the idiom of his thought—and he couldn’t tell what. Of course he had asked her to marry him, and she had turned him down flat. All that side of her nature was turned towards the little skunk in East Africa. From that now far-off afternoon when they had hung the Old Crome, he had cut out all such sentiment from their relations. They were just good honest friends; and why a good honest friend, a bona fide sculptor, shouldn’t employ a model for whose respectability, and even virtue, she could vouch passed his understanding. At last he shrugged his shoulders. At any rate, Robina knew all about it.

He did not see Robina again for some time. Her Royal Academy exhibits were ready to be sent in. Tired from overwork, she had fled to an old-maidish, tiny cottage of hers on a ridge of the Somersetshire hills overlooking Bath, where she abandoned herself to a manifold innocent voluptuousness. The may, lilac and laburnum flowered around her. She drew her own water from a well deliciously cool to the eye. She ate country food, delicately cooked. Robina was not one for whom a handful of dates and a cup of water from the spring, still less a swill of tea and an indigestible bun, could furnish forth an adequate repast. She lay long in bed; read French novels; forgot the existence of clay and wax and castings and those marble copies fresh from the carvers, so nearly right and yet so dead, which she, with renewal of creative effort, must inspire with life; closed her doors to whatever fashionable friends were taking the

waters in Bath; and gave herself up, with a sigh or two, as a woman will, to her own intimate thoughts. She had made quite a lot of money this year, and she had found peculiar and half-melancholy pleasure in sending out an extra hundred pounds to Humphrey in Kenya Colony.

Meanwhile Joshua, man of affairs, lost no time in getting to work on his Great Idea. He called in Euphemia Boyd to discuss preliminaries. He had already learned that, before he can enjoy the fine frenzy stage, the artist in any medium must submit to a prodigious amount of drudgery. Not only had a special model-platform to be built so that a woman could lie full length and be raised or lowered by handle and screw, and a special modelling-stand to be designed and made, but many little rough sketches in clay prepared so as to obtain the practicable pose and effect. A lay figure on a trestle-table was model enough. Once the pose fixed, there was the question of the armature—compo piping and copper wire and butterflies. There was also his superficial knowledge of back and arms to be deepened. Joshua lived happy and laborious days.

As a pursuit, he had long forsworn racing, much to Lady Evangeline's astonishment, and kept in touch with her mainly through the artistic streak in her husband, Fenton Hill, the collector of miniatures. But now and again he escaped into the bright open air of a country meeting and enjoyed himself prodigiously. He no longer felt lonely. His daylight hours were gladdened by inspiring work, and he could spend his evenings in whatever social distraction he might choose. He reckoned himself a happy man.

Now it came to pass, one late afternoon, about a week after Robina's departure, when he was smoking the cigar of reward for a day's hard work, and reading in the evening paper the account of an international prize-fight in America, that Sutton, his labours over, burst into the library. His fresh young face glowed with laughter and excitement.

"There's a young woman in the hall wanting to see you. I found her on the doorstep and let her in with my latchkey. The most beautiful young thing. The most terribly divine young person. Says she's your model."

"Give her name?"

"Miss Keene."

"Why didn't you ring for Dotley? I'll see her. Ask her to come in."

The boy lingered by the door. "I do think it rotten of you, Dad, not to introduce me to your friends," he said, before he went out.

Joshua rose. The crease across his forehead deepened. He had scrapped tons of old iron traditions and had done his best to respect the freedom claimed by modern youth; but now and then modern youth overstepped certain eternal

sanctities. A son should regard his father as a pillar of virtue in which no cracks of frailty could be perceived. Sutton's remarks were in execrable taste.

And Susan? Why had she sought him here instead of at the studio? To learn the answer he had not long to wait.

Sutton threw open the door with a flourish.

"Miss Keene."

He waved a farewell hand to his father and disappeared.

Susan's instinctive glance around took in the luxurious comfort of the room. Joshua said:

"Do sit down. I'm sorry I haven't let you know about sittings yet; but I wasn't quite ready for you."

She stood with her hand on the arm of a chair, regarding him with the mournful eyes of the Tragic Muse and with about as much human sympathy.

"I've come to say I don't think I can sit to you."

"Good God, why?" cried Joshua.

"You're Mr. Joshua Fendick of Trenthampton, Chairman of Swan's?"

"I was," said he, the crease again deepening. "But I gave that up long ago. How did you know? Did Mrs. Dale tell you?"

He was relieved when she cleared Robina from sudden and hateful indictment.

"I found out from *Who's Who*. A girl like myself has to make sure of people."

"So you buy *Who's Who*?" said Joshua incredulously.

"You can consult it in any public library," replied Susan.

Joshua with an underbreath blasted *Who's Who*. He had been greatly flattered by the invitation of the editor, after receiving the honour of the C.B.E., to contribute his autobiography. He had been gratified to insert in the last proof sent him the Glebe Studios as a secondary address, and to substitute modestly "sculpture" for a list of lusty physical recreations.

He turned on her with the vernacular, his hands in his trousers pockets.

"Well, and what about it?"

"I'd rather sit to professional artists, sir, if you don't mind."

She stood there, impersonal, cold, beautiful, and remote as a Fate. Joshua nearly lost his temper. The obsession of that wonderfully contoured back was the beginning and end of his creative impulse. Without her as model the whole of his dream would melt into the sea foam. Common sense told him that there

were a hundred other women to be selected from. Any decently made young girl must have the same kind of flesh contours around her spine. But obsession held him. He threw out his hands angrily.

“What the devil does it matter to you whether I’m a professional or an amateur? You saw some of my work in the studio. Enough to show you I’m not a bungling fool. . . . I can’t make out what you’re getting at, or why you’ve come here instead of the studio.”

“I wanted to see Mr. Joshua Fendick of Trenthampton,” said Susan.

“Oh, for God’s sake sit down,” said Joshua, almost pushing her into a chair. “Of course I’m from Trenthampton. Swan & Co. And you’re from Withering.”

She caught her breath in a little gasp.

“Then you know?”

“Naturally. I know everything about you. But I wanted you as a model long before I had any idea who you were.”

“I thought I had cut away from Withering altogether,” she said, in her deep, impassive tones. “That’s really why I came to you here after looking you up in *Who’s Who*. To find out if you knew. You being a friend of Mrs. Dale —— She told you, I suppose.”

“Who you were—yes. I knew most of the rest. You’ve been through a bad time.”

“A very bad time.”

“And you’re still not going to sit for me?”

“I’d rather not, sir.”

He threw his cigar, which had gone out, into the fireplace, and cried angrily:

“But you must sit. The whole root of the thing is that bit of you Mrs. Dale did, and didn’t finish. . . . If you think I’m going to talk to you about Withering, I’m not. That’s your business. Making a copy of you in marble is mine. I can’t see what one has to do with the other. Have you got a job at another theatre?”

“Not yet.”

“Are you in constant demand as a model?”

“I can generally get work.”

“Can you?” he cried, rather brutally. “I don’t see you running round the studios like the rest of the professional models hereabouts. You’re not of their class or their habits. You’ll make a mess of it. You’ve been making a mess of

it for a long time. You don't earn enough to feed yourself properly. You're under-nourished, that's what you are." She shrank, somewhat scared, before his accusing finger, all the more effective because the two next ones were missing. "And here you are, refusing to accept a decent livelihood because you don't want to sit to an amateur, as you call me, who happens to be Hamptonshire like yourself, and knew your father and sympathizes with you in the hell of a time you've had. You're a damned ungrateful young woman."

From which it is evident that Joshua had worked himself up to an unusual pitch of indignation.

"Yes, damned ungrateful," he repeated, as she remained silent.

He turned swiftly to the mantelpiece and pressed the bell-push. She rose, in her strange, impersonal dignity.

"I can find my way out by myself."

"Way out? What do you mean? Oh, sit down. I rang for tea or hot soup or something for you. You and I have got to talk sensible business."

Dotley appeared.

"Tea and stuff for this lady, and a cocktail for me. And sandwiches. I want a sandwich."

Dotley retired. Joshua went on: "It never struck you I might have known your father, Roger Keene. I did. Of course he was older than me; but we belonged to the same Masonic Lodge. So it's up to me to do something for his daughter. When a man, as a Mason, proposes to do anything for a brother Mason's daughter, it's on the square, if you understand what I mean. I can't think of anything more sacred than invoking the Craft, as I've just done. . . . That ought to satisfy you."

She sat twisting her fingers nervously, impressed, though somewhat frightened, by his harangue. Joshua mopped his forehead and walked about the room, wondering in a dazed sort of way, what the devil had happened. Until this last half-hour it had never occurred to him to do more than pay Susan her model fees and keep a general eye on her welfare. It had never occurred to him to relieve her indefinitely of financial worries. It had never occurred to him to make use of the fact that he had known and shaken hands with Roger Keene, a past-Master of the Lodge in which he had received his initiation; still less to invoke the sacredness of the Craft. And yet he had done all these things from incontrollable impulse, starting from the dread, the all-but terror of losing her as a model for the exquisite body of his dreams. He knocked his head with his knuckles. Was he going mad? Only once before had he gone mad, and that was when he had proposed to Bella. . . . By some chance—so he imagined—the fact of predatory nymph lying in ambush had never, even through the long

after years, entered his ingenuous mind—he had met her one moonlit evening at the end of Redesdale Road. At that first moment of encounter he had no more thought of asking her to marry him than of throwing his boots at her, or of burning her alive; and yet, by the time they had reached her father's gate he was her lip-sealed betrothed. But that was a special case. There wasn't the young body suddenly thrown against him with all the sex appeal of intimate contact. This crazy notion of providing for a young woman for life, safeguarded by sacred oath, was a different matter altogether. . . . Mad? Well, perhaps it was. It didn't matter. He felt that his life and hope for the future depended on this girl and the half-drowned girl in eventual marble being one and the same incorporation.

He turned about suddenly on her.

"Well, what do you say about it?"

"About what?"

"My proposition."

"I don't quite see what you're proposing," said Susan.

He came down to the business earth.

"I suppose I have been a bit indefinite," he confessed in his disarming, rueful manner, "but we'll fix up something, I'm sure."

Dotley came in and set the tables. The light of the room was that of the early twilight of May, which cast soft shadows. Joshua served his guest courteously, and ate sandwiches with his cocktail, so as to encourage her to eat.

"At home," said he, "we would have sat down to a regular spread. But these are London ways."

She sipped her tea. "Why are you so kind?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "I think people of the same county ought to stick together more or less. . . . And I've told you the other reasons. There's no kindness about it."

Susan left, about half an hour afterwards, with even her impassivity stirred by the eccentric proposal of Joshua, which, waif and stray that she was, she could not do otherwise than accept. In consideration of a salary, far exceeding her dreams of earning power, she must be at his sole disposal as model for an indefinite period, at any rate until the last shave of the chisel on the finished work of the drowned woman; she must change from her Bloomsbury room to comfortable quarters in Chelsea; she must eat nourishing food; she must replenish her wardrobe; and she must set her mind to invent some sort of

occupation, preferably remunerative, which would occupy her hours of leisure.

Joshua, alone in the library, poured himself out a second cocktail, and rubbed his hands in satisfaction. He had at last got hold of this elusive girl of the beautiful back. No one but he would reproduce it in sculpture. He had also got hold of the most pathetic human being in the world; one who had almost ceased to be human, or rather one in whom circumstances had arrested the humanity. She was his for the experiment that had vaguely suggested itself to his mind after their first interview in the studio. It was going to be immensely interesting. The first appliance of an invention of his own years ago to facilitate a stage in the making of boots, he had thought at the time to be pregnant with excitement. Compared with this, it had been but a pale and dreary emotion.

Boots! Good Lord! He drank his cocktail. How mistily far away they were. Boots. Forty thousand million pairs of them. A vision of murky horror now vanished into the thinnest of clear air. Now only the dream of one exquisite marble form, the woman cast up by the waves and gripping, at she knew not what, her last chance of life.

“Yes. A damned sight better than boots,” said Joshua.

CHAPTER VIII

By the time Robina returned from Somerset, Susan had established herself in comfortable Chelsea lodgings. They were in Denbigh Grove, a quiet thoroughfare on the south side of the King's Road, on the first floor, and the sitting-room had a western aspect. So deeply rooted were Joshua's mid-Victorian principles, that, lest the landlady should suspect her lodger to be living under a gentleman's protection, the fact of his existence was not revealed. Susan, vaguely declaring herself to be a lady of independent means, lived in the unaccustomed luxury of a couple of airy rooms, and three regular meals a day, with very little else to do than hang about the studio in Glebe Gardens whenever Joshua required her attendance.

"That's a nice thing to spring on me," said Robina when he had told her the whole story. "How much of it do you expect a woman of the world to believe?"

"If I were keeping a girl in guilty splendour—that's what it's supposed to be called "—said Joshua, "a woman of the world would expect me to put her into a smart little flat in Mayfair. She'd think me rather a mean beast to stick her into dingy lodgings."

"That's quite a point in your favour," said Robina, with her ironical smile.

"And I'm old enough to be her father," he declared. "You can't possibly think ill of me."

He stood, very much in earnest, tense, just as he had stood in the years past, as centre forward, ready to spring when the tide of football battle rolled his way. Robina burst out laughing.

"Of course I know your intentions are all that is most honourable, my dear Joshua. But why be so solemn about it, as if you were confessing to a murder and telling me where to find the body?

"I have every reason," he replied, still rather hurt by her insinuation, "to value your good opinion of me." He pivoted on a half-turn and swung back, one of his characteristic movements. "What I said to you a year or so ago still holds good. You may forget it, but I don't."

Robina, half lying among the cushions on a couch, stretched her large and shapely body. She was comfortably enjoying herself. They had been to a theatre together, on this her first night in London, they and Victor Spens, with whom they had dined. Joshua had seen her home and gone in for a drink and a talk. It was natural that he should take the first opportunity to talk of Susan. He would have written had he been more skilled in the use of the written word;

but when a man's habit of correspondence has been confined to acknowledging (by dictation) a favour of the 26th ult., and begging to state in reply that he does, or does not, see his way to accepting an esteemed offer, he finds the detailed statement of the delicate motives leading to a peculiar position extremely difficult. So Joshua had decided to make his explanation to Robina by word of mouth.

Robina, conscious of looking her best, in old rose and gold and general tawny flesh tints, conscious, too, of her authority over this stocky, earnest, red-headed man with the puzzled crease across his forehead and mild blue eyes, lounged among her cushions in great content. She loved to play on Joshua; to strike chords and listen to a result of which she was never quite certain. He still remained an instrument new to her experience. She was humorously puzzled by him, just as a flageolet player is puzzled by the chanter of a set of bagpipes when, on first setting it to his lips, he tries to extract from the stops the simplest melody.

She was in a lazy and teasing humour. Also deep down in herself an idiot germ of resentment inspired the imp of malice lurking in every woman. Whether living in guilty splendour or in innocent drabness, Susan had entered Joshua's life as a curious new feminine influence. The innocent drabness she took for granted. But still, there was the sex of the girl, in some kind or fashion, artistic or otherwise, running through Joshua's veins.

So when he renewed his year-old declaration, the imp of malice sprang up. She laughed, and pointed to the clock on the mantelpiece.

"I don't think it fair of you to come to the house of a lone and defenceless woman at one o'clock in the morning and make love to her."

He threw out his hands. "It's not fair of you to laugh at me. I said then you were the only woman I care about in the world. I'm not a chap given to change, so I say so now. By questioning what I've told you about this girl, you've asked for it—and you mustn't be surprised to get it."

"That's all very well," said Robina calmly. "But are you really such a model of faithful devotion? Don't your affections ever stray a bit?"

"If you mean that I run about after women, no," he declared. "I've got too much to do."

"I thought I'd heard about a certain Mrs. Blackadder."

He flushed red.

"Who told you about it? Victor Spens? If he did, I'll go out and break his b-b-beastly neck."

She put up a restraining hand. No, she reassured him, it wasn't Victor. She

had no idea he was aware of the matter.

“Then how did you know?”

“How do most of your friends know? They do. Birds come and whisper things in everybody’s ears.”

“No one let on that they knew,” said Joshua, feeling peculiarly uncomfortable.

“I can’t see how they could have done so, unless they expelled you from the congregation—and we’re not such a primitive lot as all that.”

“Would it have been the same if some rotten scandal had come out of it?” he asked.

“There are scandals and scandals, my dear Joshua. The story goes that you were very devoted to the lady for a few days and then made a bolt of it, planting her there so that she nearly cursed the house down. If there was any scandal, she made it. You didn’t. Apparently the rest of the house-party had the time of their lives.”

Joshua picked a cushion off a chair as though he was going to sit down—like most men he loathed cushions—and threw it back savagely.

“When did you hear all this?”

“A long time ago—when it happened. Everybody has forgotten the incident—including the lady. Everybody except me. . . .”

“Why have you saved it up to throw in my face now?” he asked, advancing a step with his hands clenched by his sides.

She sat up. “We seem to be having quite a nice little quarrel,” she said with a laugh.

“No, we’re not,” he declared hotly. “If you said I did and I swore I didn’t, that would be quarrelling. Well, I did. I did make a damned fool of myself. After all, I’m a man——”

She rose swiftly and clapped her hands on his broad shoulders.

“That’s just it. That’s the beginning and end of this lunatic discussion. If you weren’t a man, do you suppose I’d give two thoughts to you? Do you ever see any of the etiolated worms—from fifty downwards—who seem to be in fashion nowadays and talk foul things about Art and Literature in cracked voices, and, at home, wear apricot-coloured pyjamas, drink apricot-juice through straws—and if you mention the war, say: ‘War? What war? Oh yes. But it was all so terribly crude; let us forget it’—My God! Do you ever see any of that kind within a mile of me?” She swung away, after a final clutch, so that even his sturdiness rocked, and went on. “I love men. I hate to see a man drink Vichy water when he can have brandy and soda. I’d sooner see a man drunk

than sipping syrup like an imitation girl of fifty years ago. I don't care if a man does get drunk," she said somewhat wildly—her thoughts, as even the slow-witted Joshua realized, darting to the drink-sodden husband in Kenya—"it has been a man's privilege ever since the world began. It takes a man to get drunk. The epicene don't. They take drugs. I loathe the type." She swept her face with her big hands and faced him, laughing rather foolishly. "I've got mixed up. What the devil was I saying?"

"Something about my being a man," said Joshua.

"Well, there you are. I've told you. . . . Indeed, you proclaimed the fact yourself, and started me off." She lit a cigarette and threw herself again on her cushions. "Let us put the whole thing in a nutshell. Sit down, for Heaven's sake, and don't be offended. I'm going to say nice things to you." Joshua obeyed. "A man may be a man, and yet be as simple and inexperienced as Adam—and, after all, Adam was a man. That's why I like you. I'll go as far as to say I've a great affection for you. There's Eve in every woman. . . . If we carry on about snakes and things, we'll get issues confused. . . . Anyhow, you're aware of my friendship—affectionate friendship if you like. You profess, honestly, to be in love with me. I tell you, for reasons given, that all that sort of thing's impossible. You renew, after a year, the same story. Meanwhile you've been a perfectly good, strong, hefty man, and got, as was only natural, in the toils of a notorious siren—literary touch about that, isn't there? Anyhow, you did. Now, in the most quixotic way in the world, you've made yourself responsible for the welfare of a strangely beautiful and unfathomable young woman. Considering all that I've said, you can't expect me to look at the matter in the same light as if you were adopting a baby."

"That's exactly what I'm doing," cried Joshua. "Adopting a baby—a grown-up child suffering from arrested development. You've just called her unfathomable. That's another way of putting it. The siren and man question doesn't arise."

She stretched out an arm and beckoned with her eyes, she herself not un-siren-like.

"Are you angry with me?"

He took her hand and said "No." But he was angry, ruffled, disappointed. That she, for a moment, should have regarded him as a potential betrayer of maiden innocence outraged his puritanical consciousness. He had come near to reviling in his heart the kindly and courteous world into which she had gained him admittance, as a horrible evil-thinking world from whose contamination even she, Robina, could not escape. Not remote from his mental attitude might be the indignation of the burglar arrested in a house into which he had entered

on a noble mission.

She held his hand in her strong grasp, and looked up at him from the gaudy cushions, where, under the softened lamp, in a corner of the harmonious room, she lay gaudy and swarthy in sensuous pose.

“I only want to warn you against possible folly. Susans are often more dangerous than Blackadders.”

He suddenly tightened the clasp with the grip of his left hand. He cried:

“What the hell do other women matter when you’re there?”

And before she knew where she was, he was sprawling on the ground beside her and his lips on hers. And it was only after an appreciable moment that she thrust him gently away, and rose and touched hair and face. She drew herself up and regarded him stonily.

“You’d better go. I hope you’re ashamed of yourself.”

“I’m not. You shouldn’t have lain there looking like a damned Cleopatra.”

She turned, and her features worked for an instant in the curious pucker of a woman about to cry. The amazing words had hit her like a blow. A damned Cleopatra! Her proud honesty told her that the man was right. She braced herself quickly to command of nerves.

“Any more foolishness like that on your part and that’s an end of it all. Our friendship’s over, finished. I’ll never speak to you again as long as I live. Understand?”

“I’ve kissed you—you’ve kissed me. You daren’t say you didn’t. And that’s all there is to it.”

She went to the door and threw it open. She stood by it, resplendent and outraged Juno.

“Please go.”

But Joshua deliberately sat down on a chair near her abandoned couch. “I’m not going unless you ring the bell for servants, which would be silly. Shut the door and come back. . . . I’m not going to do it again. You’re quite safe.”

She obeyed him with a contemptuous laugh.

“Safe? I should think I was! But I don’t want to see you any more to-night. Look at the clock. I’m tired and sleepy.”

Joshua rose. “I’m sorry,” said he, “if you put it like that. On the other hand, although you’re tired—you must be after your journey—you’re not sleepy, any more than I am. I’ll only stay another ten minutes. Let me fill up your glass.”

He crossed the room to the table where decanters and siphons and sandwiches were set out, and returned to her, glass in hand. She received it

mechanically. Her eyes, as she faced him, were still hard.

“Well, I’ll give you another ten minutes. What have you got to say for yourself? Don’t you think you behaved damnably?” And, as he stood before her, frowning, red and inarticulate, her courage and self-confidence grew, and she went on, after putting her untasted glass on a table near by: “What you did was to take a woman who trusted you unawares. I did return your kiss. No”—she threw out an imperious hand—“I’m doing the talking. Do you suppose men only have sex impulses? I know that was a puritanical theory taught you at Trenthampton. All the women you were brought up with would have died rather than discuss such things with a man. They regarded them as shameful. But I’m a modern woman, my friend, and look facts squarely in the face and talk about them.”

“I don’t see what you’re getting at,” said Joshua.

“I’m getting at this,” she retorted. “If I, a woman bound by all sorts of ties of decency and love and loyalty and honour, lose self-control, or rather common sense, even for a minute—what about you, a man, who hasn’t got any ties in the world, who’ve only got your natural stretching out of tentacles, your cravings for something feminine in your life, to say nothing of passion?” She laughed, recovering at his evident discomfiture. “You’re not fit to be let about loose. I repeat: you’ve just behaved yourself damnably.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, meekly.

“I’m glad to hear it.” And she condescended to sip from her glass. She had regained the upper hand, not by shameworthy, sensuous allurement, the consciousness of which reacted unpleasantly on her nerves, but by the sheer force of character in which she took pride. She could now afford to be magnanimous.

“Wouldn’t it be best for everybody if you took me fully into your confidence with regard to Susan?”

“But, good Lord, isn’t that what I’ve been doing?” he cried. “What else is there to tell you?”

“You must have something at the back of your mind as to her future. You’re not keeping her there in lodgings merely to copy her body day by day, year in and year out, until the end of time. Are you?”

He reddened again in perplexity and anger.

“If you can’t get it out of your head that I’m either a semi-idiot or a rotten villain—in any case on the track of seducing the girl, I’d better go.”

She regarded him with ironical mournfulness, and shook her head.

“Oh dear, what a stupid conversation we’ve had.”

“You began it,” said Joshua.

“Did I? I suppose I did. But I had some kind of logical thought behind it.”

“Oh,” said Joshua.

“Yes. When you told me of your arrangements for Susan, I said to myself: This man’s motives must be either the worst or the best.’ You’ll own that I dismissed the worst good-humouredly. I accepted the highest motive, but I pointed out dangers—which seemed to annoy you and play the devil with everything. Now you’re comparatively sane, once more, I’ll tell you what was in my mind. You’re interested in this girl and her tragic history—she’s of your own little part of the country, of your own people—you feel that instinctively. She’s strange, friendless, dangerously situated. . . . You want to befriend her. More. You want to make a human being out of her.”

“If you knew that, why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I was trying to clear the ground when you set fire to it,” replied Robina with calm disingenuousness.

Joshua rapped his head with his knuckles, his old gesture, which made Robina smile.

“What’s the upshot of it all?” he asked.

“Take me into partnership,” said Robina, “in the Re-creation of Susan.”

As the door clicked behind him, Manifold, the chauffeur, sprang from profound somnolence on his box to instant activity. Joshua the kindly, and with the instinct of class identity with Manifold, said:

“I didn’t know I should be so late. Otherwise I should have let you go, and walked. It’s just a step.”

Manifold touched his cap. “That’s all right, sir.”

But Manifold didn’t regard Joshua with the same class sympathy. Joshua was a man of wealth, as far above him as the eternal stars. He had his own ideas of the goings-on of Joshua with a lone widow-woman till half-past one in the morning.

And Joshua had his own jumbled and as yet uncorrelated idea of these same goings-on. Why the devil had Robina led him through all these post-theatre adventures, especially the amazing and flaming adventure of the kiss, just in order to put before him the perfectly plain and sound scheme which, seeing that it was in her mind, according to her own deliberate statement, she might have propounded from the very beginning?

A man would have said: “Look here, my dear fellow. I’ve got an idea. It’s perfectly plain sailing, etc., etc.”

But a woman! Well—damn it all—he wouldn’t have interrupted the man—he wouldn’t have been kicked by some unknown god into his arms and kissed him. . . . He paused in the act of brushing his teeth for the night in order to laugh aloud at the insane comicality. But a woman was different.

He went to sleep with the vague, unformulated theory in his mind that all would be for the best in the best of all possible worlds, if only it were unisexual.

CHAPTER IX

It was Victor Spens who put the idea of the jaunt to Rome into Robina's head, he being despatched thither on diplomatic errand. And it was Robina who issued the Decree to the meek and stay-at-home Joshua. In pursuance of her original idea for the satisfactory Disposal of Susan, she had ordained, and was in process of carrying out, a well-considered scheme. For the future of Susan, child, as it were, of their common adoption, they should be jointly responsible. To rub into Joshua the impression of quasi-filial relationship already vaguely formed by Freemasonic scrupulosity, to which, however, woman-like, she attached but little importance, was the only way to save him, and incidentally Susan—not that Susan mattered so much—from the greatest danger that could beset a muddled and artistic middle-aged man.

"We must do one of two things," said Robina. "Either treat her as a model and throw her to whatever wolves are on the prowl for models—which is rather late in the day now—or look after her properly. I hate half-and-half measures. That's not my way—you ought to know me by this time. Leaving her in lodgings all by herself to mildew indefinitely is neither human nor divine. It's only a man, and a stupid one at that, who could conceive such an imbecile idea."

Joshua had replied: "I'm sure you're right, Robina. How on earth can you expect me to know anything about young women?"

The result of much discussion, in which Joshua always took the acquiescent part, was the transference of an unquestioning and docile Susan to the neutral territory of Euphemia Boyd.

Now Euphemia was facing hard times. For all the medals and prizes in the country, a sculptor without a certain inexplicable and elusive gift of personality is, of all artists, the one who finds it the most difficult to make a living. A woman sculptor even more than a man; a sensitive, timid woman more than a virile, firm-fingered Robina Dale. Euphemia was unsuccessful. She could only teach, and her lessons scarcely enabled her to maintain her pretty little Chelsea flat-studio, which years ago she had furnished with fine taste and glowing hope. She was even about to move, broken-hearted, to humbler surroundings when the vision of Robina and Joshua converged upon her. Susan should be the paying guest, paying not only for board and lodging, but for some further extent of supervision and educative influence. Black care was thus dismounted from Euphemia's thin shoulders. On the other side—and this was the brilliant idea of Joshua, on which Robina ironically complimented him—Susan should

be secretly subventioned and, as far as she knew, employed to act as salaried lady companion to Euphemia.

“Nothing like giving people a definite job,” said Joshua, rubbing his hands. “It gives them something to think about. If they’re conscientious they stick to it. Don’t you see we’ve got it both ways now? Euphemia’s paid to look after Susan, and Susan’s paid to look after Euphemia. A man does come in useful now and then, my dear, doesn’t he?”

“If woman only had man’s brains,” said Robina, “God knows what the world would be like.”

Joint responsibilities for a young woman’s future included those financial. Robina would be generous according to her means. Joshua protested; almost to the point of offering her a salary as Managing Director of the J. & R. Susan Estates Ltd. At the end of the argument he conceded to Robina the right to supply Susan with the standard raiment of the social circle in which Robina had her being. She had defeated him by enunciation of sociological truths. No taxation without representation. No vote in a company’s concern save that of a shareholder. A stake in the country. She overwhelmed him with platitudinous verities.

“She has got a voice—a full contralto,” she declared. “I tried it the other day. Oh, I didn’t rush at it in your bull-at-a-gate fashion. I led up to her singing. I’ll pay for her lessons. That’ll give me another vote.”

Joshua proclaimed her the stupendous marvel of women. There was something in Shakespeare about somebody bestriding lesser men—he stuck the two forefingers of his unmaimed hand fork-wise on the table—like a Colossus. She was the Colossus. He had given up search for her motives. They were beyond him.

The days had thenceforward passed to the satisfaction of everyone. Robina supervised. Euphemia bought a hat so as not to be too greatly eclipsed by Susan’s new splendour. Joshua worked in his studio, went for an occasional day’s racing, dined now and then with his friends and found life as full as he could desire. Susan surrendered herself to the gentle destinies that came to guide her life, and asked no questions. The mistrust or suspicion that had dictated her visit to Joshua at Eaton Terrace had vanished. She went about like a contented child who knows that if it is good there is no prospect of punishment. And, with kindness encompassing her round about, it was apparently easy to be good. Of the outside world and its liberties and stimulating pleasures she seemed to take no heed. She had no desire to walk abroad on her own innocent errands.

“We must manage to find you some young people of your own age,” said

Robina one day. “You must miss them.”

Susan shook her head. “I shouldn’t know what to do with them—what to talk to them about. We’d have nothing in common. I’m more than happy.”

“You’re an odd girl,” said Robina. And Susan replied:

“I feel so safe.”

Her response to her benefactors was, therefore, a dutiful though somewhat dreamy fulfilment of all their behests. She sang, she read the books prescribed by Euphemia, she concerned herself not only with the flowers of the flat, but with the bills of grocer and baker. She attended Joshua’s studio, ready to disrobe at any moment. But that moment, even by the time of the Rome visit, had not yet come.

For Joshua, learning more and more of the terrors of his craft, day by day, one unskilled touch on lesser things after unskilled touch, and, in the dim recesses of his soul, knowing that this Thing which he had set out to do was the very meaning of his life, had determined to delay the feverish agony of creation until he could feel within him the sense of mastery. He modelled her head, her clinging hands. The studio began to be littered with plaster casts of Susan’s hands. He also made a little statuette of her as Diana in tunic—an academic exercise. The armature of the masterpiece lay ready for the clay, but as yet he dared not begin.

In August came a break. Robina went to friends in Scotland. Joshua despatched Euphemia Boyd and Susan to Cromer, where the former had relations and the latter could get bracing air. He himself was persuaded by young Sutton to go to Deauville. The Pellings would be there, Lord, Lady and the Hon. Victoria, villa guests of a Mrs. Vincent Crumstock, an American widow of fabulous wealth and the dearest old thing in the world. He, Sutton, would be of the house-party; but he gave Joshua to understand that perfect comfort could be found at the Hotel Normandie, and that, further, a little unostentatious entertaining by Joshua—by which Sutton, in the airy way of modern youth, meant dinner parties of twenty covers at the Casino—would do him, Sutton, a bit of good with the Pellings, *père* and *mère*, whose attitude towards him, though not frigid, was of an irritating tepidity.

“You know,” said he, “how in a badly run long bath you sort of get streaks of hot and cold. That’s what I feel about them.”

Wherefore Joshua, desirous of more intimate touch with his son, went to Deauville, where, being the opulent father of the elegant Sutton, he was speedily involved in the Pelling-Crumstock vortex. He enjoyed himself after a fashion. Mrs. Crumstock was slenderly elderly, profuse and vague.

“Your son tells me you sing so divinely,” she said to him a minute after

their introduction.

Rumour had it that, meeting Voronoff, she had declared how much she loved him in that beautiful Russian Ballet.

Lady Pelling, who thought of mankind in terms of bridge, regarded the non-bridge-playing Joshua through her lorgnette as an armless or legless or headless freak at a fair. Lord Pelling, who had heard of him through the Baldos as an ex-captain of Industry, sought to beguile Joshua into putting him on to a good thing. Pelling passed an impecunious life under the illusion that there were fellows in trade—if you could only get hold of the right ones—who could put you in the way of getting seventy per cent. for your money. He was long and raddled, and a silly, drooping moustache gave him an air of semi-distinction. Joshua, most of whose money was in the still flourishing concern of Swan & Co., and other investments in the hands of a steady old firm of stockbrokers, took a child's interest in the general market of stocks and shares. He knew nothing about Oils except that they were substances useful for lubrication and locomotion, and the Amalgamations of world-famed drapery stores and other commercial organizations took place beyond his purview of human affairs. Lord Pelling was, at first, disappointed in Joshua. The latter's uncanny knowledge of the Turf, however, and reasoned tips given for the Deauville Races whereby Pelling won a pleasing amount of money, established his position as a man of parts in Pelling's eyes. He had also brought over a comfortable Rolls Royce, which saved the Pellings a considerable amount of hiring.

"You're priceless, Dad," said Sutton, gratefully. "All the cold streaks have gone."

Victoria was fair-haired and nondescript. Joshua had difficulty in picking her out from fifty like her in any gathering. She had received a haphazard education, and pleased his ingenuous mind by making correct observations on Michael Angelo's David in Florence, and Frémiet's Harpy in the Luxembourg. Somehow, she reminded him of a cultivated, perfectly attired, cocktail-drinking Arabella. In an idle way she seemed fond of Sutton. And Sutton was devoted. In fact, Sutton was a slave. Joshua, with Trenthampton traditions of masculine independence, didn't know how he could put up with it. A truth hitherto unknown to contemporary censors of morals broke suddenly upon him. To wit: that the ascendancy of the young female over the young male has never been greater than it is to-day. Once it was the fabled privilege of the proud beauty to make her inamorato fetch and carry for her; now any girl, proud beauty or not, expects any attracted young man to fetch and carry her herself; literally fetch her from home in a reasonable conveyance, and carry her to entertainments. No fulfilling her pretty little orders, and guarding her fan

until parents whisked her away, and then going out for a solid and horrible orgy with his brutal young male associates, and, the next afternoon, when he had got the blear out of his eyes, calling on her, bouquet in hand. None of that sort of thing nowadays, thought the philosophic and ever-learning Joshua. The young woman (indeed, in common with her parents) regarded parental whisking away as an absurd anachronism and unconsciously saw to it that, when she had finished with the young man, he was so dog-tired that a subsequent orgy was the one thing in the world from which his soul revolted. All he craved was his own little quiet bed into which he could fall, and where he could snore until decency or circumstances compelled him to rise.

"How the devil do you do it?" Joshua asked the pair, when they confessed to having danced in a cabaret till six o'clock in the morning.

They laughed at him, young, healthy, unquestionably moral. They had observed the fine line of convention, a young married couple having been their companions. . . . And this was not one occasional flare-up of youth. It was a habit of social life. Victoria took the young man, Sutton, by an apparently willing scruff of the neck, and only let go of him during the hours when each must obey the imperative call of slumber. Well, in a way, it kept the boy out of mischief. Coming home with the milk seemed, in these days, the conclusion of very mild saturnalia. And if Sutton liked the scruff of the neck treatment, it was his own affair.

A forgivable tinge of snobbery also coloured Joshua's outlook. The Pelling title was no matter of post-war purchase or reward. It had been alive for some three hundred years. The Pellings belonged to the old aristocracy. They were of the kind of which, during his youth in the Hamptonshire Territorial Brigade of Artillery, and even until he had retired from Swan's, he had stood in almost reverential awe. The fact of the Honourable Victoria Pelling taking his son, Sutton, by the scruff of his neck afforded him an honest English plebeian's combination of amusement and gratification.

If he, Joshua, should astonish the world as a great sculptor and Sutton should marry a lord's daughter (James I creation), surely the name of Fendick would be translated from the damp stone kitchen in Trenthampton—he could never forget the sour smell of ironing day—where he had first known it, to the lofty spheres of Aristocracy and Art.

Still, as he once said to Sutton, over their morning cocktail at the Potinière, the free hour of confidence between father and son which Joshua welcomed: What was going to come of it all?

"I suppose if I work her up to it, she'll marry me one of these days," replied the young man.

“You haven’t asked her yet?”

“Not in so many words. She knows right enough. I’ve half an idea she’s trying to make up her mind about another fellow.”

“Who’s that?”

“You don’t know him, and I’ve only just met him. A chap called Tommy Olifant. But he’s about everywhere. Old family, fair amount of money, but generally half-tight. If he’d sober up I don’t think I’d have a look in. However—that’s not very likely. When a man’s steadily on the drink, he sticks to it.” His young face beamed hopefulness. “You do like her, don’t you?” he asked suddenly.

“Of course, of course,” said Joshua. “We get on famously together. . . . If you love the girl and she loves you, that’s all that matters. But why don’t you go in and win? It’s the hanging around—the half-and-half sort of thing that I can’t understand.”

Sutton picked the cherry from his cocktail by its slender stick and contemplated it moodily.

“I suppose it is a bit unsatisfactory, although we do have a good time.”

“What stands in the way? Money? Whatever’s mine you know will be yours some day—and you could have some of it now if you wanted.”

The boy flushed and laid a shy touch on his father’s arm.

“You’re one of the best. If I did marry, perhaps I’d come down on you . . . for more than I do now. But it isn’t that at all.”

“Then what the devil is it?”

They were intimately close together over the little table, in the midst of the packed and chattering terrace, a concentration of all the vanities of all the worlds. And yet, in the artificial atmosphere of the gewgaw palaces, the ripple on the many-coloured surface was one of fresh gaiety, in curious contrast with the once fashionable, but heterogeneously filled terrace of the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo, with its white-capped, black-coated waiters moving about like vultures after their prey; whereas here in Deauville the trim waitresses threading the path through the maze of tables gave the impression of gentle ministrants to innocent pleasure. The air was alive with the chipper of all the languages under heaven. Father and son found themselves beautifully alone in the tumult.

What the devil was it, asked Joshua. Plebeian birth? A young woman like Victoria Pelling knew all about that. Personality? Sutton, though no beauty, was a well set-up, clean-run, scrupulously attired and attractively honest fellow. Money? Sutton could trust him to lower that barrier. Joshua pressed the

point. Such moments of confidence were rare.

“I’m keen on her, and I think she’s keen on me when Tom Olifant’s not around,” said Sutton. “But it doesn’t seem to be man and woman, if you see what I mean. She doesn’t seem to be that sort,” he added cryptically. “And it worries me.”

“A cold woman doesn’t bring a man much happiness,” said Joshua.

Sutton, finding no suitable answer to this piece of wisdom, remained silent; and then an acquaintance strolled up and the unusual conversation ended. He seemed to have taken his father’s somewhat broad hint, for just before Joshua left Deauville, Sutton came to him beaming. He and Victoria had arrived at an understanding. They would carry on as they were till the end of the year and then, if both were of the same mind, they would declare a formal engagement.

“What about the old people?” asked Joshua.

The boy laughed: “Oh, she’ll fix them all right.”

She appeared to have already done so to some extent, to judge by the cordiality of Lord Pelling’s farewell. His wife and himself had been delighted to meet Joshua, having heard so much about him from that charming young son of his; hoped they’d see a lot of each other in the autumn and get to know each other better; longed to look round his studio; perhaps one of these days he might do a head of Victoria—opportunity of having her to himself and seeing what a sensible, good sort of girl she really was; in this kind of upside-down place, everything was a masquerade in which values were confused.

“We must get together in normal life,” said he. “Christmas with us at our little place in Warwickshire, if you’ve no plans for the South, or nothing better to do. But we’ll meet before then in London. Good-bye, my dear fellow.”

From which heartiness, even Joshua could deduce the fact that it was in Lord Pelling’s mind to hold a family party at his ancestral seat at Christmas, in celebration of a freshly announced engagement.

He went back to town somewhat puzzled. Socially the boy was made. Financially he was sound. His income from the leather-broking firm in Mincing Lane would automatically increase year by year, and he himself would do things handsomely for the young couple. Eventually Sutton would step into his shoes—and boots. Having a simple sense of humour, he laughed at the conceit. But whether, for all the glamour of breeding and dainty attire and fashionable accomplishment, that of the essential Arabella which he suspected in the Hon. Victoria Pelling would conduce to the boy’s happiness was another question. Sutton had already deplored the lack of romantic passion in their relations. Well . . . Joshua shrugged his shoulders. All that side of it was Sutton’s affair. He had been startled into giving an opinion once, and that

was enough. He couldn’t touch the question of the girl’s sex-consciousness again. It would be indecent. Besides, how did he know? All that was Sutton’s business. But he felt uneasy. The boy was on the threshold of life, demanding much, and with the power to get it.

The studio greeted him as a mellow haven of rest. The bronze of his Susan-Diana had not come out well. It was a cold, heart-breaking, uncompromising reality. There was a soothing deception in plastic stuff; a touch of the thumb, and there was a perfectly good plane full of light and softness. Here and there you could fake craftily. An uncanny quality in the material hid the little dishonesties. But the bronze stood hard, blatant, accusing. What he had moulded as the light, wind-swept tunic of his Diana now stood out like grotesque armour. He rubbed his head in his rueful way. He had yet much to learn. If he couldn’t do drapery, how was he to work the magic of sea-foam over a human body?

In spite of disappointment over the bronze Diana, the studio was a haven of rest. For a haven is not a place where a man sits down to eat lotus, but where he contentedly occupies himself with cleaning up the craft in which he has braved stormy seas.

A little later came the jaunt to Rome.

CHAPTER X

THE lovers of old Rome, or, more correctly, the old lovers of Rome, profess to be shocked to find the once wooded summit of the Pincio cleared of trees, and a gorgeous restaurant, vauntingly styled a Casino, cocked perkily in their place. But all kinds of rapscallions have committed all sorts of profanations through the long centuries in Rome, and Rome still wears its proud title of the eternal. The sight of the columns ravished from the Baths of Caracalla and set up in support of roofs of Christian edifices wrings the heart of the Classical Archæologist. So does the thought of the violation of the Colosseum as a Frangipani fortress, as a quarry to build Farnese palaces and St. Peter's itself. It was not only the devils of the Dark Ages that played the devil with Ancient Rome. Mediæval Christianity, though it abhorred its paganism, took material relics of such paganism and converted them to its uses, all to the Greater Glory of God. The Renaissance Church played the most reckless havoc, and completed the effacement of the grandeur that was Rome, to the greater glory of a lifeless sacerdotal idea. And that expression of Nothingness, which is the Deadly Sin of Pride, which also is named, in art jargon, the Baroque, moulded the Rome that, for three centuries, has been Rome to every living man. And when the violent reflexes of the eighteenth century had spent themselves, Rome became a city as bloodless as its museums, as dead as its catacombs. And then came the germination of a new life.

The amiable dodderer whose parents were accustomed to winter in Rome, according to a once modish phrase, revisiting, in this last decade, the Roman scenes of his youth, is shocked to find a modern city replete, almost to the bursting-point of repletion, with modern conveniences. It is a city of broad, urbane thoroughfares, of by-ways just tortuous enough to give a fillip of interest to the wanderer.

To the antiquated dodderer, mindful of old filth and squalor; of decaying church porches alive with human vermin, all rags and sores, holding out horrible hands for pence; of cut-throat drivers of ramshackle cabs; of old palaces peeling like the bark of eucalyptus trees without the vigour of over-topping foliage; of ancient ruins, a jumble of arches and columns and strewn capitals and meaningless ashlars of stone and rubble and mud and dust and importunate dark-eyed, hollow-cheeked children and ghouls of self-styled guides, modern Rome is a vivid anachronism. He suffers the shocked impression that some American multi-millionaire has built a city in a picturesque plain between seven hills and, with unerring historical

connoisseurship, has placed in convenient sites all the surviving relics of pre-twentieth-century Rome, cleaned, swept, garnished, ticketed, and proudly opened to the admiring world.

This, be it insistently stated, is the point of view of the dodderer mildewed by the conservatism of fifty years. But what has fifty years to do with the untold centuries from which, in spite of convulsions of nature, violences of savagery, ignorance of man, black blight almost ordained by God, Rome springs still supreme in her eternal majesty? The history of Rome is that of the blind making and marring of man. It is the mingling of the splendour of human achievement with the piteousness of the failing of human aspiration that makes modern Rome, to the pilgrim through its streets, the most fascinating riddle in the world.

Of late years a man, whose world status must be appraised by the Court of History when all of us are dead, has arisen in Italy and promulgated all kinds of strange decrees. Among them is the decree that Rome shall be clean. In its crooked by-ways you shall not find an unsightly scrap of newspaper or a forlorn fish-head.

There is no more operatic picturesquedom to be found in Rome than in a barrack square. The slouching banditti who once drove cabs are now smart jarveys in yachting caps.

Yet Rome is Rome, and no change can ever change the changeless city.

“I don’t agree with you a bit,” said Robina, on the terrace of the Casino Valadier, on the Pincio. “Vandalism has been the preservation of Rome. Is there another spot in the place where one can eat in beauty?”

Victor Spens laughed. He had been one of those who deplored the perching of the restaurant on the top of the historic hill.

“If you put it that way——” he said politely.

“If you say much more, I’ll begin to defend that damned thing down there.”

She pointed to the vast white semi-circular monument to Vittore Emanuele that is the centre of modern Rome, the meaningless end of every vista in the city, the glaring, monstrous incongruity from which the eye, looking down from no matter what historic height over Rome, cannot escape.

“A damned thing—but tremendous,” she went on. “It’s the assertion that, after sixteen or seventeen centuries—don’t worry me with dates—Italy and Rome, and Rome and Italy, are again one and inseparable. A great conception. What you lose in the shudders you make up in the thrills.”

“That’s jolly interesting,” said Joshua.

“Oh, look at that horrid woman,” said Susan, pointing over the balustrade at the trim garden below where a convent infant school was having its daily recreation.

They looked and saw that the gaiety of the troop, little boys and little girls, who marched up but a short while before, crocodile fashion, to the garden space under the conduct of mild Sisters, had been frozen by the advent of a kind of chief nun, a gaunt figure with hidden features. The children, obviously of a well-to-do class, for they were well-dressed in variegated colours, squirmed higgledy-piggledy on the benches ranged circle-wise about the centre, and any arch-squirmer was instantly reproved by the tall thin figure which, in its robes and veils, seemed remote from humanity.

“Poor little dears,” said Susan. “They seemed so happy a minute ago. Why spoil it all?

“Discipline, discipline,” said Victor Spens, in his half-smiling, saturnine way. “There’s nothing like it.”

“But why so young? God knows, they’ll get enough of it when they grow up.”

The waiter poured out coffee. The wine-waiter came with fingers full of liqueur bottles. The *maître d’hôtel* hovered close by.

It was a late October day of mellow sunshine. The table for four was set at an angle of the verandah. Immediately below were the gardens, and the stone parapet and the gate leading from the road, and here and there through the trees the gleam of statuary. But far deeper down and further off the whole of Rome, bathed in the golden mist, with her dome after dome rising above vaguer habitations, lay like a many-breasted mother of a great world, calm, confident and strong. The dome of St. Peter’s brooded over the many domes of the palpitating organism outstretched before it. The rounded keep of St. Angelo kept grim watch by the Tiber. Away on the ridge of the Aventine, the avenue of cypresses cut the sky like a many-arched aqueduct. There was Rome beneath them, dreaming in the autumn Sun, enfolded in the secular embrace of her seven hills. And in the midst of the sweet and yellowed greyness of its immensity glared the white marble of the modern monument, and one of its gilded statues, catching the sun, flashed its message of victory.

“Look,” said Robina. “It speaks for itself. What have I been telling you?

“Pure and crystal truth, my dear Robina,” said Victor Spens. “Valadier, who built this restaurant, was the most exquisite of Vandals. Here alone in Rome can one eat, as you say, in beauty. And”—he turned to the *maître d’hôtel* and said in Italian—“we have lunched perfectly. Accept my compliments and convey them to the chef.” With a wave he dismissed the

maître d'hôtel. "Elsewhere in Rome," he went on, "one eats fairly well, but in caves and crypts and stuffy parlours, or, God forgive us, in Palace Hotels. Why, pray tell me, does anyone, except for the mere purpose of nourishing one's poor human frame, eat in Palace Hotels?"

Susan took her eyes from the still squirming children.

"Isn't the Superba a Palace Hotel?"

"Of the most palatial," said Victor.

"The food there is luxurious."

"It is indeed excellent," replied Victor with a bow and a smile. He had it on his mind to deliver his lecture on ganglionic cooking, in which he was wont to develop the thesis that in some secret part of the earth was a ganglion kitchen where the one table d'hôte meal for all the Palace Hotels in the world was despatched by some subtle and lightning process through thousands of radiating tubes. But why cast a perplexing cloud over a girl's innocent enjoyment? He turned the talk. "I wonder what you like best in Rome?"

She moved her shoulders helplessly. "I don't know. It all stuns me. Perhaps I like the fountains best. I can see what they mean."

"Come," said Joshua heartily, "you loved that jolly little Santa Maria Lucchesi with the blue nuns always praying."

"Yes," said Susan, her gaze away on the roof of the world. "The little blue nuns. . . ."

Joshua smiled across the table at Robina. "If I only knew how to do it—like those fellows who did the blue and white and yellow plaques"—his hand described a circle.

"The Della Robbias," Robina suggested.

"Yes. If I could only do it, I'd like to make a blue nun of her myself."

"We're supposed to have lost the secret of clay, pigment and process," remarked Victor.

The talk drifted to matters of art, Robina speaking with authority and Victor from his general knowledge of things; Joshua listening and learning in his modest fashion; and Susan, graceful and beautiful, elbow on table, her cheek supported by her hand, heeded nothing but some vision in the pale amethyst air above the Dome of St. Peter's which she regarded with her strange and mournful eyes.

That was Susan's attitude towards most of the new and amazing city, which she was visiting for the first time. She looked beyond things into some world of her own. As she said, the fountains pleased her most. She could not

resist the fascination of the eternal splash of waters spouted from the mouth of strange sea or river dwellers—dolphins, deities old, young, male, female, grotesque and happy, for ever amid the swirl that robbed her, for the time, of consciousness. She spent a happy afternoon among the hundred fountains of the Villa d'Este. She could see what they meant, she had said rather lamely; but they meant to her far more than she could say.

Once Joshua pressed her for more definite explanation.

"They're the only things alive," she replied.

"But surely the great things we've seen, the Venus of Cnidus, the Antinous, the Laocoon, are alive?"

She cast him one of her furtive glances and her lips curled in their wan smile.

"They live in your way, I know," she said hurriedly, with obvious intent not to hurt his sculptor's feelings. "They're wonderful. The snakes round the old man and the boys give me the creeps still. Perhaps I was thinking more of the ruins. There are so many. They're all dead, if you know what I mean." She turned away with a shudder. "I hate death."

It was only long afterwards that she avowed her horror of the galleries of white marble forms through which she was conducted. Will and self-repression alone, she admitted, had saved her from hysterical outburst. They were endless lines and lines of white corpses.

Pictures, though she could scarcely understand them, pleased her more. Any representation of Virgin and Child gave her vague consolation.

They were an odd quartette thrown together for the first part of their visit, at any rate, in an empty Rome. For, just as in former days there was nobody at all in August London, so even to-day there is no social life in early October Rome. The lounge of the Hotel Superba, where they stayed, was but sporadically peopled. In the American Bar, the barman served half a dozen cocktails a day and, for the rest of his time, talked to the flies about Paris and London. Victor Spens transacted his business at the Embassy with a tired Chargé d'affaires, whose wife was enjoying herself in Scotland, and passed the rest of his time in sight-seeing with Robina, Joshua and their beautiful but baffling protégée.

"It's I," he said to Robina, "who am receiving a liberal education."

Robina confessed her disappointment at Susan's lack of response to the marvels with which she found herself in daily contact.

"I expected a more definite reaction."

Joshua's mind boggled at the word.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“It’s a term used nowadays. Comes from America,” she replied impatiently. “It’s a good word too—borrowed from physics and chemistry. You have some kind of blue liquid in a glass and you pour in some kind of white liquid and the damn thing turns red. That’s a reaction.”

“I see,” said Joshua. “Susan doesn’t turn any colour at all.”

“You’ve got it,” said Robina. “We’re trying to do the impossible.”

Joshua passed his hand over his red thatch. “Perhaps it’s because she hasn’t had enough grounding. You want something to go upon in order to understand things. I’m beginning to understand ’em only because I’ve mugged ’em up. She hasn’t. The Forum and Adrian’s villa and the Baths of Caracalla and all the rest of it bore her to tears because she can’t get it into her head what they represent. I sympathize with her. We must give her a chance. When we go home we must tell Euphemia to make her mug it up. She will. That’s the charm of Susan. She always does what she’s told. We’ll come back next year and she’ll see things with new eyes, like me, and it’ll be a revelation to her.”

“Let us hope so,” said Robina.

Meanwhile she was perfectly happy. If she was seeking reactions, she found as many as her mind could grasp in Joshua himself. He went about in a continuous state of ecstatic appreciation. His power of expression developed, as his general knowledge of the history of art widened. When Robina had first pointed out to him the merits of his Morlands, he had a confused notion that Jesus Christ was born at some date midway between the creation of the world and the Norman Conquest—William I (1066-87) that had been drummed into him at school—and that Oliver Cromwell had intervened between the Conquest and the Battle of Waterloo (1815). But of the significance of the centuries he had no idea. Now with his periods of Nero and Trajan and his quattrocenti and his cinquecenti and his baroque he was as glib as you please. He found a childish delight in strolling through the centuries with a familiar air. At any one of them he could wave a friendly hand. Every statue in the endless galleries of the Vatican and the Villa Borghese, every broken bit of Roman capitol lying in the coolness of cloisters, every canopied tomb with hefty angels sprawling above it, every little primitive church, or Roman house with its artless yet appealing mosaics, filled him with a joy which, in his exuberance, he communicated to his companions.

“It’s as refreshing as taking a kid to the Zoo,” said Victor Spens.

One Sunday they obtained tickets for the choir of St. Peter’s. The occasion was a Benediction by the Pope in honour of a Beatification. The great church, so dead ordinarily in its silent vastness, with its flamboyant yet flameless

monuments, but now packed with worshippers, became, to Joshua's awakened soul, a throbbing immensity of life. The black and white of the multitude, chiefly black with gleams of white, as far as his eye could reach across the almost incalculable space between him and the great west door, set on fire the golden panelled roof and the majestic cornices and brought into an existence related to that of humanity the vista, dying mysteriously into the west, of once living artists' dreams of beauty in human form.

A hundred—he thought there must be a hundred—bishops, congregated in groups, or one by one, in the opposite stalls, glowing in their purple like old stained glass struck by slanting sunlight. High Officers of the Papal Guard, ablaze in glittering uniforms, crept about through nave and aisles and choir. And dotted about, surprising bits of colour, stood members of the Swiss Guard, in the doublet and trunks designed by Michael Angelo, striped yellow, violet and red.

Joshua and Victor Spens, in evening dress at two o'clock in the afternoon, Robina and Susan in the costume ordained for women when the Pope's eye might perchance fall on them—black veils, black dresses high at neck, sleeves reaching to wrists, skirts covering ankles—waited in the dense mass of black and white, here and there relieved by the uniform of Ministers accredited to the Papal Court.

Suddenly came the blare of silver trumpets. Joshua followed the eyes of the multitude, away to the fabulous west of the gigantic building that had assumed the proportions of a world. There was a glint of colour. But above the colour, raised high on men's shoulders, there shimmered in his chair a white-clad figure, swaying slightly from side to side, with benedictory movements of his hand. The organ pealed. The stately procession came into view. Of what other members it consisted no one could reasonably tell; for twenty Cardinals in Cardinal's scarlet preceded the high-borne white figure and wiped out all colour from the gorgeous uniforms, the gilt of cornices, the blues of pictures and the stained-glass window glory of the serried row of bishops.

Joshua found his hand closely locked in Robina's.

"My God!" he whispered. "Colour! I never knew what it meant."

She had never felt nearer to him than at that moment. Their eyes met. Hers melted. She quivered with a thrill of pride. Out of a dull mass of provincial clay she had moulded this sensitive artist, responsive to anything the world held of beauty. A shaft of sunlight—it had been a fickle day—swept through the mighty dome athwart the advancing pageant.

"Look," said Joshua, and it was only a few moments afterwards that they found they had hurt each other's hands considerably.

Joshua reacted to Rome more than Robina had deemed possible.

When they came away from the Benediction and sought their car in the vast colonnaded piazza in front of St. Peter's, he said:

"I started my religious life in a hideous little tin Bethel on the edge of a bit of waste ground where they dumped refuse heaps. They sang dreary hymns and the minister was a dull sanctimonious ass. I don't think religion has come much my way since then. But this thing just now has knocked me. I can't put the two and two together. It's one of two things, as it seems to me. On the one hand—the tin Bethel idea—any old dismal rubbish is good enough for God; or, on the other, all this heart-tearing pomp and ceremonial is what He really wants. It licks me. I don't know."

"Perhaps," said Robina, with a smile, "your people prayed to a Hebraic, Calvinistic Deity and only conventionally brought in Jesus Christ. Here, of course, God the Father is a vague conception, the Jehovah who had to do with Adam and Eve and Moses and Samuel; but whatever there is spiritual in the worship has to do with Christ, and of course the Virgin."

"But if I read things right," said Joshua, with a deepening of the furrows across his brow, "Christ—the humble and meek—would have hated all this splendour."

"When He was a man, the Carpenter's Son, yes," said Robina, very much aware of amateur theology, and hoping that the earnest Joshua would not think her flippant. "But—without irreverence, my dear—as Second Person of the Trinity He may take a different view of things."

"What you say is illuminating, Robina," he conceded, in his serious way. "I never thought of it. He is merged—Trinity and so forth—into the Godhead. God, as we're taught in Masonry, is the Great Architect of the Universe. Any great Architect must be an artist. He must love beauty. What we've just seen is a miracle of beauty. It's all dam interesting. Not that I'm going over to Rome—but I've got something clearer in my mind. If you try to do beautiful things—no matter how—with your brain or your fingers or anything inside you, all for the glory of God—the more beautiful, the better—you'll be following true religion. The colour of this ceremony," he added, after a pause, "has been a hell of an experience."

Robina smiled at his simple exposition of faith. Yes, he was progressing rapidly. Even a year ago it would have been impossible for him to have understood, still less to have formulated the conception of God as the Supreme Artist.

They entered the waiting car, having followed Victor Spens and Susan, who walked a few paces ahead. Victor talked to Robina, sitting opposite, of the

great personages in Vatican circles whom he had recognized. Joshua bent forward towards Susan.

“What did you think of it?”

“I liked the trumpets at the beginning,” she said, “I wish they could have gone on longer.”

He agreed that the clarion notes of the silver trumpets were beautiful.

“But the Pope himself?

“He seemed so lonely,” Susan replied, with a faint knitting of her forehead. “And you tell me he’s a prisoner in the Vatican——”

“Well, he’s not locked up in a cell and fed on bread and water,” said he, jestingly.

“I know that. But he’s a prisoner in all sorts of ways. People can be prisoners when they’re walking about quite free.” She looked beyond Joshua. “I wish I could tell you what I mean, but I can’t.”

“Try,” said Joshua kindly.

She shook her head. “I can’t,” she repeated. “At any rate not now. Some day, perhaps.”

On their way through the lounge of the great hotel, to change their ceremonial trappings, she laid a detaining hand on his arm.

“I hope you don’t think me ungrateful.”

“Ungrateful? Good Lord, why?”

“You do everything for me and I do nothing for you. I don’t even tell you I’m enjoying all the wonderful things you show me.”

“You needn’t tell me,” said Joshua cheerfully. “I see you do. Anyhow, I’m thirsty. Come into the bar.”

He led the way. The bar was empty. Even had it been full, no one would have been astonished by their attire at four o’clock in the afternoon—the man in full evening dress, the woman half-widow, half-nun—for Rome is still under the wizard spell of the Vatican. They sat at a little table. Joshua ordered a whisky and soda for himself, a lemon-squash for Susan. When the drinks were brought she twisted a straw nervously in her fingers.

“There’s something I want to say to you, Mr. Fendick. It’s been haunting me, and because I can’t say it, it has been making me miserable. I wish I could tell you—you see, I know you and Mrs. Dale are giving all this to me as a great treat. You expect me to tell you—to show you—how I’m enjoying it.”

“But aren’t you?” he asked.

“I don’t know. That’s what’s worrying me. I can’t take it all in. It seems

unreal.”

Joshua set down the glass which he was about to raise to his lips.

“Rome unreal?”

She bent her pale tragic face across the table.

“Everything seems unreal. The life I’m leading, all you and Mrs. Dale are doing for me. My life without any anxieties. The comfort—the luxury—my lovely clothes.”

Instinctively she touched the black garment run up for pontifical occasions. Joshua laughed.

“You look all right in it,” said he, “but it isn’t lovely. I’ve learned a lot about women’s clothes the last year or two, and I can’t say I admire the Pope’s taste.”

He meant, in his kindly way, to attune her to a lighter mood; but beyond her vague smile she gave no sign of change.

“You know what I mean,” she persisted. “You—you and Mrs. Dale”—to anyone but Joshua the insistence on the implied partnership of generosity would have been significant—“have done for me what I can’t understand. I sort of live in a dream. I don’t know why you’re doing it. You bring me here. I never knew there was such luxury in the world. You know how we lived in Hamptonshire. I’ve got common sense, though I’m not very well educated. Any mistress in the Trenthampton High School would give the eyes out of her head to be in Rome.”

She took the wet straw out of her glass, broke it across nervously, and gulped a mouthful.

“Well, my dear, and what about it?” said Joshua, reverting to his Midland accent.

“That’s what I can’t say. I’m afraid—it keeps me awake of nights—that you think me ungrateful because I go about so stupidly and don’t tell you how I feel about the things you’re all so excited about.”

“But to-day—this amazing show?”

She passed both hands quickly over her eyes, and then dashing them away suddenly, and in a shrill whisper cried:

“You’ll never understand. I know it’s one of the greatest sights of the world. But it’s unreal. I wish I could tell you why. I was happier in the little rooms in Cromer this August, with Miss Boyd. I want to tell you,” she went on, with an unusual note of passion in her voice, “because I think I’d kill myself if you thought I took things for granted and accepted everything without showing a bit of gratitude. But I am grateful.” She put both elbows on

the table and her hands clutched the black lace veil on her head. “And I don’t know how to show it. If you and Mrs. Dale would like to trample me to death, I’d willingly lie down on the ground and let you do it.”

Joshua, for the moment, at a loss for a reply, swallowed a big gulp of his whisky and soda. Then a word in her unprecedented harangue struck him. He smiled, with the air of a man who is about to deliver himself of a great phrase.

“My dear,” said he, “you’ve just hit it. Grapes, you know. They trample on them. And the result is wine. Perhaps we’re trampling on you now—but there’s going to be good wine. Oh, we know it.”

She spread her arms.

“But why? Am I worth it?”

“I’ll tell you,” said Joshua, suddenly inspired. “Robina and I are a couple of conspirators. I’m going to make you a living woman in marble and Robina’s going to make you a living woman in flesh and blood.”

Then their eyes met. The mutual stare held for a few seconds which in the relativity of time might have been many hours.

“Perhaps,” said he, “I’d like to make you a woman of flesh and blood myself.”

CHAPTER XI

THAT was the first time Joshua had departed from his paternally artistic or artistically paternal attitude towards Susan. It was only the echo of his words in his own ears immediately after their utterance that made him realize a disconcerting fact. For no man has any particular reason save one for desiring to turn a girl of subdued nature into a woman of flesh and blood. He took a deep drink of whisky and soda.

Susan finished her lemonade and went upstairs to change her dismal clothes.

Joshua rapped his head with his knuckles somewhat ruefully. Making love to Susan had no part at all in his scheme of life. The attempt would be mean and entirely abominable. Besides, he had twice laid his heart at the feet of Robina Dale. There it lay still, and there it would lie until such time as the doings of the scallywag in Kenya should tear the scales from her eyes and she should condescend to notice the heart aforesaid and pick it up. No, he was romantically and, though not tragically, yet seriously in love with Robina. He felt ashamed of his sudden outburst. But, confound it all, the girl, with her curious passion of gratitude, her haunted face, her dark eyes that looked through and beyond you, her exquisite curves of body, her beautifully modulated voice, all the more attractive because it was touched with the familiar inflexions of his native county, offered a physical allurement that might reasonably damn an anchorite. Perhaps it was the incongruous black dress which gave her the air of a nun distraught with visions forbidden in any respectable convent. . . . He had heard of men's imaginations playing them foul tricks. Only a night or two ago Victor Spens, over their last drink in the lounge, had got on to the subject of morbid psychology. Joshua shivered at the thought of the possibility of inclusion in a class so appallingly maniacal. He called to the barman for another whisky and soda.

When they all met for dinner, and Susan appeared before him in her conventional evening frock, showing frankly bare shapely arms and perfect beginnings of bosom and back, her diabolical appeal had vanished. She was just Susan, the child of tragic history, saved from God knows what by Robina and himself; the destined model for his masterpiece of marble. Robina, vivid, superbly feminine, gracious tigress in old gold and black, wiped a pink-vested, tired Susan out of the range of vision. Just, he thought, as the scarlet Cardinals had wiped out the purple Bishops.

They dined in the hotel that night, attired in some splendour, in view of a

reception at the British Embassy—the Ambassador having just returned after his holiday—given in honour of a great foreign statesman passing diplomatically through Rome. Victor Spens regarded the prospective entertainment as a part of his professional boredom; Robina, as a commonplace, not unamusing interlude in the day's work; Joshua, always honestly reminiscent of the dank, stone-floored kitchen of his childhood's slumbers, as a queer and interesting experience; Susan, with a shy and awful dread.

Victor, of course, had obtained the invitation. At first Susan had refused. To her simple mind, Ambassadors ranked with Kings and Fairy Princes and Sheiks and Dukes living in dazzling splendour of environment. Victor Spens discovered, to his ironic amusement, that her idea of the Great World was not far removed from that of Barrie's heroine in "A Kiss for Cinderella." He promised himself a delicate distraction from social banalities in shepherding her through the cosmopolitan be-decorated and be-jelled crowd.

He was interested in Susan, although neither Robina nor Joshua had told him of the tragedy that seemed to be the basic inhibitory factor of her non-responsiveness to the little joyous impacts of life. That she would be the model of Joshua's projected masterpiece he had no idea. Joshua had all the Midland Englishman's sensitive reticences with regard to women-folk. It was Victor himself who had dragged out of him reluctantly the half-told story of his relations with Mrs. Reggie Blackadder.

Robina observed the discretion of the two discreet statues in the Alhambra tale. Susan, descending on earth from the blue ether, was vouched for by Robina, most impeccable of social vouchers, and by honest Joshua Fendick, as a young woman of ordinary social status. That was good enough for Victor Spens.

She was beautiful. Her mournful Madonna face and her perfect sinuous form appealed to him from the first moment of their introduction. She had been shy, unable to utter any original set of words. With his man of the world's experience he had struck chords in her to which she had timidly responded. He found her by no means a fool. She had retained such universal facts as she had gathered during her sloppy education at the Trenthampton High School. A latent sense of humour could be pleasantly awakened by one both ingenious and sympathetic. She had her ideas on the economic and the sociological conduct of general life. He realized that in the higher sense of the term she was uneducated. Compared with the flamboyant rose of Robina she was but the little flower of a vegetable marrow. But still the little flower of a vegetable marrow has, even though blighted by hail and frost, something to say for itself. Now and then he could make her laugh.

They waited for a while in the queue of cars drawn up in the circular drive before the doors of the old Villa Torlonia, now the British Embassy. Susan clasped her hands together tightly.

“Please let me go back,” she urged.

“I want to introduce you to a beautiful young attaché,” laughed Victor.

“Oh no—don’t.”

Joshua bent forward and touched her arm.

“I won’t let him. It’ll be all right. We’ll just go in and see the show, you and I, and not say a word to anybody.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure,” said Joshua.

“But I promised my young attaché,” said Victor.

“You’ll have to break your promise,” said Robina finally.

They entered the great hall, disposed of outer garments, met in the crowd and mounted the stately marble staircase. Their names were cried by the English major-domo. They shook hands with the Ambassador and his wife and passed through into the thronged reception rooms.

“We’ll slip out as soon as we can and send the car back for you,” said Joshua to Robina, who was stopped by an American woman of her acquaintance.

“There’s something to look at, anyhow,” said Joshua. “The diamonds and pearls alone are worth the trouble. To say nothing of the women’s dresses and the stars and garters plastered all over the men. Better than the dowdy congregation this afternoon; women hiding themselves all up in black. It got on your nerves—your own black dress especially. Now didn’t it?”

She smiled at him fleetingly; for she knew he meant to be kind and encouraging.

“These folks seem to belong to another world.”

“So much the better. A new experience. Do you know, I felt just like that myself a few years ago.”

“Did you really?”

“Yes.” He laughed. “But one gets used to it. You’re getting used to it already, aren’t you?”

“With you by me, it’s different,” she said. “The idea of being stuck here alone with a strange young man terrified me.”

They found vacant seats in a corner of the drawing-room, and watched a glittering assembly, diplomatists of all countries bespangled with decorations,

Italian officers of high rank lavishly be-medalled, women exquisitely gowned in Paris during the summer exodus from Rome. One swarthy woman—she might have come from Sofia or Santa Fé de Bogota—wore round her head a gold circlet carrying in front an emerald of inordinate size and brilliance. Many of them were Americans, conspicuous by their queer elegance of costume and jewellery. Diamond tiaras flashed. The air was heavy with scent and noise. Joshua and Susan, sitting in their corner, soon found themselves hemmed in by the standing crowd.

"Does this sort of thing give them pleasure?" she asked.

"It's their job—at least, for most of them. And the majority of people like doing their job well. You see, as far as I can make out, a fellow representing Hungary thinks it's his job to be pally with the wife of a fellow representing Brazil; and the wife of the Hungarian thinks it her job to be kind to the Brazilian chap, and so forth. Then there are all kinds of people, like ourselves, who come to look on. Not so many," he added, conscientiously, deepening the furrow across his brow. "Lots of people love to rub shoulders with notabilities. They can go away and say: 'As the Bloomingarian Ambassador told me the other day——' " He laughed at his own conceit. "You see what I mean?"

"But what do they all find to talk about?"

"Oh, ask me another," said Joshua. "As a matter of fact, I think they're telling one another about the state of their insides after the cures they've had during the summer."

And who shall say that the shrewd Joshua was entirely wrong?

Does Monsieur Potirescu, greeting Madame Morowovska whom he has not seen for some months, forthwith enter into a discussion on the rate of infant mortality in their respective countries? Does she say: "Mon cher monsieur, I hold strong views regarding Freud. Would you mind developing yours?"

They can't. They meet in the sweltering banality of a three minutes' conversation. For up comes the Count Sverdman from Scandinavia, with his "chère Madame Morowovska——" and Potirescu clicks his heels and bows and goes off to find somebody else, and so *ad infinitum*.

In some such wise did Joshua, parroting Victor Spens, translate to Susan the Babel of babble round about them. She sighed wearily.

"It seems so silly."

He went back to his original proposition.

"All the same, they're doing their job. It's the diplomatist's job to impress on another diplomatist the fact that, if there's another country he loves even more than his own, it's the other fellow's. His wife's in it too. And it takes

some doing.”

“I still think it’s silly,” said Susan, staring through him, as usual, out of her deep eyes. “It matters so little.”

“That’s all very well,” said he, “but how do you know?”

She shrugged her delicate shoulders, with the air of the fantastic reincarnation of a disembodied spirit. Joshua felt a little chill creep through him. She appeared so immeasurably aloof, not through a vulgar feeling of social alienation, but spiritually—yes, that was the word, spiritually, in her spiritual essence—from this international gathering, in one of the world’s great capitals, of the people into whose subtle hands the destiny of the world is entrusted. Although he had spoken to her jestingly, his forced education of the past few years enabled him to appreciate its significance. He would have liked Victor Spens to act as cicerone and point out the men in whose brains were being woven the plots for the peace or the warfare of Europe. In a kindly way, not suggesting even faintly the hindrance of her company, he set out before her as best he could, this aspect of things. Even while he talked, he was arrested by the words of two elderly men standing with their backs towards him.

“My dear fellow,” said one in English, but with a foreign accent, “why didn’t you tell us that before? It would have saved so much red tape and loss of money.”

And the other, square-headed, with upstanding shoe-brush hair, replied:

“But it was delicate, my friend. There are things one hesitates to put in writing.”

“Still, you might have sent somebody.”

They moved away.

“Did you hear that?” asked Joshua.

Susan nodded.

“Do you still think people come here just because they’re all idle idiots?”

She leaned back and played with the little pearl necklace that Robina had lent her for the evening.

“I don’t know. I suppose you’re right. I suppose things do matter. I’m not quite a fool. If people like these had been clever enough to keep the peace there wouldn’t have been the Great War. I was too young to know much about the Great War. To me, as a child, it seemed beastly. People in the war, I know, were up against it. But these people here aren’t up against it. They’re doing their job as you say. But they’re like carpenters or plumbers. They’ll go home and say: ‘Thank God that job of work’s over.’ I knew the feeling myself when I sold programmes. But I was a shadow—and they’re shadows. There’s no

reality in them. They're not up against it."

Joshua in their corner of the brilliantly crowded drawing-room took her gloved hand.

"You're up against a horrid memory. I know that. But you hadn't anything to do with it. You've had a bad time. But that's over. Robina—Mrs. Dale—and I have given you our guarantee that it's over. You're up against nothing now. You talked about shadows. You're not even up against shadows now."

She bent her shapely head.

"I'm an ungrateful little beast. No, I'm not up against anything. You've given me everything a girl could want."

Her graceful body moved, with a sudden spring, from sinuous dejection into taut pride. She rose.

"I'm a fool. I know I am. Let us try to find Mr. Spens. He must think me half dotty, as you do. I'll talk to anybody. You must be bored stiff with me."

"My dear Susan," said Joshua, as they made their way through the room, "I don't think I've had such an interesting conversation with you during the whole course of our acquaintance."

Soon they came across Victor Spens. "What about my beautiful young attaché?"

"You might bring him along," said Joshua.

Victor brought the boy—Susan, with an unusual flush of excitement on her pale cheeks, smiled on him with an air of pleasure. Joshua moved away with Victor.

A while later he came upon them. The boy looked depressed, Susan pale and half-frightened. As soon as the boy saw her in guardian hands, he made his little bow and faded away.

"Why," said Joshua, "what has he been saying to you?"

She looked about her in a hunted way.

"Nothing. He meant to be kind and amusing. But after the first few minutes I went dead. You don't know what it means to go dead. I couldn't find anything to say—and the more he tried the worse I became. Then I saw he was bored to death with me, didn't know what to do with me, and I think I should have screamed if I hadn't seen you coming."

"Would you like to go?" he asked.

"Oh yes—if you don't mind. I'm a drag on all of you, I know. I'm sorry. But I do try."

"Tut tut," said Joshua, kindly. "I'm not having a very gaudy time myself.

It’s like walking about a Zoo among all the animals turned loose, isn’t it? Only none of them really bite, you know.”

He laughed as he led her away through the crowded rooms. On the great staircase they passed Robina, who left her companion for a second.

“Going?”

Joshua exchanged with her a significant glance. She moved her shoulders in an almost imperceptible shrug, as though acknowledging her partnership with him in the Susan problem.

“Good night, dear. You’ve had a tiring day.”

The girl’s eyes went wide of Robina as she took the proffered hand. “Good night, Mrs. Dale.”

In the car, she shrank into a corner and cried with a touch of hysteria:

“You oughtn’t to have brought me to Rome. I’m not fit for it. I’m not worth it. I’m bringing shame on all of you who are so good to me. I’d like to kill myself.”

“If you do that,” said Joshua gently, “what’s going to become of my statue?”

“Statue? Oh . . .” She recovered herself, after a few short breaths, with an effort of will.

“I’m silly. You must forgive me.”

She began a not over coherent account of her conversation with the young attaché. It appeared they had decided not to exchange first impressions of Rome. He had been doing it with everybody he met for the past week. From a cheery conversationalist he had developed into a gramophone record. She too confessed her desire for non-Roman talk. He had plunged into the personal. He bewailed his trade, in which he, a junior apprentice, was kicked all over the place by the inhuman Robots of the Foreign Office. Whenever any fellow anywhere in Europe wanted a holiday, the Foreign Office, regarding him as a Robot like themselves, sent him to take his place. From Teheran he had been shunted to Bukarest and from Bukarest to Rome. Nobody ever thought he needed a holiday. Oh, of course he had been given leave in Persia. But what kind of civilized merry-making could one do in Persia for a month? You could only go out and shoot things—dear gazelles and what-not, in bewildering discomfort. He had rattled on, amusing Susan, who had but to act the part of the sympathetic listener. Then he had said:

“Now I’ve told you all about me and the knife I have into this beastly universe, tell me about you and your knife.”

And so, being a frank and fresh young man of the world, who had

explained himself, without undue egotism, to an arrestingly beautiful young woman, he had made obvious his interest in her personality and, by light questioning, had sought her superficial confidence. What was she doing in Rome? Who were her friends? Robina Dale the sculptor? He had once met her. Here to-night? He must seek her out. The best on earth. And she liked England better than foreign parts? He was with her every time. What part of England did she come from? He was Midland, Hamptonshire. And she? And she, in sudden dread, had replied at random: “Westmoreland.” It was his mother’s country. He plied her with sympathetic questions which she couldn’t answer. She vaguely avowed a life in London from childhood. And then the cold dead hand had clutched her mind and her heart and her being. She knew more or less now who he was—the Honourable Geoffrey Ayling, a younger son of the Earl of Ballington, of Bandon Chase, one of the historic homes of the county. And Bandon Chase was only twenty miles from her mother’s farm. . . . It was then, as far as Joshua could reckon things out, from her story in the car and in the lounge when they arrived at the hotel, that the inhibition had checked the flow of her newly awakened sympathy with life and youth and a world in which the sunshine was too pervasive for the existence of shadows. According to her own phrase, she had come over dead.

“It’s a rotten little world, I know, Susan,” said Joshua oracularly, filling his pre-slumber pipe. “It’s a wonder there aren’t more coincidences than there are. Only the other day I was waiting outside the house for Manifold, who was late. Who should bump into me but the nurse who had tended me during the war. I recognized her. I said, ‘Hullo Sister!’ She looked at me for a minute and then said: ‘I think you’re Fendick.’ And I said ‘Yes.’ Then she asked me how I was getting on. I said, ‘Fair to middling.’ You see, she knew me as a Non-com. ‘Only that?’ she asked. And Manifold comes buzzing up with the car and jumps out and touches his cap, full of apologies. Sister Warren—that was her name—gasped. ‘That yours?’ It was obviously mine. I said, ‘Can I give you a lift? One good turn deserves the hundred good turns you did me in hospital—or perhaps it’s the other way about?’ She was confused, began to hesitate. I told her to get in, she wanted to know which way I was going. I told her that some time or the other I’d be making for the Melbury Road, Kensington. I had an appointment with Filmore to look round his studio. You remember, he has that big thing on—I told you—a Perseus and Andromeda. She was going to the Melbury Road too. And would you believe it, we were going to the same house? She to nurse Filmore’s wife. Coincidences are too common to worry about, my dear.”

Susan smiled dutifully at this recital, guessing that it was meant to serve a soothing purpose, and promised to worry no more. Then she went up to bed.

Joshua smoked his pipe. No, Susan was not reacting—according to Robina's word—to Rome in the orthodox fashion. Everything that set him in a glow left her cold. Other things that held little interest for him filled her with nervous dread.

They had visited the lovely old circular church of San Stefano Rotondo, with its frescoes all around the walls of would-be terrific scenes of martyrdoms. Robina had flashed the truth on him. The attitudes and the faces of both torturers and tortured were of such artless benignity as to eliminate the element of horror. The interest aroused in the mind of the modern spectator was merely æsthetic, historical, archæological, psychological, or what-not. The frescoes should evoke a smile rather than cause a shudder. But Susan, in spite of Robina's exposition, could not bear to look at them. She ran from the church and stood in the little entrance courtyard until they came out.

He noted that anything to do with death terrified her. Those Ancient Roman houses, precious in their history, fascinating though their modernity, if one gives play even to a little imagination, so charming in their splendour of mosaic walls and floors, where Saints met their deaths or soul-shaking ordeals: that of the Saints Giovanni and Paolo where they were murdered; that of Saint Cecilia—below the church of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere—where the pleasant lady was miraculously saved from being boiled alive—had conveyed to Susan nothing but a morbid impression of decay, death and antecedent horror.

Joshua brooded over his pipe. Susan's reaction—he thanked Robina again for teaching him that word—was, on the whole, not negative. Rome might have been—his mind instinctively used the right tense, for they were leaving the next day—Rome might have been good for Susan, and it might have been bad, but it had awakened her from her usual unemotional passivity. She feared, she hated, she questioned, she protested, she implored: all signs of life—blood running through the unknown veins of the marble that was Susan.

Of course she had gone through a bad time, thought Joshua—two or three years ago. Both he and Robina had agreed in their estimates of allowance for shock. But, after all, people eventually have to die somehow and their survivors have to live and, as a general rule, find a literal *modum vivendi* not too intolerable. That was the worrying problem of Susan. She seemed to have found for herself no satisfactory method of living; not as a human being. She accepted food and shelter like dog or cat.

She was ill at ease with men. Himself, so he reflected grimly, she regarded as elderly, grotesque, half-lunatic, semi-god, remote from human passions, whose sole aim in life was to copy her back in clay. From Victor Spens, good-natured and delicate gentleman, she inwardly shrank—Joshua knew it, because, to an extent of which he was unaware, he was obsessed by the girl—

as from a satyr. Before the odds and ends of men whom she had met during their three weeks in Rome, she had remained as unresponsive as an oyster—an oyster whose valves were portals of adamant. Joshua relit the pipe which he had neglected in these profound reflections. The beautiful young attaché to-night, for instance, a Prince Charming of a young fellow, attractive in his boyish way even to him, Joshua, who had exchanged with him only a poor half-dozen words of courtesy. He could imagine any healthy girl falling in love with him on the spot.

But no. He had left Susan keyed up to a certain point. He had found her run down, almost like a mechanical doll. The fact that he was Geoffrey Ayling, son of Lord Ballington of Bandon Chase, in the County of Hamptonshire, could not account for her breakdown. The Aylings were as remote from her father's farm as—as, well, as Mr. Joshua Fendick of Eaton Terrace and the Cock-Pit Club, late sergeant of Territorial Artillery, was from Sister Warren who had nursed him after his contact with bits of an unkind German shell. She had seized upon the coincidence as an excuse for her behaviour.

Victor Spens, ignorant of her history, had lately put the case before him in succinct form.

"The girl is man-shy. That's all it comes to. There are lots like her. They generally go unexpectedly off the deep end."

Geoffrey Ayling must have spread his male peacock plumage too flauntingly before this beautiful being of the other sex and she had taken sudden fright—fearful oyster closing her shells of adamant.

It was a devil of a puzzle. All women were puzzles, if you came to that. Arabella had been a puzzle. But one devoid of any interest in solution, just like a silly riddle:

"Why is a vegetable marrow like a wasp?"

One to be given up without caring for the answer. But Susan was different. So, of course, was Robina. Yet he could get more or less at Robina. She was generally direct, in spite of odd quirks and twists which he put down to her infatuation for the drunken little beast in Kenya. But, here again, Susan was different. She was no vulgar riddle or conundrum. She was an enigma. Again another word which pleased him. His retarded education had led him by the legend of the Sphinx. An enigma, Mystery of woman's soul insoluble.

Joshua damned the pipe which had once more gone out.

The great lounge of the hotel was a desert of upholstered chairs and cold tables. The electric lighting was that of a mausoleum perfunctorily kept illuminated by testamentary disposition.

He rose, yawned, stretched himself, a solitary, stocky, red-headed figure in

the bleak emptiness. Habit, when he was in perplexity, caused him to tap his red thatch with his knuckles.

A slight sound attracted his attention. He glanced through the lounge and the outer hall and recognized Robina and Victor standing against the glass entrance door.

He fled up to his room, conscious of the night’s more than adequate supply of things to think about.

CHAPTER XII

THE clear light of a fine December morning flooded the studio. In the quiet of the place there was a breathless sense of mystery, the mystery of creation. Joshua had, at last, begun his great work. He stood by the modelling-stand, the furrow very deep across his brow, his breath coming quick in the intensity of his effort. The armature of iron and flexible lead piping was already covered by the wet clay, and the vague form of the cast-up girl was discernible. By his side a small table held the few simple clay-stained tools of the modeller's craft.

Before him on the revolving-table, raised to convenient height on four small packing-cases, lay Susan, apparently indifferent to his anxious scrutiny. She lay nude, the lower part of her body to midway between hips and thighs covered by some thicknesses of filmy gauze which served the double purpose of a wrap and of an indication of the foam of the receding wave. She lay lifeless, a little more than three-quarters prone, revealing that curve of spinal contour whose beauty as sketched by Robina had changed the meaning and the aim of his life. Her shapely arms were outstretched to the pose, but there was no need yet for the desperately clutching hands. Those she had posed for many times. There was a bit of wall in a corner of the studio decorated with plaster studies of Susan's hands. She lay there before him, exquisite and untroubled loveliness. When it came to great grips with reality she would have to pose with half-uplifted head. For the moment a cushion relieved her of the strain.

Joshua, in his artist's absorbing dream, lost consciousness of Susan, the strange bit of human jetsam that had been cast up on the shores of his life and had awakened within him all kinds of disconcerting emotions, and saw her only as the Thing of Beauty which it was his queer destiny to immortalize in marble. He stood looking from the shapeless clay to Susan, from Susan to the clay. He walked a step towards her, gave the table a slight turn, anxiously compared her pose with the little wax maquette on a stand close by.

"Your right leg is a bit cramped. Move it up a bit. Not so much. Yes. That's it."

He went back to his clay, moved the mass dependent on the flexible piping beneath.

Yes. That was more or less like it. It gave the right grace to the forlorn body of his vision. . . . He put a bit of clay here, a bit of clay there, building up the delicate waist which had been thrown out of perfection by an awkward pose.

A very human sniffle from the dead Susan awakened him from his absorption.

“Cold?”

“Just a little.”

“We’ll have a rest.”

She drew up the ocean gauze around her and swung herself from the table, draped like a modest Nereid. He fetched from a chair-back the fur coat which Robina had given her.

“Stick it on and come to the fire.”

She accepted the coat. “It’s quite warm, really. It ought to be with central heating and a fireplace. I’m sorry. But when one has nothing on, one sort of gets goose-flesh. I’d sooner walk about a bit.”

“Just as you like,” said Joshua.

He had little appreciation of her existence. His world was narrowed down to the amorphous mass that one day, after many days of patient and exhausting effort, would find itself the magically complete embodiment of his dreams. He couldn’t tear himself away from it. Here would be the tragic half-dead face, there the neck melting into the tender shoulders. . . . Had he got his anatomy right? No; something was wrong. His intent eye found the weak spot.

That shoulder-blade would have to be sharp—he had noticed it in the model a short while ago, while he was busy with the waist. It must stand up sharp, even in the plumpest woman who assumed that attitude; you couldn’t go against the basic structure of the human frame. But that realistic upstanding fin of a shoulder-blade would play the devil with all the rest of the figure. He must modify the pose, so that it should not be so significant. On the other hand, if he did not convey the impression of the last spending of vital force in this cast-up creature, all his labour would be in vain. He would be doing a chocolate-box thing in the round. The apparently ugly feature must be shown, clean and frank; and there must be taut muscles of the delicate female form, reaching from thighs through soft swelling curves, up the sinuous back to culminate in the anguish of the gripping hands.

He had been academically aware of all this. Vaguely and very uncomfortably aware. He had hidden it from his artistic consciousness. He would trust to luck, find a way out. He realized now that the serious artist doesn’t trust to luck.

Susan, incongruous figure in manifold wrappings of sea-foam surmounted by a long coat of fur, beneath which showed a pair of legs encased in flesh-coloured silk stockings and shod with tan shoes, looked out of the studio

window at the trim, stunted little gardens of the row of houses opposite. She seemed to take no account of the artistic preoccupations of her patron. If Joshua had paid more regard to her Roman impressions he might have divined the root of her indifference. This counterfeit presentment of herself when finished would be but one more addition to the marble company of corpses which had frightened her in Rome. She stared out of window at her own visions.

Joshua turned away from the stand and went to the fire to warm the fingers which had been working in the cold wet clay. He lit a cigarette and again scrutinized his work, walking slowly round it. During his tutelage he had learned the fact that this rough beginning ought to satisfy him. As far as it went his anxious eye could discover nothing amiss, except the lack of allowance for that sharp fin of a shoulder-blade. That would require treatment. Rodin could have done it; he would have known instinctively how far to modify stark prominence into significance; he would have carried it off by the strength of his genius. But modest Joshua was no Rodin. Other fellows could do it with the cunning born of long experience. He had seen them at work. They jabbed on the clay, fingered it, scraped it a bit with a certainty of attack so different from his patient tentativeness.

Why had he spent all the impressionable and creative years of his life in the making of boots when he might have spent them in the creation of things of beauty? If only the dunderhead of a Trenthampton art-master, under whose tuition he had gained a prize for freehand, had recognized in him some dormant artistic sense and had opened for him, even though an inch wide, the door into dazzling realms! But no. What had the fourteen-year-old son of a Trenthampton boot operative to do with æsthetics? Joshua's prize was but an item in the teacher's list of examination successes. Besides, when the next term began, Joshua, flung into the grim and unlovely factory, had faded from his memory. Still, the art-master might have done something—what Joshua couldn't rightly define. He himself had loved his drawing-hours, blessed relief from the dreadful, uninspired lessons on dead geographical and historical facts which conveyed no meaning to him, and on the ghastly arithmetic of firkins and kilderkins. But, in the grim whirring of the factory, drawing, a mere school-subject of no practical account, had quickly passed into the limbo where all other subjects floundered unhonoured and forgotten.

If only he had had twenty years of training in his youth, instead of two in his middle age, there would have been no need of all this torture of self-distrust.

Only last week, a serenely wise Robina had said to him:

"No artist, no matter what medium he works in, does anything worth doing

without agony and bloody sweat.”

That was consoling, up to a point. These real artists might suffer agony and bloody sweat. That was part of the game. Women go through pangs in childbirth. He was more than aware of the analogy. But just as the woman knows that, in the ordinary course of things, a child will be born full of life and vigour, so were there good people perfectly certain that, at the end of their travail, everything would be as right as rain. The picture, the musical composition, the novel, the play, the building, the statue would come out just as they wanted. They had the technique, the sureness of touch which experience and devotion to any art makes a matter of instinct, not one of deliberate decision taken in a tangle of confused thought.

In some such way did Joshua, in his mingled excitement and dejection, dimly analyse his soul-position as he stood before the roughly moulded form of clay that, the power granted him, would one day be a miracle of radiant beauty.

Suddenly, recovering his solid British sense of values, he addressed himself in Midland Doric terms of opprobrium and called on his model, who, all this time of his artist’s Gethsemane, had stood, like an impersonal ghost, staring through the window.

“Do you think you can manage another half-hour?”

Susan turned. “Of course, Mr. Fendick. As long as you like.”

She threw off the fur cloak and resumed her pose on the revolving-table. Joshua arranged the sea-gauze which she had left around her shoulders, and gave her the necessary directions. She was the ideal model, obeying the man’s slightest hint of movement. Her obedience seemed to be the result of an intellectually mechanical process. She took no emotional interest whatsoever in her co-operation with the artist. No “Am I all right? Is this what you want?” like the flesh and blood model eager to please; but just an embodied phantom of a human personality. Had it so pleased him, he could have pulled her limbs about as he pulled the lead-piping boned limbs of his clay figure.

He made her lie this way and that way. No. In no compromise of posture could the wonder of her back express the half-dead woman’s last despairing clutch on life. She must go to the original pose, the pose of the vivid picture which had shimmered before his eyes—it seemed long ago—when he had looked out of that window and beheld the Great Vision. Contour gracious or ungracious, that shoulder-blade must be the essence of the poignancy of the idea. He examined his little maquette or wax sketch. He had faked the osteology. It wasn’t a bit like it.

For good or evil in his execution, that sweetly covered shoulder-blade must

be the expressive factor. It would be difficult. But the truth must prevail. He went back to the building up of the waist.

The sitting over, she rose and went into the little fitted dressing-place behind the screen, whence she presently emerged fully dressed, the Susan of everyday life. He rubbed his soiled hands together and smiled at her.

“It seems to be going on all right. Don’t you think so?”

“How can I judge?” she asked.

“Well, it’s beginning to get into the shape of a human figure, isn’t it?”

“Oh, of course,” she said. “Shall you want me after lunch?”

“We might put in an hour while the light lasts. Unless you’ve anything else to do.”

Her faint smile played around her lips.

“This happens to be my job, Mr. Fendick. When I sold programmes, the management didn’t ask me to attend unless I had a previous engagement.”

At which Joshua laughed. Now and then Susan emitted a pale gleam of humour.

“But I’m not a machine of a theatre management, my dear.”

“You once ran a great factory,” she countered seriously. “Did you ask your hands to come to work if they felt like it?”

Joshua fell too into seriousness. “You’re neither selling programmes nor standing up in front of a machine that punches holes in leather.”

“Then what am I doing?”

“You’re helping me to do something wonderful—something that’s the dream of my life. What we’re here together for isn’t Business, but Art. If it weren’t for you, I couldn’t get on. An ordinary model at so much an hour wouldn’t be any good to me. You’re different.”

“I’ll never quite understand why,” she said, in her deep, even tones, “but that’s not my affair. To be your model is the only job I’ve got in the world.”

“I wish you wouldn’t use that beastly word—job,” cried Joshua half angrily. “It hurts me.”

She turned away with a sigh. “It’s the way I was brought up, I suppose.” Then she turned again and faced him and he saw unprecedented tears in her eyes. “Don’t you think it hurts me,” she flashed suddenly, “when you think that anything could stop me from doing the only thing on earth I’m capable of doing for you? No, Mr. Fendick,” she went on a trifle hysterically. “Supposing I said: ‘I’m awfully sorry. I’m lunching with Mr. Victor Spens and going to a matinée and I can’t sit for you this afternoon’? It’s not a question of what

you'd think of me, but what I'd think of myself."

Joshua rubbed a good deal of the dried clay from his fingers on his red thatch of hair. Susan he found was addicted to sudden and surprising explosions. Hitherto, since their return from Rome, she had relapsed into the unemotional young woman whose remoteness from the common gaiety of life had both puzzled and fascinated him, as it had puzzled and fascinated Robina, though not in quite the same measure. Robina stood benevolent Juno, mother of sorrowing maidens. He was a mortal of the sex perhaps damnably opposed to that of the maiden aforesaid; and he was also absorbed in an artistic conception of Susan with which Robina could have nothing but an academic concern. Still they were partners in Susan. During the past month or so they had often discussed her, and contrasted her nervous outbursts in Rome with her usual lifeless docility. She had very calmly begged Robina to desist from further attempts to widen her social horizon. She had been a failure in Rome. She would be a worse failure in London. Seclusion in the flat with Euphemia Boyd afforded her complete happiness. She had resumed her singing lessons, and to sing to an appreciative Euphemia was her favourite relaxation. To the multitudinous pulsations of the great outer world, which reacted, spiritually, artistically, intellectually, on the sensitive Robina, and, to some extent, on the modernized Joshua, she remained phlegmatically unresponsive. The downfall of governments, the triumphs of ephemeral gladiators, the far-flung advertised splendour of a new play or a novel, the livid light playing over a murder mystery, the popular enthusiasm over a Royal marriage or birth, cyclonic catastrophes of coal of which her scuttle was the centre, the divorces of dukes and duchesses, accidents by sea and automobile race-track, the arrival in London, in more than regal publicity, of an American Film Star, the sensational discovery of a cancer bacillus, the latest bright invention for killing time—in short, the world pageant of life which the newspapers parade before the eyes of the imaginative, left her untouched, unmoved, uninterested. If she glanced through the pages of an illustrated daily, it was only through a dull sense of duty. Her protectors expected her to know something of current happenings, so that when they spoke to her she should not regard them like a dumb idiot.

Joshua rubbed clay on a head puzzled by this contradictory Susan. At last he said:

"As you like, my dear. I don't want you to feel hurt. . . . It's the very last thing. . . . Well, well, when I ask you if you can come, you may take it that I'm telling you to come—in a polite sort of way. Will that satisfy you?" He held out his hand, with a shy grin. "Turn up after lunch at the usual time."

That was the last of their discussions for a long while. She disrobed, posed

for Joshua and went her silent way afterwards. Joshua, in the grip of a creation gradually taking a suggestion of life, lost the woman in the model. Outside the studio he scarcely saw her. She lived recluse with Euphemia. He found himself gradually more and more enmeshed in the pleasant web of social things. He went to dinner-parties and even dances, and entertained without trepidation in his own house. Now and then he consulted Robina, by courtesy but not of necessity. She was proud of him. The genial and efficient host was her handiwork. The home itself had undergone a continuous transformation. The hand of the Art Experts of the Eminent Firm was no longer visible. To her it seemed as though she had stood him in a magic circle and waved a fairy wand and bidden him express himself in the terms that give personality to a dwelling. It was no longer the Eminent Firm's idea of a gentleman's house. It was his own idea of surroundings that satisfied not only his eyes but something spiritual that his eyes craved to behold. Æsthetic Analysis was beyond honest Joshua's capacity for thought. He bought a picture or a bronze or a bit of tapestry or a chair, because it was jolly or stunning. Beyond that he didn't go; but in its jolliness or stunningness the acquisition was inevitably right.

One day Robina congratulated him on the evolution of the House Beautiful. Modestly she said: "How you've done it I don't know."

"It's all you—of course. Where should I have been without you? I've kept the Morlands—they're really good."

Robina accepted the tribute graciously. That she should have started him off, she declared, would always be a feather in her cap.

"You opened my eyes, of course," said he. "But what really started me off was your revelation of Susan's back."

"I'm getting a bit tired of Susan's back," said Robina, frostily.

Whereupon Joshua knew he had blundered.

This is by the way. The main fact to be recorded in Joshua's history during this period is that he enjoyed whole-heartedly the agreeable social life of Winter London. Sir John Baldo suggested his joining a City Company. He himself was a Cordwainer, had passed the chair. What more appropriate member could there be than Joshua, a real live actual eminent cordwainer himself? Every path on which Joshua set his foot seemed a path of pleasantness.

Then, of course, there were the Pellings. They had descended on London, the three of them, for a few weeks during the autumn from their place in Warwickshire, and had established themselves in their ancestral home, or what had taken the place for many years of their ancestral home in Grosvenor Place, long since sold, namely Jevon's Hotel in Albemarle Street. Lord Pelling had a

room there all the year round, which he occupied on the occasions when his conscience bade him vote in the House of Lords against any measure which signified the oppression of the Aristocracy, or when his necessities compelled him to perfectly beastly interviews with his bankers. But when he came up to town, with his family, Jevon's gave him as stately a suite as old-fashioned Jevon's could provide. That the suite should be denied his lordship, on the interchange of telegrams, owing to its actual occupation by purse-proud people from Cincinnati or Bradford, was a conception that never entered the heads either of Jevon's or Lord Pelling.

"Damn it all, sir," he would say. "They owe me something. Old Brooks, the steward"—he was really the Head-Waiter—"the pillar of the place, came straight from Pells, where he was trained as footman in my father's time."

Thus he claimed seigneurial rights over Jevon's.

Joshua fraternized once more with the Pellings and wandered about, humorously unamused, in their stodgy Court Families circle, and watched the progress of true love between his son Sutton and their daughter Victoria with an interest half paternal and half ironical. He remembered that little glow of an intimate conversation with Sutton at Deauville.

Christmas came, as it always comes to a busy man, with the disconcerting suddenness of an unpredicted eclipse. Joshua had to pack up his traps and, according to long-standing engagement, to journey with Sutton to Pells, Lord Pelling's county seat in Warwickshire.

He was impressed by the stateliness of the Elizabethan house which had been in the possession of the family since its erection. It was somewhat bleak, it is true, owing to general economy in fuel. To enjoy the long picture-gallery one needed a sweater and an overcoat. But on the walls of the gallery hung masterpieces of Vandyck, Allan Ramsey, Gainsborough, Romney, Lawrence, glorifying inglorious Pellings of past generations. Joshua stood before the masterpieces in frozen admiration.

"You're one of the very few people, my dear friend," said Lord Pelling, smoothing his drooping, ineffectual moustache, "who can understand what a sacrifice I'm making, in all sorts of ways, to keep these pictures. Hard-headed, common-sense fellows come along and say: 'Why the hell don't you sell 'em if you're hard up?' Well, I could sell 'em. America would pour out dollars for 'em. But I put it straight to you. What do you think? All these are my own people. It'd be like selling my own flesh and blood. See what I mean?" It cost Joshua, with the dreariest ancestry behind him, considerable intellectual effort to appreciate the point of view. He was aware of the financial embarrassments of the impoverished peer. Both at Deauville and in London Lord Pelling had

hailed a free meal for himself and his family as a god-send. He was for ever picking the brains of business men in the forlorn hope of learning the certain way of making a hundred thousand pounds out of a hundred pounds investment. He was a master of petty shifts and pathetic economies; in the whole of Pells Joshua had been unable to discover one superfluous luxury. Even the wine at meals, poured by the butler to an accurate sixteenth of an inch below the brim, seemed to be served out according to rigid measure. The coal and sticks for his bedroom fire in the prepared grate, visible when he entered the room during the daytime, seemed to be rationed. And yet, some queer instinct of pride, of the essential obligations of nobility, prevented Pelling from making a comfortable fortune by the sale of his uninspiring ancestors. On the whole, Joshua liked the fellow better for it. The other pictures in the Pells collection unconnected with the family had gone long ago.

The house, in spite of discreet disposal of artistic treasures, still retained an air of dignity. The stags' heads and the trophies of arms and the suits of armour in the spacious heavily furnished entrance hall alone gave the place a feudal air. The magnificence of a Renaissance Italian chimney-piece swept the mind away from the calculated smouldering of the two great logs beneath. A footman in plum-coloured livery whose buttons were engraved with the Pelling crest kept up the illusion of an unruffled nobleman's careless and necessary state. And, in old-world courtesy of welcome, Joshua admitted that both Lord and Lady Pelling could not be outdone.

"My dear fellow, for anything you want, you've only to touch your bell."

Thus Pelling, with the air of a man bidding his guest command the resources of the universe.

"Jolly old place, isn't it, Dad?" said Sutton. "And when you come to know them, they're dears, aren't they, both of them?"

The "both" referred to prospective father and mother-in-law. The daughter, Victoria, he discreetly left out.

"They're doing their best, my boy," replied Joshua. "But"—he laid a hand on his son's shoulder and whispered into his ear—"I wish they'd give me a little more to eat."

For Joshua, although absorbed in artistic pursuits, had never undervalued the supreme importance of keeping himself fit; all allowances made for the years' depredations on man's physical constitution, he was as fit as when he played centre-forward for the Trenthampton Wanderers in the days of his early youth; and when a middle-aged man is as lustily fit as ever he was, he has a lusty appetite.

"I'd have given a sovereign for a second helping of that roast mutton at

lunch to-day.”

Sutton laughed. Professed himself sorry. Said he would give Victoria a hint.

“For God’s sake, don’t,” cried Joshua in alarm. “What the devil will they think of me?”

The object of the Christmas entertainment was that which Joshua had conjectured in August. After lunch on Christmas Eve, his wife and daughter having left the gentlemen to their wine, Lord Pelling held the port decanter towards the young man.

“Port?”

Pelling was of the old school which holds it to be discourtesy to ask a guest to have another glass of port, as though he had already as much as was good for him; but he clutched the decanter with the unmistakable air of a man engaged in a ceremonial formality.

“No, thank you, sir,” said Sutton.

“In that case,” said Lord Pelling—and a smile lit in his tired eyes, and, fading over his drab features, lost itself in his drooping moustache—“perhaps you’ll find more congenial company in the drawing-room. Let me fill your glass, Fendick,” he went on when Sutton had gone. “It’s a ’78 Cockburn—and a good bottle. Precious little of it left. I don’t mind telling you I only open it on serious occasions. This is a serious occasion.”

“I suppose it is,” said Joshua.

“The boy has told you all about it?”

“He said he asked you this morning and you didn’t turn him down.”

Lord Pelling sipped his wine.

“Why should I, my dear friend? I won’t hide from you the fact that Adelina and I have had other ideas regarding Victoria. You see what I mean? But we’re forced to the conclusion that we’re old-fashioned people and that old-fashioned people with old-fashioned ideas are only figures of fun in the modern world. Your son wants to marry my daughter. My daughter wants to marry your son. The younger generation has taken the bit between its teeth and run away with all of us. We’re helpless.”

Joshua agreed. “All the same, Sutton’s a good, straight lad.”

“My dear fellow, if he wasn’t—well——But he is. A charming boy——Well—I can’t go into the matter further without knowing your views.”

“Mine?” said Joshua, taking a cigar from his case, and offering the case, after a second’s thought, to his host, who accepted a cigar, with a compliment

to Joshua's taste. "My view? You know our family history. Sutton tells me he has been perfectly frank both with you and the young lady—your daughter, Victoria," he quickly added, vaguely conscious of solecism. "I can't have any possible objection to my son marrying into a noble family like yours. It'd be silly, not to say indecent. I've sprung from the people, but I'm not a Bolshevist. I come of old English stock that believes in the old aristocratic tradition. My father when he was a machinist in our boot factory always voted Tory." He bit off the end of his cigar and lit it. "I'd like you to understand, Lord Pelling, that, as far as I know, I'm an honest sort of chap. I'm not a self-made man. All the credit's due to my father. He gave me my position in the manufacturing world. Money and all that sort of thing. Of course I've done my bit of work in my time—but that's neither here nor there. Anyhow, what I want to say is that I've no social ambitions. I've found a line of life—amateur sculpturing—which is quite enough for me. . . . I stick to my old Tory principles, and so I feel it a great honour that you should be willing to receive my son into your family. That's all there is to it."

The interlude of the service of coffee interrupted the conversation. When they were alone again Lord Pelling said:

"I can't tell you how I appreciate your—well, what you've just told me. It's men like you that are the solid facts of the Empire. As a boy, I heard my grandfather, and later as a young man, my father, declare that the country was going to the dogs. Well, it hasn't gone yet—thanks to you and what you represent. I thought I'd tell you this, for there's nothing like mutual understanding. . . . Now we're fathers on the same ground talking of the happiness of our children."

Nothing could be more frank and fair. Joshua enjoyed his cigar. He also enjoyed, in a kindly comfortable way, a nervous movement of his host's hands and an uncertain ferrety look in his eyes. He had seen that look before in the eyes of men who had come to borrow money. He anticipated the inevitable question; sometimes it is pleasing to be maliciously generous.

"I think Sutton will have enough to keep his wife in the position to which she is accustomed. He doesn't make much yet. But he's the sort of fellow that makes his way. In the meanwhile, as he's all I've got, I can settle a couple of thousand a year on him. With what you can allow Victoria, I hope you think that's a good enough start."

"It is indeed," said Lord Pelling with a sigh of relief. "I believe in young people working their way up. . . . I'm afraid, however, that Victoria's dowry won't be very dazzling. The damned taxation—the upkeep of a place like this—you know what I mean—Victoria can only have pin-money."

“As I’ve said,” Joshua replied, “like you, though with some difference, I was brought up in an old-fashioned way—in the idea, don’t you know, that if a man can’t support a girl he has no business to ask her to marry him.”

So all was well. The fathers pledged each other in a glass of the ’78 port, which after coffee and cigars tasted beastly.

“We’ll announce the engagement this evening, if that’s agreeable to you,” said Pelling.

“I’m entirely in your hands,” said Joshua.

They went into the drawing-room where they found Lady Pelling playing patience. She was one of those women to whom life without cards was meaningless. Mrs. Shandy’s historical utterance: “My dear, have you remembered to wind up the clock?” might well have had from Lady Pelling a psychological variant in, “My dear, why did you trump my King of Spades?” She held up a detaining hand, while with knitted brow she decided on her move. Then her features relaxed and she turned.

“Well?”

“All well, my dear,” said Lord Pelling.

He related briefly the substance of his talk with Joshua.

“We’d better have ’em in and get it over,” said Lady Pelling.

She was a thin, worn woman with fair reddish hair undecided what to do with itself. But for her husband, she would have dyed it any old colour. It was his one maniacal foible. She could paint her nose blue and her cheeks bottle green and wear skirts up to her hams and bodices down to anywhere it pleased her, and she could play bridge till the cows came home the day after tomorrow, while the house went slovenly to the devil, and he uttered no sort of protest. But when it was a question of dyeing her hair he foamed at the mouth. To save so indulgent a husband from human rabies, she allowed her hair to go through the brindled processes ordained by an unproviding Providence.

In the interval between the summons of the plum-coloured Mercury of a footman and the casual entrance of the lovers, she continued her game of patience.

Joshua went up to Victoria, a thin-lipped young edition of her mother.

“My dear, it’s all fixed up. Sutton’s a lucky fellow. But I’m sure he’ll be a good man to you.”

He held her hands, touched by a queer primitive emotion; for one doesn’t feel a potential grandfather every day of the week. “I’m very happy—and very proud,” said he. He bent forward and kissed her, as she inclined her head, somewhere between nose and ear. She said:

“Thanks very much. I’m glad you think it’s going to be all right.”

Then followed complicated greetings and congratulations.

“My dear boy, bless you,” said Joshua.

Sutton grinned, but winced under his father’s grip. The hand of Joshua, old footballer, boxer and clay-modeller who had kept himself fit, when inspired by nervous force, was a clamp of steel.

Victoria touched her father’s sleeve.

“Do you think you need make the announcement this evening to all those dear old dug-outs?”

“What else would you suggest?”

“A notice in ‘The Times.’ Quite enough.”

“My dear child,” said the dismal nobleman, “when you’re married you can lose sense of the Family, if you like. But until then, I’ll cherish it as one of the few things I’ve got left in the world.”

“Old Sophie Harpenden will keep her pearls and cut you out of her will if she’s not told to-night,” said Lady Pelling acidly.

Now the Dowager Duchess of Harpenden, great-aunt of Victoria, was a crabbed old woman who would do all sorts of nice turns if you pleased her and all sorts of foul ones if you didn’t. Common sense dictated the right procedure. After all, it takes little expenditure of vital force to win the good graces of a self-centred old woman of seventy-four. Just a little sincere hypocrisy and the trick is done.

Victoria shrugged her thin shoulders and laughed.

“Oh, just as you like, only all this ceremonial seems a bit barbarian. Somebody the other day put me on to a book I’d never heard of—Westermarck’s ‘Primitive Marriage.’ As I was more or less interested in the subject, I looked through it and handed it over to Sutton. We don’t seem to have progressed very much.” She moved to the card-table at which her mother still sat.

“How are you getting on?” She scanned the layout. “Knave on the Queen, nine down, ten on the Knave. Don’t you see?”

“I do now. But all this has confused me,” replied her mother.

“What about a game of billiards?” Sutton suggested to his betrothed.

Lovers’ walking out-of-doors in the mystery of December early twilight was prohibited by pitiless Christmas rain.

“We’ll make a four, Pelling,” cried Joshua, enthusiastic and skilful player. Had he not practised the game from youth up in the snug and stuffy billiard-

rooms of Trenthampton?

“I must have my little rest,” said Pelling, “if you’ll excuse me. Three at billiards is no company. Perhaps my wife will take you on at Rubicon Bézique.”

He faded through one door. The young couple departed through another, without taking the trouble to fade.

“You’ll have to teach me, Lady Pelling,” said Joshua.

“I’ll teach you right enough,” she said genially.

And the genial lesson cost him exactly five pounds fourteen and sixpence.

During the afternoon came the *ban* and *arrière-ban* of the Family. The one outsider was Robina Dale, known to the Pellings not only personally, but as the intimate social sponsor of Joshua Fendick.

They came. They had sporadic tea in the immense hall, sentinelled by ghosts in armour. They trooped into dinner. They dined; even well. Lady Pelling had killed the fatted turkey for the occasion. Raddled old Sophie Harpenden said to Joshua, her neighbour: “First eatable food I’ve ever had in this house. How do you manage it?” To which Joshua, after a rubbing of thatch, could only reply: “It is a good turkey, isn’t it?” Which was about as feeble a remark as man could make. Inwardly he had a little shivering feeling which conveyed to his brain the idea that the great old aristocratic lady’s remark was in the worst of taste.

At the end of dinner, Lord Pelling rose and announced the engagement to an unsurprised party. Healths were drunk, congratulations buzzed.

“Thank God that’s over,” whispered Victoria. “Now we’ve only got to talk platitudes.”

She talked them all the evening to a bitter-sweet family, with her air of young independence. But when she went to bed, she took from a drawer a photograph which, without looking at it, she tore across and across and cast into her little rationed bedroom fire. The sudden blaze caused a horrid gulp in her throat. She threw herself on her bed and cried her eyes out.

CHAPTER XIII

By the early spring various things had happened within the circle of Joshua's interests.

One of them was the flight of Sutton from the paternal nest. He was now not only a well-known young man about town of the better sort, a member of a St. James's Street club, but had been received into the leather-broking firm as a junior partner and begun to earn what Joshua called a tidy income for his age. His flight from Eaton Terrace can be so termed only in the language of metaphor. He was neither pushed out of the nest, nor did he escape secretly. Before he married, said he, he must learn to live on his own. He must also have a place of his own wherein, accompanied by his friends, he could indulge in such mild, pre-nuptial orgies as his fancy might suggest.

"My dear boy, you can kick up hell's delight here whenever you want to," Joshua had said. "Only give me a few hours' notice."

It was just the stipulated notice that robbed the orgies of essential spontaneity. Besides, there was always Dotley, the butler, who had spent his life in the service of the peculiarly unorgiastic families whose qualities, mainly propagational, are celebrated only in Debrett. Since Sutton's widely announced engagement to the Honourable Victoria Pelling, Dotley had opened wide the pages of Debrett and stood, with the air of a gold-stick-in-waiting, ushering both father and son into the sacred halls of the nobility. Wherefore Sutton loathed Dotley and all his works.

"I agree with you, old chap," said Joshua. "I'm sorry to lose you so soon. But anyway, you'll be off in October." That was the month which Victoria had fixed for the wedding. "Best to make a trial flight for all kinds of reasons."

Hence the justification for the word. Sutton established himself in a set of chambers in Duke Street, St. James's, in whose artistic equipment Joshua took much interest.

Another thing that happened was a gradual lowering of the young man's tone not long after his February installation in Duke Street. Joshua put it down to the unsatisfied longing of the lover for his lass, the latter having gone off, with friends, to winter sports on heights to which the young leather-broker, though rising in Mark Lane, could not aspire. He looked pale, wan and worried.

"What's the matter?" Joshua once asked, suddenly.

They were dining together in a comfortable corner of the Cock-Pit coffee-room.

“Nothing. What could be the matter?”

“Drains in Duke Street, perhaps.”

“I’m as fit as anything,” Sutton declared.

“You look as though you had lost God and found Mumbo Jumbo,” said Joshua.

He was very fond, very proud of Sutton. The streak of sensitiveness that swept through his being of brawn and muscle and superb physical strength caused him to regard the motherless boy with a pathetic maternal solicitude.

Sutton laughed. “Why do you say that?”

“Just came into my head,” said Joshua. “Nothing wrong between you and Victoria?”

“Of course not. She’s enjoying herself. Why shouldn’t she? She writes, of course. All’s well, Dad, I assure you.”

“You want a holiday.”

“Want? Naturally I want. The man who says he doesn’t want a holiday’s an ass. But I can’t get it. Now I come to think of it, perhaps I’m the ass that really doesn’t want a holiday at the moment. There’s a big deal in the firm. They’ve put me on to it—in a junior capacity, of course—acting under old Brotherton—but all the work’s on me. He sits in his damn chair and tells me to do things. I’m not grousing, for I like it. But I’m working like hell.”

“I used to work like hell myself,” said Joshua reminiscently. “No doubt it’s good for the soul.”

“I’ll tell you all about it if you like,” said the young man eagerly.

“Do,” said Joshua. And he followed the track of the red-herring, more or less craftily conjured into existence by his agitated son, with perfect content for the rest of the evening.

But when he took real count of the matter, he could not co-ordinate Sutton’s dejected demeanour with the suppressed excitement which every young business man must experience in carrying through his first big deal. And Sutton was the instinctive business man. To him Art and Literature had no other significance than the stage setting of comfortable life.

He deplored to himself and to Robina the protracted engagement. If only he could get hold of the girl at once and teach her sense, all would be well.

“No man born of woman, my dear,” said Robina, “has ever succeeded in teaching a woman sense. Their attempts have resulted in tragedies all through the ages. It’s such damned cheek on your part. Hasn’t that aspect of things ever occurred to you?”

Joshua rubbed his red thatch, now beginning to show little straw-coloured patches.

“You know what I mean.”

“Of course I do. But what I’d like to ask you is this: How—supposing things were different and I were free to marry you—how would you propose to teach me sense?”

His mind boggled at the enormous fatuity of the idea.

“But you——” he began.

He stopped short, dizzied by the flash of a new conception. It was a question of words. There was ordinary common sense, horse-sense, as the Americans call it, common to all mankind. It had to do with getting under shelter when it rained, with refusing three pounds ten change on a five-pound note for a ten shilling purchase—he had no time for the accretion of instances. He didn’t mean that sort of sense. It wasn’t ordinary common sense, but a sex-sense common to men, which he, primitive man, would be trying to drive into ironical primitive woman.

“Well?” she asked.

“Oh, I give it up,” said Joshua.

He had to. How could man put that kind of sense into the great commanding panther of a physical woman, who, for all her intellect and superb artistic achievement, was chained captive by something beastly—no, no—that was a foul word—the beast had little or nothing to do with it—by something intricately carno-spiritual—the knowledge of which, denied to man, is only shared by woman and God—to that fellow in Kenya. And how could Sutton put that sort of sense into Victoria (his mind leaped back to the Deauville confidences) who might still be in love with the man about town, Tommy Olifant, generally half-tight, and a *persona ingrata* to the family? Said Sutton, in effect: “If Tommy Olifant was a decent member of society, I shouldn’t have a look in.”

Oh, no. There was no putting that sort of sense into a woman. Here, he realized, were two parallel cases of the impossibility of the endeavour. Both women were perfectly honest according to their lights. Robina, married to the brute, loved him still in some sort of idiot way, and in the same sort of idiot way held her marriage bond indissolubly sacred. The other woman, or girl, knowing marriage with the opposite number, so to speak, of the ineffable Dale an impossibility, had done the next best thing in the interests of herself and family in accepting Sutton. She couldn’t help liking Sutton. Everybody liked Sutton. Robina proclaimed him the dearest boy in the world; a boy not only of shrewdly cultivated impeccability of manners, but of instinctive courtesy and

charm. But between liking and loving there lies a great difference. Victoria didn't love Sutton. The boy was beginning to find it out; beginning to wonder what the future held in store for him. Hence his depression.

"I don't see what you can do," said Robina.

"Neither do I," said Joshua, somewhat ruefully.

A pleasanter spring happening was the gradual emergence into the similitude of life of the clay mass on his modelling-stand. He had got over the difficulty of the sharp shoulder-blade. Robina one day had specially commended him for it. Bold and fine, she declared, a bit of a triumph. Once you funked a thing, there was an end to it; you mucked it up. In other words, you began to fake; you grew self-conscious; you set out to deceive; you were insincere; and insincerity was in art the unforgivable sin. It was selling the gifts of God at a price, Simony of the worst. Far better be a sincere bricklayer, for instance, than an insincere architect. To the one the kindly portals of the Kingdom of Heaven were open; to the other, only the gates of a derisive Hell. If you saw a truth essential to be proclaimed, proclaim it valiantly. Which didn't mean that it was everyone's duty to proclaim unpleasant truths blatantly at every street corner.

"We all know," she said, "that Johnny Jones is really a dirty dog who would have been crucified in more enlightened days, and that his sister Sue and her friends ought to be tied up in sacks and thrown into the sea. Added to which, they're both of them infernally ugly. You could proclaim in sculpture, if you liked, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about them. But what good would it do? If it comes to that, what good do all these modern, so-called truthful uglifiers of life, to any human being? Here we're on different ground. You're obliged by your conscience to express the truth, because it's essential. You've done it without fear and the result is beauty. Yes, my dear Joshua, that bit's a thing any sculptor might be proud of."

Joshua glowed. He had done that bit in a couple of hours of concentrated agony. It wasn't so sharp and fin-like after all. Strain as hard as she was bidden, Susan could not free her shoulder-blade from the tender ripple of muscle.

The left outstretched arm gave some trouble. The full weight of the cast-up woman was more on her right side. That left arm was a string of muscles from between the arm-pit to fingers.

"Leave it for awhile," counselled Robina. "You've fiddled about with it until it has got on your nerves. Carry on with something else. That water's enough to worry you for a long time."

"I wish," said Joshua, "one could make clay and marble transparent like

paint. You ought to see the lower part of the body through the thin covering of surf.”

“You’ve got lots of fun in front of you,” laughed Robina.

“You don’t mean that I’ve bitten off more than I can chew, do you?” he asked, anxiously.

She became serious at once.

“My dear, the man that can do that”—she indicated the beautifully modelled right shoulder and the outstanding blade—“can do anything.”

So Joshua believed in himself and his power to express his poet’s dream in marble and was as happy a man as you might wish to meet on a violet-scented March morning.

The most striking phenomenon of the spring, however, was the subtle regeneration of Susan.

The realization of change came to a preoccupied Joshua all of a sudden. He was working, as he had worked a hundred times, on the delicious melting of back into spine, when he became aware of a sense of the unfamiliar. A trick of light perhaps. In place of the leaden skies and dismal rain of the past few days, pale sunshine laughed outside. Something was wrong with tones; something inexplicably subtle. He turned the winch that moved the blind over the skylight. No; that made no difference. Now, the tones of a model’s body may seem to have little to do with the sculptor’s art, in which colour is sacrificed. But when a play of tones presents a different set of values in a human form, accentuating hitherto unnoticed contours, then a sculptor to whom his model has been an inspiration rubs his head, like Joshua, in peculiar puzzledom.

Since the Roman journey he had reconciled himself to the conception of a dead Susan. Both he and Robina had more or less abandoned their fantastic idea of inspiring this apathetic woman with the breath of life. She had come and gone at his summons like a beautiful wraith. The exquisite flesh, with all whose intimate folds and swellings he had for months been as familiar as a priest with his breviary, had lain hitherto before his eyes, a marvel of dead pale ivory. She had gradually signified to him nothing, in the plastic sense, but abstract beauty of form; spiritually nothing but the incarnation of the half-dead woman gripping blindly at the last hope of life.

The devil of it was—and this worried his vague, non-analytical mind—that Susan seemed to be gripping at nothing. Since he had provided for her material welfare, there was nothing for a sensible girl to grip at. It was all very well when she had to earn her living. She was then at grips with all the forces of the world. Sheltered, she had no need to struggle. She had just gone dead. He remembered the curious phrase she had used in Rome. . . .

Well, whatever things were happening inside her, positive or negative, she had lain day by day before him, a dead woman. The tones of her flesh declared the inviolable chastity of a spirit in human shape.

And now, to his supreme amazement, some surge of warm blood had welled and spread beneath the chaste ivory and imbued it with the delicate soft pink and rose of a living woman. A queer discomfort broke the spell of his work. He ordained a short rest. She drew up her covering and slipped unconcernedly from the table.

“It’s you that are tired this time, Mr. Fendick, not me.”

He realized, with a shock, that she was looking not through him in her usual uncanny fashion, but directly at him, and that her eyes were like those of any other girl; further, that they were lit by a smile. She surprised him by going straight to the clay figure.

“It’s beginning to look beautiful,” she said. “Now I can see. I couldn’t before, when it was all lumpy. It didn’t seem to mean anything. Now it does. It’s going to be lovely.”

When he came to think of it—and Joshua was a man to whom thought-process was not a matter of instinctive flash, but of quiet deliberation—Susan, for the past few days, had exhibited an unusual cheerfulness of demeanour. During the rest intervals she had chatted more freely on things in general. Looking back, he perceived change of which he had been unaware. The fact had only been brought home to his consciousness by the all but imperceptible tinge in a body so familiar to his accustomed eye.

He said, with a rudeness due to embarrassment:

“I’m glad you’re taking an interest in the thing, at last.”

She wrinkled her brow and curled her lips with an air of charming ruefulness.

“Better late than never,” she said, making no further attempt to justify her former apathy.

“That’s true,” he assented. “But it’s going to be damned good, isn’t it? If you can bring along anybody who can do that better”—he swept a thumb over the curved back—“I’ll eat him. Sir Haddo Thwaites couldn’t have done it better. Do you know why?”

“No,” said Susan.

“Well, I do,” said Joshua.

He scrutinized his clay idol once more. “It isn’t quite right yet. Let’s have another turn at it.”

Susan resumed her pose. He put in anxious touches, losing sense of the

revelation, perhaps fantastic, of the new tones of the flesh.

The morning's work over, she issued from the dressing-place, and appeared before him as the tastefully dressed young woman of the world, with a glow of colour in her cheeks that rendered her peculiarly attractive. He obeyed a half-comprehended impulse.

"My dear," said he, "we haven't had a fling for months. Come and lunch with me at the Berkeley."

The flush in her cheek deepened and a new softness came into her eyes.

"That would be delightful."

This was the first time she had shown a sign of enthusiasm over any pleasant proposal for her entertainment. The words and the tone in which they were uttered caused a thrill to run through Joshua's body. His adult reading had made him acquainted with the legend of Pygmalion and Galatea. He had also specialized in the Lives and Legends of Sculptors. Joshua was a simple soul. Had he been more complicated, he would not have gained the affection of many honest folk. The thrill that ran through his body was mainly occasioned by the memory of the legend. He Pygmalion, she Galatea. The analogy was not quite accurate, seeing that Pygmalion is not recorded to have had a model, but carved a marble goddess out his head; and it was the marble statue, and not the model, that the artist's adoration turned into flesh and blood. But it was near enough to serve; to explain or illustrate the secret founts wherein the thrill took its being. A bit muddled; but no matter. Galatea Susan and Joshua Pygmalion, driven to the Berkeley in a car steered by a commonplace Manifold, had together the pleasantest time imaginable. The thrill developed into serene jubilation. He had done the trick; all by himself, this time. Robina, with no irresistible motives for striving to achieve the impossible, had given up the vitalization of Susan long ago as a hopeless task. Susan no longer had gone dead. She showed unmistakable signs of resurrection. His miracle.

"I've been so abstracted in our work," he said, tactfully, "that I'm afraid I've been neglecting you. What have you been doing lately?"

It appeared that she had seen some plays. She spoke of them intelligently, in the spirit of remembered enjoyment. She also, almost for the first time, and quite for the first time with appreciation, recalled odds and ends of things in Rome.

"I hope you like oysters," said Joshua, when they were half-way through the dozen each which he had ordered.

"I love them," said Susan.

He had never before heard Susan say she loved anything or anybody. Hitherto she had accepted food as she accepted human beings—with polite

surrender to material or spiritual circumstance.

“It’s jolly to hear you say that,” he remarked.

“Why?”

Before replying, he paused on the reflection that allusion to this new mood might be injudicious. He turned craftily aside from his first impulse and said:

“Because I adore them too. It’s always good to have somebody to share your pleasures, isn’t it?”

Her eyes took in the well-dressed crowd of lunchers.

“I hope you like all these nice-looking people.”

“You’re the nicest looking of the lot, Susan,” said he.

Her cheeks flushed, she laughed and shook her head.

“I’ve got a decent figure,” she admitted, “but I’ve never had much use for my face.”

“You will,” said he with a smile.

It was a little *festa*, ordinary in its commonplace, but delightful in its unexpectedness. He was entertaining a strange young woman whom he found a most agreeable companion. The rest of the meal she welcomed with the same approval as she had bestowed on the oysters. He viewed the resumption of work, that day, as an absurdity.

“Let us have a holiday this afternoon. What would you like to do? A drive in the country? Matinée?”

“I’ve never been,” said Susan, “to the Tower of London.”

“We’ll go there, then,” cried Joshua, “and have a splendid time thanking God we’re living in the twentieth century.”

So they went to the Tower and enjoyed it, bedevilled as it is and robbed of its old thrill by the idiot creation of the modern armoury. They were of the younger generation who never saw the Torture Chamber as it was in the dear old days when the rack and the Scavenger’s Daughter and the pit into which a great company of recalcitrant Jewish bankers were flung by that dismal humorist, King John, remained *in situ* in the damp, mysterious gloom; who never crept along the narrow passages that led to the cells of Guy Fawkes and Lady Jane Grey; who can’t appreciate the imbecile vandalism of officialdom that swept all these joys away, and left the historic cells in the air, mere inaccessible holes in the wall, and set out the cheery instruments of torture as cold items in a museum. But they saw the room where the two Princes were murdered, and Raleigh’s prison, and the place where the block stood on Tower Green, and were perfectly happy. Susan loved the Beefeaters. They reminded

her of the Swiss Guards of the Vatican. But she loved the Beefeaters far more, because they were English. Any foreigner could dress up and look like a Swiss Guard, but no one but an Englishman could look like a Beefeater.

That being settled, they had tea and scones in a cheap and pleasantly sour-smelling, crowded tea-shop in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's Cathedral and enjoyed the fare as much as they had done the luxurious lunch in the West End restaurant.

"It reminds me of old times," said Joshua.

"How?"

"I don't know. It seems so friendly."

He snapped his fingers and, catching the eye of a ministrant, summoned her in a loud voice and a Midland accent.

"Here, Miss. Can you bring us another pot of tea, please, and some plum cake?"

He had learned that to address a waitress as "Miss," in the world of West End fashion, was a solecism as dreadful as calling his butler "mate." But now he had thrown off the shackles of Belgravia. He could call the waitress "Miss" to his heart's content.

It appeared that there was no plum cake known by that specific name; but there was a variety of cakes verging on the plum. The waitress rattled them off, with an interlude of "Coming, coming" to another impatient customer.

"Yes, that'll do, Miss," said Joshua, choosing something, "and look slippy about it, my dear, we're hungry. You are hungry, Susan, aren't you?"

She laughed. "Not very."

"I am."

She smiled at him with the primitive female's admiration of the appetite of the male who kept himself fit. Unconsciously they found themselves in the environment common to their upbringing, and they felt at home. The busy scene of trim waitresses, uniformed in black with white adjuncts of caps and cuffs and shoulder-strapped aprons, scurrying with trays through tables thronged with chattering clerks and typists, and here and there, in majestic isolation, an obvious boss, might just as well have been enacted in Horner's Popular Café in Trenthampton. There were the same kind of people, dressed in exactly the same way, crying for and absorbing the same pots of Ceylon tea, the same little jugs of milk and the same dreadful wedges of pastry which English superstition regards as scones—a word which the Scotch, expert makers of the real cate, are thankful that the English mispronounce—and totting up eventually to the slightly dishevelled and moist waitress the items on

the price-list which they had consumed.

Susan expanded more and more under the glow of Trenthampton Joshua. They talked Hamptonshire, for the first time since her original discovery that he was Mr. Joshua Fenwick of Swan's. They had common memories of villages and families. Had Susan ever heard the story of Farmer Thurlow's old cow? Of course she had. On a detail in the story they differed and argued the point.

"I know, because old Granny Thurlow told my father."

"And I know," declared Joshua, "because I had it straight from the cow herself."

At this tremendous joke they both laughed heartily.

Manifold, waiting disapprovingly before an establishment where neither chauffeur nor car of their social standing had ever waited before, gave the impression, as he held open the car door, of ushering them into a cold draught. The chill of Belgravia enveloped them as they stepped in.

"I've enjoyed myself no end," said Joshua.

"So have I," said Susan.

They talked little on their way westwards. He dropped her at the flat which she occupied with Euphemia Boyd.

"Thank you so much. I've had a lovely time. Half-past ten to-morrow?"

"Half-past ten as usual. Good-bye."

He drove off. An Imp of perplexity danced through his mind. Would half-past ten be ever as usual? He was still chasing the Imp before his library fire when Dotley came in.

"Are you dining at home to-night, sir?"

"I don't know," said Joshua. "Bring me a cocktail."

"Yes, sir," said Dotley.

Half an hour afterwards, Dotley reappeared.

"Mrs. Dale's maid on the telephone, sir. Mrs. Dale's compliments and will be glad if you can dine with her this evening."

"My compliments to Mrs. Dale," said Joshua, "and I'm sorry I've got a most important engagement to-night. I've a most important engagement, Dotley. I'd quite forgotten. Of course I'm dining out."

He suffered himself to be attired in white waistcoat and tails by the punctilious Dotley and dined at The Cock-Pit in a corner all by himself.

He felt in no mood to face Robina.

CHAPTER XIV

THE spell of a new happiness wove itself around Joshua. Halcyons sat about on charmed waves. Spring danced with Botticelli grace before his eyes. Youth coursed through his veins.

Who had wrought the miracle of raising Susan from the dead? Who but he himself? Bit by bit, line by line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little of humanity, he had weaned her from the morbid memories whence she had seemed to drink her existence. He had awakened her to sunshine, to beauty and the gladness of things. How else to explain the new Susan? Yet, there were abstract considerations with which he did not bother his head overmuch. His instinct was ever to project them into the concrete. He had found a companion who could talk of the familiar with laugh and jest. He had found a model as eager as himself to achieve the perfection of his masterpiece. He had found utter loveliness not in a dead woman, but in one radiantly alive. His heart sang an incoherent song of miracle. Without formulating so imbecile a conception, he worked like an inspired god.

His touch acquired the master's certainty. He did what Rodin would have done to the puzzling shoulder-blade. The exquisite body of clay began to attain fulfilment of his dreams. Some power, he knew not what, nor did he inquire, seemed to guide his fingers; and to guide them sacredly over the all too alluring flesh.

Robina, invited to inspect progress, came to tea one afternoon. Susan, too, was bidden.

He had not seen Robina for some time. She had been suffering all the year from the artist's pleasant malady, a plethora of work. The more she raised her prices the more did the great and opulent desire to see themselves in her bronze or marble. Fearful of over-strain, she had withdrawn for the time-being from social life, reading, in her hours of relaxation, detective stories, of which she complained there were still too few to satisfy her imperious demand, and going to sleep early after a bedside supper such as would be loathed by man, but is woman's mellow gastronomic consolation. Once she had asked Joshua to dinner and he had declined.

She had not met Susan for a couple of months; she had no time to waste on half-dead girls. Joshua's periodical reports and the knowledge of Euphemia Boyd's old-maidish sense of responsibility had relieved her of any practical concern with Susan's welfare.

When she entered the studio, Joshua welcomed her with outstretched

hands.

“My dear, how good of you to come.”

“I’m not denying it,” said Robina, with a laugh. “I’m dog-tired. Hallo, Susan. How are you getting on?”

“Nicely, thank you, Mrs. Dale.”

Robina’s quick glance marked the change in the girl.

“What have you been doing to yourself?”

Susan smiled, and the smile was not on her lips, but in her once haunted eyes.

“Nothing that I know of, Mrs. Dale.”

Joshua, happy man, laughed. “It’s the Spring.”

“Whatever it is, it’s doing you good,” said Robina. “How’s the great work?”

Joshua removed the damp cloth and revealed the figure. Robina arched her eyebrows and uttered a little exclamation of surprise.

“Splendid. I never thought . . .”

She continued in panegyric. Since she had last seen the work, he had advanced from strength to strength.

“A flawless study,” she said.

“Isn’t it lovely?” cried Susan. “I often wonder whether I really look like that.”

“Anything to suggest?” asked Joshua.

Robina smiled in her grave, kind way and shook her head. “Not now, at any rate.”

“Then we’ll have tea,” said Joshua, covering up the clay.

No inexperienced sculptor, eaten up by vanity though he were, could have reason for disappointment in the praise of so great a Master as Robina Dale; and her praise had been full and ungrudging. Yet his sensitiveness divined a touch of reservation. Her use of the word “study” with reference to a portion of finished work, her postponement of suggestion, struck him as odd. It was only later that he was to discover in what critical paths her mind had reluctantly travelled, and to hear her reply when he reproached her for lack of frankness: “You were bound to find it out for yourself.”

Over tea that day, however, she repeated her general encomiums, which were sincere and well-founded. The statue was on its way to be a masterpiece. The glamour of the enthusiastic word swept into darkness the previous implicit criticisms.

The horizontal line deepened across his brow.

“Do you really think so?”

“Sure of it. You’ll get it right without much trouble. You’ll send it next year into the Paris Salon—the old one—and I see it bought for the Luxembourg. Why we haven’t got a National Gallery of Sculpture God alone knows—but we haven’t.”

“What you say goes, as always; but such a thing never entered my head. If it had, I’d have been scared lest I was getting what-do-you-call-it—the medical name for the disease of swelled-head——”

“Megalomania?”

He snapped his fingers. “That’s it. Anyhow, we’ve got to do it first, Susan and I.”

Susan protested with a laugh. She, a mere lump, had nothing whatever to do with it.

“You’ve everything to do with it,” said Joshua. “Hasn’t she, Robina?”

“I suppose the Salisbury meadows had a great deal to do with Constable’s landscapes,” replied Robina.

“That’s just what I meant,” said Susan, on the faintest little note of feminine defiance.

“Naturally, my dear.” Robina took a cigarette, which Joshua lighted for her, and lay back in the corner of the couch. “I suppose you two are having a good time.”

Susan flushed red and caught her breath. Joshua grinned in his puzzled way.

“I’m having a good time—yes. Work by day, play by night. What Susan’s doing I haven’t asked. I hope the same.”

“Are you, Susan?”

It was only when he saw the girl stiffen that the significance of Robina’s first lazy remark dawned on Joshua. He sat up with a frown, while his anger glowed in the pure flame of a virtuous indignation. No matter what imbecilities and idiocies and devil-sent lunacies went on inside him, he had never said a word to Susan that a man might not have said to his daughter. Good God! He was twice her age. It wasn’t the first time that Robina had suggested ridiculous possibilities. . . .

Susan, with obvious effort, laughed and said:

“I don’t know about a good time, Mrs. Dale. But I’ve been feeling so much better lately. Wonderfully better.”

Robina drew herself up and stretched out her large capable hand.

“I’m glad, my dear.”

Susan stood before her, slim and exquisitely rounded Diana, in the modern slip of a dress which is little more than Diana’s revealing tunic, and took the elder woman’s hand, which closed around her fingers. Robina smiled up at her in her peculiar Robinaesque way, large, generous, appealing, dissipative of possible cloud.

“You’ve discovered that life is a beautiful thing and the world is quite a good place to live it in.”

“That’s about it,” replied Susan with a shrug. She glanced at the grandfather clock in the corner. “I must go.”

“Why?” asked Joshua.

“I promised Euphemia. She’s getting a new dress and is going to be fitted. She’s helpless by herself.”

Susan ushered ceremoniously through the door, Joshua turned and strode down the studio.

“Robina——!”

She rose, commanding.

“I know. I’m a beast. Perhaps—you may take it as a compliment—a jealous beast. Anyhow, I’d hate you to make a fool of yourself over that girl. When I saw the two of you all up in the air of happiness, I, like any woman, drew conclusions. Oh, I know they’re dam silly conclusions. But there they were, and I wanted to see whether they were correct——”

“I swear to you, Robina,” he cried, “I swear to you, it’s monstrous.”

“I know, my dear. If I didn’t, you may be sure I wouldn’t call myself a beast. But sit down and let us talk quiet sense for a few minutes. That girl has changed. She’s—how shall we call it?—revitalized. No dead woman has ever been brought to life except through a man. If you’re not the man—and I believe you—who is he?”

“I thought, perhaps,” said Joshua, rubbing his head, “that I might have been what you call the man.”

Robina crossed helpless arms on her lap.

“Now, what the devil do you mean?”

“Well,” said he, floundering in search of expressive terms, “we talked, long ago, when we first started out on the Susan stunt—you and I—about creation. I was to create Susan in marble. You and I together to create her in flesh and blood. I don’t want to be rude, my dear, but you sort of chucked it and I’ve

gone on.”

“And just by the magic of your abstract human personality, you’ve succeeded?”

“Don’t talk like that,” he said roughly. “You know what I mean.”

“Of course I do, and it’s the silliest thing I ever heard. You’ve had no more to do with it than the Archbishop of Canterbury. Susan’s in love. There’s a young man hanging around somewhere. You had better find out who he is.”

Now, it occurred to Joshua to ask impulsively: “If you insist on putting things down to lower influences, why shouldn’t Susan be in love with me?” Being a cautious man, he didn’t. But he warmed up that agreeable possibility in a little corner of his heart.

Robina threw away the end of her cigarette and swept her face with her hands.

“Lord, I’m tired.”

“You’re working yourself to death,” said Joshua. “You must come out and play a little. Let me take you to a theatre to-night.”

“Not to-night, but to-morrow,” said Robina. She would arrange a day less strenuous so that she should be fit to be seen in the evening. Joshua was delighted. They would dine in Eaton Terrace and go on. What would she like to see? She named a play or two which she had hitherto missed.

“We’ll have Susan too,” said Robina, “if you don’t mind. I’d like to study that young woman a little more closely. Remember our talk in Rome about reactions? I want to see how the new Susan reacts to modern drama.”

Robina’s will was law. In the present case, obedience to the law lay on the path of pleasantness.

The next evening found the three in Joshua’s dining-room—a room which had undergone the subtle transformation of the rest of the house since Robina had played hostess at the inaugural dinner-party. Perhaps the table, the chairs, the sideboard and Dotley alone remained of the original furnishing scheme. Dotley would have fitted into any surroundings of wealth and comfort. In fact, he was the kind of man who sets a note. You could build up around him in assonance with his dignity.

Joshua enjoyed his dinner, as it must behove a man sitting between two beautiful and intelligent women each of whom has reached out tentacles gripping his heart: Robina, swarthy, large-limbed, large featured Cleopatra, dressed in her favourite rose and old gold; Susan, a dark-eyed Nereid in pale sea-green. He leaned back comfortably with the proprietary air of a celibate

sultan. To-night he noted a new phase of Susan. She gave the impression of a girl modestly subdued in the presence of her elders, yet perfectly happy; she looked three or four years younger. He could not guess the cause of her attractive shyness. He conjectured that it might be Robina's overpowering personality. It never occurred to him that it proceeded from the fact that this was the first time she has been a guest in his house. Only once before had she entered it; the theatre-programme seller announcing her decision not to sit as a model to Mr. Joshua Fendick of Trenthampton. Why he had not invited her before, during the early days of his collaboration with Robina, he scarcely knew. Possibly Dotley had something to do with it. He had a morbid dread of Dotley, and for nothing in the world would he have incurred his displeasure or his criticism. Dotley, besides, was a cherished Old Master.

Really it was Dotley and all that he symbolized in the house that subdued Susan to a state of pleasurable awe. He was the genius of the soft carpets, the shaded lights, the polished table, the gleaming silver and fragile glass, the discreet flowers, the mysteriously lit, restful pictures on the shaded walls; of the sense of ease and wealth and of the repose and beauty that wealth can afford. . . . Under Joshua's protection she had seen the gaudy restaurants of European capitals, one differing from the other only in details of garishness; she had once, at the Embassy in Rome, been admitted into a great house. But a house swept and cleared for a reception is no longer a house, but a staircase and a series of crowded rooms. This was the first time in her life that Susan had sat in such surroundings, part and parcel of their graciousness, and the newly awakened chords within her responded to the appeal.

Dotley enveloped her in an atmosphere of physical well-being; his pouring out of wine was a religious rite intended to comfort.

When he was out of the room, Robina asked:

"Is Dotley still the same treasure?"

"I don't know what I should do without him."

Susan bent forward with a laugh.

"I didn't know that such people still existed."

"He's one of the few survivors of his caste," said Robina.

"I'd back his judgment of wine against anybody. Baldo was here a few nights ago with some other people. He professes to know wine. Aldermen ought to know—it's part of their job. Of course I gave them the best stuff I had. He said he took off his hat to me. I said, 'Not to me, but to Dotley. He's responsible for my cellar.' And Sir John looked up at him—he was helping him to liqueur brandy—and said: 'Then I take off my hat to you.' And Dotley never moved a muscle. All he said was—in that thick soft voice of his: 'I'm

greatly honoured, Sir John.' "

He turned to Susan. "You'd like to take him home and make a pet of him."

Susan gasped and laughed. As soon make a pet of one of the Cardinals she had seen in Rome. Suddenly she said:

"I wish I could see that service in St. Peter's all over again. I couldn't take it all in," she added hurriedly in reply to a mute inquiry in Robina's eyes. "It dazed me."

"We'll have another jaunt, this autumn," said Joshua.

She touched his sleeve impulsively. "It would be too lovely!"

On their way from the dining-room, Joshua drew Robina aside.

"What do you think of it?"

"Have you had a heart-to-heart talk with Euphemia?"

"What for?"

"To find out."

It hadn't struck Joshua to consult Euphemia. He hadn't seen her for ages.

"I would, if I were you."

The suggestion warred against his instincts. Spying on Susan? No.

"I can't do that," said he.

"As you will, my dear Joshua," replied Robina. She paused for a moment in thought, and drew him back into the dining-room.

"Whatever's the cause, we're up against something extraordinary. Here's a girl who we know has been suffering from arrested development. All of a sudden she recovers and begins again from where she left off. To-night she's a normal girl of nineteen or twenty. How do you account for it?"

"Nature—given a chance. And, thank God, we've given it."

"Perhaps you're right," said Robina.

They drove to the theatre. Dotley, arbiter of Joshua's elegances, had taken a box. He had explained that, the play being a great success, no stalls but three in the obscurity of the last row had been obtainable at so short a notice. A box had just been returned.

It was a brilliant comedy to which all London was flocking. A faint alcoholic and garlicky flavour of evil attracted both the ingenuous and the over-sophisticated.

They took their places in the box and looked down into the rapidly filling stalls. The orchestra began the opening piece. Outside the atmosphere of

Dotleydom Susan lost her shyness. She chattered gaily of the men and women below. Robina pointed out a Cabinet Minister, for the moment much photographed and cartooned. Susan recognized him at once. She liked his face but disapproved of his wife; said she was sure she secretly voted against him at elections. One or two notabilities, unknown to Robina, she herself indicated—a famous racing stockbroker, an unpleasant young peer, a be-pearled woman of unsavoury reputation, whose names she had perforce learned from her colleagues during her programme-selling days. She grew thoughtful for a while at the sight of the uniformed girls with big black bows on their heads, briskly carrying on the thousand-times repeated routine: taking the stalls' counterfoil, glancing at the numbers, indicating seats with the quick professional slip of programme, and the whispered word—"Sixpence, please"—she could see their lips form the phrase—deftly receiving the sixpence in palm, and then with perfunctory thanks darting away on a further errand.

She touched Joshua's arm—he was between and a little way behind the two women—and said, in a low voice:

"When I was doing that, I never dreamed I should look on at them doing it, like this."

"It's the unexpectedness of Life that makes it such a jolly good game," he laughed. "Play it for all it's worth, and it's the best game in the world."

She smiled and shook her head, and leaned back, while he bent forward. Robina, for the moment, was interested in the stalls.

"Don't you think you've got to be picked?"

"What do you mean?

"You can't play a game unless you've got a chance to play it. You had a chance to play football for Trenthampton. But how many rickety, half-baked hands in Swan's ever had the chance of even kicking a ball about?"

She paused. "Go on," he laughed.

"Well. You've had the chances and you've taken them. Something always happened. I was down there selling programmes, with no kind of a game to play—earning only enough money to keep me from starvation. Then you came and gave me my chance. As I said, I was 'picked.' "

"You're getting too dam philosophical for me, my child," said Joshua, with a grin. "Anyhow, now you're in the game, it's worth while playing it."

"I'll do my best," replied Susan. "But what are the rules for playing a fairy-tale?"

She gave his arm a squeeze of gratitude which sent a queer little thrill

through his body, and leaned over the edge of the box.

He stared at the sleek back of her dark head and worked his lips in a ruminative fashion. This young woman was getting beyond him, in a way. Where had she learned to talk in metaphor, like Lady Evangeline Hill and the other clever women of his acquaintance? He gave it up, vaguely attributing the phenomenon to the mimetic faculty of her sex. He had talked of unexpectedness. As far as women were concerned, he had been about right. You never knew what they would do next. He was perfectly contented to leave it at that.

Robina looked round with a smile and a faint gesture of the hand.

“Sutton and Victoria.”

He followed her directions—the further end of the fourth row. There sat the pair, she reading the programme, he staring at the drop-curtain.

On a little sign he edged his chair a bit nearer.

“Are they desperately in love, those two?”

“The boy is. She—God only knows. She’s a cold fish of a girl, anyway.”

“They look like a ten-year-old married couple, each with a separate establishment.”

“It’s been worrying me like hell,” said Joshua. “You know it has. But I gather he’s crazy over her.”

“The more I see of men in their relations with women, the more am I convinced that the human race is engendered by hopeless imbeciles.”

“And the more I see of women,” said Joshua, hotly, “the more I——” He stuck. “Oh damn—you know what I mean.”

She turned her deep, ironical eyes on him.

“Let us take it as known, my dear.” She lifted a greeting hand. “They’ve spotted us.”

Conventional nods and smiles rose from the stalls. The orchestra ceased. The house was darkened. A few bars of music and the play began.

The curtain fell on the first act amid enthusiastic applause. When the theatre was re-illuminated, Susan said:

“I don’t believe there are people like that. If there are, I’m glad I don’t know them.”

“But it’s very funny,” said the ingenuous Joshua. “You were laughing half the time.”

“So long as I don’t think they’re real people,” said Susan.

“Whom do you call real people?” asked Robina.

“You and I and Mr. Fendick, and Euphemia and Mr. Victor Spens and—and—Mussolini and the King and Queen.”

She paused for breath.

“And Dotley?”

She laughed. She wasn’t sure of Dotley. There was a light discussion of the play until the box-door opened to give admittance to Sutton and Victoria. There were greetings. The young couple wore conventional smiles. Joshua brought Susan forward.

“Victoria, may I introduce Miss Keene—Miss Pelling. Sutton——”

The young man stepped forward and shook hands with Susan.

“You forget I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Keene in the studio, a fortnight or so ago.”

“Of course,” said Joshua heartily.

He had forgotten the trivial incident. Sutton, with a view to cancelling a dinner engagement with his father at the eleventh hour, not finding him at home, and feeling it his duty to make apologies more courteous than the cold and casual telephone could convey, had rushed round to the studio in Glebe Place. Joshua had never encouraged Sutton to visit the studio. Much as he loved the boy, he kept him, an unsympathetic alien, out of the sphere of his artistic life. Sutton was as good a fellow as ever lived, a son to be proud of; but essentially a business man, to whom pottering about making clay figures was the hobby of a harmless lunatic. Perhaps he did Sutton, a young man of acute intelligence, who had taken peculiar pains to give himself a worldly education, a pathetic injustice. But there was this little Joshua-ordained gulf between them. Joshua, sensitive, had never forgotten his insulting exit, long ago: “What the devil are you doing?”—“I’m making a cat.”—“Oh, my God!” No. Sutton was not admitted into the Arcanum of his Mystery. Only twice or thrice had he entered the studio, always on some such imperative errand as the one in pursuit of which he had met Miss Susan Keene. This gulf between them was an essential element in the relations between father and son. Each was for ever extending blind tentacles of affection towards the other, and only now and then did the tentacles touch.

In the falling twilight, work over, stood Susan, ready to depart. Sutton, shown in by the waiting caretaker, had addressed a few courteous words to the model. She would have gone, but there was some trivial thing that Joshua must say to her. Sutton had but his errand of apology, a matter of seconds, to fulfil, and he was gone in a gay flash.

“Of course,” Joshua repeated. “It was when you came to turn me down for

dinner; so that he could dine with you, Victoria. When you're married, you won't let him turn his poor old father down more than you can help, will you?"

She smiled in her wintry way. "If he does, I'll divorce him."

Joshua, with his human instinct towards the genial, took her two hands.

"That's right. We're pals, we two, aren't we?"

She gave him a swift glance and flushed.

"I hope so."

She released her hands after a tiny pressure which sent a vague message to Joshua's brain:

"There's something in the girl, after all."

They went into the corridor outside the box and smoked cigarettes. The two men drew together and Sutton gave his father the latest news of the leather-broking business in the City. The three women, a step or so away, discussed the piece. The warning bell in the foyer was faintly heard. Sutton and Victoria sped to their stalls.

"I had forgotten you had met him," said Joshua, as they turned to the box. "What do you think of the lady?"

"She's quite good-looking," said Susan.

During the next interval Joshua went out to meet Sutton in the vestibule, for a breath of fresh air. The two women saw Sutton rise from his stall, receive a languid nod from Victoria in reply to his word of apology, and disappear.

"I don't think *that*'ll last long," Susan remarked cheerfully.

"Why?" asked Robina.

"Did you ever see such a pair of lovers in your life?"

"They couldn't sit with their arms around each other's necks like young persons in cinemas."

"They might convey to each other that they'd like to." She laughed scornfully. "Anyhow, I don't see them getting married."

"You seem to know a lot about it, my dear," said Robina, with the ironical glint in her eyes. "When are you going to get married yourself?"

Susan flushed. "When Mr. Right comes along, I suppose," she replied lightly—"and when Mr. Fendick has finished with me."

"If you don't meet—er—your affinity, I don't see how Mr. Fendick can finish with you."

"I must hurry up, then," said Susan.

Joshua returned with a look of trouble on his ingenuous face. He had just

time to seat himself before the rise of the curtain on the third act. It was strong, revolting, and the end dramatically inevitable. Our Lady of Pain, obeying the poet's summons, had come down and redeemed everybody from Virtue.

"Sutton wants us to go out to supper with him at some new-fangled night-club, the Cabaret Vert, after he has taken his young woman home. She's got a sulky headache, he says, if you know what that means, and won't come along. What about it, Robina?"

She agreed, provided they didn't stay too late. Susan would like it. And a glass of champagne would wash down the taste of the filthy play.

They mingled in the surge descending the stairs and at the entrance door found the irreproachable Manifold on the look-out for them.

They followed him down a discreet side-turning to the car.

"The Cabaret Vert."

Manifold touched his cap and drove them to the obscure haunt as if it had been his nightly routine. On the way Robina asked:

"What's been worrying you?"

"Nothing."

"Rot," laughed Robina, and quoted, " 'Your face, my Thane, is as a book in which any idiot may read whatever you're thinking of.' "

"Things aren't going well between those two. That's all."

"Even I could see that," said Susan.

"That damned fellow Tommy Olifant has pulled himself together—drinking nothing but barley-water and orange-juice, and is hanging about again. I wish Sutton had never met the wretched girl."

Robina bade him cheer up. Champagne in a presumably generous flood awaited him. Also much noise made on barbaric instruments by grinning negroes. There would be all the fun of the fair; no place for woeful countenances.

They reached the cabaret, found themselves at a table reserved by Sutton. The room was upholstered in pale sea-green and there was a pale sea-green illuminated glass dancing-floor. The table was laid for six. At each end a bottle of champagne lay in its silver cooler. Soon a bright young couple were ushered towards it by a *maître d'hôtel*.

"This is Mr. Fendick's table."

"Isn't he here yet?"

"No. He telephoned to change his table from one for four to one for six and to say that he might be a few minutes late."

The bright young couple approached the three strangers somewhat diffidently. Joshua rose.

“If you’re looking for Sutton Fendick—I’m his father, and I’m glad to see you.”

The bright young couple gave their names and qualities. Joshua performed the introductions and ordered the opening of the champagne bottles. When Sutton arrived a while later he found a merry party.

“Victoria cried off at the last moment—tired—headache,” he explained, “and I had to drive her home. I see my father’s deputising all right. What about food? *Maître d’hôtel!*”

The room filled quickly. The negro band crashed into barbaric and compelling rhythm. Joshua and Robina ate, drank and danced like the others. The bright young couple, whose names, save those of Kitty and Billy, Joshua had not rightly caught and whom he never saw again, inspired the little party with their youth and gaiety. He forgot, and so, apparently, did Sutton, the existence of Victoria Pelling.

Dancing with Susan, on the not too crowded glass floor, he said:

“Funny you should wear that sea-green dress to-night. I’d like to see you alone in the middle here. You’d look as if you came up through it—Venus what-d’ye-call-it—rising from the sea . . . Botticelli’s picture—what?”

She glowed, looked into his eyes, radiantly happy.

“I’ll tell both these young men what you said. Except the Venus part, which is silly. It’ll teach them to be observant.”

“There’s something, after all, in being a bit of an artist,” he said.

“Well—something,” she replied, with a touch of mockery.

Like most athletes, Joshua danced well; Susan was an instinctive dancer. He felt her perfect body vibrate to the rhythm under his clasp, vibrate, as it were, to the pulsations of a dreamy sea.

He held her closer.

“It’s wonderful dancing with you. I’m loving it.”

“So am I. Every minute of it. Ever since we came in.”

And it was obvious to Joshua, when she was dancing with either of the two young men, Sutton and Billy, that this was the supreme evening of her life.

“By God!” said Billy, sitting alone for a few moments with Robina, and pointing at Sutton and Susan dancing together, “she’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

“I wouldn’t tell your fiancée so”—for in such relationship, it appeared, did

Kitty stand to Billy—“or you’ll be asking for lots of trouble.”

The young man grinned; Kitty was all right.

“Is she?” said Robina, dryly. “If so, she’s the first woman who has been all right since the world began.”

They left the Cabaret Vert at two o’clock. Joshua put down Robina and Susan at their respective homes, and let himself into his solitary house in Eaton Terrace. After a lonely drink in his library, he mounted the silent stairs to his room.

He passed a night disturbed till morning by half-waking dreams. The cast-up woman had arisen and his arms were about her, and her body pulsated with the rhythm of the sea.

CHAPTER XV

THE next day was Sunday. Joshua, baptized in a little tin Bethel, scrupulously observed the Sabbath, and on it did no manner of artistic work. Susan had her day of rest. The studio remained locked.

For the first time in his hard-working life did Joshua fret against the Sabbath ban. His fretfulness found expression in pre-bath exercises with dumb-bells, india-rubber ropes and punch-balls, performed with singular violence. The last suffered most. They might have been the tablets of Sinai.

It was only the principle of *non modum excedere*, essential to the art of keeping fit, that restrained him from deliberate physical exhaustion. He went through his complicated bathing arrangements, sprays, showers and what-not, dressed and went down glowing to the breakfast of a healthy man. Yet he attacked his kidneys and bacon as though they were his enemies. They, with punch-ball and everything, were conspiring with the Sabbath to rob him of his day's work with Susan. He wanted her, there, in the studio, intensely. He could have worked, so he told his fool of a self, with an inspiration undreamed of hitherto. He could have finished off the whole thing at a sitting. And instead of this delight he must go and spend the day with the Fenton Hills at their week-end cottage near Sevenoaks.

The week-end cottage was a country-house on a small scale, exquisitely furnished and appointed. Fenton had some new miniatures, a Cosway among them, for him to admire, and a bottle of old Johannesberger for him to drink. Lady Evangeline showed him her nucleus of a racing-stable, and hung on the wise words which he uttered in criticism of the bloodstock. A few other pleasant folk were of the party. At lunch Joshua carved from an apple a cubist portrait of the host, a gaunt-faced man, with overhanging brows and sunken eyes. The likeness, happily caught, gave the artist instantaneous success.

Driving back to town late at night, he could not deplore a day lost in wretchedness. It had rained most of the afternoon and the billiard-room had been their refuge. They had played snooker pool and he had won everybody's money. He had met an old member of the Corinthians—the premier Amateur Association Football club in England—and they talked ancient football.

"Good Lord!—you weren't the Trenthampton Wanderers centre forward, Fendick, were you?"

"Of course I was."

Still famous!—Oh—he had enjoyed himself prodigiously.

It was only when he got home that he began to wonder what Susan had

been doing with herself.

Monday dawned black. There was a telephone call from Euphemia Boyd. Susan couldn't sit to-day, having caught a chill. Had a temperature of 101. She was keeping her in bed and sending for the doctor.

"How the devil did she catch a chill?" asked Joshua.

Voice of Euphemia: "She went on the River yesterday."

"The River? What on earth was she doing on the River? Were you there?"

"Of course not."

So might she have answered had she been questioned as to her presence at an orgy in a lupanar. What had the little faded old maid to do with Thames jaunts to Henley, Bray or Maidenhead?

"Then whom was she with?" asked Joshua.

It had never occurred to him that Susan might have had occasional disassociations from Euphemia. He had taken it for granted that the two had lived some sort of inseparable lives. For the moment he forgot the phenomenon of Susan's sudden regeneration. Susan spending Sunday on the River by herself was an insane conception.

"Don't you hear me? whom was she with?"

"Mr. Victor Spens had a party," came Euphemia's voice. "He called for her yesterday morning."

"Why didn't she tell me on Saturday night?

"Oh—it was a surprise."

"Why didn't you let me know?"

He was unaware of taking a stand orientally possessive.

"I didn't think you would object . . . Mr. Spens is such an intimate friend of yours."

"Yes. Quite so. But Susan—is it serious?"

There was a faint laugh. "Oh, no. She got wet. They were caught in a shower."

"Well, ring me up as soon as the doctor has gone."

"Of course, Mr. Fendick."

Victor Spens! What the blazes was she doing in a boat with Victor Spens? She had made no reference to any meeting with Victor since their Roman journey. He stood, pyjama-clad, by the telephone in his bedroom, with folded arms, looking very ugly. A rufous Napoleon with his knife into somebody.

The man! The man, postulated by Robina, who had raised Susan from the dead! Victor Spens! Damn him! He would have his blood!

He rang up Victor. A polite manservant informed him that Mr. Spens was still asleep.

“Wake him. I’ve got to talk to him. It’s urgent.”

The servant, through much strophe and antistrophe, at last managed to convey to Joshua’s intelligence the fact that if he awoke Mr. Spens, on no matter how urgent a summons, he, a married man, would be thrown forthwith into the street, with wife and children facing beggary.

“Tell him to ring me up as soon as he can.”

“Very good, sir.”

A lame and impotent conversation.

Joshua bathed and dressed in a hurry, having reduced his physical exercises to a conventional absurdity. What was the use of keeping fit, when Victor Spens was playing the snake with Susan—the snake in the Garden of Eden—the snake in the River . . . the water-snake?

In the midst of hatred of breakfast and Victor Spens comes Dotley.

“Mrs. Dale on the telephone, sir.”

“Oh, damn the telephone. Say you’ve made a mistake and I’ve gone out.”

“She said it was very urgent, sir.”

Anathema on anathema. He uttered many. Everything that morning seemed to be urgent.

“All right. I’ll go.”

He went.

“My dear”—Robina’s voice—“so sorry to worry you—but I’ve dreadful news. Can you come round some time soon?”

“What’s the matter?”

“I’ll tell you when I see you.”

What the dreadful news was he had no notion. Something to do with Susan and Victor Spens. There seemed to be no news worth calling news, much less “dreadful,” unconnected with Susan.

He was shown into the studio, where Robina appeared to be wandering aimlessly about her statuary, clad in skirt and silk jumper. A scared, tragic look in her deep eyes told him that Susan had nothing to do with her trouble. She crossed to meet him in lithe movements.

“You’re a dear to come at once. Read this.”

She whipped a telegram from her jumper pocket and handed it to him.

> "Sorry report serious accident Humphrey mainly injury sight more details after further medical opinion Swayne"

"Humphrey——" He was puzzled for the moment.

"My husband."

"Oh! of course." His eyes caught the place of origin on the cable. "It's rough luck," said he.

"Can't you find anything better to say than that?" she cried, impatiently. "Read between the lines. *Mainly* injury sight. That means a general smash-up. God knows what. A man like Swayne, a Senior Commissioner of Kenya, isn't an hysterical woman. 'Injury sight' means blindness. There's not even a modifying word. 'No immediate danger,' for instance."

"That's pretty obvious," said Joshua. "I'm sorry, my dear."

What less could he say? Or, indeed, knowing the character of the Kenya wastrel, what more?

She flung away and set to examining an all but finished wax portrait-bust, turning it round on its revolving stand.

"I thought you'd be more sympathetic."

"But, my dear, I am sympathetic," he replied helplessly. "It's dreadful . . . poor chap! . . . If what's-his-name—Swayne—had only given you an extra word or two to tell you what kind of an accident . . ."

"What does it matter?" She pivoted from the bust. "He's blind and generally mangled." She advanced a step. "Very likely mauled by a lion."

As the remittance-sot—portrayed by Fenton Hill and others of Robina's friends—couldn't possibly have gone out to seek a lion, the only chance of his being mauled lay in the fact that the lion accidentally tripped over him while he lay intoxicated. But even now Robina proclaimed the fiction of the Great Game Hunter. Silly, thought Joshua; but magnificent.

"My dear," said he. "If I can help you in any way—you know I——"

"That's what I asked you to come for. You can help in all sorts of ways. These things have got to be looked after. There are castings that must be watched—my Academy and Salon stuff. You'll do what's needed; I take it for granted. But it's a devil of a mess."

"Of course, anything you like—it goes without saying"—he became a trifle incoherent—"but I don't quite catch."

"Catch what?

“Why you want me to carry on for you.”

“But haven’t I told you,” she cried, with a woman’s impatience at a man incapable of deducing the particular from the general, “that I’m going straight out to Humphrey in Kenya?”

“The devil you are!” murmured Joshua, aghast.

“What do you take me for?” She drew up her tall figure. “Do you think I can stay here while my husband is lying maimed and blind in East Africa?”

Joshua, with a man’s instinctive view of difficulties ahead, advised her to await the promised further cable. As a matter of fact, she would have to do it, seeing that steamers to Mombasa didn’t run with the frequency and the certainty of immediate accommodation of a London Tube Railway.

“I’m going to Kenya, by the very next boat. If there isn’t a boat, I’ll go by aeroplane—even if I’ve got to buy one and fly it myself.”

She picked up a sheet from a devastated copy of “The Times” that lay in a corner.

“This is Monday. There’s a Messageries Maritimes steamer that leaves Marseilles on Wednesday. I start to-morrow morning for Marseilles and go on board the ‘Amiral Peyrou’.”

“But you don’t expect to find a berth on a crowded ship at the moment of departure—just like that?”

“There’s got to be a berth. If there isn’t, I can sit on deck all the way.”

Joshua scanned “The Times” shipping advertisements. The Messageries Maritimes had an office in Fenchurch Street. The futile man of practical life suggested ringing up the Agency.

“You can, if you like,” said Robina, humouring him.

He disappeared in quest of the telephone outside the studio. Robina returned to the nearly finished wax bust. It was the portrait of a Very Great Lady. One who had the privilege of command, and whose patronage meant a flow of much money into Robina’s so often depleted coffers. She was a Great Lady who stood solid on her dignity and concerned herself little with the emotional problems of a lesser world. In that she differed essentially from the general run of Great Ladies whom Robina had encountered professionally or socio-professionally, or of whom she had heard in the artistic and social world. They, for the most part, were simple, kindly folk, fully recognisant of artistic quality as of an aristocracy in itself. They were sympathetic women on the human plane. But this particular Great Lady was difficult . . . a throw-back to pre-French Revolution days.

“Madame, I cannot accept the honour of a sitting from you to-day because

my wife died an hour ago.”

“Monsieur, I fail to perceive the connection between your domestic affairs and my appointment with you to sit for my portrait. You will be good enough to bring out your palette and brushes.”

The devil of it was that Robina knew it to be an excellent portrait—one of the best things she had ever done. There was the touch of obstinacy at the corner of the lips, the arrogance of the brows, the unutterable stupidity in the flat contours beneath the eyes.

She had made a relief plaque of the Lady ten years ago. Now she had portrayed her in the round . . . If she worked like a madwoman she might fake it into a finished thing. . . . But no . . . She didn’t work that way . . . Neither did Benvenuto Cellini, who told Kings and Emperors and Popes to go to Hades whenever it so pleased him. She turned away. The Great Lady might await her good pleasure in whatever Hell, Purgatory or Limbo she happened to select. Hadn’t she preached to Joshua, a while ago, the Gospel of Sincerity in Art? Either be honest or throw the whole thing up.

“As I said, my dear,”—Joshua ran in—“it’s a hopeless proposition. Every berth booked. You haven’t a dog’s chance.”

“I don’t take chances, my dear Joshua. I go on certainties.”

“Then you’re not going in the ‘Amiral Peyrou’.”

“Why argue? I start for Marseilles to-morrow. My maid’s packing now.”

“She going too, in the good ship ‘Certainty’?”

“No, she isn’t.” She turned on him half angrily. “Maids are useful in Palace Hotels, but they’re no earthly good in Jungles.”

Joshua rubbed his head. There was no moving her from her purpose. He might just as well implore Niagara to shoot up instead of falling down. He shrugged helpless shoulders. Beyond keeping an eye on the castings, what else could he do?

“Now you’re talking sense,” she said graciously.

He could do a great deal. He could book her seat in the Blue Train to Marseilles. He could go to her lawyers—she had already scribbled a note—and fix up a power of attorney for her signature. He could employ his day on her errands. He could put a notice in “The Times” to the effect that Mrs. Robina Dale was sailing for East Africa and must cancel all her engagements. During her absence he would be master of her affairs. Now he must go, and not waste her valuable time. She put her arm around him.

“My dear,” she said, “if I didn’t love you, I shouldn’t have thrown all my responsibilities on to your shoulders.”

“There’s one thing I am going to do, at any rate,” said he. “I’m going to see you as far as Marseilles.”

She laughed out loud. He would be terribly in the way. An old campaigner like herself not only needed no escort, but found far more comfort in travelling alone. He would be a ghastly nuisance. As for showing his nose near the Messageries Maritimes steamer, that would ruin her entire scheme.

“I don’t know what your scheme is,” he persisted.

“Neither do I. But you’d ruin it.”

She made the concession of allowing him to see her off at Victoria.

He lunched the next day at the Cock-Pit, out of humour with the universe. Robina had gone, with luggage to last her a lifetime; Susan was still afflicted with a temperature; Victor Spens had gone out of town, God knew where; a golf-idiot had bribed him with a cocktail to endure his imbecile monologue; it was a beast of a day, all murk and drizzle, and his modest helping of roast beef was criminally overdone. He ate morosely in a corner.

In some unexplained fashion Robina had failed him. She had no business to go off to Kenya in pursuit of a ne’er-do-weel whom she hadn’t seen for years. Noble of her, of course! that his common sense admitted; she would always be doing the noble thing. Also the poor devil was lying in the wilderness blind and maimed. He himself felt sorry for the fellow. All the same, so whispered the little black devil perched on his shoulder, what could she do when she got there? Bring him back to London and play the fool with her life? And how was she going to get there? Smuggle herself on board and make the voyage as a stowaway? She was rather too big to lie hidden behind trunks in the hold. He smiled grimly. At the best she would have to wait in Marseilles for the next boat. And all her work hung up. She needed the money for it, as her instincts were generous and her habits lavish. He ended by pitying Robina and cursing the carelessness of Humphrey Dale in running into an accident. A Stilton cheese, mellow and dreamy, and a pint of ’96 port—the happy Cock-Pit still had in its cellars a few half-bottles of that perfect vintage—obliterated memories of unsatisfactory beef, and opened his heart to a kindlier view of the universe.

A weather-bound acquaintance took him off to the billiard-room. He played a game of two hundred up, giving his opponent fifty, and won the sovereign bet.

“Next time, my lad,” said he, in high good-humour, “you take fifty in a hundred when I offer it. Just as you’ll take a whisky and soda now.”

The other accepted with a laugh. “I’m afraid I had very little run for my

money.”

“I was County Amateur Champion once,” said Joshua. “I ought to have told you.”

On his way home through the rain, an idea struck him. Why shouldn’t he call on Euphemia Boyd and talk to her heart-to-heart about Susan’s illness? He might learn something of the machinations of the unconscionable Victor Spens. Through the car speaking-tube he gave the address to Manifold. A while afterwards it occurred to him that he had heard somewhere that sick women liked flowers. Except for the hospital days during the war, he had never been ill in his life. Yet he remembered dimly that flowers on the long table running down the centre of the ward had been a grateful sight. He stopped at a florist’s and sent half the shop into the car.

Euphemia, prim and spectacled, received him all in a flutter. This was his first appearance in the flat. He paid for it, of course, and for its upkeep, and for free board and lodging Euphemia scrupulously performed her duties of duenna. If the conditions of her duennaship had been based on countenancing violation of proprieties, Euphemia would have resigned her position. As for Joshua, it had never entered his head to visit Susan in her own surroundings, or to make inquiries into her goings and comings. He trusted Euphemia. Euphemia trusted Joshua. They were both simple souls.

He found himself in a very chaste little drawing-room, furnished more in accordance with a country cottage than with a Chelsea flat: austere yet kindly oak and chintz and a bit of gleaming copper here and there and an old Italian mirror and a water-colour or two on distempered walls. A tawny Pekinese, rising from his slumbers before the tiled hearth, his tail arched over his back, regarded the intruder with inscrutable eyes.

“Hullo! That’s the famous Gog,” cried Joshua. Susan had often told him of the *genius loci*, the presiding deity of the establishment. “Why ‘Gog’?”

“He had a twin brother called Magog, who’s dead,” said Euphemia. “Come, Goggie darling.”

But, like all his race, Gog had no use for human command. He stood his imperturbable ground. It is possible too that his masculine dignity revolted against the inane diminutive.

“Hullo, old son,” said Joshua, and bending down, took the little dog’s head between his hands. Gog, after a second or two, darted away backwards with barks of interrogation and, falling into the attitude of a lion couchant regardant, wagged his vast tail. Joshua played with him for a while and then, at Euphemia’s bidding, sat down. Gog sprang upon his knees, curled round and round and composed himself to slumber.

“Well, I never!” cried Euphemia. “He hates strangers.”

“When a dog bites me,” said Joshua, “I’ll know that I’ve done something very beastly. It’s Susan I’ve come about, not Gog,” he said, after a pause. “How is she?”

Euphemia gave reassuring news. The doctor had repudiated the alarmist thermometer which she had used that morning, and had declared the girl’s temperature normal. Just a chill, nothing more. Let her keep in bed to-day, stay indoors to-morrow, and the day after she could go on the River again, if she wanted to.

“Yes, the River,” said Joshua. “Does she often go on the River?”

Euphemia smiled. “Oh no. This was the first time.”

“It seems so odd that she said nothing about it on Saturday night.”

“She didn’t know. She found a note from Mr. Spens when she came home. In the morning she asked me whether she ought to go or not. As Mr. Spens was a great friend of Mrs. Dale and yourself—well—you all had been in Rome together, I saw no harm in it——”

“Of course not, my dear Euphemia, of course not,” cried Joshua hastily. “I wouldn’t dream of suggesting such a thing. It only seemed odd—that’s all—she was in such gay spirits on Saturday. Naturally she would have told me . . . She has been quite a different girl lately. You must have noticed it. Your influence, Euphemia. Congratulations.”

“Sly, sir, devilish sly,” thought Joshua, patting himself on the back.

But Euphemia didn’t help him by indicating another reason for Susan’s regeneration. Perhaps, she admitted, affectionate care was a factor: there was also Time; also the vital one of youth. Obviously, to Euphemia’s knowledge, there was no young lover of Robina’s imagining who ruffled the chintz chastity of her home. Joshua felt relieved; somewhat ashamed of himself for his doubts of Susan. But, all the same, what was she doing in that galley with Victor Spens?

A neat maid entered with a message from Susan. If Mr. Fendick didn’t mind, she would like to thank him for the flowers. Euphemia glanced at him inquiringly through her tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses. He explained that he had brought a nosegay for the invalid and had given it to the maid who had admitted him. . . . He would love to see Susan. Euphemia would show him the way.

“Friend Gog,” said Joshua, taking the sleepy little head in his hands, “you must walk in the procession.”

Gog blinked, rose, stretched, yawned, stared at him for a second with the

expression of one who should say: “I don’t think the fellow could be such an ass as to disturb me deliberately,” and began to curl himself up again. Whereupon Joshua threw him up under his chin and followed Euphemia into the invalid’s bedroom.

It was all chintz and oak and daintiness, like the sitting-room. The moiety of the florist’s shop swiftly decanted, so to speak, into vessels of glass and copper by the maid—aided, if the truth were known, by a guiding, assisting, barefoot and diaphanously clad Susan—transformed the room’s chastity into a glowing and sensuous bower.

Susan, in wide-sleeved, russet silk dressing-jacket edged with swan’s-down and open over her night-dress, stretched out bare arms from the pillows against which she sat up.

“These wonderful flowers! How good of you! I’ve never seen anything so lovely. And Gog! Euphemia darling, look at Gog.”

“Gog knows when he’s well off,” said Euphemia.

But Gog, knowing the probability, nay, the certainty, of being better off, scrabbled at Joshua’s shoulder and leaped on the bed. Joshua he had judged worthy to enter the circle of his acquaintance, but the man was nothing to Susan, the centre of his adoration.

“Do sit down,” said Susan. “I’m sorry I’ve been so silly and caught this cold. I’d have come yesterday morning, but Euphemia wouldn’t let me.”

“I should think not,” said Joshua. “She’s a wise woman. We want you alive, not dead.”

Euphemia said something about tea.

“If you’ll get it ready, darling, we’ll have it in here. You don’t mind, do you, Mr. Fendick?”

Joshua opened the door for the departing Euphemia and crossed the room to the window which offered a view of uninspiring buildings, mercifully veiled by pouring rain. He was almost diabolically inspired with a conception of a totally new Susan. Susan, radiant mistress of her little domain. Susan, with the faded artist Euphemia under her control. And a loving and beloved control. He turned to the girl in the bed, aware, in a stupefied way, of magic.

He heard her say:

“I’m so sorry to put you out. I couldn’t help it, really. It looked so fine after lunch—lovely sunshine—that we went out in punts, and then the rain came down, all of a sudden, and we all got wet through.”

“We all? . . . A large party?”

She laughed. Her once tragically haunted dark eyes were now filled with a

Southern glow of laughter.

“Of course. All kinds of people. I’ve forgotten half their names. Mr. Spens is a dear, isn’t he?”

Joshua made an effort to pull himself together, as doubtless Merlin must have done before he was finally caught in the spell of woven paces.

“I didn’t know you had kept up with Spens.”

“He has been awfully kind,” she said, with a frank gaze. “At first I didn’t feel inclined to go about—but lately he has taken me to the theatre—you don’t mind, do you?”

He renounced resentment and jealousy. Susan was merely grateful to Victor for taking pity on her loneliness and providing her with innocent enjoyment. He proclaimed his delight that she should accept the good times offered by their kind friend. He contrasted her air of candour with his own previous attitude of suspicion and convinced himself that he had an evil mind. If it were not essential that the good Victor should remain ignorant of his disloyalty, he would have written him an apology on the spot.

Such instantaneous havoc did the sight of a happy and beautiful girl, in her intimate feminine atmosphere, in the glamour of dainty night-dress and swan’s-down edged jacket, of a dimly realized, delicate pervasion of perfume, either from flowers or from faintly scented garments, work in the simple philosophy of Joshua Fendick. . . . She smiled at him with a tiny curl of pretty malice at the corner of her lips. And her eyes smiled too. Merlin Joshua rubbed his head, not knowing what to make of the dainty vision. Hitherto he had had little experience of the fragrant charm of ladies’ bedchambers. His thoughts flew back, for a moment, to the subfusc past. Arabella’s good qualities were of the solid order that abhorred daintiness. Her unconsidered and homely garments lay, with a certain primness, it is true, all over the place. When she was ill, and desired warmth, she stuck on any old jacket of pink flannelette. He remembered that he never quite liked using her hair-brush in the days when she neglected to clean it from the combings eventually to be deposited in the embroidered cardboard slipper hung on the wall near the dressing-table. Never the grace of a flower. Flowers in bedrooms were unhealthy.

He awoke from the momentary retrospect to find Susan, fresh as a dark poppy in the corn, smiling, apparently, at his confusion. Gog blinked at him the supercilious eyes of one to whom the enchantment of ladies’ bowers was a commonplace of existence. Joshua took refuge in the arms of Gog. Susan put Gog through his tricks when tea was served.

Gog talked, with the secular courtesy of his race, to the three humans until Joshua took his leave.

In the evening he dined with the Baldos. As Robina was to have been of the party, there was much talk of her wild-goose chase in East Africa. He learned more unpleasant things about Humphrey Dale.

“Some women still are like that, my dear Joshua,” said Lady Baldo, who had the solid sense befitting the wife of an Alderman of the City of London. “The man who—how shall I say it decently?—who has awakened them is for all time the only man on the earth. It’s a survival, I suppose, of some Neolithic woman instinct. Just elemental savagery. There’s no other way to explain Robina. She has worked herself to death for years to support this unspeakable fellow. And now—well, you see.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” said Sir John. “She’ll be hung up for a passage for at least a month, and by that time all sorts of things may have happened.”

But on the afternoon of the next day, Joshua received a telegram.

> “Sailing in command of Amiral Peyrou. Love.
>
> ROBINA.”

“Damn the woman,” said one Joshua. “Bless the woman,” said another. “But we knew it all the time,” said both Joshuas together.

CHAPTER XVI

JOSHUA entered the studio, put on his blouse, and stripped the damp cloths from the clay masterpiece. There was no doubt of progress. He had succeeded beyond his hopes in the rendering of the foamy water that covered the lower part of the woman's body. The curved wave which made the terminal of the piece was a very satisfactory wave. It gave the impression of transitory form. In another second it would topple down in a swirl. He was very proud of his wave. Also of the bit of sluggish ebb. He had made many studies, on odd occasions, at the seaside, sketches and photographs. The effect might be a trifle heavy in the clay; but, in the marble, the chisel could give lightness. He felt his hands working out the network of foam.

And there she lay, a rounded thing of beauty. The head was more or less done, the face, although in the round, yet practically in profile that of Susan, cold and classical. The loosened hair lay streaming. A lot to be done to it yet. Also to the arms, their attachment to the body. Also the half-crushed left breast. He turned the revolving-table, and as he looked at his work the furrow deepened across his forehead.

"Somehow the darned thing isn't right," he said.

But what was wrong with the darned thing he couldn't tell. If only he could send for Robina. On her last visit she had mingled the enigmatic with her praise. If she were there he could force her to be explicit. But she was away, on the high seas, to be communicated with only by wireless. It was most inconsiderate of Robina to leave him like that, just when he had peculiar need of her advice. His kindly sense of humour brought a smile to his lips. The inconsiderate person was the infernal fellow in Kenya.

There was a ring at the front door bell of the studio, followed by the sound of a fresh young voice greeting the caretaker, and presently in came Susan, gay as the spring morning, in beige hat and costume, a bunch of violets against her coat.

"I'm not late?"

He pointed to the clock. "Punctuality itself. You're the most conscientious girl I know. . . . But are you sure you're quite fit?"

She laughed. "Look at me."

He looked at her; more particularly when she had thrown off the obscuring hat and coat and stood in the youth of her curly shingled head and daintily clinging frock.

“I don’t want you to catch another cold,” said he.

“I was perfectly well three days ago. Euphemia told you.”

Joshua acknowledged the fact. “Better make sure,” he said. “Besides, I didn’t want you really. I was working on the water and the lay figure was all I needed.”

“Well, anyhow, I’ve come now. I must justify my existence.”

“What do you mean?”

She shrugged her shoulders with a smile.

“It’s obvious. I’m an honest woman. I want to do my job to the best of my ability.”

“Oh, of course,” said he, and went and fingered the clay beneath the socket of the outstretched left arm. “Yes. I’ve got my job to do, too. An infernally difficult job. I suppose we’d better get it over.”

She stared uncomprehendingly at the back of his head, and disappeared behind the screen.

He still fiddled absent-mindedly with the clay. A sudden fear fell on him, deadly, causing the sweat to bead on his forehead. His teeth were set and his breath came hard. After an astonishingly short interval—one, it seemed, only of seconds—he heard a voice behind him.

“I’m ready.”

He turned swiftly and beheld her draped in the familiar gauze. Unconsciously she had caught her foot in it, and it had slipped below her shoulders. But what did it matter? In another minute or so she would have cast it off and lain, as she had done a hundred times before, in her chaste nudity on the model-table. But now their eyes met and she read in his that which made her instinctively huddle the stuff around her neck.

He waved her away roughly.

“Go and put on your clothes. I can’t work to-day. I’m not in the mood.”

“I don’t think you are,” she murmured, and fled to her screen.

Joshua reeled to a chair and sat, elbows on knees and hands over his face. Why? Why? Why? He shivered at the question. The girl’s form, the sweet secrets of her, the adorable back, were as familiar to him as her face. Never had the sight of them aroused in him any other emotion than that of the artist concentrated on the ideal. Why? Why? Why, suddenly, couldn’t he bear the possibility of her exposing her loveliness for the how-many-th time before his eyes? Then he became aware in damnable clarity of a vision that had been murkily hidden during the last few days; of a sense of something changed

which had caused him to shrink from this first sitting after her slight illness. And the clear and damnable vision was that of the girl, sweet and desirable, yet unutterable remote from him in her frank maidenhood, woman in her dainty bed-gear, a flower among profusion of flowers, a perfume among perfumes.

Yes. That was it. To let her strip herself before him in cold blood would be an outrage. She had ceased to be the model, the block of wondrous flesh appealing only to God knows what of the spiritual that is the motive force of the artist. She was just woman, exquisite, mysterious woman, all the more mysterious because of her trusting simplicity.

He sat there, he knew not how long. It didn't occur to him to think of the flight of time. He never dreamed that Susan sat on the straight-backed chair behind the screen, terrified, with the whole of a beautiful new universe crashing over her head. How could the honest fellow think of such a thing in the amazement of his self-discovery? He loved her. He wanted her. He clamoured for her. All the smothered passion of his life had broken loose. It had been decreed. He was a man who had ever bowed to Decrees. It had been decreed from the day when he had seen the captivating beauty of a girl's back in Robina's studio. It was the fount and origin of all present delights and evils.

To come nearer. . . . Their jaunt to the Tower of London. Their quick intimacy in the tea-shop atmosphere of their Trenthampton upbringing. Oh, a hundred things! The dancing, body to body. Hadn't that revealed her to him as a warm and yielding delight of the arms instead of a cold pleasure to the eyes?

This cold pleasure to the eyes! He rose and stared haggardly at the model-table. To set her there ever again would be a profanation. Either that, or a horror too base for thought. He rose, wandered about, mechanically sprayed the clay, sprayed the cloths, and covered his work of beauty. Then, in a dazed way, he looked around. Where was she? He called: "Susan!"

She appeared from behind the screen.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Come here."

She advanced slowly across the studio. The joyousness of the past weeks had faded from her face. She appealed to him as the tragic figure of a year or so ago. He went up to her and laid his hand on a shrinking shoulder.

"Don't be afraid, my child."

She said—and the far-off look—the look that seemed to see things beyond the one to whom she was talking—returned to her eyes:

"But I am afraid."

"Of what? Of me?"

She nodded. "You seem different."

He turned away. “I suppose I am. I’ve just found out something. Would you like to know what it is?”

She said, below her breath, “No. I’d rather not.”

A real fear in her tone smote him and caused him to realize what it was that she dreaded. She had received all and given nothing—nothing that mattered. Now she had the sudden terror that he was calling on her to repay. He was nothing but a blundering bull.

He sat down on the arm of a chair. “It isn’t what you may think, my dear. I’m an honest and decent man. Besides, I love you far too much—and far too”—he paused for a word—“far too sweetly.” She smiled, reassured by his gentleness; and, when he rose and came near her, she no longer shrank.

“What is it, then?”

“Do you think you could care enough for an old fellow like me to marry him?”

“Marry you?”

She gasped and lifted to him eyes of wonder, mingled with sheer pain. “I never dreamed——”

“I know you didn’t. I’ve given you no cause—until to-day. I’ve been worrying my head about the shadow”—he waved a hand towards the clay woman “when all the time I ought to have known it was the substance I wanted. I’ve sort of known it, my dear, somehow, in my bones—but I’m a slow sort of chap . . . you must have seen it. We Trenthampton folk don’t boil over all at once like Italians or Spaniards——” He sought pathetically in her face a response to his tiny jest. “But when it does come to the point—well . . . we’re human.” He took her hands which were cold and lifeless. “And we’re dead sure. I’m dead sure I feel for you what I’ve never felt for any woman before. Will you marry me, Susan?”

Prisoner in the unconscious grip of his hands, she flashed him an agonized glance, and hung her head awry.

“I can’t. I can’t.”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“I know I’m old and all that,” he persisted, “but you must care for me just a little.”

She wrenched her hands away. “My God! I’d lay down my life for you.”

And before the bewildered man knew what to make of the cry that came from the girl’s heart, she had thrown herself down on the sofa and buried her

head, giving way to a passion of tears and sobs.

Joshua rubbed his greying red stubble of hair and knew not what to make of the situation. He had the masculine impulse, at the sight of a woman in tears, to go up and pat her helplessly on the back with a futile, “There! There!” But a deeper instinct restrained him, the certainty that the source of her passion lay too deep for his comforting. He let her sob herself out.

Eventually she raised a tear-stained face.

“I’m sorry. I’m a fool. I’d better go home.”

He sat next her on the sofa. “Just as you like, my child,” he said gently. “I’m sorry, too, that I’ve upset you.”

“It wasn’t you. At least, you didn’t mean it. But you’ve brought me to earth. I was beginning to forget, just beginning to be happy again.” She twisted her wisp of a handkerchief in nervous fingers. “Oh, why did you tell me that? It brought it all back again.”

“But, my darling child,” said Joshua, “you can’t live in an old, old nightmare all your life. At first, I know, it was natural. But now, it isn’t fair to yourself—it isn’t fair to those who love you. No, it isn’t fair. Thousands of people have got over horrors in their lives and afterwards have made themselves and those around them happy. You must do it too—for both our sakes.”

Except for his veiled reference to her known antecedents during their interview when first she had come to Eaton Terrace, to decline his offer, this was the first time they had approached the subject of the Withering tragedy. She was aware that he had been conversant with the reports of the inquest in the Trenthampton papers. He had practically told her so on that occasion. A far-off hint from Robina Dale had satisfied her that her tale, poured out one day in an hysterical moment of strain, had been repeated to the man whom she could not regard otherwise than as her awe-inspiring yet beloved protector.

So, when he added: “You see, I know everything, my dear . . . the newspapers . . . what you told Mrs. Dale . . .” she realized that all along she had taken it for granted. Of course he knew. In a way it simplified things. And yet, she sat staring at ghosts through the studio wall.

“After all,” said he, “you must be reasonable. It was a horror, of course, a black cloud which I hoped all the love we’ve given you would clear away like the sun, you know. You had nothing to do with it.”

She said tonelessly, looking straight before her:

“I had everything to do with it. That’s why I can’t marry you—or anybody else.”

“What do you mean?” cried Joshua. “Everything to do with it?”

“I killed them both,” said Susan.

He rose slowly, looked at her in a dazed way.

“You—you killed them both?” he asked stupidly.

“Just what I say. Both. I killed him because I meant to kill him. I shot my mother accidentally.”

“My God!” said Joshua.

There fell on them the silence of death. She sat rigid and pale marble. He turned to the window and stared unseeingly at the trim patches of garden on the other side of the Street. He recalled with strange clarity of memory the proceedings at the inquest. The girl, awakened by two shots, had gone down from her bedroom to the living-room and found the two bodies, a revolver equidistant between them. The man shot through the head, the woman through the heart—straight and not obliquely, through the heart. Which of the two had shot the other, and which had committed suicide? That had been the question discussed so ardently in Trenthampton. As there was only one pistol, they couldn’t possibly have shot each other. Medical evidence had proved that, except by some fantastic acrobatic feat, the wound through the head of the man Burrows could not possibly have been self-inflicted. On the other hand, what woman, pistol in hand, could so bend her arm as to shoot herself, frontwise, direct through the heart? Dilemma for coroner and jury. Husband and wife were both dead. The least improbable solution was adopted. The woman, in the course of odious quarrel, had shot the man, and then committed suicide. And the girl, in night-dress and wrapper and streaming hair, had come in and found them thus on the stone-flagged floor.

Joshua realized that a man couldn’t stand staring out of window, like a fool, all day long. He turned and went back to Susan.

“Don’t you think, my child, you’d better tell me all about it?”

She made a helpless gesture.

“What’s the good?”

“It may get it off your mind, for the first time. From what I know of your stepfather, I’m sure you were justified.”

“I don’t know. I lied to Mrs. Dale—as I lied at the inquest. I had to. One’s skin isn’t worth much—but one goes through hell in order to save it. I’ll tell you. Let me begin from the beginning. Then perhaps you’ll understand.”

“I’ve heard the beginning from Robina,” he said.

She waved a hand. “She didn’t know everything. I’d have given myself away if I had told her. Neither she nor anyone else ever knew where the

service pistol came from last. Of course it was his. He had a commission of sorts in the war. Everyone took it for granted it had remained all the time in his possession. But for a couple of months it had been in mine. It used to be in the kitchen drawer with some cartridges. Anna, the old servant, said so in her evidence. One day I loaded it and took it upstairs to my room—to defend myself. . . . Did Robina ever say I had need to defend myself?”

“She hinted at something horrible. . . .”

“I lived in terror of him. Both of us did. He could knock my mother about—kick her . . . but with me it was even worse. You understand. He was a brute always, but a mad animal when he was drunk. . . . I had to defend myself. I made up my mind that if he came into my room again I’d shoot him. Kept the pistol in a drawer by the side of my bed. No one knew it was there, because I always did my own room out myself—one old servant can’t do everything—and slept with it under my pillow.”

Joshua sat beside her and touched her arm.

“My poor child!”

She looked at him tragically.

“It wasn’t a pretty life for a girl, was it? . . . I don’t know if you heard of his bringing a woman one night into the house?”

Joshua nodded.

“He became worse with mother just before that—better with me. . . . You know we had to get two men on the farm to turn the woman out. . . . Oh, yes . . . that came out at the inquest”—she passed a hand across her eyes. “It’s public property. He went away with the woman. Came back next morning and worked. He ate his dinner with us without saying a word. We were too terrified to do anything. In the afternoon he went away. We thought we were rid of him, thought he had gone back to the woman . . . oh! a drunken slut of a woman. We went to bed at half-past ten and locked ourselves in our rooms. There was a dreadful storm—thunder and rain and wind. . . . I fell asleep. . . . Up to that everything’s true that I said at the inquest and told Robina. All the rest I made up. . . . I don’t know why. . . . To save my skin, I suppose. They were both dead. Nothing could be mended. Why should I be hanged for it?

“Why, indeed?” said Joshua gently. “Go on.”

“It wasn’t shots that woke me. It was a scream from the kitchen down below. Then another. This time one of agony. I don’t want ever to hear such a thing again—in real life. Sometimes I still hear it in my dreams. It came to me that the brute was torturing my mother. . . . The pistol, as I’ve told you, was underneath my pillow. I took it in my hand, threw on my wrapper and ran downstairs. There in the living-room I saw them. He had my mother down on

her knees—one hand was at the base of her throat—the other was pulling straight up a great clump of her hair. She was screaming. I shot at him anyhow. I couldn't help it. He rolled over. Mother and I stared at each other for God knows how long. Then she sprang up with a shriek.

" 'My God, you've killed him!' "

"I said: 'I hope so.' I didn't know. I might have missed—just rendered him insensible for a few moments. I knew nothing about firearms. I had never fired off a pistol in my life. I was determined to fire again if he moved. . . . And then mother rushed at me. 'You mustn't. You mustn't.' I pushed her away. But she would come to try to get the pistol from me. I don't know how it happened—but it went off straight in front of her—and she fell down. . . . It was a long time before I realized they were both dead. . . . Then I ran screaming upstairs to wake up Anna, who slept in an attic in another wing of the house. She had heard nothing . . . the noise of the storm. . . . Even I hadn't heard the beginning of the quarrel. . . . It was only when I went back with her into the living-room, with all its furniture overturned, and the two bodies lying with the pistol on the stone floor between them, that the idea flashed on me to say that I knew nothing about it—that I'd been awakened by two shots and rushed downstairs to find them both dead. It was his service revolver. Everyone knew that. He was capable of any crime. Everyone knew that. . . . So I told my story. No one doubted it. . . . But I killed him, and I meant to kill him. If he had stirred I'd have shot him again. And I killed my mother through holding on to the pistol which she wanted to get away from me. That's the truth. Thank God I've told it to someone at last."

She had poured out her story almost unemotionally, sitting rigid. But now she swayed, white-faced—and would have pitched forward had not Joshua caught her and leaned her back on the sofa cushions.

He flew for a glass of water and tended her in his man's clumsy and ignorant way. Even in his scared solicitude, he recognized the half-dead face of the drowning woman of his great work. For the moment he damned the alien flash of thought as heartless and unworthy, and cast it into the limbo of abominable things. He moistened her lips, her forehead, tore off the cardboard back of a large sketching-block and fanned her, as she lay half-lifeless. What more could he do?

She revived, sat up with an effort.

"It's silly of me. I'm used to keeping myself under control. Forgive me."

"My dear," said Joshua, "you've passed through a great ordeal."

"I suppose I have. Anyhow, you see"—reaction forced a wan, mirthless laugh—"I'm not a woman to be a wife and bring children into the world."

“I don’t see it at all,” replied Joshua stoutly. “What you’ve told me only makes me love you all the more. . . . But we’ll not talk of that now.”

“Why not now and get it over?” she asked tonelessly.

“Because you’re not fit to get anything over, and because I’m an obstinate brute of a man.”

The tenderness in his voice soothed her overwrought nerves. He drew her, unresisting, to him, her head on his shoulder.

“The best thing we can do, my dear,” he said, after a while, “is for me to take you back to Euphemia and tell her to put you to bed and be very kind to you. You’ve got up too soon, you see, after your illness and you collapsed, and you’ve got a dreadful headache. And she mustn’t be silly and call in any doctors. All you want is buns and tea and turtle-soup and pêche Melba and hot-water bottles and eau de Cologne and daffodils and the nearest thing to angels’ wings fanning you that I can think of.”

She said, her face still against him:

“If you talk like that, there’s nothing left for me but to throw myself off a bridge into the river.”

He patted her head with a little laugh.

“I don’t know what the answer to that is. Anyhow, you’re going back to Euphemia. She can be a terrible dragon when she likes.”

She rose suddenly, touched with vague, instinctive fingers her cropped but rumpled hair.

“I suppose it would be beastly of me to do such a thing.”

“If I knew a better word I’d say it,” said Joshua.

She crossed the studio mechanically in search of the little beige hat and coat which she had thrown off on her entrance, and put them on. She stood, waiting.

“I’ll do whatever you tell me,” she said submissively. “I can’t do more.”

“I won’t tell you any more, my dear, until you’re well and strong again.”

He threw off his blouse and put on blue serge jacket, picked up his hat and went out with her into the spring sunshine. Manifold was waiting with the car. They sat silent during the short journey to her flat. But just as the car stopped, she flung her arms tight around him, kissed him passionately on the mouth, and, flinging open the door, sprang out before Manifold had time to descend from his seat.

“Don’t come up,” she cried. “I’ll make it all right with Euphemia.”

And she vanished like a flash in the gloomy vestibule of the Mansions.

CHAPTER XVII

HERE was tragedy enough to account for the haunted eyes of any woman. Suddenly to behold the dead bodies of mother and stepfather, victims of tragic circumstance, was one thing; quite another to have been the active agent of the double catastrophe.

The immense pity which had compelled Joshua's tenderness remained unmitigated; but away from its practical manifestation, he shivered with horror at the pictured scene of that night of slaughter. It was more the simple man's shrinking from the thing that had been done than from the doer that kept him awake at night. Susan stood before him almost colourless, like a personage in Greek drama, Fate-driven, fulfilling will-less that which had been decreed. She had killed the man deliberately. Else why, not in defence of her own body, had she taken the revolver from under her pillow? Her act caused within him no revolt. In ridding the world of a human beast she had been justified. Never could man or woman be more justified in taking human life. If it came to absolute ethics, how far less justification had he, during the war, in destroying with his eighteen-pounder God knows how many German peasants dressed in field-grey, who, apart from being German, had done no particular harm to anybody? His simple mind, unaccustomed to such problems, boggled at that of the right to kill.

He left it half-determined in theory. Practically he found her guiltless of what the law lays down as the greatest crime of which man is capable, the crime that is punishable only by death.

His pity remained and stretched out to enfold her. It would enfold her for ever. As far as its influence went over her life, she would never want for the comfort of material and spiritual things.

But . . . There arose another problem, soul-racking, and its demand of solution. His commonplace, mere human man's attitude towards her? What was it? What could it be?

He must surrender to the agony of unfamiliar introspection. She had been enrooted in his being, sexual, artistic, spiritual—how could he differentiate between multitudinous elusive fibres?—since that far-off hour of idleness in Robina's studio, when some unknown force compelled him to take clay in his hands and copy something divine in its unspeakable appeal. For months and months he had been obsessed by this cast-up thing of beauty and womanhood, gripping at the last hope of life. . . . And then the cold model had suffered a change. She had become warm and laughing woman. No longer pallid jetsam;

but a being of warm blood, whose unveiled loveliness he knew by heart, and, in a common, human way, he had come to adore; a woman suddenly and miraculously awakened to the simple joy of existence; a being who revealed herself to him as the incarnation of the Eternal Feminine in her dainty and pure appeal, in her love of gaiety, in her wit and dancing intelligence. Was not that enough, good God! to make a man both lose his head and find his manhood? To have coldly accepted her entrance from behind the screen, nude beneath her wrap, to take the familiar pose, and carry on his work in calm, artistic serenity would have been beyond the strength of mortal man.

And yet, and yet—he beat a helpless head—he had brought his passion, his middle-aged passion, into her new-found happiness, and had withered and shrivelled it up.

It was a kind of crime that he had committed. He was beset by remorse. If only he had exercised a little self-control! But, on the other hand, why? There had been no question of the pouncing satyr. What more could a man do to prove his honest love than ask a woman to marry him? He had done so, elderly fool or not. And with this calamitous result.

Fairly comprehensible all this review. But what now? The question tortured him, because it was based on her question: “How can I marry and bring children into the world?” He could find no answer. His ancestral Puritanism agreed with her cry of despair. As a murderess, she had put herself beyond the pale of marriageable women. His more modern conception of ethics revolted at the convention. His mind went back to an evening of his childhood when his father selected for his evening Bible reading the story of Jael. He remembered how his father seemed to gloat over the foul and treacherous murder. There was no doubt that he regarded Jael as a holy heroine. How would he have regarded poor Susan, who had far more reason than the disgusting Hebrew female for killing a man in her own house? Indubitably he would have voted her to the gallows. It was a damned paradoxical world.

He was under no illusion as to the meaning of the kiss she had given him. It was a kiss of passionate gratitude, of infinite devotion, of despair and renunciation. It was the kiss of an overwrought girl, not the pregnant kiss of a woman.

When he rang up for tidings of her, Euphemia, in a tone of unconcern, informed him that she had gone to bed with a bad headache, wanted nothing but tea, and would be all right on the morrow.

The next morning he went round to the Mansions and found her alone, arranging flowers, Euphemia away on her round of modelling lessons. Her

face was pale, and bore traces of strain, but she was perfect mistress of herself. The hand she gave him was warm.

“I’m perfectly well, *cher maître*,” she said, with a smile—using a term of address of which, originally learned from Victor Spens in Rome, she had been shyly chary, but which in late happier hours had pleasantly replaced the formal “Mr. Fendick.” “And you?”

“I’ve not had a very good time.”

She sighed. “I’m sorry. I seem to bring trouble wherever I go.”

He threw himself in a chair.

“That’s a bit ungenerous, Susan. You know you don’t. If you had your way, you’d gladden the world.”

She stuck a daffodil into the vase and turned.

“God knows I would.” She paused to give a finishing touch to her flowers, and came and sat near him. “Well?” she said. “What am I to do?”

“The best thing is to give Time a chance,” said he.

“I’ve done it, and Time has turned me down.”

“It hasn’t,” he objected. “You’ve been going about with this dreadful thing locked up inside you, and you let it out only twenty-four hours ago. Oh, no. You’ve given Time no chance at all.”

“I’m glad I told you,” she said simply. “It’s a relief—like what I’ve heard people feel after some dreadful operation.”

Joshua shook a wise head. He understood. Hoped the operation wasn’t so dreadful after all. A bright idea occurred to him. She mustn’t have any more operations. This one was enough for the rest of her life.

“Do you suppose I could tell anyone else except you, no matter how much I loved him?” she asked.

He rose, drew a cigarette from his case, and crossed the room for matches.

“You’re young and beautiful, my child. Someone may make you the same proposal as I did yesterday. What then?”

“I should say ‘No,’ without giving the reason.”

He paused in the act of lighting the cigarette.

“Then why did you tell me?”

She threw her arms wide.

“You’ll be always different from anyone else in the world. I belong to you. I’m your property. You’ve bought me. You’ve——”

He threw the cigarette away and strode up in sudden pain and anger, and,

interrupting her, cried:

“How dare you say such a thing?”

She flew to him, laid her hands on his shoulders.

“You don’t let me finish. You’ve bought me with your love and all that matters in the world. I told you yesterday I’d lay down my life for you. . . . I’m not given to saying hysterical things that haven’t any meaning. . . . Of course I belong to you. It’s the only happiness I’ve got. Listen. I didn’t know till yesterday that you felt like that for me. . . . I had to tell you. . . . Don’t you see? When it came to the point, it was impossible for me to feel that you had bought me under false pretences. . . .”

He took her hands from his shoulders and kissed them before releasing her.

“I see, my dear.”

He saw all sorts of things, as in a glass darkly. They were confused, inchoate; a nebulous jumble of everything that she had meant to him, of what in the recesses of her woman’s being she meant to herself. She had said with an unmistakable implicitness: “I am your thing, your slave. You have bought me at a price inestimable in gold or precious gems . . . but still at a price. . . . Do with me as you will.”

He could have all her wonder for the assertion of his mastery. But to what good? As well take into his arms the form of damp clay that was his creation of Susan in his half-forgotten studio. Again his inherent Puritanism spoke: all that was clean and strong and virile in it. No, the taking of her, no matter whether as wife or mistress, would be dishonourable, a sin against some kind of Holy Spirit that hovered over the waste waters of his modern half-belief.

“I see, my dear,” he repeated. “Let us leave it at that for the time being. Anyway—you can take it from me—you’re the most precious possession I’ve got.” He smiled disarmingly. “So don’t worry.”

The next day he sent her off to Brighton with Euphemia for a long week-end. The sea-air would do her good. It would also, he argued, give Time a chance, not only with her, but with himself. If sleeping on a problem for a night brought a certain amount of counsel, sleeping on it for three nights ought to bring three times the amount of counsel. The most logical proposition that could be stated. He remembered that the bright young couple, Billy and Kitty, whom they had met at the night-club after their theatre party had declared their intention of spending this week-end at the Metropole with some married friends. In his hearing they had asked Sutton to join them; but Sutton, dutiful fiancé, had declined. When Joshua secured rooms for Euphemia and Susan at the hotel, he made no mention of the bright young couple. The company of the

bright young couple, who were bound to recognize Susan, and the consequent dancing with their young friends and acquaintances, would unite with the sea-air in invigorating effect. He rubbed his hands, thinking what a very clever fellow he was.

He avoided the studio. He, too, must have a rest. For months the son of the caretaker, a marble-cutter by trade, had looked after the spraying and damping of the clay masterpiece. As Joshua had promised him the job in rough marble, he took a personal interest in the work. That is the worst of clay. Once dry it cracks, and that's more or less the end of it. Often he regretted he hadn't started with wax. But his original inspiration had set him groping clumsily with clay, and somehow clay had become a sanctified medium. But had it not been for the providential young marble-cutter, he would have been worried to death.

At The Cock-Pit he met Fenton Hill, who inquired how the great work was getting on.

"I'm giving it a miss for the present," he said. "I'm getting stale. There comes a time when you lose grip and begin to fidget and tinker, and ten to one you spoil the whole dam thing. Best way is to leave it alone for a bit. I don't set up as an authority, you know," he added modestly. "But that was always Robina's advice."

As a matter of fact, when he thought during these days of entering the studio, he broke into a cold sweat of terror. It would be all right next week, however, he told himself. In the meanwhile, like Susan, he must have change of scene and interests. He went off to Paris; made his presence there known to one or two of Robina's artist friends and, under the pleasant sand of their company, buried his ostrich head. They took him to a revue. *Le Nu à travers les Ages*. It rather saddened him. Not one of the women, scrupulously picked for beauty of form, had that tenderness of curve and contour. . . . He went to a matinée next day at the Comédie Française of Racine's *Mithridate*, which, although he understood no word of its majestic dullness, soothed a spirit wearied by the excitements of an unmajestic world.

As his train entered Victoria station on the Tuesday night, he was almost stupefied by the sight of the young man Sutton among the crowd waiting at the barrier. He had sent the boy a postcard, it being a habit, perhaps a pathetic one, to keep him in touch with his movements. But never before had it occurred to Sutton to meet his train. He must be meeting somebody else.

But no. As soon as their eyes met, Sutton waved a greeting hand; and, as soon as they could meet, he led him off to the waiting Manifold. It was only after they had started on their short journey to Eaton Terrace that he explained

his unprecedented presence.

“I’m in a hell of a fix,” he said; and an anxious face confirmed the ingenuousness of his utterance. “I’ve got a beast of a Firm dinner-party—old Messiter”—Messiter was the senior partner in Sutton’s leather-broking business—“and this seemed to be the only chance of catching you. Do you know what’s happened?”

“Not the faintest idea,” said Joshua.

“Victoria has bolted with Tommy Olifant.”

Joshua turned a startled face on his son.

“When?”

“This afternoon. Look.”

He took a crumpled telegram from his jacket pocket. Joshua read:

> “Tommy and I couldn’t stick it any longer. Married yesterday special licence. You’re such a dear that I know you will forgive me. VICTORIA.”

The place from which the telegram had been sent was Dover. The time 12.50 that day. Joshua’s train from Paris had passed theirs.

“What the devil were you doing yesterday?” asked Joshua.

“How do you mean? I was at the office.”

“But last night, and Sunday and Saturday?”

“I haven’t seen her since Friday evening. Dined with the family. She was as right as ever she was—which isn’t saying much. She was going for the week-end to the Plymptons’ in Hampshire. Kissed her good night—ordinary way. Next thing I hear is this—when I got to my rooms—lying on my table. What do you think about it?

“I think, my boy,” said Joshua, “that you’ve got rid of a fish.”

A while later, over cocktails served by Dotley in Joshua’s library, they resumed the talk.

“What do you feel about it yourself?”

Sutton didn’t quite know. Obviously his male vanity had suffered outrage.

“If it had been a decent fellow—but Tommy Olifant!”

“He must have stirred the woman beneath the fish, which, apparently, you didn’t. With women, my boy, no one knows,” he said sapiently.

“It’s a bit of a knock-out, all the same, isn’t it?” said Sutton, anxious for sympathy.

“I suppose so,” said Joshua. “Your wife’s letters would have been addressed, ‘The Honourable Mrs. Sutton Fendick.’ You’d have moved in County circles. You’d have been a social success. On the other hand, you’d have been bored with the fish-woman—perhaps it’s your fault for letting her stay fish instead of woman—but that’s a different matter. You’d have gone off with little ladies who’d have amused you a dam sight more, and there’d have been ructions. You’d have been bored to death by family trees and inter-relationships with every aristocratic dud in England. And you’d have had old man Pelling and Lady Pelling on your back all the time—and, incidentally, I should have had ’em too. And what the hell would you have got out of it? Conjugal happiness—with a wife who’s a fish to you, no matter what she may be to other people? Social status—such as it is? Not much fun in it. Business chances? You’d be slaving for them instead of them helping you. I’m not sorry, old man. In fact, I’m glad. The only thing that justifies your being crazy over her—in my eyes—is the fact that there was all the hidden stuff in her that made her bolt with Tommy Olifant.”

The young man looked at his wrist-watch and rose.

“I suppose you’re right, Dad, but I don’t think you’re very sympathetic.”

“Some years ago I might have been. But nowadays I can’t excite myself over things that seem to me—what’s the word I want?—tepid—yes, tepid. Here you leave the girl you’re engaged to on Friday night. You know where she’s staying. You don’t write to her−-so I gather—she doesn’t write to you. Neither of you rings up the other on the telephone—Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. Dammit, you had no more claw on the girl than a frog. Sympathy! Well . . . what were you doing over the week-end?”

“I went down to Brighton with the Pulleynes.”

Joshua vaguely associated the name with the bright young couple.

“Are those the friends of that engaged boy and girl—Billy and Kitty, I think you called them?”

“That’s right.”

“At the Metropole?”

“Yes. And of course I met Miss Keene,” he added more cheerfully. “She told me you had sent her there to rest up. The Pulleynes and Billy and Kitty were awfully good to her—and the other dear old thing that goes about with her.”

“Miss Boyd,” said Joshua.

“That’s it.” said Sutton. Again he looked at his wrist-watch. He must fly in order to be in time for his dinner-party.

“I see your point about Victoria. Perhaps I’m well out of it,” he admitted. “But nobody likes to be turned down flat. It’s humiliating.”

Joshua was sententious. “Better before than after marriage,” said he. “After—it must be thoroughly beastly. If you’re doing nothing better, come and have a bite of dinner here to-morrow.”

“Love to,” said the young man.

Joshua accompanied him to the front door and dismissed him with an affectionate grip on the shoulder. Sutton drove off in a smart two-seater.

Joshua bathed and changed under the figurative eye of Dotley, and under his bodily eye dined in solemn grandeur. Feeling extraordinarily lonely, he suddenly looked up at the Perfect Servant.

“What part of England do you come from, Dotley?”

“Somerset, sir. Yeovil. My father was butler to Lord Crewkerne. I was born, so to speak, in the Family.”

“I don’t know Somerset very well,” said Joshua.

“A beautiful county, sir,” said Dotley.

Joshua was vaguely disappointed. If Dotley had been Midland born there might have been established some connecting link between them. But Yeovil and Trenthampton have as little in common as Omsk and Monte Carlo.

“Port, sir? The Taylor ’08.”

Dotley poured out the wine.

“To-morrow,” said Joshua, “you might give us a bottle of the Dow 1890. Mr. Sutton’s dining here.”

He would give Sutton of the best, so as to manifest his sympathy. The boy must be feeling raw. Any male must, when a female tells him candidly she can’t stick him any longer, and goes off to find what she wants in another male’s arms. It must hit a fellow in the midriff of his sex-vanity. Poor old Sutton! He lavished unconscious tenderness on his son. Well . . . As he had said, the boy was dam well out of it. He drank his port and lit a cigar. He himself was far from sorry. The Pelling lot weren’t his crowd at all.

He watched moodily the blue smoke of his cigar rise into the still and discreet air of the quiet dining-room. Who were his crowd, as he termed it, after all? He belonged to no particular crowd. He was but a heterogeneous unit wandering around homogeneous groups. Just like Susan. Somebody a few weeks ago had been talking about a famous French play some years old—“Les Déclassés.” He had asked and had learned the meaning of the title. He and Susan both belonged to the disclassed category. Neither of them could return to the well-defined social class from which they had arisen. Socially he would

have far more in common with Dotley, for all his remote West Country breeding, than with his father-in-law, old Sutton, still alive, head of the great Trenthampton drapery emporium. Now Susan and he thoroughly understood each other. Why on earth had she gone around murdering people and making things generally impossible?

Dotley entered with coffee.

“Liqueur brandy, sir?”

“No.”

He had drunk far more of the fine but still potent 1908 port than was good for him. A temperate man, he waved away the brandy. Dotley rectified the crookedness of the doyley on which the port-glass had been set, and was about to retire.

“Can you get hold of Manifold?”

“He’s downstairs, sir.”

“I’m going out,” said Joshua.

The immediate prospect of a lonely evening in the great lonely house oppressed him. If only there were Robina to turn to. But Robina was, most likely, sweltering in the Red Sea at that moment. He might find someone, at any rate, to talk to at The Cock-Pit.

He did. For the first person he met sitting in the lounge over after-dinner coffee and cigarette was Victor Spens, who rose in warm greeting.

“My dear Joshua! How good to see you. I’ve just come back from The Hague.”

“And I from Paris.”

“Join me. Waiter, a coffee and old brandy for Mr. Fendick.”

They talked awhile of Holland and France. Then, said Victor:

“I hope our dear little friend, Susan, was none the worse for her wetting, a week or so ago?”

Joshua, to Victor’s polite concern, gave the news of Susan’s cold.

“But it was awfully good of you to bother with her,” said he. “I didn’t know you’d kept up with her after Rome.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t done much. I’ve taken her to a theatre or two. She’s interesting if you take a bit of trouble. There’s lots behind her.”

“More than you know,” said Joshua.

“No doubt. But I know something.”

“Tell me,” said Joshua, after a pause, “what made you ask her all of a

sudden to your river-party?”

“Just curiosity.” A humorous smile played over Victor’s dark face.

“What else?”

“The simplest thing in the world. I had got up a nice little festa for Victoria Pelling. A selected dozen. Early on Sunday morning your dear young Sutton wakes me up on the telephone. Victoria was ill or something and couldn’t come. It knocked my party to bits. I asked him if he could suggest—at the eleventh hour—another woman. He said: ‘Why not my father’s protégée, Susan Keene? She’ll come like a shot.’ So I rang up Susan, and she came. Didn’t you know?”

“Neither of them has told me a word about it,” said Joshua, bending forward, with a face which Victor Spens afterwards characterized as ghastly.

“I hope I’ve not been indiscreet,” said Victor. “You asked me and I’ve told you. I’d no idea there was anything between them until I saw them together. You’ll pardon a good friend’s frankness—but I can’t make out what the boy’s playing at. Personally, I think Susan’s little finger is worth the whole of Victoria’s scraggy body. But . . .”

“Her scraggy body, as you call it,” said Joshua, “bolted to-day with Tommy Olifant. They’re married.”

“You don’t say so,” Victor murmured. “I knew that girl couldn’t avoid the respectable.”

“And now you say that Susan and Sutton are in love with each other.”

“Let us hope so.”

“Hope so!” cried Joshua. “You don’t know what the hell you’re talking about. Hope so! Oh, my God!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE was only one person, Joshua assured himself, who could piece together this jumble of a puzzle, and that was Robina. Once more he felt impotent, exasperated at her absence. She had been right from the beginning. The new colour in Susan's cheek? Who could have put it there but a man? So had she declared, and for all his assertion of having re-created a living woman, so had she maintained.

And the man turned out to be his own son, Sutton—at any rate, according to Victor Spens. Who else?

He reeled under the shock. Would Robina have been of much use? Talk with her would have entailed confession of impulses which the Puritan-bred Englishman shrinks from discussing with women. He would have had to explain, in his blundering fashion, why he had sent Susan back behind the screen to dress herself. An uncomfortable, an impossible thing to do. Perhaps, after all, it were better that Robina should be unsuspectingly out of reach. In the meantime he floundered about among the débris of earthquake.

He had been tricked by two of the people he most loved and trusted in the world. He began to nurse violent anger in his heart. His man's dignity was outraged. From Sutton he could demand no explanation. He revolted from such a course as from an indecency. Besides, of what, in the name of common sense, could he accuse him? He saw Sutton protesting, candidly ingenuous. Here, on the one hand, was Victoria turning him down on every occasion, and giving him a dog's life, and there, on the other, was a pretty and amusing girl who seemed to be glad to be taken about a bit. He would disclaim, with an air of innocence, any reprehensible intentions. He had done the same with a score of young women, each of whom was doing it with a separate score of young men. It was the unreprobated social custom of the day. Why shouldn't he have asked Victor Spens to invite Susan to the river-party? What was he, Joshua, driving at, anyhow? Abominable and unanswerable questions.

And at the back of it all flickered the livid tragedy in the stone-flagged living-room of the Withering farm-house.

There was only one thing to be done. Susan must be questioned. Yet, as he realized the added turn of the screw he must give to the already tortured girl, his anger waned.

She appeared, obedient to his summons, in the studio. Having arrived earlier than the fixed hour, he had been waiting for her.

It was a cloudy morning. The air of the studio struck cold. Instead of the

place of life in which he had ever found joy, it chilled him with a sense of decay. Recently she had either sent or brought flowers. He missed their note of gaiety. His bust of Dotley stared at him with the inscrutable face of one who had exploited human folly and vanity from his youth upwards. The great masterpiece in the centre lay covered, like a corpse in its damp cerements. Around the walls were studies, in plaster, of Susan's hands, fine, delicate, nervous, with strained sinews.

The bust of the little Italian boy, the study in imitation of the Laughing Faun of the Louvre, sniggered at him like an imbecile who had been struck dead in the course of a fatuous grin.

She entered, advanced to meet him, almost unconcerned, yet with a faint smile. He thought of her as a swaying reed in her slim beauty. They shook hands.

"I'm glad to find you can carry on, *cher maître*."

"I'm not going to carry on—at least, not just yet. I asked you to come here because I want to talk to you." He noticed a tiny movement of her shoulders and a swift glance round the studio. Sensitive for the moment, he interpreted her mute questioning. "Perhaps I ought to have come to the flat, or asked you round to the house, but I thought we'd be quieter here. This is a sort of common-ground for us. Better keep on your coat. It's beastly cold—although the heating seems to be on." In his rough, kind way he sate her in a chair. "How are you now?" he asked brusquely.

She smiled. "I'm all right. And you?"

"I'm worried. Dam worried. I'll tell you straight. Why didn't you tell me that you'd been going about with my boy, Sutton?"

She half rose, gripping the arm of the chair, and there were spots of colour on her cheeks.

"Was there any harm in it?"

"That's just what I want to get at, my dear. Why didn't you tell me he was one of the River-party?"

She looked away. "I didn't think it mattered. I had met him with you. . . . You've always given me a free hand—never asked what I did."

"And this last week-end at the Metropole?"

"You sent me there yourself. How was I to know I should meet him? Who was been telling you about all this?"

Joshua answered her. Both Victor Spens and Sutton himself.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you about the River," she said with a little cold dignity. "I thought it might worry you. As for the Metropole, I'm not

responsible.”

He cast a glance at what, in his muddle-headed masculine way, he considered a sphinx of a girl, and wandered about the room in perturbation of spirit. At last he spoke, his hands in his pockets.

“What made you think it would worry me? You had met Sutton the night before—danced with him. Why hide the fact, as though you’d been doing something wrong?”

“Perhaps, after all, I was doing wrong,” she admitted. “He was engaged to Miss Pelling. He knew he was doing wrong, too. It wasn’t the first time we’d been out together. It’s difficult to put it so that you should understand.”

“Not very,” he sighed. “I suppose neither of you could very well have told me. Jolly awkward. I see. Still, I wish you had. It would have stopped all that happened here last week.”

“It’s best it did happen,” she said, in her old toneless voice. “It put an end to all kinds of impossible foolishness.”

“I don’t want to hurt you, my child,” said Joshua. “Or myself either for the matter of that. I’m pretty selfish, you know, and think a lot of a pain in my little finger. But we must straighten out things—so as to see what we’re all doing. Don’t you agree?”

She stared away and nodded.

“If you could tell me,” he went on, “that it has been just a matter of two young people wanting to have a good time together, I’ll believe you. Then there’ll be an end of it, and I’ll apologize for making this silly fuss.”

She met his eyes, and made a wry face, a woman’s prelude to tears. She broke out:

“Oh, my dearest, don’t look at me like that, or I’ll feel a brute. Of course it went deep as far as I was concerned. It seems idiotic for a girl like me to talk of a prince out of a fairy-tale. But that’s, more or less, how it was. I suppose you think him a young blackguard. He was afraid you would if you came to know. I suppose you do?”

“That depends,” said Joshua.

She gave him a swift upward glance, and laughed, and in her laugh there were tears again.

“Oh no, no, no! Nothing of that sort. He’s as straight as can be.”

“When he was engaged to another woman? To me it sounds a bit crooked.”

“That’s what he was afraid of.”

“It’s a hell of a mess,” said Joshua.

She assented, with a forlorn gesture. He walked away, picking a path through a pathless muddle, and turned, as though giving up the attempt. There was one apparently blind alley, at any rate, to be cleared.

“Do you know that Victoria bolted yesterday with another fellow?”

She nodded. “Yes. I had a letter this morning. He wants me to marry him.”

Joshua threw up his hands.

“My God, my child, what’s going to be done about it?”

He felt enmeshed in a net of sex revulsion. He forgot her past. The ghastly fact remained paramount in his mind that he and his son desired the same woman. He stepped towards her and repeated, “What’s going to be done about it?”

She answered like a Fate, the tears repressed for the moment:

“Nothing. What do you think can be done? Even if there wasn’t all the rest of it—I’m years older than he. I’ve seen enough of the world to know that there’s no happiness that way.”

“Then why the devil did you ever let things begin?” cried Joshua.

“Now you’re asking,” said Susan, “more than I can tell you.”

Joshua fell back on his assertion that all were in a hell of a mess, and crossed the studio to his favourite stare out of the windows at the trim fringe of garden on the other side of the way. And he stared as he had done on the day of his far-off reincarnation when he had seen his Vision? The Vision of the drowning girl cast up by the sea, gripping at the last hope of life. And now he stared at another Vision. The same, but, as it were heraldically, with a difference. It was not a chance sunken stone, or an embedded bit of wooden groyne, to which she clung for her salvation. Nor was her hand clinging—but just upheld. For there was another hand within reach of grasp—the hand of Youth stretched out from behind a mist veiling the face of Faith and the lips that murmured promise of life and of love. He stood shaken, as he had done in what seemed the long ago, before his Vision. His boy, Sutton, had melted into a symbol.

The eternal symbol. Youth reaching out to Youth instinctive hand, all the more instinctive in despair, longing lips to lips responsive, consolatory. The primal act of girl at bay on the sight of the young rescuer.

Again a surge of pity swept him towards her. The mess was by no means cleared up. But through his Vision he saw it less abominable. Why should not the affrighted youth of Susan have held out despairing hands in a clamour for salvation to the good, clean hands of youth? God! It was, all said and done, only one more infinitesimal link in the infinite chain of human generation

since the Beginning of Time. Sutton and Susan. Why not? The Vision faded, as Visions must fade when the petty actual is dropped into them, the acid solvent of dreams. Sutton and Susan. He turned from the window and his ear caught the staccato note of something that was less a sob than an indrawn breath. Susan, her face on the sofa-cushions, was crying quietly. He rubbed his head in his customary gesture when perplexed. So had she wept last week; but then in hysterical anguish. That fount of tears must have run dry. These came from another source. He paused for a moment on the threshold of a Great Problem. Why the devil did women cry? He had seen men cry during the war. But war was war. He had seen a good pal of his, a fellow-sergeant, who, during an intensive bombardment, when the battery emplacement was but a shambles of dead and wounded men and squealing horses, had never wavered from his smiling and indomitable courage, but, afterwards, behind the lines, had cried like a baby before having a loose tooth pulled out by the doctor. That was the reaction of war. He himself had only cried once in his life. . . . Well, not cried, but tears had streamed on his face when, it being essential to put a beloved old dog out of its misery, and having called in some underling with a gun, he had heard the fatal shot. Yes, the tears, in an idiot sort of way, had spurted. He had wiped his face impatiently. . . . He remembered it had given him a slight headache. . . . It was a most uncomfortable experience. But women were always doing it, when they were up against things. It seemed to make them feel happier, or sadder, or, at all events, more consoled. Arabella, lachrymose economist, would weep when he told her that he didn't care a hang whether prime cuts of beef, or whatever it was, cost one and sixpence or two shillings a pound, so long as he had food he could chew; also when he found excuses for non-attendance at the gleeful meetings when Old Man Sutton, full-bearded, but with clean-shaven upper lip, addressed the Young Men's Christian Association. But then Arabella was Arabella, a dank, limp female of a species all her own, remote from that to which belonged the women of his newer life—Robina, Lady Evangeline Hill, the all-to-be-forgotten Dora Blackadder, Lady Pelling, Victoria, Susan—and even, hang it all! his own vaguely remembered square-built, harsh-faced Puritan of a mother.

Susan was there crying, just as if she really liked it. He didn't know what to do; felt, of course, guiltily responsible for her tears. What had finally set her off? He had to throw back his mind to the last words of their conversation. He remembered. Knowing how impossible were her relations with Sutton, he had asked her why had she allowed them to begin? He was asking, she had answered, more than she could tell him. Well, now that he came to think of it, she could scarcely have made a more straightforward statement. What human being is endowed with such prescience as to enable him to avoid the beginning of things? The proposition was an absurdity. He turned away with a movement

of his thick shoulders. He should have put his question differently. Being aware of the beginning, why had she allowed things to continue? Even to that, however, she could have only replied confusedly. In these contacts between people of different sex there is a call—a call that one obeys without thought or reason. Susan had heard it for the first time in her existence, and had instinctively obeyed. It had led her from gloom into the rapture of sunshine. She had warmed her hands at the Fire of life, as someone, he remembered, had said somewhere.

He went up to her and touched her arm gently. She raised a damp face, but, seeing his eyes kind, smiled at him.

“I don’t know that we’ve got much further,” said he gently; “we’ve got to think what’s to be done about it.”

“What I said. Nothing. What can be done? I’ve had ‘my hour,’ as it’s called . . . and that’s over. Even if I could and I wanted to, you’d never let me marry Sutton, would you?”

“I don’t see why not,” he declared sturdily. “You’re a dam sight better than Victoria—worth a hundred dozen of her. If you were good enough for me to marry—I asked you—why, confound it all, you’re good enough for Sutton. I don’t say that I’m not in an awkward position—part of the mess I was talking about. But if it would clear up everything and make us all happy, you can marry Sutton to-morrow, as far as I’m concerned.”

“You seem to forget,” she said, with weary patience, “I told you I could never marry any man.”

“I don’t forget. I don’t think all that past business matters a row of pins. . . . For God’s sake, my child, don’t begin again looking at it through people and stone walls. I tell you it doesn’t matter.”

“It does to me,” said Susan helplessly. “It’ll always matter.”

“Well, that’s a maggot in your brain,” said Joshua, equally helpless, “that nobody can get rid of except yourself.”

There was a pause. She took up her gloves mechanically from beside her and threw them a foot or two away on the sofa. And then: “I didn’t tell you quite all. I had wanted to kill him for a long time. As soon as I got hold of the pistol I knew that I meant to kill him at the first opportunity. The opportunity came and I killed him—and my mother too. How can you say all this doesn’t matter?”

Joshua sat down and put a hand to a puzzled head. “I don’t know, my child. It licks me. Pity you’re not a Roman Catholic. Then you could go to a priest and tell him all about it, and he’d tell you what, according to the doctrines of his Church, God thought about it, and what you yourself were to

think about it—and, if you had Faith, you'd go away and, I'm sure, would be perfectly happy."

"I believe God has a horror of me," said Susan.

These were seas into which Joshua, good easy man, had never ventured. He shivered at the idea of Susan being accursed.

"Were you church or chapel?"

"Chapel."

"So was I," said Joshua. "Perhaps a good training, but grim."

His thoughts flew back to the little tabernacle roofed with corrugated iron, set in the bit of waste land, and to the terror with which the name of the vengeful Jehovah inspired his childhood. Love Him—to his childish mind the Apotheosis of his own unutterably terrifying father? How could he? It had taken his subconscious mind years to devise a milder and more sympathetic Deity. And now here was Susan apparently still under the spell of the same God of Mercilessness.

Joshua was one of millions, a shyly religious man, professing little, uninterested in outer observances, but vaguely conscious of an unquestionable Christianity, sweet and gracious, which, when it came to questions of right and wrong, or of mild judgments or harsh judgments, inspired his conduct. So it was his concept of a kind God into Whom the tenderer Christ and the, to him, incomprehensible, superfluous, yet technically accepted Third Person were merged that caused him to revolt against her utterance of despair.

"I'm damned if I'd believe in such a beast of a God," he declared. "Either we are ruled by an All-loving Father, from Whom no secrets are hid, or we're at the mercy of an Idiot Devil. It's only an Idiot Devil that can have a horror of you, my dear."

She gathered her gloves again from the sofa and rose.

"I suppose I must have the Idiot Devil inside me—for I've a horror of myself."

Joshua flung away. "I give it up. I'm only a plain sort of chap who loves you very dearly. Oh, not in that sort of way now. You've put the lid on it, you and Sutton. I'm an old fool. You can forget . . . I just want your happiness. If you love the boy and he loves you, just go and tell him the whole story. As for his being younger than you—that's the look-out of the two of you. Doesn't concern me. Go and tell him everything. If he says: 'No, thank you—I'm not taking on that sort of thing,' then you'll know what his love's worth. If he says: 'I don't care a damn. You're the only woman in the world for me,' then you'll have happiness for Life Everlasting. That's all I can say. . . . And now,

go home and leave me.”

He waved her away. She came to him, white-faced.

“I can’t. You know I can’t, for all you may say. No boy’s love could stand it. He’s at the beginning of life. I feel as if I were at the end. My God! Do you suppose I want to be thrown away like an apple with a worm in it? Not likely. . . . You’re the only human being I’ve ever told, and you’re the only human being I’ll ever tell. Why? Because you are you. Because you’re the only God that’s ever been good to me. Listen. This is my last word. I said I’d give up my life for you. I don’t say stupid things. I mean it. My body is yours.”

He made a stride towards her, and thundered:

“Shut up!”

From steel tenseness she crumpled into the lassitude of a flower on a stem.

“You’ll never understand. No one will ever understand. Oh, can’t you see?” She stretched out piteous hands. “No man will marry me if he knows all. And I have my pride, and won’t be a wife and mother of children. But why can’t I have some happiness in the world? A man’s mistress—there’s no obligation for a woman to tell all her past.”

Joshua, like Susan, at the end of his tether, pointed the forefinger of his maimed hand.

“You can marry Sutton. He needn’t know anything—except the police reports—common knowledge. He’s my son, and you’ll be my daughter. But, by God! if you start on the other tack . . . I’m flesh and blood . . . I’ll tell him the whole thing. Then he can marry you or not, just as he pleases.”

He went to the studio door and threw it open for her.

“You’d better go, my child. You’ll find Manifold outside. Tell him to come back for me.”

A signalling note of the horn announced the car’s return. Joshua rose from his chair and went out of a meaningless studio.

After lunch he busied himself with Robina’s affairs. There was the casting of a delicate bronze, concerning which he had an appointment with the expert in a Lambeth workshop. He lingered, watching processes after the accomplishment of his errand, finding consolation in the atmosphere of his art. Then on to some dry business of investments with Robina’s stockbrokers in the City; a question of selling out certain shares or holding on. He, having power of attorney, must decide. A bit of a gamble, wasn’t it? he asked. The broker smiled. All Mrs. Dale’s investments were gambles. All high-spirited women despised gilt-edged securities. Only four or five per cent on their

money? It was scandalous. They always knew somebody who was getting twenty per cent out of a concern as safe as the Bank of England. They expected brokers to make their fortunes right away. In view of Mrs. Dale's temperament, and the state of the market—this is what he would advise. . . . He was an old personal friend of Mrs. Dale. He loved her as a human being, bowed down before her as a great artist, but dreaded his dealings with her as a woman of business. Joshua listened to his advice and, finding it sound, agreed to his suggestions. He went away with something like a smile lurking round his heart. The stockbroker's revelation of Robina's feminine weakness was both an amusement and a solace, he knew not why.

When he got home, he remembered that he had asked Sutton to dinner. It had been in his mind to do the boy well, flood him somehow with sympathy over his disappointment, and finally establish that confidence for which he had longed and which had always proved elusive. But now Sutton was more remote than ever. The secret lover of Susan. The honest lover, in a fashion, since he had asked the girl, in writing, to marry him. And, but for a chance word of Victor Spens, he would not, at the present moment, have known anything at all about it.

He felt peculiarly disinclined to see Sutton that evening. The more he thought about it, the more impossible it seemed for Sutton and himself to dine together under the blandly cold and efficient eye of Dotley. He felt it would be more decent for him not to see Sutton for a week—a month—a year. Susan and Sutton must go their ways, several or joint, just as they pleased. He was out of it.

He rang up Sutton's office in Mincing Lane, and gave the answering clerk a message cancelling the dinner—an important previous engagement which he had forgotten.

He dined early and went to the Ring at Blackfriars, where he saw some interesting boxing. In that, too, he found consolation. But he went to bed with an uncomfortable certitude that something in his life, like an essential part of a machine, had snapped. In his wearisome dreams he seemed to be looking for it under the bonnet of a grotesque motor-car.

CHAPTER XIX

THE days passed, and Joshua heard no more of Susan or of Sutton. Between the former and himself all had been said that could be said. Between father and son there remained everything to be said, and that everything was impossible. At all events Sutton must make the first move. There was such a thing as parental dignity. In rather a depressed mood he went about his own affairs.

One night he dined quietly with Mark Fuller, one of Robina's painter friends, who lived in a modest little house in St. John's Wood with a comfortable little wife and a couple of children. He always felt at his ease there, because food, service and talk were unpretentious. Mark Fuller, like himself, had emerged from the drabness of a manufacturing town, and still talked with a provincial burr. There were no Dotleys about the place to freeze life into inescapable convention. Guests—they were few at a time—wore dinner-jackets or not, just as they fancied, until they learned the rule of the house instituted by Mrs. Fuller. If they were invited to dinner, they dressed; if to supper, they didn't. As a general rule it was supper: cold meats, beer and whisky. The informality sent Joshua's thoughts back to the days of his boyhood, lasting to the end of his career as a professional footballer, when he and his father always sat down to meals in their shirt-sleeves. It was only when they moved to Redesdale Road and employed a servant that old Fendick had ordained the keeping on of coats.

But there the suggestion ended. The simplicity of the Mark Fuller establishment was emphasized by beauty, which had no place in his Trenthampton memories; a beauty, too, of comfort, and not of austerity. Colours were bright, chairs were soft-cushioned. The hand of a modern artist seemed to have touched solid early Victorian things and transmuted them into loveliness.

"I could look at Sheraton's chairs all day long," said Mark Fuller once, explaining his furniture; "but I wouldn't sit on the darned things for a quarter of an hour."

He was a big, loosely-jointed and loosely-clad man of a ruddy complexion, and he greeted Joshua genially.

"So glad to get hold of you, my dear fellow. Robina threatened us with fire and brimstone from heaven if we didn't."

"When was that?" laughed Joshua.

"The night before she started. She rang Mattie up. We've been away for a

while. That's why we're a bit late. You have to look on Mattie as *in loco Robinæ*. She's tickled to death. Here she is."

The comfortable little wife entered the small and comfortable studio-living-room, and welcomed the guest.

"I was just telling Joshua," said Fuller, "about Robina. She doesn't think he's fit to be let abroad loose. So it's up to you."

Joshua laughed.

"Robina certainly is a very ready help in time of trouble."

The significance of his meaning was hidden beneath the lightness of his tone. How were these two to know of his recent need of her guidance? But he laughed with a certain gladness. It was characteristic of the large-natured Robina to think of consigning him to these two in all the desperate hurry of her departure.

"Well, so is Mattie, if it comes to that," said Mark.

"Of course," said Joshua—and went on with the only reply possible. "If there is a time of trouble, I'll come to you."

"I must tell you whom we're expecting this evening," said the host, dismissing the subject, "and that is Ruben Fontana. Know him?"

Joshua didn't.

"Musical man, a friend of Robina's. That's how we came across one another. Don't quite know what he does, but to give him a qualification, we may call him an impresario. In with all the singing and operatic people. Interesting chap. Oh, he's well known."

"I'm afraid I'm out of the musical world," said Joshua. "To tell you the truth, unless it's very simple, music means nothing to me. I've tried hard to find out something about it. But, what's the difference between Beethoven and Rossini and Wagner and—what's the name of the modern fellow?—Stravinsky, I can't make out for the life of me. To me it's just a lot of sound, complicated, but quite pleasant. So for Heaven's sake, stand by and help me, my dear."

Mrs. Fuller smiled. "Like Robina?"

Joshua grinned. "That's what I meant."

"We'll tell him we're fed up with his rotten music," said Mark, "and won't let him play a note. He won't mind. He's fairly universal. He fancied a sketch of mine, and bought it. This one."

He led the way across the studio to an oil sketch on a strainer. Just a head. The broad, greasy, leering head of a fat-jowled man. It might have been the

portrait of a *lion comique* of the early eighties, made up to reflect all the villainies and sensualities of the time. It struck a note of triumphant insolence.

“A great bit of work,” said Joshua. “Who is it?”

“It was just a ne’er-do-weel of a model sent on by a brother painter. The fellow amused me,” said Mark Fuller.

“He fascinates me,” said Joshua. “I’d like to do him in wax.”

“I’ll give you his address.”

The maid announced the purchaser of the picture, Ruben Fontana.

He was a man of fifty, heavy-featured, with a pointed greying beard and curiously liquid dark eyes. Obviously Semitic or Levantine in origin. He had a soft voice and soft white hands, what the French call a prelate’s hands. Yet he conveyed an air of power. His manners were courteous.

“I have heard of you, Mr. Fendick, from our friend, Madame Robina Dale. A great artist. I am so pleased to meet you. I remember her telling me of your work.”

“It was very kind of Mrs. Dale,” said Joshua. “And very good of you to remember.”

“There are some people whose words it would be a crime to forget, and Madame Robina Dale is one of them.”

He spoke English accurately, somewhat pedantically, with a touch of foreign accent. He gave the impression that he could speak all languages, each with a foreign accent.

“We’re all Robina-worshippers here,” said Mrs. Fuller.

“And she has left us. ‘What has become of Waring?’ as your poet says. But I trust she will soon come back. Once, long ago, I thought she might sing. She had a contralto, oh, rough and uncultivated, but so promising. But *dis aliter visum*. Fortunately. There are many mediocre contraltos, but very few great sculptors.”

In spite of the exotic about the man, alien to the sturdy Englishman that was Joshua, he yielded to his spell. His admiration of Robina was a link of sympathy; his wide knowledge and appreciation of all artistic media one of brotherhood. Fontana had travelled all over the world in the exercise of his own profession of music. He had been *répétiteur* to the illustrious. He had been manager to famous opera syndicates. He was also a familiar in the studios of great painters. He was ready of anecdote, keen in criticism. To Joshua his knowledge was encyclopædic, his taste sure.

An argument arose on the subject of modern sculptors. Mark Fuller’s god was Rodin.

“Tell me, Fontana,” said he, “what you consider the greatest work of sculpture during, say, the last half-century?”

“Dalou’s Triumph of the Republic in the Place de la Nation, in Paris.”

Joshua half rose in his chair and flicked his maimed hand at his host.

“Didn’t I say that about six months ago?”

He was childishly delighted by this confirmation of his judgment. To no other modern, he maintained, had the grand vision been granted in such measure. Of course, a humble amateur could not do otherwise than bow in adoration before any work of Rodin—but in the Place de la Nation he grovelled on his face. Look at the mastery of grouping, the proportion, the perfection of detail.

“And it talks like the age of Louis Quatorze.”

“And dam good talk, too,” cried Joshua.

“That’s what an artist’s wife has to put up with,” said Mrs. Fuller to Fontana. “People screaming each other’s heads off. Personally, you can take all your great big monuments and give me one little Tanagra figurine, and I’m happy.”

“As one might say,” her husband remarked, “ ‘I prefer butterflies to eagles.’ ”

“Most sane people do,” she laughed. “Let us have coffee in the studio.”

Her husband rose and shook his head.

“Was there ever such a woman?”

They left the dispute on sculpture behind in the dining-room. The talk drifted from subject to subject. Joshua felt the glow of intimacy; contrasted this temperate zone both with the latitudes in which he had met Dora Blackadder and the Arctic Circle in which the Pellings dwelt. He shivered at the thought of his misspent Christmas. Here were real people, warm and human. Only Robina was lacking to make the reunion perfect.

When Fontana, at midnight, asked his host to ring up a taxi, Joshua offered him a lift home in the car. Where was he living? Claridge’s? On Joshua’s way.

“I’m so sorry,” said he, when they had started, “I’ve never met you with Mrs. Dale.”

“For the last two years I have been so little in London,” Fontana explained. “I am a bird of passage. Paris, New York, Chicago, Milan, Buenos Ayres . . . all over the place.”

“I hope you’re not running away from London at once?”

“Thank Heaven, I have a couple of months’ respite from travel. I wish it

were repose; but I have business. Still, without work, or rather, the interest in work, what would a man become?”

“Having nothing to do’s a dog’s life,” said Joshua.

“Our friend Mark Fuller seems busy,” remarked Fontana, switching off to the particular. “I’m glad. He’s honest, and paints things as God meant him to see them, and gave him the touch of genius to do it. This little sketch is a gem. Franz Hals could not have done better.”

“It’s good to hear praise,” said Joshua.

“It’s an artist’s food and drink,” replied Fontana.

“Don’t I know it who have passed my life among them? Perhaps myself an *artiste manqué*—through a commonplace set of vocal chords—but granted the great privilege of tending the Sacred Lamps. . . . Of course, with food and drink you must give sometimes the wholesome medicine of criticism. But it must be administered with scientific knowledge.”

On descending at Claridge’s he thanked Joshua, and desired his better acquaintance.

Mr. John Bullace, the model for Mark Fuller’s sketch, appeared in the studio at the appointed hour, and, in the character of a deboshed and shameless fish, delighted Joshua. He was everything a man should not be; but everything imaginable as an elderly Bacchus, discarded by his epoch of worshippers, yet, oblivious of oblivion, still continuing a futile reign, thyrsus-sceptre in one hand and wine-cup in the other. A pathetic figure of attributes vulgarized by hopeless years. A greasy bowler hat, too small for his head, had replaced the leafy crown; a whisky-bottle the wine-cup; and a ragged stick when he took his tramps abroad, the thyrsus ivy-twined. Joshua, having looked up the god in works of reference, so as to make sure of his facts, conceived the fascinating idea of a humoristic presentation of the decayed Bacchus. As Mr. John Bullace had never heard of Bacchus, and the reason for sitting to an artist with a wreath round his head, and cared less, there was no chance of wounding delicate susceptibilities.

Joshua welcomed him as an anodyne to cares, artistic and otherwise. He filled in a suddenly yawning gap of life. The thought and then the sight of Bullace had set listless fingers itching again to create. The masterpiece lay covered under its damp cloths. Some day, perhaps, when he had recovered from nightmare, he might finish it. But not now. Best not look at it. Forget it. Since his contact with the artistic world, he had often heard of such choking of the founts of inspiration. Artists had said: “I couldn’t get on with the beastly thing; so I shoved it aside for six months and thought no more about it, until

one day something as simple as falling off a log occurred to me and I finished it.” A novelist had once made confession to him of having been similarly befogged. The remedy in all cases was to turn to fresh work. Here in the presentment of the elderly out-of-date Bacchus was fresh work to his hand.

It was inspiring work, too; not altogether cynical. For beneath the swollen and bestial features could be traced a far-off beauty. In the flabby flesh around the man’s mouth still lingered a smile of inscrutable charm. A flash of ironical merriment could still illuminate the bleared eyes. His obese movements retained an indefinable grace. Looked at once, he was naught but a bald, elderly, fat-faced rapscallion. Looked at twice, he was the epitome of some history compellingly human.

Joshua built up a big armature. Being that of a god, the head might well be of heroic size. He could get a broader effect. There would be a chance of accentuating the fineness of feature quite discernible beneath the loose flesh.

Working, dabbing on bits of wax, he asked:

“How long have you been at this game?”

John Bullace had been at it ever since he could remember. He had been cupids, angels, little St. Johns with a lamb; young fellows in red tights—Italian. He had sat in the Life School at the Royal Academy. When young he had been a fair picture of muscular development. To keep himself fit he had taken to professional boxing. Joshua’s interest kindled. They talked pugilism, and Joshua injudiciously gave him a drink. As he poured himself out nearly a tumblerful of neat whisky, Joshua soon had to throw him out of the studio.

The subsequent sittings were dry for Bullace, but, inured to the unreasonable scowls of Fortune, he bore no malice. He entertained Joshua with his artless adventures. There were women, of course; women all over him. One gave him religion. She belonged to the Later Adventists and sent him on a year’s tour to preach the Coming of the Messiah for the year after next. She had the date quite pat. That was his ruin; for every man he converted took him into a public-house for obvious reasons of hurry. And every woman he converted—well, there were the same reasons. Everybody seemed to clamour for a good time before the end came. When his Later Adventist patroness wanted him to go about in a goat-skin and eat out of a bag some awful sticky stuff which she called locusts and wild honey, and proclaim himself the Forerunner, he struck and forfeited his substantial salary. Just in time, because the lady was carried off by her friends and put into a lunatic asylum.

There, for a period, according to his account, he seemed to have exploited adventist religion as a principal and not as a paid apostle. One more point in common between model and subject. Joshua’s researches had revealed to him

the fact of the propagandist travels of the young Dionysus.

“There’s money in it all the time,” said the elderly reprobate, with a leer, “if you know how to set about it. But you’ve got to have the brains to stick money in one box and fun in the other. If you mix the two up together, you’re done. I was done, because I hadn’t the brains. I couldn’t go to a town twice. Often I couldn’t stay in one half a time. If I was to give advice to a young man starting out in life, I should say: ‘Cultivate your brains even though they be as small as a grain of mustard-seed.’ ”

With such talk, which grew juicier every day under the ripening influence of familiarity, did Mr. Bullace entertain his employer. He was a fruity and shameless rascal, obscenely grotesque when he sat with the wreath about his head. It was a pity, thought Joshua, that the Roman sculptors had to take their emperors seriously. If one had only let himself go over the glutton, Vitellius! He worked with new-found zeal on his subject. It occupied his thoughts, it was work giving him incentive at night to look forward to the next morning.

Still, there were heart-aches and worries from which he could not escape. One day Lord Pelling confirmed a letter of apology and regret by a ceremonious call. Joshua must take his word of honour that both Lady Pelling and himself were horror-stricken when they heard of Victoria’s elopement. Never would they have given their consent to such a marriage. They had refused it outright during Victoria’s minority. Now that she was of age, she could legally do without it. Tommy Olifant’s name was mud with all right-thinking people. . . . They had set their hearts on this marriage with Sutton, whom already they had taken like their own son to their bosoms. Both he and her ladyship must set themselves right with Joshua. He almost wept.

Joshua convinced him of belief in his integrity. His dismay was genuine. There were sure grounds for it, apart from a gentleman’s sense of honour, which Joshua appreciated. Tommy Olifant was a rake-hell who had flung away a family fortune and was at present living on what non-alcoholized wits remained to him; by no means a son-in-law on whom an impoverished peer might now and then call for ease in temporary pinch of circumstances. There was every chance of the son-in-law calling on him.

“I haven’t seen the boy. I’m ashamed to, I confess. He must be terribly cut up. After all, Victoria’s a fine girl—I say it apart from parental prejudice. Please give him our heartfelt and affectionate sympathy.”

Lord Pelling blew his nose as though to divert the channel of tears. Joshua realized to his discomfort that he was far less in sympathy with Sutton than this obviously distressed gentleman. He felt that his acceptance of the gracious message lacked sincerity. Whatever may have been the degree of Victoria’s

recent chilliness of demeanour, the fact remained that, for some weeks, Sutton had strayed elsewhere for consolation. He had come to frigid nymph, a tepid lover. She had recorded at once the drop in temperature. The modern young woman might be whatever you liked to call her—except a fool. . . . And thus had the affianced pair reacted on each other. To Joshua, elementary psychologist though he was, the position was clear. In place of the lukewarm Sutton came the boiling Tommy Olifant, about whose constant temperature Victoria could never have had a doubt. She thawed suddenly and that was the end of her. There was no getting away from it. In a sense, Sutton had behaved badly and brought the catastrophe, such as it was, upon himself. But at this he could not hint to Lord Pelling. He could only comfort the outraged father with a whisky and soda and a cigar, and, with a sturdy hand-grip at the front door, bid him farewell, as far as he knew, for all eternity.

It was immediately after this visit that he summoned Euphemia Boyd. When Dotley returned from the telephone with the message that Miss Boyd would take a taxi at once, he reproached himself for a touch of orientalism in his dealings with dependent women. It would have been more courteous to have visited Euphemia. That's what Pelling would have done. The Trenthampton part of him damned Lord Pelling; he knew it was the Trenthampton part, and damned that too.

Euphemia, neat, grey-haired, spectacled, was shown into the library.

"My dear, do forgive me for routing you out like this," he said, making amends with his conscience, "but I'm so busy. Scarcely a minute to myself," he added, with the consciousness that his mendacity would be received by the simple lady as gospel-truth. "But I want to know how Susan's getting on. I've not seen her for some days. Do sit down."

"She's getting on all right, Mr. Fendick. That's to say, there's nothing the matter with her. She's a curious girl. Up and down. You never know."

Joshua assented. "Yes. A strange girl. In a difficult position. You know what I mean. I've taken over the responsibility of her welfare for the rest of her life. There were circumstances. . . ."

"Mrs. Dale and yourself told me of them from the beginning," said Euphemia.

"Anyhow, she's under my protection, and you know that doesn't mean what it usually means. If it did, I wouldn't have insulted you by asking you to look after her."

Euphemia raised a delicate, protesting hand.

"Why mention such a thing?"

"Because men are men and women are women and human beings are

human beings—the whole boiling of us. That's what I want to talk to you about." He lit a cigarette, and stood by the fire, stocky and earnest.

"No decent woman wants to owe everything to a man and give him nothing."

"But she worships the ground you tread on," cried Euphemia.

"That's as may be. All the more reason," he said with some incoherence. "But let me finish. Up to now she has given me what she could. Herself as a model for the thing I'm doing. I've taken all this time over it. It seems to be years. A novice can't have the attack of the professional. You know all about me, for you gave me my first lessons. I've been groping, groping towards something. . . . Well, I find I can't get any further with the model. I've done all I can. In that way I've no more use for Susan. She knows it. She's sensitive. Perhaps, to put it in a beastly vulgar way, she may feel she isn't earning her keep. I want to know what you think about it."

He set his teeth in his strong jaws and regarded her with a smile which he was aware was both disingenuous and diplomatic. It was for Euphemia now to reveal what she knew of Susan.

"I don't think she feels that way at all," she said. "Of course she's reserved. But her devotion to you is unquestionable. She looks on you as a kind of god. And she has every reason to. I myself"—her cheeks flushed—"owe you more than I could ever dream of repaying."

"Don't talk rot," said Joshua. "I want to hear about Susan. What does she do? How does she put in her time? A woman can't carry on for ever without any interests in life. I'm not talking like a schoolmaster—suggesting she should do something useful or artistic. . . . By interests I just mean things to occupy her mind—going about, seeing people. . . ."

"She doesn't seem to want to go out," said Euphemia, "except for exercise, a bit of shopping, and that sort of thing. A while ago she took to going out in the evenings. Seeing your friends, she said. Since we came back from Brighton, she has spent all her evenings at home—sewing, reading. . . . Of course in the daytime she either has her singing-lesson or she practises."

"She never talks to you about the future—next year—five, ten years hence?"

No. To Euphemia Susan was inscrutable. She grew somewhat piteous. She had done her best to carry out her trust. Did his present questioning imply her failure? Joshua replied roughly. Of course not. But a woman living with a girl would see things quite hidden from a man who didn't.

"I can't explain it to you," he said, abruptly, after a pause. "But I'm afraid. She means a lot to me. More than I can tell you. I'm afraid of her going along

in the old dead way. What'll happen to her eventually? It isn't normal. Don't you see?"

Euphemia Boyd saw. She had seen it for a very long time. She had also seen other things. It was no part of her contract or her duty to Joshua to report on Susan's goings and comings and doings. With regard to any departure from the conventional proprieties, she, for her own sake, would have come to him for advice. But from the beginning it was made clear that Susan was a free agent whose private affairs were no one's concern. So it was with a flush on her cheeks and with some hesitancy that she said:

"She has been receiving a good many letters lately."

"Man's handwriting, of course?"

"Why, yes."

"Don't worry," said Joshua. "I was sure of it. Man been to see her?"

"Not that I know of."

"She been out to see him?"

"I don't know any more about that than you do. Certainly not in the evenings."

Joshua swung about in his restless way and came to a halt.

"Of course there's a man behind it all. I know it. So for God's sake don't think you're telling me things you shouldn't. The main fact is that she's miserable and gone back to the same old condition."

"More or less," said Euphemia.

And that was all he could get out of her. Indeed, it was all that the little lady knew about her perplexing charge. Joshua sent her home. The interview had been in every way unsatisfactory. No. In one respect it had brought enlightenment. Whatever might be the stage at which the loves of Susan and Sutton had arrived, there was precious little joyousness about it. How could there be? It was a depressing business for the three of them, himself, Susan and Sutton. He tried to cast Sutton impatiently and angrily out of his thoughts. He shrank from feeling almost sorry for Sutton.

He lunched at Claridge's next day with Fontana in his private sitting-room. His host's welcome was both apologetic and flattering. Gayer downstairs in the restaurant, no doubt; but the upstairs peace was more conducive to pleasant conversation. Besides, during his visit to London he was collecting a few odds and ends on which he would appreciate Joshua's opinion. He had a little house in Fontainebleau mainly used, alas! as but a storehouse for his little treasures, but destined, if fates were kind, as a haven of rest for his old age. He displayed before Joshua some of his odds and ends. A bit of white Chinese jade, a set,

complete save, alas! for one print, of Henri Behm's Labours of Hercules, various precious bits of autograph music which left Joshua cold, and, framed in perfect taste, Mark Fuller's sketch of Bullace, which hit him like a blow between the eyes.

There, rendered with easy mastery, was the living rascal, with all his shameless sincerities and all his lurking craft. Fuller had no need to stick a crown on his head and translate him into a fantastic conception. There the man was; direct, strong, recorded for ever. His heart sank before it. He rubbed his head as though to conjure away a frenzied impulse to rush off straight, then and there, to the green wax effigy practically finished in his Chelsea studio. And the worst of it was that, as he sat at lunch, the picture stood leering at him just in front of his eyes. He made conscious effort in listening to his host's stream of talk.

It was only after lunch, when cigars were lit, that he forgot Bullace and all the works of which he had been the occasion. Fontana shot at him a sudden question.

"Do you know a man called Lesueur—Ferdinand Lesueur?"

Joshua shook his head.

"Never heard of him."

"Yet you are one of his—what shall we say?—patrons."

The name seemed familiar. He groped about his mind. It occurred on one of Euphemia's quarterly cheques made out and presented for his signature; for a fixed amount like the rent, so that there was no question of examining books and accounts and asking, with his business man's financial conscience, for information concerning details. At last he became aware of the man's identity.

"Now I place him. He's a teacher of singing. I've never had the pleasure of meeting him."

"Lesueur is a very great friend of mine," said Fontana. "In fact, it was I who recommended him to Robina Dale for a protégée of hers and yours too, I believe."

Joshua remembered that Robina had undertaken the task of finding the singing-master for Susan.

"He's making a great name," Fontana went on. "His *flair* is extraordinary. He has told me about this pupil—a Miss Susan Keene, I think. It's about her that I should like to talk to you, if you will not think me impertinent."

Joshua looked at him oddly, somewhat nervously.

"Of course not. But—I don't quite understand. What has she been doing?"

The other was faintly puzzled.

“Doing? Why, nothing—except singing. You’ve heard her sing, of course.”

“I can’t say I have,” said Joshua. “You see, I’m not a musical chap, and so . . .”

“Then you don’t know she has an extraordinary contralto voice?”

“Not extraordinary—no.”

“She has. So Lesueur says. He is not in the habit of taking geese for swans. In our profession we grow cynical and have the opposite tendency. He is anxious that I should hear her. Do you think she would care to give me an audition?”

He made a little gesture of appeal with his white plump hands, and smiled at Joshua.

“I’m sure she would,” replied Joshua, still puzzled. “It’s very kind and courteous of you, of course, to come to me—but why didn’t Mr. Lesueur fix it up with you, without bringing me into it? You see what I mean?”

“I thought perhaps,” said Fontana, “you were *au courant* with her progress. It seems I must explain. Lesueur feels himself up against a *cas de psychologie*, and he can get no further. She has a grand voice. A musical ear; she sings true. A marvellous mechanical instrument without a soul behind it. I put things as simply as I can. Do you follow?”

The line deepened across Joshua’s forehead. “I think so.”

“The nearest analogy I can get is Trilby in du Maurier’s novel. Lesueur, being no Svengali, is in despair. The curious thing is,” he added after a pause, “that some little time ago she showed signs of a change. He called it an awakening. But it seems it was but a transient phase—evanescent. He has aroused my interest—to use a better word than curiosity. I should like to hear her.”

“More than kind of you, I’m sure,” said Joshua.

“Not at all,” said his host. “The discovery and exploitation of people who can sing is the business of my life. Let me fill your glass with this quite drinkable brandy.”

Joshua declined. The purpose of his host’s luncheon invitation had been fulfilled. He rose to take his leave, meeting the rascally leer of the now detested Mr. Bullace. Fontana, soft-mannered, orientally courteous, saw him to the lift.

On descending, he found the great hall crowded and his passage to the cloak-room by the Davies Street entrance, where he had left his things, blocked by an obvious wedding reception. He threaded his way with some difficulty through the opposing current. At the cloak-room door he came face to face

with Sutton; Sutton in morning coat, grey silk tie, striped trousers and white spats, wearing the gardenia which proclaimed him an official, an usher at least, of the wedding. They exchanged the British hullos of greeting.

“You in this show?”

“Yes. It’s Billy and Kitty. You remember? I’m best man.”

Joshua drew him into a temporary breakwater.

“Why have you kept away from me all this time?”

“I supposed you knew,” said the boy, reddening.

“I know something, but I can’t say I know much—from either of you.”

“You needn’t take it that way,” said Sutton, looking into angry eyes. “I’ve been perfectly decent about it—all the way through. As soon as I was free I asked her to marry me. If a fellow can do more to show his love and respect for a woman, it’s up to you to tell me.”

“I know all about that,” said Joshua impatiently.

“Well, my dear——” The uncomfortable young best man made a helpless gesture.

“My dear be damned. What’s happening? That’s all I want to know. You ought to have told me.”

“She has turned me down flat. Why, God only knows. I thought—well, I had reason to think, in a way—— But no. Flat. I’m wiped out. There’s nothing more to it.”

A group of young men and maidens in wedding garments clustered round him and dragged him, waving an apologetic hand, away from his stocky, unconsidered father.

Joshua drove to The Cock-Pit, and in the early afternoon solitude of the lounge ordered a whisky and soda. It had been a day of many emotions, through which he must disentangle a straight course. Half an hour’s reflection showed him one path that clearly led somewhere.

He followed it to the studio, which he entered by means of his Yale key. All was silent, dim, mysterious, like a mausoleum. The ghosts of Susan’s hands were on the walls. Her body lay there swathed in cerements. A sickly odour of damp clay pervaded the place. On a stool beside the bust of Bullace lay the sculptor’s simple tools which he had used that morning. He turned the head of the garlanded, elderly, demoralized Bacchus to the light, and, looking at it, saw that it was a dead thing of no account. So he took the green wax in both hands and worked it into shapelessness, and went away.

CHAPTER XX

JOSHUA sat at breakfast frowning over a neatly printed circular folded in three to fit the business envelope, and allowing his excellent kidneys and bacon to grow cold. It had never occurred to him to do otherwise than observe that unhappy English habit of breakfasting with correspondence and newspapers which upsets the national digestion. He had been awakened by Dotley bringing him a cup of strong tea, devastating to any empty stomach save that of a Briton; he had risen, washed himself in tepid water with plenty of soap, stood under an icy douche, played about with his gymnasium of rubber ropes and punch-balls so as to keep himself fit, and descended to a heavy meal intertangled with all the worries of a normal human day.

He frowned over the Annual Report and Balance-Sheet. As though he hadn't enough worries already! Why should Swan & Co. come and interfere with his health and appetite?

Now, it must be remembered that Joshua had sold out the controlling interest of Swan & Co., acquired by his father and automatically magnified by the war, for a pretty considerable sum of money. Hence Dotley and the other Old Masters adorning his house. But he had retained a useful block of preference shares in the business. The main part of his fortune he had cautiously invested. In business affairs he had the shrewd hard-headedness of his Midland upbringing. Faith in God was necessary for salvation, but it wouldn't help you much unless you kept a keen look-out on the Devil and all his works. For this pessimistic or negative Theology there may be much to be said. In the business world the Devil assumes many specious disguises. Joshua as a social unit, with a mind quickly broadened by modern social conditions, was not unkindly disposed towards the Devil.

He did his best, poor chap, to maintain the equilibrium of the universe on which the Lucretian idea of the fluidity of things must depend. As a cosmic factor Joshua recognized his utility. But when it came to sheer business, he had no pity for any trace of the cloven foot.

And it was this influence of the Devil and all his works over the present affairs of Swan & Co. that brought the frown to his forehead.

A disingenuous Annual Report; an unsatisfactory Balance-Sheet, juggled, as far as the Balance-Sheet of a great concern, certified by an eminent firm of accountants, can be juggled. Vast sums were set aside for depreciation of plant, for reconstruction, for God knows what. The ordinary shareholders came off badly. The Devil, in the abstract, not apparently in the persons of the Board of

Directors—Joshua was charitable—seemed to be amusing himself prodigiously with the affairs of Swan & Co. He, a Deus—and in the tin tabernacle of Trenthampton he was a Deus—before sending Swan & Co. to perdition, had first afflicted the Board of Directors with dementia.

The text of the Report convicted them in Joshua's expert eyes of inspired lunacy. Swan & Co. before the war had made boots for the million; strong, water-tight, genuine quality leather, all sizes, even to quarter-sizes, good sound boots; cheap. Any working-man could go into any shop in the British Empire and, demanding, finding and fitting a pair of Swan boots, could dance away with them in comfort and security. If it hadn't been thus, would the Government have given them contracts for the shoeing of the allied millions during the war?

And now, what were these dements of the purchasing syndicate doing? They were growing too big for their boots. Joshua laughed. That was damned funny. He must tell somebody that joke. He swallowed a mouthful of cold kidney. . . . But they were mad. Why not render unto Leicester the things that were Leicester's, and to Trenthampton the things that were Trenthampton's? The fools were trying to compete with Leicester in women's shoes. Why? He had no sex feelings about it at all. Women were dear, beautiful things, essential to the cosmos, and they must have shoes. But why attempt to shoe them from an organization that had specialized in the strong booting of men for nearly a hundred years? Why change? Armies no longer clamoured for boots. But millions of decent, lower middle-class men wore them, and wore them out and needed more. Why compete with Leicester and her delicate feminine shoes? To do that meant reorganization. Scrapping perfect machinery and installing new. He threw the Report across the table. The dream of idiots. He rejected his stone-cold kidneys and cut himself a slice of ham from the sideboard.

He finished his breakfast and took up the Report again. On second reading he liked it even less. The hands of incompetence were driving the firm to ruin. The shares were going down. He could sell out his holding that day, at a loss, it is true; but for far more than it would fetch in six months' time. Now, although, if Swan & Co. crumbled instantaneously into dust, he could still account himself rich, he deplored, like any sensible man, the futile loss of money. But his exasperation worked on a higher plane. He had done with Swan's years ago, when the boots, boots, boots, forty million pairs of them, had wrecked his nerves; done with the making of boots for ever. That was his own personal, temperamental, concrete affair. But Swan & Co. remained in his mind as an almost sacred abstraction. It was not only the symbol of a life's endeavour, that of his own life, not only that of the life of his father, who, like himself, had been born in Swan's, for his grandfather had been an operative in

the factory; but, in a queer way, the symbol of the imperishable in deep, century-founded British institutions. The probable decay of Swan & Co., therefore, presented itself to the eyes of Joshua, not merely as a commercial failure, for financial reasons to be regretted, but as a catastrophe fraught with shame and dishonour and the shattering of the temples of old and venerable gods. So might one feel if Westminster Abbey were swept away and a gaudy Super-Cinema Palace erected on its site.

He noted the date of the Annual General Meeting on his agenda, resolving to attend it, for the first time since his secession from the firm. Breakfast over, he threw himself into an arm-chair by the fire, and consoled himself with a pipe and the spacious recordings of the "Sportsman." Although he attended few besides the classical race-meetings, and rarely made a bet off the course, he had maintained his interest in the sport. Having once grounded himself so thoroughly in the study of form as to profess expert knowledge, it was an easy matter to keep that knowledge up to date; a question of specialized mental effort. Obscure horses were to Joshua living and picturesque personalities, with known histories behind them; by such sires out of such dams; owned by so-and-so; entered for such-and-such races, in each of which his brain remembered their recorded performances; he could tell you a clear-cut story of jockeys, weights, distances for which they were competent. His mind automatically registered the daily information. The process interested, amused and soothed him. His friend, Lady Evangeline Hill, was in constant telephonic communication with him. The three-thirty on Wednesday. What did he think of Friar Tuck? He would reel off all that was to be known concerning Friar Tuck. But would he win? She could get seventeen to one. Joshua would reply that he was a historian and not a prophet. Whereupon Lady Evangeline would call him a pig, but acting on his historian's implicit counsels would lose far less than most of her ingenuous friends.

Joshua knocked the ashes from his pipe and the doings of horses from his mind, and set forth on the business of the day.

He realized, with some disconcertedness, that he had no real business for the day. Hitherto at this hour he had set forth for the studio. But now no work in progress, no model awaited him there. On the morrow of his reducing the bust of Bacchus into nothingness, he had dismissed Mr. Bullace with the wherewithal to maintain himself in even intoxication for months.

There was nothing in hand but the bit of jetsam in human form with which he was powerless to deal. Nothing to do in the studio. He might just as well go and sit down among the extinct things in the Natural History Museum.

Dotley appeared.

“I have put the cellar-book and the monthly accounts on the library table, sir.”

He blessed Dotley for providing him with a morning’s occupation.

There descended upon Joshua’s candid soul a cloud premonitory of storm. He walked in a vague fear of things. He shrank, he knew not why, from the studio; dreaded the lifting of the cloths from the clay form that was Susan. He held himself aloof from Sutton. Since his meeting with the boy, debonair in wedding garments, he had felt ill-disposed towards him; perhaps rather indifferent than ill-disposed. Here was a young man of no particular account in the world, negative in that he had neither uncomfortable vices nor salient traits of character, an ordinary modern post-war youth segregated by circumstance from the intellectual of his generation, not only not striving towards, but unaware of, other ideals than those of personal decency and business integrity; here, in fact, was this perfectly commonplace young man dancing through a burning tragedy and complaining, none too desperately, of the singeing of his heels.

He has asked her to marry him. What more could a decent fellow do? She had turned him down, God knew why—and that was that. Finis. End of the second turn in the variety show—vaudeville—what did they call it?—of his flimsy and shallow life.

Was he judging his son too harshly? Of his outward appearance, his clean-run figure, his intelligent face, his tasteful dress, his acquired ease and charm of manner, he was justifiably proud. But beneath all that, what was there? What could he grip hold of inside Sutton and say with equal pride: “By God, here’s a man!”? He couldn’t. If the boy had possessed quality he would have kept Victoria from the arms of the sot, Tommy Olifant. Nothing Napoleonic, only a virile assertion needed. Sutton had failed. He had failed from the start. She took him and found him naught but the presentable son of a rich man. Over her sex-consciousness he had passed, and left no imprint. What kind of a man was that?

The more he thought of Sutton, the less heroic did he appear as a figure in the tragedy of Susan.

His vision, seen through the studio window, reappeared; but with altered values. Youth clamouring for youth. Yes. The starved impulse of the girl leaping towards the promise of spring’s delight. Not to understand it, middle-age, with impulses still strong, would be uncomprehending dotage. But there was still the tragic woman stretching out for salvation. Had she recognized solid rock within grip of her hands, would she have let Sutton go? If Sutton had been a man, would he have gone at her unexplained bidding?

Sutton would console himself. In his social world, represented by the wedding party, there grew a garden of girls from which he might take his pick. It was the solid privilege of a young man in easy circumstances, and of domestic rather than romantic inclinations. Joshua ruled Sutton out for ever from the emotional tangle of his life. But Susan remained. Susan, the problem. Susan, the sphinx, with the tortured human soul. Also Susan, the thing of beauty and charm, of witchery of line and contour. Susan the desirable. Susan, whose love and kisses given to his son had placed her beyond the pale of his honest desire. Susan, whose sweet body he could no longer scan with seemliness in the chaste fervour of his art.

Susan remained. She remained his, a thing, according to her own passionate professions of gratitude, for him to use in whatever way he would—with one vital saving clause. Not as a wife and the mother of his children. That arose from the awful conviction of God's horror of her and her crime. But as mistress, slave, anything he might care to ordain, she avowed herself his chattel. . . . The more he puzzled his head over Susan, the more deeply-rooted did she remain as a permanent enigma in his life.

At last he went to see her. He had started out on what he thought was an aimless walk, and found himself outside Carruthers Mansions. It was a bright spring morning. In the tiny patch of garden between the open gates and the front door, lilac was sprouting. A cockney thrush, occupied with its affairs among the fresh green leaves of the one plane tree, made comfortable melody. Sparrows twittered. A nursemaid with perambulator and tiny passenger lingered on the threshold in talk with the porter. She smiled on Joshua as the porter left her to take him to the lift. All around were tokens of a pleasant world.

The neat maid, accompanied by a rapturously barking Gog, admitted him. Above the dog's noise swelled the deep notes of a human voice. Miss Keene, said the maid, was alone and practising her singing. The maid had a smiling way of stating the obvious.

Where were complexity, enigma, tragedy, in this Arcadia of spring?

Susan broke off, rose from the piano, and welcomed him with a smile.

"I only dropped in to see how you were getting along," said he. "How are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

Daffodils flaunted in a deep blue vase on a gate-legged table.

"Jolly bit of colour," said Joshua. He waved a hand towards the piano. "I'm afraid I'm disturbing you."

She laughed. "You? How could you?"

There was a pause. He had come unprepared for emotional interview. And yet things had happened since he had last seen her. Finally he said:

“You’re not looking well. You’re getting thin and pale, and there are circles under your eyes. That’ll never do. I don’t think you’re eating enough.”

She turned it off. “Ask Euphemia.”

“Euphemia seems to know a dam sight less about you than I do,” said he.

“That’s very possible,” she replied, on an ironical note. “If anybody she loved very dearly told Euphemia that the world was flat, she’d believe it.”

Tangentially they discussed Euphemia, her old-maidish, lovely lack of guile. She was the dearest thing on earth, Susan declared. Without her she would be lost. Joshua caught her eyes. They seemed to flicker like a boxer’s as she watched him. He got it into his head that she was regarding this interchange of the commonplace as preliminary sparring. Neither had sat. They moved, unconsciously restless, about the dainty room of chintz and oak and blue and daffodils. The flashing keyboard of the piano eclipsed the incongruity of its rosewood case.

“I saw Sutton the other day,” said Joshua. “He told me.”

She turned aside. “He was bound to, I suppose. I couldn’t.”

“And that’s final?”

She flashed a quick glance at him. “Of course it is. I don’t say a thing one minute and take it back the next. You ought to know that.”

“May I ask why you did it?” asked Joshua.

“I thought I’d made it clear to you,” said Susan.

“That’s the devil of it, my dear,” said he. “What seems perfectly clear to you is as black as night to me. I want to do the best for everybody. But I’ve got to feel my way in the dark.”

She flashed upon him the pain in her eyes.

“Don’t you think I’m in the dark too? Do you suppose I’m happy? God knows I’ve got everything that ought to make me happy. But you ask me things. . . .” She braced herself and stood tense before him. “Suppose I had told Sutton what I told you—do you think he would have wanted to go on with me? No, he wouldn’t. His ideas of life with a woman—outside buying and selling or whatever they do in business, which matters most to him—are all gondolas and bubbles and pretty clothes and kisses and the rest of it. If he knew, he’d be scared to death. He’d be taking on something outside his imagination of what decent folk do. One of us has to go. I prefer to tell him to go, without any reason, than he should tell me to go. That’s all there is to it.”

“I suppose so,” said Joshua.

“But you see, don’t you?”

He made a gesture of assent. She proclaimed the obvious. She said with a twist of her head:

“Let us take it that I’ve made a fool of myself, and say nothing more about the matter. The question of age ought to have settled it from the beginning.” She came up to him and touched his shoulders with her beautiful hands. “Don’t worry. It’s all buried. We can look on it as dead.”

“So long,” said he, with a wry smile, “as you don’t dress up in mourning and put flowers on the grave every day.”

Her lips laughed. “I promise you. It isn’t worth it.”

And that, he knew, was the end of Sutton.

He took her out for a walk and home to Ebury Street for lunch. All the proprieties of Dotleydom be damned! He was at the loosest of loose ends, and the gift of her company would be a charitable act. She made valiant effort to be companionable during walk and meal. Her mind and taste had developed during her long solitary tutelage under Euphemia Boyd. Insensibly her sympathies had broadened. She sprang oddly into touch with him when he bewailed the present mismanagement of Swan’s.

“You ought to do something—put the fear of God into them at the General Meeting!”

Joshua grinned—quite happily. That was what he was going to do. He was glad he mentioned it. Nothing like talking to a woman with brains.

When Dotley had served the coffee and definitely relieved them of his perturbing presence, he said, abruptly:

“There’s another thing we must talk of, and that’s your future. Drifting’s pleasant, but it doesn’t work out satisfactorily at the end.”

“I know,” she replied in her calm way. “When I was useful to you, it was all right. But now—I suppose a proud, high-spirited girl in my position, after all the pain and distress I’ve caused you, would refuse to accept anything more from you, and would go out into the world to fend for herself.”

“That’s idiotic,” said Joshua.

“Oh no. In a way it would be right. But if I did such a thing, I know it would hurt you terribly, and so I’ve not thought of it seriously.”

“You’re perfectly right,” said Joshua, looking at the cigar which he had just lighted. “It would be a beastly thing to do. I’d never forgive you.”

She said pathetically: “You do understand? It’s so difficult to explain—to

find words.”

“Why try? You know what I feel for you—and I take it for granted you’re fond of me. Let us put it this way. I’ve adopted you for keeps. We both know it, so there’s nothing more to be said. But that’s all the more reason for my butting in, as it were, my child, into your private life. Living in the flat with Euphemia, like a lonely ghost, all your days isn’t good for you.”

She played absently with the rim of her finger-bowl.

“I’ve thought I might do something with my singing. I’ve never suggested it to you.”

“Why?”

He saw the familiar little movement that represented a shrug ripple across her shoulders, and caught her fleeting glance.

“It didn’t seem to interest you.”

Joshua murmured apology and excuse. He ended somewhat incoherently.

“A man can’t be interested in everything all at once.”

He went on. Her singing was precisely what he had come to discuss with her. Had she heard anything about the great Fontana? Yes. Her master, Lesueur, had wanted Fontana to hear her sing. He had spoken, apparently, to Fontana.

“And nothing more has come of it?”

“Nothing more. What more could come of it?”

“Something’s going to come of it dam quick,” cried Joshua.

He rang for Dotley, gave his orders. Put him through to Claridge’s. To Mr. Fontana, if he was in the hotel. There was a telephone extension in the dining-room.

“Lesueur has been raving about you to Fontana,” he explained. “You know who Fontana is, don’t you?”

Susan smiled. Fontana was great, and Lesueur was his Prophet.

“He asked me to lunch really in order to talk about you. Did I think you’d give him an audition? That’s what he called it. Right, isn’t it? I said you would. He seemed to be in such a red-hot hurry that I thought everything was fixed up.”

Presently the telephone rattle sounded in a corner of the room. Fontana, happily caught, was speaking. Called away to Brussels, he had arrived in London only the evening before. Of course he hadn’t forgotten the young singer. . . . Joshua listened; turned to Susan.

“When is your next lesson with Lesueur?”

“Eleven o’clock to-morrow.”

He gave Fontana the information desired.

“Yes. Yes. Splendid,” said Joshua. And eventually there came the final “good-bye.”

“He’ll turn up at Lesueur’s to-morrow,” said Joshua, rubbing his hands. “You know, all this puts new ideas into my head. Until I met him I’d never heard of Fontana. But since then I’ve found everybody in the musical world knows of him. Lady Evangeline tells me he has written a couple of operas himself. He has conducted at New York, Milan, Madrid, all sorts of places. He’s a tremendous swell. Lady Evangeline says you’re a lucky young woman to get the chance of an audition. You must have knocked Lesueur all ends up. I wish I had known before. But, you see, my dear, I’m such a dull kind of dog. . . .”

“You?” she laughed unhappily, with an upward glance.

He gripped her shoulder.

“In every kind of way. Especially when it comes to music. But I know what things mean to an artist. . . . Only think! Covent Garden—everything before you.” He was carried away on unaccustomed wings of fancy. “Aren’t you glad?”

She rose, made some kind of effort, which brought a fictitious gladness into her face.

“Of course. But supposing he says: ‘Very pretty, but no good.’?”

“We won’t suppose anything so silly,” declared Joshua. “You’re nervous. That’s all about it.”

She admitted the charge, invented a fantastic analogy. If he found himself up against an examination for admission into the Royal Academy, wouldn’t he be nervous? He laughed. So long as it was only a silly question of nerves, the best thing was to forget them; to get into another atmosphere.

“I have it,” said he suddenly. Why not go to the Zoological Gardens? How could one worry about human concerns in the company of lions and monkeys and elephants and snakes and giraffes and bears? Especially bears; they were so comfortable. And then they could have tea. Good old strong tea and great thick hunks of cake. Didn’t she remember their jaunts to the Tower and their feast in the tea-shop?

He watched anxiously for a responsive gleam in her eyes and a spot of colour in her pale cheeks.

They came, and gladdened him.

“We’ll go for a ride on the hippopotamus. There’s nothing like it as a cure

for nerves.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE next afternoon Fontana delivered his verdict to Joshua, who had called on him by appointment. A voice of extraordinary quality; an individual voice; almost a tantalizing voice. He agreed with Lesueur. It wanted an undefinable, psychological something to make it an amazing organ. A touch of soul, to put it crudely, was lacking. He explained to his non-musical listener. The most God-gifted chorister with a voice that would stop his colleagues in heaven from quiring to the young-eyed cherubim—had he ever heard one? Had he ever heard the urchin give his rendering of no matter what aria of wonder with a note of passion, a quiver of emotion? Susan, in her way, resembled the blue-eyed boy in the white surplice. He recalled his Trilby and Svengali analogy. A bow at a venture. Nothing, of course, to do with the case. He was dealing with the real and not the fantastic. A prodigious organ signifying nothing. But on the other hand, it was too rare an organ to be lost; one also perfectly trained up to a point by Lesueur. Lesueur frankly confessed the end of his achievement. In five years' time he would get no more out of her than she had given that morning.

"Then nothing more can be done, as far as I can see," said Joshua.

"Ah! That's where I come in," said Fontana, with a rich exotic accent of authority. "As far as I can see, all sorts of things can be done. Everything can be done. Listen, my dear friend. I know nothing about the young lady. I don't ask——" He made a gesture of deprecation. "I only know that she was brought up in one of your little English country places, and, since Madame Robina Dale and yourself took an interest in her, that she has lived in charming retirement in Chelsea. . . . She is—I ask because I am interested—what the French call *jeune fille*?"

"Of course she is," said Joshua. "As virtuous a girl as ever lived."

"Precisely. She knows, except intellectually, nothing of the things that rend the human soul and the human body with passion and joy and despair. How can she render in the most emotional of all arts the emotions which she can only conceive as intellectual abstractions?"

"I see what you're getting at," said Joshua. "But I don't see Susan getting at it with you."

"It doesn't matter whether you see or not," said Fontana, with a disarming smile. "She will arrive there on her own account. There is a chaos of unawakened storms beneath those deep eyes that stare out of her tragic face. *Ah! Laissez-moi faire.* Let me have a free hand."

“What the devil do you want to do?” asked Joshua, in some alarm.

“Give her a free hand. Send her away to live her own life.”

“That be damned,” cried Joshua. “She’ll live in comfort while I’m alive, and after I’m dead.”

“So much the better. All the more reason.” Fontana smiled blandly. “I was not suggesting that you should throw her into the streets. Why? But you could allow a characterful young woman in her middle twenties to live untrammelled in Milan.”

“Why Milan of all places?” asked Joshua.

“Because it is only in the Conservatoire of Milan that she could get the training she requires. Send her alone—oh yes, alone—I insist—that is to say, if you find my counsel of any value—to Milan, financed according to your judgment—and, of course, apart from finance—it is best to be clear on these things—I will hold myself entirely responsible for the musical side of things.”

Joshua rubbed his head and took a cigarette from his case.

“I’ve been trained as a business man,” said he, “and can’t be happy unless I get hold of the right end of the stick. Just tell me straight where you come in in all this.”

“Your question is perfectly sound and justified,” smiled Fontana. “I thought I told you my profession in life was the discovery and the exploitation of vocal talent. That means much knowledge and highly trained judgment. I stake much loyal and specialized work against the possibility of a future reward. I hope to be richer by Miss Keene’s future earnings—in what degree, fate only can decide. Tens of thousands of honourable men are doing the same as I in the commercial world. But, after all, there is more joy in pushing—that, I think, is your term—a beautiful voice or an artistic temperament than a sanitary appliance.”

Joshua went away uplifted. He drove straight to Lady Evangeline Hill, who had conjured him to tell of the verdict. She raised his exhilaration by asserting the made future of Susan. A girl invited by Fontana to place herself unreservedly in his hands—why, it was not real life, but a fairy-tale. She went off into anecdotes of young men and women who had been at fabulous pains and expense to gain an hour’s hearing from the great man. And here was this young woman arriving in Milan, financially unembarrassed, and Fontana only anxious to do the rest. Girl blessed of all girls by Fortune!

Lady Evangeline had friends in Milan, a distant American cousin and her Italian husband. She would tell them to hold out a welcoming hand to Susan. The girl must have her chance, socially as well as musically. Besides, the

Cafarellis themselves were musical people.

“What a good sort you are,” said Joshua.

“Fond of horses and dogs and kind to children!”

“There’s a lot more in that than you think,” said he, by way of tribute.

He went away to Susan and Euphemia. Of the two, the latter was the more fluttered, looking on the day as one of miracle, the raising of the dead model to the living artist. Who would have thought it? Of course she had heard Susan practising and singing by herself; but, like a fool, she had not guessed the artistic value of the voice she heard. She was full of self-reproach and made her excuses to Joshua, who laughed at them. His fault, too, if it came to that. He must start then and there and mug up music, so that he could appreciate what was going on. The great thing, however, was settled. They were all artists together.

Susan, too, manifested a thrill of excitement. Hope had again returned to her dark eyes, exorcizing ghosts. Before her lay a suddenly revealed vista of unexpected promise. A couple of years of vivifying struggle and then a career—possibly a great career.

“I can’t believe it. It’s too good to be true,” she said.

“Nothing’s too good to be true,” Joshua declared. “Anybody who says the contrary can’t have any faith in God.”

Susan didn’t follow him to these peaks of theology. She said:

“The only thing I don’t like about it is leaving you—being so far away. I couldn’t bear to think I shouldn’t see you again. It would be dreadful.”

“But, good Lord,” cried Joshua, who had armoured himself in cold steel against foolish sentiment. “Milan isn’t at the other end of the world. You get into a train at Victoria, and you’re in Milan before you know where you are, and vice versâ. Besides, you’re not going to stick there the whole year round. Nobody does, especially when they’ve got a home in London.”

There was a little silence. He looked from one to the other of the two women who seemed embarrassed. At last he guessed.

“Why, of course you’ve got a home. This. Don’t be silly. Euphemia will look after it until she runs away with a millionaire. Oh, let’s talk sense.”

Sense was talked. Susan must begin in Milan, as soon as Fontana’s arrangements could be concluded. In ten days or a fortnight, if that interval were long enough for replenishment of wardrobe. He didn’t know whether there was any special singing kit ordained by Mussolini for students at the Conservatoire. He made an effort to keep the talk light within the bounds of sense.

“And now, my dear,” said he, “I want to hear you sing.”

Susan moved, a dark lithe flower, to the piano, obedient to incontestable claim. She sang one of the songs in which Lesueur had coached her for Fontana’s hearing—*Triste est le Steppe*, by Gretschaninow. Her voice suited the plaintive and tender melody and the accompaniment of minor chords, all expressive of the Slav’s nostalgia for the twilight of happiness. She sang it well; and, to a finer perception than Joshua’s, would have betrayed something of the Slav in her own brooding and yet passionate temperament. He was moved both by the unexpectedness of her rich deep notes and by the simple song itself.

“By God! That’s good,” said he. “There was one part where you let yourself go—I should never have believed it.”

“Shall I sing another?” she asked.

“Do you know,” said he, “I think another would spoil it. Just like a picture that hits you in an exhibition—at least, that’s my way—you want to keep it and not have it blurred by others. Great, my child. Great.”

“So long as I’ve pleased you——”

“I don’t see where I come in,” said Joshua, with one of his queer reversions to roughness, “except that I’ve been an idiot not to recognize your wonderful gift and let you take advantage of it. Anyhow, better late than never.”

A while later he left the flat, the rich organ notes still ringing in his ears, and felt himself to be the least important person in the world. Still, he walked homewards, a stocky, vigorous figure, with the strides of youth, alert and full of purpose. There was something to live for—Susan’s career. He set aside Fontana’s reservations. Susan only had to stand on a stage and fill the theatre with that glorious golden sound and the multitudes would listen enraptured. In the glamour of her success the infernal ghosts of the past must vanish for ever. He was obsessed by Susan.

During the next few days before her projected departure he saw much of her. Lest she should pine in the closeness of a London spring, he took her for afternoon airings in the car. They stopped for tea in democratic wayside Tea-gardens, to the repressed disapproval of Manifold, who regarded with cold eyes the motor-cycle combinations that had brought the other chance guests.

“Much more cosy than those rotten fashionable places,” said Joshua, breakfast-cup in hand.

“Much,” agreed Susan.

“You’ll have as much Fashion as you can stick in Milan—like me in London.”

“Don’t let us think of Milan while the laburnum is out here. Look at it.”

“The English country takes a lot of beating,” said Joshua, with a wave of the hand, as though he owned it, which he did in common with all other Englishmen.

These were happy hours. He did not realize how happy until the number before him was shrinking into vanishing point. Then he stood dismayed. The time was soon coming when there would be no more Susan. Gone on her path of high endeavour, she would be lost. The flat always open for her return would be filled by her perpetual simulacrum. Her art would claim her ruthlessly. Of her loyalty, of her affection, of the spiritual bond that seemed to be established between them, he had no doubt. But there would be the break; the blank left in his life. He stared at the blank uncomprehendingly.

In spite of all the good friends and acquaintances he had made in recent years, he felt pathetically alone. Perhaps Robina was responsible. Until he met her, the need of relating himself to the mind or consciousness of another human being had never occurred to him. She it was who had originally elicited his shy confidences and had gradually created within him the necessity of self-revelation. Thus Robina had become a habit. He missed Robina more than he knew. . . . At the same time his nature, craving the newly awakened need of sympathy, had thrown out sensitive tentacles in all directions. But only here and there did they hold, and then only in a restricted sense. There was Victor Spens, man of the world, friend and good-fellow, but sympathetic only within the horizon of his worldly experience. Fenton Hill would be at any pains to obtain for him expert advice in the matters of art. Lady Evangeline, perhaps the one of his social circle with whom he was most at his ease, a large-hearted woman with universal interests, bounded by racing stables on one side and by Stravinsky and Picasso on the other, had not yet established that intimacy in which a man is free to treat himself and his little longings, his petty disillusions, his greater despairs or his higher aspirations, as recognized topics of conversation. What went on inside the kindly florid woman with the wind-swept face and the keen intelligence, he had no notion. And she had apparently no notion of what went on inside Joshua. The Fullers were nearest him in companionable sympathy; but even to them he could not disclose the tumult of ill-defined emotions that raged, in a murky sort of way, within his soul. As for Sutton, he had disappeared from his scheme of things. He loved the boy, of course, as much as ever; but Sutton was no use to him as a spiritual companion. He longed for Robina’s return.

Then suddenly came a bombshell in the form of a cable from Nairobi:

“Find Humphrey recovered from injuries though crippled and

blind. Am bringing him home with me immediately. Love. ROBINA.”

He stared at the typed slips gummed to the flimsy paper. He had almost taken it for granted that the man would be dead by the time of her arrival. Otherwise he had concerned himself little about him. Of course he hadn’t wanted the fellow to die. God forbid! Such would have been the sin of committing murder in his heart. He had merely counted him as a dying or dead wastrel on whom no one could lavish sentimental pity. And now he was alive; a real living entity coming to share Robina’s home in London.

Since his trip round the world only four years had elapsed. It had seemed to him the longest period of his life. But only five years ago, before his breakdown, he had been content to live the dull and soulless Trenthampton routine. Only four years of ease and Dotleydom; of artistic awakening and artistic endeavour; of transplantation into an alien social environment. He had groped his way; he was, indeed, still groping. A man of intelligence can quickly learn the code of social conventions; especially one of modest quality and responsive nature. But every social sphere, high or low, is imbued with its own individual code of spiritual conventions, indefinable, impalpable, gossamer. It was in this imperceptibly charted region that Joshua, quite unaware, felt lost. Landmarks were inestimably precious. Robina was a landmark; more, an oasis in a perplexing desert. Had he not often said to her, almost in so many words: “These people are not my people, and their ways not my ways”? And she had laughed her deep, wise laugh, and had comforted him.

He rubbed a rueful head, seeking to translate psychological phenomena into terms which he could understand. Robina was bringing back this useless poor devil that was her husband—to cherish him for the rest of his life. That was Robina’s way. Hadn’t she worked herself to the bone, gambled like a lunatic—he had had more than one interview with her stockbroker—in order to maintain in mythical big-game hunting the man whose far-distant presence had been a stumbling-block and an offence? She had loved him all the time. She loved him when she started like a bullet from a gun to what she thought was his death-bed. She loved him, a blinded, piteous wreck. She would love him all the more now that she had him a helpless child in her hands. And she had found her happiness at last. At this certainty of conclusion Joshua’s momentary dismay turned into admiration and pity. He knew she would remain immutably his friend, and would scorn to doubt his loyalty in the new conditions of her life. For the maimed man she would claim a man’s aid, and would give in return out of her great generosity. He sent her a long cable from the fullness of his heart.

But the fact remained that as a potentiality of immediate comfort she had

gone; just as Susan was going. He still groped forlornly in his unfamiliar spiritual world.

Time narrowed itself down to three days before Susan's departure for Milan. The stars had worked beneficently in her behalf. Professors at the Conservatoire were prepared for her preliminary reception. Rooms in a foreign students' hostel had been reserved by the Cafarellis, Lady Evangeline's friends. She had naught to do but step into her train at Victoria and be carried to the railway station at Milan, where she would find welcoming hands to guide her.

"It's all too wonderful for words!" cried Susan. "It's like being born again into a new world."

"Yes. It's splendid, isn't it?" said Joshua.

She seemed to dance before him, a new-born thing of feverish happiness. He had come in the morning to the flat to announce some trivial detail of arrangement. The spring sunshine flooded the room of chintz and old oak. Vague tags of poetry and impressions of painting and sculpture floated through his mind as she stood in the feathery poise of young gladness. The golden foot of May on the flowers—it had been quoted to him somewhere; the light motion of nymph on a Greek frieze; the Primavera of Botticelli; and—half-mad thought—the suggestion of an elusive something in a Russian dancer he had seen last year. And all the time she was there before him; simple happy girl in her twenties, exquisitely shaped, as he knew to his bitterness.

"If only I can make you proud of me—I want nothing more on earth."

It was then that the scales fell from Joshua's soul. He said gruffly:

"That's all right, my dear." But he turned away, so that he should not see her, for the pregnant moment; so that she should not see him. For he knew that he needed her and wanted her more than anything on earth. There was a loveliness in his desire that had not yet bloomed when he had sent her behind the screen in the studio. Or had it not been in bud all through the seasons, from the first revelation of her in Robina's studio?

He turned abruptly:

"This singing business is going to make you jolly happy, isn't it?"

A shadow fell across her face.

"I hope so."

"Hang it all!" he cried. "You mustn't hope, you must be sure."

"Then I'm sure," she replied.

He glanced at the grandfather clock in a corner of the room. He had come

with the intention of taking her out to lunch before the General Meeting of the shareholders of Swan & Co. But it were better not; better to see her in intimacy as little as possible before the final break. He invented an engagement and left her.

His mind was far away from boots when he entered the gaunt room in the City hotel where the meeting was held. It was a fine day. He might have been driving through green lanes and in open country with Susan. He wondered why he had come. The affairs of Swan & Co. seemed ridiculously unimportant.

For so limited a company there was a good attendance, a score or so of shareholders. Scared, perhaps, thought Joshua, as he took his seat among them. The Directors came in by a side door and took their places at the long baize-covered table. The Secretary read the minutes of the last meeting. One or two of the Directors whom he knew, catching Joshua's eye, waved a hand of surprised greeting. The Chairman rose and put forward for adoption the Annual Report and Balance-Sheet. He was a suave, genial man, a county gentleman, a Master of Foxhounds, a Justice of the Peace, and controlled enormous interests in the Leicester shoe trade. Joshua had never liked him, regarding him as a *faux bonhomme*, false beneath his mask of the bluff, port-drinking squire. He had manœuvred a ramp in the trade at the beginning of the war; a perfectly legitimate ramp; so legitimate that it had led to a knighthood; but a ramp all the same, in Joshua's solid opinion. Therefore, when he began his expository speech, Joshua collected his distracted mind and gave the speaker his prejudiced attention. He more than suspected another ramp as the specious arguments in favour of the Report led to the irresistible conclusion that the disastrous balance-sheet proved Swan & Co. to be the most flourishing commercial concern in the wide world. When the Chairman sat down Joshua rose. A flutter of interest and a special word of welcome from the Chairman reinvested him with the once worn halo of a Great Personage in the boot-world. For the next quarter of an hour Joshua became the inspired maker of boots. He lost the unconsciously cultivated accent of society and reverted to the broad Trenthampton Doric. He tore the Report to shreds. He exposed its fallacies, accused the Managing Director of weak-kneed incompetence, denounced its recommendations and challenged the Board to deny that the Reorganization scheme was less in the interests of the shareholders than in those of a vast Leicester combine. His attack afforded him a savage enjoyment alien to his nature and almost to his experience. He had not tasted the joys of battle since the war, when his battery had picked up the position and was giving the Boches hell. Now he felt he was giving the blighters hell. They deserved it. He moved that the Report be referred back. Somebody seconded.

He had the shareholders with him. There was some angry talk; an amendment that found no seconder. The Chairman had to put the motion. It was carried. A Director came down to Joshua in the confusion, spluttering with anger and cheap sarcasm.

“If you think we’re such a lot of fools, why don’t you come down and run the accursed place yourself?”

“I’ve a damned good mind to,” said Joshua.

He drove away in indignant triumph. For a long time things had been going badly with him. Fate had been goading him with pin-pricks, so that he felt the need of hitting somebody. Well, he had had an opportunity. He had hit, and hit hard; and in a justifiable cause. Serve the blighters right, he concluded. He felt all the better for it. He would go and have a well-earned drink at The Cock-Pit.

But the club on this glorious May afternoon was empty, save for four dreary men whom he didn’t know, playing bridge in the card-room. Frank, the barman, with whom, at a pinch, one could always converse on Turf affairs, was off duty. To sit in the lounge over a solitary drink was but dismal festivity. He went out and stood at the entrance, waiting for Manifold to be summoned. It was getting on for four o’clock. What is there for a lonely man with no engagements to do in London in the early afternoon? He must do something. His heart tugged him painfully towards Susan. That way did madness lie. Manifold drew up. He stood irresolute. The British Museum had often been a refuge for him destitute. He shrank from its accusing white masterpieces. Mark Fuller and his wife? His spirit leaped at the suggestion. He drove to St. John’s Wood to find that they had gone for a day or two to their country cottage. He felt flouted by Fortune. Nothing left but Eaton Terrace and the absurd ministrations of Dotley.

CHAPTER XXII

THE last day came. He gave Susan and Euphemia lunch in a quiet little restaurant in the West End where they had spent the morning over last purchases of feminine odds and ends. For Susan, about to be thrown solitary into the wilds of a continental city, must be equipped against all emergencies. What these latter might be, he knew not; but they were things one was always up against unexpectedly. Euphemia was granted a free hand; Susan an unrestrained imagination. They both enjoyed themselves prodigiously. Some time before Joshua had sent Susan a vast Innovation trunk. Its hangers could hold suspended hundreds of frocks, and in its system of drawers there was place for the lingerie of a royal trousseau. Euphemia, on seeing him shortly after the arrival of this piece of heavy furniture, had cried in dismay:

"But, my dear Mr. Fendick, we can't fill this!"

And he had stuck his hands in his pockets and laughed.

"You've got to. There's no knowing what you can do till you try."

So they had tried zealously, and had more than succeeded.

"Anything, my dear Euphemia," he had said in her ear, "to send her away happy and brimful of hope. It means more than even you can guess. It means her salvation."

On that chance he was staking his own happiness, odds on. She quivered before him as his life's significance. Apart from her nothing mattered. It had taken a long time of blind groping through the spiritual wilderness for him to come at last on the light. And the light was a pure flame of love. When he beheld it, and knew it for what it was, he bowed down before it, making inevitable sacrifice. Here he obeyed unthinkingly, in queer psychological logic, the inexorable law of his Puritan upbringing. He had wrestled with temptation during sleepless nights. In the way of flesh this beautiful thing in whom his soul was centred was his for the taking. Euphemia, in her old-maidish fashion, had practically told him so. So, frankly and desperately, had Susan herself. What stood in his path? The affair with Sutton was but a transient episode in a tormented girl's emotional life. It counted for nothing now. Except for the bonds in which she held herself bound, she was free. These bonds he could loosen. A great love could loosen the fetters of hell. So, in essence, had a hundred poets declared. What stood barring his path of rescue?

It was not until after much tribulation that the light in its plenitude was vouchsafed to Joshua. In it he saw again the vision of the woman he loved. She

still lay there cast up, jetsam, by the waves. But now she had the sure and certain grip on a great reality. A thing undreamed of, and now suddenly revealed. God's gift of song. That which would set her among those who could carry multitudes with them through the gamut of all emotion. A divine Art.

Once more in his life had the God of his fathers moved mysteriously; first awakening him to the sense of beauty in form, then of colour; now—perhaps only as an intellectual concept—to the beauty of sound. He had not the philosophical equipment to entertain himself with æsthetics. Enough for him to receive humbly the revelation that all the arts were one Art, guiding mankind through Beauty to the Splendour of God.

The mental processes of Joshua whereby he arrived at this conclusion were vague, erratic, unformulated. But, standing spiritually before the new vision of Susan, through such dim labyrinths of mental process must he pass in order to arrive at the serene conclusion.

Susan had found and now clung to the Rock of her salvation. It was God's doing. Impossible to deny that certainty. It stood in his path.

The Rock to which Susan clung for the salvation of her tortured soul—the soul of one who had committed premeditated murder and, by tragic accident, had been guilty of matricide—was inviolate. Such was the serene conclusion arrived at in Joshua's honest mind, he knew not how, and expressed, as far as he was aware, in articulate terms of commonplace thought. They were terms direct and, to his mind, adequate.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Fendick, we've bought up half London," said Euphemia, with the intoxicated mouse's show of bravery.

"Then your work is only half done," he declared in his robust way. "There's not much time left."

"We haven't really been so dreadful," Susan assured him.

"Whatever you do is right, my dear," said he. "You know that."

The *maître d'hôtel* presented the card. He ordered lunch. The meal proceeded in outward pleasantness, even jocosity. It was to be their last together. More shopping, more packing would take up the remainder of the day. Susan must be in bed betimes, to prepare herself for the excitement of the morning's adventure. So had Joshua ordained. He would see her off at Victoria.

It was an unpretentious restaurant, three or four inter-communicating rooms on a ground floor, with a predominant theatrical and sunny clientele. No heteroclite music disturbed its quiet charm. It was well filled, so that table-talk had a gracious background of human voices. Food was good. The Fullers had

originally introduced Joshua to the place. He vaunted its excellences. It was intimate, like the good little restaurants in Italy. Did Susan remember Campari, in Milan, where they had dined on their way through from Rome? Also Savini, under the dome of the Galeria, where they had lunched the next day? She must give him a thought when she visited them. She bent forward and said in a low voice:

"Do you think you'll ever be out of my thoughts?"

He patted her hand and laughed. "Let us hope so. Now and then. When you're having a good time. If you don't, I'll be miserable. That's what you're going for."

"I thought I was going to learn to sing," said Susan.

"Well, don't you call that a good time? In itself. Besides, you can't be singing all day and all night. Letting yourself go among people, developing your personality—I think that's what Fontana said—is part of your training. That's why you must go off on your own. It'll be all strange at first, of course—as in any adventure. And this is a Great Adventure."

"I know," said Susan. "God knows how great."

"Sort of thrilling, isn't it?" said he.

"Yes—thrilling—a little bit frightening."

"That's part of the thrill. Especially when you know, at the back of your mind, there's nothing to be frightened at."

"She's only afraid she mayn't do you justice," said Euphemia.

He waved an emphatic hand.

"Bosh!" said he.

That was the wrong end of the stick, he continued. The justice to be done by an artist was justice to himself. Shakespeare said it in relation to human life, generally. "To thyself be true," etcetera. But to the artist it was God's own message. . . . Perhaps he parroted Robina; but her preaching long ago on sincerity in Art had sunk deep into his mind, and he had come to invest the elemental truth with a very deep spiritual significance. . . . Of course, on the face of it, it seemed egotistic and vain to concentrate one's thoughts on doing justice to oneself. Beastly, some people might call it. He floundered a bit in his exposition, but found eventual sure footing. After all, the artist didn't do things for himself, but for humanity at large. He was an apostle. To qualify himself for the position he must go through a certain amount of hell-fire. He had no patience with the artist who talked about art for art's sake. The silly idiot who spent himself painting masterpieces and smudging them out before the profane eyes of the world could rest on them. Such a fellow was a crazed egomaniac

who had misinterpreted the root justice-to-himself principle. . . . Joshua grew almost eloquent, carried away by obsessing idea. Susan must be convinced, for her salvation, of the sacredness of the mission on which she was setting forth. And he, too, must be convinced of it, for the peace of his own soul.

“I’m boring you to death,” he said at last. “But that’s how I look at it. Susan must do justice to herself. There’s nothing more to it.”

He laughed, filled up glasses, and they drank to Susan and to the great singer that she should become. Her face glowed and her eyes shone. Joshua thanked God that the ghosts had gone; also that he had played some part in their exorcism. He yielded for the moment to a sweet sense of ownership of this beautiful and gentle woman whose destinies he was moulding. Supposing she was his daughter, he thought in a moment of self-discipline, wouldn’t he be as proud as Punch of her and lavish on her all that his affection could suggest? That was the best idea yet. Let him attune himself to it, and all would be well. This last meeting was going splendidly. Euphemia made a sign and he inclined his head. She whispered in his ear:

“Isn’t she looking lovely? I think everybody in the room is admiring her.”

This pleased him. Whether it be the small schoolboy who parades an exquisite mother before his fellows, the youth a charming sweetheart, the man a handsome wife, the middle-aged financier a flashing mistress, or the old man a pretty granddaughter, every male suns himself in the reflected glory of the lovely woman over whom, in the eyes of a momentary world, he can claim, no matter how slender, a proprietary right. It is a matter of sex vanity, a text for unending disquisition. Joshua smiled and nodded and felt his tie with questioning fingers. Euphemia looked around the room at the various groups as though diagnosing their appreciation of Susan. She, too, in her old-maidish, vicarious way, enjoyed the success of the girl’s fragile beauty.

Presently Susan drew Joshua’s attention.

“It’s all very well for you to preach to me about art and things, *cher maître*, but what about yourself?”

He did not answer for a minute or two. Something in her voice recalled a far-off impression of their first meeting when she had stood on the threshold of Robina’s house faced by the pouring rain, and he had put his car at her disposal. Just the tone of the few words: “Oh, I couldn’t—thank you so much,” and the memory of the notes of the wood-pigeon he had cherished as a boy. Her voice, lowered and tender, had that dove quality of magical allurement. The line deepened across his forehead.

“Well, what about me?” he asked.

“You’re going to carry on, aren’t you?”

He put a far elbow on the table. Euphemia was forgotten.

“What do you mean? Of course I’m going to carry on.”

She met his eyes. “I’m so glad. I’ve been worried to death about the Great Work. You know if you’d let me help you finish it, I would—it goes without saying. You won’t. But I feel I’ve failed you. Somehow . . . You must finish it. At this stage any old model will do. Even I can see that. You must finish it,” she repeated in her deep voice. “I’ve been wanting to tell you so for ever so long; but I haven’t dared. This is the last time I can talk to you. I’d be miserable to go away thinking it wouldn’t be finished.”

“Why should you be miserable?” he asked.

Her lips twitched perilously.

“Do you still think I’m not human?”

The response was inevitable.

“You’re too human, my child, and that’s the devil of it.”

He changed his attitude brusquely.

“I don’t want you to be miserable. I want you to be as merry as a grig. As for the work, of course I understand. It’s our job. You’ve done your bit—all you can do—the rest’s mechanical. You’re quite right, I must get on with it. Euphemia, help me. The child’s looking for trouble, hunting for it. She has been asking herself: ‘Where the devil can I find trouble?’ She thinks she’s found it. Because she’s going away I shan’t be able to finish our bit of statuary. I say I can—easily. Tell her I’m right and she’s wrong. A lay-figure would do the trick.”

Euphemia, divining in Joshua’s pale blue eyes under-currents of emotion, acquiesced with mendacious sagacity. Susan could go to Milan with a free conscience. She had served every conceivable purpose of the sculptor. Heaven forgive her for a liar, thought Euphemia. The waiter served her with crême de menthe. It was her idea of the last word in dissolute revelry permissible to a modest woman. She tasted, and the lie dissolved in exquisite flavour on her lips.

Susan was convinced. “So long as you promise to carry on——” A smile completed the sentence.

The room thinned. They, too, must depart. Still a few things to be bought? Manifold would drive them round. He would take a taxi home. They argued, after the way of humans, for a few seconds on the pavement outside the restaurant door. Euphemia entered the car. Susan turned from the step and, grasping both Joshua’s hands, drew them instinctively against her bosom, and looked straight into his face.

“You are sure, sure, this is the best thing I can do?”

“Absolutely sure, my dear,” said he sturdily. “God bless you.”

He waved a cheery hand as she drove off.

What force drew him later in the day to the long-deserted studio, he knew not. He scarcely questioned it. It was irresistible. . . . The dimness of blinds carefully pulled across skylights greeted his entrance. He handled the various cords and admitted the cold clear north light of a May afternoon. He had the sense of a wanderer returning to the accusing intensity of familiar surroundings. There was little change since his last visit. The caretaker had thrown a cloth over the defaced head of Bullace and the tools lay cleaned on their accustomed bench. Why Bullace should have been covered up he couldn’t make out. Perhaps the caretaker didn’t like the look of him. He whipped off the cloth. Yes. Facelessness wasn’t a pretty sight. He covered him up again. He must get hold of the fellow again and have another try. He wandered round the studio. The boy faun wasn’t bad. Dotley in his expressionless solemnity was good; but he had the uneasy conviction that anybody could carve Dotley out of a raw turnip. And there was the Susan-Diana in her clumsy bronze tunic whose folds not Zephyrs, but only tornadoes, could disturb. And there were the casts of Susan’s hands on the wall.

It seemed very cold and forlorn, the place that henceforward would know not Susan. Yet something material of her still remained. Behind the screen, the gauze drapery hung over the back of a wooden chair. On a ledge below a small mirror against the wall lay her brush and comb and a cheap little open vanity-case which she had forgotten to take with her on that last day. He regarded these objects for a few seconds and then moved away impatiently.

Why had he come? Subconsciously guided towards the fulfilment of his promise to carry on? He shrugged his shoulders. He supposed so. Hang it all, he must carry on. It was something to live for. The sooner he began, the better. Angry at his pusillanimity, he strode to the great platform where the figure lay and removed the cloths. He turned it round slowly on its pivot and gazed at it at first hungrily and greedily. And as he gazed, his heart gradually grew cold within him, and a chill passed over his flesh. He had not seen it for many days, and he brought to bear on it now a clear and remorseless vision. The thing was dead. Not that the woman was a dead woman. As far as the lithe roundness of her body went, she was a live woman, all too alive. But as a work of art it was dead.

He remembered the mysterious reservation in Robina’s praise the last time she had seen it. She had called it a study. She had had no suggestions to make. “Not now, at any rate.” He understood the reserved criticism. It was a study.

Just the study of a beautiful woman lying on her side. And the more the tortured girl had developed into the warm woman, the rounder and more flowing had become her curves under his unconscious hand. The figure which his eye still found charming conveyed no suggestion of despair. That shoulder-blade over which he had spent such intense and, as he thought, inspired labour was but that of one happily asleep. The great conception had gradually lost itself in his love of Susan's loveliness.

As he gazed he saw that even the reproduction of that mere loveliness, that haunting exquisiteness of spinal contour, was little else but facile trickery. There were faults in modelling which, in another man's work, he could have pointed out at once. The thing was dead and meaningless. Never with all the most perfect models in the world, Susan herself, could he breathe into it the breath of life and meaning. It was as dead as his first crude copy of the majolica cat.

The truth fell upon Joshua not as a light, but as enveloping darkness. He had failed in this great new purpose of his existence. Through no fault of his, no slackening of endeavour, no lukewarmness of enthusiasm; but merely and humanly because the High Gods had denied him "the sorrowful great gift" of the artist.

He knew, in the quivering pain of his soul, that, except as trivial pastime, he could never mould wax or clay again. This chapter of his life was closed.

Susan had begun it. Susan must end it.

He stood for a moment in ghastly uncertainty, rubbing his greying red thatch with his maimed hand. Something ordained had to be done. It must be done, not in sudden fury, not in anger of disappointment, not even in the cold self-critical mood of the artist who destroys only in order to rebuild; but reverentially, finally, as befits one who buries for ever something dear.

It took him an hour to strip the beloved clay to its armature, so that scarcely a vestige of subtle curve remained visible. He covered up the wreckage tenderly, as one covers a dead body. And then he stood before it dripping cold sweat and shaking like a man in the throes of malaria. He threw himself down on the sofa, and, head in hands, remained there he knew not how long. When he recovered some kind of consciousness, he found himself staring almost unseeingly at the white casts of Susan's gripping hands, which now held no meaning. . . . There was nothing for them to grip at despairingly now. They were closed in soft young firmness around all that there was of comforting safety in the world.

Nothing was left to him but the Susan henceforward remote from this dear haven of dreams. Not even the haven remained, for he knew that he would

never seek it again. In a short while it must pass into alien hands; the alien hands of one more fortunate, whose dreams came true. Only Susan—this time to-morrow speeding further and further from him across the Continent. His frame shook with a deep sigh. Renunciation was the better part. He was getting old, nearing fifty, twice her age. He must live in the future. It was hard. But it was decreed. He bowed his head, as he had always done, before the Decree; this time, his face hidden in his hands, very sorrowful.

He heard the catch of a door behind him and a quick little cry. He rose and saw Susan. She said, nervously:

"Oh—I didn't know—I didn't expect to find you——"

He controlled his voice. "You came to have a last look round?"

"Yes. They opened the studio for me. They didn't tell me you were here."

"They didn't know."

"You don't mind?" She looked at him, rather frightened.

He smiled. "Why should I?"

"I don't know," she said. "I only felt I must come back and say good-bye to it all. You don't know what it has meant to me."

"A haven of rest," said Joshua, quoting his recent thoughts.

She nodded. "And I wanted to see the work again. As it was when I left it—before you finish it—with somebody else." She crossed to the covered figure and glancing back at him—"May I?"

He stood for a moment stricken with a queer horror. Her hand was on the corner of a cloth. In another moment she would see what he had done. The mad consequences of revelation flashed through his brain. He rushed to her quickly.

"No, no, my dear. That and you have finished. You must each go your ways. I don't think I could stand it."

She drew a little choking breath and hung her head and turned away. He realized that she had divined his suddenly inspired explanation. The danger was over. He breathed more freely.

"There's one thing, my dear, that's yours, which no one else must touch."

He fetched from behind the screen the piece of gauze drapery, folding it up hurriedly as he returned.

"This is yours. A bit of the haven. Stick it in somewhere. It may remind you." He thrust it into her hands. Her eyes filled with helpless tears. "I'll never forget your coming to say good-bye, my dear. Never. It means a lot to me." He caught up his hat. "Well, that's all there is to it," he said with forced heartiness.

“I’ve got all kinds of things to do before dinner. I’ll set you on your way. Come, my child.”

The studio door closed behind him for the last time. They went into the street and he put her into the first taxi-cab he met, and went home.

In the solitude of his house in Eaton Terrace, so differently appointed during the years of awakening from the gentleman’s town mansion flawlessly furnished by the experts of the Eminent Firm, Joshua listened to the Last Decree and yielded to it his almost fatalistic obedience. He must return whence he had come and carry on the work of his father before him. Of this Decree he had been dimly aware from the day of the General Meeting of Swan & Co., when the Director, in savage irony, had suggested that he should run the tottering concern himself. That was his duty: whether to himself, to his neighbour, or to some holy spirit of boot-making, he could not determine. The psychology of the matter, in face of practical necessity, was not worth consideration. He must go back to Trenthampton and take up the ordained business of his life where he had left it. There would be fighting. So much the better. He was growing soft. There would be sacrifice of years of ease free from financial anxiety. Capital soundly invested must be reinvested in Swan & Co. if he were to be the master, the sole position possible. He must live near the factory. That, in itself, was no hardship. A comfortable house would be easy to find.

The more he considered the Decree, the more irrefragible did it appear. Man was born to do to the utmost of his powers that which he could do well; to neglect the talent was subversive not only of divine teaching, but of human ethics. So much of sound philosophy had his grim father beaten into his mind. He could make boots by the million as few other men in England could make them. He knew everything about them from the stamping of an eyelet-hole to the economics of their distribution. His return would be the fulfilment of his destiny as a supreme maker of boots. The summons was imperative. It was the summons from the Land of Dreams of the past few years to the Land of Realities.

What had been his dreams? He looked back on them wistfully through the wreaths from the bowl of a disregarded pipe held between his teeth. What had they been? To create in material substance an interpretation of his Vision of Life. He had obeyed this dream counsel of fine audacity. He had failed. No one but himself, or a man like himself, the artist quivering with divine fire to begin, yet powerless to execute, could gauge the immensity of his failure. To continue in the spiritual guise of dogged determination would be self-deception too gross for his sturdy common sense.

In the attempt he had spent all that his soul could spend. That epoch of his life was over. The dismembering of the sweet clay body had been a sacrificial and sacred rite.

That was the end. Now to return, according to Decree, whence he had come. There were moments when he accepted it as a doom assigned after an ironical wastage of years. Just to go back to boots, boots, forty million pairs of them, after this freedom, these revelations of beauty, these all but overmastering emotions of desire and love, was but the re-condemnation of a prisoner let loose by sardonic gaolers into the specious liberty of green fields and sunshine.

He wandered in a bleak despair through the rooms of the house which he knew he must abandon. In the drawing-room he paused before the Old Crome, the mellow picture of English country charm which had been his first exciting purchase. And then a thought, a very simple thought, taking the form of a very simple question, smote him as though with a hammer.

Would he, returning to Trenthampton, be the same man as had left it?

It was a devil of a question. It took some answering. He left the Old Crome and switched off the drawing-room lights and, in his library, composed himself to its pleasant consideration by a whisky and soda. The answer came inevitably.

No. A Joshua who had suffered some sort of queer change would go back. Materially, to whatever house he went, these things of beauty would accompany him. He would take with him, wheresoever he went, the sense of beauty, an unalienable possession. . . . He had left Trenthampton a lonely human machine. He would return in an aura of human affection. Robina's staunch and inexhaustible loyalty. . . . Beauty? Wasn't the undying love she lavished on the poor wreck whom she was bringing home a manifestation of beauty? His friends, good, generous-hearted folk, would it matter a row of pins to them where he lived, whether at Trenthampton or in London? They would come and comfort him in his Trenthampton house. And, all said and done, the house would not be a prison. He could have a *pied-à-terre* in London, a modest set of bachelor chambers. And there was the wide world to travel over when he had set the house of Swan & Co. in order.

There lay before his scarcely declining years—he was not yet fifty—a life, not only of wholesome work and inspiring effort, but of cultivated enjoyment of its sweetest things. There, too, was Sutton, the ambitious young man, his outer thoughts agreeably engaged in whatever vanities of emotion came the way of his youth, but his serious instincts deeply rooted in the leather trade. His return to business affairs might bring about a new sympathy between the

boy and himself.

And, dominating this welter of poignant despair and buoyant hope, moved the figure of Susan. Susan, with her exquisite body, of which he saw every curve beneath her clothing. Susan, with her finely chiselled and mysterious face which could be as sallow as an ascetic nun's or as flushed with bloom as a dark peach, with her eyes that could be haunted by awful ghosts or shine with the merriment of happy elves. There was Susan. There would always be Susan. And all that Susan meant to him physically and spiritually.

He lay awake most of the night—for it was a day and a night of great decision; and he arrived again at the great comforting certainty of which he had been long aware, that the God of his fathers, or whatever *It* was, had given him the privilege of saving a human soul alive.

His commonplace life would be occupied in the ordained pursuit of the making of boots—an absorbing interest; his mental, his intellectual life would be passed in the enjoyment of beauty—friendships, pictures, statues, sunsets, and deep blue seas; his deep and intense spiritual life, in the exorcism, in whatever fantastic form it might assume, of the curse of Cain that hung over one utterly and now selflessly beloved woman.

The next morning he saw her off at Victoria. She had the heightened colour and bright eyes of youth setting forth on brave adventure. Just before the time of starting she drew him aside, to the middle of the platform, and pressed his hands convulsively.

"You know—you do know—if ever you wish for anything different—I'll come back."

"God forbid I should wish for anything different," he smiled. "All my heart's in your voice."

Her lips parted and her eyes glowed.

"Really?"

"Really, my dear."

"It's time," cried Euphemia, darting across to them.

Susan entered the Pullman. She stood at the window as the train moved off. Joshua waved his hat.

Euphemia, in tears, said: "I do hope she'll make a success of it."

Joshua smiled at her very wisely.

"She will," said he.

THE END

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