



THE KINGDOM  
OF THEOPHILUS

WILLIAM  
J. LOCKE

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THE GOLDEN JOURNEY OF MR.  
PARADYNE  
THE JOYOUS ADVENTURES OF  
ARISTIDE PUJOL

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THE BODLEY HEAD

# THE KINGDOM OF THEOPHILUS

BY

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

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# THE KINGDOM OF THEOPHILUS

THE  
KINGDOM OF THEOPHILUS

## CHAPTER I

**T**HEOPHILUS BIRD, having walked the half-mile or so from Blackheath Station, opened the gate of his dark villa, crossed the bit of garden faintly lit by the fanlight over the front door, and with his latch-key let himself into the house. Hat and coat hung up on a walnut hatstand, he rubbed his hands together, for it was a frosty January evening, and though, according to convention, he had put on his gloves in order to walk from his office in Whitehall to Charing Cross Station, he had taken them off in the railway carriage and forgotten to put them on again.

The plan of the entrance floor was simple. On the immediate left of the hall, a small room—grandiloquently termed the library—and, farther along, the dining-room. On the right, one flight of stairs going up, and another going down, with a toilet-room between. In front, the drawing-room. The door of this he opened, to find pitch blackness. An electric light switched on showed the ashes of a dead fire. The dining-room proved equally cheerless. He rang the bell. A meagre woman in a soiled print dress appeared.

“Oh, cook,” said he in a deprecatory tone, “the fires seem to have gone out.”

“Dear, dear,” said the woman, “I told Florence to be sure to look after them before she left. It’s her evening out, sir. These girls are so careless nowadays.”

“But what’s to be done?” asked Theophilus.

“I’ll light the gas-fire in the library,” said the cook.

He followed her meekly into the dismal little room, and thanked her for the extra toil which she endured in applying a match to the asbestos lumps in the grate.

“Oh, and your mistress——?” said he, as she was at the door.

“Madam’s at Greenwich, sir.”

“Yes, yes,” said Theophilus, “I forgot. A Committee Meeting. She said something about it this morning.”

He accepted the deadly cold of the house more like an unreasoning domestic animal than a human master returning to expected comfort after a hard day’s work. The gas-fire, before which, seated on the edge of an old leather arm-chair, he warmed himself, satisfied physical needs. In its mechanically genial glow, his soul expanded. He rose at last, with the air of a contented man, and, picking up from an untidy small table on the other side of

the room a heavy-looking green-covered review, like one seriously and soberly on inexorable duty bent, began to read a statistical article on Poor-Law Legislation in Poland. His feet growing scorched before the fiercely red asbestos, he moved them away and impelled himself backwards. No longer suffering from frozen extremities, he had apparently nothing more to ask of life.

He sprawled comfortably in his chair of broken springs, of which a particular one, projecting sharply, would have caused exquisite annoyance to any other male human being. To catch the light on his page from the central chandelier, he had to twist his neck awry. But it had never occurred to Theophilus to get a reading-lamp, or otherwise contrive the amenities of studious leisure. Nor, as the time went on and his article finished and digested, he began another on the Rhythmic of Magyar Folk Songs, did he reflect with any displeasure that Evelina, his wife, was unconscionably late, and that the half-past seven dinner-hour had merged itself long ago into the abyss of eternity.

He took her deflection as a matter of course. A member of the Greenwich Borough Council, she had Civic Duties commanding his respect. His commiseration for her fatigue in the exercise of these high functions far exceeded any petty grievance which might have been inspired by her neglect of household affairs.

Once, Daphne Wavering said to him:

“How you can stick it, I don’t know!”

Daphne Wavering was very young—the daughter of Luke Wavering, the brilliant financier, who was Mrs. Bird’s first cousin.

“If I were a man,” she had continued, “and had a wife like Evelina, I’d bash her over the head with a club and lock her up in the kitchen until she had learned to serve up a ten-course dinner.”

The criticism had aroused his resentment. At that time, two or three years before, Daphne was seventeen—a mocking thing, all shamelessly exposed legs and arms and neck, all impudence and bad manners, all unhealthy froth, the cynical incarnation of everything that was material, gross, sensual, ignorant, the negation of whatsoever there was of the intellectual, the earnest, the marble reality in human existence. For once in his unemotional life he had rasped out words of cold anger, and she had not spoken to him for a year.

Theophilus Bird admired his wife. She was a personality. She did Things. He liked people who did Things as long as they weren’t futile Things like those perpetrated for petty gain by modern painters, poets and actors. That was why he held in high esteem his wife’s cousin, Luke Wavering. He made mines

to yawn where no mine had ever yawned before. He contributed to the Welfare of the Race. Theophilus held his wife's strong views on the Welfare of the Race. He steeped himself in Tolstoi and Dostoievsky and Nietzsche and *hoc genus omne* of merry apostles. His marriage with Evelina, according to Daphne Wavering, was made on the Highest Brows of Heaven. . . .

He lounged ungainly in the shabbily-furnished room, intent on queer facts that mattered not to any quick son of man. Yet his semblance to his kind was by no means unprepossessing. He was long and big-boned, and the hands that held the review were long-fingered and sensitive. His features were pleasant and a finely-cut falcon nose gave them distinction. His complexion was dark sanguine. He wore a scrubby, ill-cared-for black moustache, which seemed to be a stray wisp of his untidy dark hair. His age was thirty-seven, and he was a Principal Clerk in the Home Office. On the whole, a man of some distinction; a Scholar of a small Cambridge college; a brilliant First in the Economies Tripos; and he had come out near the head of the list in his Civil Service Examination. He became inevitably the successful official. He could conceive no avocation more congenial than that afforded by his Department, which dealt with one of the manifold branches of Human Welfare. His work absorbed his emotional activities. It formed the beginning and end of his existence. The middle was distributed between such studies as should further qualify him for his high office, and a mild interest in Evelina, who, in her own sphere, was devoting herself, like him, to the furtherance of Human Welfare. . . . For relaxation they would go from Blackheath to Hampstead on Sunday evenings to see exotic plays which, to the *cognoscenti*, marked some stage in the progress of mankind, but made the average citizen sit on his tail and howl like a dog. Theophilus read "The Times" every morning on the railway journey from Blackheath to Charing Cross, and was rather disliked by the man sitting next to him, who, generally reading the less voluminous "Daily Sketch," objected to the wind being, so to speak, taken out of his sails. Theophilus admired "The Times" for the self-denying ordinance that banned flippancy from its columns. . . . He dressed in a subfusc yet careful austerity, wearing a clean shirt every morning so as to maintain the dignity of one who was responsible for certain of the wheels on which depended the working of the machinery of Human Welfare. If the Home Office did not devote itself to the Human Welfare of England it was naught. He was contented to place high gifts of scholarship, altruism and integrity at the service of the Empire for a remuneration of eight hundred pounds a year.

There was the rattle of a taxi outside, a sharp woman's voice, the click of a latch-key, a slamming door, and his wife entered the room. He closed the review and rose to his feet. He was essentially a man of dry courtesies.

“I hope you’re not very tired, my dear?”

“If you want to study human unreason, join the Finance Committee of a Borough Council. I’m nearly dead.”

She looked it, especially when she clawed off a close-fitting hat and cast it on the table and disclosed an untidy shock of cropped black hair that hung in damp wisps about her forehead. Evelina’s hair was always an offence to Daphne Wavering, who asserted that Theophilus bit it off in absent-minded moments of tenderness. She was an agreeably built woman, with delicate features and almost beautifully set dark eyes, rendered startling by general haggardness, and discounted by negligence of the simple arts whereby a woman modifies a sallow complexion.

“In spite of the sense that John Roberts—that’s our Chairman, you know—and myself tried to put into them, they’ve passed that idiotic Tramway Extension. They call themselves Socialists, the Apostles of Progress, and they can’t see that tram-lines are as dead as sailing ships, and the only solution of transport is free-moving traffic. I’m sick to death of them.” She put off her coat. “You’re suffocatingly hot in here.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Theophilus, moving with his foot the lever which controlled the gas-fire; “but when I came in there was no other fire in the house.”

The gaunt cook appeared on the threshold.

“Shall I serve the dinner, ma’am?”

Evelina passed a hand across a weary brow.

“Dinner? Oh, yes, of course.” She glanced at a clock on the mantelpiece, occupying, under the gable of a Swiss chalet, the superficies of its ground floor. “I’m afraid I’m late, Theophilus; but those fools . . . Do you mind if we don’t change?”

Theophilus didn’t mind. Usually they changed for dinner. It was part of the ritual of respectability. Theophilus put on an old dinner-jacket suit, and Evelina threw on some semblance of an evening gown. Their neighbours on each side of them, and in nearly all the little detached comfortless villas over the way, were frankly lower middle-class. Their daughters “walked out” and “kept company,” and they had kippers and periwinkles and shrimps and other relishes to their tea, and supped at nine on cold scraps of meat and cheese and beer. But the Birds, for all their austerity of temperament and narrowness of means, were gentlefolk by tradition, and could not rid themselves of the conventional amenities of life. They knew no one in their depressing little Byfield Road, and by every one in Byfield Road they were respected and envied and cordially disliked.

Ten minutes later they met in the arctic dining-room.

“What about a bit of fire?” asked Theophilus.

“By the time it’s set going we’ll have finished dinner,” said Evelina; but she conceded so far to human frailty as to command the cook to light the fire in the drawing-room, even though she would demean herself to the functions of Florence, the house-parlourmaid, now presumably a-thrill in a Picture Palace, with a beefy young man’s arm around her waist.

“I can’t do everything at once, ma’am,” said the cook, in polite defensive. “If the dinner’s spoilt it ain’t my fault—to say nothing of its being three-quarters of an hour late.”

Recognizing that the woman was just in her apologia, they ate the clammy and ill-served meal without conscious consideration of its beastliness. They belonged—God knows why, but at any rate for a subscription of five shillings a year—to the Anglo-Lettonian Society, and, that morning, Evelina had received a pamphlet on Prostitution in Lapland. An amazing illumination on the question of the Social Evil. Theophilus must read it. Theophilus professed the eagerness of the man starving for sociological fact. Withered slips of plaice polluted by a scum-covered viscous something compounded of flour and anchovy sauce out of a bottle; wizened bits of a once shoulder of old mutton floating about in thin, greasy, liquid, hard-boiled potatoes and a few chunks of flotsam carrot; a cabinet pudding that might have been made by an undertaker; a dish of plague-spotted bananas, and another of figs of ancient vintage; coffee made from Superb Mocha Paste; and for Theophilus the one cigar *per diem*, drawn from a store always renewed by an indulgent wife as a gift on the three great anniversaries of the year—Christmas, his birthday, and their wedding day—from some secret emporium of which she, *sola mortalium*, held the awful secret: such was the dinner of the Theophilus Birds, who went through with it, happily unconscious of its vileness. They had drunk a wine-glass each of decanted Australian Burgundy. They were anti-prohibitionists, and had been trained in the idea that wine was a necessary accompaniment to a gentleman’s dinner. Neither of them liked it very much. For lunch at his club Theophilus drank ginger-ale.

“Any news?” asked Evelina.

“Nothing pleasant. We hear that the vacant Assistant Secretaryship is to be filled up from the outside. Octavius Fenton’s mentioned . . .”

“That’s damnable,” said Evelina. “It blocks all promotion. And Fenton—that’s the man——”

“Yes, you know . . . rotten little solicitor taken up by Granbury towards the end of the War, and pitchforked into job after job—and now about to be

pitchforked over the head of us all.”

He spoke with the bitterness of the justifiably aggrieved official. Yet he immediately sought to make his complaint impersonal.

“It’s the principle of the proceeding I object to. All our university careers, all our years of training and devotion to our work, go for nothing. I doubt whether this fellow Fenton could translate a line of Horace, or solve a quadratic equation. It’s all corruption, intrigue and underhand dealing. . . . Luckily I’m interested in my work for its own sake. I’m doing something, which is all that matters. Otherwise——”

He made a vague gesture that might have signified his consignment to deserved perdition of the Service on which the British Empire depended.

“Also, thank goodness,” said Evelina, “we have our intellectual interests apart from these sordid worries.”

“Quite so,” said Theophilus, “but, anyhow, there’s such a thing as Abstract Justice for which we ought to fight.”

The telephone bell shrilled in the little hall outside. Theophilus rose to attend to the summons, and presently returned to Evelina, who was finishing her cup of Mocha Paste coffee.

“It was Luke wanting to know whether we’d be in to-night. He’ll be round in a few minutes.”

Evelina frowned and brushed straggling hair from her forehead.

“What on earth does he want?”

“Says he can’t tell me over the telephone.”

“He’s not bringing that awful child with him?”

“Daphne? . . . Yes, I suppose so. I think he said ‘we.’ ”

“I can just stand Luke—but Daphne——”

“Why don’t you go to bed, my dear? You look dog-tired. I’ll make your excuses.”

Evelina rose and threw her yesterday’s napkin impatiently on the table. Theophilus often irritated her by delicate hints at feminine weakness. The insinuation that she should fear encounter with Daphne aroused her polite anger.

“If Luke has anything important to say to you, it’s essential that I should hear it.”

Vaguely conscious, as he was now and then, of his wife’s sex, and of some mental twist inherent therein, he said: “All right, my dear,” and opened the door for her to pass out. They entered the drawing-room, where a sulky fire

was fuming in the grate. Theophilus thrust the poker between the bars to create a draught, and Evelina went upstairs to fetch a knitted woolly shawl. The room was furnished anyhow. It had a carpet, curtains, chairs and a sofa. A set of huge Piranesi prints of Roman temples and arches (a wedding present from a university friend) threw the little room out of scale; as did also a massive carved Venetian walnut table (a wedding present too—from Evelina's aunt, Miss Fanny Wavering) on which stood a melancholy aspidistra in a naked flower-pot.

When Evelina returned to the drawing-room, wrapped in a salmon-pink woolly shawl, tiny tongues of flame were beginning to rise through the hitherto uninterested coal.

"I wish Luke would have a little more consideration," she said petulantly. "He knows we're busy people. I was counting on this evening for reading over the Report of the Health Committee, which comes up at the next Council Meeting."

"If he hadn't made such a point of it——" Theophilus began.

She interrupted. "I don't blame you in the least, my dear. What could you say?"

She had always been impatient of her cousin, Luke Wavering, who stood for all the ideals that her temperament and self-training had led her to despise. He was a successful seeker after wealth and pleasure, and owned race-horses and—according to malignant rumour—mistresses; he squandered money on the tables of Monte Carlo and Deauville, and had a great big house close by, in Denmark Hill, with liveried footmen and French chefs and motor-cars and expensive dogs, and cared no more for Human Welfare than for the Moral Training of Warthogs. He had never read a line of Sydney Webb or Tchekov in his life. Once escaped from the City, where he made mere money, he was but an empty thing bounded by a horizon of all the Vanities. If Evelina had no use for Luke Wavering, still less had she for his daughter, Daphne, brought up by him in this atmosphere of Babylonian miasma. Save now and then for week-ends, in rich old Aunt Fanny's stately mausoleum of a house in Hertfordshire, they rarely met; for which Evelina was grateful to a benign Providence.

"I wonder what on earth he wants to see you about at this time of night," said Evelina, who at least had the human attribute of curiosity.

"He said something about a good thing—an opportunity that occurs once in a hundred years. After all," Theophilus continued, regarding the stump of his cigar which had only an eighth of an inch to go before it warranted happy rejection, "we could do with a little more money, couldn't we?"

"I suppose we could," said Evelina. "But I don't quite see what we could

do with it. We're comfortable as we are. What more do you want, Theophilus?"

A few moments' reflection produced the shadow of a smile.

"I don't quite know. I should like to get a few more books—and a fur-lined coat would be comfortable on these cold nights."

"If you'd only wear the woolly waistcoat I gave you, you'd be just as warm as with a fur coat. But you won't."

"I sometimes do," said Theophilus apologetically. "But this morning I forgot it. Perhaps if we had a little more money we might employ somebody to remind me of such things."

She uttered a dry little laugh.

"Since when have you developed ideas of Oriental luxury?"

He laughed too. They often met in such waste-lands of humour, and, invariably ashamed, bolted back into the trim paths of sobriety, like truant but God-fearing children.

"Of course, with money, one could do a great deal of good," she said.

"Undoubtedly," he admitted.

"Unfortunately it seems to be all in the wrong hands. Most people who have money fritter it away in frivolities."

Again Theophilus counselled repose. With Evelina platitudes was a sure sign of fatigue. Men often have more knowledge of their wives than that with which their wives dream of crediting them; and thus is many a happy marriage maintained.

"I'm not going to leave you alone to talk business with Luke," she declared finally. "Although he's my own cousin, I trust him no further than I can see him."

The electric bell of the front door clanged through the house. Theophilus rushed to anticipate the cook, who, in the process of washing-up and tidying the kitchen and preparing supper for herself and the holiday-making Florence, would not be in fit temper or attire to admit visitors. And, when Theophilus went, on rare occasions, to Cedar Hall, the door was opened by a devil of a fellow in glittering buttons and a gilded waistcoat. . . . Florence was trim enough, but cook . . . no! Fancy the Messenger on his floor at the Home Office a beery fellow in rolled-up shirt-sleeves! The subversive Bolshevism of the idea scared him. Now, Evelina didn't care who opened the door. Theophilus did. Although so much alike in tastes, there was that much of not unimportant difference between them.

A parade of furs seemed to enter with the bitterly cold air into the dimly-lit

hall; furs and the faint scent of hot-house flowers and the disturbing sense of wealth and ease and laughter.

“Brrr! I’m frozen to death,” cried Daphne, huddling into her long mink coat, from whose lifted collar sprouted her dainty mocking head. “It’s an awful night. And Ole Luk Oie would have a bit of window down. Says he likes fresh air. I draw the line between fresh air and blizzards. No, thanks, Theophilus, I’ll keep my coat on until I’m thawed.”

Mere man not being granted the privilege of entering drawing-rooms in overcoats, Luke Wavering divested himself of a five-hundred-guinea covering, and spick and span, neat and precise, elegantly dapper in dinner-suit, followed Daphne into the drawing-room. He was of middle height, spare, clean-shaven, with the long face which instinctive imagination associates with that of the successful barrister; he had keen eyes, brown and round, with yellowish gleams—the eyes, according to a prejudiced Evelina, of a bird of prey. His thin, light-brown hair, trimly cut, was brushed back over an intelligent forehead.

Evelina, in her salmon-pink woolly shawl, received them with conventional politeness. Theophilus drew the molten poker from the grate and the little superstructure of coals fell down into a thin glowing slice.

“Put some more coal on, my dear,” said Evelina.

Theophilus, scoop in hand, dived into an empty scuttle. He stood helpless.

“Please don’t bother, my dear fellow,” said Luke Wavering. “All I’ve got to say can be said in ten minutes. . . . Do you mind my taking him off, Evelina? He has a cosy little den of his own, I remember.”

“And a gas-fire which burns up in no time,” said Theophilus. “Unhappily our parlourmaid’s out, and—er——”

“We can all go into the library if it comes to that,” said Evelina.

Daphne, who after looking over the various chairs had decided against them, and had perched herself on the solid Venetian table swinging her legs and smoking a cigarette through a long holder, cried out:

“Ole Luk Oie’s not going to give away business secrets before me; so, if you all go off, where do I come in?”

“You won’t come in, my child,” laughed her father. “You’ll stay with Evelina, while Theophilus and I have our talk. . . .” He approached Evelina with a courteous gesture. “I’m sorry. But I’ve information for one pair of ears alone. Sworn secrecy, or nothing doing.”

“Surely my wife’s word’s as sacred as my own,” said Theophilus.

“I should be the last of men to doubt it,” said Luke. “But if your attitude is

‘*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*’.”

“Oh, Lord, what’s all that?” cried Daphne.

Luke turned to Evelina. “Would you ever think I gave this child an expensive education? It means ‘I fear the Greeks, especially when they bring gifts.’ Anyhow—if that’s your attitude—I can only say I’m sorry to have disturbed you, and clear out. Otherwise, there are my conditions of secrecy.”

Evelina shrugged her shoulders and yielded.

“All right. I know your wonderful secrets. *Secrets de polichinelle*. They make me laugh. Go along.”

They went, Theophilus somewhat apologetically. Evelina and Daphne were left alone.

“How do you think Luke’s looking?” asked the girl, with a sudden air of seriousness.

“The same as usual,” replied Evelina, to whom her cousin’s state of health was a matter of indifference.

“I don’t think so. He’s getting pasty-faced and worried. He works too hard. I’m always telling him so.”

“He can drop it any time he likes. Surely he has made enough money.”

“He says it’s easy enough to make, but the keeping of it is the very devil.”

“He needn’t spend so much,” said Evelina curtly.

“That’s nothing to do with it. Not what he means by keeping it, anyhow.” Daphne sighed, and looked at the point of a golden slipper. “I wish Luke would chuck it for a year or so, and let me take him round the world.”

“I may be old-fashioned,” said Evelina, “but to me it seems disrespectful to call your father by his Christian name. It was all very well when you were a child.”

“And it’s all the better now that I can be a companion to him,” cried Daphne, with a flash of dark eyes. “If I called him ‘Father’ he’d drop right down dead and want to know if I didn’t love him any more. ‘Ole Luk Oie,’ that’s nursery. ‘Luke’ for common talk. ‘Lukolunatic’ when he goes around playing the ass. By the way, what do you call Theophilus when he’s funny?”

The wearied Borough Councillor looked with distaste at youth in fur coat and silk stockings, and sought vainly for repartee. The most elementary sense of the grotesque forbade the obvious rebuke: “Theophilus is never funny.” . . . The bright, fresh-coloured young face glowed at the scoring of a point. Her brown eyes laughed. She allowed herself a moment’s joy at her cousin’s embarrassment, and went on:

“I wish you’d tell me, Evelina, why all you people go on preaching dead superstitions. You’re not actually preaching, but you look as if you’d like to. . . .”

“What superstitions?”

“Respect for elders, for instance, on the part of the very young—just because they are elders. You know very well you have no particular respect for them yourself. Why shouldn’t I make jokes about Theophilus?”

Here headstrong youth gave itself away.

“Because they’re in bad taste,” said Evelina.

“Sorry,” said Daphne.

She slipped off the table, and, crossing the room, flicked the end of her cigarette out of the holder into the fireplace.

“Why don’t you keep a dog?” she asked suddenly.

“My dear Daphne,” replied the long-suffering woman, “as Theophilus and I neither hunt nor shoot nor herd sheep nor have anything to fear from burglars, why should we keep such an abominably useless animal?”

Daphne, of whose existence a dog was as essential a part as a flower or a song, stood aghast at blasphemy. Vaguely she felt that the love of a dog was interfused in the lyrical expression of life.

“I dislike dogs,” Evelina continued, “and cats when they’re not occupied in catching mice. In fact, I dislike all useless beings, human and otherwise. Useless people are cumberers of the earth.”

Daphne threw back her cloak, revealing a gold-coloured frock, and leaned her elbow on the mantelpiece.

“I suppose you think me useless, Evelina?”

The dowdy, nervously and physically tired woman looked at her from her comfortless arm-chair, and saw incarnate the enemy of all her drab ideals.

“Since you’ve asked for it, my dear Daphne, you shall get it. I think you and your kind are the most contemptibly useless things in the universe.”

“We’re decorative, at any rate, aren’t we?” said Daphne, with rather a dangerous drawl.

Whereupon she drew a vanity case from her bag and ostentatiously occupied herself with mirror and lipstick. The fretted nerves of the elder woman gave way.

“Any hussy living on a man’s money can paint her face and dress herself up.”

“And any hussy,” cried the girl, gripping in each hand an instrument of

adornment, “can keep a man’s house decent for him. I do. I run a big house. I’m useful. You run a small house. You ought to be more useful. It isn’t a question of money. I’m not a snob. Any fool of a woman can take care of a man. If Luke hadn’t a fire to sit by, I’d go out and hang myself. But here you let poor old Theophilus, to say nothing of everybody who comes into the place, get frozen to death, and you don’t care a tinker’s damn. So you’re utterly useless—and God knows you’re not decorative.”

Evelina had risen and stood, her sallow face pale with anger, at the door until the girl had finished.

“You little insolent beast,” she cried.

She burst into the library where the two men were talking, their chairs drawn up close to the gas-fire.

“I must ask you to take that little insolent beast”—she could find no alternative to the phrase which rang in her head—“out of my house at once, and never let me see her here again.”

“What’s all the rumpus about?” asked Luke, as they were driving home.

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied Daphne. “We got on each other’s nerves. She lives on brains, is utterly futile, and starves poor old Theophilus. So I told her exactly what I thought of her.”

“Do you think that was quite judicious?” he asked.

“Thank God, no,” said Daphne. “If you want a judicious woman, go and make love to Evelina.”

“She’s not a bad sort, really, you know,” Luke remarked, after the indulgent way of men.

“She’s negative. You yourself have said it. Negative, sexless, useless. At any rate I’m positive. We’re opposite poles. When we meet sparks fly.”

Luke Wavering chuckled dryly.

“You’re always astonishing me, my dear, by the results of your fantastic education.”

## CHAPTER II

**T**HEOPHILUS, in spite of assiduous sociological and statistical reading, could never arrive at a definite conception of Luke Wavering's activities in the City. He knew that he was interested in many companies, that he was chairman of a great concern—"The British and Overseas Trust Limited"—and that he made a great deal of money. Personally he was not at all displeased that Luke should make a great deal of money, seeing that every now and again the Maker of Money, out of the kindness of his heart, put him in the way of making money too. The process was both simple and agreeable. On receipt of a message from Luke, he had but to instruct the manager of his bank to buy so many shares in such-and-such an undertaking, and, on another message, to instruct the manager to sell out. Sometimes even he would receive communications from The British and Overseas Trust Limited to the effect that they had bought so many shares for such a sum, and sold them for such a greater sum; and begged him to acknowledge the receipt of an enclosed cheque. Thus, within the last two or three years, the modest £2000 of Theophilus's savings had increased to £15,000 which he invested in War Loan, both through prudence and at the advice of Wavering.

Most of these transactions he hid from Evelina, whose attitude towards her cousin's methods of money-making was coldly unsympathetic. She had her own little patrimony of two or three hundred a year invested in Municipal and Colonial Stock, which she threw into the joint account that was complemented by her husband's official salary. On that they lived. He dispensed petty cash, paid all bills, and every half-year, in January and July, when he received his pass-book from the Bank, made the neatest possible balanced statement of accounts in a special leather-covered book which he submitted formally to the inspection of his wife. He was methodical, precise, official. That the joint income must be accounted for, Evelina took as a matter of course. Was she not a member of the Finance Committee of the Greenwich Borough Council? She respected him as the perfect accountant.

That it was wrong and disingenuous on the part of Theophilus to open a secret banking account of his own, and keep on deposit the interest on his gambler's fortune, no conscientious person can deny. But when a man's wife will only try to do general good with his money, without any particular benefit to himself, his villainy may be pardoned by those who view human error with a certain indulgence. On the other hand, the secret joy of Theophilus in

amassing a miser's treasure may most reasonably be deplored. Again—such can be the strophe and antistrophe of argument—why should he deny himself the only Puckish delight afforded him by ironical circumstance?

“I’ve done with those two for ever,” said Evelina, as soon as the door had shut behind her cousins. “That child is the most odious product of modern decadent civilization, and I’m perfectly certain that Luke isn’t straight.”

“Daphne no doubt is trying,” Theophilus admitted, “but what’s wrong with Luke?”

“I don’t know,” said Evelina. “You might just as soon ask me what’s wrong with a bad smell.”

“I’m sorry,” said Theophilus, “but I really like Luke.”

She shrugged her thin shoulders beneath the pink woolly wrap. They were standing in the hall.

“I don’t pry into your affairs, my dear, any more than you pry into mine. That was part of our agreement when we married—and I’ve observed it religiously”—Theophilus wondered whether he had been as astutely secretive as he had imagined—“but I warn you. If you put any trust in Luke—and I say it although he’s my own cousin—you’ll be a fool and live to repent it.”

Theophilus held his peace. He had the unemotional man’s wisdom of silence. His natural kindness, too, forbade touching on raw nerves. He looked down on her with the affection of habit, and saw an exhausted and irresponsible woman. He smiled.

“There’s nothing to worry about as far as I’m concerned; but as far as you’re concerned, I am worried. You go off to bed. I’ll lock up and put out the lights. I’ll read a little before I turn in.”

He put his arm round her, and she laid her head against him. She confessed to the awful weariness consequent on a day’s hard work and to a splitting headache brought on suddenly by the girl’s insolence. They parted with a conventional peck of lips. Theophilus went into his library to think over the interrupted revelation of Luke’s El Dorado.

Impeccable official though he was, he nevertheless stole an hour from Government time the next morning in order to interview Luke in the gorgeous offices of The British and Overseas Trust Limited in Aldwych. Luke, bearing no malice for overnight happenings—of what account were women’s squabbles in the serious affairs of men?—received him cordially. He went out

dazed, cheated the Government of another half-hour, which he spent in his bank manager's parlour. When he got home that evening he said nothing of his petty larceny of Government time to Evelina. Recovered from her fatigue, and perhaps mindful of the odious child's criticism, she warmed the house against his arrival, set before him an edible roast leg of mutton, and took him off to a cheery performance at Croydon of "Titus Andronicus" given by the New Shakespearean League.

For a month Theophilus lived the life of the exultant gambler. Never before had his following of Luke's gospel given him such a cumulation of daily thrills. Indeed, he regarded Luke less as an apostle than as a god. Himself, admitted into a tiny band possessed of secret information, he considered as one of the Chosen. For, lo, what Luke had predicted had come true. Shares in a moribund mine were bought for a song. None but the small hierarchy knew of the new rich vein of life that had just been discovered. The shares mounted daily in dizzying leaps. Although Theophilus read his journal of physical offence every morning in the crowded railway carriage, the serried columns swam mistily before his eyes while one little entry danced over them, will-o'-the-wisp fashion, in letters of fire. At last the price quoted reached such astounding heights that he grew fearful. Should he sell? Luke, consulted by telephone, bade him hold on. He had an investment and not a speculation. Theophilus thought of the easily made thousands he could put into safe and solid War Loan, and of the re-invested dividends that would bring in what he vaguely thought of as compound interest. So, one morning, after a sleepless night, scared to insomnia by Fortune, he instructed his friendly bank manager to sell.

And, lo and behold, the very day after his enormous profits were assured, the shares in Consolidated Gonzagas fell several points. Day after day they dropped with the accelerated speed of a hurtling avalanche. Luke telephoned a frantic message. "Sell for God's sake for what you can get." He replied, with a pardonable glow of exultation, that he had sold at the top of the market, and, in a mad spirit of generosity, asked Luke to lunch with him at the vast semi-political caravanserai which was his club, and where he lunched modestly every day of his official life. Luke accepted. His genuine affection for Theophilus was due to some kink in a queer character. Daphne, the child of his adoration, encouraged the sentiment. With the impatient cruelty of youth, she called Evelina "The Blight," and taught her father to look at Theophilus as a sort of withered and unflowering hollyhock.

Theophilus, still regarding Luke as Allah, but promoting himself to the

position of His Prophet, departed from his usual procedure of hospitality, which consisted in putting the bill of fare before his guest and asking him what he would like (whereupon the latter would modestly choose roast mutton or minced veal with poached egg), and enjoined upon the steward to serve the most sumptuous meal the club could compass.

“Oysters, sir?”

“Of course. And ortolans?” said Theophilus, with a vague memory of a novel—possibly one of Ouida’s—which he had read in his youth, wherein ortolans as an article of diet had impressed him with an idea of Lucullan luxury.

The steward, who had no notion whether the thing was a fish, fowl or beast, replied gravely:

“I’m sorry, sir, they’re not in season.”

“That’s a pity,” said Theophilus with equal gravity.

“How about a nice sole with white wine sauce, and cutlets *réforme* and chocolate *soufflé*?”

“Excellent,” said Theophilus. “I leave it to you.”

Theophilus, deeming the unimaginative author of this dull meal an expert in banquetry, went away perfectly satisfied. Indeed, he had more imagination than the steward, for the white wine sauce (which, in the world’s most famous restaurants, is, at the best, but a sticky mess artfully employed to disguise staleness of fish) appealed to him as something new and exotic that would evoke the enthusiasm of his luxurious guest.

Luke came. When Theophilus suggested that they should go in at once to lunch, he demanded a cocktail. Theophilus led him into the crowded smoking-room. He summoned a waiter.

“A cocktail, please.”

“What kind, sir?”

“Is there more than one kind?”

Luke interrupted. “A dry Martini. Listen. Just be careful and give the order properly. Three-quarters gin and one French vermouth, instead of two-thirds and one-third—three-quarters and one-quarter, see?”

“Yes, sir. Only one?”

“You’ll excuse me,” said Theophilus. “But I’ve only had a cocktail once in my life, and then I didn’t like it.”

“Oh, God, man, do be human,” cried Luke. “Waiter, bring two. If Mr. Bird doesn’t want it, I’ll drink it.” He turned to Theophilus. “Damn it all. I need it.

I've had a hell of a morning. I thought I knew a thing or two, but I've been simply done down by those Gonzaga swine. Without knowing it, you're one of them."

"My dear fellow," Theophilus protested, "I never heard of the things until you told me of them."

"Of course I know that," said Luke, "but who gave you the tip to sell? You couldn't have done it on your own."

Behind Luke's round hawk eyes even so ingenuous an observer as Theophilus could perceive the conjectured shadow of some Machiavelli-Mephistophelean enemy.

"I assure you I sold on my own initiative. The price seemed too good to be true."

"Cold feet?" said Luke.

"If you like to put it that way—yes."

"Now I remember," said Luke, draining his cocktail which the waiter had just brought. "You've done the same thing—though not on so big a scale—once or twice before. Your infernal feet seem to be like a minimum registering thermometer. I'm not quite sure that they wouldn't be worth three or four thousand a year to me."

They went into lunch. Luke swallowed the oysters, picked at the yellow mess of fish, ate half a cutlet, and waved away the chocolate *soufflé*. He would hear nothing of Theophilus's suggestion of champagne, and demanded plain water from the tap. He had a Board Meeting of sharks at 2.30, and it behoved him to meet them with the shark's clear and unalcoholized intelligence. The cocktail he needed for his nerve's sake. For that he was grateful to Theophilus.

"Thank your stars," said he, "you can sit in a comfortable Government Office, preventing people—chiefly people like me—from doing things. All you have to do is to put a minute in your most characteristic university handwriting at the foot of a blue foolscap pile which represents the thought and labour of years. 'Scheme unnecessary and wasteful, T.B.,' and the thing's damned for ever. If I could only be a professional damner instead of a creator, I should be a happier man."

"What's wrong?" asked Theophilus, who, not encouraged by his guest to stray into unfamiliar vineyards, had sipped his customary ginger-ale.

"Everything's wrong. The ordinary investor's wrong. The City is wrong. The country is wrong. The beastly universe is wrong. And the infernal part of it is that I seem to be wrong too!"

He leaned across the table, chin on elbow-supported hands, and the corners

of his thin, lawyer-like lips curled into a wry smile.

“I’ve been right most of my life. That’s why I’ve been able to live like a rich man. I had nothing to start with, as you know. Practically all the family money went to that silly old ass of a woman in Hertfordshire. She’s dropsical with money. God knows what she’s worth. When she dies, I suppose I’ll come into it; but meanwhile . . . you know all about it. If my father and Evelina’s father hadn’t been God’s worst fools, she and I would have been born very well off. But they practically told the old man, my grandfather, to go to the devil. I don’t blame ’em, for he was the filthiest old swine ever miscreated. Aunt Fanny, to whom he left his money, isn’t much better. As a family the Waverings are a rotten lot. . . . Anyhow, I’ve had to fend for myself most of my life. Without scholarships I couldn’t have gone up to the University. I’ve lived by my wits ever since, and I’ve done pretty well. Five and forty, big house, cars, the beginnings of a racing stable, a future of ease. And now comes this infernal knock. It’s damnable. I think I will have an old brandy and a cigar.”

“We’ll go to the smoking-room.”

Theophilus paid his bill at the desk. Before giving the order to the waiter in the smoking-room, Theophilus asked:

“What kind of brandy would you like?”

Luke waved an impatient hand.

“There’s only one brandy worth drinking anywhere, and that’s the best they’ve got. Yes, I’ll have a cigar.”

He took one from the proffered box, and lit it.

“You lift a weight off my mind by saying that no one suggested your selling. That’s why—pardon my frankness, my dear old chap—I was so keen to come and lunch with you. You’re quite sure no one gave you a suggestion? Not Daventry?”

“Daventry?” Theophilus queried.

“Of course—Daventry. My partner. You’ve met him at my house. Pretty wife—Mona Daventry. There’s a bust-up there just at present; but that’s nothing to do with the matter.”

Theophilus vaguely remembered them. Evelina and himself had agreed that they were dreadful people, beyond the pale of intellectual folk. Mona Daventry, however, he liked. . . . He denied converse with Daventry, and repeated his assurance that the coldness of his feet alone had guided him along the warm path of prudence.

“It was most important for me to know,” said Luke. “There’s nothing more

to be said.”

They talked of indifferent things. Presently Luke remarked:

“It’s a pity Daphne and Evelina don’t hit it off.”

“I think, my dear fellow,” said Theophilus, “Daphne was a bit—what shall we call it?—inconsiderate, that night at our house. Evelina’s a woman of some distinction, you’ll allow, and Daphne—though I know how you worship her—is, after all, only a chit of a girl. . . . I’m more than sorry there’s this breach. I’m ready to make allowances for nerves and that sort of thing; but it was all Daphne’s fault, wasn’t it?”

Luke leaned back in his chair and puffed his cigar. “I suppose it was, old chap. Daphne’s my only problem outside that accursed City. She has run me, and everything that is me, outside mere business, since she was three years old when her mother died. . . . I’ve brought her up badly I suppose. . . . Yes, even from her own account, she must have been abominably rude to Evelina. I would apologize for her if I thought it would be of any use. But it wouldn’t.”

“If she came to Evelina, and said she was sorry, I think all might be well.”

“But she won’t,” said Luke; “I’ve tried to persuade her.” He sniffed and tasted his brandy, and nodded to Theophilus. “Quite good. Has it ever occurred to you what a simplified world it would be if there weren’t any women in it?”

“It would be simplified to the extinction of the race,” said Theophilus unhumorously.

Luke laughed. “I’ve often wondered what you knew about women. Or, to put it better—about Woman. I know you’re perfectly happy with Evelina. But anyhow—*enfin*—there’s a lot else to it. . . .”

Theophilus, who, by way of the courtesies of hospitality, had allowed himself to be tempted by the Club’s oldest brandy and an excellent cigar, and was enjoying a new sensation of post-prandial mellowness, chuckled wickedly.

“Well, there was a very pretty little girl in a confectioner’s shop at Cambridge. I think I gave her a locket.”

“And what happened?”

“Oh nothing—nothing serious, of course. Another fellow came along and gave her a bracelet. She was a jolly pretty girl, though. . . .”

“You must have been a devil of a fellow at Cambridge,” said Luke. He looked at his watch and finished his brandy.

“I must go to my Board Meeting. Thanks for lunch. If I sent my love to Evelina she’d throw it out of window, so I won’t this time.”

Theophilus accompanied him to the Club door and saw him drive away in

a magnificent car. He did not envy him the possession. Had he one he would find it an embarrassment and an offence. A Principal Clerk could not drive up to the office in such a vehicle, with anything like becoming modesty; and Evelina certainly would not show herself in it anywhere within the Borough of Greenwich. But it was pleasant to reflect that, should he desire such a one, he could take a bus to a motor shop and buy it on the spot.

A quarter of an hour afterwards he was agreeably absorbed in the minutiae of the application of the Factory Acts. At five o'clock he varied his usual habits by looking in at a Strand tea-shop to meet, by appointment, Evelina, who, having a day off from municipal affairs, had come up to town to attend a lecture on the Economic Disposal of House Refuse. He found her as much aglow with the treat as a child after a pantomime, and, her enthusiasm evoked by the fairy tale of hygiene precluding any interest in his day's doings, he considered it unnecessary to inform her of his meeting with Luke. Perhaps he would not have done so in any case. Already he had begun to be a miser in exotic sensations.

They spent together their dull and amicable evening in their uninspiring home, both, in their peculiar ways, claiming nothing more from life. As a woman she was quite content with Theophilus. He was a gentleman, an intellectual man and a theoretic social reformer, who therefore sympathized with her practical work. He was both strong and decisive. But, feeling herself to be several shades stronger and more decisive, she liked him enormously. Now and then they discussed what would have happened had they been blessed with offspring. She confessed that children would have been inconveniently in the way. A high birth-rate was, beyond question, a sign of a country's prosperity; but the intelligentsia must have the privilege of promoting it vicariously. She could do much more good by inducing a hundred other women to bear children in hygienic surroundings than by bringing into the world an unconsidered unit or two of her own. So Evelina was happy. As a matter of fact, she didn't like small children. The intimacies of any friend's nursery were antipathetic. Her instinctive dislike of babies was as strong as her instinctive dislike of dogs. Babies were messy and maddeningly egotistic. Dogs she could subject to a rational criticism of their uselessness. Babies she had to explain away as best she could. She sincerely thanked Heaven that Theophilus hadn't the bump of philoprogenitiveness.

He, good man, took Evelina for granted, as the female portion allotted to him by Destiny. She had never been a revelation, still less a mystery, although now and then she was a confounded puzzle; and it had never occurred to him to ask himself what on earth she represented in his man's life. Yet he was perfectly contented with her as his daily companion, and was proud of her as a

woman of public note. She had Parliamentary ambitions which he gravely fostered. Her name had been long since set down on lists of the Party Organization, and she only awaited the suggestion of a reasonable constituency. Now and then a Member of Parliament, meeting him in the club, would make a complimentary reference to his wife, and express the hope that she would stand at the next election. Whereby Theophilus felt agreeably flattered.

They spent their evening therefore mutually content. Florence, being in, had attended to the fires. They had changed into polite raiment. She wore a faded mauve combination of tea-gown and kimono with a deep yellow Mechlin lace collar which one of her family had given or bequeathed to her years ago. Her cropped hair was fairly tidy, her sallow face clean. Had she been attired, not in devastating hues, but in harmonious colour, she might have been an attractive, even, in the eyes of affection, an alluring woman. But when a woman consciously scorns all the arts of allurements and unconsciously defeats Nature, she sits for a whole evening two yards away from a young husband who can find nothing more exciting to talk about than the continued iniquity of political nepotism in Government departments, and the bearing of the Factory Acts on the hygienic disposal of household refuse.

It was only when they had risen preparatory to retiring for the night that Evelina remembered a letter she had received from the Rich Aunt in Hertfordshire.

“She tells me that Mona Daventry is divorcing her husband.”

“That’s Luke’s partner, isn’t it?” asked Theophilus, feeling diabolically astute.

“Yes. We’ve met them at Cedar Hall two or three times. She’s a fluffy-haired, empty-headed dumpling of a woman, and he’s a hideous little dark pig of a man.”

Theophilus nodded. “I can’t say I blame her. A dreadful fellow.”

“To me both of them are merely animals,” said Evelina. “But he seems to be the worse of the two. . . . I only tell you for what it’s worth. . . . I never could understand Luke mixing himself up with such horrible people. After all, socially Luke’s a gentleman, however rotten he may be in his business affairs.”

“My dear,” said Theophilus, with mildly uplifted hand, “you’re always saying things like that about Luke. How do you know?”

“First I feel it in my bones—and that ought to be good enough. And then his name is mud in the City. Only yesterday John Roberts and I were talking over the general financial situation in the country, and he told me that many big concerns in the City were on the shoals—he’s a stockbroker, and of course

knows what he's talking about—and among others mentioned 'The British and Overseas Trust.' ”

“The deuce he did!” exclaimed Theophilus. “That's Luke.”

“I know. Of course I didn't proclaim Luke as my cousin. But that bears out what I've always thought of him.”

“Why didn't you tell me last night, my dear?”

She made a wearied gesture. “It slipped my mind. I had more interesting things to think of. Anyhow, keep clear of Luke.”

Theophilus smiled.

“Financially clear, yes. I promise.”

They kissed perfunctorily and parted. He turned out the drawing-room lights and went into his cheerless library, where he found his current bottle of Vichy water and a tumbler set out on a chipped lacquered tray. Conscious of need of warmer comfort, he searched the dining-room for whisky. The decanter from which he had entertained Luke hospitably a month before, and since not touched, was empty. He was certain of its fullness when he had brought it in to Luke, and their potations had been almost of a symbolic character. He registered a vow, as he had registered many such others—all written in water—to inform Evelina of cynical domestic turpitude, and cheerfully bore away with him from the sideboard the remains of the Australian Burgundy left from dinner. Half a tumbler of this fluid by his side, and between his lips a cigarette drawn from a paper packet—Lucky Camels or Dromedary Strikes; his habit was to enter a tobacconist's and ask for a packet of cigarettes and take whatever the smart young man behind the counter slapped before him—he gave himself up to rumination over the extraordinary events of the day.

The most extraordinary phenomenon was the co-ordination of Evelina's report on the British and Overseas Trust Limited with the nervous talk and behaviour of the ordinarily serene and a trifle supercilious Luke.

He himself had cleared a small fortune of some twenty thousand pounds. With that which he had already made, his estate was now thirty-five thousand, bringing him in seventeen hundred and fifty a year—subject, of course, to income tax—more than twice his salary, and bringing him in more and more every year, seeing that he had instructed his bankers to reinvest every dividend. And he owed it all to Luke, kindly, altruistic Luke, who had never—as far as his search into dark motive could surmise—been the richer for him by one penny-piece. By the time he had finished his modest, though perhaps unseasonable, draught of Burgundy, he glowed in defence of his benefactor. He did not realize that the operations of the British and Overseas Trust Limited

and other cognate companies were pregnant with disaster to many thousands of his fellow-citizens.

## CHAPTER III

THE months went on and Theophilus saw little or nothing of Luke. The breach between Evelina and Daphne forbade social relations.

The sardonic old Aunt Fanny in Hertfordshire, to whose house the two branches of the family were periodically bidden for a gaunt week-end, sometimes tried, by way of diversion, to bring them suddenly together. But, Evelina requiring from the old lady a definite assurance that she should not meet the unspeakable Daphne, Aunt Fanny found herself balked of her whim by an elderly gentlewoman's distaste both for lies and bad manners.

The Luke Wavering affairs were further eclipsed for the Birds by a General Election which shook, to the foundations of their being, the queer-minded in the country who attached importance to so absurd an event. Evelina stood for a Midland constituency, and was only defeated by some eight hundred votes. Pyrrhic or not, it was a famous victory. She established herself, in that section of the political world as yet unstupefied by universal jazzery, as a Marked Woman. She was invited to lecture all over Darker England.

Theophilus had less consciousness of her as the wife of his bosom than as a bit of amorphous garment that flapped now and then about the interior of the little Blackheath house, instead of being decently hung outside to dry. The cook drank the whisky and served up meals so sketchy that they might have appeared in the comic papers, and Florence, the house-parlourmaid, went to Picture Palaces whenever her beefy young admirer had the time or the condescension for escort. Theophilus, regarding Evelina as an Intellectuality and a Force, and sincerely interested in her activities, rarely complained. It seldom occurred to him that he had much to complain of. A cut off the joint or a wedge of cold pie, with vegetables *ad libitum*, at his Club—and Clubs, even in these narrow days, are over-generous in their helpings—provided him with such material sustenance for the day that anything swallowable satisfied his evening hunger. While Evelina was spreading the Gospel of Human Welfare in Pontypridd or Lowestoft, Theophilus spent his few hours of home life in reading about it in dull periodicals. His Saturday afternoons he usually passed in the Club reading-room over the weekly reviews. Now and then an exuberant acquaintance (with subsequent regret) led him to play a calamitous game of bridge. On Sundays he practised a round of hygienic and unenthusiastic golf. For he had taken to golf as he had taken to the Civil Service, to statistical reading, to marriage, in the unemotional hope of some good that might eventually accrue.

Daphne once described him as a lost soul trying to find itself.

During these months Daphne darted about in a dragon-fly fashion of her own, never straying far from the focal point of her existence, which was her father. She was just one and twenty, aflame with all the revelations of life which close touch with the modern throbbing world must of necessity afford to eager girlhood. She combined her father's clear brain with her actress mother's vivid sensuousness. Luke, seeking for temporary surcease from agony of care, took her on flying trips to the Continent. A week with her, no matter where—Paris, Rome, France, Monte Carlo, Sicily—he proclaimed the cure for all mortal ills.

They were sitting one mellow October day on the lofty terrace of Portofino, and the sunset splashed the sky above the dreaming western promontories with swathes of crimson and gold and elusive blues and greens. Daphne nestled against him, her head on his shoulder. He put his arm around her. Presently he was aware of wetness on the back of his hand and, looking down, saw that she was in tears. Alarmed, he held her off so as to look at her.

“Why? . . . my dear. . . ?”

“It's so beautiful.” She broke away and laughed and hastily dried her eyes. “I didn't realize I was crying. Beauty often makes me cry. Perhaps because it seems too much for our capacity. Don't you find it so?”

“It's a compensation, of course,” he said. “But only a small compensation for the world's ugliness.”

“Ole Luk Oie, if you go on saying the world's ugly, I'm not going to talk to you any more. What's the matter with you?”

He smiled at her dryly. “A surfeit of ugliness, my dear.”

She protested her disbelief. Hadn't he been her guide to Beauty ever since her eyes were opened? Hadn't he told her stories in her babyhood which had set her a-dreaming all her life? Wasn't his very name—the pet name, Ole Luk Oie—that of the dear gnome of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, who sprinkled dust in the children's eyes so that they should sleep? All her remotest memories were those of a tender figure sprinkling in her eyes the golden dust of legend, so that she should dream of things sweet and beautiful.

In some such terms did she upbraid him for recalcitrance.

“Of course,” said she, “if you bring me up to find something to enjoy in any old thing—the smell of furs, this opalescent sea in front of us, dancing with a man who can dance, old Hock—it's you, not me, that's responsible for my palate, Andrea del Sarto—what else is there?—the Pyramids, San Marco in Venice, Debussy's ‘Rain in the Garden.’ . . .” She flickered her delicate long fingers amusedly before him . . . “duck *à la presse*, and . . . the Venus de Milo

. . . and I enjoy it and find beauty in everything, it's an awful bump when you let me down and preach—wait—let me get it right, when you preach the essential ugliness of the world.” She patted both his cheeks. “That's a damn good speech, isn't it?”

He took her hands and looked deep into her eyes, and tried to smile.

“The perfect Hedonist,” said he.

But in his eyes she read something she had never read before—something compounded of defeat and despair and fear. She clutched him, moved by an unknown terror.

“Luke—Father dear—there's something the matter. You've not been yourself for a long time. What is it?”

He touched her hands lovingly.

“Ordinary business worries, my dear. I thought we would escape from them for a bit by coming out here, but I had a wire from Daventry this afternoon which has rather upset me.”

“I wish Daventry were right there,” cried Daphne, pointing to the now pale Mediterranean. “At the bottom of the sea. He's a beast.”

“If he were there, I'd be there too,” said Luke. “Let me tell you something—Ole Luk Oie turned philosopher. The hardest and perhaps the most impossible lesson that a woman has got to learn is that a man in his business or political life is a totally different creature from him in his social life.”

“I don't see it at all,” said Daphne. “If a man's a beast in a drawing-room he's a beast in an office or anywhere else.”

Luke smiled with the weary indulgence of one who speaks to adored woman.

“But supposing he's a highly gifted and powerful beast?”

“All the more reason for throwing him in there,” said Daphne, flinging a far-handed gesture out to sea.

Luke shivered. They had exceeded the time-limit of the balm of the Mediterranean air. He rose.

“Perhaps you are right, my child. Or, rather . . . can you stand man's philosophy? . . . women are never right. But, on the other hand, they are never wrong. You can worry your little head over the paradox till all's blue. In the meanwhile, if we stay here we'll be frozen to death, and contract double pneumonia, and catch a filthy cold.”

She squeezed his arm as they went into the hotel.

“I think you must be feeling a bit better,” she said.

Early in the New Year the crash came, sudden, cataclysmic, complete. The details are written in letters of mire on the pages of recent financial history. Scarcely had twelve months passed between Luke's visit to Theophilus Bird, radiant with visions of El Dorado, and his Lucifer-like fall. The lurid event shocked the City—even the individual units that form the conglomerate mass which moulds the financial destinies of most of the human race—even so unimportant a Cassandra-like unit as John Roberts, stockbroker and Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Greenwich Borough Council. Bankruptcy proceedings were swiftly followed by the flash of the Public Prosecutor.

Before puzzled financiers, distracted relations, and ruined shareholders in the companies promoted by the British and Overseas Trust Limited and other corporations, knew what to think, Luke Wavering and Emanuel Daventry stood in the dock of the Old Bailey and faced a criminal trial. It was the old story of financial juggling. A week was spent in tracing the intricate veins through which public money had trickled. But it was the same old dreary record of a fraudulence through which the names of honoured men have faded into the oblivion of gaol. In a few words, the simplest and yet, to the gambler, the most fascinating form of fraud. You float a company, and employ its capital to pay the dividends on the shares of a moribund predecessor, and so on, and so on, hoping to God, all the time, that, at last, Sunbeams and Cucumbers Ltd. may set you free, bring you a baronetcy at once, and land you, finally, on a flood-tide of gold, high and dry in the House of Lords. But, as the French say, there are faggots and faggots. Some may be employed in the honourable burning of heretics to the Greater Glory of God, and others may be set fire to just in order to get rid of them. Luke Wavering was one of the latter. Judge and jury found no use for him as a faggot. He had robbed the struggling parson, the widow and the orphan. He faced a judgment clear and merciless. His partner, Emanuel Daventry, the pig-faced man of Evelina's detestation, pleaded ignorance of his hawk-eyed partner's secret operations. There was remorseless raking of private lives. So foul were the disclosures of Daventry's moral past evoked by prosecuting Counsel, that the eminent K.C. defending Daventry seized upon them as proof of his client's innocence. For was it not obvious that, while he was sunk in the stews of dissoluteness, according to the evidence obtained at great pains by the prosecution, he must have neglected his business, and that his partner, an acute man of affairs, who had passed through the ordeal unscathed as a clean-living gentleman, should have been virtually in supreme control? On the enunciation of which daring paradox a transient gleam of mirth flitted over the crowded Court.

Which was the greater rogue of the pair, the man in the train, confused by

the arraignment of complicated financial dealings involving ungraspable sums of money, could not rightly determine. Daventry, at any rate, was a peculiarly unpleasant fellow, while Wavering, the flower of domestic and gentlemanly virtues, might possibly be all the more a black-hearted hypocrite. The man reading his newspaper in the train could not solve the problem. At any rate, gross villainy had been committed.

Daphne sat with Mona Daventry, day after interminable day, in the well of the Court by the side of the solicitors for the defence. And she sat brave and smiling, defiantly championing the beloved one at unfair grips with fate. She willed her courage, faith and vitality into the tense-faced, dapper figure in the dock. It was unthinkable that he should be there for evil deeds of his own. Did not even the harsh-featured vulture in the wig bow before the evidence of a blameless life? The arch-rogue, the traitor, the Judas, the everything that was most vile, who sat next to him, was alone responsible for the trickery and fraud for which they stood jointly accused.

And every day, during the short interview she was allowed to have with him in the cheerless room below, he assured her of the certainty of his acquittal, and compared her radiance in the sordid Court with that of the life-giving sun.

“I’ve never been so proud of you,” he said one day. “I never dreamed it was ever possible for a father to be so proud of a daughter. To tell you to have faith and courage would be an insult.”

During these unhappy days, Theophilus once said to Evelina:

“Don’t you think you might hold out the olive branch to Daphne?”

She turned on him.

“Why?”

He was somewhat disconcerted by the crispness of the question.

“You’re the only woman relation she has got besides Aunt Fanny, and she must need some comfort, poor child.”

“If you’d read your newspapers, my dear, you’d see that she doesn’t. Every paper comments on her laughing and joking in court with that awful Daventry woman. She’s making an exhibition of herself. The child’s frivolous to her soul. She doesn’t seem to be conscious of the degradation of her position.” She rummaged among an untidy pile on the lower tier of a cane table, and produced an illustrated morning paper. “Look at that. All furs and smiles and silk stockings. ‘Miss Daphne Wavering leaves the Old Bailey.’ Might just as well have been: ‘Miss Tottie Fay leaves the stage-door to step into her motor-

car.’ ”

“I don’t think any actress would call herself Tottie Fay nowadays,” said Theophilus, with a new and curious prompting of antagonism.

She shrugged her kimono-covered shoulders—it was after dinner.

“You know perfectly well what I mean. Anyhow, if she wants me she can come to me. I’m always here.”

“Yes. That’s so,” said Theophilus. And his dryness was imperceptible to the untrained senses of his wife.

But the next day he again misappropriated Government time and, abusing privilege by scribbling “Home Office” on the card which he sent in to those in authority, was allotted a seat in the low-set gallery reserved for the Aldermen and Councillors of the City of London. He found a seat at the end of the front row, on the left, only separated by the gangway from the dock. Luke’s eyelids flickered when he met his greeting smile, and a spot of colour came into his pale cheeks. Daphne saw him, and there was gladness in her eyes. The dry and technical cross-examination of accountants was in progress, interrupted now and then by the judge who put an elucidatory question for the benefit of the jury. Theophilus couldn’t make much of it one way or the other.

When the Court adjourned for luncheon, Theophilus met Daphne and Mrs. Daventry in the corridor outside. The latter was a pleasant-faced woman in her middle thirties. Although sharing with Evelina her righteous detestation of Daventry, he had never been able to find in his heart grounds for positive dislike of his wife. Now that she had divorced him in circumstances that gained her public sympathy, he found himself suddenly confronted with a personality both attractive and courageous. For Daphne’s sake alone had she, for the second time, sat in open court, listening to the tale of Emanuel Daventry’s depravities.

“She’s the dearest of dears,” cried Daphne. “I don’t know what I should have done without her.”

“You’d have been in court all the same,” said Mrs. Daventry.

“Yes. But by myself. It would have been hard to stick it. Your being with me makes all the difference.”

This was, of course, after her first greeting of Theophilus. She had come to him with arms outstretched.

“Oh, Theophilus dear, how good of you to come! You don’t know what the sight of a kind face means to us. Those deadly people in the seats where you are, with cold eyes and hard mouths; and women powdering their noses; all looking from me to him and hoping for the worst, like guests of the Inquisition

in reserved stalls at an auto-da-fé. God! How I hate them. Sometimes I could get up and scream at them, though you know I'm not hysterical—so the sight of you. . . ." She laughed with moist eyes.

They emerged into the great vestibule, where the thin, outgoing crowd of the public and witnesses from the various courts was crossed by hurrying wigged and gowned barristers on their way to eventual food.

"When this horror is over," said Daphne, "I'm going to take him to Egypt—to Assouan, where there's perpetual sunshine, so that he can sit in the sun and get his dear soul warm." She put both hands on Theophilus's arm. "Don't you think it monstrous that he should be there?"—she flung a vague gesture towards the courts—"through no fault of his own."

"Of course it's monstrous, Daphne," said Theophilus with stiff kindness, "but he'll get off."

Daphne flashed. "Naturally he'll get off. But to be dragged through all this mud! He's so sensitive, the soul of honour—of—of every thing wonderful!"

"I know, I know, Daphne," he said consolingly.

He had the chivalrous idea of asking them to lunch. He took out his watch. The conscience of the Perfect Official knocked the Man endwise. He must have a hasty meal somewhere, and get back to the office.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

Daphne waved a hand to her companion. "With Mona, in Albert Hall Mansions; where else? Cedar Hall's shut up. I don't even know whether it belongs to Luke any more. . . . Aunt Fanny offered to take me in, but she understands that I must be on the spot."

"I wish I could be of some use to you," said Theophilus.

"I'm sure you do. But it'll be all over soon. So don't worry. I can see it through."

"You're a brave girl," said he, "to face it like this."

She smiled and shrugged. "It's the least I can do to try to cheer him up. If I went about in black with white cheeks and hollow eyes, looking like nothing on earth, it wouldn't be very helpful to him, would it?"

Theophilus assented cordially. He lingered a few moments until the call of duty summoned him away.

When he got home, Evelina said:

"Have you read to-day's evidence in the evening papers?"

He nodded.

"Things look black against him," she said. "I can't understand, at the best,

how the man could have been such a fool.”

“I was in Court this morning for an hour or two,” he remarked off-handedly. “I thought I’d like to see for myself . . .”

“I don’t think it was very wise of you, considering——”

They argued the point amicably. He gave a dry description of the scene.

“And Daphne?”

“She was there, of course. I spoke to her. I think, my dear,” he said, with the deliberate slowness of his official manner, “that your judgment of her last night was not quite fair.”

She smiled. “My dear Theophilus, if there’s one thing in this world I’ve trained myself to be, it is utterly just.”

With a little bow of acknowledgment he put before her the case of Daphne, as he had heard it from her lips. He pleaded that she was doing for her father all that lay in her girl’s power.

“Then perhaps I was wrong.”

She made the dry admission with the air of a Committee woman withdrawing from an untenable position in the face of a new set of facts. He commended her with equal dryness.

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Evelina. Perhaps justice is the greatest and the most difficult to attain of all human virtues.”

They dined early, as she was engaged to speak at an eight o’clock meeting at Lewisham, whither he had promised to accompany her. But at the last moment he found himself driven to invent excuses: work that he had brought home from the office to make up for the hours of borrowed time; also the threatening signs of a cold caught perhaps in the germ-infected railway carriage that morning. There had been a wheezing and sniffing man who had insisted on tightly-shut windows . . . Yet he accompanied her to the taxi in his thin old dinner-suit.

She said, turning on the cab step:

“Have you thought what a difference all this is going to make to my career?”

She drove off; he entered the house and, sitting before the gas-fire in his library, tried to read. But he couldn’t. Yes. He supposed the conviction of Luke would react on Evelina’s high ambitions. The fear had been running through his head, and naturally through Evelina’s, all the time; but this was the first occasion on which she had formulated it in definite phrase. Yet he was shocked, he knew not why, by the brusque pronouncement. It dismissed from consideration another woman’s immediate agony of suspense. Evelina had

yielded to a sense of abstract justice; but she had remained merciless. The picture of the other woman rose before him—the girl with the darting, generous hands, the flower-like young face, the eyes haunted beyond their brightness—and his heart was suddenly torn by an anguish of pity.

For he knew that all the girl's splendid hopes were vain; that all the King's Counsel and all the King's men could not set up Luke Wavering once more in his place; that Luke was doomed. It was a family disgrace; no one could get away from the fact. Yet there seemed to be a world of tragic difference between Evelina's discomfiture and Daphne's despair. He forgave or forgot all past insolences. He saw her only as a thing of fresh and valiant beauty, heartrendingly pathetic, that stood out radiant in the vast and fog-hung hall of the Old Bailey.

To the last, the man reading his newspaper in the train was confronted by the problem of the greater villain of the two men that stood accused. The jury solved it for him by acquitting Daventry and finding the other guilty.

Luke Wavering was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

## CHAPTER IV

THE unfortunate man had served but a few months of his sentence when Miss Fanny Wavering died of sudden heart-failure. As her nearest relative who was free of movement, Evelina, accompanied by Theophilus, went down to Hertfordshire for the funeral. Theophilus, practical man of affairs, made all the dismal arrangements. The interior of the house known as The Grange, and, in happier times, alluded to by Daphne as The Morgue, with its air of mouldering old age, did not protest, like many a stricken home of brightness, against the dreary solemnities of death. Even the unimpressionable Theophilus felt that the old woman was but moving from one mausoleum to another—an Early Victorian, floridly Gothic family vault in Moorstead Cemetery. For nearly half a century scarcely an article of furniture or a curtain or a carpet had been changed. A staff of servants had kept the place swept and cleaned and dusted—for Miss Fanny Wavering had been a tyrannical woman who exacted the last ounce of service from those dependent on her—so that perhaps Daphne was technically wrong in her impatient designation, the house resembling rather a well-kept museum of the domestic life of the eighteen-seventies. But, after all, a museum is as dead a thing, as far as the inspiration of life is concerned, as an Egyptian tomb, and the transportation of the coffin down the broad staircase and across the gloomy hall was as little discordant with the surroundings as the removal of a mummy.

The family legend went that, in her early days, she had been disappointed in love, which, in the remote Victorian era, seemed to be a valid and respectable excuse for a woman's subsequent pestiferous behaviour. Be that as it may, she was, at any rate, an unlovely old woman who had devoted her life to the cultivation of a finished selfishness which she was fond of exhibiting with a display of grim humour not unattractive to the cynical. Wherefore Luke Wavering had ever found pleasure in her company; and Evelina, compelled by some fascination—Aunt Fanny had Luke's glittering hawk's eyes—or by some subconscious surrender to the power of family wealth, had never dared to break off dutiful observance. She underwent caustic criticism with outward meekness, while abominable anger surged in her breast. Her dislike of the old woman, had it been spread out on a plane surface in arabesque, would have been a work of art.

Theophilus took the head of his wife's family, as he took most things, at her face value. She had stored her mind during many lonely years with a prodigious accumulation of facts. He could converse easily with her. They did

not argue. They exchanged facts. Secretly he rather liked her. On the other hand, his periodical visits to The Grange had never been anticipated by any thrill of delight. As Daphne had once said, how could one enjoy going to a house where even the old servants welcomed you with the disapproving cold eyes of fish?

And now the old Rich Aunt, Fanny Wavering, was dead, and her body was transported from Daphne's morgue to the church, and from church to the Family Mausoleum. There were not many mourners. In the first carriage sat Theophilus and Evelina and Daphne. In the second, the doctor, the lawyer, and Miss Wilkin, Miss Fanny Wavering's companion, who had endured thirty years of bitter service. A sprinkling of acquaintances in the neighbourhood turned up in the church, out of some vague notion of respect for the memory of Miss Wavering of The Grange, which was not a mere home but a great estate of many acres. It was a melancholy November day of raw damp and hopelessness. The vicar's voice suggesting the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to Eternal Life fell flat. It comforted nobody. Miss Wavering seemed to have lived quite long enough.

The due observances accomplished, the occupants of the two carriages, with the exception of the doctor, returned to The Grange. The old servants had set out a conventional luncheon of cold food. The house was warm. A great fire blazed in the wainscoted and maroon-papered dining-room and threw decorous gleams on the dingy gilt frames of black oil portraits of forbidding and happily departed Waverings. For all their cold lack of enthusiasm, the old servants had not been trained to miserliness. On her own creature comforts, such as warmth, soft beds, rich food and good wines, Miss Wavering spent unregarded money. To share these with her, any guest was welcome. At the suggestion of luxuries outside her own horizon of comfort, her imagination boggled. . . . "Bath-rooms! Curse the fellow!" she had once trumpeted, referring to her favourite, Luke, who had insinuated the desirability of installation of such adjuncts. "I've never had a bath-room, and never had the need of one. If he can't wash himself in the bath-tub put out for him every morning, like his father before him, he can stay away." So that her nightly peace should not be disturbed, she enjoined that all lights should be out in bedrooms by eleven o'clock. The butler went his solemn rounds like a gaoler. Also, if men wanted to smoke, they could go up into a bleak tower-room furnished, through Luke's bribery of the butler, with odds and ends of dilapidated furniture disinterred from an attic.

A couple of years before, Daphne, alone in the morning-room and greatly daring, lit a cigarette. She sat on the fender-seat enjoying her audacity when the door opened and Aunt Fanny appeared on the threshold. Defiant, she

continued to puff, her long holder accentuating the monstrosity of the act. The old lady, lean and vigorous, though gasping with indignation, sped towards her, plucked the offence from her lips, threw holder and cigarette into the fire, and smacked her soundly on both cheeks. Daphne, furious, rushed in search of her father, whom she found, cigar in mouth, leaning over a pigsty.

“Serves you damn well right,” said he. “Carry on here,” and he handed her his cigarette case.

Sitting at the repast of funeral baked meats—an excellent cold luncheon—Daphne was anything but defiant. She had lived for many months in the lifeless house, grateful for the seclusion provided by such entombment. Since that day of ghastliness when she had heard the words of condemnation fall coldly from the judge’s lips, she had scarcely regarded herself as a being actuated by any personal desires. At first she flamed with the sense of hideous injustice against which there must be an appeal. But she spent her spirit on impregnable reefs.

“My dear—it breaks my heart to say so,” said the eminent advocate who defended Wavering, “but there are no technical grounds for appeal.”

No old evidence had become discredited, no new evidence could be brought forward, no claim lay against the judge for misdirection of the jury; could partiality be detected in the summing up, it was rather on the side of Wavering. Daphne drooped, withered by the icy logic of a world gone mad. Of her father’s innocence she had no doubt. Aunt Fanny, not inhuman, held her peace, so that the subject was never mentioned, and, as the castaway was too forlorn to stray beyond household regulations, she treated her with such kindness as did not interfere with her own well-being.

A month or so before, however, the sap of youth had begun to revive in her veins, and Daphne emerged from her torpor. She informed Miss Wilkin, the companion, one day, of an uncontrollable desire to seize the soup-tureen from the sideboard, shoot the contents about the room and plant it like a Mambrino’s helmet over Smithson, the butler’s, head. To Miss Wilkin’s dismay she underwent the cure of hysterical laughter. The death of her aunt checked possible folly.

She sat demure and anxious at the luncheon-table, patiently aware of the arid conversation. Evelina, without any emotional display of taking the distracted girl to her heart, had, nevertheless, not ungraciously conveyed to her forgetfulness of past differences, and had gone so far as to offer her shelter in the house in Blackheath, should the atmosphere of The Grange prove too inclement. They had met on only two or three occasions; but the feud was at an

end. Up to now, however, they had not much to say to each other. The talk hovered languidly over trade depression, the taxation of land values and the unexploited potentialities of Australia, whither Mr. Widdington (of Widdington, Son & Widdington, Lincoln's Inn Fields) had journeyed two or three years before. Smithson (obese butler) and Emily (gaunt and grizzled parlour-maid) went through their impeccable service like fish-eyed automata. It was only long afterwards that Daphne found it in her to sketch the scene:

“Corpse of hen, madam, or dead duck?”

“Deadly nightshade, sir, or strychnine and soda?”

It was not a merry meal. The only incident that broke the monotony occurred at dessert, when Miss Wilkin, helping herself to a banana, burst into tears.

“She was so fond of them,” she wailed.

She dabbed her eyes and her little peaky red nose grew redder. Overcome with emotion, she rose. Theophilus sprang to the door. Evelina, after a blank gaze, turned to continue her talk with the lawyer. When Theophilus returned to his place next to Daphne, she whispered with a sudden gleam in her eyes:

“Can't you hear Aunt Fanny, at the other end of the table?—‘Don't be a fool, Wilkin!’ ”

She had caught the old lady's rasping intonation so perfectly that Theophilus laughed.

“Poor Wilkin!” said he.

A fat old sexless cat, lying on its lifelong cushion in front of the fire, stretched out its legs, rose to an arch and surveyed the company with a speculative stare.

“There's something wrong with the world,” it said. “What is it?” It blinked wisely. “I think I know. I've warmed my back too long; now I must give my belly a chance.”

Whereupon it curled itself round again in luxurious suppleness.

Daphne's was the interpretation of the egotistic animal's manoeuvre.

“Funny, isn't it?” she said in Theophilus's ear. “Poppy—what a name for a tabby cat!—was the only thing she really loved. She sat up all night with him a month ago when he had eaten some filthy stuff outside that nearly poisoned him, and kept the whole house awake bringing fomentations and so on—and he doesn't care a hang. And there's poor Wilkin, whom she used to treat like a black-beetle, crying her silly eyes out. . . . I wonder what I ought to do?”

The question was beyond the philosophy of Theophilus. Within himself he had just been appreciating the nice decorum of the girl's demeanour.

“She showed you a good deal of kindness,” said he.

“That’s the devil of it,” cried Daphne, in a higher tone.

“That’s the devil of what?” asked Evelina, turning from her neighbour.

“Everything,” said Daphne.

Smithson came round with the port, and filled the men’s glasses, the ladies declining, and set the decanter on the table.

“Shall I serve coffee here or in the drawing-room, miss?”

Mr. Widdington consulted his watch. He must catch the three-twenty to London. Meanwhile, if he could have a few minutes’ talk with Mr. Bird. . . ? He half rose, and solved the butler’s question. Evelina and Daphne went to coffee in the drawing-room. While he attended the ladies to the door, Theophilus admired him for dismissing Evelina with such urbane courtesy.

“This,” said Mr. Widdington, raising his glass after a smell and a sniff, “is some of Miss Wavering’s famous Taylor 1870, laid down by her father, and only opened by her on great occasions. I hope you appreciate Smithson’s psychological motives in giving it to us to-day. His mistress would have wished, on the Greatest Occasion of all . . . you see?” He sipped again. “A perfect bottle. Possibly the good old man sacrificed one, if not two, which were not so perfect. . . . I’m glad to say that Smithson will have no reason to be dissatisfied with the old lady’s will.”

“Oh, yes—the will,” said Theophilus, to whom Venerable Port was just port wine. “I suppose that was what you want to talk to me about.”

He was not greatly interested. Apart from a Puckish delight, queerly dissonant from his general asceticism of thought and habit, in concealing from Evelina his Luke-gotten little fortune, he cared little for money.

“Just so,” said the lawyer “You and I are joint executors and trustees.”

“I presume,” said Theophilus, honestly taking the aunt’s disposition for granted, “that the will is in favour of our—our unfortunate cousin, Luke Wavering?”

The lawyer threw up deprecatory hands.

“That’s where you’re wrong. That’s why I wanted to have this little talk with you. . . . It’ll be a shock for Daphne—Miss Wavering now. . . .”

“What do you mean?”

“I did my best to dissuade her from altering her former will,” said Widdington—he was a man of fifty, stout and hearty—“and to be frank, I was acting against your interests—but she was a woman of iron. Listen to the preamble.”

He drew the will from his breast-pocket and read.

In terms of common speech, Miss Fanny Wavering revoked all former wills whereby she had made Luke Wavering heir, in consequence of the misery into which he had callously plunged thousands of homes and the disgrace with which he had stained the name of an honourable family, and started afresh on a new disposition of her wealth.

“I think it’s damnable,” cried Theophilus. “Luke was more sinned against than sinning.”

“No one more than I appreciates your point of view, Mr. Bird. Perhaps I had better read on.” He tapped the document.

Item succeeded item; minor though substantial legacies to servants; a provision for the amorphous cat during its lifetime; a sum of money to the Medical Research Society against the anti-everything obscurantism of scientific progress—there was a long list of them. “A hard, clear-headed woman, you must admit,” said the lawyer. “A life income of five hundred a year, free of income tax, to her niece, Daphne Wavering. . . .”

“I’m glad to hear that, at any rate,” said Theophilus.

Mr. Widdington took another sip of port.

“And now comes the most delicate part of all from your point of view. You, my dear sir, are personally the residuary legatee. It’s a large fortune. Over half a million. Read for yourself.”

Mr. Widdington handed him the will, took off his glasses, and drank port. That which Theophilus read made him one of the most worried husbands on earth. Evelina’s name was only mentioned casually—“Theophilus Bird, husband of my niece, Evelina.”

“But why? Good God!” cried Theophilus.

“Again I must speak frankly. I know it’s a delicate position all round. We’ve been the family lawyers for over fifty years. I pleaded naturally for the family. Forgive me—but I hadn’t the pleasure of knowing you. I said this, that and the other. Six months ago. As I said just now, Miss Wavering wouldn’t budge an inch.”

“But why should I inherit and not my wife?”

“Mrs. Bird,” replied the comfortable lawyer, “is a public character. Miss Wavering—let us put it this way—had old-fashioned ideas, and didn’t approve of women being public characters. . . . Besides, if you’ll allow me to say so, I didn’t gather that Mrs. Bird and Miss Wavering were in very great personal sympathy.”

“That I can possibly understand,” said Theophilus. “But why me?”

He tapped his chest with his finger-tips—an unusual gesture for Theophilus, the Official. The other sketched a shrug and pointed to his glass.

“This,” said he, with an air of mellow comfort, “is comprehensible, in spite of its mystery. But women, my dear fellow”—perhaps the genial transition from the formal “sir” to cordial “fellow” was due to the glow of God’s gift in the wine—“I’ve nothing to say against them, of course. I’ve been married twice, and I have seven daughters. What I don’t know about women oughtn’t to be knowledge. But I’m as ignorant of the workings of their minds as any innocent lamb of sixteen. . . . You happened to be *persona grata*, indeed *gratissima*, to Miss Wavering, and so she has left you her money. That’s all there is to it. . . . It’s the Unforgivable Sin to leave this decanter.”

“I’m somewhat dazed,” Theophilus confessed. “You say that I, personally, come into all this”—he waved a vague hand—“and half a million of money. The position is, to say the least of it, difficult. There’s Daphne and there’s my wife.”

“We had better get it over,” said Mr. Widdington.

They found the three ladies mutually remote black figures in the great, unwelcoming drawing-room. Theophilus went up to his wife.

“I think, my dear, I must have a word with you.”

She accompanied him outside into the hall. When she saw him mop his face nervously with his handkerchief on that chill November afternoon, she knitted her brows in perplexity. He answered her mute question.

“I’ve seen the will. Luke’s disinherited.”

A nervous laugh acknowledged the shock of surprise.

“Serve him right. The old woman had some sense. Daphne gets it, I suppose, which after all comes to much the same thing.”

“She doesn’t. She’s provided for, of course. . . . Five hundred a year. . . .”

Her eyes caught the handkerchief in his nervous hand.

“Then?” she said, with a little gasp.

“The estate comes to us.”

“Good God!” cried Evelina. “I never dreamed of such a thing.”

She was staggered for the moment. All that she had expected was some trifling legacy, on the possible amount of which she had been too proud and indifferent to speculate. She had regarded the grim Aunt Fanny as a reactionary, a stuffed brain of the past, the incarnation of all in Victorianism that is anathema to modern woman. And she knew that Aunt Fanny loathed the sight and the sound of her. . . .

“One never knows,” she said lamely, answering her own thoughts. “I suppose it’s a lot of money?”

“Round about half a million.”

Evelina steadied herself against an ebony negro holding up a hall lamp.

“I never thought she was as rich as all that.”

“It’s great wealth, isn’t it?” said Theophilus.

“Somewhat overwhelming,” she admitted.

Silence followed. Theophilus went over to the fire beneath the great stone chimney-piece, for the high hall with its staircase and balcony and domed roof was draughty and bleak.

“I’m worried about Daphne,” said he, without looking round.

“Daphne? . . . Daphne’s all right. She has nothing to complain of.”

He turned round and fronted her.

“Don’t you see, the fact of Luke being cut out is an added disgrace to the poor child?”

She came to him and laid her hand on his sleeve. “My dear Theophilus, don’t be sentimental.”

“Still. . . .”

“Anybody with a grain of sense will see that no woman in common decency could leave all this money to a convicted swindler. Besides, my dear—I’m sorry—but, after all, isn’t this really my business rather than yours? I think we’d better go in and hear what Mr. Widdington has to say.”

She crossed the hall, flung open the drawing-room door, Theophilus following her, embarrassed by the still impending explanation. They came upon Daphne standing wet-eyed and defiant before a perplexed lawyer. On seeing them she sped forward, her hand clenched, her eyes burning.

“You’ve heard of this iniquitous will? . . .”

Said Evelina, conciliatory: “My dear, there’s no iniquity in people disposing as they like of their own property.”

“Who cares for property?” cried Daphne, tragic. “Do you imagine I’m thinking of the money? I hate it, I loathe it. I won’t touch a penny of it. It’s the insult to my father.” Her voice shook. “When he was prosperous, she was all over him. She worried him to death about her financial affairs. She made hundreds of thousands out of his advice. She used to declare to his face that that beastly cat and he were the only things she loved in the world. And now he’s down and out, she has no use for him. Let him rot. What does she care? Oh, my God!”

She held her head high and stalked about the room, as though defying them all to suspect that she was on the verge of breakdown. Theophilus went up to her.

“Of course I admit that the will was cruel. . . .”

Daphne turned on him. “Cruel! It was the work of an old devil. In that beastly thing there”—she pointed to the blue corner of the document protruding from the breast-pocket of Mr. Widdington’s black coat—“she has condemned him twice over. She followed the horrible people who said he was guilty. If I had dreamed that she had cast him out like this I wouldn’t have remained another minute in this damned house. . . . We never spoke of it. . . . She was old and self-centred, and I was proud . . . but I never imagined. . . .”

Evelina interrupted. “My dear child, do listen to me for a minute. We can’t help what people think.” Daphne regarded her with momentary scornful tolerance, her young bosom heaving. “After all, Aunt Fanny has treated you very kindly. From what you’ve told me yourself, she played the part of a great lady and all these months scrupulously avoided hurting your feelings, in spite of her own opinion as to the rights and wrongs of things. And she has made ample provision for you.”

“She can keep it and give it to the worms to play with. I won’t have it.”

“It’s quite natural for you to be upset,” said Evelina, advancing a conciliatory hand which Daphne shook off her arm, “but we can’t settle all these important matters off-hand, in a few moments of stress and excitement. . . . Surely, my dear”—her voice and manner and intention were of the kindest—“all of this is a family affair. We can meet later and come to some arrangement. God knows I don’t want all the money. . . .”

The girl, at breaking point, laughed ungenerously.

“You haven’t got it. She didn’t leave you a penny. It all belongs to Theophilus.”

Evelina turned to Theophilus with a voice nervously shrill: “What’s that?”

The lawyer intervened, perplexedly genial—for here were the materials for a first-class family upheaval. He wouldn’t for a moment suggest that the late Miss Wavering was not capable of making a will; she was more than capable; but with advancing years her characteristic eccentricity had certainly developed. Recent untoward circumstances had not been without their effect on the testator, and she had insisted on making a fresh will while under the first painful impressions. In making Mr. Bird residuary legatee, her intention, as he could vouch professionally, was a legacy common to them both . . . and so on and so forth.

Evelina, a little red spot burning in her sallow cheeks, stood silent and

dignified during the good man's harangue, while Theophilus maintained the apologetic air of the official bound against his will by departmental rules of procedure. Daphne had turned away and, staring out of the long window at the dripping yews on the lawn, was silhouetted black and slender against the light. Miss Wilkin, forgotten, sat in a far corner still dabbing her eyes and wondering how she could bear the terrifying independence assured her by her legacy of one hundred and fifty pounds a year free of income tax.

The sprawling clock on the mantelpiece, incongruously embraced by adipose Cupids, struck three. Mr. Widdington started. His three-twenty train! He must fly. He made hasty adieux.

"Dear Miss Daphne," said he, going to the girl by the window, "I'm sure you'll think better of it."

"I'll think worse and worse of it every hour and every day," said Daphne.

He said in a half-whisper:

"Look on me, my dear, as a human being, a friend, and not as a stuffy lawyer, and come and see me when you feel like it. I've got girls of my own—of your age. Just make believe to be one of them."

Daphne, emotional, responsive, surrendered to the kindly man. No true lover of God's great gifts, sunshine and wine and good oil for salad, can be other than a kindly man. She met smiling, rather tired elderly blue eyes. The tears started.

"I rather need a friend——"

"Then that's all right. And my first word as a friend is to tell you to crucify your pride for your father's sake and keep the legacy. He may have bitter need of it."

He wrung her hand and turned away brusquely.

Theophilus accompanied him to the waiting car.

"Whew!" said Widdington "Thank God you're not one who combines the functions of family lawyer and family friend. I've had a rotten day." He drove off. Theophilus returned to the drawing-room from which Miss Wilkin had slid silently, never more to be heard of there, into fairy realms of her own. The day before she had confided to Daphne her never-to-be-realized dream of joining an elderly cousin in a small villa on the outskirts of Swansea where she was born.

Daphne marched up to Theophilus as he entered and held out her hand.

"Mr. Widdington has convinced me that common-sense is the only quality that separates woman from the beasts that perish. I accept the situation. As executor you needn't worry."

“I’m immensely relieved to hear you say so.”

“And I, too, Daphne,” said Evelina. “It’s foolish to fly in the face of Providence.”

“Quite so,” said Daphne.

She hesitated between them like a dark flower on a tall stem, bent by the wind, swaying, as it were, towards Theophilus. She smiled wanly.

“I think I’ll go now and have a rest.”

“I’m sure you need it,” said Evelina kindly.

“Yes. It has been a bit trying, hasn’t it?”

“Tea about five?”

“Yes—thanks so much—about five.”

Theophilus accompanied her to the door. It was a long walk from the fireplace where they stood, at the far end of the stately yet lifeless and hideous museum of a drawing-room. She swung him suddenly into the hall, out of sight and hearing of Evelina, and raised a tense face, and clutched him by both shoulders.

“Luke’s out of it, I know. I’m nearly mad, but I can understand. If she had left things to stray cats or Evelina, I’d have gone out and drowned myself. I’m glad you’ve got the money. Stick to it. Don’t let her have a bean. Have a hell of a time with it.”

She broke down, and he could do nothing but catch her sobbing in his arms.

“There, there, my dear,” he said, impotently patting her back.

She released herself suddenly, and rushed to the foot of the hall stairs. She turned.

“You’re the dearest fool in the world, but for God’s sake have a hell of a time with it.”

She flitted upwards, a black shadow in the twilight.

Once again Theophilus entered the drawing-room. Evelina confronted him, dark, unemotional, intellectual.

“Poor child, I’m very sorry for her.”

“So am I,” said Theophilus.

There was a silence during which tricky Fate wove an imperceptible curtain between them. They talked, and the voice of each seemed absurdly remote in the ears of the other.

“There’s not much to discuss, my dear,” said Theophilus, “but don’t you

think that an hour's sizing up things independently would be for the best? . . . Supposing I went for a little walk—the fresh air, you know?”

Evelina agreed. Wisdom counselled an hour's quiet reflection. Having a splitting headache, she professed gratitude for his tactfulness. Any other man would have distracted her with argument. She dismissed him with the reminder that Smithson had ordained tea for five o'clock.

At five o'clock, Theophilus, official automaton, presented himself in the drawing-room, where the massive silver and dainty Worcester tea-service, with adjuncts of sandwiches and scones and buns and cakes, were formally displayed.

“I've had a good walk,” said Theophilus, “but I almost lost my way in the woods.” He sank into a chair. “Yes, I would like a cup of tea.”

She, officiating priestess, seized the handle of the tea-pot, and turned to Smithson who had entered, chief hierophant.

“Will you call Miss Daphne?”

The elderly, roseate, perfect butler stared at her in reproachful astonishment.

“Miss Daphne? But, madam, it never occurred to me that you didn't know. Miss Daphne took the four-thirty train to London with all her luggage. She said it was all arranged, and you were resting and not to be disturbed.”

When he retired, with the air of the perfect butler, the two stared at each other. Then, after a few moments, Evelina poured out tea.

“The ungrateful little hussy,” she said.

## CHAPTER V

**A**CCORDING to a very wise philosopher, money is any old thing you choose, or circumstances allow you, to make of it. It's as idiotic to call it a curse as to regard it as an unmitigated blessing. In any hands, whether strong or palsied, virtuous or vicious, it certainly means power. It dawned gradually on the upright Theophilus that it meant power over Evelina.

Suddenness of impulse or thought was not one of his characteristics. He had ever walked in dull wariness. His opinions, tastes and habits had been beaten out by the patient hammering of years. Thus, this lightning change of fortune did not immediately transform him—to use an extravagant figure of speech—from grub to butterfly. He had already undergone a preparatory process of development during the acquisition of his secret fortune. He had hugged himself as a happy miser. The hoard had become a subtly delicious expression of his own personality. The sober contemplation of it gave him the vague feeling that thus he could sport in the sunshine not overshadowed by Evelina. The idea of sporting was an essentially subjective conception in the mind of the unimaginative man. That he might sport with some Amaryllis in the shade never entered his head.

The damp twilight prowl around the grounds of The Grange led only to an accelerated continuance of his joy in acquisitiveness. He realized that this estate with its four-square Early Georgian house and its many acres of meadow and pasture farm-lands and tenements and messuages, as described in the romantic legal phraseology of the will, was his very own. He could turn it into a race-course or a Garden City, or set fire to it, and there would be no one to say him nay; not even Evelina. He glowed in the pride of possession, so that he lost his way in the dark of a little copse beyond the greenhouses.

They returned to Blackheath in time for late dinner, the car (his car) taking them to Moorstead railway station. Over the usual uninspiring meal they continued their mild discussion of the new condition of affairs. Evelina, having enunciated the proposition that Aunt Fanny had every right to dispose of her property in her own way, could not logically declare a personal grievance. Pride also forbade any sign of the querulous. She prided herself on her dignity. Besides, what did it matter? Man and wife were one: two minds with but a single thought, that thought being hers. Her trust in Theophilus was infinite.

“You'll have to consider what to do with The Grange. It's rather a white elephant. You could easily let it furnished. Rich Americans are always looking about for such places . . . characteristic old English homes.”

Theophilus smiled. “Don’t you think it’s perhaps too characteristic? Not a bath-room in the place . . .”

“That’s true,” said Evelina thoughtfully.

In spite of her disregard of luxurious living, she had been born into a modern world of essential plumbing. Even in their house in the Byfield Road there was a bath-room, somewhat dingy, and the hot water supply dependent on the humours of the cook and the kitchen fire. But, at any rate, a bath-room. She had agreed with Luke and Daphne in their condemnation of the barbarous survival at The Grange of the bedroom bath-tub.

“We can easily put some in,” she added brightly.

“No difficulty at all. I know an architect at the club—Bindon. He builds hotels. Just the man.” He stared into the unfathomable distance. “I should like,” said he, “a great big bath-room to myself. I’ve always wanted it. One big enough to do my physical exercises in comfortably. In ours, for instance, I’m always barking my knuckles and shins against sharp edges.”

“But as you’re not going to live there,” she smiled good-humouredly, “I don’t see the point of it. I don’t know how you feel,” she said after a while, “but, personally, I don’t see why we should change our mode of life merely because we’ve come into a great deal of money. Our interests continue to be the same.”

“You wouldn’t contemplate living at The Grange?” he asked tentatively.

She started. “Good heavens, no! An enormous house with a regiment of servants! What should we do there? It would take me all day to get to Greenwich and back.”

Theophilus supposed it would. He reflected that his wife was a strong woman whom no temptations of Fortune would move from the path which she had chosen to travel. Had she control of the money, God knows what plans she would have made for the Advancement of Human Welfare. He was willing, of course, to aid her, within reason. If she found a seat in Parliament, her great ambition, she would have no cause for complaint. But her suggestion of the continuance of their present mode of life did not awaken enthusiastic response. He looked around the dingy, cramped room and contrasted it with *his* dining-room, airy, spacious, majestic, where a man could breathe. He thought, too, of the library of The Grange which he could fill with all the books he had ever craved to possess, and in its turn contrasted it with his own little shabby den, and its crowded inadequate book-space. And he thought of the bath-room at Chesham Towers whither, when he was official private secretary to the Minister of the day, he had once been invited for a week-end. He could have played squash rackets in it, or run a Marathon race. . . . He became conscious

of a wild desire to live in *his* house.

The casual talk of husband and wife wandered from the immediate subject of residence. There were many cognate topics, new and exciting, old and reimbued with vital interest. Aunt Fanny and her eccentricities; Daphne and her future; a telephone call had established the fact of her present safety with Mona Daventry. "The sort of woman she would go to," said Evelina. Then there was the eternal tragedy of Luke.

"This will be a crushing blow to him," said Theophilus.

"He deserves what he's got. Look at the thousands he has ruined. I refuse to be sentimental."

"He has done you no great harm, at any rate," said Theophilus.

She assented grudgingly, for it was true. She remained, unchallenged, an influential member of the Greenwich Borough Council, and the prospective party candidate for the Midland constituency which she had contested at the last General Election. But, all the same, the family disgrace weighed heavily on her soul.

For the first time, perhaps, in his decently ordered life, Theophilus spent a sleepless night, for which Daphne was more or less responsible. Every time he tried to concentrate his mind on the Higher Drama, or Bradley, whose philosophical work he had just discovered, or the Factory Acts which claimed the morrow's attention, there rose before him the picture of a girl with supple figure and eager face, and her words rang insistently in his ears: "Have a hell of a time with it."

What she meant he could not exactly fathom, but the ordinance suggested disturbing possibilities. Men of wealth having a hell of a time squandered their money on race-horses and on dancing-halls and on yachts in which they took strange goddesses to exotic lands. Attired in immaculate, diamond-studded, camellia-adorned evening dress, they drank champagne all night long. They ran unimaginable riot at Monte Carlo. They belonged to that social over-world which Evelina and he, knowing little about it, hated and scorned as the lowest under-world of culture. Gradually Daphne's ordinance stimulated his imagination to a nightmare of wondrous potentialities. First and foremost there was Freedom, which signified the Liberty of Life, the sanction to go about the world without caring a damn for anybody. His unprecedented waking dreams danced him through realms of fantastic romance. Pictures rose before him of a yacht with white bellying sails; a Reckitt's blue sea; a shore with a fringe of snowy foam curdling on an island's golden sand; palms, dusky shapes of hibiscus-garlanded girls; the presence by his side of something languorous, seductive, in vague female guise. . . . A gaming-table on which in reckless

excitement he threw gold and more gold, while bands played maddening music and the froth bubbled out of gold-necked bottles. . . . He beheld himself, free and unshackled, once intellectually forbidden and austere despired, libertine, master of all the delights of the Earth. He started up in bed, suddenly horror-stricken. For the first time in his life he seemed to have a glimpse of himself that wasn't himself. What did his excited fancy mean? Had he secretly, subconsciously, hankered after these voluptuous things throughout his past decorous years? Was it the case of a luxury-complex? Hitherto he had shrunk from the indecent nakedness of Freudism. What did it mean? He rose in the black middle of the night and groped for a glass of water, and went to bed again, only once more to toss about in despair and wakefulness, and to hear the girl's voice clear and insistent: "Have a hell of a time with it."

Towards morning, however, he passed from nightmare into the cold region of Thought. He went down to breakfast tired, ashamed, yet determined. A cool Evelina poured out his Mocha Paste coffee and diluted it with cold milk. As he tasted it, he reflected that at The Grange on the previous morning the milk had been hot and the coffee fragrant. From the breakfast dish he helped himself to a kipper, skinny and over-dried. He remembered the luscious kidneys on the sideboard of the house that was *his*. He endured the meal uncomplainingly while Evelina read the copy of "The Times" which he, in his turn, would read in the railway carriage. It was a morning of pouring rain.

He looked at his watch.

"Has Florence rung up a taxi?"

"My dear, I'm so sorry . . . I never told her."

She pressed the electric button on the table. The maid, somewhat slatternly in print dress, appeared.

"Why haven't you got a taxi for your master?"

Theophilus stopped argument. No taxi would enable him to catch his train. A private car, ordered from the Formosa Garage, would take him to the office in time. Evelina laughed.

"Of course, you can afford it now."

"It seems odd," said Theophilus, "but we've a car of our own at Moorstead. I'll have it sent up to town to-day."

Evelina passed her hand over her eyes.

"I suppose we have," she said helplessly. "Everything seems so complicated since yesterday."

Twenty minutes later, the hireling car drew up before the gate. Florence announced its arrival. He took leave of Evelina, and broke precedent by

forgetting "The Times."

At the door he turned.

"By the way, my dear, I gave the matter much thought last night, and I've decided to live at The Grange as soon as possible."

Thus came to an astounded lady the first revelation of her husband as a Man of Character. She was filled with gasping and helpless resentment. The night before she had given him a cogent reason for continuing to live in Blackheath. How could she possibly carry on her work at Greenwich from Head Quarters in West Herts? And now Theophilus, in an incisive sentence, had scrapped Greenwich as of no account. It was amazing. It was as though the family cat (had she possessed one) should get upon its hind legs and help itself to a whisky and soda, and autocratically bid her fetch it a cigar.

She, too, had lain awake much of that night, and her thoughts had turned now and then to her own ambitions. Very little would turn the vote of Maresfield, her nursed constituency, in her favour. The Infirmary badly needed a new wing. If she headed a subscription list, say with £20,000, the grateful town would surely send their benefactress to represent it in Parliament. But now she was beset by horrid doubt of Theophilus's complacency. Heaven knew what the suddenly developed Man of Character would choose to do with his money. It was his money. She had no legal right to dispose of a penny of it. The thought galled. She almost hated Theophilus as an interloper between herself and the Wavering fortune, her natural and lawful inheritance. She wondered whether she had ever understood the wooden, unemotional man that was her husband. Beyond the workings of a formal intellect which she respected, what went on, otherwise, in his brain?

She faced a day of pelting worry, wherein she was brought up against the *lachrimæ rerum*, the Tearful Dismalness of Human Things. Soot fell down the neglected dining-room chimney, so that the room became a greasy horror of smut. The summoned sweep, having washed himself for the afternoon and settled down to tobacco and beer, and the construction of a rabbit-hutch for his children, arrived with the air of a man peculiarly aggrieved, and treated her with studied impoliteness. He proclaimed justification in having voted against her at the last election for the Greenwich Borough Council. Any woman of sense would have called him in a couple of months ago. It was hard to bear. Then, Florence, the parlour-maid, gave notice. She was going to get married to the beefy young man with whom she had been keeping company for some time past. The cook served up for her lunch a cold ragged mutton bone. Evelina professed a lofty disregard of food; but, after all, she didn't like it to smell of mice. To drive the fainting lady to distraction, a leading bore from Maresfield called on behalf of the local Temperance Society, and summoned her to

declare her support of Prohibition in her next address to the constituency. As she was devoting the catastrophic day to the drafting of the speech in question, she was at much pains to disguise her ill-humour. The dreadful man stayed for tea, wolfed the meagre thin bread and butter and half a dozen dry fancy biscuits, and looked disappointedly around for cake. Accustomed to boiled fish, or bloaters, or, at least, shrimps as a relish to his tea, he departed, a declared enemy to the tactless lady.

Lastly there came a telephone message from Theophilus that he was detained, and would not be home for dinner. Evelina went early to bed with a cup of Bovril, the “Hibbert Journal” and a headache.

Now Theophilus, kindly and over-wrought soul, thought much during the busy official day of Daphne who had so greatly influenced his waking dreams. She stood out a tragic figure. As the newly constituted Head of the Family, it was his duty to concern himself with her material welfare. He must consult Widdington and see what could be done. Meanwhile, he was aware of a curious longing to meet her and to convince himself that, for the present at least, she was in a quiet harbour of refuge. This insistent desire, and the hired car which he had kept all day, swept him towards evening through the murky and traffic-blocked thoroughfares to Mona Daventry’s flat in Albert Hall Mansions.

A dainty drawing-room, a leaping fire, the fragrance of tea and cigarettes, and two fair women welcomed him.

“I knew you would come. I felt it. I told Mona, didn’t I?”

So Daphne, brightly triumphant. Theophilus, confused, asked why.

“I just knew it. That’s all. You wouldn’t be you if you hadn’t.” She paused for a laugh. “To your academic mind that must sound rotten English. But it’s true.”

“It’s perfect and—and—delightful English,” said Theophilus. “Of course the proposition is not self-evident.”

Mrs. Daventry rang for fresh tea. He held up protesting hands. He had had tea at the office. He had only run in for a minute to get news of Daphne.

“A cocktail, then?”

“Not alone. . . .”

“Oh, I’ll join you.”

The maid appeared. Cocktails were ordered. Theophilus glowed in the warmth and the cosiness and the unaccustomed sense of feminine

environment. Mona Daventry was pretty and pleasant. She had a soft voice and a sympathetic intelligence. Daphne talked, as ever, in flashes. Time wore on. Presently Mrs. Daventry left them on some domestic pretext. Theophilus, standing with his back to the fire, looked down on Daphne in the long, low chair. She had shed the mourning of the day before, and in an old, short-skirted, deep red frock, beneath which shapely legs were crossed, she appeared singularly vivid in the man's eyes.

"My dear Daphne," said he, "there's something I want to say to you."

She sprang to her feet and put her hands on his shoulders as swiftly but not so wildly as she had done the day before.

"You're going to talk family business. I see it in your eye. If you do, I go straight out of the room."

He smiled and touched her hand for a second.

"In that case," said he, "I'll communicate with you through my solicitors."

"You can communicate with me through the Lord Chancellor if you like, and I'll turn him down."

"But you don't know the nature of the communication."

"Yes, I do. You're a transparent glass man, electrically lit inside. Evelina said something about a family arrangement. I lost my temper. I was abominably rude and brutal. You must forgive me. I recognize all Evelina's good qualities. What she said she meant kindly and generously. But whenever we meet we clash. It's my fault. I can't help it. Well, as I was saying about Evelina . . . you've come on the same errand—in your own way. Isn't it true?"

"Why, of course," said Theophilus. "I have everything and you have nothing. It's grossly unfair. Besides, I couldn't bear to have you hate me as a usurper."

She protested. They argued a while.

"You must consider my feelings as a decent man," said he.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, passing an impatient hand across her face, "we've come to the discussion that I said we wouldn't have. If you were anybody else but Theophilus Bird, I'd stamp my foot and swear I wouldn't touch a penny of your beastly money, and plant you there, and go out and never see you again. As it is, I've told you I'm glad you've got the money. I don't talk through my hat, even when I'm half crazy. But I'm not going to listen to any proposition you may have in mind. It's silly nonsense to talk about being a usurper."

"But, my dear Daphne," exclaimed Theophilus, with the one unaccountable burst of emotion he had experienced in his life, "I'd give the heart out of my body to be of service to you."

“You would?”

“I’ve said it.”

The man of scientific mind and official training, precise as to the exactness of the spoken word, instinctively resented the doubt implied in the question. He drew himself up, dignified. Raw-boned, falcon-nosed, clean-featured, he had a presence. So had Daphne, slim, erect in her young dark beauty. The mutual play of eyes was almost antagonistic. There was a silent moment of poignant suspense; a moment, to Theophilus, pregnant with unknown issues. What was in the girl’s mind he could not conjecture; yet, within the dark fastnesses of his soul, he was aware of a moment of destiny. On that moment depended the blotting out of Daphne from his life, or her continuance therein as a thing of grace and wonder, if not of vague and unformulated desire.

“You say you’d give your heart out of your body to do me a service,” she repeated.

He made a slight motion of assent.

“Then promise to give your hand in friendship to my father when he comes out of prison. That’s all—absolutely all. I’ll hear of nothing else.”

He realized, so subtle are the workings of the subconscious mind, that he had been expecting the challenge all the time, and that he had been prepared to yield. He held out his hand.

“I promise, my dear,” he said simply.

The tensivity of the spell was broken. She lapsed into the modern girl bravely facing disastrous circumstance. She flung herself into a chair, threw herself back, then leaned forward eagerly.

“I was sure you would. That’s all I care for or think about in the world. All his other friends, the people that used to come and stay with us and eat his dinners, have deserted him—melted away like dirty snow. Those money-people whom he had to associate with, how I used to loathe them! You’ve never felt like that—never wanted to take a comb and comb all money out of the men? Or—the women—well, to go behind them and take hold of their ropes of pearls and draw them tight and hear them say ‘couic’.” She laughed. “You’ve got an angelic mind. I haven’t. I’d like to see them all fry in their own fat. The girls are just as bad. I’m dropped. I’m a filthy disease. There’s only Mona—the dearest of dears—and now you——”

He had sunk into the opposite chair by the fire.

“A comparative dear, I hope,” said he, in an old-fashioned way.

“A positive dear.”

“Then that’s all right,” said he.

She handed him a cigarette box. They talked. What were her immediate plans? She declared her intention to find work. Mona, in her generosity, had offered her a home for an indefinite period. But Mona was a woman of the world with a large acquaintance, and, for all her great-heartedness, would soon feel the social encumbrance of a pariah in her house. Besides, a week's loving hospitality could be accepted in all honour—a very different thing from a year's charity, however kindly dispensed. Theophilus need have no fear. She spoke two or three languages. She could draw rather neatly. She had mastered the mysteries of the shorthand-typist so that, when Luke and herself had gone on jaunts abroad together, he had no need to cast about for a secretary to attend to his incessant correspondence.

“I'm worth my weight in coppers, at any rate.”

“I should say in Bank of England notes,” he said, with a smile.

She laughed, tickled by a sense of the incongruous. Theophilus and gallantry! He reminded her of an ancient admiral who used to make her pretty compliments when she was a child of fifteen. She remembered describing him to her father as a beloved old ass. Youth asserted itself.

“I'll go now as far as to say that you're more than a dear.”

The talk wandered into lighter airs. The entrance of Mrs. Daventry, who had changed into a semi-evening frock, caused Theophilus to spring up. He had been unconscious of the flight of time. He must go. Dinner awaited him at Blackheath. The hireling chauffeur of his hireling car must be sodden with rain and chill and misery.

“Why not send him off to get food and warmth, and stay and dine with us?” said Mrs. Daventry.

“Do,” said Daphne.

Theophilus struggled against conscience, duty, meek habit, and all sorts of conjugal complexities. He had never done such a thing before. On the other hand, Evelina had left him stranded a thousand times at a solitary meal without the pretence of compunction.

“A message to Mrs. Bird is a matter of a minute,” urged his hostess.

Theophilus hesitated, again confronting contrast—the indefinable charm of his surroundings, material and human, with the comfortless house and the ever courteously bleak Evelina.

“It's awfully kind of you,” he stammered, “but—er——”

“If there are lions in the path,” laughed Daphne, “they can all be shoo'd away down the telephone. I'll fix everything.”

She darted out. Theophilus stood helpless. He confessed with a queer little

twist of his lips:

“I’d really like to stay. Very much indeed.”

“It’d be a Christian act,” said Mona Daventry, with a touch of seriousness. “The child’s in the depths, up to her neck. You mustn’t be taken in by her manner. That’s her way—you know what she is, as well as I do. If she was drowning and came up for the last time, she’d have something brave and defiant to fling out. . . .”

Theophilus murmured: “I’m sure she would.”

“She’d keep her end up to the last. . . . I believe you and I are the only two people she trusts in the world, apart from her father. She thinks him a martyred saint. But for practical purposes he’s no good to her; in fact, worse than useless.”

“Does she ever see him?” he asked.

“No. From the first he made that definite. You can quite understand him, can’t you? The hideous prison, his clothes, the degradation of it all. . . . He won’t allow her to have the shock of it. The poor devil’s suffering the tortures of the damned. I know it. He may be this, that, or the other, but, at any rate, his life was wrapped up in Daphne, and hers in him. They might have been taken for lovers. . . . There was a lot of rotten gossip, of course. . . .”

“I never believed it,” said Theophilus.

“You were quite right. Whatever his amours were, he kept them secret. I’m not a silly ass of a woman to expect a man of Luke’s temperament to be a saintly celibate. Why on earth should he? All that, anyhow, is between himself and his God, and whatever little ladies there may have been. I say may have been—just to give the poor man a chance as a human being. . . .”

Theophilus smiled. “Your philosophy is wonderful, Mrs. Daventry.”

She threw out a hand. “I’m a woman of the world. Heaven knows I’ve had lessons enough. But listen. I’m only taking things—supposed things—at their very worst. What matters is that no one has ever been able to pin Luke down to any particular woman. And no woman has ever—even in shadow—come between Luke and Daphne since her mother died when she was three years old. As I’ve said, Luke may be all that he’s convicted for—how can you or I tell?—but his love for Daphne must be accounted to him for righteousness.”

Theophilus assented with a sigh. It was a miserable business altogether. He quite appreciated Luke’s attitude.

“And Daphne?”

“They’re too much in touch for her not to understand. But she suffers. . . . Do you know what she said to me? ‘It’s only for Luke’s sake that I accepted

the legacy flung at me by that horrid old woman.’ ”

“When I think of Daphne I go about feeling like a brute,” said Theophilus.

“Don’t worry,” she smiled reassuringly. “Daphne has no grudge against you. Quite the contrary. Whatever she has told you she means. She’s nothing if not splendidly blatant. . . . What she’d do if she fell in love, God knows. When that happens a woman gets all tied up in knots, and she doesn’t know how the devil to undo herself. That’s the whole secret, my dear man, of the Mystery of Woman which you all talk so much about. There’s nothing to it, really.”

“I wonder,” said Theophilus.

Mona Daventry had a pleasant laugh; also white teeth and quietly smiling eyes; also a quick intelligence. He began to detect a certain dull-wittedness in Evelina’s summary criticisms of this charming lady.

“Wonder as much as you like,” she cried gaily, “and go on wondering. We live by it. We’re the greatest frauds on earth. That is to say”—she made a pause so as to twist to the serious—“until sex comes along with all its clamours. But apart from that . . . what were we talking about? Daphne. Well, she’s untouched—as far as I know. Diana. And she’s the realest thing that ever lived.”

On these words Daphne came back, with the bland announcement that everything had been arranged. And thus it befell that Theophilus passed a singularly agreeable evening, while Evelina, his wife, drank Bovril and read the “Hibbert Journal” in bed.

It is remarkable that not one of the three women concerned thought of Theophilus as a selfish brute.

## CHAPTER VI

THE summer saw Theophilus lord, effectively of the Manor, and titularly of The Grange. Evelina had followed him thither in a state of bewildered meekness. He had told her in set, though courteous terms, that, should she choose to inhabit the Blackheath house, she was free to do so, but that he himself would live in Hertfordshire.

“It’s absurd to talk of separate establishments,” she had said.

“Naturally.”

“If we live at The Grange how can I get backwards and forwards to Greenwich?”

“Give up Greenwich.”

She gasped at the revolutionary suggestion.

“I can’t. I’ve promised John Roberts I wouldn’t. He’ll be Mayor next year, with Heaven knows what kind of a Bolshevik Council.”

“John Roberts is a very good fellow, my dear,” said Theophilus, “but I don’t see that I’m called upon to regulate my way of life to suit his convenience.”

In this and in many another similar talk, Theophilus stood before her a new and almost fantastic being. He could not be brought to understand that, as John Roberts’s right-hand colleague, she was of vital importance to the welfare of her borough. He didn’t seem to care a hang for the welfare of the borough. He would view its gradual decay and ultimate putrefaction with calm unconcern.

Meanwhile he reminded her that Maresfield, the Midland constituency, could be worked as easily from Moorstead as from Blackheath. So would be the London County Council on which she could easily find a seat. There was also the Hertfordshire County Council.

“After all, my dear,” said he one day, “although the formal zero meridian of the earth runs through Greenwich, it’s not the absolute hub of the universe.”

She was disquieted by a suspicion that Theophilus was trying to be funny.

Now and then she shifted her ground. How could a busy woman like herself accept the responsibility of the conduct of a big establishment?

“I’ve made inquiries,” said Theophilus, not confessing that his consultant had been Mona Daventry, “and I’ve learned that there are expert middle-class women whose business it is to run big establishments.”

At last she yielded to an immovable Theophilus. Greenwich was

abandoned. Her eyes were unprecedentedly moist when she parted from John Roberts, a stout man of expansive geniality.

“We’ve fought the good fight together for so long that it goes to my heart to withdraw.”

“You’ll carry it on, dear lady,” said he, “in those higher spheres which I can’t hope to enter.”

The Blackheath house was sold with most of its gimcrack furniture. A model housekeeper arisen, as far as Evelina’s knowledge was concerned, from God knows where, at a salary of Heaven knew what—it was Mona Daventry and Daphne who played the part of mysterious deities, and thereby had the time of their lives—had staffed The Grange and got it ready for the day appointed for their arrival. Daphne had given clear instructions.

“Mrs. Garraway, the servants you choose must all have the eyes of birds or dogs or gazelles. None of them must have the eyes of fish.”

When Evelina took up her life at The Grange, she marvelled at the smoothness of household affairs, and her respect for the new Theophilus waxed exceedingly. She lauded Mrs. Garraway as a very capable woman. Of course she had gone through the formality of interviewing Mrs. Garraway, who bore references from Great Families whom she had served. The meeting had taken place in a sanctum set apart for such purposes in that Cavern of Unrest, the famous Woman’s Club to which she belonged. Theophilus, at his worst, was a dry master of courtesy. He had arranged that Evelina should imagine that she was responsible for Mrs. Garraway’s engagement. She told the woman all about herself, and being thus assured that she had learned all about the woman, engaged her then and there.

For Theophilus it was a new and lovely life. The library of The Grange was a Paradise of book space. Furlongs of shelves stacked with dead lumber awaited a living population. Into the limbo of second-hand dealers he despatched cartloads of calf-bound Annual Registers, Gentleman’s Magazines, Agricultural Reports, mouldering three-volume novels of the ’fifties and ’sixties of the last century; gift-books of the same period—for there was a time when certain books were bought, not to be read but expressly to be given away; rows of the insensate works that improved Aunt Fanny’s girlhood; even seed catalogues thirty years old.

The sorting and re-stocking of the library afforded Theophilus the most glorious occupation of his life. He spent hours in ticking off items in booksellers’ catalogues, and crates of volumes were daily dumped at The

Grange. A bookish young bank clerk, with whom he had somehow got into touch, devoted his evenings to temporary employment as librarian. Evelina, too, greatly interested, had her say.

It had gradually occurred to Theophilus that, by remaining at the Home Office, he was blocking the all too slow promotion of his poorer juniors. He no longer needed his eight hundred a year and the modest pension to which he would be entitled between twenty and thirty years hence. The pang of resignation, which he felt acutely, was caused not only by severance of indurated habit, but by a fear of public duty evaded.

“If you’re dying to serve your country,” said Daphne, whom he saw now and then at rare intervals in London, “how much nobler to do it without remuneration or hope of reward. There are heaps of ways, if you only take the trouble to think. Fancy going down to posterity as *The Unknown Patriot*.”

Theophilus found perhaps more sense in her irony than in Evelina’s prosaic advice to carry on his official career as though nothing had happened to affect his fortunes. Evelina fell between the two stools of the masculine intellect on which she prided herself, and the feminine instinct inseparable from her sex-consciousness. She lacked subtlety. His awakening intelligence in such matters divined her motives. Theophilus engaged in official work from nine to seven (travelling time included) would be Theophilus kept tame by rational employment; in fact, Theophilus out of the way. On the other hand, Theophilus, the new Theophilus, with opinions and decisions of his own, with nothing in the world to do but go on forming such opinions and decisions, might develop into a most disconcerting nuisance; a Theophilus very much in the way. From this analysis he derived amusement, dry perhaps, but not devoid of flavour.

He overwhelmed her one evening with the announcement of the accomplished fact.

“I’ve sent in my resignation this afternoon.”

“You know your own business best, I suppose,” she said, after a while, resignedly. “I think it’s a pity. . . . It’s no use going over the old ground again. . . . But still, what are you going to do with your life? If you could speak, there would naturally be Parliament; but you know you haven’t the gift.”

He made the acknowledgment of his deficiency.

“I’m afraid I’m not one of the world’s talkers.”

She smiled with the indulgence of a master of craft. Evelina was nothing if not an orator.

“That you’re not, my dear,” she said.

Both remembered the rare and humiliating occasions on which Theophilus had been called upon to speak in public. His scholarly mind had always lost the thread of his discourse while seeking for pearls of speech to string on it. He envied Evelina's glib facility, but in the hidden depths of his heart thanked God for incapacity to utter such appalling English. Rather than confess this secret consolation, however, he would accept her low estimate of his powers till the end of his days.

"Well, *gethan ist gethan*," said Evelina, who, now and then, quoted a German tag to show her broad-mindedness. "What's done is done. There's the present and the future. Have you thought?"

"I have, my dear. I've thought a great deal. I've discovered that my mind, such as it is, is divided up into various water-tight compartments. In one there continues my keen interest in the interplay of international politics; possibly, with leisure, I may do some writing on the subject. In another compartment is a desire to make a complete study of the Elizabethan dramatists. . . ."

"Isn't that rather a waste of time?" asked Evelina. "What have they got to do with modern life?"

"Modern life isn't everything. Life in its eternal essence, as the old Elizabethans express it, is worth consideration. I rather think I'm quoting you, my dear . . . you said something of the sort while we were coming home after that performance of 'The White Devil' given by the New Shakespearean League. You deplored the littleness of modern dramatists in the presence of John Webster."

"I remember," she admitted; "but the drama, as far as it concerns you and me, is a relaxation, not a pursuit."

He laughed kindly. "We'll call it a relaxation, then. . . . In another compartment is a great longing to keep bees." Evelina looked at him as though he were going mad. "Yes. I haven't seen a bee since I was a boy—in the Rectory garden. My poor old father was a great bee-keeper. I can see him now in his green veil and gloves. . . . I think I could take a swarm now. . . . There's a set of filthy, neglected hives at the bottom of the vegetable garden. They awakened old associations. Besides, bees are classic—the Georgics, you know."

She asked, with the polite air of one talking to a child:

"Any more compartments?"

Ever urbane in his relations with her, he made smiling reply.

"I think those are enough for the present."

Evelina figuratively threw up her hands, disclaiming moral responsibility

for a Theophilus who was already suffering deterioration from unearned wealth. He could go to his unproductive studies of Elizabethan dramatists if he liked, and his Virgilian interest in bees. Why any sentient human being should worry about a bee when there were dole-taking human drones to consider, she was at a loss to determine. She might have respected the bee as one of the world's workers if it produced anything more necessary than honey. What was the good of honey, anyhow, while there were sugar from cane and beet, and saccharine from Chemical works, and calory-giving glucose constituents in many foods. Personally, she disliked honey, and most sweet-tasting things. Conscientiously she struggled against a petty annoyance at his atrophied sense of proportion. Why should Theophilus waste his time over bees?

The late summer found Theophilus a placid student of international politics and the Elizabethan drama, and a bee-keeper both contemplative and practical. When Evelina saw him issue forth in gloves and green veil she hoped the bees would sting him very hard. They never did; whereat she suffered annoyance. She was interested in few of his occupations. Yet, for the time, she lived in the great house, with unruffled equanimity. To a pair more emotionally united, here might have been perceived the fatal divergence of their lives. The truth is, perhaps, that as they had started so did they continue to run, on parallel lines, not to meet in love or hatred until Infinity, which is the Never-Never in the finite span of human existence.

Thus they went their separate ways, in perfect content. They were too near London for the County to be a factor in their social life. Two or three formal dinner-parties and an afternoon reception paid their debts to society. For the purposes of keeping in touch with the thought of the day, Theophilus ran up to London, lunched at his club, and passed an hour or two with Mona Daventry or Daphne. Once or twice he took them out to lunch at the Carlton—as Daphne said, just in order to learn how to do it. Of such adventures he related no item to the incurious Evelina. Adopted as a Progressive candidate for the London County Council at the November elections, and as prospective candidate for Maresfield, and as Chairman of the Economics Section of her feverish Woman's Club, whose function it was to feed, with more or less delectation, all the dull and learned dogs of the universe and listen to their lectures, she had but few thoughts to give to Theophilus. Ample allowance out of the family fortune was paid into her account at the bank, which, as Daphne once said, while discussing the Birds with Mrs. Daventry, she hadn't the horse-sense to use, still less to exceed.

For Theophilus these were idyllic days. In their hives the bees stored their honey; in his library he stored his learning. He found many illuminated by-paths in the late sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century publicists, from

Machiavelli to Harrington, whose “Oceana,” which he had never before had the leisure to read in a legible edition, struck him as a work of great significance. He had dreams of forging a weapon out of this half-forgotten intellectual material of the past, wherewith to mould the unwelded condition of modern political affairs. In spite of a worrying confusion of thought, he was a modestly happy man.

In the autumn there came a sudden General Election. He forgot bees and dramatists and philosophers, and worked whole-heartedly at Maresfield for Evelina. The cheery John Roberts came from Greenwich and harangued the electorate like a fat Demosthenes. Theophilus had never liked John Roberts, whose unctuousness was antipathetic to his essential dryness. Evelina, carried away by excitement to the inversion of previous rôles, proclaimed him her right-hand man. Theophilus, for the sake of the good cause, suffered him gladly. Triumph crowned their struggle. She got in by a two thousand majority. He was immensely proud of his Evelina, and when, after the declaration of the poll, they stood on the balcony of the Town Hall, he kissed her amid wild public enthusiasm.

In order to attend conscientiously to her Parliamentary duties, Evelina, though deploring the sale of the Blackheath house, found a convenient service flat in Westminster, and spent her week-ends at The Grange.

Everybody was happy. But behind the sober content of Theophilus lurked the ignominiously-clad figure of Luke Wavering, counting in his prison the slow and awful days.

## CHAPTER VII

OF Luke's prison sufferings no one knew; not even Daphne, although she lay awake many an hour in a cold horror of conjecture.

"Think of me," he wrote, "as stranded at a not too comfortless North Pole, with a curiously efficient postal service at my command."

Not only did he prohibit such visits as were permissible, but he ordained an attitude of mind. Fate had set him in remote regions inaccessible to his friends; but he would return thence in due time and take his place in the world again. Explorers' wives and daughters must cultivate the brave patience to endure the period of separation. His wonderful Daphne's power of endurance he took for granted. Hers was the stuff that not dreams but realities were made of.

The news of the disposition of the Wavering fortune he accepted gallantly. It was obvious to anyone bowingly acquainted with human nature that the old Victorian lady could not have acted against her traditions. Sooner Theophilus, however, than Evelina. Theophilus might be an uninteresting weed, but he was harmlessly human, whereas Evelina was but a fungus on the body politic.

"My dear," he wrote, with regard to this pronouncement, "don't think the North Pole is freezing my milk of human kindness, but I never could abide the imperturbable ego of our cousin Evelina."

"It would be folly," so ran another letter, "for you to forgo your inheritance. Even five hundred a year means edible food, clean underwear, and a warm bath . . . Have no fear of the future. When I return, I'll re-establish our fortunes, and all will be well."

Certainly he was as gallant a convict as ever languished in His Majesty's Prisons. Unless it were a reference to a book he had read, or a talk with chaplain or doctor on outside affairs, he gave no hint of his daily life, made no suggestion of complaint or claim for pity. In the splendid courage of Daphne lay his confidence in the present and his hope for the future.

So Daphne went about the world more defiant than ever. Never had woman been so gloriously parented. As often as prison regulations allowed, she wrote him reams concerning herself and the great ambient world, accepting proudly his North Pole convention. Her picturings of the conditions under which he existed she kept locked in her young brain.

Her stay with Mona Daventry lasted but a week or so. To be a drag on the wheels of Mona's social chariot was unthinkable. She shared (to their common advantage) the West Kensington flat of one Ellen Pennycuick, an adoring

school friend, with whom she had maintained affectionate relations, and who now was earning a comfortable living as a designer in a firm of Art Decorators in Maddox Street. Thither now and then came Theophilus, and thence daily she sallied to conquer the world. She found the world a peculiarly obdurate enemy. She stormed its strongholds in vain until she began to lose heart. What chance had an amateur shorthand-typist against a horde of professional young women highly certificated? She came to the conclusion that London was the world's most grim and impregnable citadel.

She claimed work—work that would occupy her eager mind and also allow her to put aside her inherited income against the reappearance of Luke; for, in spite of her blind faith in his eventual rehabilitation, her common sense told her that he would issue penniless from his prison. Pride forbade besieging the offices of his City friends. Elsewhere she became conscious of the handicap of her name.

“Change it, my dear,” Mona advised.

Daphne would sooner see the universe weltering in final damnation.

She answered all sorts of advertisements, and one day found herself engaged as a waitress in a tea-shop in Westbourne Grove. Apparently her name suggested nothing to the proprietor, who engaged her on sight—on a first sight of palpitating admiration. She stayed there some time, humorously delighted to trip about in natty uniform, and listen to the artless compliments of the young male Westbourne-Grovians and the equally artless but more embarrassing confidences of her female colleagues. She had stepped into an unknown world, wherein all her values were deliciously muddled. She learned the difference between walking out and keeping company, as expounded by the prim, and the secret amenities that were at the disposal of the reckless. The male, either as Galahad, or Adonis, or Don Juan, seemed to be an obsession. She noticed that the Galahads wore scrubby moustaches, and neckties that rode up at the back of their collars.

It was not, by any means, an immoral world, but, to the girl trained in the lax cosmopolitan society of wealth, it was a stupefying world in which, as far as she could gather, it was a convention for virtuous young man and maiden to hug each other in the blackness of a cinema theatre, and to regard as improper abstract conversation on topics which she had discussed from girlhood. In the by-paths of pruderies that threaded the vast expanse of licence she often lost her way, to her amused vexation. As she could not confess to the shadow of a boy, the tearoom looked on her as a beautiful freak from an alien planet.

Her brief career at the tea-shop ended in sudden drama. The proprietor who had engaged her on sight, lay in wait for her in a passage between kitchen and

shop, and tried to kiss her; whereupon Daphne administered such physical chastisement as lay in her power, and walked out of the place never to return.

Before Mona and Theophilus, she made great play with this adventure. She taunted him with lack of courage in refraining from visiting her in Westbourne Grove, and consuming buns under her auspices. She could have proclaimed him her young man, and saved herself from humiliation. It was about this time that, losing temper with him, she taunted him, also, with his dryness. It was a chance occasion. Evelina, home for the week-end, had preached the wonder of an exhibition of the latest school of painting—the Neo-spherists. Theophilus, in the middle of the week, meeting Daphne at Mona Daventry's, and expressing a dim desire to see the pictures, was carried off by Daphne the following morning to the Gallery, where a pallid young man sat at the receipt of custom. They went the round of the portentous daubs.

“Tremendously interesting,” said Theophilus.

“Rot,” said Daphne. “Take me out to lunch and give me something real to eat.”

This was the beginning of the loss of temper aforesaid. Over the luncheon-table in the quiet, bandless restaurant which she had ordained—(“Oh, that some Great Dictator would arise who would decree instant death to anyone who played noisical instruments in places where sane men and women assemble to eat and talk,” said Daphne. “The joy of life, yes. I'm all for it. I can suck it in like a sponge, from my toes to my head. But the beastly, blatant, make-believe orgy of Life—I hate it. I used to come here with Luke. He discovered it. That's why I've brought you.”)—Well, over the luncheon-table, after this explosion, they discussed the pictures.

“But you don't feel, you don't think for yourself. You just talk other people's feelings and thoughts and ideas, without knowing anything at all about them, and sit on them like a solemn old hen trying to hatch chickens out of hard-boiled eggs.”

She dashed sardines and stuffed olives and bits of anchovy impatiently on her plate.

“Why can't you be a human being and say that your soul revolts from folly? It's worse than folly. It's disease. You talk to anyone of these insects and he'll say: 'Poor old Michael Angelo.' ”

“What wine would you like, Daphne?” he asked, leather-bound card in hand.

“Hippocrene,” cried Daphne, “‘with beaded bubbles winking at the brim.’ Anything to take away the taste of that filthy show.”

Theophilus ordered the wine indicated by the officiant's finger.

“All the same, they’re trying to express something. Evelina said . . .”

“Oh, damn Evelina”—she repented at once—“I’m sorry; forgive me. But I’m not interested in Evelina. I’m interested in you.”

“Why?” asked Theophilus.

She touched his hand. “Because you’re so dry, and because one day I’d like to see somebody set fire to you and make you blaze up.”

He laughed. “Do you think I’d make a good blaze?”

“A bonfire!”

That was the last time they met for a considerable period. Immediately after this, Daphne went as companion to an old lady in Hampshire, a distant relation of Mona Daventry, even as Miss Wilkin had been companion to Miss Wavering. This lasted some months. Then one fine day Mona received a letter with the Paris postmark.

“I’m here,” wrote Daphne, on paper that bore no address save the word “Paris,” “to make my way in my own way. That dear old idiot (so-called) aunt of yours has her ways which aren’t, and never can be, my ways. A woman’s real job is to look after a man; not another woman. I’ve looked after a man all my life. I’m fitted for it. I’m not fitted for reading Coventry Patmore and the Parish Magazine and the leaders of ‘The Times’ to old ladies, and registering in my mind the daily condition of their insides. And then she has around her a set of elderly epicene ducks with fat hands, who give me the creeps. They play a fantastic round game which they call Bridge, for a penny a hundred. It’s considered bad form, if not unkind, to draw notice to a revoke, and their bidding is like an auction (had there been one) in ‘Alice in Wonderland.’ When one of the ducks gave me to understand that he was, for the best of motives, enamoured of me, I threw up the game. Mrs. Phillpotts and I parted the best of friends. God knows what tale I told her. I think I said that I had heard of an excellent position as a wife in Java, and that I must be on the spot in order to apply personally for the job. . . . So that’s that. Why didn’t I come to see you in London on my way through to Paris? Because my nearest port of embarkation for France was Southampton. Also, ‘Southampton-Havre, the quickest and cheapest route.’ See Advertisements. Well, I’ve only just arrived, so you can’t say I’ve delayed telling you all about it. I commend to you Theophilus. Sounds like a quotation from the Epistles. If you can set fire to him, do so. Which doesn’t sound Biblical. I don’t know what I’m going to do. Possibly I may ultra-shingle my hair and buy some choice ready-made male suitings and hire myself out as a valet to a pleasant millionaire.

“You’re the only woman I’ve ever loved. If you weren’t I wouldn’t tell you all this. I’m a man’s woman and not a woman’s woman. The greatest regret of

my life is that I was too young for the war. I really think I should have come out a Dame of the British Empire . . . Don't think I'm suffering from dreadful complaints. I'm not. I'm simply fed up with women, women, women. Aunt Fanny and Wilkin; Ellen Pennycuick who looks on Man either as a potential Satyre du Bois de Boulogne, or as an awe-inspiring Rameses statue with whom she can hold no communication; then Mrs. Phillpotts, and the other old ladies in trousers—if I had stayed longer in Durchminster I should have danced the Salome dance before them with a curate's head on a charger. . . .”

Thus, in a perplexing letter, did Daphne let herself go. Her references to Mona's kindness were aglow with sincere gratitude. She ended enigmatically.

“I've no idea what I'm going to do, but of course I'll keep Luke informed of my movements.”

The letter, little by little, gained importance in the eyes of Mona Daventry, until it began to mark the disappearance of Daphne. After a while, she summoned Theophilus, and read him those portions that were meet for masculine consideration.

“In cases like this,” said she, “there's generally a man fooling about somewhere in the background; but if there were, Daphne would have told me—or at least given me a hint.”

“There can't be a man,” cried Theophilus.

The warmth of his declaration brought into bloom a budding, satirical smile on the lips of the lady.

“I think you're right, my dear Theophilus. It's man in the abstract and not in the concrete.”

“I'm glad you think so,” said he. “It would give me great pain if Daphne threw herself away on a man unworthy of her.”

“I'm sure it would,” said Mona.

The days and weeks and months passed, and no further news came of Daphne. Whether she was lost in Paris, Seringapatam, or Java, no one knew. The bank manager responsible for the account into which the moneys due to her from the Wavering estate were paid, professed ignorance of her whereabouts. He could only give assurance that she was alive, on the evidence of cheques, cashed through foreign banks, coming in from time to time. Eventually Theophilus wrote to Luke in his prison. Luke replied to the effect that Daphne was all right and none of her friends need worry.

But Theophilus worried. Ever since the girl's eager adjuration in the hall of The Grange, on the afternoon of the funeral, she had counted in his life as a

something indefinable, a tiny flame that guided him darkling into pleasant places, a lambency playing over his arid wastes of thought. This Unknown Something defying his sober analysis, unique influence, awakened in him all kinds of emotional expressions—laughter, anger, enthusiasm. He had seldom parted from her without dimly feeling himself to be on the springing point to some high endeavour.

“If I kept bees,” she had once declared, “I’d fit them all out with rainbow-wings and make a real, glorious, wonder-hive of it.”

Which, on sober reflection, he saw was sheer aerial idiocy; but it did something, he knew not what, to his imagination.

They had talked once of Manon Lescaut and des Grieux. A week before, Mona had taken them to Massenet’s opera—the semi-celibate Theophilus, with his space-annihilating car, being led into all kinds of amazing adventures—and Daphne, aghast at his ignorance, had insisted on his reading the Abbé Prévost’s idyll before their next meeting. Meekly he had obeyed, and when the discussion took place she had made her final pronouncement.

“Neither Massenet nor Puccini had the remotest idea of those two. They’ve written pretty music and that’s all there’s to it. I doubt even whether the good Abbé Prévost knew what he was writing about. On the face of it, it’s a drab and sordid story, but to me the only justification of it is that Manon is always darting backwards and forwards like a dragon-fly across the man’s soul.”

The phrase stuck in the head of Theophilus nympholept. Daphne gone, there was no dragon-fly to dart backwards and forwards across his soul.

Evelina certainly had nothing to do with his soul. Continuing the envisagement of his relations with Evelina, she seemed, after all, to have had little to do with his body in the way of any creature comfort. Once she had been a kind of companionable intelligence, acting rather as guide and philosopher than as friend on the same level. Her public duties absorbed her interests and her emotions. She became an occasional inmate of his house to which she often invited political acquaintances for the week-end. To Theophilus, standing outside the inner sanctuary of politics, much of the talk was obscure. It dealt not with the wide issues on which he held reasoned opinions, but with minor intrigues, cross-currents of party feeling, characteristic tendencies of individuals who, even if known to him by name, were impersonal beings representing certain constituencies in Parliament. Cheery John Roberts, an occasional guest, who was now Chairman of the Greenwich Borough Council, had more intimate knowledge of such mysteries than he.

At first the pride of possession had invested these house-parties with some

glamour. He loved to take new-comers over the house and grounds, and show them his carefully stocked library and beehives. But, after a while, the gilt wore from his gingerbread content. He began to feel that he was regarded by robustious politicians as a vague fellow of not much account. They listened quite politely to his learned theories, and then demonstrated how they would be torn to pieces in the rough and tumble of politics. Said one of the hard-bitten:

“You should come in with us—we could find you a seat. There’s nothing like the House of Commons for reducing ideals to practical values.”

“A House of Correction,” murmured Theophilus, and Evelina, who overheard him, laughed her mirthless laugh, and cried:

“It may be. But my husband’s incorrigible, so it’s no use his thinking of entering into politics.”

The more he saw of his wife’s friends, in the less esteem did he hold our minor legislators. Indeed, in the less esteem did he hold Evelina herself. He began to perceive in her a hardening, a tendency to measure her enthusiasm for Human Welfare by party standards. She seemed to be caught up in some relentless machinery and, unaware, to rejoice and fancy herself a free and enlightened agent. As time went on she began to adopt oracular airs, obviously not to the liking of the women who accompanied their husbands to The Grange. To these did Theophilus instinctively turn for polite companionship; but none of them made much impression on his mind.

Once, in the company of the wife of a north-country member who had received the honour of knighthood for no other reason than that Theophilus could conjecture than that he sold prodigious quantities of soap, he swept a hand round his beloved book-cases.

“The most restful sight civilization has yet invented.”

She replied: “Yes. And how lovely it must be to be able to read them all.”

Whereupon he saw that the amiable lady’s desire to please outstripped her power of comprehension.

When a woman, frankly non-intellectual, satirical critic of her husband’s ponderous activities, and proclamative of her joy in the flippancies of modern life, took him in hand, turned him inside out and amused him, Evelina inevitably marked her down as a guest to be ostracized.

“That brainless woman. Thank Heaven she’s gone. Never again!”

And if Theophilus, in the lady’s defence, put forward the plea that she was bright and even stimulating, Evelina would shrug impatient shoulders.

“Can’t you see, my dear, that she was out of the picture, wrong with the

atmosphere?”

To some such criticism he retorted on one occasion:

“I don’t know much about music, but I believe that here and there a discord is of value in a musical composition.”

“You’re tumbling, Theophilus, into the fallacy of false analogy.”

His intellectual sphere being thus arrogantly invaded, for he prided himself on a logician’s training, he bit his lip to repress sudden anger.

“Perhaps I was wrong in my major premiss,” he replied with urbane irony, “in likening our late symposium to a work of art.”

“I don’t at all know what you mean.”

Theophilus sighed. “To use a commonplace figure of speech—” said he—“didn’t it strike you that the lady in question flashed like a dancing-girl through a crew of dullards?”

She stared at him for a moment, hesitant before the double attack. Dullards! The insulting word aroused instant indignation. But the feminine prevailed. She shrugged contemptuous shoulders.

“Of course, if you set the society of dancing-girls above everything else, go to it. I’ve nothing more to say. Only I must say,” she added by way of postscript lacking in literary style, “that I’m very greatly disappointed in you.”

He lit a cigarette. Many months ago, Daphne had suggested to him the brand smoked by her father, which he could order by the thousand from a famous firm, so that he was no longer condemned to the adventitious packet of abomination purchased over a counter.

“Disappointment presupposes hope,” said he.

For the first time in their lives they looked into each other’s eyes as enemies. He had dealt her a blow of dismaying shrewdness. She had been hitherto—or at least until his accession to wealth—contented with him as the cultivated but inferior mate whom some queer destiny, decreeing the married estate more honourable than spinsterhood, had thrown into her indifferent arms. She had accepted his deference to her positive qualities as a matter of course. He had been a negative being who followed her through sheer lack of initiative. She now realized suddenly the resultant of many active forces which she had done her best to depreciate. She beheld him a man, actuated by unknown motives, remorselessly logical. Disappointment presupposed hope! What had she hoped from him? Nothing but acquiescence in her own ambitious scheme of existence. She saw him sitting there opposite her, hard, unruffled, sticking a cigarette now and then between compressed lips, which somehow seemed to merge insensibly through his scrubby moustache into a

cruel aquiline nose. She read an unyielding irony in his eyes.

“Well, my dear,” said he at last. “I don’t quite see where your disappointment comes in.”

She took refuge, woman-wise, in the beautiful breadth of a side issue.

“All this money has spoiled you, as it spoils most people. It has almost ruined you. You’re no longer the same man. You’ve lost all your ideals.”

“I’d be glad,” he interrupted, “if you’d tell me what they were.”

“To do something in the world—to advance the progress of mankind. . . . Now what do you do? Please don’t think I’m angry, my dear Theophilus. It’s well to have a heart-to-heart talk now and then. . . . But, really, what do you do?”

Months of loneliness and obscure aspirations and agitated thought dictated a reply which, to the woman, was a bewildering bomb.

“I’m getting myself together as a human being.”

The butler announced the car that was to take her to her London duties. Prepared for the journey, she had been sitting with him in the library. Theophilus accompanied her to the car, by which time she had recovered her balance.

“I’m sorry, my dear,” she remarked casually, “but that’s always the way. Idleness leads to futile introspection.”

He laughed as she drove off, a chance sidereal visitor from remote spaces. A worthy woman, according to her lights, an intelligent woman, an attractive, good-looking woman in her way; but, to the man’s clearing vision, a woman with whom sex had been spilt into intellect—not to the greater clarifying of intellect. He became aware, with some dismay, for he was a man of kind instincts, that, for all her subtle twistings, she was powerless beneath his assertion.

But this was not the ideal married life. There were women in the world who could give a return for things given. He vaguely pictured Mona Daventry as such a one; a laughter-loving, comfortable, sympathetic, capable woman, endowed with all the common sense a human being could need in the world.

When he sat with her in her daintily furnished flat, he still contrasted it with his surroundings. Evelina had made very little change in Aunt Fanny’s dull house. The drawing-room, morning-room and hall still gave the impression of a set of galleries in an unvisited museum. Theophilus, longing to refurnish or rearrange, had no notion how to set about it. Sometimes he longed to invite Mona to take the place in hand, certain that, as with a fairy wand, she could effect instant transformation. But there was Evelina, mistress of the

house, who refused to acknowledge the existence of Mona Daventry! He was thinking in terms of the unthinkable.

During these two or three years the nature of Theophilus underwent alchemic change. From joy in freedom he passed through the stage of regretting his severance from the old absorbing official routine, and emerged restless, eager for aim in life, until he realized himself as a man alone in a desert obsessed by the idiot idea to create a garden around him. He grew, if not morose, at least a lover of solitude. He went off on lonely journeys to queer places, sensitively shrinking from routes ordained for the wealthy. He went to Abo in Finland, wandered, more or less aimlessly, about Bulgaria, with a sense of dismal enjoyment. As he always returned from these travels full of accurately tabulated information, Evelina learned to wave him hopeful adieux, and to welcome him back with a grateful show of enthusiasm. The simulacrum of their wedded lives was thus prescribed. He fed her with statistics, and her soul was content.

But the soul of Theophilus went a-hungered. For what, he knew not. In his vast club of few acquaintances, he held himself remote from his kind. Now and then he attended public dinners, either alone or accompanying Evelina, and they seemed to be shadow shows at which he sat, a dead spectator. Only to Mona did he unconsciously vouchsafe here and there a gleam of self-revelation.

“Of course,” said she, “if you like being a snail in your own little self-contained shell, be a snail! Only don’t complain that your shell’s not big enough.”

“Who’s complaining?” he asked.

“Everything that talks for you, except your tongue. . . . Do you know, I’m beginning to lose patience with you? Here are you with enough money to command most of the joys of the earth, and you prefer to sit down and cover yourself with green mould.”

“Joy that can be bought doesn’t appeal to me. ‘Two penn’orth of joy, please’; Oh, no! Do you know what kind of conclusion I’ve come to?” he said with some eagerness. “It’s this. Two penn’orths of joy, no. Two heart-pangs’ worth of happiness, yes.”

“Where did you get that from?” she asked.

He coloured. “I think it’s one of Daphne’s *obiter dicta*.”

Uninspired travel, the study of world-and bee-economics and the Elizabethan dramatists, filled his recluse hours. But his soul or sub-

consciousness or his waking dreams, or whatever it may be in a man that is of the spirit and not of the body, was haunted by a devil, or, maybe, an angel of unrest. The man was suffering the pain of the transmutation of spiritual values.

So the years passed. Towards the end he even neglected Mona. Only her voice one day, over the telephone, recalled to him the fact that he had not seen her for many months. Indeed, he had been away on one of his lonely journeys, blindly seeking the unfindable. He had just returned, the day before.

His ear caught strange tidings. To-morrow Luke would be discharged from prison. She was meeting him with her car. Daphne, reappearing from nowhere with the suddenness of lightning, was with her.

“I’ll come to you at once,” said he.

“You’ll do no such thing. You’d be an abominable nuisance. . . . No, you can’t speak to Daphne. . . . But listen. Luke comes out to-morrow. What are you going to do about it?”

The sweat stood on Theophilus’s forehead and poured down his cheeks. He was brought up against fantastic realities. Two years had passed since Daphne had disappeared into the unknown, and the flame of her—such is the easily darkened soul of man—had grown dim. He had never reckoned the time of Luke’s release. Five years was the sentence. He knew that good conduct could earn remission. The fact of his immediate freedom was a shock. The Daphne flame burst into sudden radiance. He remembered his promise to the transfigured and tragic girl.

“Are you there?” came the voice through the telephone.

“Of course.”

“Well? What do you propose to do?”

He said: “Give Daphne my love. Tell her Luke shall have the right hand I promised.”

“But when?”

He detected a quavering voice. Something within him alien from reason spoke.

“At once. Bring Luke and Daphne straight here. It’s where they belong.”

He heard a kind of sigh.

“My dear, I felt sure you would say that.”

The uncanny interview was over. Theophilus staggered rather than walked out on to the terrace outside the morning-room where Evelina was reading in a long cane chair. It was the afternoon of a Friday in late September, and the air was still and warm and scented with lingering summer flowers.

He made abrupt announcement of his news. She gripped the arms of her chair.

“Are you going mad?”

“Going or gone doesn’t much matter,” said Theophilus.

She gaped with indignant anger. It was monstrous. She rose, for the first time in their married life, livid with anger.

“I forbid you to have that convict and his drab of a daughter in my house.”

“It’s my house,” said Theophilus.

There followed the inevitable and horrible passage at arms which lasted, as it seemed to the tensely strung man, for many hours. Finally she delivered her ultimatum.

“You choose between them and me. If those two come in, I’ll go out—for ever.”

Theophilus took a few paces up and down the terrace, and finally halted and laid a hand on his wife’s shoulder.

“For pity’s sake,” he said, very gently.

Some instinct made him unconsciously clutch her flesh until it hurt. On her part she felt the new physical and even spiritual dominance of the man. She broke away from him and, groping her way to her chair, astounded him by a burst of passionate tears.

“Do as you like,” she said when she had recovered, looking away from him. “If you think it’s your duty to give them shelter for the time being, do so. It’s cruel to call me pitiless: I’m not. Only, don’t ask me to meet them.”

“*Parcere subjectis*,” said Theophilus.

## CHAPTER VIII

LUKE Wavering, sprucely dressed, overcoat on arm and small dressing-case in hand, issued from the prison gates and crossed the pavement to the open car in which sat Mona Daventry awaiting him. Bareheaded he kissed her hand as soon as the chauffeur had opened the door.

“You dear, good, beautiful woman.” He settled down on the soft cushions with an involuntary sigh of content and turned to her eagerly.

“And Daphne? I know she’s with you. How is she?”

She gave assuring news. “And you, my friend?”

He smiled, with an air of jauntiness. “Pretty well, considering. Still sound in wind and limb. . . . How do I look?”

She glanced at him swiftly, and noted that he bore no obvious traces of the horrors through which he had passed. The years, of course, must leave their mark. He had left the great world looking like a successful King’s Counsel; he returned to it with the frosted air of a Judge. That was the only change that she could see.

“I’m glad Daphne obeyed me to the last,” he said. “I should have hated to have her visualize even these gates.”

“She understood. She has been awake all night.”

“And you? You must have started from London at dawn.”

“The happiest dawn of my life, my dear,” said Mona.

“And mine,” said he.

It was a very early morning in September. The pale sun smiled on the sleepy little town and gave promise of a mellow day.

“My God! the air is sweet,” said Luke suddenly. And when, a few minutes later, they were rolling along the gentle Kentish roads, “It’s a good world, all the same.”

Mona fumbled in her bag and fetched out a cigarette case in Japanese gold enamel.

“May I? A gift of welcome.”

His fingers trembled as he opened it, and drew out a cigarette. “Always wonderful,” said he “And my old brand! How did you know?”

“Daphne remembered.”

He inhaled a few puffs in silence. At last he spoke.

“It’s almost worth while passing through the Valley of the Shadow to come out again into the beautiful world. Look at those fields—that bowling-green—ah! we’ve passed it. That was one of my hobbies. Bowls. Do you remember the bowling-green at Cedar Hall? I used to say it was the best in England. . . . Funny. . . . I wonder whether you know what was one of my unsatisfied ambitions? . . . Ever seen the workmen and peasants playing bowls in the South of France? They have only any old bit of rough earth course and bowls without bias, and they’re marvellous, simply marvellous. It’s skill. The bias they put on with a twist of the fingers. I always longed to get over a team and watch their amazement at an English bowling-green. One more ambition unfulfilled, my dear. . . . Lots of them die in the Valley of the Shadow.”

She laid a hand on his arm.

“Was the Valley so dreadfully dark?”

“It would have seemed the Valley of Luxury during the War. When one has lived in mud and blood and the stench of both, and unpleasant death howling and snarling at you all the time, a sheltered, peaceful existence is not to be despised. The last three years or so have made one realize what a good old toughening lesson of a war it was. But don’t let us talk of valleys. They’re both got through, thank God. This last we must consider as never having existed. I remember early on writing to Daphne that she must regard me as an explorer hung up by snow at the North Pole with plenty of store and comforts. We must let it go at that.”

“You’re a brave man, Luke,” said Mona.

“I’ve kept my head, that’s all. . . .” He changed the topic swiftly. “Far more important is the immediate present. My clothes. I took the precaution to disappear in a brand-new suit. Second time of wearing. But God knows what it must look like now.”

She reassured him with a laugh. Savile Row might have sent the suit home yesterday.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said. “I was dreading to appear like a dandy of the past—everybody looking at me, as though I had stepped into the world in the costume of the ’eighties. That’s the worst of the North Pole. One’s sense of values gets confused.”

“I’d be proud to walk down Bond Street with such a perfectly dressed man.”

She laughed. But her heart was filled with great pity and longing to find some undiscoverable formula of consolation. He might really have come from the North Pole, for all his claim on her commiseration for the three and three-quarter years of his imprisonment. When he turned to her, with the old gleam

in his yellow circled hawk's eyes, and pointed out some feature in the landscape, she knew that the book she sought to read was closed. A frozen man had returned to life, eager to pick up old threads, and spin himself a web of the old glamour.

They talked of Theophilus.

"A dear old stick. But loyal. As I've said before—in my letters—I can't grudge him the money. It was obvious I should be wiped off the old woman's books . . . she might have left things to Daphne, who has done nothing undesirable. . . . That's a matter one can't discuss. She and Daphne . . . how could they meet? A withered old Fate—one of the Three—and the gayest of Dancing Mænads? Daphne's a spark of fire. The old woman was mid-Victorian asbestos. Oh, a damned old sucker on the body politic, my dear Mona. I know my metaphors are mixed, but what I really think of her could only be expressed in red-hot cuneiform straight from Hell. Well, anyhow . . . thank God she squashed my cousin, Evelina, and left it all to Theophilus. . . . My only fear is that Evelina may have put him away in a cupboard. . . ."

"Nothing of the kind," said Mona.

She sketched the Bird situation as far as she had been able to divine it from the reticent Theophilus. She gathered that he was master, at last, in his own house, very little troubled by Evelina; further that both were contented in their respective ways, which seemed to lie many leagues apart. So much master was Theophilus that he was awaiting father and daughter as guests, for as long as they might like to stay at The Grange. Luke looked in front of him with narrowing eyelids.

"That's very kind of him."

"It's a compact made long ago by him and Daphne."

"And Daphne?"

"She holds him to it, of course. Not," she added hastily, "that he had the slightest hesitation."

She narrated the telephone conversation of the previous afternoon.

"I've not doubted Theophilus's friendliness—from his letters now and then, and from Daphne's. . . . But for a—a victim of circumstances like myself to plant myself on the world's most respectable man—that calls for some consideration."

"You forget, my dear," she said, "that you're an explorer returning from the North Pole."

He laughed grimly. "Moorstead won't accept the fable."

"What does it matter? I don't think Theophilus knows that he's living in

Moorstead.”

He spread out his thin hands in a feeble gesture.

“Until I can find some anchorage, I’m but a straw driven by the wind. . . . You’ve been kind enough to house the trunks containing my poor wardrobe and petty personal belongings. Daphne has her jewels and her mother’s jewels. She has her legacy. . . . Beyond that, I’m penniless—practically penniless. I’ve a few Swiss francs in the Bank of Geneva which no one knows anything of—a mere trifle. So, if it weren’t for Daphne, I’d have to come upon the Prisoners’ Aid Society.”

“Oh, don’t,” cried Mona with a shiver

He lit another cigarette.

“I must face facts. I haven’t a penny in the ordinary sense of the word. When the crash came, everything disappeared like a bit of gun-cotton that had been set fire to. . . . Daphne had spoken of a little flat in Paris. . . . This proposition of Theophilus is new to me.”

“He has been abroad, with vague addresses, and only came back the night before last. I’ve written, wired, and telephoned—and, by good luck, I got him yesterday.”

“We’ll see what Daphne has to say about it.”

They neared London. The crowded morning trams hurtled with clatter and screech through the suburban thoroughfares of unloveliness. Yet the sun, shining brightly, invested the mean and filthy streets of Woolwich with the radiance of a free human activity in the eyes of the man cramped for years behind grey prison walls.

“God! It’s lovely.”

Mona could only seek his hand in a friendly and fugitive squeeze. Even the dismal New Cross Road aroused his enthusiasm.

“Everybody looks so happy,” said he.

When they emerged from the squalor of South London at the approach of Westminster Bridge, he sat regarding the towers of the Houses of Parliament and the Abbey, and the majestic stretch of architecture to the east, like a man in a trance. On this warm morning of late September stately London lay at its loveliest. The classic buildings in Parliament Street imposed their message of the Empire’s dignity and its security never to be shaken. Beyond, all was dreaming in the mist of blue and pale elusive gold. At the twist of the Street, past the Cenotaph, dawned the perfect Banqueting Hall of Inigo Jones, and beyond again, into delicately toned ether soared the perfect spire of St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields. They swept through the Admiralty Arch and down the

Mall, most august and gracious of thoroughfares fronted by Buckingham Palace, dignified though unostentatious symbol of the corner-stone of the Empire. On the right there came flashes, through the distant railings, of the traffic of Piccadilly. Mona saw the eyes of the exile fixed on these things, and knew that his heart was wrung with emotions too deep for words. Again she stole, beneath the rug, a comprehending hand. They passed through the chariot-crowned arch marking the end of Constitution Hill, crossed the now busy roadway to the Decimus Burton's placid gates of Hyde Park, and so proceeded down the green-embowered and restful drive.

Cars bearing daintily clad women flashed by, recalling the accustomed luxury of past days. Along the trim yellow sidewalks passed what seemed an endless procession of youth and hope, proclaiming, with a strange unconsciousness, the eternal pride of freedom. They were all, men and women, young and old, free—remote from any fear or memory of captivity. They were happy. They were glad. Their springing step brought message of near achievement. The mellow trees and the sun-swept lawns to the northward smiled on him with an air of welcome and consolation. From the sordid streets of Woolwich to the graciousness of Kensington heralded by the dome of the Albert Hall, all had been a crescendo of quivering delight. As they neared the Albert Gate, a shaft of eastern sunshine caught the gilt figure of the Prince Consort beneath his fretful Gothic canopy and evoked a spasmodic thrill in the heart of the man who had starved for three and three-quarter years.

They came to the end of their journey. The lift went up to the flat. In a moment or two Daphne flung herself into his arms. Mona vanished.

A while later, Daphne led him into the dining-room where breakfast things were set out. It was barely ten o'clock.

"I've waited for you. I knew that, like me, in the excitement of it all, you could only have had a scratch cup of tea. It's just for you and me and us two. Mona's a darling. She's having hers in her own room."

She talked somewhat foolishly while the maid brought in the hot dishes; she poured out the coffee.

"Two lumps, Ole Luk Oie. I've not forgotten. . . ."

He turned away his head and snapped feverish fingers.

"Don't talk for a minute or two, my dear."

Then he sat back in the Chippendale arm-chair and stuck both hands over his eyes, while his lips worked curiously and his chest heaved, his body shook as though he were engaged in a mighty struggle for self-control. At last he withdrew his hands, and his features relaxed into the simulacrum of a smile.

"I'm feeling better now. Yes, my dear. I'd love some of those nice-looking

grilled kidneys—and why shouldn't I have a fried egg and a bit of bacon as well?"

He ate with an appetite of which he strove to hide the greed. Yes, by Jove! He was hungry. As Daphne had guessed, he had breakfasted—but so early—on only a cup of tea. Then the long drive through the open air. At this rate, he would soon fill out his clothes again. He pulled his waistcoat to show that he had thinned a little with advancing years.

"I'm afraid I've got bald, too," said he. "There's no remedy for that."

"Not very," said Daphne. "It's scarcely noticeable. But you've got grey, dear, about the temples. I'm not quite sure whether it doesn't suit you—gives you an air of distinction."

Yet, as she watched him, eager to see the old Luke again unchanged, her heart sank a little. The thinning and greying hair did not matter. But his features had grown pinched and hard, so that his face appeared longer and gaunter, and there was a furtive fearful look in his eyes.

The meal over, he lay back in his chair and lit a cigarette.

"Ah!" said he. "The North Pole's all very well in its way, but civilization's better. I'm looking forward to a great many trivial comforts. Getting into dress things, for instance—we don't wear them up there—after a hot bath with bath salts and warm towels. . . ." He laughed a little harshly. "By the way, I was forgetting. It shows you one can't have everything—that's one thing you don't get at The Grange."

"Indeed you do," cried Daphne. "Theophilus has put bath-rooms all over the house."

"That's excellent," said he. "Has he got a cook?" He smiled again. "I mean—well, a cook?"

"That I don't know," said Daphne.

There was a spell of silence. Her heart was heavy. What she had expected from this first meeting so agonizingly awaited, she scarcely knew. Certainly she had not dreamed that, within the first half-hour or so, they would be talking of Theophilus's bath-rooms. She could not realize the barrier between them of the prison atmosphere—the atmosphere created by the man's all too fresh memories of the hideous meals eaten on the three-legged stool in the solitude of the cell; of the drab exercise procession in the yard; of the hall of the building that had been his home, and its grim, railed tiers of balconies with nets stretched out from side to side; of the beastly iron baths where once a week he could wash himself in hot water, in disgusting publicity; of the pervading smell of lime and disinfectant that made even cleanliness an outrage; of the miserable horde of men, his associates; of the soulless

mechanism of their life; of the clank, clank, clank of the warder's steps on the corridor; of the ghastly instinct, that very morning, to salute Mona's uniformed chauffeur. . . .

"I hope you won't mind going to Moorstead, dear," said Daphne, after a while. "It's the best one can do for the present. We couldn't stay here, as Mona hasn't an extra room. In Paris you'd be out of things, whereas at The Grange you can look about and take your time to make your plans."

"Quite," he assented. "And, after all, Theophilus does owe us something." He threw the butt-end of his cigarette into his coffee cup and rose. "I feel a different man. Let us go and see happy trees and green grass from Mona's balcony."

Daphne's eyes filled with sudden tears. She knew that for the present, at least, she must be content with such dark flashes of revelation. He drew himself up, and with a smile opened the door for her to pass through.

She flung an arm about him. "Oh, my dearest, my dearest, you don't know how I've longed for you."

"And now," said he, "you'll have me for as long as ever you like."

They sat on the cane chairs on the aerial balcony. Kensington Gardens stretched apparently into the infinite distance, melting away in northern haze.

"Tell me about yourself, my dear," said he at last.

A smile passed fugitive across her face.

"There's not so much to tell you. My letters. . . ."

"Gifts from Heaven!"

"Well—they gave you my news up to date. There's my little flat in Auteuil, quite convenient for the Metro. . . ."

"As soon as I can turn round, there'll be no more tubes and buses for you. You were brought up in a decent car, and a car you must have."

She laughed. "I don't seem to want it. I can get about quite easily in tubes and buses—also trams. I can get into Paris in a few minutes—twenty from my door to the Place de la Concorde. . . . And I've told you about my work. I'm beginning to make quite a nice little income out of my dress designing. Pataquin's very decent to me. Ellen Pennycuick put me on to the idea. She thinks in terms of wall-papers and curtains, and dresses herself as if she were decorating a bedroom. Then one day when she was planning out a new frock—she can't afford expensive dressmakers—I took the pencil from her, and lo and behold! I found I could do the trick. Just like that. She had the dress made by some little seamstress round the corner, and for the first time in her life looked like a pretty Christian woman. So I went to Paris and studied a bit—and that's

all there is to it. One of these days we'll set up for ourselves in London. 'Daphne'—you see it, don't you? Beginning with a very big 'D,' and tailing off slantindicularly up with a great big sweep at the end of the tiny 'e'. I'll do all the designing and the interviewing the women, and, in your spare time, you'll be the financial brain—the Power behind the Mannequin Throne. There's a fortune in it."

"Yes, my darling," said Luke. "In my spare time. For I hope I shall be very busy."

"I'm sure you will," said Daphne.

"I've got many ideas, you know. Some of them elaborately worked out. Yes, many ideas. . . . This"—he smiled foolishly, and waved a vague hand to the sunshine—"is not the time to think of them. Still, we'll get back to Cedar Hall again. Very soon. I promise you."

He stared in front of him for a while, and then, passing his hand across his eyes, seemed to rouse himself to the sense of present things.

"Forgive me, dear. I've got into a bad habit of going off into day-dreams."

He bent forward and took her hand and stroked it. "I haven't quite realized you yet. Of course you're three and three-quarter years older than when I saw you last. But there seems to be a greater difference than merely that you're so much older. . . ."

She grasped the caressing hand tightly, and there was the pain of love in her eyes.

"Do you think I haven't gone through all your sufferings with you?"

Both were bending forward in their chairs, hands clasped and their faces close together.

"There were no sufferings to speak of," he said gently. "I told you, over and over again, not to think of them. But you're a wilful and disobedient child—I brought you up very badly."

"You brought me up to stand on my own feet—to accept responsibility—to face anything."

"And bar me—and all that I imply—what have you faced, my child?"

She tried to escape from his eyes; but she could not. At last she met them in her old defiant way.

"I've faced my life as a woman."

"Ah," said he, still holding her. "Strange, isn't it? There was always something magnetic between us two. I've thought and thought of you in my solitude, and felt that there was something. And now I see you and hold your

hand and look into your face I know there was—something. No, my dear,”—for she shivered ever so slightly—“it’s not uncanny. Now and again the mind of a—an explorer—becomes so crystal that it hurts . . . then it grows damnably opaque. I hope the something will bring us nearer together.”

“It’s over,” said Daphne.

“My poor child!”

“Miserable Starkey?” She laughed. “No. Happy Starkey. I’ve only you to think of.”

She released her hands and drew them over his cheeks and then leaned back in her chair.

“The longer I live,” said he, “the more am I baffled by the inscrutable humour of the high gods. I said that a while ago to the chaplain, carefully avoiding specific allusion to his Personal Deity. We had quite a nice little argument. He’s a good fellow. He proved to me by the rules of logic that, as a sense of humour was an appreciation of the juxtaposition of the incongruous, and as the incongruous could not exist in the Absolute, Jehovah or whatever you like to call Him, couldn’t have a sense of humour. So he bowled me out. Rather good, wasn’t it?”

He lit another cigarette.

“Adorable of you to remember the old brand.”

“I’ve laid in a stock.”

“More adorable than ever.” He smiled. “I remember poor old Theophilus used to smoke the filthiest things. Has prosperity improved his taste?”

“I haven’t seen him for a couple of years,” said Daphne.

“Ah, yes!” said he, “I forgot.”

They talked of Theophilus and Mona and the solemn visits they had paid to Aunt Fanny. The old woman, he declared, couldn’t have made less—taking it all in all—than a hundred thousand pounds out of his tips alone. She was a born gambler. Gambling ran in the blood of all the Waverings. His poor father—well! . . . He himself, if it came to that. But the old woman, with her mid-Victorian hypocrisy, was the limit. To stake a hundred francs at Monte Carlo was to wallow in vice. . . . To risk ten thousand pounds in a speculative venture on the Stock Exchange was virtuous financial dealing. When Aunt Fanny got stung, she howled. But that didn’t occur very often. He saw to it. Put her into things that he knew were safe, although she didn’t. She used to be as much on the quiver as anybody with maximums on, watching the roulette wheel. Yes, naturally, he had never put her on to wild-cat schemes. The Wavering Estate was too precious. There was something precious in a great

Family Property—especially when one looked forward to coming into it in the course of Nature. . . . But still, there it was. Aunt Fanny was a gambler. Now and again sharks got hold of her, and when she had lost a few hundreds, she would summon him in despair. He abandoned himself to the anecdotes of reminiscence.

Mona appeared. It was past midday. She announced that after one o'clock lunch, she would drive them down to Moorstead. Her maid would take all Luke's stored trunks and Daphne's luggage by train. He declared her, in his pliant, courteous way, the fairiest of fairy godmothers. Then, with a gesture:

“Can I have time before lunch to have my hair trimmed and my nails manicured? And where would you suggest? Knightsbridge or Kensington High Street?”

He went out, kissing the tips of his fingers to Daphne, and Mona, lady of the house, followed him.

Daphne stood on the balcony in a bewilderment of pain.

More had happened to cloud Luke's soul than all her tortured imaginings had pictured. The old Luke only came out in rare flashes. In one of them he had divined her secret. With all the old love and understanding he had compelled her practical confession. It was the secret she had withheld from all the world, had resolved to hold inviolate in her heart for all time. He had wrested it from her—that poignant and soul-shattering thing—and then, to all intents and purposes, had attributed no importance to it, had indeed forgotten it and had wandered off, even with an air of gaiety, into irrelevant paths.

She had given him more than a glimpse, impelled by his sudden magical reading of her, of the hell within inferno through which she had passed; and, without reference to her ordeal, he had gone out to have his nails manicured.

She leaned over the balcony and soon saw his foreshortened figure, far away down, walk briskly westward.

## CHAPTER IX

EVELINA, actuated by human motives which she could not analyse, made concession to Theophilus. She would stay at The Grange and receive her unwelcome guests. Remote as Theophilus might be from her scheme of life, he yet stood, a concrete, immovable figure, as master in his own house.

Years ago, in pursuit of Human Welfare, she had interviewed the Governor of Dartmoor. Theophilus, accompanying her, had been taken round the prison, while she, inwardly raging at the idiot disabilities of sex which forbade her from penetrating further than the Governor's library, collected second-hand information. Yet, one thing had moved her, as it must move any human being who, in that land of desolation, comes to the prison gates and reads the more than century-old inscription above them: "*Parcere subjectis.*" Theophilus, quoting it with perhaps more pedantry than personal reminiscence, had awakened memories of that fleeting instant of emotion. "Show mercy to those in captivity." The admonition had proceeded from some befogged British official sense of fair-dealing when the prison was built to house the French prisoners in the Napoleonic wars. But it had remained through the century, with loss or obscuration of origin, as a vital appeal to the elemental tenderness of mankind.

Thus was Evelina induced to show mercy to the captive Luke. For, though free in the sense of his emergence into the outer air, he was still a captive in many ways. There were the restrictions of the Ticket of Leave. There was the man's social isolation—in itself a captivity. The moral law ordained mercifulness; to it she yielded, though profoundly deploring the occasional dissociation of the moral law from a successful political career. She could only hope, somewhat forlornly, that the second-rate Press would not make a damning masquerade of her magnanimity. Across the dreams of a troubled night flamed crude headlines: "Famous M.P. entertains discharged convict." "Notorious Swindler received in the Bosom of his Family." In the morning she said to Theophilus:

"It takes courage to face things like this."

"In some way, my dear," said he, "you'll reap your reward."

"I'm not so sure about it," said Evelina.

Mona Daventry delivered Luke and Daphne at the time appointed. Evelina

received them with the graciousness of a hostess welcoming undistinguished people who were her husband's guests. Her attitude was irreproachable, even to Mona, whose agency she could not regard as essential. Mrs. Daventry never having set foot in her house before, she felt inclined to ask her politely to what she owed the honour of her visit. Her remoteness from the ordinary converse between men and women had obscured the fact that Mona Daventry had come down, armed, of set purpose, so as to support Theophilus and save Daphne from unprofitable battle, in the event of open hostility. As it was, however, Evelina went through the formalities of tea-dispensing with an urbanity in which Theophilus could find no fault. Strong? Weak? Milk? Sugar? Scones or sandwiches? Her decorum was perfect. Perhaps Daphne alone noticed the little bitter lines at the corners of her lips.

To Luke she had said:

"I'm so glad to see you again. I hope you've had a pleasant drive down."

He might have come from Cedar Hall, instead of from the North Pole of his dismal convention. To Daphne she was pleasantly civil.

"What have you been doing since we last met? I'm such a busy woman that I find it almost impossible to keep up with family affairs."

"I've been working in Paris, dress designing."

She expressed her approval. "I think every woman ought to have a specific avocation."

"Not when she has a man to look after her," said Luke. "Perhaps that's my old-fashioned point of view."

She disregarded an unpleasant raspiness of tone.

"We can't argue from different view-points—that is to say, from different premisses," she said with a conciliatory smile.

Yet, for all her active efforts and passive repressions, it was not the most jovial of tea-parties. The almost unchanged dead museum of a drawing-room had not rung with gay laughter for half a century. It still asserted its sempiternal blight. Mona, learning that her maid had arrived with the Waverings' heavy luggage, announced her plan of taking her back in the car to London. Theophilus accompanied her to the car door.

"I appreciate your wife's kind reception of me," she said.

He sketched the conventional bow and smile.

"Such a splendid friend to her cousin . . ."

She dismissed the compliment with a nod.

"You'll find curious changes in Luke. A man can't live through all that,

and come out just as he was when he went in. You must look on him as a man groping about in the dark—or, rather, like a man who has lived in the dark for years, trying to find his way by daylight. He wants a bit of following, guiding—if you see what I mean—but you mustn't let him know you're guiding him. Daphne sees it. Follow her lead. It's a miserable business. But when a man's up against it, what can we do? . . . You're a dear good friend, and I'm only trying to put you wise. . . ." She shook hands and entered the car. "You know, Theophilus dear, I'm always on tap."

He smiled. "A fountain of beneficence."

"Only you could translate slang into—well . . . good-bye, my dear."

Theophilus returned to the drawing-room—from a sense of human warmth into a consciousness of chill. Evelina, doing her best, was talking to Luke about the League of Nations. She belonged to an organization called the League of Nations Union, which apparently knew more about Nations than the many-headed League itself. Luke leaned forward, with an air of submissive politeness, but Daphne saw that his thoughts were wandering far away, so she sat silent, on the alert, ready at any moment to protect. Theophilus stood on the threshold, the room's length from the fireplace around which they were talking, and watched her for a moment. The poise of her daintily cropped head was as like as ever to a flower on its graceful stem. The firelight in the late autumn afternoon played on features as delicate as ever in contour and colouring. There was the same magic of browns and shell-like purities. There was always a characteristic attitude of right-hand shapely fingers behind her cheekbones. And yet, seeing her thus, for the first unembarrassed minute after two years, he became aware of change. Something was missing. Something was added. The defiant insolence, whose childishness, after the first dark days, he had grown to adore, had gone from her face and manner. Something, he knew not what, had arisen in its stead. Obscure workings in some recess of his intelligence fluttered across his mind a vague concept that he was looking now not at a girl but at a woman. All that remained was the impression of her as a beautiful woman, amazingly, tragically alive, behind her pose of silence. As he approached, she shifted her position and turned her eyes away from the thin-faced, frosted Luke and his dark-coloured and animated lecturer, and smiled at him in welcome. And, his nerves tautly strung during the past emotional hour, unconsciously he read in her eyes sadness and trust and indomitable courage. She motioned to the place beside her on the old-fashioned sofa.

"What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

"I don't know. Reading, travelling—perhaps chiefly travelling."

"I suppose," said she, "that there are more places of interest in the world

than you ever realized.”

He caught the spark of laughter in her glance.

“At the Home Office it was expected that one’s horizon should be bounded by England and Wales. Even then, I was quite a traveller. I used to do my four thousand miles a year, regularly.”

“Scouring England and Wales?”

“No. Going backwards and forwards between Whitehall and Blackheath.”

She laughed at the little jest. Presently Evelina, dutiful hostess, took her off to her room. Theophilus would look after Luke. Dinner was at eight. Luke rose as the women went out.

“It’s very kind of Evelina to take us in,” said he.

“Not at all, not at all,” said Theophilus.

“It is indeed. The black sheep, the tainted wether, the returned prodigal, is not often made welcome by his family.”

“All that doesn’t apply in this case”—Theophilus was a man of many delicacies—“we all know that you had bitter hard luck.”

Luke looked up eagerly.

“Yes, the luck of the damned. The Springer Combine had sworn to do us in. They beared the market. We were bulls. They made it impossible for us to unload. . . . The true story didn’t come out in the trial. One day I’ll tell it you. It’d be too long now. Besides . . . I’m not going to bore you with old far-off forgotten things as soon as I meet you.”

“They wouldn’t bore me at all,” said Theophilus.

“Oh yes, they would. The great thing is that you never doubted me. I was the victim of a conspiracy. They all ought to have been where I’ve been. . . . But there’s the windward and the leeward side of the law. They had the strength—the money strength—to keep to the windward, and they pushed me over the line on a technicality. That’s what it comes to—spiteful revenge on the one side, and damnable luck on the other. Your belief in my innocence is all that matters.”

“What are you thinking of doing?” asked Theophilus.

Luke stared into the fire.

“I’ll get back. Get back somehow.”

Soon he recovered himself, and glanced around the room.

“Few changes. I don’t know whether it isn’t pleasanter to return to the old surroundings.” He rose and walked about, examining familiar objects, and halted before a glass case of stuffed birds in a corner. “I remember it since I

was a tiny child. This gaudy old mouldering toucan with its great beak used to fascinate me. It looked like my grandfather—*fons et origo malorum*. God! how I loathed him!”

They parted, to meet again at dinner. As a gala it lacked festivity. Luke, having realized the dream of dreadful years, and wallowed in hot scented water and arrayed himself in the cool cleanness of evening clothes, found most enjoyment in the entertainment. Mrs. Garraway, model housekeeper, a machine to be no more interfered with by Evelina than the blind works of the car which transported her hither and thither, had ordained as usual a satisfactory meal. For the moment, Luke asked no more of life. He ate in holy silence. Daphne watched him, disinclined for talk. Theophilus watched Daphne, still vaguely wondering at the subtle change wrought in her by the two years of absence. Evelina, concerned in the full performance of duty, talked of Bolshevism and Einstein and Marcel Proust, and elicited spasmodic replies from her three preoccupied companions. Wherefore her valiancy must be set down to her credit. She gave all of herself that she had to give.

She retired early after dinner. Luke, professing, with some swagger, unaccountable fatigue, soon followed. Theophilus, accompanying him with a host’s solicitude on a guest’s first night, returned downstairs to Daphne.

“Come into the library. It’s cosier. I don’t like this room.”

She looked around the museum with a shiver.

“I hate it. It means everything that’s smug and soulless on the earth. Why don’t you go round with a crowbar and smash it all up?”

“That’s an idea,” said Theophilus with a smile.

“Of course it is. Would Evelina object very much?”

“I don’t think wanton destruction would appeal to her.”

“Still sitting on the same old fence?”

“Not quite the same,” said he. “But perhaps another. Fences are restful.”

They had crossed into the hall, where the ebony negro beloved by Aunt Fanny still upheld the shaded lamp. Daphne turned on him.

“What has a man of your age to do with rest? My God! If I were a man I’d tear the world down and remake it. . . . Do you remember when we stood here last? I said I was glad you had the money, but I told you to have a hell of a time with it. Why haven’t you?”

“There are various connotations of the word ‘hell,’ ” he replied somewhat wistfully, with his hand on the knob of the library door. “Perhaps I’ve mistaken the sense in which you meant it.”

He switched on the lights of a noble room, lined with cases of books in

decorous bindings. A few old mezzotint portraits hung on the vacant wall spaces. A large writing-table gleamed in decent array. Green curtains matched the green leather-covered chairs. A cheerful fire burned beneath the high chimney-piece. Daphne stood in survey.

“This is you, anyhow, not the corpse of Aunt Fanny. I like it, but it’s a bit austere.”

“What do you think would brighten it?” he asked.

“A woman, perhaps,” said Daphne.

He realized quite suddenly the old spurring of Daphne which, for two years, he had not felt. He winced. This spurring, this stinging him with a sense of a divine discomfort, was her peculiar gift. He turned aside her answer with a half-laugh.

“What kind of a woman?”

“That”—she shrugged her shoulders—“is beyond me.”

She threw herself, slender and graceful, into one of the green leather arm-chairs, and lit a cigarette. The blue smoke curled like incense around her head. He sat on the other side of the hearthrug and watched it; he watched her mobile face, the easy curve of her body, the slim delicacy of silk-stockinged leg and the daintiness of foot. He blinked at a preposterous dazzle of a notion that buzzed through his head; the notion of Daphne, not exactly a woman in the grosser sense, but a Goddess out of the Machine, just descended in order to transmute with her touch that which the room lacked into beauty. From the alarm of the idea he shrank once more into the commonplace. He looked around vaguely.

“Any suggestions, Daphne . . . I should love them. . . .”

“I can’t make any. The room’s perfect—materially. There’s nothing wrong. But then . . .”

“But what?”

“Just but——” She smiled helplessly. “If you only had the photograph of a dog somewhere about.”

“It could easily be got,” said Theophilus, gravely humorous. “But I should have to pretend that the original once belonged to me.”

“That’s just it,” said Daphne.

Presently she rose. “Let me give you a whisky and soda. No . . . I’d like to. Sit down.”

“But I very rarely touch it.”

“It’ll do you good to-night. We’ve all had an emotional day. . . . Besides,

why shouldn't you have the comfort, as a matter of course, of a drink before going to bed?"

He yielded, followed her with contented eyes as she moved to the table whereon was set out the ritual array of decanters, siphons and glasses, ordained as inalienable from a gentleman's existence by Mrs. Garraway, the perfect housekeeper.

"You spoil me," he said, taking the glass from Daphne's hand. "By myself I never think of it. Solitary drinking has a flavour of vice. . . . And you?" he queried, as she stood over him.

"I'll help myself to some Evian."

Sitting there, while she wandered with her easy grace about the great, formal room, he felt impolite, Oriental and delighted. She filled the place with a new influence. He knew that, were she never to enter it again, it would always be haunted by the sweet ghost of her presence.

She returned and stood on the hearthrug, sipping her Evian water.

"What are we going to do with Luke?" she asked suddenly.

Theophilus had no idea beyond the fact that Luke was his welcome guest for an indefinite period.

"He must look about, I suppose," he concluded lamely.

"He can't do it yet," said Daphne. "You must give his eyes time to get accustomed to the sunshine. I hope you see what I mean? There's a danger of his getting all his values wrong."

He was deeply moved by her fine authority. She had stated in terms of defence what he had uncomfortably formulated in terms of judgment.

"You'll take things—well, everything into consideration, won't you?"

"Of course. A man can't come through that ordeal and retain perfect balance. As it is, I think him wonderful."

"He's a gallant gentleman or nothing," cried Daphne, with a proud toss of her head. "He got his D.S.O. at Ypres. Every one says he ought to have had the V.C. Of course the brutes have taken it away from him. But they can't alter the fact of his winning it. Oh, yes, he's as brave as a lion; but he's also a human being with a nervous System, and that has been broken up. . . . You must make allowances."

No appeal could be more logical. Theophilus promised.

"He's dreaming already of a whole London to conquer," she continued. "We must let him dream, and treat all his plans as dreams." She set her glass on the mantelpiece and came to him, putting one hand on the back of his chair.

“You do understand, don’t you, Theophilus?”

He looked up into her young, eager face. Yes, he quite understood. She needn’t fear. Luke should be the sick man of the house. She clasped her trim head and threw out her hands in an appealing gesture.

“I can’t explain what I mean. But I’ve a feeling that it means a tremendous lot to all of us.”

He rose and took her hands and smiled gravely.

“We’ll look after him, you and I. I promise.”

She returned his grip firmly.

“I wish I could tell you what I think about you.”

Modesty counselled the answer: “Please don’t!”

“Oh, it’s not all complimentary by any means,” she laughed. “Now I go to bed. I’m dog tired. Don’t worry. I know my way. . . .”

She picked up her bag—that detached pocket of woman which perhaps, to men, is the great symbol of the unbridgeable gulf between the sexes, and hesitated for the flicker of a second. Then she opened it, as of sudden impulse, and drew out something which she dumped on the writing-table.

“I bought it in Paris for Luke. He used to love jade; but—I don’t know—I don’t think he’s in tune for it. I’d much rather you had it. It may take the place of the photograph of a dog. Good night. At any rate, you’re the dearest of dears.”

Like a flash she sped to the door, kissed her fingers, and disappeared.

Theophilus found on his writing-table a two-inch high Buddha in white jade, exquisitely carved. After examining it, he set it down again and stood away so as to contemplate its effect in the surroundings. It was unique, individual in the perfectly appointed impersonal room to which he had given so much formal thought.

He passed his hand over the thinning hair of the ex-official. Daphne was right. Something had been wrong with the room. It had missed an indefinable touch. The woman’s touch. It had contained nothing fragrant with human sweetness. Now the room was transfigured by the touch.

The Buddha, arms folded, with delicate hands touching elbows, looked into the distance with those eyes of unfathomable serenity which can yet bring comfort to mortals in distress.

## CHAPTER X

EVELINA, having conducted herself irreproachably in trying circumstances during the week-end, pleaded the call of public duties, and left The Grange on the Monday morning. A divinely appointed International Sanitary Congress took her away, a fortnight later, to Stockholm. The cheerful John Roberts who, besides being Chairman of the Greenwich Borough Council, was serving his year as the Right Worshipful Master of the Plumbers' Company of the City of London, was also one of the delegates. He and Evelina had been close friends for some years. Her absence from Greenwich had perhaps made his heart grow fonder. They were dear companions. They walked hand-in-hand through sewage Systems as through fields of asphodel, and enjoyed themselves enormously.

"You are really missing an education," she wrote to Theophilus.

From Stockholm, on the invitation of the Dutch delegates, they proceeded to Holland, where all National Sanitary Secrets were revealed to them. In October Parliament reassembled. Evelina gracefully evaded the nominal duties of hostess at The Grange. To the three living there she faded into a shadow.

Whilst she was abroad conventional correspondence took place between husband and wife, remarkable, if the negative can have salient value, by its unruffled urbanity.

"So long as I am not at The Grange, my dear Theophilus, have whom you like to stay. My political parties last session were useful, but not essential, and I can easily postpone resumption of them to days, I hope not far off, when unfortunate family affairs have simplified themselves. Meanwhile I can carry on the personal side of things both at the flat and the Club. You will no doubt, excuse me to your guests on the ground of absorbing national affairs."

This general reply to a specific question absolved Theophilus from delicate hesitation in asking Mona Daventry to the house, over which reigned for some time an untroubled peace.

The first time Mona came down for a week-end, Theophilus waved a hand round the drawing-room.

"This," said he, "is the most deadly room in England. It has got to be changed. Plush curtains and stuffed birds and cabbage-rose-flowered Axminster don't seem to embody the modern spirit. I really am beginning to dislike those mahogany-backed arm-chairs, and the bead-embroidered footstools. I don't like those pedimented, Corinthian-columned glass cases,

and I can't stand the wall-paper and the pictures. I always thought I was somehow uncomfortable in this room, and now I'm sure of it. What is to be done?"

"Scrap it all," said Mona.

"That's Daphne's idea," said Theophilus.

"There are some treasures of china and glass."

"I know," he replied helplessly. "That's the devil of it."

A month of Daphne's society had unconsciously inspired him with a discontent all the more divine because it defied his sober efforts at analysis. Life seemed to present itself to him as a mirror of many facets in every one of which he found the reflection of himself to be distorted. Now, either the mirrors were false, or, they being true, he himself or his conception of himself was wrong. It was a puzzling quandary. Most modest of human beings, he could not accuse himself of anarchical revolt against an apparently well-organized world. Nor could his good man's pride in integrity and virtue act otherwise than defensively. He had harmed no man, no woman, in his life. From youth up he had fulfilled every duty with a disinterested mind and with a face as grave as that of Mr. Shandy's bull. He had never deviated from the broad, clean-cut path of conduct. He had nothing wherewith to reproach himself. Fortune unsolicited had come to him, and he had used it with fastidious modesty in the unblameable gratification of simple and intellectual tastes. And yet everything in his world was wrong. Or else he was wrong.

In the first place his relations with Evelina were wrong. How was he, Theophilus, to blame? A wife's first duty, according to the standard accepted by all mankind, from primitive ages, was the cherishing of the individual that was her husband, the father or potential father of her children. Well, no children had come. Evelina had often declared that she would sooner even have dogs about the place than children. But the primitive duty of the cherishing of her husband persisted. That was Eternal Law—so long as the husband did not put himself beyond the pale of woman's tolerance. In all the implied terms of the proviso, he held himself blameless. From the early days of their marriage, Evelina had deliberately sacrificed the cherishing of the individual to a passion for general welfare. She was a good and remarkable woman; but as a wife, judged from any canon prevalent from the Neolithic Age to the Neo-Georgian period, she was naught. She was a factor in the general wrongness of the world.

Talks with Daphne made him realize that he was a friendless man. Why? He didn't know. He neither put on airs of superiority, nor displayed to his neighbour a cantankerous disposition. He felt pleased when people liked him.

Luke's disinterested affection in the old days had always brought him a heart-beat of pleasure. To Mona he was more than grateful. Daphne was the only creature in the world who had ever taken the trouble to stir up the depths of his being, and turn him, as it were, inside out before himself, and show him what he was, what he might have been, what he might be; the one creature who, paradoxically, had put the whole world wrong before his eyes. She was ever holding up a flaming torch to guide the way through an unfamiliar labyrinth, and the flare cast fantastic shadows all around, yet here and there illuminated something in dazzling clarity.

The revelation of the drawing-room's mausoleum monstrosity, of the falsities and hypocrisies and vulgar ideals and ignorant superciliousnesses that had gone to its making, was but a symbol of the growing change in the man's hitherto restricted outlook on life.

"Talk to Daphne, my dear," he said to Mona, "and between the two of you get out a scheme of decoration and furnishing. Do as you like. What will please you and Daphne"—she smiled at his delicate merging of the pair into a feminine chord—"will be the very thing I'm looking for."

He stopped, passed his hand over his head in some confusion.

"You must forgive me. I didn't quite realize what I was saying. . . . I've been trespassing beyond the bounds of friendship. . . ."

She interrupted with a laugh. "You think it a tall order? Why, Daphne and I would have the time of our lives. Yes, I assure you. But . . ."

"But what?"

She hesitated. "Mrs. Bird. . . ?"

"Evelina? She'll be only too glad, I'm sure. If she hadn't been such a busy woman she would have turned the place upside down long ago. It'll be a pleasant surprise to her."

And, even as the echo of his words died in his ears, he wondered whether Evelina would take much note of the change. She was a woman curiously insensitive to environment. Amid the bought furniture of her predecessor in the Westminster flat, she was perfectly contented. To her, chairs, tables, beds, curtains, were purely utilitarian objects. As far as her own æsthetic taste was concerned authentic Chippendale held as much significance as the deal appurtenances of a workhouse. She might not even be aware of change. She was a wonderful woman of brilliant intellect and tireless energy, and, now and then, of singular personal attractiveness; but to her the house was as impersonal as a hotel. When he left Mrs. Daventry, after pleasant detailed discussion, he went into his library and was greeted by the personal note, struck with exquisite preciousness, by the white jade Buddha on his writing-

table.

In spite of the darknesses and the sudden flashes, and the confusion of tones which rendered his inner life rather a dream than a reality, Theophilus was confronted by the practical problem of Luke, who manifested no desire to move from luxurious quarters. Daphne grew restive, apologetic to a host conscientious possessor of a guest's forfeited fortune:

"Give him time."

To which Theophilus would reply:

"The house is his and yours, my dear."

And then came a period of strange inaction, of acceptance of existing things. The man must be given time to attune himself to a life that had to be re-made. He was curiously self-sufficing, self-effacing. He spent solitary hours in the little sitting-room attached to his bedroom, which had been placed at his disposal, reading newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals. For exercise he wandered about the grounds, or walked through country lanes with Daphne as companion. At meals he was the courteous guest, discussing the trivialities of the moment, the garden, the mild autumn weather, or the current affairs of the world. He had soon ceased to refer, even by implication, to the dark period of his life. The reaction of generous diet and soft lying caused him to put on flesh. The austerity of the frosted judge melted from his face, the colour returned to his cheeks, and his hawk's eyes lost the fierce hunger that had stricken Daphne on their first meeting.

Now and then he went up to London. To do what, no one thought of asking. One of the rare references to his fallen estate occurred when a pile of cardboard cases arrived addressed to Theophilus Bird, and bearing the name of a firm of tailors. Luke made his apologies. A decent outfit he must have in order to face the world again. His own tailor, the best in London . . . he shrugged his shoulders at the impossibility of renewed relations. Yet he must go to a well-known firm, give banker's references. He had used Theophilus's name. But let Theophilus have no fear. He had only borrowed a few days' credit. The account had been paid. He drew from his pocket the signed receipt for two hundred and forty pounds.

"There are some shirts and ties and socks and shoes and things coming in the same way. . . . I was sure you wouldn't mind, my dear fellow. A name's just a name—impersonal unless it happens to be notorious. . . . You see, if one has to play a part in life, one must dress it. . . . Those four-year-old, antiquated costumes that I've got are more than useless. They're condemnatory. You

follow me?”

“Generally, but not quite accurately,” said Theophilus, with a recent trick of humorous smile. “This kit of mine”—he indicated an old golf suit—“is, I think, pre-war.”

Luke waved an indulgent hand. Theophilus was the chartered libertine of dowdy attire. He, Luke, was a man of pre-ordained smartness.

In his new clothes he went, a resurrection of his former self, to do his business in the great waters of the City of London. Of his activities he never spoke specifically, only making vague references to the re-establishment of useful relations.

One day during indefinite talk of the reconstruction of his fortune, Daphne offered the little sum of her savings. He was deeply affected, and wiped the moisture from his eyes. He would not touch a penny of it. For present needs he had sufficient funds, a tidy little sum which he had saved from the wreck, and which lay secure in the Bank of Geneva. This fact, of course, must not be proclaimed from the house-tops, seeing that, as a bankrupt, he had not yet obtained his discharge.

“It’s enough,” said he, “to keep the wolf from the door for a year—and naturally the longer we can postpone the beginning of the year, so much the better. That’s why I accepted Theophilus’s hospitality. It can’t go on for ever. I’m the last man in the world to play barnacle. That you know. . . . But there are other aspects of things. Theophilus feels himself to be under moral obligations to us. Now, far from speaking cynically, my dear child, I’m convinced that the fulfilment, in some way, of these obligations eases his mind. It’s a case of the delicate balance between giving and receiving. . . . I’m quite as grateful to receive as he is eager to give. But soon we must fend for ourselves. . . . As for your savings, my dear, regard them as a nest-egg. Always useful. In your case,” he concluded with a smile, “I shouldn’t suggest Geneva.”

He was charming, courteous, affectionate, but, to Daphne, impenetrable. At his urgent entreaty—what could he do without his Daphne, who had kept house for him ever since she was three years old?—she had journeyed to Paris, sold up her flat at Passy, and surrendered her position as dress-designer to the great firm of Pataquin.

“How long are we going to stay here?” she asked Theophilus, in her direct fashion.

“A few years, I hope,” said he.

She bade him talk sense. He countered by the retort that it was the most sensible proposition he had formulated in his life.

“If the situation weren’t so extraordinary,” said Daphne, “our staying on here indefinitely would be monstrous. As it is, why should we eat your bread, and give you nothing in return?”

“Ah, don’t!” said Theophilus. She saw that he was hurt.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

It was only the next day that he found an answer to her question.

“I may have the *esprit de l’escalier*—the flash of the thing that ought to have been said, which only comes when one is going downstairs after leaving a drawing-room—but you asked me yesterday why you should eat my bread. Any bread can be eaten when it is blessed by love—the love I have for you—and your father.”

They had met in the hall. He turned away abruptly, and entered his study.

The weeks drifted by imperceptibly. The refurnishing of the drawing-room under the guidance of Mona Daventry and Daphne, and the latter’s school-friend, Ellen Pennycuick, the decorator with whom she had lived in West Kensington, occupied much of his time. He was greatly interested in the discovery of the scientific aspect of æsthetics. There were harmonious chords of colour, for instance, just as there were harmonious chords of sound. Cherry and brick-red were discords just as there were discords in music. It was a question of interval in tones. He sucked in learning, both from his advisers and from text-books. He even went through Owen Jones’s “Grammar of Ornament.”

Christmas loomed upon them almost unawares. Theophilus sought Evelina in London, as he had ever done once or twice a week, since she had maintained her impersonal Westminster establishment. She gave him, in her dining-room, the midday food which the cynical management of the service-flats provided for the helpless or depressed, and with her usual charm of courtesy listened to the tale of his dilemma.

“My dear,” she said, “isn’t it odd? I was on the point of writing to you—to ask you whether you’d mind my spending Christmas abroad. There’s an interesting party of friends going to St. Moritz.”

Theophilus paused in the effort to cut a tough cutlet with a blunt knife, and regarded her in surprise.

“But what’ll you do at St. Moritz? That’s where they go about on skis and bob-sleighs all day and dance to beastly noise all night. You’re not going in for winter sports and dancing?”

Evelina as an undraped Corybante in the most modern of Paris revues was a less realizable figure.

She laughed in her charmingly intellectual way.

“Of course not. But the life there must be interesting from the eugenic point of view. We hope to get, at first hand, as observers, some very valuable information.”

The image of Daphne flashed across the field of his mental vision. He could almost hear her cry:

“Oh, my God!”

He expressed the polite hope that she would have a pleasant and profitable time, and when, after cordial leave-taking, he found himself in the free, crisp air of the Sanctuary, he took to wondering what kind of a woman he had married and lived with for so many years. He walked along the Embankment to his Club, where he had told his chauffeur to meet him, and all the way his head reeled with the problem, not only of Evelina, but of himself in relation to Evelina. In the dismal Blackheath house he would have taken her abstract eugenic interest in winter sports as a matter of course. He would have met her on her high intellectual plane; now he was teased by the suggestion of an abnormal mentality. He paused on the steps of the Club, gathering together his wits.

There she had sat, as agreeable to look upon, as charming to converse with as any woman he could wish to meet—and yet she was remoter from him in the flesh than any girl who had tripped by him on the pavement; remoter from him intellectually than the medalled commissioner who held the door open for him; remoter spiritually than the red-faced, obese acquaintance, reputed to be a bookmaker, who, on passing, gave him a nod of greeting.

He stood for a while in the columned hall that seemed peopled with busy phantoms. What was he doing in this unreal world? How many of the figures were going, like Evelina, to that apotheosis of the radiance of youth, which, in his soul—he could not tell why—he realized as being St. Moritz, like cold-blooded, incarnated intellects, to note and tabulate in meaningless numbers the blood-pressures, the heart-beats, the average dietetics in terms of vitamins and calories, of such a joyous, care-free assembly?

He could not stay; the Club sounded no call. The car sped him homewards to Moorstead. . . . A line of George Meredith came into his head: “League-sundered by the silent gulf between.”

So league-sundered were now himself and Evelina. But why? Why had he not stepped across the first opening rift and stood by her side? Was it that a hand stronger than he knew held him back?

It so happened that, on his return, he met Daphne descending the broad staircase of the balconied hall. His confused mind distorted her into the figure

of a lithe goddess, yet warm and human, coming down to him with welcome in her eyes.

Her words of greeting were of the most commonplace.

“Well? What about Christmas?”

“Evelina’s going to St. Moritz.”

Daphne knitted her brow “Will she like it?”

He explained her object. She would run down one day to make her apologies for defection at such a time, and offer her Christmas greetings.

“I think,” said Daphne, “that Evelina’s perhaps a better sort than you realize.”

“Why?” he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“She loathes the sight of Luke and myself, and so has found this graceful way of escape.”

“I’m sure that’s not in her mind at all,” said Theophilus.

“Rubbish,” said Daphne, ending the argument.

Mona Daventry, loyal friend, came down for Christmas and the opening of the New Year. As a festive party, they might, as far as the outside world concerned itself about them, have been marooned on a comfortable desert island. They were cut off from the social world by unnavigable seas. Sometimes Daphne chafed. She was young. The blood danced through her veins. Her two years in Paris had pulsed with thrills manifold and perilous. She had lived at the top of her being, and though she had passed through bitter disillusionment, the splendour and faith of her youth clamoured for something yet unfulfilled of life. Her desert-island horizon comprised three human beings; when Mona Daventry was away only two men remained. On each of them, in separate ways, she was ready to expend her passionate devotion. But the song and laughter and the human modern rubbing of shoulders with her coevals, the dancing, the flush and flutter and insistent rhythm of it which had been an inalienable factor of her being since she could first sway to fox-trots at children’s parties—all that had gone. . . . Mona, woman of a pleasant social world, would have taken her to the resorts where youth, authentic and otherwise, rejoices in its ebullience. She was a member of most of the far-famed clubs perched on the rim of the world volcano. It was in her heart to give Daphne a good time; but the conjunction of names, Daventry and Wavering, rendered impossible such excursions into the realms of gladness; she could do nothing.

Thus they led a secluded life. Now and then a box at a theatre, Luke

sensitively insisting on a seat in the dark background, provided them with immediate entertainment and a common subject of talk for a day or two. Daphne was for daring publicity. Why, since he had done nothing wrong, should he remain in the shadow? She went off to London with him one day, and they lunched together at a great restaurant. She challenged all around with an air of proud defiance; but she was driven to confess failure of the experiment. He scarcely ate anything; his eyes were ever furtively alert; a wine-waiter handing him the list addressed him by name, in which the ear of each, hers jealous, his suspicious, detected an ironical intonation. At a far-off table there were whisperings and glances from the company assembled.

“They’re talking about me over there,” said Luke.

“We’ve got to get used to it, dear,” said Daphne.

On their way out through the lounge, a man sitting with a woman half rose as though to speak to him. He hurried by with averted head.

“Who was that?” asked Daphne.

“A man I used to know. Perhaps I ought to have stopped. . . . My nerves, after the North Pole, are not what they were.”

He would not go out with her again. Still less would he present himself in the public glare in the company of Mona and Theophilus. The Christmas quartette were thrown upon their own resources. They walked when the weather was fine. They played bridge, mainly with a view to the scientific education of an inexpert Theophilus. Luke, an accomplished musician, spent hours at the piano.

“I’ve been playing the organ a good deal lately,” was one of his rare references to the past few years.

From which Theophilus, late of the Home Office, deduced the fact that, a first-class convict, he had attained the coveted post of organist in the prison chapel.

For most of the day each of the four lived his or her separate life, restful, with book over fire, unexciting, uneventful. Fortunately they were all unaware of the cackle of Moorstead, to which the presence of Luke Wavering was that of a fox lurking near a poultry yard. Evelina Bird, that distinguished woman, driven from her home, received the circumambient sympathy. Had there been a general election, and had she put up for the Moorstead Division of Hertfordshire, she would have been returned with an overwhelming majority.

Mona Daventry departed, leaving behind her a perfume of human graciousness and love.

“She’s rescued, thank goodness. We three remain marooned,” said Daphne,

to whom the desert island simile had first occurred. “Luke and I must build a raft and get away.”

Theophilus asked: “What will happen to me?”

She bade him not press figures of speech to their logical conclusion. Or, if he was bent on logic, let them postulate a fantastic and unreal existence such as theirs, in which anything might happen. He, living alone, would probably find the djinns of the county only too ready to come to his aid.

“But I want you, my dear Daphne,” said Theophilus in some alarm—“I want you more than ever.”

“Why?” she asked boldly.

“I don’t know,” said he, and after a pause of seriousness, “perhaps it is that during these months you have meant to me warmth and colour. If you went, this place would be like a cold room with a fireless grate.”

Their eyes met and in a smile the thoughts of each went back to the chilly Blackheath drawing-room where Daphne, in her young insolence, had proclaimed the futility and uselessness of Evelina.

“You’re learning to say most captivating things,” she began.

“I mean them,” said Theophilus.

“Of course you do. If you didn’t, do you suppose I’d stay here a minute longer than I could help? But we must come down to bare facts. Unless I drag Luke away, he’s here for the rest of time. There are springs in him that are broken. I’ve got to supply them.”

“Just a little longer rest here and they’ll be mended.”

So pleaded Theophilus then and in subsequent talks, thus delaying the building of Daphne’s raft.

There came a day towards the end of January when Luke, after one of his mysterious visits to London, broke into the scholarly calm of the library.

“My dear fellow . . .”

Theophilus rose courteously from his writing-chair, in an attitude of inquiry.

“I’ve done a great day’s work,” cried Luke.

He seemed to have cast off the blight of mouldering years, and reappeared as the brisk, dapper man, with clear, fearless eyes and dry conquering smile, whom Theophilus had known long ago.

“I’ve done a splendid day’s work. I wonder whether you’ll help me. . . .”

Oh, no—no question of money.” He waved away the mean suggestion. “One rather of social position. . . . It’s difficult to explain. I’ll put it this way. As a broken, bankrupt financier, I’m not of much account in a City office. Here, as the honoured guest of the owner of The Grange at Moorstead and of Mrs. Theophilus Bird, M.P., with my charming daughter, I’m more or less somebody. I can stick up my head. You follow me?”

He helped himself to a cigar from a box on a side table, and lit it during the polite murmurings of Theophilus.

“It’s this way. There’s a scheme that started in my mind some time before the crash, and has been maturing ever since. It’s to do with wool-packing—a scientific process . . . I can’t go into details. It would take too long, and you wouldn’t understand. But the principle of the thing is this—that if you compress a bale of Australian wool into half its present cubic space, you save half the freightage. That’s clear, isn’t it? Of course, you’ve got to deliver the wool in the same undamaged condition as it is now. Any fool with hydraulic presses could squeeze a fleece into a handful of petrified absurdity. But this process not only does no harm, but saves to a great extent the present processes of extraction of the oils. It’s a secret. And I’ve got it. I bought it from a poor devil who invented it . . . hard up, you know. Of course I meant to give him shares in the company I was thinking of floating. That goes without saying. But he’s dead. No relations. So I can carry on with a free conscience. I’ve improved on the idea. One thinks a lot at the North Pole. And now I’ve got some people interested in it. I’ve had to work, work like a dog, putting my pride in my pocket. But I’ve come out on top. Did you ever hear of Willoughby, Gurt, Sexton & Sons? No? Well, how should you? They’re one of the oldest firms of wool-brokers in Mincing Lane. They’ve been wool-gathering for over a century, and intermarrying and mixing their woolly lives together, so that they’re all in a tangled skein. Anyhow, I’ve got hold of Sexton Gurt, one of the partners. He would come down to discuss this quietly and see the original documents which I have here, if he was asked. Will you help me to fix it up?”

“Why, of course,” said Theophilus.

“You see,” said Luke, “my position here is a bit delicate. . . .”

“Not at all, my dear friend,” said Theophilus. “When will you begin to understand that this house is yours?”

Luke smiled. “*A la disposicion de usted!*”

“I’m an Englishman, not a Spaniard,” replied Theophilus.

## CHAPTER XI

THE young man, Sexton Gurt, came to The Grange, saw, and was conquered. No needy wolf lurking about the City was Luke Wavering, but a comfortable gentleman living in luxury, and held in honour by a nominal master of the house, and adored by a daughter of astonishing excellence. The financier's record was one which inspired suspicion in the mind of a reasonable man; but the financier had a brain; perhaps the catastrophe of some years before had been due rather to the Imp of Mischance than to the Devil of Wickedness. Sexton Gurt found himself hovering on the fine edge of judgment.

He was a young man of versatile talent and broad interests. He wool-broked by day with natural ability and hereditary enthusiasm; but away from Mincing Lane he loved to mingle with the dilettanti of the Arts and Sciences. He collected Græco-Roman glass, first editions of seventeenth-century English poets, and had a well-appointed astronomical observatory in his house on Highgate Hill. He was dark, clean-visaged, keen-eyed, neat-figured, and displayed the engaging manners of the man who found alien to him nothing that was human.

He came down one Sunday dressed in discreet purples. There was even a purple shade in the brown of his suit. To Daphne, he came as a zephyr from the Outer World. The luncheon was passed in allusive jest, in which both Luke and Theophilus joined, just as though raw wool and gaols had no existence on this most delectable of planets.

Whether it was the excellence of the meal (including wines of which Theophilus knew nothing) provided by Mrs. Garraway, or the unimpeachable honourability (to use a Gallicism) of Theophilus, or the rekindled spirit, up to then just on the wane, of Daphne, that was the predominant influence in the young man's judgment, who can say? Perhaps all three worked in combination with Luke Wavering's personal magnetism. The fact remains that before Sexton Gurt stepped into his car on his London journey, the solid nucleus of the new wool-packing company had been formed. After examination of the precious documents, plans, working drawings, detail drawings, specifications, expert reports, assignments of patent rights in consideration of moneys paid, which took up all the afternoon till dinner time, Luke stood triumphant before three bemused people, triumphant like Horus, the hawk-faced god. He had begged Sexton Gurt to permit the confidential presence of Daphne and Theophilus at the interview. All that Luke had told by word of mouth to the

young wool-broker stared at him proven, in the blue and white of prints and the black and white of documents. The keen intellect of Theophilus mastered the scientific detail. The leaping feminine intelligence of Daphne, scorning absurd detail, sprang unerringly at result. To her it was a world-shaking invention, all due to Luke's genius. She lost sight of the poor dead devil of an inventor who had sold his life's work for a hungrily-needed sixpence, in the radiance of Luke, the discoverer, the compeller, the old Luke fashioning great events out of his brain. . . .

The inclusion of Daphne and Theophilus in the discussion had been a stroke on the part of Luke of daring business unorthodoxy. But it had been subtly conceived and prepared. Theophilus contributed to the scheme the dry light of reason; Daphne the flame of enthusiasm.

The draft prospectus submitted by Luke was as clear as desert sunlight.

The young man, Sexton Gurt, went away perfectly happy, having expressed his readiness to take up a vast number of shares in the new company, and to join the Directorate.

Theophilus, too, found himself, for the first time in his life, a Director *in posse*.

"Ten shares, a paltry hundred pounds, my dear fellow," said Luke, "is all that is needed in order to qualify."

As for Luke himself, he must remain in the background, leasing his invention in consideration of a due apportionment of shares, of which Theophilus should be the nominal holder.

"If my name appears in the matter—I'm frank—the whole thing goes sky-high. That's obvious. . . . But the very few people in the know, who will put up the money, will realize that the allocation of shares to me represents far more than the lease of an invention. It means a financial brain at the back of the concern. I can only be that if I'm behind the one who has the controlling interest. To wit," said he, with a laugh, "my level-headed cousin, Theophilus Bird."

It was Daphne who invested him, the man of straw, with rainbow wings and prismatic halo. In the mirror which she held up he beheld himself as the god-sent personage who alone could restore the fallen fortunes of the Waverings. He put far more than his hundred pounds into the Wool-Packing concern, and, in a few weeks, when the experimental Company was floated, he found himself with his own shares and those allotted to Luke, which stood in his name, in a very influential position on the Board. The Chairman was one Sir Hercules Samways, a financier knighted during the war for services rendered, according to spiteful, unkind tongues, incidentally to the Empire, but

mainly to a shrewd gentleman whose original name was Samuels. What he did not know of company-promoting was not worth knowing, and Theophilus, regarding him as a new Gamaliel, sat at his feet.

Meanwhile some swift transaction on the part of Luke, a daring buying and selling of shares—to Theophilus a dazzling turn of prestidigitation—made Luke master of a goodly sum of money. He explained the matter, with perhaps purposeful vagueness, to Theophilus.

“I can now see my way, my dear fellow,” said he, “to start once more a modest establishment of my own. I’ve found a little house in the Wellington Road—between Lord’s and the beginning of the Finchley Road, you know—which I can rent furnished for a year or two. It will suffice for the modest needs of Daphne and myself. . . . We can no longer be a burden on you—even the pleasantest of burdens, for I appreciate all that’s in your kind heart. You must let us go our ways with our souls filled with unspeakable gratitude.”

Thus, in brief, Luke during a long conversation. It was March. He had been six months a guest at The Grange. Once again Theophilus protested, but this time in vain. Daphne stepped into the argument. Her pride had been strained to breaking-point. Did he not realize that they had been keeping Evelina out of her own house? Theophilus had to yield.

It was a mild morning of clear sky and breeze and dancing sunshine. The tender greenery of the trees rustled happily. On the banks by the greenhouses crocuses and daffodils leaned towards the sun. Here and there peeped violets, and the air was sweet. Daphne had said: “One last look round,” and Theophilus had accompanied her. He looked at her swinging easily by his side, tall, slender, her head bent in its curiously flower-like way, her cheeks whipped into colour by the spring, and when she touched his arm with an “Oh, look, how lovely!” he shrank with a sense of pain. Half an hour hence she would be gone. The six months’ wonder of her presence in the house would vanish. Her wit, her laughter, her beauty, her wisdom, her influence, her grace, her . . . well, everything that was Daphne would fade away, like a wood-nymph allotted to mortal for a span, and then summoned from him at some inscrutable behest of Olympus.

He threw out his arms lest his casting-off of her touch should be misinterpreted.

“My God,” said he, “what am I going to do without you?”

She said with kind gravity: “I wish I knew. When I came I wanted to make you do something, set things on fire, go out into the world and play hell. . . .”

“You didn’t catch me young enough,” sighed Theophilus. “I had passed the age before you were born.”

“You’re only forty.”

“That’s true,” said he. “But perhaps I was born old. I never had the chance of learning how to play hell in the world. . . .”

“And I’ve longed to teach you and I’ve failed,” said Daphne with a laugh.

“All that doesn’t solve my problem, what am I going to do in this enormous house all by myself, chasing the ghost of you from room to room?”

She halted and faced him.

“Eh? Say that again.” In her smile he saw all the tender mockery of the spring.

“No,” said he; “I’ve said it once.” He turned away. “Perhaps once too much. But that’s what it’ll come to. You are vivid. When you pass through a room the light or whatever it is of you remains. You must be aware of that. . . . What I mean by the ghost of you. A lingering luminosity . . . always there—but felt rather than seen. I’m not much good at talking of such things. It’s more than a figure of speech. It’s something real.”

She looked away. “That’s foolishness. If you only knew . . . I’m a girl of not much account. . . . But such foolishness may make it impossible for Luke and me to come down here again.”

“I don’t see why,” said Theophilus.

“Don’t you?” She looked at him squarely between the eyes. “I’m woman of the world enough to put it in a nutshell. Either you’re talking nonsense—and you’re not the man to do it—or you’re saying that you’ve fallen in love with me. Which is it?”

“I’m not talking nonsense,” said Theophilus. “I’m expressing my feelings as best I can. I repeat that the house will be dark and cold when you’ve gone—where for the last six months it has been bright and warm. Also that something elusive of you will remain—like a ghost. . . . I’m not at liberty to tell you that I’m in love with you.”

“It would be improper, I suppose,” said Daphne.

He was stung by her taunt into unprecedented action. He seized both her wrists, unaware how his strong bony grip hurt them.

“It would be disloyal to my wife and to you. I’ve told you what you mean to me. I’ve asked you for nothing. Can’t you leave it at that?”

“Please”—she smiled as she disengaged herself. “Why should I? I don’t like the mysteries of moonshine. I like to see my way clear, so that I can act.

Of course I've seen that you're in love with me. Even a young girl would have seen—and I'm not a young girl. I ought to have gone away months ago. . . . But there was Luke. He's paramount. Besides, it was very pleasant to feel oneself loved by a man like you. I thought, like a fool, I could help you a bit. . . .”

“But, by God, you have helped me!” cried Theophilus.

She sighed. “To what?”

He could find no immediate answer. The gardener's Airedale bitch came leaping out from behind the conservatory, and threw herself, ecstatic, on Daphne.

“There's another who'll be miserable when you've gone,” said Theophilus.

For Daphne and the dog were bosom friends, and although, loyal to Evelina's prejudices, Theophilus had not brought a dog of his own into the establishment, yet Bunch, the Airedale, a passionate admirer of Daphne, had, in some kind of way, been given the freedom of the house. She had been her companion on lonely walks, when they had talked heart to heart.

“I don't want to take her away from you, Franklin,” she had said once, “but I've been cut off from a dog for such a long time, and my life has not been the same without one.”

And the old gardener who had known Daphne as a child had grinned and assigned her the free companionship of Bunch, with the proviso that she must not feed her at table. He had also given her a six months' old son of Bunch, impeccably fathered, on whom she had bestowed the name of Napoleon.

She stooped and took the wiry head in her hands, feeling the vibrations of the dog's body from the funny little stump of tail, and looked into the honest brown eyes, laughingly avoiding the licking tongue that sought her cheek.

“And I'll miss you, old dear. Dreadfully. It'll be the tragicalest thing that ever was.”

She rose. The dog, contented, sat down on her haunches, and as her goddess did not move, awaited further developments.

“Can't you look on me as a sort of Bunch?” said Theophilus.

She turned and began to retrace her steps towards the house. He walked by her side, the dog sedately following. There was silence. Presently he was aware that she was crying.

“My dear,” said he, “what's the matter?”

She pulled herself together, swept her eyes with both hands.

“Don't ask. Everything's in an unholy mess.”

They issued through the clipped box doorway on to the lawn path. Luke came from the house to meet them. The emotional spell was broken. A few minutes later Luke and Daphne and the puppy, Napoleon, drove away, leaving Theophilus and a disconsolate Bunch standing lonely on the front steps of the house.

“Come into the library and let us talk things over,” said Theophilus. And when they were seated in front of the fire, Bunch on the hearthrug, he continued: “We’re both of us in a bad way, old thing, but she really does care for us. That’s some comfort, isn’t it?”

Evelina came down for the week-end, the house being cleared of undesirables. Theophilus took her into the renovated drawing-room. She cast a critical glance around.

“Yes. If you like this sort of thing, it’s all right. It’s your house.”

“But it is charming, isn’t it?” he pleaded.

“Tasteful—I don’t deny it. But I must say I miss the old dignity.” She smiled kindly. “After all, what do these things matter? Except, of course, that they mean the pursuit of shadows instead of the substance. There’s so much to be done in the world other than this.”

“Beauty has its value,” said Theophilus.

“To the idle. But I don’t see what good a supply of art cushions would be to miners’ wives in South Wales.”

“I’m afraid there’s a fallacy in your logic, my dear,” said Theophilus good-humouredly. “The undistributed middle. Listen. Art cushions are no good to miners’ wives. They are human beings. We are human beings. Therefore they are no good to us.”

“You know quite well what I mean,” she said impatiently.

“I’m afraid I don’t, unless you mean that we should give up art cushions, because miners’ wives can’t either afford them or appreciate them. If you marched under the Red Flag I could understand you: but, thank God, you’re a stalwart Conservative.”

“So I am,” she said; “but that senseless luxury . . .”

He shrugged away the theme and talked of something else.

She took up the argument later.

“I’m afraid money has spoilt you, Theophilus. In these surroundings you’ve lost the sense of the grim modern world in which we have to live and struggle. Once we worked towards the same ideals. We were hand in hand.

Now you seem to care for nothing but the comfort and leisure of the dilettante. What does the beauty of your own surroundings mean, I won't say to society—for that's an obscure term—but to humanity at large?"

Theophilus hung about in front of her, his hands in his pockets. He had no desire to quarrel with Evelina, especially on the first day of her visit. He answered mildly.

"In the Home Office I served—let us say—the General Scheme of Things, to the best of my ability. Ramsay, who was only too glad to step into my seniority, is, I'm sure, doing it very much better. He's a live official, whereas I was a dead one. And, outside the office, I was a kind of automaton, not doing a hand's turn for anyone."

"You had intellectual tastes—we had them in common," said Evelina.

"But they didn't lead to any practical result, did they?"

"We discussed problems, and I relied greatly on your judgment."

"It's kind of you to say so," he replied, veiling a gleam of irony. "Well—as it is—I lead what might be called a scholarly life."

"But what do you do, my dear Theophilus?" She laughed most charmingly. "What's the good of a scholarly life and an environment of beauty, if there's no objective reaction?"

He admitted a certain logic in her argument, and was puzzled to find an adequate answer. At last he said:

"You must get a subjective reaction first. What was wrong with me was that I hadn't realized myself as a human being. It sounds Ibsenish, doesn't it? But it's true. I think I said something of the sort before."

"You're on the brink of discovering a new Theophilus," she laughed.

"More than likely," said he.

The butler entered to give an eye to the fire, and following at his heels, in spite of swiftly shut door which narrowly escaped squeezing her in half, in rushed Bunch—moist, dirty, enthusiastic.

"Good Lord!" cried Evelina, starting up and protecting herself behind the back of a chair. The dog, turning from demonstrative greeting of Theophilus, growled her disapproval. "You haven't added that to your eccentric establishment?"

"In a way, yes. Franklin is the technical owner—but Franklin having just acquired a prize bull-terrier pup of which he's tremendously proud, I've been given the use and the affection of Bunch." He smoothed the dog's head, and ordered the butler to take her out.

“Of course, while you’re here, my dear, she won’t be allowed in the house.”

“Thank you,” said Evelina. And as soon as they were alone again: “This is a new development. You used to dislike dogs as much as I do.”

“Did I? Perhaps my dislike was passive, not active. I never knew one until I came here. They’re very humanizing things, dogs.”

There was a long silence. The spring’s mocking promise of two or three days before was now belied by rain and hail and howling wind in which the rent virgin green branches of the trees shrieked in panic. The vast many-windowed drawing-room gave the town-bred woman a sense of insecurity and isolation. She loved little town rooms that assured discreet protection against the meaningless yet convulsive manifestations of Nature. She was aware of a welter of elements. A new Theophilus. A new home. A new dog. A new storm of electric currents. Woman-like, she dived to the depths of the storm-centre and found Daphne.

For she remembered Daphne’s insolent question on a far-off evening: “Why don’t you keep a dog?”

“There’s one thing I think I ought to mention to you, Theophilus, although, as you know, I don’t deal in gossip,” she said after a while. “Some one told me a little while ago that he had seen Luke lunching with Daventry.”

Theophilus started.

“Impossible.”

She shrugged shoulders that were growing plump, and none the less comely for plumpness.

“I’m only repeating gossip.”

“Who told you?”

“John Roberts. His brother saw them in a little restaurant in Soho. He’s in the City, and knows them both by sight. They must have chosen Soho as a place where they would be least known.”

“Couldn’t be,” said Theophilus.

“Roberts and his brother are both honourable men. I don’t see why they should lie.”

“Neither do I. But people make mistakes.”

“Look, my dear,” she added after a pause, and, glancing at Theophilus, she stood by with knitted brows; “Luke and Daventry were rogues years ago. Daventry only got off by the skin of his teeth. Why shouldn’t they be rogues for all time? What moral consideration could prevent them from putting their

heads together now? Luke has the brains. Daventry has the money. Even I, who am outside all these rotten and sordid affairs, know that Daventry has taken the Prince's Theatre, and is behind the idiot musical performances they give there. If he goes on long enough he'll get a knighthood."

Theophilus waved a hand. "Yes, yes. I know. He's making lots of money; Mona has told me. But he let down Luke during the trial in order to save his own skin, and I can't understand Luke having anything more to do with him."

Evelina smiled, with an indulgent "*Sancta simplicitas.*"

"After all," she added; "I've nothing to do with it. If you're satisfied, that's all that matters. Only for your own sake I repeat my warning of years ago. Trust Luke no further than you can see him."

He had not told her of the new wool-packing company, nor of his directorship. He would have come up against the old wall of prejudice. Yet her information and her warning left him uncomfortable.

Later in the day, recurring to the subject of Luke, she said:

"I can quite understand how you feel about the Wavering estate, and I appreciate your desire to set Luke on his feet again. But I hope to goodness you won't try to start him running."

Theophilus glanced at her sharply. Evelina was not wont to employ such picturesque figures of speech. Again he felt in her neighbourhood a pervading sense of discomfort.

During the next twenty-four hours the hardy theme cropped up through the stony waste of their sociological and political conversation. On the Sunday evening she gathered her cunningly-sown harvest. Her generous allowance she acknowledged gratefully. It more than sufficed her wants. But there was such a thing as security of tenure.

"But by my will everything is yours," said Theophilus, more by way of statement than of argument. Now, she could have as much money as ever she liked.

That Evelina knew as well as he did. But in this mortal life there were unforeseeable changes and chances. There were such unpleasant vultures as Death Duties preying on carrion. She hinted the fact, but made no use of the simile. In plain terms, she required a settlement.

Theophilus threw out his hands.

"My dear, of course. Why didn't you suggest it before?"

The principle was obviously sound. The details, which he held in scornful disregard, were a matter for men of law guiding the trustees of the estate.

Evelina went to bed happy. She was the last woman in the world to crave

wealth for the satisfaction either of personal vanity or of philanthropic altruism. She prided herself, with some degree of justification, on her broad, calm survey of human affairs. But she could not look forward with equanimity to the prospect of penury that might be wrought by the hand of Luke, devastating, for his own ends, the Wavering fortune. Which fortune, as at present administered by Theophilus, she foresaw in full process of spoliation. Her conception of Theophilus at this period was irritatingly incomplete. She had avowed her disappointment in his evolution. He had, in fact, evolved far away from anticipated lines. He had lost all interest save that manifested by courtesy in her absorbing work. He had developed during the last few years into a stranger of whom, in some queer way, she was somewhat afraid. He asserted a strong individuality which baffled her analysis. She was not quite sure whether she liked Theophilus; wondered why in the world she had married him, why she had been led into marriage at all. Well, she was young, and thought, through the teachings of tradition, that man was the complement of a woman's life. There was also a certain amount of sex vanity about it. This, being an honest woman, she admitted but deplored. The official surrender to a husband, however, had been an irreparable blunder. Women, in her chaste vision of life, were nowadays divided into two main categories—the overlapping margin she conceded as a being of common sense—the women whose function it was to produce the population of the world, and those who could direct, intellectually, the results of that production. She recognized with cheerful frankness that both the most charming and the most contemptible of her sex were only too delighted to accept, as their reason of existence, conjugality, legal or otherwise, and its manifold responsibilities. But she, Evelina, was not of that category. To her a husband was by no means a complement to her existence, but a definite supplement, unnecessary, such as to those of an unscientific twist of mind might be the Engineering Supplement of "The Times." More than that. The unscientific subscriber to "The Times" could throw the Supplement into the waste-paper basket. But what the deuce could woman do with a husband, a physically unwanted supplement to her journal of dally existence?

Much better had she not married at all. She would have been free from the human log of Theophilus dragging at her ankles. And yet her association with him had been of value. She had escaped the public blight of the name of Wavering. She was the wife of an honourable man, whose godfathers and godmothers had given him an idiotic, but, from the point of view of publicity, a peculiarly useful name. Mrs. Bird would have been of little value. Mrs. James Bird scarcely more. But Mrs. Theophilus Bird sounded a note. It caught public attention. She owed something to him, after all.

She was divagating. The main point of her pre-slumber meditations was her security from financial anxieties. Of the old Theophilus grinding out the daily mill, like horse, donkey or dog, in more primitive times, turning a crank in incessant circle, she had lost notion. The artificially ardent and embarrassingly awkward lover of the first week of their marriage had vanished into the wrack of a clouded past. The sociological machine which she had greased and oiled had broken down. A new Theophilus stood before her. And yet, in spite of incalculable change—perhaps, on the other hand, on account of it—she regarded him as a man of infantile intellectuality, and dreaded the influence on him of the acute criminal brain of her cousin, Luke Wavering. At any rate, now she was safe. Theophilus, with all his incomprehensibilities, was a man of integrity. The next fortnight would put her in a secure position. She slept contentedly, her mind relieved of a burden unconfessed for many months.

When she was aroused the next morning by the drawing of curtains and the admission of pale spring sunshine, she became conscious of the graciousness of the flowered chintz in the room and the repose of old coloured prints on the wall. Yesterday she had taken no notice. A room for her was but a room. A bed but a bed. Walls but walls conventionally decorated. But on her awakening on this Monday morning, after her minute envisagement of her relations with Theophilus, the beauty of the room struck her between the eyes.

She began to reason. A room could not spring into beauty, like a flower, of its own accord. Behind it lay the human creative spirit. Whose? Certainly not that of Theophilus. Then, who else but Daphne?

A new hatred of Daphne sprang from unsuspected wells of her being.

## CHAPTER XII

LUKE explained the Daventry association in what he still thought was his old debonair manner. But the candid light in his eyes, its former sanction, had given place, without his knowledge, to a gleam whose furtiveness carried no conviction.

“It was Daventry who sought me out, my dear Theophilus. He was in with the wool-gatherers. Said he: ‘Here’s your chance with the process.’ Gave me, in fact, the introduction to Sexton Gurt. I’d have been a fool to have turned him down. At the same time he put me on to a good thing. Anyone else but I would have called it a wild-cat business; but I know about these matters”—he tapped his forehead. “I risked my little all, the Geneva nest-egg, and I cleared a few thousand pounds. It was like old times”—he laughed—“a small fortune in a day. . . . That’s how I felt justified in setting up this little establishment.”

Theophilus frowned. How could Luke accept favours from the man who had betrayed him?

“Betrayed me? Nothing of the sort. He fought for himself just as I fought for myself. He won. I lost. That’s all there is to it. With his private life—Mona and all the rest of it—I have no concern. I regard him merely as an electric wire in the City which he has allowed me to tap.”

“Does Daphne know?” Theophilus asked.

“Women should know nothing,” said Luke. “They feel too much. There never was a woman yet who could dissociate emotion from reason. Evelina told you about Daventry in order to satisfy feminine instincts. She didn’t give a clear thought to the matter. And she’s a woman who prides herself on her intellectual clarity. Daphne doesn’t, thank God! She confesses to being a bundle of temperament—like the tied-up bunch of forked lightning that Jupiter used to chuck about. . . . No, my dear fellow, I haven’t told Daphne. And I should be obliged if you didn’t either. Besides, you may take it from me that, as far as I am concerned, this is the beginning and end of Daventry.”

Theophilus went away sorrowful. He did not like the infinitesimal streaks of blood in Luke’s eyes. Moreover, he had never believed in Luke’s innocence, save when he lost count of things in Daphne’s radiant faith.

The days wore on. The Board Meetings of the new Company gave him occupation. He interested himself in the installation of the experimental plant.

The dog, Bunch, seemed to be the only link, other than ghostly, between him and the great lonely house. He spent much time at his Club, at Mona Daventry's flat, at the little house in the Wellington Road. Before Easter, Evelina filled The Grange with one of her political week-end parties. It was more than usually dismal. It included one Upcher, a loud-voiced electioneering agent, who found peptic, eugenic, and moral salvation only in a diet of raw mangel-wurzels, the stems of artichokes, and buttermilk strained through hot spinach. He also ate at lunch the whole circular top rind of a Camembert cheese, and scorned the fools who laid up for themselves manifold ills by consuming the interior. Theophilus became aware that Evelina was greatly impressed by the theories of the abnormal beast. John Roberts, who was contesting a seat at a by-election, was there, too, for the Sunday. Theophilus had never liked John Roberts, a florid man of aggressive cheeriness. Now he regarded him with peculiar distaste. He lay awake until he found a definition of the blatant company; they composed a Parliamentary jazz band, in which Upcher howled on the saxophone, and John Roberts beat the jazz.

At the next suggestion of a week-end party, he took firm ground. He would take a flying trip to Paris. In wonderment Evelina asked why.

"I've reason to believe that entertainment can be found at the Folies Bergères and the Casino de Paris."

At first she thought him mad, having little sense of irony. Then she divined an underlying method.

"I'm sorry you don't like my friends," she said acidly

"It can't be helped. I don't," said he.

"What's wrong with them?"

"They're all like Emerson's monkey," he replied. "They've too much ego in their cosmos."

Evelina had her party and Theophilus went off alone to Paris. As a matter of principle he went both to the Folies Bergères and the Casino de Paris, and bored himself exceedingly. His only compensation was Daphne's delight when he recounted his experiences.

In spite of bees, the Elizabethan drama and a critical work thereon which he had been planning for some time, and the mysteries of wool-packing, he found life stale and unprofitable. It was at about this time that he said to Mona Daventry:

"I'm young—only just past forty—I'm well off, and I have intellectual tastes, and yet I'm rotting my life away doing nothing. What can I do?"

With a smile she suggested politics. He moved impatiently. One politician

in a family was enough. The professional politician was either a cynic or a crank or a futile idealist. He was none of those.

“Sometimes,” said he, “I feel driven to go back to the Home Office and beg them to give me a job as a Factory Inspector. But even if they gave it me, it would be immoral, as I’d be replacing some poor devil who’d be glad of the money. Of course,” he added, after a while, “I might throw myself into unpaid public work, but I’m fed up with Human Welfare in capital letters. So there’s nothing I can see for me to do. I’m in a devil of a fix.”

He found himself in whatever may be the comparative degree of a devil of a fix a while later, when the wool-packing company fell into ignominious collapse. Not only were the patent rights questioned by a claimant from the Antipodes, but the experimental plant, in which most of the present capital had been sunk, failed to produce satisfactory results. The company went into voluntary liquidation. Sexton Gurt, at a directors’ meeting, declaring himself mainly responsible for the flotation of the company, and, speaking in the capacity of a wool-broker and not that of an artist, cast doubt on the integrity of the individual from whom, on the company’s behalf, he had acquired the patent rights. It was a painful hour for Theophilus. He also found himself the loser of a large sum of money.

For some days he sought a Luke as elusive as a *fata Morgana*. Daphne couldn’t help him. Luke came and went like a dragon-fly. His affairs called him forth at every conceivable hour. At last Theophilus pinned him down to an appointment in the house in the Wellington Road. A neat maid-servant showed him into a tiny library, furnished with a roll-top desk, a few chairs, and a couple of vaguely filled book-cases. Luke welcomed him effusively.

“My dear fellow, I’ve been longing to have a talk with you, but I’ve been driven crazy with business. Of course you want to know about the company.”

“Naturally,” said Theophilus.

“But what can I say more than you know already?”

“I should imagine a good deal,” said Theophilus coldly.

Luke threw out helpless hands. “My good friend, what would you have? In this business of Company-promoting we must take the rough with the smooth. . . . I’ve been perfectly straight and above-board. I bought the process in good faith—paid for it money down. Either our Australian larrikin is a blackmailer, or the man I bought it from was a rogue and sold me a pup. Anyhow, the thing has petered out. . . . After all, I’m the one to be pitied. I gave years of thought to it in—at the North Pole, and I’m not a farthing the

richer.”

“Quite so,” said Theophilus, “but, on the other hand, the people who put up the money are many thousands of pounds the poorer.”

“The same law,” replied Luke, “prevails in the financial world as in the world of Nature. ‘So careful of the type she seems. So careless of the single life.’ You remember your Tennyson. . . . By the way, has it ever struck you what a wizard crystallizer he was of contemporary thought? . . . This particular crystallization is wonderful. He sums up the law of individual sacrifice against which mankind has revolted all through the ages. It’s immutable. In this particular case we individuals may be crushed out; but the ferment of the inventor remains and eventually will result in the progress of humanity. Will you have a whisky and soda?”

Theophilus declined.

“I will,” said Luke, and he rang a bell and ordered the drink from the responding maid.

“This has been a bitter disappointment,” he said later, after swallowing half the sizzling glassful. “It isn’t pleasant, in the first place, to fail in one’s ambitions, and in the second, to let down one’s friends. But the milk’s spilt; it’s no use crying over the irrevocable fact. Any silly kind of old platitude you please. . . . The past is a cemetery tended only by sickly sentiment. Don’t let us be morbid. The present is but the germinating ground, the forcing bed of the future. . . .”

His eyes, those of a bird of prey, yet horribly humanized by the fine striations of blood, held Theophilus fascinated, while he developed his parable.

It was an afternoon in July. The window of the cramped study looked out on to a tiny walled garden, all lawn save for a fringe of flower-beds, the lawn about half the size of a tennis court; at the farther end were a couple of old trees, a plane tree and an apple-tree; and in a low hammock swung between them lay Daphne, daffodil clad, reading a book. A slim-stockinged leg, foot touching the ground, was visible knee downwards. On the strip of bed behind her glowed a glory of hollyhocks. The shadow of the wall cut the lawn in twain.

“I’m up to the neck now,” said Luke, “in something really big. Not the exploitation of a trumpery invention, but the launching of a great scheme. . . .”

Theophilus looked out on the picture of daffodil Daphne set against the hollyhocks, and, though conscious of the sound, lost the sense of Luke’s persuasive voice. Now and then he nodded with an air of assent.

“You’ve got quite an idyllic little place here, you know,” he said at last, conscious of silence.

Luke's eyes followed the instinctive motion of his hand.

"That's the devil of it—idyllic. But how long will it last? And Daphne the central essence of it." He rose and gripped Theophilus's shoulder. "By God! What a girl! Rather, what a woman—for she is a woman—five and twenty. Loyal. Great. The only thing I've left to live for. Man alive!" he cried, changing the shoulder clasp into a thump; "what does all I've been telling you matter, if it weren't for Daphne?"

Theophilus had but a vague idea of what Luke had been telling him.

"I'm done. I'm blown upon," Luke continued. "I can never get back into the light of day. No fault of mine, mind you——" His thin ascetic face was set, and his eyes pierced. "I'm as free from any guilt as I declared myself to be that dreadful day years ago. But I've done time. I'm discredited. If I work, I can only work underground where no one can see me. And I must work, you see, for her sake." The hovering hand again gripped Theophilus's shoulder, and the other was outstretched with finger pointing to the girl in the hammock framed in the flaunting background. "For her sake I must see my reputation re-established. I must put her in the place where she belongs—not in this blasted little hovel where nobody comes. . . . My God! as far as human society goes, we might just as well be living in a stone cottage in the middle of Dartmoor. . . . Look at her. . . ." His voice shook, and all that was human of Theophilus vibrated in unison. "Young, eager for life, woman—sex-clamant, proclaimant. I'm not a mealy-mouthed damned fool, and if I didn't love her so much I shouldn't know all that went on inside her—sex impulses—all that goes to make a woman. And I'm proud of it. A pale, flat-chested, drab bit of a girl with mouse-coloured hair that you know you could pull out by the roots like a wax doll's, couldn't be a daughter engendered by me. For, damn it all, I'm a man! Daphne's the real expression of me." He smote his chest. "Look at her. I count for nothing. Food, drink, warmth, shelter from winds—that's all I seek for myself. . . . But Daphne . . . she must live her life—the full, big life—and she mustn't be allowed to sacrifice it to an outcast like me."

He turned away and gulped down the rest of his whisky and soda. Theophilus looked out at the small, red-brick-walled commonplace yet enchanted garden; at immediate July sunlight in which a water-wagtail ran, with little impudent steps, stopped, pecked at some possibility and ran on again; at the clear demarcating line of the further wall's shadow; at trees and confused bits of roofs and chimneys beyond; and, like a child saving up for the end the last precious bit of the helping, at the dear human picture in the cool band of shade.

"I tell you, my dear friend," said Luke, sitting down by his side, "it's a

certainty. That”—he pointed to Daphne—“is my guarantee of good faith.”

“Forgive me,” said Theophilus perplexed, “but I don’t quite catch . . .”

Luke smiled with the indulgence of a tired vulture. “Perhaps I broke it on you rather abruptly. . . . I forgot you had the philosophic rather than the business mind. . . . But I’ll put it up to you again, and try to be clear this time. . . .”

He developed the new proposition. Again his eyes fascinated Theophilus.

“It’s only ten thousand pounds. You’ll be secure in any event. But for Daphne and me it’s a matter of fortune, so that I can face the world again, and Daphne can come into her own. Daphne as a withered, soured old maid—Christ! it’s a nightmare! Or else it’s a question of God knows what. She has her five hundred a year. She will share the pittance with me until one of us dies. We, both of us, know her. But can honourable men let such a thing happen?”

Theophilus sat with his head in his hands, realizing once more, and even more than ever, how inexpressibly dear Daphne was to him; yet, with his clear intelligence at work, doubting the good faith of the convicted swindler, and instinctively seeking to differentiate between the specious business proposal and the intensely emotional appeal.

His eyes wandered to the limited garden. Daphne threw one careless leg over the other and curled, with a rhythmic grace, out of the hammock. She stood, unconscious of observation, like any nymph of Diana in a river pool, and stretched herself, with outspread arms. Then, like a nymph or goddess, she crossed the shadowed patch of lawn into the sunshine, which played magic with the golden reflections of her hair and the tiny stripes of shadow in her daffodil gown, and suddenly her flower-like face (to the eyes of Theophilus) caught the laughter of the sunshine, and she snapped her fingers low in appeal, and a loping flash, all sinews and wiry yellow hair, Bunch’s son, Napoleon, darted into her stooping arms. She disappeared into the house.

Theophilus turned to Luke.

“Has Daventry anything to do with it?”

“No. Not as far as I’m aware. A different quarter altogether.”

“I should like to help you and Daphne—of course,” said Theophilus; “but I must learn more about details. . . .”

Luke laughed triumphantly.

“I’ll post you draft prospectuses, reports and everything to-morrow.”

“I’ll take them with me now.”

Luke explained that the documents were at his office. This was the first

Theophilus had heard of the office.

“Just a modest pair of rooms in Holborn,” said Luke. “I trade under the name of ‘Provincial Investments Ltd.’ One must have something on the plate downstairs and on the office door. Besides, although it’s only in embryo, it might turn out to be a good thing. The point is that one must have a place in the City where one can see people. . . . Well, that’s practically settled. You’re a good fellow. Shall we go and find Daphne?”

He led the way out into the drawing-room on the other side of a passage at the end of which was the glass door into the garden. Daphne welcomed them.

“The midges drove me in; Napoleon was sick and I had to drive him out; this is a rotten book, and I’m dying for human companionship.”

“You’ll have a surfeit of it, my darling,” cried Luke gaily. “Theophilus is staying to dinner. If there isn’t enough we can ring up the nearest cook-shop and tell them to send round some more.”

Daphne announced the coming of roast duck. If they sniffed hard through the open window, they might possibly smell it, as the kitchen was below.

“Ah! and sage and onions,” cried Luke. “Funny—once I loathed the stuff. Now duck seems to be just a pleasant vehicle to carry the sage and onions.”

Theophilus caught, as he had often caught before, a flutter of pain in Daphne’s eyes. For in the bathos of his sudden proclamation of greed lay the pathetic self-betrayal of the man still nauseated by the memory of tasteless prison food. For nearly a year he had craved keen flavours. . . . Presently, on a pretext, he left the two alone.

“Luke seems happy,” she said. “He was rather dreading the business talk with you; but I told him you would understand. You will stand by him, won’t you? It’s a terrible uphill fight for him. . . .”

“And for you.”

“I don’t count,” said Daphne.

“You count more than anything else in the world,” said Theophilus. “For you I’d do anything. You know it.”

She flushed and looked out of the window at the hollyhocks for a moment or two. Then she turned.

“Help Luke to put through a new scheme he has got hold of——”

“I’ve half promised,” said he.

“Then promise unreservedly. Back my faith in him. He can’t fail twice. I know your help means everything.”

“It shall be given,” said Theophilus, with a smile.

She threw out her hands and caught his responsive ones and pressed them to her bosom.

“You’re the dearest of men. I wish to God I could give you something in return.”

He looked into her eager, proud face, and said huskily:

“I’ve never kissed you—I could ask for nothing more.”

She held up her lips. He kissed them and was thrilled to feel that they were not the passive lips of courtesy. His arms went round her and she stood in his embrace.

When she freed herself, she laughed with a touch of defiance.

“That’s a bond and a seal, isn’t it?”

“And a vow,” said he, his pulses throbbing, and the patch of light in front of him glimmering unreal.

“And I would give you more. Anything you could ask for—for Luke’s sake.”

He passed his hands over his eyes.

“No, no, my dear. . . . That way madness lies. . . . You don’t realize what you’ve said. . . .” He moved away and spoke with his back to her, not daring to meet her eyes. “Think of it. . . . I’m not that abominable kind of man.”

She gripped his arm and twisted him round.

“You beloved fool, if you were, do you think I’d have said what I did? You and Luke are all I’ve got left to love in the world. Luke’s sake and your sake and my sake are all one and the same thing. The three of us are unhappy. Each for a particular reason.” She held up three fingers and ticked them off. “Luke for the reason we all know. I for what nobody knows except myself. You for reasons that I know. I don’t count, as I said before. I don’t care. Luke’s happiness and yours are all I’ve got to think about.”

“But Luke comes first?”

“Of course. What are our trivial grievances against life compared with his sufferings?”

“That’s true,” said Theophilus.

And so a curiously undefined pact was made.

They spent a pleasant evening with the windows open to the small summer garden. The scent of stocks and wallflowers crept in with their humble appeal. Luke at the piano played Chopin and Debussy. He was very fond of *La Cathédrale* and of *Le Jardin sous la Pluie*, which was gracious hearing on a breathless night. Music was his main resource. In the modest galleries of the

Queen's Hall and the Opera he could pass unnoticed. Daphne always accompanied his plunges into these safe obscurities. In music alone the man's darkened soul found reconciliation with the eternal harmonies of existence.

Theophilus and Daphne sat by the window and talked in desultory fashion in low tones. Luke, playing for his own consolation, neither heard nor heeded them. They spoke of the approaching August when business was at a standstill, and company-promoters arrayed themselves in the white flannels of boyish innocence and found ingenuous pleasure at the tables of Deauville and Aix-les-Bains. But there were no such resorts for the pariah Luke. He must be taken to a hidden-away corner by some sea, where no finger of scorn should be pointed. Daphne sighed. Such spots were difficult to find in an overcrowded holiday world. And Luke was not the man to live contented in a fisherman's cottage and sail boats; to get up in the dawn and catch fish; to tramp with sense of exhilaration along wild and lonely coasts; to sleep hard and eat frugally. Now, even more than in the old years, must he go about with a Ritz Hotel on his back. Once he had outdoor tastes, but the tastes of the luxurious man; golf on perfect courses; race-meetings with a member's ticket for stands, lawns, enclosures, and what not; motor trips in a Rolls-Royce car with a polyglot valet to arrange for wayside accommodation. Now, golf was a pursuit of the past, for obvious reasons; to mingle with rabble on a race-course was unthinkable; touring-cars were beyond their means.

Daphne laughed. For all her love of Luke, she found him impossible. And yet, he needed a change. All the year he had been working and worrying himself to a shadow. What was to be done?

Theophilus suggested a visit to The Grange, where all would be peace.

"But Evelina?"

He replied that Evelina would be going early in August to the meeting of the British Association, before which body she was reading a paper. After that she was going on a flying visit to Australia to look into something or the other. He had, with regard to the hospitable side of The Grange establishment, a perfectly working, amicable Box-and-Cox arrangement with Evelina. They could come to The Grange without any fear of ill-feeling on Evelina's part.

"You must always remember, my dear, that Evelina is the most transparently honest woman I know. What she says she means. What she means she says."

Daphne agreed to the proposition with a woman's mental reservations. But The Grange would not offer the distractions that Luke needed. He would be forever eager to rush up to town. . . . No. She must get him far afield.

Said Theophilus, with sudden inspiration:

“If you’re thinking of a motor tour, there’s my car at your disposal. I shan’t want it.”

“What are you going to do?”

He replied, with another inspiration: “I’m thinking of taking a cure at Marienbad.”

“What for? Fat?”

She laughed, for Theophilus was lean and hard. He took refuge in vagueness.

“A cure is good for anybody.”

She dismissed to the contemptuous winds a cure for a man in iron health. His dishonesty was as idiotically transparent as the honesty of Evelina. No. The motor trip was an idea. But he must come with them. Probably Mona Daventry would come too. It would be a question of shared expenses. Well, they would let Theophilus provide car, petrol, and chauffeur; that was all.

They had not noticed that, for the last minute or two, the music had ceased, and that Luke was listening.

“I’m all for it,” said he, rising from the music-stool.

Daphne rushed at him and kissed him.

“Oh, how lovely!”

“But it must be off the beaten track,” said Luke. “England’s impossible. Plaice and anchovy sauce out of a bottle, and roast leg of mutton, and indigestible fruit pie and soapy cheese everywhere you go. And so’s France, from another point of view. Germany? The war has fed me up with the Boche. I’m one of the few patriotic Englishmen living. To me a Boche is someone to shoot on sight or take prisoner. Germany’s cut out.”

“I more or less agree with you,” said Theophilus mildly. “But where can we go?”

“I know,” cried Daphne gaily. “Poland. None of us has ever been to Poland.”

Luke turned to Theophilus.

“Was there ever such a girl?”

“But we don’t speak Polish,” said Theophilus with a wrinkling of the brows.

“I can put my hand on a Pole to-morrow,” said Luke, “who will be-guide-philosopher-and-friend us for twopence a week.”

The gaiety of childish excitement electrified the little scented drawing-room. Luke sought a volume of the “Encyclopædia Britannica” from the

library of the hireling-house, and looked up the article on Poland. Daphne rushed to the telephone, and came back radiant. Mona thought it the most wonderful idea that had ever been conceived by mortal intelligence. They must all lunch with her to-morrow and talk things over.

Theophilus drove his five and twenty miles to Moorstead, his brain throbbing with the forecast of an adventure sanctified, it seemed, in some lunatic fashion, by a girl's kiss. He gave little or no thought to the ten thousand pounds he had promised to invest in Luke's new and unconsidered company. Romance held him in grip. He whirled through unknown lands, through strange cities, where architecture, costume, manners, were all startlingly bizarre and fascinating, and beside him was always Daphne, the flower imbued with flame, whose voice was like the music of deep-toned bells, whose liquid eyes both held unspeakable allurements and indisputable command.

The next day, which happened to be a Sunday, they took happy counsel together at Mona Daventry's. Theophilus kissed Daphne good-bye before returning to The Grange. Up to then, it was the happiest day in his life.

But before practical arrangements could be made for the Polish adventure, things happened, according to the remorseless law of human cause and effect, which brought about radical changes in their lives.

## CHAPTER XIII

DAPHNE'S first glimpse into a world where lines ran crooked instead of straight was afforded by Luke himself.

"My dear," said he, "there's a group of three men, very influential men, to whom I must show some attention. One of them will be passing through London to-morrow evening—my only chance of seeing him—so I've asked them to dine here. I want to do them well, and show them what Todgers' can do when it likes. If cook twists up her lips in that peculiarly disagreeable way of hers, we can get caviare and a terrine of *foie gras* from somewhere, and at any rate she can cook lobsters somehow and a dozen *poussins*. They look like men, my Daphne, of fleshly appetites, and one fledgeling chicken apiece might savour of starvation rations. So do your best. I myself will look after the wine. Perhaps a tradesman somewhere may be able to send in a fellow who can do the complete old English butler."

Daphne, delighted, guaranteed Lucullan fare. Hitherto their only guests had been a pot-luck-taking Mona or Theophilus. This formal festivity dawned as an excitement in her subdued and solitary life.

"I'm afraid they're not the kind of people we're accustomed to meet," said Luke apologetically. "One's a Canadian, another a rough diamond of an Englishman who has been all over the world, and the other—the one passing through—is an American. So if you'd care to dine at Mona's or to ask old Theophilus to take you out somewhere, please don't hesitate. In fact," he added, dubiously, "I'm not quite sure whether it wouldn't be better if you did go out."

"At our first dinner-party I'm going to be the lady of the house," she declared. "Heaven knows what kind of a devil things might go to, if I weren't there to look after them. Perhaps," she laughed, with a touch on his greying hair, "I might be usefully thrown in with the dinner—by way of doing them well—a finishing touch. I may be anything you like, but I'm not shrinkingly modest."

"Well, if you don't mind," said he. "Anyhow, I've warned you."

And so it was arranged.

The three guests arrived together in a taxicab, and were shown into the drawing-room by the hireling butler Luke, tail-coated, white-waistcoated, dapperly correct, received them and introduced them to Daphne, prettily though simply gowned. Her first swift impression of the trio was that of

detectives in disguise preparing to hold up a night-club.

Mr. Cousens, the Canadian, was a broad, florid, clean-shaven man. He wore a dinner-jacket suit with a saffron-coloured waistcoat ornamented by peculiarly odious green sprigs. A large diamond set in gold glittered on the little finger of his left hand.

Mr. Spooner, the Englishman, was small, weedy and foxy, also in dinner-jacket. Had it not been for a couple of diamond studs in his shirt-front he might have been the dismal gentleman who occasionally bleats on the bassoon in the orchestra of a two-shows-a-night provincial music-hall. His hand was horrible clammy.

Mr. Leopold Klingsellor, the American, the only one who gave his Christian name—with an impressive flourish—to the butler, was tall and thin, and in a well-cut blue serge suit, bore himself, as it seemed to Daphne's critical eye, with a false air of distinction. His neat blue tie was fixed by a diamond pin. He apologized, not too profusely, for his costume. Had he known they were to be honoured by the presence of ladies, he would have dived to the bottom of his trunks for the most ceremonial raiment he possessed. But it was his one night in London. He was leaving by a midnight train. Would Miss Wavering forgive him?

Miss Wavering forgave him. Of the three he was by far the nearest to the men with whom she was in the habit of associating. He had a humorous curl at the corners of his thin lips, and his thin brown hair brushed back from his forehead hung, with an attractive grotesqueness, like a thin thatch far away from the back of his head.

The butler entered with a tray of cocktails. Mr. Cousens, the Canadian, tossed his off with a murmured: "Well, happy days!" Mr. Spooner sipped his dejectedly without saying anything. Mr. Leopold Klingsellor, before pouring it down his throat, made a bow to Daphne—"Mademoiselle"—and another to Luke—"My host"—and set down his glass on the piano with the finish of a man accustomed to the graces of cultivated society. Mr. Spooner wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and looked about helplessly for a refuge for his glass. Whereupon Daphne darted forward and took it from him.

"Oh, please let me——"

"Thank you, Miss—Wavering."

The uttered name held, in Daphne's ears, the comicality of an afterthought.

Said Mr. Cousens: "I'm the last man in the world to refuse a dividend, if one is declared. Do you declare?"

As Luke had hinted that they might go slow on cocktails in view of plentiful alcohol to follow, Daphne, embarrassed yet hospitable hostess, fled

the room to return with the newly-filled iced shaker. Mr. Cousens held out his glass to be filled. Mr. Leopold Klingsellor allowed himself courteously but a few drops. Mr. Spooner declined, saying that he would keep himself for the champagne.

Luke won a dancing gleam of admiration from Daphne by saying:

“My dear fellow, how remiss of me! Would you like a glass now?”

“No,” said Mr. Spooner, “I can wait.”

It was the oddest dinner-party at which Daphne had ever presided as hostess. On her right, at the round table, as the guest of honour, sat Mr. Leopold Klingsellor. On her left, Mr. Cousens. Then came Luke and Mr. Spooner. Luke talked chiefly with Mr. Cousens, in his light way, about Canada and its wonderful future, now and then turning to Spooner, so as to include him in the conversation. But Spooner only responded gruntingly, and buried himself in his food and swigged his champagne, and now and then cast malevolent glances at Daphne, who was obviously enjoying the company of the masterful American. Indeed, once she could discount the sense of an elaborate artificiality of manner, she found Klingsellor an entertaining neighbour. He had travelled far; he had keen knowledge of men and things; he could flash bits of humorous observation; he could engage her in a pretty battle of wits. She recognized a man of keen intelligence.

The Canadian, on the other hand, betrayed at every turn his position on a lower social stratum. He reminded her of the quaint males to whose wants she administered during her tea-shop episode. He referred naughtily to the shows of Paris which young ladies, of course, could not be expected to attend.

“You’re delicious,” said Daphne. “I’ve never heard myself called a young lady before. Is ‘Our Good Queen’ still the pattern of Canada?”

“We’re the most loyal subjects of the Empire, Miss Wavering,” he replied solemnly, “and we don’t like to hear King George and Queen Mary lightly spoken of.”

“Quite so——but I was referring to Queen Victoria,” said Daphne.

“Oh! . . . What’s she got to do with what we were talking about?”

Mr. Cousens was honestly puzzled.

“Well, you see, it’s this way,” said Daphne seriously, “I was thinking of Queen Victoria. And I’m sure she wouldn’t have invited Canadian young ladies to a command performance of a modern Paris revue. So I was wondering whether they still shrank from hurting the poor old dear in her grave. You get what I mean, don’t you?”

Mr. Cousens didn’t. He merely stared at a bewildering young female, all

laughter and beauty and rare accomplishment; at a young female as remote from the secluded and virtuous young females in his boyhood's home in Saskatchewan, as from the unintelligent hetairæ who, in his mind, were the only alternative of female society.

He guffawed. "As my friend Klingsellor would say—you're some girl."

The American leaned towards her.

"Believe me, Miss Wavering, that although I could not deny the underlying sentiment, I could never express it in such crude terms as my friend Cousens suggests. We Americans keep our slang for the trivialities of life. When we come to bed-rock, we talk English—English pure and undefiled."

Daphne caught a murmur from Mr. Spooner, breathed into his plate, which sounded strangely like: "Aw—come off it."

She set herself to talk to the little man across Klingsellor, and learned that he spent much time in Monte Carlo, Aix-les-Bains, Deauville, Biarritz, and resorts of high gambling. He whipped out the names of well-known people with whom, at such places, he was in the habit of consorting. Without blatancy he let it be inferred that he was a man of fortune who could afford to regard high play as a puerile distraction from weightier affairs. Under the encouragement of Daphne and the comfort of good food and wine, he lost his shyness and held the table with an anecdote or two. He spoke, as the loose English saying goes, all right; that is to say, committed no solecisms in grammar or accent; but he had a queer intonation which she could not place. Its rough undulation suggested Lancashire. At any rate, he was not a fool. She was conscious, however, of a stiffened alertness on the part of the American, as though in preparation for a spring. When the port came round, she was almost certain that Spooner checked the butler's hand, when his glass was a third full, on a glance from Klingsellor.

She left the men to their wine, and took up a novel in the drawing-room. But she could not read. It was an amazing dinner-party. What was Luke doing in such a galley? In the old days, from childhood up, she had met and mingled with all kinds and conditions of Luke's business acquaintances; but the men had the easy manners and speech of decent society; they and their families were conventional English gentlefolk. Who were these three—the vulgar Canadian, the shrewd yet unpolished rat of an Englishman, the American who comported himself with such studied artificiality? She had never seen so many diamonds on three men in her life—Cousens' ring, Spooner's studs, Klingsellor's tie-pin.

They were there declaredly on an errand of sheer business. Luke had reckoned them so financially important that he had not only taken the

unprecedented step of asking them to dinner, but had contrived every impressive accessory his mind could conceive. He had arrived that afternoon with a large crate of roses for the drawing-room, and a lesser crate of orchids for the dining-room table. He had attired himself with the scrupulousness of a man who never thought of sitting down to dinner without a white tie and white waistcoat, and had bidden her wear her best. He had done his utmost to invest the house with a false air of wealth.

Her heart sank under its load of hateful surmise. Something sinister lurked beneath the incongruous orchids, among the expensive peaches; in the folds of Cousens' sprigged waistcoat; in the uncultivated sing-song in Spooner's voice; in Klingsellor's tensivity; in Luke's cordial yet restless manner of the honoured host. She had a scared impulse, which she at once despised and rejected, to ring up Mona and, were she at home, to bid her take taxi and come and look the strange crew over. But she could not protect Luke by spying on him.

The air of the hot July night grew stale with the inordinate masses of roses in the room. She sighed at Luke's loss of his old faultless taste. She remembered once, at Cedar Hall, when, as a girl of fifteen, she had arranged the flowers for some party, he had entered the drawing-room and, looking round, had said: "Good God, my child; why don't you stick tickets on 'em and, when the people come, elect a committee to judge and distribute the prizes?" And he had cleared her girl's lavish display to the epicurean satisfaction of his fastidiousness. She sighed again. Luke had suffered some evil influence, a djinn of the Orient, a Loke of the North, a malignant devil of the Dark Ages . . . no matter what . . . something that had wrought this abominable change. Was it that the foul spirit of the Gaol held him in thrall? She shuddered, grew faint in the over-scented air, and went into the passage and through the passage door into the quiet little walled garden. She sat in the hammock, and looked up at the stars than which, in the cosmos, there is nothing more icily unsympathetic.

She was roused to a sense of immediate things by the quick illumination of Luke's library, the little room which, like the drawing-room on the other side of the passage, overlooked the garden. Luke and Klingsellor appeared, clearly defined in the light, like figures on a stage. Voices cut the still air.

"Well, I take it that you're with us?"

"Can you doubt it?" said Luke.

Daphne saw him move to a drawer and take out a box of cigars.

"These are more than recommendable."

There was silence during which the cigars were lighted.

"You can thoroughly rely on our two friends," said Klingsellor, "to carry

out instructions. But you and I”—he tapped the forehead beneath his thin, sandy thatch of hair—“must be the brains that guide them. You’re sure of your friend Theophilus Bird, anyway? He’ll come in blind, you say. And Daventry \_\_\_\_\_”

Suddenly Luke seemed to remember the open window. He put up his hand with a sudden “Sh!” pointed across in the direction of the drawing-room, also open to the air, and, with a swift movement, drew down the sash.

For a few dazed and fascinated moments Daphne watched the pantomime of the two conversing men. And Luke’s face, seen in the vivid square of light, seemed to shrink into beak and brow and the fierce eyes of the hawk.

She rose, and, like a thief, crossed the tiny lawn, let herself silently into the house, into the drawing-room, controlling the easily betraying door-handle, and went to the window prepared to close it, lest there should be chance of sound for the eavesdropper. But, hearing not even the murmur of voices, she left it open, and sat down by it with a breath of relief. In the stale room she would have gasped for freshness. She looked out at the patch of sky and saw no stars. It loomed low and thunderous, and she realized that while she sat in the garden a storm had gathered and crept up behind her.

Her troubled mind had the prescience of a storm gathering around Luke and Theophilus and herself. “Your friend, Theophilus Bird.” That was well, as far as it went. Theophilus had given her his promise to support Luke in the new concern, whatever it was. But to go into it “blind.” . . . The possible meaning of the word threw her thoughts to the sinister. Theophilus was not to be consulted. That was the way of crooked dealing. And Daventry? The name uttered in the American’s crisp tone had sounded sharp in the still air. No mistake was possible. Daventry! The three syllables had rent the air like the zigzag forks of sudden lightning. She had never heard Luke name the man. She had taken it for granted that Daventry was the swindler, the betrayer, the liar who, by his criminal cunning, had put her belovedest into the false position from which he could not extricate himself. The trial had been proof positive. Daventry was the black Apollyon beyond the pale of human consideration. His treatment of Mona alone had damned him for ever in the eyes of decent men. His name was a synonym for all that was foul and bestial and traitorous. . . . She saw him, in the dock, mean, swarthy, fleshy-nosed, crimp-haired—so crimp-haired that it seemed impossible that under any physical violence could the straight side parting be disturbed; yet, in his Semitic way, a good-looking man, with soft voice and plausible tongue—otherwise how could Mona ever have dreamed of marrying him? She saw him there, in the dock, false as Judas. She saw him in the witness-box, calm, almost unconcerned, swearing away, with unquestionable perjury, her father’s life and honour. And now . . .

Daventry! Her mind still reeled with the shock of Klingsellor's pronouncement.

These men, these freaks of men, to win whose favour Luke had ordained such a parade of vulgarity, were in league with Daventry. Luke knew it. Luke assented in the conspiracy. Theophilus would come in blind. Theophilus, with his Wavering fortune, was to be a victim. Her brain after swift workings grew numb.

The oppression of the coming storm descended more heavily. The hired man came in with a tray of drinks. She poured out a glassful of mineral water over a lump of ice, and drank it thirstily.

Her mind went back to such a night a year ago—within three weeks or a month—it didn't matter. Yes, it was in July. She had sat by her window in her flat at Passy, waiting. . . . And while she waited the Despair of Hell had mounted into the Heavens and had descended upon her. For her window commanded the turn of the road by which, either on foot or in vehicle, a man must come. And the man didn't come. She had sat there till three o'clock in the morning, and then the universe was suddenly rent by lightning and thunder and deluging rain; and she had gone to bed amid elemental, cataclysmic convulsion of existence.

Well, thank God she had emerged with some lingering serenity of soul from the catastrophe. She had conquered. She rose impatiently and moved about the small, uninspiring room. If she had gone through that ordeal of a year ago, she could walk unscathed through any other. Her hand swept her daintily cropped head. What could she do? Her woman's futility in the eyes of men engaged in men's affairs daunted her. What could she do?

Sudden lightning played over the stale roses like a horrible miasma. An immediate crash of thunder followed. After an instant's silence the rain fell. She passed from the drawing-room, across the passage to the library. The two men, side by side at Luke's desk, were engaged on some sort of document. At any rate, there was a sheet of paper on Luke's writing-table, and Luke held the pen. They turned round with a start as she entered.

"My darling, what's the matter? It's only an ordinary thunder-storm. No danger. . . ."

So Luke.

"There's lots of danger," said Daphne.

Luke rose and put his hands on her shoulders and moved her gently towards the door.

"No, no, my dear, I assure you there isn't. Go to bed, my dear, and let it lighten and thunder, and you'll be quite safe. . . . Yes, yes . . . but don't you see

that Mr. Klingsellor and I are exceedingly busy . . . the most important matters, my darling.”

She stood erect under his would-be propelling hands.

“I’m frightened.”

“Of thunder and lightning? You, my brave Daphne? . . .” He laughed.

“I’m only afraid of thunder and lightning when Daventry is mixed up in it.”

He released her with an action almost reflex.

“Daventry? . . .”

Klingsellor, who had stood an urbane spectator of charming feminine weakness, suddenly sprang rigid.

“What do you mean, my dear?” said Luke. He looked round at the now iron-faced American. “Daventry?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “Daventry.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Luke, with another glance at Klingsellor.

“It beats me,” said the latter, who, seeing Daphne stand unconcerned by another flash and peal, knew that if the earth dissolved into elemental rack, she would wear the same air of disdain. “I should like to get you, Miss Wavering. Of course, like any man of business, I know that Mr. Daventry was your good father’s late partner—but how is he mixed up with this unexpected thunder-storm?”

“You cried his name out loud just before my father shut this window. I was sitting in the garden. You talked of Mr. Theophilus Bird, and you mentioned Daventry. I couldn’t help hearing.”

Luke smiled indulgently. “But, my dear, it’s the thunder, after all, that has got on your nerves. Of course Mr. Klingsellor mentioned Daventry. Daventry’s a power in the City in the particular market in which we hope to operate.” He flourished a hand towards the writing-table. “All that has to do with Daventry. He’s the enemy we’re out to overthrow. Why, of course!” He smiled the Ole Luk Oie smile that had ever captivated her since babyhood. “Now you must leave us. Mr. Klingsellor’s time is short. He has to take the midnight train to Scotland.”

“But it’s past midnight,” said Daphne.

Luke pulled out his watch. “It’s a quarter-past eleven. We’ll only just have time to conclude our business. So, my dear . . .”

He opened the door. What could she do but pass out with dignity, though

there was a cold hand clutching her heart?

“And Mr. Cousens and Mr. Spooner?” she asked on the threshold.

“They have doubtless things to discuss in the dining-room, my dear.”

He would have closed the door on her, but she swung him into the passage and whispered in his ear:

“Theophilus isn’t going into this thing blind.”

He went with her a few steps down the passage, towards the dining-room, and clasped her cheeks in both hands.

“Why are you hurting me so, Daphne? Why don’t you trust me? Your trust in me is my very life. What else have I to live for but you?”

“Not at the expense of Theophilus.”

He was aware of her intensity—and with a swift movement closed the library door and stepped back to her.

“What is Theophilus to you?”

“The only loyal friend—except Mona—we have in the world. Why should he go blind into the schemes of these filthy people?”

“Filthy . . . ? Oh, my darling! . . .” He threw out his hands appealingly. “Don’t you think I know? Do you think my long sorrowful experience of the world counts for nothing? Do you suppose I would condescend to play with them unless they were pawns in my game?”

He drew himself up dramatically. In the bright electric illumination of the narrow passage she beheld him as the faultless, intellectual, frosted English gentleman. His eyes as they met hers, lost their hawk’s fierceness, and rested on her with a lifelong appeal for indulgent humouring.

She said: “Oh, my God, Luke. I’m a woman and not a child, and I know the world as well as you do—and these men are scum and you oughtn’t to have anything to do with them.”

He smiled. “But seeing that I’m master—seeing that they come to see me . . . not I that go to see them . . . what does it matter?” He laughed again reassuringly. “You’re worrying yourself about Theophilus. Don’t. We’re all on velvet. But with Theophilus there’s purple and fine linen and all sorts of silk thrown in. Go to bed and be happy, my dear.”

He kissed her and hastily escaped into the library. Daphne returned to the drawing-room and sat down once again, amid the flash and crash and downpour of the insensate storm. . . . Her poor little hammock swung between the trees would be a drenched and draggled thing. She remembered that she had left a French translation of a novel of Dostoevsky in the hammock, an

alternative English novel having commanded a greater appeal. The poor thing must be sodden. She swung a sudden arm. So much the better. There was one bit of insanity swept down the gutter of the sane world.

It was a notable thunder-storm. Peal followed flash in affrighting sequence. Daphne was old enough to remember the War. She had done a few late months of work not far behind the front. She had heard the artillery of men. The artillery of Jehovah appealed to her as the silliest demonstration of noisy nothingness in the cosmic scheme. . . . The rain poured down, straight from the zenith, so that there was no need to close the window. The roses drooped and stank. It was only half-past eleven. She had thought it must be hours later. True, they had sat down at a quarter to eight. . . . What were her two unregarded guests—the Canadian Cousens and the Lancashire Spooner—doing in the dining-room? Figuratively she snapped her fingers. If they hadn't either the sense or the manners to leave the port and old brandy for the conversation of the drawing-room, what to her, in the slightest degree, did it matter?

For herself Daphne, sitting alone in the alien and unsympathetic drawing-room, conscious of little else but the immediate insistence of things—the overcrowded room of roses—the storm black and pelting outside the open window, the God-knows-what of sottishness hidden behind the dining-room door; the diabolical intrigue that was being woven, a few paces away in the library . . . for herself . . . she passed her hands over her eyes. . . . For herself it was all a phantasma or a hideous dream. The spirit of evil in her morbid fancy impregnated the storm.

The front-door bell rang. She stiffened in wonderment. At half-past eleven at night who could come to the house? A boy, of course, delivering a belated telegram. She cursed her nerves. Yet she held the door ever so slightly ajar while the man-servant attended to the summons. Some one entered the front door.

“Is Mr. Klingsellor here?”

“Yes, sir,” she heard the man say.

“Would you tell him that Major Burnaby would like to see him on the most important business?”

Daphne went out into the passage and confronted a man of strange appearance. He wore a dripping raincoat, and water poured from the brim of his hat on to the floor. He started ever so slightly at the gracious vision of the girl. He came a step forward.

“Miss Wavering?”

“Yes.”

“I’m so sorry to trouble you, but I’ve an urgent message for Mr. Klingsellor before he leaves for Scotland to-night.”

“I’ll go and tell him,” she said simply. “Won’t you wait in the drawing-room?”

He made a courteous gesture. He was so wet . . .

Again Daphne entered the library. The pair were still at work over notes or calculations. They rose to their feet, Wavering with a little note of protest.

“My dear——”

She delivered her message.

“Show him in, of course,” said Luke.

“I think I’d better go out and see him,” said Klingsellor. “It’s a purely private affair.” He paused by the door. “Excuse me for just a couple of minutes.”

He went out, closing the door behind him.

“The other two must be having a thin time,” said Daphne, motioning with her head towards the dining-room.

“Haven’t they joined you yet?”

“I seem to be no attraction,” said Daphne.

Luke looked at his watch. “Klingsellor’ll have to hurry up in order to catch his train. . . . We’ve just completed the affair. When he’s gone I’ll look after the others. Our private talk was an arranged matter. . . . But they might have gone into the drawing-room. Naturally I told them they were expected.”

He busied himself with the sheets of paper, ordered them, and thrust them into a drawer which he locked with a key on his bunch. He glanced at his watch.

“He’ll miss his train.”

Suddenly the sharp click of the front door was heard. They waited for the returning Klingsellor. They waited for nearly a minute. From front door to library was but a dozen paces.

“He has gone into the dining-room,” said Luke.

Scarcely knowing why, she followed him out and down the passage into the dining-room, where they saw two bleary-eyed, stupid, half-drunken men. Daphne was about to speak when she found her wrist tightly grasped by Luke. She glanced half frightened at him; his profile was that of the bird of prey seen from the garden in the square of light.

“I’m so sorry to have been away from you all this time. But business is business. Klingsellor had to rush away to catch his train, and asked me to make

his farewells. My dear, I have to report to these gentlemen the result of my interview with Mr. Klingsellor. It won't be long. So perhaps you'll take leave of them. And would you mind asking the butler to ring up a taxi? It's a dreadful night. You would like that, wouldn't you?" he asked the men. "Some brandy or whisky and soda wouldn't be amiss. . . . I'm sorry not to have thought of it before."

"This table is as wet as any man could wish," said Cousens genially, pointing to empty decanters of port and brandy, and a half-emptied bottle of champagne which they themselves must have opened.

Said Daphne: "Well, I must wish you good night."

She waited for them both to rise before she shook hands. Luke went with her to the door and kissed her.

"It's all over," he said in a low voice. "A thousand thanks. You've been wonderful. Go to bed. I'll see to everything."

She lingered for a moment at the foot of the stairs leading to the first floor. She was no longer needed. Her part, such as it was, had been played. Whoever these Bœotian men might be, Luke was a match for them. The taxi was ordered. The butler, a tall and hefty fellow, would stay until the house was clear. She could do nothing. About twenty minutes after she had gone to bed she heard the grinding of the taxi outside, the muffled sound of voices, the clang of the front door.

It was long before she could sleep.

The most puzzling incident in a bewildering evening was the vanishing of Klingsellor.

There was Major Burnaby, thick-set, black-moustached, in dripping Burberry, looking and speaking more like a sergeant-major than a field-officer. There was Klingsellor, with his air of false distinction, going out of the library with the perfection of suavity to meet the messenger. Then the click of the front door—and, without a word to Luke or herself or his two undesirable friends, he had gone out into the night of pelting rain.

She still felt Luke's grasp on her delicate wrist.

## CHAPTER XIV

LUKE spoke little at breakfast the next morning. Scrupulously dressed, as usual, he looked haggard as though he had passed a sleepless night. He played with a plate of bacon and eggs, crumbled a bit of toast, and swallowed two cups of tea, all behind a propped-up copy of the "Financial News." Daphne watched him anxiously. He was wont to be a sprightly breakfaster, making a point, although it may have been artificial, of respectable British convention. He made only one reference to the previous night, and that was when he rose from table and prepared to take his leave. He smiled frostily.

"I'm afraid my business friends were worse than I anticipated. I assure you, my dear Daphne, you won't be called upon to entertain such dreadful folk as Cousens and Spooner again."

She laughed. "My dear Ole Luk Oie, don't apologize. I found them comic enough."

"You're a daughter of all the virtues," said he.

She accompanied him into the passage, and gathered for him the hat, stick and gloves laid out on the slab. For the first time he noticed she was wearing a hat.

"Are you going out?"

"To take some drawings to Pataquin's. Will you give me a lift?"

"My dear, only too delighted."

They drove off in the waiting taxi; but on the way silence enshrouded them. Now and then he looked nervously at his watch.

"If you're in a hurry, my dear," she said, "drop me at the Langham." He confessed an early appointment. Did she mind?

"Pataquin's is only a step."

"But that monstrous packet of drawings?"

"If I tipped the hall porter of the Langham fifty pounds he might carry it down Regent Street for me," laughed Daphne.

The taxi halted by the old hotel. Luke alighted, helped her out, and sped her on her way. After a few paces she looked round, and saw Luke giving what seemed fresh directions to the taxi-driver. She walked on with her drawings. The great dressmaking firm had treated her kindly of late, and bought many of her designs, although she had dwindled in their eyes from the professional into the amateur. Without such occupation, the lonely hours in the Wellington Road

would have crawled into intolerable length.

Her business over, she emerged into a Regent Street suffering the nightmare of reconstruction. The old Georgian quiet which she had loved as a girl was gone. It was in process, as far as she could judge, of assuming the blatant pride of the main thoroughfare of some new American, Middle Western city. The grace had vanished from it, as it had vanished from so many things in her modern world. Scaffoldings, hoardings, brick, dust, skeleton perpendicular and horizontal ribs of steel—all to be plastered over with something that gave the pretence of a work of architecture. She stood at the corner of Vigo Street, irresolute, oppressed by the sense of an unreal world. Everything was a ghastly skeleton plastered over with a semblance of reality. Herself—she did not care; she had to face things out. Luke. She gasped with the pain of sudden revelation. If ever man with stucco, artificial outside had spent a morning hour with woman, that man was Luke, her best belovedest. She had the vision of him in the naked frame of girders across the way. . . . What should she do, where should she go to fill in the listless and detested time until Luke's return in the afternoon? Mona would be kind; but to talk with Mona without relation of last night's happenings would be too great a strain on nerves already frayed. To take Mona into her confidence might be a betrayal of Luke. Theophilus? She shrank, guided by the same loyal instincts. Yet Theophilus must be protected. Theophilus was to "go into it blind." He must be warned. . . . Luke had said that the three dreadful men were but pawns in his game. . . . A man and woman, passing by in the ceaseless traffic, jostled her against the scaffolding at a corner. She moved and turned down into the quiet of Sackville Street. The more she thought, the less it seemed likely that Luke was the master hand moving the three pawns of absurd yet villainous aspect. Luke was dupe, as would be Theophilus. She must save them both, and by the toss of destiny's coin, it was Theophilus that must be saved first.

In Piccadilly she hailed a taxi and drove to the Wellington Road. There she tried to telephone to Theophilus. But he was as elusive as a wraith. He wasn't at The Grange; or at his Noah's Ark of a club; or at Mona's; or at Evelina's flat in Westminster. She did not think, nor could she think, of Sexton Gurt, whom Luke, at that moment, was trying to pacify. For Sexton Gurt had lost a great deal of money, and an eminent wool-broker, no matter how artistic his tastes may be, regards the loss of money as an unpardonable outrage on the part of a reprehensible social scheme.

Theophilus being unfindable, she went through the rooms with the parlour-maid and cleared them of yesterday's orchids and roses which she ordained for the dust-heap. There came the question of lunch.

"There's a lot left over from last night," said the maid.

“Do what you like with it,” said Daphne. “I’ll have a couple of boiled eggs and some cheese.”

The aftermath of the last night’s dreadful meal would have choked her.

She read, she drew, she sat in the garden hammock, for the day was fine. In the afternoon she went for a walk. When she returned the early evening paper lay on the slab. A while later she glanced through it idly. In those July days the world lay comparatively calm. The main excitement was a cabinet crisis in Poland’s internal affairs. The projected motor-trip thither seemed but a child’s dream—an excursion into Never-Never-Land or the Island where the Rainbow Ends. Those horrible men held up arresting hands in front of the car. Poland might be in Mars or Neptune for aught she cared.

Suddenly her uninterested eyes fell upon a report under the heading:

“ARREST OF NOTED AMERICAN SWINDLER,”

in which it was recorded that John P. Schneider, alias Robert Farquharson, alias Leopold Klingsellor, arrested the previous night, appeared at Bow Street on various charges of fraud, and was remanded, bail being refused.

She sprang from the idle hammock, the paper clenched in her hand. Leopold Klingsellor . . . the only one of the unspeakable trio who had given a Christian name. The world could not hold two American Leopold Klingsellors. The arrested man and her guest of the night before were one and the same. . . . She saw things vividly. . . . That was the reason for his mysterious disappearance after colloquy with the man in the dripping raincoat, who called himself a major. The arrest had been effected in that house—the house of Luke Wavering, who, to her eternal horror, lived still under the formal surveillance of the police. . . . The artificially mannered American was an international crook, a vendor of shares in bogus companies: the other two were his accomplices, his agents, vulgar folk carrying out his instructions. And Luke knew their quality. He was not a fool to be gulled by such rogues. Once, indeed, he might have been gulled by Emanuel Daventry. . . . Then, suddenly like a hammer hitting her brain, the thought smote her: “After all, was he gulled by Daventry?” She reeled, and felt faint as the edifice of loyalty, passionately built during the years, fell with a soul-shattering crash. . . .

Luke suspected the arrest. Otherwise, why his imperious grip on her wrist? He knew who and what these men were. . . . The clarity of her mind was that of a white flame blasting her body with its agony. Ever since his release his attitude had been one of boastful self-confidence. There had been nothing his financial brain could not and would not do. The one scheme he had developed with integrity, the wool-packing process, had gone wrong. Had he even in that

dealt honestly? She sat on a bench in the little garden and stared unseeingly in front of her. She recalled hints from Mona, veiled in terms of affectionate sympathy. No matter how innocent was Luke, how could he retrieve his credit in the eyes of a hard business world? Luke had been battering at impregnable fortresses. Men of honour had shut their doors on him. In order to carry on the only avocation to which he had been trained, he must consort with men of dishonour—with Klingsellor and Cousens and Spooner. But why bring them to his house, which he knew was under police supervision? Had he done it purposely, so as to betray them? No, Luke was incapable of such baseness. Rather must he have thought that by displaying himself as surrounded by all the luxuries of life, including a beautiful daughter, he might create an atmosphere of influence of which his astute brain could take advantage. He would fleece the crooks, plant them there, and get away with the spoils.

It was all a ghastly hypothesis. But it was the one least prejudicial to Luke's tottering credit.

Reaction came. The conception of Luke as a criminal was abhorrent; it flooded her being with the slime of disloyalty, of traitorous thought, of everything unclean. Why shouldn't he have been the dupe, as many good men have been, of plausible rogues?

But a dupe is an amateur inexperienced in the devious byways of finance. Recent history had proved that such had been many men of eminent accomplishment in other walks of life, and of unimpeachable private honour. Some had died of broken hearts and fancied disgrace. They had erred through their own ignorance and their sweet trust in their fellow-creatures. To this category Luke did not belong. No Moses was he to buy up any swindler's stock of green spectacles. She faced the two alternatives: Luke the dupe; Luke the criminal. Madness lay either way in the only possible choice.

Suddenly she thought of Theophilus, who was to go into it blind. She shivered with dreadful apprehension. She saw Luke's long pianist's fingers, crooked like a vulture's claws, intent on plucking back, no matter at what cost, the Wavering fortune of which he had been disinherited. In a flash she coordinated a thousand casual sayings to which she had paid little heed. The Wavering fortune was his, Luke's, to do with what he liked, Theophilus but an interloper of no account, a cipher, an impersonality whose present and future, whether of ease or starvation, mattered nothing in the eyes of Luke and God.

She felt unutterably alone. In the early days of her pariahdom she had derived some comfort from the counsels of Widdington, the kindly solicitor; but Widdington was dead, hardened arteries having prevailed against an heroic stand, with defiant fingers gripped to the last around the port decanter, and the trustee who took his place was but a dusty member of the dusty firm. . . . It

was half-past five. She must get into touch with Theophilus, who that very day might have signed the cheque for ten thousand pounds, not a penny of which would he ever see again. Yet first she must find Luke. Common loyalty ordained it. She rang him up at his office in Holborn. There was no reply. It was twenty minutes before she got on to Moorstead, Mr. Bird was still in London and had not yet arrived. She rang up his club. After interminable waiting with whirrs and clicks maddening her ears, she had the inexpressible consolation of hearing his voice.

“Hullo—yes?”

“I’m Daphne. For God’s sake come at once.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Hell’s the matter. Come.”

“All right.”

She hooked up the receiver, and went out again into the garden, where Napoleon, son of Bunch, greeted her rapturously. The man or woman who, in time of awful strain, has never known the solace of a dog, has missed a great thing in life.

She was looking into his brown eyes, and grasping his stiff hairy jowls, so as to master him in the game of playful biting, when Luke suddenly appeared down the short flight of steps. She rose and released Napoleon, who, perhaps resenting the interruption of his delicious play, growled and snarled at the newcomer. At Daphne’s command he lay down.

“That’s the first dog of ours, my dear,” said he with an assumption of airiness, “that I’ve ever had to reproach for ill-manners.”

He smiled the indulgent smile that she had known and adored since her memory emerged from nothingness. He stood before her in the charm of the fastidious, courteous gentleman. In his neat brown suit with delicate primrose shirt, collar, and handkerchief sticking out of breast pocket, and striped brown tie, and dark brown shoes, he was a model of all the careless elegances. And there was his finely-featured face, with the frostily touched brown hair swept back from his forehead. Slim, and of medium height, he bore the air of easy distinction which in some foolish girl’s and woman’s way had excited in her a pride of possession. This human being of charm and urbanity belonged to her, and to no one else in the world.

He sat down on the bench, and passed his hand over his forehead.

“Home is the loveliest place. . . . The rest and freedom of it. . . . I’ve had a tiring day. And you, my dear? Pataquin pleased?”

She challenged him at once, standing over him.

“Have you seen Theophilus?”

“No. Why should I see Theophilus?”

“We spoke about him a good deal last night. He’s on his way here.”

He started from an attitude of fatigue.

“What for?”

“I asked him to come. He’s mixed up in things. And I’m to a certain extent—perhaps to a great extent—responsible.”

“What do you mean, my dear?” He regarded her as blandly as he could.

She pointed to the crushed newspaper that lay on the long gravel path.

“That man Klingsellor.”

He made a gesture of despair.

“I was hoping you shouldn’t know.”

“How could you? It’ll be in every newspaper in the English-speaking world.”

He sighed. “The paltry vanity of the high-sounding name has brought many a human being to disaster.”

“Yet you were misled by it,” said Daphne.

He looked away from her. “Quite so—— quite so. . . . I needn’t tell you that this has been a shock . . . a terrible blow. I’ve been dealing with him as with a man of sound position. He brought the highest financial references. Otherwise—why, naturally. . . .”

“And did Cousens and Spooner bring references too?”

“They were guaranteed by Klingsellor. . . . Now, of course, after this morning’s mess, I know they’re rogues.”

“I told you so last night,” said Daphne. “It was obvious.”

He leaned back on the bench and regarded her wearily.

“I should have been guided by you, my dear. Youth and innocence have truer insight than hard-bitten worldly experience. . . . I’ve had a shocking day. Those two have accused me of the worst treachery. Last night’s dinner, they said, was a plant to give Klingsellor away. You see the absurdity. Once I had him here, what need of caviare and expensive champagne and flowers? I put it to them. They’re too ignorant to see the point. They tried threats and blackmail. . . . It goes without saying that they met with no success. . . . I’m not the kind of man to be bluffed and bullied, my dear. No, thank God, I’m out of it with clean hands and conscience. How Scotland Yard traced him here last night, I don’t know.”

In spite of an air of virtue and outraged trust, his voice sounded a note of the defensive. Daphne bent down with a hand on his shoulder.

“Luke . . . Ole Luk Oie. If there are secrets between us, I’m no good to you. When Klingsellor didn’t come back last night, you knew what had happened.”

He rose, casting her arm away gently.

“It happened to me.” His tone suggested that such a thing might happen at any time to any gentleman. “Incidents of that kind make a deep impression.” He turned to her with a lamentable attempt at a smile. “My dear, I’m dog-tired. A whisky and soda and lump of ice would work wonders.”

She entered the house. He sat down again on the bench and lit a cigarette, and lost himself in his thoughts. Daphne reappearing with the full glass caught him unawares, and in a flash saw the criminal that was Luke Wavering. On seeing her, his face lit up and he sprang to his feet. She descended the four or five steps into the garden, and gave him the drink with steady hand. He drank half the tumbler thirstily. Then he made a little bow.

“A daughter is a widowed man’s most priceless blessing.”

She moved near him and laid a hand on his arm. “You must realize, my dear, that even a daughter can’t bless, as you call it, beyond a certain point.”

The words came out she knew not how. She was in a white tenseness of emotion. She knew that she stabbed, yet at the same time had the ghastly intuition that she was stabbing dead flesh.

He took a sip of whisky and soda. “You speak in riddles, my Daphne.”

“They’re easy to guess. I’ve been speaking them for the last twenty-four hours.”

He drained his glass. “Would you mind putting this down somewhere?”

Mastering an impulse to throw it on the patch of grass, over the wall, anywhere, she moved towards the steps. The summoned Theophilus appeared on the threshold of the door. She deposited the glass on the first corner to hand, and sped up to the tiny terrace to greet him.

“I came as soon as I could,” said he. “What’s wrong?”

“Everything. Tell me. That money—the ten thousand pounds I asked you to invest in Luke’s company—what’s happened?”

Theophilus looked first into her dear and eager face, and then at the brown-clad dapper sphinx standing a few yards to the left.

“I sent Luke my cheque as soon as I got home.”

“Days ago?”

“Why, yes. Has there been any hitch? By the same post I instructed my bankers to sell certain securities so as to meet it. . . .”

“My God,” cried Daphne. She reeled backwards, and would have fallen down the steps had not Theophilus caught her with his arm. She steadied herself, sprang down, telling Theophilus to follow.

“Luke. Theophilus’s cheque. The money I made him give you. Did you get it?”

“He has my receipt. How d’ye do, Theophilus. Daphne’s rather abrupt. . . . You did get my acknowledgment?”

“Oh yes. Of course,” said Theophilus, very much bewildered.

“Where’s the money now?” asked Daphne.

“In my bank, my dear,” replied Luke, with all the urbanity at his command. “Where else should it be?”

“Are you sure?”

She stood before him slim and tense, with eyes of agony.

“My word of honour.”

“Thank God! . . .” She drew a breath of relief. Then pointed with dramatic gesture to the house. “Go and draw a cheque at once and return the money to Theophilus.”

“My dear Daphne,” said Theophilus. “I don’t understand.”

“It’ll be best for all of us if you never understand. . . . Luke——” She held out shaking fingers, and seeing him irresolute dragged him to the far end of the garden by the hammock. “You had already ten thousand pounds out of him—you were going to get thousands more out of him—blind. . . . It’s worse than I thought. . . . Give back the money now, or I’ll never see you or hear of you to the end of my life.”

He regarded the quivering, panting thing that was his daughter, and, after a while, raised a calming hand.

“My child, there’s no need for all these heroics. . . . Of course now that the bottom has fallen out of this scheme, Theophilus’s capital will be returned. That he should have paid up at once was the *beau geste* not only of a friend, but of a man not conversant with business affairs. That I didn’t return it to-day was because my day has been one drag through hell. But to-morrow the cheque would have been posted. Your question of my integrity hurts me to the soul. I confess I no longer know my Daphne.”

“And I no longer know my Luke.”

He turned away. “I thought I had already tasted all that there was of human

sorrow. It seems there are dregs. . . .”

The false note jarred on her strung nerves. She said, with voice under control:

“You’ll go now and write the cheque for Theophilus, won’t you?”

“Of course,” said he. “Why need of such argument?”

He crossed the big lawn and entered the house. Daphne followed in his wake and joined Theophilus.

“I’m in the dark,” said he.

“So are we all, my dear. Stumbling about in awful blackness.” She passed her hands swiftly over her eyes. “Listen—Luke has been let in—or rather, by the grace of God, has just escaped being let in. . . . This Company——”

“The Yukon Oil?”

“Yes. . . . It’s bogus. We only heard the news to-day. Take Luke’s cheque, and pay it in at once and forget all about it.”

“I’ll do what you and Luke think best—of course,” said Theophilus. “But Luke must be bitterly disappointed. He held out such bright prospects.”

“He’s the incurable optimist,” said Daphne.

She stepped a pace or two away and bent over the puppy. Napoleon, who, finding himself a personage of no account, had snuggled himself into a morose round of slumber on the edge of a border of lobelias. Treated as a thing of life, he responded with sudden bound and vehement wag of stumpy tail. Daphne sat on the grass beside him.

“There’s something I must ask you, Theophilus,” she said, apparently all concerned with the dog’s affection. “Never do this again. I know you did it for my sake, because you love me. I made you do it. But now, just because you love me, don’t listen to Luke any more. His judgment has all gone. Those awful years. . . . Don’t give a penny to Luke without letting me know beforehand. . . . This is dead serious, my dear. Tragically serious. You must promise.”

She looked up at him while her hands were busy with the dog’s shaggy head. Their eyes met. He saw then that she knew, even as he knew, that Luke Wavering had not been the victim of circumstances or the villainy of other men, but that his conviction and sentence had been just.

He looked down on her and said brokenly:

“My poor darling. My poor, poor darling. What can I do?”

Luke ran down the steps, cheque in hand.

“My dear fellow . . . Daphne has all the impulses of her sex. You’d have

had this to-morrow in the ordinary course of business.”

## CHAPTER XV

SOME time afterwards, Luke went, by appointment, to Moorstead, to see Theophilus on important business. The car met him at the station and brought him to The Grange in time for lunch. Theophilus, clad in easy grey flannels, met him on the lawn in front of the terrace.

“My dear fellow,” cried Luke, “what a change from the noise and glare and general beastliness of town. How I envy you!”

Wicker chairs and a table beneath an elm, where Theophilus had been reading, invited immediate repose. Luke pointed to a big volume.

“I see a Book of Verses underneath the Bough. But where’s the Jug of Wine—or its modern equivalent . . . ?”

He passed his tongue over dry lips. Theophilus smiled.

“There are standing orders for your arrival.”

Their observance was proved soon afterwards by the arrival of the butler with cocktails on a silver tray.

“Ah!” said Luke, “you have the genius of making me feel at home.”

They pledged politely and drank. Luke poured himself out a second glass from the shaker.

“What’s the important business?” asked Theophilus, at last.

“Don’t let us spoil the excellent lunch which I know awaits us,” said Luke with a flourish. “The afterglow of good food and drink sheds a soft light on what now might seem the crude and sordid.”

He looked far beyond the lawn and its beds of summer flowers and the upward sloping pasture dotted with heavy-foliaged beech and elm and oak, and lazy cows lying in the shade.

“How many cows have you on the estate?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” replied Theophilus.

“Why?” Luke asked sharply.

Theophilus laughed. “It never struck me to ask. Cows are outside my line of country. I know they’re useful and decorative and I suppose profitable. . . . You’ve given me quite an idea. I’ll make a point of inquiring into it.”

“If I were running this place,” said Luke, “I’d know every detail of it, down to what happened to the last half-pint of milk and the last lettuce. You’re being robbed of hundreds a year, perhaps thousands.”

“Forster, the dairyman, and old Franklin, the head gardener, are honest men,” said Theophilus.

“There you make a mistake,” said Luke, raising a significant finger. “No man who isn’t watched is honest. The temptation to add here and there a feather to the nest is too strong.”

“If they’re only feathers,” said Theophilus, “what does it matter?”

He turned the talk by asking for news of Daphne.

She was well, but drooping, said her father. She needed rest from household worries, and country air. The top of a Swiss mountain would do her a world of good.

“But she won’t go. She thinks it’s her life’s duty to look after me. Woman’s way; but I feel ashamed.”

Lunch was announced. They strolled across the lawn into the house. As they entered the decorous dining-room Luke clapped his host on the shoulder.

“Lucky fellow—without a care in the world.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Theophilus.

“Well, well,” cried Luke heartily, as he sat down to table. “Black care sits behind the rider’s back, but when the philosophic rider sits down to his meal in the inn, he leaves *Atra Cura* outside with the horse.”

It was later, when coffee and liqueurs and cigars were served on the lawn beneath the elm, that Luke unfolded his important business.

“My dear Theophilus,” he said, “I am in a tight corner. There’s no one in the world to whom I can turn but you. But for unforeseen cogs in the Wheel of Fortune, I should be in possession of these moderately broad acres. . . . I envy you, but I don’t grudge them to you. There’s a world of difference between the two sentiments. Envy is a passive sort of thing; but a grudge is active. . . . Anyhow, I played my cards wrongly, and I lost. Let us leave it at that. All the same, if I have a shadow of a claim on any man’s kindness and generosity, I have one on yours. . . . This old brandy of my grandfather’s—my God! how good it is!” His lips moved in the connoisseur’s appreciation. “How much of it have you left?”

Theophilus shook his head. He didn’t know. It was never served except on Luke’s visits.

“That’s good hearing,” said Luke. “But how do you know that the butler doesn’t make an occasional couple of pounds a bottle for it? You’ve come in for a wonderful cellar—a gift of God. You ought to watch your cellar-book.”

“I’ll make a note of it,” replied Theophilus.

“In the midst of all this exquisite setting of Life,” said Luke, after a sniff and a sip, “it is difficult for a man like me to attune himself to incongruous realities. . . . Yet I must do so. Theophilus”—he bent forward, tapping the table, and regarded his host with eyes that only will saved from dreadful furtiveness—“I’m down and out. I haven’t a penny left. What am I to do?”

“I thought you were in a good thing with Daventry,” said Theophilus.

“So I thought. . . . Any man would. I cleared a lot. Enough to set up my little house in Wellington Road. Then the damned swine let me down again. There’s a curse upon me. Everything I touch now turns to dust. The wool-packing scheme went. I pinned my hopes on Klingsellor. . . . Thank God you got back your ten thousand pounds, but he’s for penal servitude. My luck’s dead out, my dear fellow. . . . Look . . .” And Theophilus looked—at the strained, hawk face, and the hunted eyes. “I put all my cards on the table. The Klingsellor business has done me in. I’m on ticket of leave, if you know what that means. I’ve had a hell of a time the last few days. Scotland Yard. The brute was arrested at my house. They won’t believe I was as much of a mug as any of his victims in the past. . . . Thank God, he’s up on all sorts of other counts. . . . The scoop he was planning with us was only in conception. Naturally they can’t touch me. But they’re making it damned unpleasant. Reporting. The rigour of the game. Watched at every turn. That sort of thing. I daren’t make a move. I’m done. I’ve not slept for nights. . . . Think of it. Suppose this Yukon Oil Company had been floated. It was on the verge of flotation, mind you. . . . The two jackals I’ve learned since were to beat up investors. . . . Suppose there had been a month’s grace. Do you know what would have happened? I should have been in the soup again. Scotland Yard told me so, in beastly words. I’m down, I tell you. The only trade I know is closed against me. And now Daventry has sold me a pup—and I’m up against it. I haven’t a bean in the world. You must help me, unless I live on Daphne’s little heritage, savings and earnings. But, my God, what degradation for a man \_\_\_\_\_”

“Does Daphne know all this?”

“She may guess; but she doesn’t know. It would be to the greater happiness of the two of us if she didn’t.”

“I see,” said Theophilus. He thought for a moment. “But why hide things from Daphne? She’s devoting her life to you. She would be far more able to help you if she knew what she was fighting against.”

Luke made a helpless gesture.

“God knows what to do for the best. . . .”

He sighed and helped himself to a cigar from the box on the table.

Theophilus regarded him, grave and anxious. The last few months had dissipated any lingering doubts he may have had of the justice of Luke's sentence. The man was crooked, criminal; now, a pariah, he was predatory, conscienceless, dangerous. In the good old days he could have been shipped, on remittance, to vague colonies where he could either remake or finish himself as he chose. But the simple colonies were now Dominions, all within daily reach by telegraph, telephone, wireless, with the civilized world. None of them would welcome Luke Wavering, and the probability was that under an assumed name he would be known. Besides, he would not be a free man for some months to come. They had all overlooked the fact during the fervour of their Polish plans.

"Have you thought of any way in which I could really help you?" he asked at last.

"If my pride would allow me to take something for nothing," said Luke, with a critical glance at the lighted end of his cigar, "I should say: 'Make me an allowance.' You can't spend a quarter of your income, and a few hundreds or a thousand a year would not embarrass you in any way. But I'll make a business proposition. Let me manage the estate at a salary . . . perhaps, if you'd care for it, your financial affairs. Even with my salary and my keep—and Daphne's—according to whatever arrangement we might make, I guarantee you'd be far better off than you are to-day. In the matter of income tax alone, there are many items on which you can legitimately claim exemption."

To gain time, Theophilus waved aside the income tax.

"It is nothing."

"A couple of hundred a year, at least, is something," cried the financier. "If you pay it in insurance premiums at your age, it means something over six thousand pounds added to your estate at your death. By the way, you've made your will, haven't you?"

"Yes," replied Theophilus with a smile. "I've made my will."

"That's a good thing," said Luke. Then, after a pause: "Well, what do you think of my proposal?"

"I have a wife," said Theophilus.

"Of course, of course. It wouldn't be common courtesy, to say the least, to give an opinion without consulting her. . . . But you'll think it over?"

"I'll think it over," said Theophilus. "In the meanwhile?"

"A cheque for five hundred would free me from many pressing trivial worries."

"With pleasure," said Theophilus.

An hour or two later, there came Daphne and Mona Daventry by car. It had been arranged that they should drive Luke back to London. Tea was served beneath the elm. Daphne, slender and cool in light green frock, played hostess. Her delicate hands moving among the silver gave Theophilus a new revelation of beauty. In his sight she had never appeared more gracious. Yet, for all her light gaiety, there was a haunting fear in her eyes that made his heart ache. He had not seen her since the day of Klingsellor's arrest.

Luke, debonair, talked amusingly. He had gone to Sandown the day before, mingling with the common herd, betting his shillings, and he, of all men, had been welshed! Or, rather, he had lost the ticket given him by the ready-money bookmaker. He made a gay story of his misadventure. He discussed form with Mona, who, in her idle and amiable way, backed horses for small sums all through the racing season. Theophilus and Daphne played with the dog, Bunch.

When tea was over, she drew him aside.

"Take me anywhere. I must talk to you, or I'll go mad." She called over her shoulder. "Theophilus is going to show me his new model beehives."

They went up the path leading to the closed garden. As soon as the door was shut behind them she clutched him by the arm.

"Oh, how can he do it? How can he do it? Sandown . . . He was once a member . . . and now, jostling among the crowd . . ."

"He must have some relaxation," said Theophilus gently.

"I know. It's difficult for him. But to lose all sense of shame, as he has done. This is only a little sign of it. . . . Theophilus, dear, you're the only creature in the world I can talk to. . . . What can I do? I'm helpless. I believed in him all through, even after he came out of prison and behaved so strangely. I put it down to the horror of his life there. I believed in him till the Klingsellor affair. I was staking my faith in him when I asked you to help him. You had the wonderful loyalty to do it—although you knew. You knew all the time. . . . You and everybody. . . . You never had the shadow of doubt. . . . But it has crashed down on me all of a sudden. My father—my Ole Luk Oie!"—her voice cracked horribly. "Nothing left. . . . Oh, you see what I mean, don't you?"

He put his arms around her and she broke down sobbing, at the end of her tether. A few yards up the path between the riotous herbaceous borders was a rustic bench. He led her thither and sat, his arm still around her while she sobbed. What could he say? In her eyes Luke stood as stark a scoundrel as in his own.

Presently she withdrew, dabbed her eyes and sat weary, catching at her

breath.

“I’m an idiot. I don’t do this sort of thing as a rule. I thought I had got over it. You must forgive me.” She made a show of smiling. “I won’t do it any more. I’m just being sorry for myself, that’s all!”

“Something must be done,” said Theophilus.

“It must. But what?”

“He has just been suggesting that he should run the estate, and convert it into a paying proposition.”

“He would do it,” said Daphne. “But I shouldn’t advise you to let him try.”

“Do you think . . . ?”

“I do. I know. He looks on you as his supplanter and all this as his right. It’s a fixed idea. I should be disloyal—criminal—if I didn’t warn you.”

“But that’s just what worries me,” said the just Theophilus. “I have a legal right to the Wavering fortune; but morally . . . ? Luke was the old woman’s next of kin. . . .”

“There’s always Evelina.”

“In her heart, too, there’s a justifiable grievance. Failing Luke the fortune should be hers. As far as I am concerned it is hers. As much as she wants of it. I regard myself as her trustee.”

“My dear,” said Daphne, “don’t you think the best thing to do is to cut Luke and me adrift? I can keep him from starving. We have no right to darken your life like this. He would accept an allowance, I know. But I—I should feel humiliated. . . .”

“Why?”

She lifted her shoulders. “I don’t know. But there it is. In spite of everything, I love him. I’m bound to him and must see him through.”

She rose. “It’s a dreadful muddle. But it must come straight some time.”

“If you think I’m going to let you see it through, as you say, you’re mistaken,” said Theophilus.

“You’ll have to, my dear,” she said with an air of finality. “Let’s talk of something else . . . go and look at the bees. . . .”

On the bench she had been the drooping flower; now she had taken command of herself and stalked ahead, upright and proud. The Airedale, Bunch, followed them with a conscious air of responsible escort. She talked of the dog, and Franklin, the old gardener. Theophilus, not knowing what to say, walked in silence by her side, with a pain that was almost physical in his heart. They wandered through the rose-garden, with its flame of roses, past the

conservatories, through whose glass there gleamed flashes of orchids, and glowed great clusters of grapes, and into the trim kitchen-garden, and, half unconsciously, to the row of wooden beehives, each threshold alive with its double procession of those entering laden and those returning to their senseless, altruistic quest. They watched for a few moments in silence. Theophilus drew the moral of the Georgics, illuminated by modern knowledge. 'Not for yourselves, oh bees, but for greedy men, do you gather honey,' was at the back of Virgil's epigram. He knew that it was to assure the life of the cell from which would spring the queen the silly insects worked themselves literally to death. They died from sheer exhaustion. They had no individual life. Even the drones, until they were driven out to starve, at the end of the summer, had a better time while it lasted. In fact they had the gorgeous time of over-fed sultans. But the working bee was but a sexless, self-sacrificing drudge. He was beginning to hold the working bee in a kind of superstitious horror.

"But why?" asked Daphne.

"Can't you guess? '*De te fabula narratur.*'"

"Which means, I gather, that the fable is about me?"

He took her arm and led her away.

"I can't bear to think of your wasting your life like one of those. At least they have the instinct of the continuity of the race. You're only exhausting yourself to keep a drone alive."

"False analogies can lead one anywhere. . . . You, a logician, ought to know that. Luke and I aren't insects, we're human beings. I'm his daughter and I've got to look after him. You're the man I trust more than anyone else in the world, and I'm not going to see your life poisoned by us."

"Poisoned by you? You, Daphne?"

There was a tone in his voice, of appeal and reproach, that softened her. Her eyes, meeting his, melted. A twitch of her mouth, a play of tender emotions over her features, set him on fire. He gripped her shoulders.

"Won't you ever understand? Life without you is nothingness. I don't ask any thing. I've no right to. But you can take everything I have to give. Your happiness is all I have to live for. To tell you again that I love you would be stupid. You've known it for a long time." He released her, threw up his arm, and turned away; then came back. "It's the first time I've loved a human being, let alone a woman, in my life. I was brought up on sawdust. My married life has been bran. . . . You know that as well as I do. You've come like a flame through the darkness of things, and set light to something in me—I don't know what. I was dead and now I'm alive. And you have me in your hands."

She swayed, very much shaken, and instinctively sought the support of one of the cherry trees with which the path was bordered. She stood, a half-affrighted nymph, beneath the greenery of leaves and the heavy clusters of purple cherries. The man hid his eyes for a moment as though to blot out a vision of intolerable loveliness. He approached by a pace. He said stupidly, after the way of a man to whom passion is new and terrifying:

“I ask nothing. I only want to worship you. Let yourself be worshipped. Let me put everything I have in the world at your feet.”

He advanced to her with hungering arms. She shrank, although she had felt them around her once before, when she had sealed with a kiss the bond between them. Then there was no madness. Now there was. She stepped into the middle of the path with protecting hands—palms outwards—in front of her.

“You say you worship me . . . what do you think you worship?” She laughed with some bitterness and allowed him no time to reply. “No, no, no. . . . This is the end of all things. You must let us go. Cut us adrift. You’ve lived a clean life. Luke and I haven’t. You’ve got to understand, once and for all. In the eyes of the world we’re a rotten pair. He’s a thief, and I’m not what you think I am. Let us go and be damned to us.”

She turned and sped down the path. He stood for a moment bewildered. Then he overtook her, and had to keep up with her swift pace.

“I don’t understand. What do you mean?”

“There’s no need of explanations. . . .”

He forced her down on the first seat in the rose-garden.

“You must tell me what you mean.”

“Some day, perhaps. Not now. I’ve told you the essential. Besides, what’s the good of all this talk?”

She laid a hand on his knee, and, bending forward, looked at him in her clear, frank way. “I know you love me. I’d give anything to accept what you offer. Haven’t I told you, over and over again, that you and Luke are all I have in the world? . . . There was another—yes,” she said quickly, in answer to a puzzled glance. “But that’s all over long ago. . . . You two remain. If you were free, and I were free, I’d marry you to-morrow and be the happiest woman on earth. But you’ve a wife and I’ve a father.”

“I’ve found what I thought never to find in my life,” said Theophilus; “what else matters?”

“You matter. Don’t you see? Supposing we go mad. There’ll be the shadow of Luke near us all the time. Do you think he won’t take advantage of

such an opportunity? If he can't blackmail you, he'll give everything away to Evelina, and she'll divorce you. Then you'll marry me and have Luke on your shoulders for the rest of time. You think I'm disloyal? I'm not. I love Luke—that's rooted in me from childhood. I'd defend him like a wild cat before the whole world. But I love you more. And I'll defend you against him. He would stop at nothing to get the money—the Wavering money—and all this. . . .”

She drooped again, very tired. He said in a low voice:

“I'm ready to take any risk. Evelina has no sentimental regard for me. Without bringing you into it at all, a divorce can easily be arranged. I'll shoulder Luke and all the responsibilities. It will be a bigger life, dear, than any I have ever dreamed of living.”

A sudden glance in his eyes sent a thrill of happiness through her being, such as she had not felt for years. She beheld an awakened Theophilus, and, woman-like, was conscious that her work had been the awakening. But the situation was grotesque—impossible. She shook her head sadly.

“If there were only lions in the path, anyone with courage could shoo them away. Lions are cowards. But there are chasms and abysses and all sorts of impassable things. . . . Do you think Evelina would stop at the woman of straw as the intervener? She'd cite me, too. If there's an active emotion in Evelina's heart, it's hatred and jealousy of me.”

“She would be too careful of her political career to . . . well . . .”

He stumbled. She picked him up defiantly.

“To wash Wavering dirty linen again in public? I'm not so sure.”

“I am,” said Theophilus decidedly. “What other objection have you?”

She edged away from him and gripped her hands tight. She had fallen in with Luke's airy suggestion that Mona and herself should motor down for tea and bring him back, solely in order to learn the nature of his business with Theophilus. Luke was more than suspect. The business must be to Theophilus's disadvantage. So Theophilus must be warned. But she had not anticipated this crisis, almost vital, in their lives.

Far away, across the rose-beds, patches of old red-brick wall glowed in the mild sunshine, left bare between the straddling and leafy arms of peaches and apricots, heavy with fruit. In the middle distance, a man in a cloth cap, with sleeves of a grey shirt rolled to the elbows, held a hose-pipe and sprayed the roots of the thirsty roses. He seemed to stand up to his waist in roses. Beyond the wall the mass of trees in the park stood out clear against the peace of the southern sky. The anguish of all this beauty overwhelmed her.

At last she said: “I told you there was another man. You didn't seem to

understand. I thought it would be enough for you. But I suppose a decently good man is denser than the most saintly woman in such things. . . . Well, I lied to you when I said it was all over. There is another man. A man in Paris. And I'm bound to him . . ."

"Married?" cried Theophilus.

"How could a decent girl marry a man when her father was in prison? Well, you ought to understand now. I'm bound. That's the insuperable obstacle to what we've been talking about. I didn't want to dot i's and cross t's . . . but it had to come. Luke and I will go our own ways." She rose, threw up her head and forced herself to look stonily into the man's grave eyes beneath knitted brows.

"It's time for us to get back to London. Mona has an engagement."

He followed her into the garden with the herbaceous border. The air hummed with bees frantic to get the last of the day's honey out of campanulas and the early Michaelmas daisies. All working their hearts out—like herself. And to what personal end?

They passed through the gate and crossed the lawn and found Luke and Mona still under the elm. Tea had been cleared, but by Luke's side, on a silver tray, stood siphon, decanter, ice-pail and a long half-filled glass.

He rose and greeted the new-comers in his charming manner.

"You've deserted us for an eternity, while I've been boring our poor Mona to heroically suppressed hysteria."

"We've been talking music," said Mona with a pleasant laugh. "Luke's going to write an opera. It's thrilling. Tell them about it."

He raised deprecating hands.

"You've broken confidence. But if you insist, it's this way. I found the idea in a recent French novel. An island in the Sargasso Sea peopled by the descendants of a Greek colony, who have never been in touch with modern civilization. A pleasure yacht is stranded on the island. Modern Europe and Ancient Greece face to face. I can write a rough libretto and get it polished up afterwards. It's the music that fascinates me. The juxtaposition of the Greek modes and all that we express through Stravinsky. If I can do it . . ." he added modestly. "I've composed odds and ends of things—I know my theory. But an opera! I'm afraid I was only trying to entertain Mona with a dream."

"But why a dream?" asked Daphne.

"Eh?" he turned on her sharp note.

"Why shouldn't you try, at any rate?"

"My child, what leisure have I? What freedom from the most sordid

cares?”

He smiled urbanely, and, twisting round, drank off the remainder of his whisky and soda.

“Why haven’t you told me of this idea before?” she asked.

He apologized by a little gesture. It was the result of a coincidence of the last few days. For years he had had the notion in his head, a mixture of Greek and modern civilization and its musical illustration. He had made all kinds of musical memoranda. Now this French book had crystallized his ideas. As a matter of fact, only on this idle summer afternoon, while talking to Mona, had the sudden inspiration come. His Daphne must forgive him.

“You’ll sit down somewhere and begin,” said Daphne. Her face and voice were tragic.

“But where?”

“There are hundreds of little quiet out-of-the-way places in England.”

“My child,” said he indulgently. “For a work like this I must be in touch with libraries. Who would dare write Lydian measures, with their enharmonic intervals and God knows what, without being documented? Behind the musician must be sound musical scholarship. How could I get books at Duckery-on-Puddle?” He turned to Mona. “You know how things are, my dear. London for research. The country afterwards, if you like.”

“Then why not London?” asked Daphne.

Theophilus stood silently by during the discussion. He had no doubt that Luke was penniless. The office in Holborn had been given up. Rent for the house in the Wellington Road was overdue. Nothing was left to carry on the modest establishment save what he might provide out of the five hundred pounds for which Luke had pocketed the cheque, and what Daphne might supplement. What was going to be the end of these two? He touched Luke on the arm.

“Are you serious about the opera?”

“To write it would be to realize the dream of my life.”

“Very well,” said Theophilus. “I accept the proposal you made me after lunch. We’ll arrange details to-morrow. We can shut off a wing of the house for you and Daphne, so that you’ll be independent. In this way you’ll be near London and all the libraries. . . . I must think out things before we go any further. Come down to-morrow.”

“Of course I will, my dear fellow,” said Luke. “But you overwhelm me.”

A few moments later they crossed the lawn on the way to the car awaiting his three guests.

Daphne held him back.

“Are you going mad?”

“Perhaps,” said Theophilus. “It’s a new sensation.” He walked with her a few steps in silence. Then he said:

“For all I care there may have been a hundred men in your life, but you’re the only woman in mine.”

## CHAPTER XVI

THE installation of Luke and Daphne at The Grange was simplified by the sudden death of Franklin, the old head gardener. The roomy cottage in which he had dwelt for thirty years had ever been too large for his wants, even when his wife had been alive and his daughter had remained unmarried. No one knew why Luke's grandfather had built it; for it was too pretentious, both in mid-Victorian solid architecture and interior accommodation, for the ordinary, needs of lodge-keeper, game-keeper or gardener, and not spacious enough to be styled a dower-house, an apanage not warranted by the comparative modesty of the estate. It was far away from the house, on the north side of the domain, situated far enough from the north gate to save it from the obviousness of a lodge. Certainly it had not been inhabited during his lifetime. Probably he had built it for his disappointing son. It was Miss Wavering who had settled Franklin in it, and there he had lived for thirty years. He had adorned it with a trim little garden, vegetable and flower, of his own; had seen that the outside was painted spick and span at regular intervals; had lived the last few years in two rooms on the ground floor, and had let the rest of the interior moulder and decay.

But there was a perfectly good four-square house on comfortable though unimaginative mid-Victorian plan, which, at no very great expense, could be added to and converted into the most comfortable little home for two people in the world. As for Franklin's successor—one Sparrow, the second-in-command—he was housed contentedly in a cottage of his own.

Even Evelina who, after the British Association meeting, paid a hurried visit to The Grange in order to gather together certain of her effects which she might need on her Australian trip, raised little objection to this heaven-sent mode of housing her cousins. It would, at any rate, keep them out of The Grange itself, at least when she was there, which was all that seemed to matter. She went so far as to approve of Luke's taking over the management of the estate, the dairy, the garden produce, the conservatories.

"There has been abominable waste here, ever since I can remember," she said. "Aunt Fanny thought it below the dignity of a gentlewoman to send hot-house grapes to Covent Garden, so, beyond the few bunches that came to table and those she sent, with her kind compliments, to distinguished invalids round about, they all either went mouldy or were sold for twopence by Franklin. The same with the dairy. So long as she had fresh milk and butter and cream herself, she never cared what happened to the rest of the stuff. It was an old

argument between Luke and herself. ‘My dear, I’ve not been brought up to sell things. I leave that to tradesmen. It’s their business; not mine.’ And when Luke would assure her that every Duke in the land sold milk, she would say: ‘I don’t believe it. I can’t see an English Duke going about with a wooden yoke over his shoulders and a couple of cans dangling on either side hawking milk.’ That was Aunt Fanny. It was a definite point of view. She was as autocratic as the ideal of her girlish dreams, Queen Victoria.”

Theophilus laughed. Now and then Evelina could be shrewd and entertaining. Beyond doubt, she was a mightily clever woman. If only she were a bright woman, instead of cleverness incarnate in female guise, what a difference there would be in their relations!

He put aside the thought as irrelevant. She went on with her pleasant sermon.

“So there has been wicked waste all round; Luke’s quite right. If I hadn’t been so busy I would have tried to do something. But, after all, it was none of my business.” She always dissociated herself in an agreeable, freshly acid way from the inheritance. “You were satisfied and that was all that counted. But now you come to me with a reasonable suggestion.”

“I’m so glad you think so,” said Theophilus.

“Of course, you’ll be robbed all round,” said Evelina blandly. “That goes without saying. But, in a small way, it’ll be for the National benefit. The surplus milk will feed babies; the surplus grapes will find their way into West End shops and thence into Nursing Homes, and your surplus cabbages will add to the stock for National Consumption. But you, personally, won’t be a penny the richer for it. I know Luke.”

This was one of many talks in the same tenor, at the end of which Theophilus shrugged philosophic shoulders. Her half-altruistic, half-cynical attitude relieved his mind. His decision had been irrevocably made—that was one of the queer elements of strength in his character; but his gentler soul rejoiced that the anticipated pitched battle between himself and Evelina had melted away into this amicable agreement.

“After all,” she said pleasantly, “Luke is my cousin. I see things more or less from your point of view. Left to himself he’d only get into prison again, with all the complications of scandal that would injure my position. If he’s here, in the cottage, composing futile music and robbing you, he’ll have his hands full.”

She spent four days at The Grange, sympathetic, intellectual companion. She manifested interest in his scientific bee-keeping, applauded his progress in the study of the Elizabethan Dramatists, and from her expert knowledge of

modern housing conditions, labour-saving devices and hygienic appliances, gave him invaluable advice for the renovation of Franklin's cottage.

The curious element in her gracious attitude was the practical negation of Daphne. She took her for granted as the unquestioned companion of her father; but for all she said, Daphne might have been as unimportant as his shadow.

Theophilus dutifully saw her off at Tilbury on the Orient Liner. The ebullient John Roberts, one of the party, wished he were accompanying them.

"We hope to come back, if not with broader bodies, at least with broader minds."

He had worked the platitude off a few days before in a farewell address to his constituents, and it had gone rather well, John Roberts's body tending to the corpulent.

"Theophilus is wanted at home," said Evelina. "A landed proprietor has his responsibilities."

It was the first time that Theophilus was brought to consider himself a landed proprietor. The term gave the idea of ownership of thousands of acres. Two or three minor Members of Parliament, standing by, who had not been to The Grange, were greatly impressed. One of them, during a busy moment of Evelina with the representative of an evening paper, asked him to go down and have a drink. Theophilus, glad of an opportunity to escape from John Roberts, accepted.

"I don't know what you think of this circus," said the legislator. "I hope it'll be better than it looks. They're all so damned solemn. Here's luck."

Theophilus's heart warmed towards the human fellow.

"Why are you going?"

"To see Australia at reduced fares. A poor man on holiday. I, too, wish you were coming with us; we could regard things with becoming levity. Most of them have gone mad on statistics. If we attend a race meeting they'll look out the average age of the horses, the average weight of the jockeys and the average speed per mile. And they'll publish it in a Report. Oh my God! Have another?"

Theophilus declined. They went on deck and rejoined the group. Evelina was saying to the reporter:

"I'm going with an open mind to study the methods by which a young and energetic people are attempting to solve social problems."

Theophilus thanked Heaven he was not going on the voyage. He was

tempted to take the engagingly frank M.P. aside and urge him to land and accompany him about Europe as guide and philosopher. He was sure that the young man knew more about life and its real meaning than all this academical crowd put together. He was musing, with a smile, on the fantasy, when Evelina escaped from the gratified pressman, and joined him for the final farewell.

The shore-bell rang. There was the usual scene of conglomerate hurried leave-takings. Said Evelina, by way of last words:

“I’ve conceded a great deal, you know. Perhaps more than you think. But if you wish to consider my feelings, you will fix a great gulf between The Grange and The Grange Cottage. Now is the only time to do it.”

“I’ll have exactly the same consideration for your happiness and comfort, my dear,” said he, “as you have for mine.”

And, on this enigmatical reply, they parted, Theophilus being caught by the shore-going stream and jostled on to the gangway. He stood for a few moments on the quay, watching the vast, many-decked ship and its massed throng of passengers waving adieux to the shore. He saw many of Evelina’s companions, John Roberts, and the human young Member of Parliament who shot up a friendly arm. But Evelina herself he did not see. In a few minutes the liner glided out of the dock, and Theophilus went away, wondering in his heart whether he had bidden farewell to an enemy or a friend.

Luke threw himself into the renovation of the cottage with an enthusiasm which awakened Daphne from a nightmare of apprehension. He became the Ole Luk Oie of Cedar Court. He cut down contractors’ estimates which would have been passed by an over-generous Theophilus.

“My dear,” he would say to Daphne, “I am stewarding this estate. It’s not a very big estate; but I’m going to be its just steward. Rigid economy everywhere.”

He devoted his acute financial brain to the smallest problem. He fitted up a bath-room with twice the comfort at half the estimated cost. The question of furniture was one of the first that arose. Theophilus was willing to expend a certain sum. Luke waved the suggestion aside. There were lumber rooms in The Grange stacked by his Philistine grandfather with forgotten furniture. Could Daphne and himself have a free hand in selection? It would be an adventure beloved of Daphne.

“It certainly would be rather amusing,” said she.

“There are attics crammed full of old stuff,” said Theophilus. “What’s in them I don’t know. Of course take what you like.”

They discovered treasures of late eighteenth-century furniture, which the Philistine mid-Victorians, with their ideals of wealthy comfort to be expressed

only in solid masses, had despised and rejected. There was a Hepplewhite sideboard, a Sheraton dining-table. There were Louis XVI beds. . . .

“If I didn’t love them,” said Luke the artist, “I’d sell the lot, bit by bit, and rake in thousands.”

Both in order to facilitate their installation in The Cottage, and because the lease of the house in the Wellington Road had terminated, Theophilus put The Grange at the disposal of Luke and Daphne while he himself went for his imaginary cure at Marienbad, and afterwards on a mild vagabondage through Czechoslovakia. He was used to solitude, but unfamiliar with temptation. He feared the over-poignancy of joy in living again under the same roof as Daphne. God knows what might happen. His life’s training had led him to count on the carefully anticipated.

Daphne, with her modern bravery, her often disconcerting directness of speech and act, with the puzzling conflict of her flower-like beauty and her scorn of feminine allurements, had always dwelt behind a veil of mystery. He had known few women. Evelina was no more mysterious than John Roberts, or the last Home Secretary under whom he had served. But Daphne had been, for all her frankness, a mystery of sex, rendered more baffling by sporadic gleams of half-revelation. Now, since her avowal of he knew not what, the real Daphne shimmered before him a veiled Isis. There was the outer woman, relieved for the moment of nightmare anxiety, and enjoying the reaction with all the spontaneity of her young impulses, bright-eyed, keen-brained, uplifted by hope, a sight to gladden all beholders; and there was the inner Daphne, a woman of passions, tears, heroisms, hidden behind impenetrable mist. There was a man in her life; in Paris; there was a man in her life still. And yet, before her confession, she had declared Luke and himself to be the only beings in the world whom she loved. For Luke’s sake she had practically offered him all of the outer Daphne that was hers to give.

He loved her. In that he felt he had found the Absolute. For her happiness he could conceive no cost of sacrifice of the dry thing that was Theophilus Bird. The flame of his spiritual devotion burned clear. But the love of the man for the intoxicating outer woman was a different matter altogether. He knew that if he said to her, in bodily presence, what, poor fool, in the wakefulness of unhappy nights he had rehearsed and sworn to say, she would have yielded. Whether Evelina divorced him or not, what could it matter? What disruption of social life had they to fear? Would Luke hold up horrified hands and cast the erring daughter out of his yet unfeathered nest? Rather would he press urbanely for Irregular Union settlements. . . .

He had known the wonder of her lips, the melting of her slim body into his when his arms had been around her. The man of forty, at last awakened to

fierce emotion, passed through many fires. Now he passed through what was, perhaps, the saving fire of jealousy. From the day of her dismal confession, to the morning of his departure for Marienbad, there had been no mention of the man that was in her life. But the shadow of the man stood between them. He knew that, had he so willed, she would have sent the man and his shadow to wander lonely among the myriad shadows of old loves that, in corporate form, haunt this world of erring humans. She would be his out of unquestionable devotion, out of romantic gratitude for his loyalty to Luke, out of divine pity for his loneliness and his unlovedness; out of her queer impetuous desire to set him, the dried dead thing, ablaze with the fire of Life.

His knowledge of this was the painfully garnered harvest of years. But there was the Man in her life, a terrifying phantom, who transmuted his love for the outer Daphne into an ignoble desire.

To his astonishment he had found her waiting for him at the barrier at Victoria Station, on the morning of his departure.

“You!—my dear—I never dreamed . . .”

“I did. All night. How could I let you go by yourself?”

She laughed adorably. They passed through the barrier, following the porter with his hand-baggage, down the platform between the two great Continental trains. It was not only holiday time but a P. & O. morning, and the trains were conveying wistful folk, holiday over, to work in far lands. Around the entrance to the double line of carriages, humans clustered like Theophilus’s bees, driven, after swarming, back to the line of hives.

“You’ll be lonely enough when you start, poor old dear,” she said affectionately. “So will a lot of these.” She waved a hand in the direction of the wistful ones bound for India. “But they’ve nearly all got a female of sorts to wish them God-speed. I’m sure it makes a lot of difference to them.”

“It makes a lot of difference to me, too,” said Theophilus, rather huskily.

She slid her hand through his arm.

“I hate the idea of your starting like a lost soul.”

“Going into the wilderness in search of itself?”

He laughed, looking at her, as though he had made a joke. She took it lightly.

“Your soul’s all right, my dear. If it wasn’t, I’d be a miserable woman. It’s your mind and body and general state of being that I’ve been worried about. . . . I wish you weren’t going. I’ve told you that before. . . . Of course, my dear, I know all about it. And you know that if it were possible, I’d throw over everything and sail away with you to Kingdom Come. Anyhow, the least

I can do is to see you off.” She rattled on rather nervously: “Do you know, when I was a child and would go and see Luke off during the war . . . once in a crowd of men saying good-bye to their women folk of all kinds, I saw a lonely, sad sort of man who hadn’t a woman to see him off at all. He seemed so miserable—like the poor tiger that hadn’t got a Christian. He made me cry. I’ve seen him at intervals ever since. . . . And I’ve put on my best frock for you, though you haven’t noticed it. I wanted to do you credit.”

Later, when the train slowly moved, she kissed her hands to him through the window. He blessed her for not letting him depart in disregarded loneliness.

When he returned to England they had taken possession of The Cottage. The artistic taste of father and daughter had made it a miracle of daintiness. She had aimed, she said, with chintzes and old-fashioned wall-paper, at a Jane Austen effect. She took him through the little house, happier than she had been for many months. Luke’s bedroom upstairs running the length of the front was big enough to house his piano, her gift to him out of her savings, and served as a music-room. The top of the piano and a small table near by were littered with draft pencilled scores. Learned volumes on music, bearing the label of the London Library, lay about. The room gave a pleasant sense of the artist’s workshop. Of course he had begun his opera. She herself carried on her dress-designing in the drawing-room. All her artistic plant, unlike a musician’s, could be stowed tidily away in a cupboard at a minute’s notice.

Luke in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers looked years younger.

“The City, my dear fellow—I’ve done with it for ever. Here am I among God’s fields and cows and cabbages, things I really know about, and with an art that, like a silly ass, I never dreamed of practising—and here I’ll stay. Stocks and Shares, Bulls and Bears, and all those dreadful things have vanished into the Limbo where they belong. For me the frisking lamb and the pipe and the tabor—which is a damn sight more literal than it may seem.”

With the advent of Theophilus, Luke’s stewardship began. They spent many mornings in the library of The Grange over the accounts of the estate which Theophilus, trained official, had kept in trim order. The half-yearly balance sheets evoked the financier’s admiration. They were models of neatness and lucidity. But when Luke began to examine the details, especially the deficit on the credit side that made up the balance on the other, he triumphed over the unimaginative Civil Servant.

“This item for pigs’ food! Good God! do you feed them on baby lamb and spring chicken and asparagus? I’ve been round and I’ve not seen any signs of

it myself. Why, you've been robbed for years. No wonder Judson—that was the dairy man before Binnings—was able to buy a pub in Watford. Binnings is trying to do the same. Out he goes!”

“He always seemed to me such a nice chap,” said Theophilus.

“You'd be astonished to see what a lot of nice chaps there are in His Majesty's Prisons,” said Luke, giving perhaps, for the first time—so that it startled Theophilus—the correct designation to his euphemistic North Pole. “Charming fellows, and most of them stuck away there because sweet lunatics like you put temptations in their way which they couldn't resist. I haven't the slightest doubt we could get the delightful Binnings six months' hard labour. . . . Old Franklin must have left a tidy sum. The daughter married a journeyman-plumber in St. Albans. I hear now that he's setting up for himself as a Sanitary Engineer. . . . No. Binnings goes. It'll be good for his soul. I've a capital fellow in my mind's eye. I was only waiting for this talk with you—or until I took over—to engage him. As for Sparrow—promoted, it seems automatically, to the Head Gardnership—he's a congenial idiot. Old Franklin did make things grow, at any rate. This fool Sparrow can't. I've been talking to him. He doesn't seem to know the difference between a mangel-wurzel and an orchid. . . . We must have smart, honest men about the place, my dear Theophilus. Smart *and* honest. Sparrow must go and pick up what he can out of the soil somewhere else.”

“I'm very fond of Sparrow,” said Theophilus. “He has a happy little wife and an adorable small child. No, we' keep Sparrow.”

Luke shrugged his shoulders. “I admit he hasn't the brains to be dishonest. And he does what he's told. All right, we'll keep him. But he must be deposed from his high estate, and a competent Head Gardener appointed in his stead.”

Thus did Luke, man of affairs, sweep The Grange clear of knaves and fools. There was the poultry-man, neck-deep in a quagmire of ancient iniquity. Crowe, the butler, was at a loss to balance his cellar book which he had inherited from his predecessor, the obese Smithson, pampered and legacied retainer of Aunt Fanny. He had taken the cellar book as gospel. The apocryphal nature thereof was proved by Luke's inventory.

Mrs. Garraway herself, paragon of housekeepers, didn't pass immaculate under Luke's scrutiny. Even millionaires, let alone domestic servants, did not eat freshly cooked butcher's meat three times a day. Such diet was bad for anybody's inside. Apparently there was always a queue of pensioners figuratively standing at the back door, for broken meats and unbroken pies and butter and cream. Theophilus, who regarded Mrs. Garraway as a Tower of Comfort, pleaded for her, and she was let off with a caution.

One day, one of many autumn days, Theophilus dropped in at The Cottage for tea. The lights of the little drawing-room were lit, the chintz curtains drawn. On the wall hung old colour prints which dreadful grandfather (for Daphne great-grandfather) Wavering, entering on his heritage from great-great-grandfather Wavering (a man of exquisite connoisseurship) had, in his Early Victorian insolence, cast into the lumber attics. George Morlands, in their clean vital impressions; Tomkins, in all the tender and careful original charm; a Bartolozzi or two. A miniature gallery of masterpieces. A fire glowed in a comfortable modern brick low grate. Above were heard the incoherences of the composer's chords.

Daphne poured out tea, and handed hot muffins which had a comfortable smell.

"I don't think I've eaten my due share of mud," said Daphne.

"What do you mean?"

"When you announced that you had accepted Luke's suggestion, I thought you were either going mad or crazily heroic—which comes to the same thing. Now I see you were right."

"I had to do something," said Theophilus.

"And you did it in the grand manner, my dear. A million thanks. You've saved our lives. Luke's wonderful. He walks about the place all day, putting the fear of God into everybody, which seems to please him. He's in robust health and eats and sleeps like a child. And, when he's indoors, he can think of nothing but his opera. He's the happiest thing I've seen for years."

"I'm glad," said Theophilus soberly. "And you, Daphne?"

She made a gesture as who would say: "Why ask such a question?"

"I? I've waked up after a nightmare." She laughed. "'All's for the best in this best of all possible worlds.' That's more or less what I feel like. Reaction of course. But with me reactions last a very long time. . . ."

She lit a cigarette and stretched herself in her arm-chair by the fire opposite him, and crossed her slender legs and passed her hand over her dainty cropped head. "I may look like an adventuress, but, inside, I'm not built like one. If I try the game I fall down. I'm like you; I make a fetish of honesty. Luke and I are living together honestly, which he hasn't been doing for the past year. . . . We won't talk about that. It has either been a question of crooked ways or your bounty. Of course there's your bounty still. . . ."

"My dear!" cried Theophilus. "A few pounds spent on improving the property, and"—he waved a hand—"these odds and ends brought from

forgotten decay into beautiful life. And as for my arrangement with Luke, it's a business proposition by which I profit. Besides, it's your arrangement."

For Daphne had only consented to the stewardship scheme on one condition—the non-salaried position of Luke. He had declared his certainty of a minimum £1,500 annual profit to be made out of the estate. In these circumstances not only should Theophilus not pay out money but should be in pocket. His gains would go towards the improvements. Thus, *auspice* Daphne, it had been contracted that Luke, the labourer being worthy of his hire, should receive seventy-five per cent of the profits, and hand over the remaining twenty-five to Theophilus. Luke would be housed, warmed, lighted, and receive, on his own calculations, at least a thousand pounds a year. Daphne, with her annual heritage of five hundred and her not inconsiderable earnings by dress-designing, would bring up the income of the pair to a standard of comparative luxury.

"I know all about the business proposition," she replied. "I'm not worrying about that. It's your heart's bounty. Without it we couldn't have made an honest living. . . . Now we can. That's why I'm curling up, in happy comfort, like a cat. Do you know," she added after a pause, "I couldn't have given up Luke, if he had gone on."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Theophilus.

"But what a hell of a life it would have been! My God!"

She threw her cigarette into the fire, rose and passed her hands over her eyes. Then she smiled. "I suppose I have a touch of nightmare still."

Luke came in, clad in loose country clothes, and advanced with hands outstretched to Theophilus.

"My dear Daphne, why didn't you send me a word? My work—my inspiration do you say? Why, Theophilus is my inspiration. Yes, I'll have a cup of your excellent tea, my dear, with the greatest pleasure. Has it ever struck you, Theophilus, that alcohol stimulates the business brain, but deadens the power of artistic creation? There was a time when I despised tea. Now I love it."

His air of a frosted judge with a haunting past had gone. The spare man with lantern jaws was putting on flesh, notably around the eyes, which relieved them of their old resemblance to the hungry hawk.

After a while he said: "Come into the office, old man, for a minute. I've something to show you."

The office was one of the additions built on to The Cottage, and had its outer door for the reception of servants and business folk. It was furnished with prim and austere efficiency.

There were narrow drawers all over the place, each with its little white label. A typewriter, now discreetly encased, but presided over, every morning, by a young woman from Moorstead—the writing of letters, pen in hand, was beyond the business man’s conception of the possible—stood on a solid table. There was a roll-desk, a swivel-chair before it and a couple of wooden chairs.

Luke switched on the lights, and turned on the gas-stove.

“As you’re here, you might as well see for yourself what a week we’ve had of it.”

He rolled up the top of his desk, displayed a typed statement to astonished eyes. Grapes. Look at the quantity and the price at Covent Garden! The sales of milk and cream. And the old prize boar who was past his job, but still had a reputation in porcine circles, look what he had fetched in open market at Berkhamsted! Why had he sold him? Because, running the risk of being the laughing-stock of the Hertfordshire pig-fanciers, he had bought a young boar of despised lineage, yet of whose noble descent he had secret knowledge.

“Good God!” cried Theophilus. “All that money for a damned pig!”

“No, my dear boy,” laughed Luke. “For what they blissfully imagine will be hundreds of little pigs, fat and juicy and succulent. . . . As for the new one, they think he’s just Buckinghamshire, but he’s got a strain of prize Berks in him. I had inner information. I looked him over, and I know.”

He laughed gleefully, and for a second there was a golden flash in his hawk’s eyes.

“You see for yourself what the owners of the estate have been robbed of for the last half-century. If there’s a woman living to-day with the mentality of that blasted self-sufficient old ass of an aunt of mine, take me to her and I’ll wring her neck and proclaim myself a benefactor to humanity. I used to put it to her, as I’ve done to you. And always the same reply: ‘I’m not a green-grocer’—oh Lord!”

Theophilus smiled. “But she would take your advice in investments—industrials and that sort of thing.”

“That was finance, as she called it. She couldn’t understand that when she bought rubber shares she was practically selling motor-tyres and dog balls at a profit. I should think I did advise her,” he added ruefully. “And you are benefiting by it now, you lucky dog.”

The geniality of his manner disguised any envy lurking in the words.

“Well,” said he, “those are the gross takings for the week. This time next year I’ll show you a balance sheet that’ll make you gasp.”

Theophilus walked through the grounds of The Grange a well-contented

man. The increase in income scarcely concerned him. Even after payment of income tax and Evelina's settlement and all hitherto futile expenses of the estate, he lived well within his income. The fulfilment of modest needs was all the use he had for money. The yearly balance now about to be increased, invested prudently, would add to Evelina's fortune if he pre-deceased her. For he had made his will. Daphne, as was just, should benefit; but, as was also just, the Wavering estate should go to Evelina. She would possibly devote most of it to the Furtherance of Human Welfare. Possibly not. Evelina was a professional philanthropist; also a woman. Well, it didn't matter what she did with it. Except that it gave him leisure, and means to travel and to live in modest comfort, wealth had for him no personal meaning. If Evelina had rendered cosy the little house in Blackheath, he would never have wished for change.

Yet the sales of garden and dairy produce, and the miraculous deal of the boar, winged his footsteps through the grounds. He was justified, as Daphne had said, in his decision. Luke henceforward would earn an honest livelihood, and Daphne would be free from the most ghastly of all anxieties.

He dressed quickly, motored up to town, dined with the Elizabethan Society, and drove soberly home, almost a happy man.

## CHAPTER XVII

EVELINA returned from her railway panoramic view of Australia, filled with intimate knowledge of the social and political conditions of that continent; and a blatant Daily Something published a series of articles which she wrote on the homeward voyage. These gave her the position of an Authority on the Antipodes. To people of ordinary education, including Theophilus, her revelations were common knowledge. Theophilus began to wonder whether she was, after all, the fine flower of the Intelligentsia before whom he had bowed a humble head. He had the uneasy conviction that, with the aid of a few picture postcards and a month's file of newspapers, he could have written the articles himself. When she "glimpsed" and "sensed" things, his scholar's blood ran cold. It seemed impossible that a wife of his should use such horrible words and think she was writing English.

She returned, however, into a kind of marmalade of lower-political adulation. Mrs. Theophilus Bird had crystallized, for England, the vital problem of the Dominions.

She made sporadic visits to The Grange, now free of embarrassing Waverings, and, Parliament being in full session, started anew her week-end political parties. Theophilus suffered them in patience. After all, it was Evelina's home. He was the Interloper.

She called, of course, on her cousins at The Cottage, and manifested polite astonishment at the treasures which they had unearthed from the Wavering lumber-rooms and had renovated from unconsidered timber into things of beauty. She was all courtesy and congratulation. She had Luke and Daphne to lunch one Saturday, and saw that they went before the most eager of the week-end vanguard could arrive. Her attitude was irreproachable.

By way of return of hospitality, Daphne asked them to lunch the first day that Evelina was free to come to Moorstead. It happened to be a Friday. She accepted. But, affairs detaining her in London, she changed the meal to tea. Luke was at his best. Life was a Theocritan idyll. Again he trotted out the figures of the flocks and pipes. He abjured cities and all their ways. Evelina suavely commended him. Graciously she asked Daphne to show her over the house, and Daphne, though aware of covert insolence, invested herself in rare meekness and performed her task with courtesy.

Evelina, all smiles, accompanied Theophilus back to the big house. Then, when they entered the comfortable library, on a chance remark as to the change of the unconsidered cottage of Franklin's house, she burst out:

“The whole thing’s a tragedy. If I had known we had this priceless furniture, I’d have hired the Moorstead Rooms and displayed it, and got an expert curator from London, and it would have been an education for this rotten district.”

“They’re much better where they are,” said Theophilus.

She snapped impatient fingers. “Any old things from the Tottenham Court Road would have been sufficient. You don’t seem to understand. That cottage is a museum—genuine Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, George Morland. . . . Good Lord! It might have been the education of the county. And now it’s all wasted on those two.”

“But suppose,” said Theophilus, “we had discovered it in time, and used it for ourselves?”

“As much waste here as in The Cottage,” said Evelina finally. “We’re educated to a sense of beauty; we know what beautiful things are, and so can do without them. They don’t matter to us. But we *know*, and therefore we should give of our knowledge. Educate, educate, educate—isn’t that the all-clamant call of the present day?”

They discussed the proposition half in the abstract, half in relation to the Waverings, as is the way of common mortals.

“I’ve been thinking a good deal,” said Theophilus after a while, “about your theory of education, and I can’t get at the bottom of it. You seem to stop half-way. So long as people have academic knowledge and can tell the difference between a Carlo Crivelli and a Landseer, and the difference between a refectory table and a Chippendale, you think all is done. You seem to miss things, my dear. I’ve come to a conclusion with regard to education. It has only one purpose—a threefold purpose: to enable a human being to think—to act . . .”

“Of course; why platitudes? . . .” she interrupted.

“I said a threefold purpose,” said Theophilus. “To think—to act—to enjoy—Enjoyment being the resultant of the forces of Act and Thought. If you imagine you would have taught the people of Moorstead to ‘enjoy’ by opening an exhibition of eighteenth-century furniture which they wouldn’t come to, and wouldn’t understand if they did, you’re mistaken.”

She shrugged her plump shoulders amiably. “You get further and further away from me every day. Now you’re preaching sheer hedonism.”

“In a sense—possibly,” said Theophilus.

“Individual gratification. My life’s work has been to preach the greatest happiness for the greatest number.”

“Quite so,” said he. “But if every unit of this greatest number hasn’t any notion of how the devil he can be happy, what are you going to do about it?”

She sighed indulgently, refraining from arguing a point so puerile.

“Wealth has spoilt you, Theophilus; I’ve said so before. It’s a question of temperament, I suppose. I thought yours was different; that it led you towards intellectual things. It seems I was mistaken. Your temperament is hedonistic. Epicurean, if you like, leading you to personal pleasures, not gross, I allow, for the sake of argument . . . but an abandonment to material things.”

Feeling hot in the comfortable house, she threw off her imitation fur coat. She despised luxury, and wore outer garments merely as a protection against the inclemency of climate.

“I don’t know what’s coming to you, Theophilus, when you can preach such rubbish. Enjoyment the end of Education! It’s absurd.”

Her calm assumption of superiority angered him. But the habit of urbane intercourse restrained exhibition of temper. He lit a cigarette and made one or two paces about the room. His anger took the definite form of a question which he had often thought of putting to her. Hitherto he had refrained; for he had felt that such searching would create a crisis in their relations. Now he did not care. He said coolly:

“I wonder whether you’ll be honest with me, Evelina?”

“Have I ever been otherwise?”

“Then tell me whether you’ve ever enjoyed anything in your life worth enjoying? A poem, a picture, a bit of an old city, a glade in a wood, a sunset, the taste of food and drink, the happiness of anyone around you . . . a caress . . . anything that appeals to the emotions of a human being?”

Out of apparent nothing arose the sudden conflict between two opposing personalities. Each was aware of masks torn off. Evelina, too, grew pale with anger; and yet she, too, restrained herself.

“I think if we limited our conversation to the weather, and the news in the papers, we should get along much better.”

He made her a little bow, not devoid of irony.

“I quite agree with you. There our mentalities might find common ground.”

If she had left it at that, all might have been well. But the irresistible devil that lurks in some cell in the brain of a jealous woman caught hold of her tongue and let loose words which she had never thought to utter.

“I suppose you’ve learned all this sarcastic dialogue from the convict’s daughter. I wish you joy of her.”

He clenched his fists by his sides, and they glared at each other as declared enemies.

“You wish me joy of her. So do I. I wish it with all my soul!”

“If she’s your mistress, I’ve nothing more to say.” She spat out the irrevocable. He sprang forward.

“Mistress! What do you mean? How dare you?”

She threw up an arm.

“Why not?”

For the first time in his life hatred entered the heart of Theophilus.

“Daphne Wavering’s no man’s mistress.”

She broke into the cruel laughter of a woman who seldom laughs.

“You poor thing! No man’s mistress? Why, she was living with a sculptor in Paris for over a year!”

“That’s a lie!” said Theophilus.

“You live in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land . . . Cloud-Cuckoo-Land,” she repeated, with a touch of hysteria. “That’s happier than I thought. Anyhow you’re up in the clouds. I live in the world of men and women. The man’s name was Claude Davray, if you want to know.”

Theophilus stood for a few moments stupefied, like a boxer to whom just the not knock-out blow has been dealt. He remembered the vague confessions of Daphne. But she must be defended against the implacable enemy. He pulled himself together.

“I thought you lived in the high planes of the Intelligentsia. It’s a revelation to me that you listen to gossip of the sewer.”

“But it’s true, you fool,” she cried, losing grip. “Ask anyone who knows Paris. Claude Davray—good God! I hate his work. It means nothing. It has no thought at the back of it. But fools still like it. He’s *‘cher maître’* to everybody.”

“Yes, yes,” said Theophilus impatiently. “I know all about Claude Davray.”

To his disordered mind her explanation conveyed the new insolence of one who should sketch the world place of Kant or Raphael to one of lesser intelligence.

“Well then,” she cried, “you must know that he lives in the public eye. Even you must recognize that. His statue in the Salon a year or two ago—Daphne and the Laurel. . . . The Greek myth, Daphne, pursued by Apollo, prays for aid, and is turned into a laurel-tree. She was his model. His model, so

please you!”

“Lies!” said Theophilus.

“John Roberts himself saw them together in Paris.”

“That beastly fellow,” said Theophilus, “seems to unite the functions of a smelly private detective with those of a very inferior politician.”

She drew herself up angrily.

“John Roberts is an upright man, and the only real friend I have in the world.”

It was on the outraged man’s tongue to cry: “I wish you joy of him.” But hatred of vulgarity rejected the easy retort. He made a few steps around the room; halted between the curtained window and the back of his writing-table, and looked at Evelina, who stood, strong-eyed, shrewish, in unbecoming, outworn hat and frock, by the great fireplace.

“You think,” said he, “that Daphne is my mistress?”

“With her record I’m sure of it. Anyhow, you’re a fool if she isn’t.”

His glance fell on the white jade Buddha, Daphne’s gift, with the arms folded, and the mild gaze fixed far above the squalid ways of men. Unconsciously he took the thing in his hands. He said, after a while:

“What do you want me to do?”

“It’s for you to suggest, as an honourable man.”

He held the jade Buddha tenderly.

“Did you know of these supposed relations, in August, when you agreed that Luke should come here?”

“What I thought is a matter of no account,” she replied.

“It’s a matter of supreme account,” said Theophilus.

She took off her cheap little tight-fitting hat and cast it on a sofa, and intuitively put up hands to a released head.

“I told you what I thought. I’ve suffered enough already for Luke. He was heading for gaol again. Even you will grant that. My career couldn’t stand a second family shock. The stewardship scheme was the best way out. Of course I encouraged it.”

“But you took it for granted that his daughter would live with him . . . you also went to her house this afternoon, for the second time. You suggest damnable things that, before God, have no foundation in fact, as far as I am concerned, and you take her hand in conventional friendship. I don’t understand your position—or your moral attitude.”

She snatched up her hat and moved towards the door.

“Don’t you think this conversation is getting tiresome?”

He intercepted her, putting down the Buddha.

“Our relations for the past many years have been very tiresome. I bore you to death as a man of no importance, which isn’t very flattering or pleasing to me, and you have become to me—let me put it politely—an alien woman, without anything womanly about you except your sex’s illogic . . . so it seems that the time has come for us to arrive at a definite understanding.”

“We shall never understand each other,” said Evelina impatiently.

He put his back against the door.

“We’ve damned well got to.”

“You seem to want to make a scene. I hate scenes.”

“What you like or hate is a matter of indifference to me,” said Theophilus. “You accuse your cousin’s daughter of being my mistress. You further blacken her character. You must have some point of view in your conduct. What do you want me to do?”

She lost control. “My good man, I don’t care what you do. What does it matter to me? Carry on with your Daphne as much as you like. . . . I don’t care. Why should I? I thought I’d say nothing, but perhaps I’m more of a woman than you think, and my feelings got the better of me. There! Provided there’s no scandal, I give you a free hand. . . . If I’m one thing, I’m modern and devoid of prejudice. . . . I’ll suppress elementary instincts for the future, I promise.”

“I don’t see why you should promise,” said Theophilus dangerously. “I haven’t threatened.”

“Threatened?” She caught her breath at the word.

“You want something from me that you fear I won’t grant. What is it? A divorce? Even you daren’t drag Daphne again through the family mud. . . .”

“No, no”—she flickered a disgusted hand—“that’s impossible.”

“Then what do you want? I’m tired of asking you. If you want to divorce me, you can. I’ll do you my last service. The man of no account, and the woman of straw. . . . It’ll be beastly, but it can be arranged . . . . All kinds of other things can be arranged. At any rate you’ll be free—to do as you like. . . . Oh, say something!” he cried, as she maintained a stony silence.

His nerves were on edge; his conception of the delicacies of life were soiled. The tapestry of sweet and tender things that formed the background of his simple spiritual existence hung in defiled rags.

“Tell me. I’ll go through with it.”

His soul revolted at the prospect of the vulgar ordeal. Of this she seemed to have no notion. For when she spoke, it was with an acid smile.

“Of course it would be simple. As easy as falling off a log. Then the woman of straw would vanish into the infinite, and you’d marry Daphne, apparently without any concern about Claude Davray, the sculptor; and you’d live here happily ever after. And I would be a homeless wanderer. No, thank you, my dear Theophilus. Never in this life. You can have Luke’s daughter as your mistress as long as you like, for all it matters to me; but to set her up as Lady Paramount of The Grange—never, never, never. . . . No, my poor man, never!”

“Then what do you propose to do?” asked Theophilus.

“Nothing. You said we ought to come to an understanding. We’ve done so. A little while ago I was sorry at having lost my temper—at having said things I ought to have kept to myself. Now I’m glad. We’ve come to a perfect understanding. You’re in love with this girl. So be it. All I ask is discretion, and that neither she nor her father come here when I’m about. In the meantime things will go on as before. I’m the mistress of The Grange, whenever it suits my purpose to assert my position. I hope you follow me, Theophilus?”

“Do you mean follow your leadership or your line of argument?”

“Pedantic as ever,” she scoffed.

He suffered the gibe in silence. After a while he said:

“You’ve conceded so much towards the gratification of my desires that perhaps you will grant me one last request.”

She had so far imposed her will on the unimportant man that she could afford to be gracious. Her thin lips curled into a smile.

“And that is?”

He turned on her in sudden fury.

“That you go out of the house at once, and never let me see your face again.”

She sat on the sofa and laughed.

“No, my dear. No heroics. I’m here, and here I remain. I’ve no doubt you’d like to turn me out. But how are you going to do it? Call the butler and put me out into the snow? It’s a pity there’s no snow to-night. It would be melodramatic.” She glanced up at him clenching his hands in impatient anger, and laughed again. “Of course, you’re physically strong enough to strangle me if you like. But your criminal instinct is undeveloped, and you’d feel an awful fool if you tried to beat me. Besides, I don’t think Daphne would quite like it.”

He took her by the arm and flung her to her feet and threw open the door.

“Get out,” he cried, “get out.”

And, like a prudent woman, she went out, with a little smile of scorn.

Theophilus sat for a while with his head in his hands as though to stop the rocking of the universe as it translated itself into the conceptions of his brain.

What kind of a woman was Evelina? Hitherto, as an incarnation of sexless intellect, he had more or less understood her. He was dazed by paradox. Fierce jealousy of Daphne presented itself side by side with the most cynical proposition that mortal wife could make. But why try to understand her? She was the enemy. He shivered at the thought of her hatred and contempt of him.

He ordered the car, and drove the twenty-five miles to London to his Club. There, by God’s grace, he found a whilom colleague in the Civil Service, with whom he dined modestly and discussed topics dear to him of old, of personalities and promotions and the divers merits of the Parliamentary Heads of the Office. They split a pint of the Club’s Dow 1890 port.

He was half-way through breakfast the next morning, when Evelina entered the room, and, with a casual greeting, sat down as though nothing had happened the evening before. She glanced at the few private letters which had been winnowed by her secretary from the mass of official and general correspondence.

“The Darlingtons are coming after all,” she said with a sigh of content.

“When?” asked Theophilus.

“To-day. It’s Saturday. Have you forgotten?”

“I have,” said Theophilus. “Who are the Darlingtons?”

She stared. “Sir Wilbraham Darlington and his wife—M.P. for Dudsbury. He’s a great industrial leader. A most important man. . . . That will make twelve. You—I, fourteen.”

Theophilus passed a hand across heavy eyes, for he had not slept that night.

“There are twelve people coming here for the week-end?”

“Of course. Didn’t I tell you?”

“This is the first time I’ve heard of it,” said Theophilus.

“Well, they’re coming.”

Theophilus drank the remains of his cup of coffee. That and a bit of toast had been all his breakfast.

“They’re not,” said he, rising. “I’m tired of your tenth-rate politicians and wire-pullers and cranks, who look on me as a nonentity in your house. And when you spring a party of twelve on me without the politeness of a warning, you must excuse my resentment. You will telephone to the various members of

your house party and put them off.”

“I shan’t do anything so preposterous,” said Evelina.

Theophilus went to the door and turned.

“You’ll regret it,” he said.

When he had gone she laughed a little laugh of victory. Her conception of Theophilus had crystallized into that of a wooden fool, weak with women, with a newly developed violent temper. She could afford, at the moment, to snap her fingers at Daphne. Let him have the convict’s daughter and the sculptor’s mistress, if he chose. How would it affect her? And yet she hated Daphne as she had never before hated human being. Perhaps it was the strongest emotion to which her cold temperament had ever been subjected. It confused and frightened her. She had lived the intellectual, practical life from her young and ambitious girlhood. She had had no love for father, mother, brother—all now dead, the last killed in the war—and beyond a fleeting regard, she had never loved her husband. She was unused to emotional states, had no analytical equipment wherewith to examine them. Luke, in the path of her political career, was a stumbling-block and an offence. She had a cold, intellectual distrust and dread of the man. But Daphne stabbed deep into the roots of her womanhood. She couldn’t understand why. As a human being, with a justification for existence, she had no use for Daphne. From the insolent child whom she had turned out of her house, she had developed into a secret sly cat of a young woman. A hundred such could be gathered at any brainless resort in the world—the Embassy, Deauville, Palm Beach. Yet she had condescended to hate her. On her account she had had this peculiarly vulgar quarrel with Theophilus. She must blot out so futile a personage from her clear horizon. After all, she was Mrs. Theophilus Bird, M.P., a woman of great importance and responsibilities.

She consumed her breakfast, which, during her dispute with Theophilus and her consequent reflections, had grown cold. The eggs were tepid; congealing fat blocked the bacon. She swallowed the unappetizing dish unconcernedly. She was one of those women who eat like a dog, merely because they are hungry, and have but little sense of taste. Food was necessary for the sustenance of animal organism. She had studied the matter thoroughly, and was an expert on dietetics. She could have fed an army on economic apportionment of vitamins and calories, but to the flavour and general attractiveness of the stuff which the poor devils should eat she would never have given a thought. She ate her cold bacon and eggs dutifully; had they been sizzling hot she would not have found in them greater enjoyment. She poured out a cup of more or less hot coffee, to which she added, absent-mindedly, the cold milk meant for the tea.

The meal over, she sighed with relief. To Evelina eating was one of the unpleasant functions of nature. She rang the bell and summoned Mrs. Garraway.

“I did tell you there were twelve coming—four married couples, and four single people?”

“Everything’s arranged, madam. If you’ll just give me their names, in order of importance, I’ll get the cards out for the doors.”

“Food is ordered, I suppose?”

“Of course, madam. And the two cars will meet the five-five train, for those who don’t come by car themselves.”

“Miss Leeds will give you the list, and tell you who are coming by car and who by train.”

“Thank you, madam,” said Mrs. Garraway.

Evelina marched to her private work-room on the first floor, and busied herself with Miss Leeds, her secretary, till lunch-time. She was punctilious in replying to constituents, and dictated speeches to each correspondent. Miss Leeds was worked to death.

Theophilus did not appear for lunch. He had left a message to excuse his attendance. He had gone up to town in the Daimler. This annoyed Evelina, as she had counted on the large car to meet the five-five train.

She hurried through her perfunctory meal, went upstairs, rested a while, read, and worked with Miss Leeds.

“By the way, what’s the time?” she asked, suddenly conscious of social affairs.

The worn young woman looked at her wrist watch.

“Half-past five, Mrs. Bird.”

“Dear me, I must go down; everybody will be arriving,” cried Evelina.

She descended hastily to the drawing-room, where tea in splendour had been spread out by the butler; silver, embroidered tea-cloths, and little tables laden with dainty food. No guests had arrived. She summoned the butler.

“The five-five must be late.”

“It’s the only train, either way, that’s never late, madam.”

“You had better ring up the station.”

“Very well, madam.”

He returned a moment or two afterwards.

“The five-five arrived on time, madam.”

“Did the cars meet the train?”

“Mr. Bird has the Daimler; but Johnson went with the Morris-Cowley in order to engage such taxis as were necessary. Of course the luggage-car went too.”

“But haven’t Johnson and the luggage-car come back?”

“I’ll find out, madam.”

He returned with the tidings that they had not come back.

From the drawing-room clock on the mantelpiece she saw that it was six. Not only had the five-five brought nobody down, but the car people—the Darlings, the Donellys, with whom should have been John Roberts, due at the tea hour—had not come. Impatiently she wandered about the vast room. What could have happened? She drew the curtains and looked out into the late autumn night, and saw that it was raining pitilessly.

By a quarter to seven there was still not a guest. Neither the Morris-Cowley nor the luggage-car had returned.

At ten minutes to seven Theophilus entered the drawing-room suddenly. She started.

“And you, where have you been all this time?”

“I’ve been standing in the pouring rain by the lodge,” said he; “turning away all my uninvited guests. I counted twelve. I think that was the right number?”

She gasped, and sat forward in her chair. All she could do was to cry in a choked voice:

“You—you turned away my guests!”

“Yes, I turned them away,” said Theophilus. He pressed the electric bell.

“I’m rather cold. I’ll have some whisky.”

She stared at him open-mouthed. This commonplace, lank man, with the crinkly dark hair, the foolish little falcon-nose, the greying moustache, the sanguine complexion, and the brown eyes hardened beyond recognition, seemed to her suddenly vitalized from wood to flesh; to something more than flesh; to implacable spirit.

“I’m sorry I’ve kept you so long,” said Theophilus. “But I had to wait for your friends, the Darlings. They drove up in a Rolls-Royce. When the car was stopped, a filthy little red-faced beast with an eye-glass on a broad black ribbon, put his head out of the window, and asked what the hell was the matter. The kind of man that would turn up late and keep me in the rain. As he questioned my authority at my own gates, I had some difficulty in being polite

to him. Really, my dear Evelina, I should advise you not to know such impossible people.”

She shrivelled into her chair, thunder-stricken. She said foolishly, looking away from him:

“What excuse did you make?”

“That unforeseen circumstances had arisen which made it impossible for me to have the pleasure of their company.”

She rose, swayed a bit, with her hand to her head.

“I must write and tell them that you’ve gone mad. They’ll believe it.” She gathered courage from the inspiration and laughed. “People have been certified for less.”

The butler appeared at the door of the long drawing-room.

“Bring me a whisky and soda,” said Theophilus.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**T**HUS was war declared. The outraged lady left The Grange the next day, announcing her determination never to return. For long afterwards she was haunted by the absurd picture, drawn by John Roberts, of Theophilus in the rain, standing in front of the Daimler that was backed into the drive, with headlights on, so as to block the way and, with his grave and irreproachable urbanity, dismissing the dozen guests. The curious thing about it was that Theophilus appeared to have offended nobody except Sir Wilbraham Darlington, who, it seemed, had explained to Theophilus that he had declined an invitation to a ducal seat in order to pass the week-end at his damned house. Even Evelina could find excuse for the bland irony with which Theophilus had sent him away in a raging passion. But, though the other ten guests had driven off without much murmuring, her own little political circle was swept by a cyclone of conjecture as to the nature of the unforeseen circumstances that had barred their entrance to The Grange. Evelina was frank. Her poor dear husband, always eccentric, had just stepped over the boundary that separated eccentricity from something worse. There were no unforeseen circumstances at all. She told the truth. The rooms were all ready; the cars ordered to meet the train guests; welcoming tea was set in the drawing-room, where she had awaited them in a growing state of puzzlement.

Even Sir Wilbraham was partially mollified.

“You ought to have told me that your husband was a damned lunatic, and I should have known where I was.”

As a Buddhist acquires merit, so did Evelina acquire sympathy.

Among her acquaintances she counted Sir Aloysius Jones, the great authority on mental diseases.

Meeting him by chance at one of London's vaguely conceived and unnecessary dinner-parties, she tackled him, after the unscrupulous way of Women in the Public Eye, on the subject of Theophilus's condition. The hold-up of a large political week-end party by the host at his lodge-gates, for no reason at all, had become notorious. It presented a comic side of social life. References to it were made in the gossip columns of daily and weekly journals. Of the fact Sir Aloysius Jones was aware. Evelina manœuvred an adroit approach. Sir Aloysius was involved in a review of the circumstances before he realized its tendency.

When he did, he became very coldly on his guard. He was a man of genial

impulses, loving the generous gifts of life; accidents of training and opportunity had drifted him into the arcana of sex and nerve and mind; and his human instincts and specialized knowledge set Mrs. Theophilus Bird in a category of women whom he peculiarly disliked as social units, however interesting they might be in the consulting-room.

“I should like to meet your husband,” said he. “Of course, over a luncheon table, or something of that sort.”

“If you only could! But you see, it’s out of my power to arrange it.”

“That’s a pity. I should think he was rather an original fellow.”

“But,” cried Evelina, “this is the only original thing he has ever done in the whole course of his life.”

Sir Aloysius laughed, and was unkind enough to say:

“The originality of an act is no sign of loss of mental equilibrium. On the contrary, it is often an indication of recovery from such a lack. A good symptom rather than a bad one. I don’t think you have the slightest reason to feel distressed.”

It was then that she became aware of an intense dislike to Sir Aloysius Jones. She rose to welcome John Roberts—this talk was in the drawing-room after dinner—who rescued her from the ironical charlatan. He, too, disliked the man.

About a week afterwards he came to her with an indignant account, filtered through two or three gossip-mongers, of Sir Aloysius’s rough diagnosis. Apparently he had made some inquiries—found that Theophilus was a member of the great political Club to which he belonged, but which he scarcely entered, and arranged a seemingly chance meeting with him through the agency of a distinguished Civil Servant who had asked the so-called lunatic to lunch.

“My God! I sympathize with the fellow”—so ran the filtered declaration. “Do you remember the great scene in Kingsley’s ‘Hereward the Wake’?—where Hereward cleared Bourne, his house in Lincolnshire, of Frenchmen. I’ve heard nothing like it since. Even if Bird had gone at them with a hell of a sword—or was it a battle-axe?—like Hereward, instead of adopting modern methods, I’d certify him as the only sane man in England.”

Evelina discussed the gossip unhumorously with her henchman. They agreed that Aloysius Jones should be struck off the register of the Royal College of Physicians.

“We’ll catch him out yet,” said Roberts. “We’ll keep an eye on him, and ask a Question in the House.”

But they asked no question. In a week every one had forgotten the turning away of Mrs. Theophilus Bird's week-end party. The robust utterance of Sir Aloysius Jones had circulated through clubs and drawing-rooms and, though quickly lost in the cackle of London, had reduced to formless evanescence Evelina's vision of a Theophilus declared incapable of managing his own affairs. But she nourished in her heart a bitter resentment against Theophilus for his victory. For victory it was. The ridicule and humiliation were hers. And she lay awake of nights, plotting the annihilation of Daphne.

Meanwhile Luke had speedily taken hold of all Theophilus's affairs. He could not adequately manage the estate unless he had some idea of the financial situation behind it. Would Theophilus let him go through his investments? A cursory survey caused him to throw up his hands in horrified amusement. What had he been doing with his money? Nothing, said Theophilus. But what had his brokers been doing? Nothing likewise! Until he had come into the property Theophilus had never had occasion to employ a firm of stockbrokers, and, since then, he had nominally employed the firm who had acted for the late Miss Wavering.

"Good God!" cried Luke. "Sidebotham & Briggs! They were encrusted in barnacles years ago. Their horizon was bounded by a gilt edge. They loathed me because I made the old woman take reasonable chances. And they still manage to live in these days! Why,"—he turned over the list—"you've scarcely changed anything since her time! Your money's going to seed. You've lost a fortune! For Heaven's sake let me handle these things for you, or at least make some suggestions."

Luke's enthusiasm warmed Theophilus, who hitherto had been content to have such balance at his bankers as would meet any cheque within the bounds of the fantastic.

"My dear fellow," said Luke, "you're an anachronism. To you money's just so much dead gold in a vault from which you can draw so many doubloons at a time. It doesn't occur to you that money is a living organism."

He preached a little sermon, the financier rooted in him profoundly shocked. There was a fortune lying practically dead while a hundred industries were crying out for its vitalizing force.

So it came to pass that he took over in full the setting in order of Theophilus's house. His arguments were incontrovertible. His interest unquestionably genuine. His zeal infectious. He put Theophilus into touch with a young and up-to-date firm on the Stock Exchange, remaining himself in the background, and flooded The Grange with financial literature, periodicals,

prospectuses, and reports of company meetings. It became part of their day's routine to sit together for a morning hour or two in the library of The Grange reorganizing the application of the Wavering fortune. Luke was charmingly frank.

“At first I was horrified at seeing so much good money going to waste. It seemed like a fellow who had a priceless stock of claret and port keeping it in a draughty cowshed. I was ready to do anything to come to the rescue. But now, after all, business is business. The poor old labourer's worthy of his hire. Listen. Your stockbroker charges you one-eighth per cent. on all operations. That means nothing to you . . . far less in proportion than a restaurant tip. But your successful broker operates, during the course of the year, in millions, and one-eighth per cent. on millions is a hell of a lot of money. Just as the half-crowns to the waiter in a successful restaurant mean to him a hell of a lot of money. But if only one client came a day to the restaurant, the waiter couldn't live on his half-crown. You see my point? You're my only client. So, though the stockbroker is satisfied with one-eighth, that would be meaningless to me. Give me two per cent. on transfers . . . that means on buying and selling . . . it would mean two in addition to the broker's one-eighth and five per cent. on speculations. That is to say, if you buy shares in anything for two thousand pounds, and you sell them for five, your profit is three. My commission would be one hundred and fifty.”

“That seems little enough,” laughed Theophilus, who had expected these prolegomena to result in a shrewd business proposition.

Luke laughed too, in his old way. “It's only the pleasure of the game. But one must have something on. Bridge for love is idiotic. Bridge for a shilling a hundred is exciting.” He paused, and added with a reminiscent chuckle: “I once played with a crowd of dunderheaded millionaires for five pounds a hundred, and I took a thousand out of them in an afternoon. Those were good days. But I played the next day at the Club for the regulation half a crown a hundred, and had just as much fun.”

“I've never really found much fun in bridge, no matter what the stakes were,” said Theophilus.

“That's because you're one of God's chosen.”

“Eh? . . .” inquired Theophilus.

“He picks out the world's worst bridge-players to lavish his bounty on. And yet, my dear Theophilus,” said he philosophically, “at the bridge-table you baffle me. When I used to play at the Portland with the experts of London, after a round or so of declarations I could see the pips of the two hands through the back of the cards. Your hand is always a black mystery. . . . Well, well. . . .”

Now, what about these dismal London County Council three and a half per cents. at seventy-five? Solid but dull. Oh, so damned dull!”

One morning Theophilus interrupted the delectable pursuit of speculative investment by showing Luke a lawyer’s letter, which had come by that morning’s post. It was written on behalf of Evelina. The lawyer suggested that, in view of recent events, whereby the gates of The Grange had been closed to their client, the previous deed of settlement should be supplemented by a deed of separation which should include provisos for compensation in respect of the loss of The Grange as her rightful home and the sums which had hitherto been expended on necessary political entertainment.

Luke threw the letter across the table.

“Either don’t answer it, or tell them, politely or otherwise, to go to the devil. It’s a try-on. Suggest that she should bring a suit for judicial separation, and leave the money matters to the Court. She wouldn’t bring the action, even if there were grounds for it.”

“I don’t agree with you,” said Theophilus, the just. “I practically turned her out of her own house. It’s right she should have compensation. Some idea of the kind has been in my head ever since—only I didn’t quite know how to put it to her.”

“Well, she’s put it to you pretty straight. She’s not a creature of all the delicacies, like yourself.”

“You don’t see things from my point of view,” said Theophilus. “I can’t contest the justice of Evelina’s claim. I’m not going to.”

Luke tapped the table irritably with his reading-glasses.

“What do you propose to do?”

“I was thinking of agreeing to the offer of separation, and doubling the settled income.”

Luke protested. Theophilus was modestly rich; but he was not a millionaire. So many thousands a year paid out as income would cripple the estate. In these days of insecurity, how could he tell that the estate would afford such a drain for an indefinite period? Everything might go phut, The Grange might have to be sold, and still there would be this irrevocable grant to Evelina.

“Oh, give her what she wants,” cried Theophilus, with an air of disgust. “To do her justice, she’s not out for money. For her—and for me too—it’s a question of principle. She no more wants to be sordid than I do. The only point that arises is the fairest financial solution. That’s the only reason why I’ve consulted you.”

“The letter,” said Luke, “doesn’t require an answer either by telephone or telegraph. A reply within a week would shock this respectable firm of solicitors. They would suspect underlying indecency, if not obscenity. Since you put the matter entirely on a financial plane, I don’t agree with you. But it’s your money and your wife, not mine. Give me a few days to think things over.”

A week later Luke advised him to send the letter to Widdington & Co., the firm which, in spite of the decease of the genial Widdington who had proved Miss Wavering’s will, continued to act for Theophilus, and instruct them to ask Mrs. Bird’s solicitors to formulate their proposals.

“They can’t do that until after Christmas, so they’ll give us time to turn round.”

“I don’t see that we need it,” said Theophilus.

“I do,” said Luke. “I’ve got a great scheme, by which both you and Evelina will benefit enormously. Let things mature. Also, let me get the first act of my opera off my chest. Then I’ll be able to come down to brass-tacks.”

Daphne, meeting him in the wintry grounds one day, said:

“Once more I must tell you how right you were, and how wrong I was. Luke’s a different being. He lives for the estate and the financing of your affairs, and of course his opera. He’s busy from morning to night. He goes about happy and singing, as he used to do when I was a little girl. Oh, my dear, my dear, how can I thank you?”

Said Theophilus: “The sight of your happy face is more than reward.”

She put her hands, in her old frank way, on his shoulders.

“There are things, aren’t there, that compensate for the general blindness of life?”

They talked awhile of the reformation and renovation and reorganization of Luke. The only cloud hanging over him would be lifted early in the New Year, when he would be free to do as he listed. He had made but one reference to the date of his freedom, and that on an exultant note. He had become the Ole Luk Oie of her adoring girlhood. To Theophilus he appeared the shrewd adviser, the master of finance, who had guided him along the path to the little fortune which he had hidden from Evelina, in the years gone by. And from the hunted creature he had re-created himself the charming man of the world.

“You do think it’s all over, don’t you?—that he has turned over a new leaf?” she asked anxiously.

Theophilus professed certainty. She became apologetic.

“You see, up till lately he has had his back against the wall. He was desperate. A man must live somehow. He was like some bandit in the scrub—like the Corsicans we hear of—against his will, his hand against every one. And now you’ve opened the gates of a garden and a palace for him and he’s perfectly happy.”

For Christmas came Mona Daventry. Also one Horace Seagrave, the humorously sceptical Member of Parliament who had accompanied Evelina’s delegation to Australia. He was a member of Theophilus’s Club, where they had met again and become friends. Through Seagrave Theophilus had made various pleasant acquaintances. Among them were a young writer of flippant columns in newspapers and librettos of revues, and his wife picked off the stage, whither she had now returned; Howard and Nina Wynne. As Theophilus had lately published an article on Cyril Tourneur in “The Fortnightly,” the first-fruit of his Elizabethan studies, young Wynne regarded him as a serious man of letters. His wife looked on Theophilus as a gentle joke. Theophilus beheld them wistfully as the embodiment of what Evelina and himself might have been in the years gone by, if they had adopted a reasonable attitude towards existence. Mona Daventry, drawn into his first shy entertainment of them in London, fell in love with them incontinently. They were going down to some dismal, lonely seaside town for Christmas. Mona suggested brightly that Theophilus should invite them to The Grange. Luke? If they jibbed at meeting Luke, that was the end of them. She would explain Luke. She did, and the young pair jibbed no more than did Horace Seagrave.

Then they were added to the party. Mona also brought down a pleasant, lonely woman, a Mrs. Loverton, whom both Daphne and Theophilus had met at her flat in Albert Hall Mansions.

“That,” said Mona to Theophilus, dazed but delighted, “rounds us all off. *‘Il y en a pour tous les goûts.’* Somebody for every one, and everybody for everybody else, which is the ideal of a house-party.”

Theophilus, sitting at the head of his table on Christmas Eve, contrasted the guests with the last gathering over which he had presided as host. Instead of the dull pragmatic set of laughterless men and unsmiling women, setting forth their and little theories, or seeking importance by their claims to inner knowledge of great affairs, all ugly and ill-dressed, he was dazzled by the sight and the sound of gay and intelligent folk, all good to look upon. They were only eight. The long dreary table had been reduced to proportions of intimacy. They talked the foolish things that essentially matter. Wynne was wittily

paradoxical, upholding lunatic theories. Seagrave combated him, cynically humorous. Nina Wynne, on Theophilus's left, diabolically attractive with her pale face, upturned little nose, blue shrewd eyes, and dark brown hair, flung her laughing talk into the medley. Mrs. Loverton, on his right, woman of the world, young and handsome at fifty, gave of her best. Luke, at the foot of the table, with Mona on his right and Daphne on his left, talked with animation.

Mona, whom Daphne called the universal, because she was in touch with all things human, was laughingly happy. And Daphne. . . . It was a new, and yet a remembered old, Daphne, whom Theophilus saw, with a thrill in his heart that was almost pain, surrendering herself to the joy of this unwonted atmosphere of gladness.

He turned to Mrs. Loverton.

"As a technical philosopher, I've been concerned for many years as to what is the Supreme Good. And, do you know, I've found it at last."

"You don't say so! What is it?"

"Laughter," said Theophilus.

He was happy—happier, beyond his philosophical conception of happiness. He had entered into an unsuspected world. He touched the hand of the little lady on his left.

"You're the dearest of all dears to have come down with your husband to this dull old place. You don't know what it means to me."

She made charming answer. But of course she didn't know. No one round the table could know.

When the ladies left the room, the three men moved up to him. The port was passed round.

"I can forgive Crowe many things," said Luke. "He hasn't been throwing the 1870 about. He has kept it for those that know. I've been talking to him about it to-day."

And Theophilus recalled the dismal ordeal of his presidency over the bald-headed or bearded cranks who either waved after-dinner wine away as though it were an abomination, or swallowed a mouthful or so as though it were a conventionally ordered medicine, and continued their esoteric conversation with no regard to their host, until, to their obvious annoyance at the interfering nonentity, he rose with the dry suggestion that they should join the ladies.

Now there was praise of the wondrous old wine. Theophilus remembered Widdington, the departed, smacking his lips over it on the day of Miss Wavering's funeral. . . . Here, like Widdington, were men who loved life and its beautiful gifts. He found in his heart a new love for them. They had learned

the philosophy whose exposition on his part had brought about the breach with Evelina. . . . What had he not missed in life?

Yet he must set himself to miss nothing more. The brilliant talk of his three men companions was worth not only listening to, passively, but mingling with actively, with a stimulated brain. . . . It was Luke who suggested the joining of the ladies.

The perfect days of holiday went on. The weather was deplorable, rain and sullen mist. Seagrave and Wynne went out to the Moorstead Club and played golf apparently to their rapturous delight. Sometimes Mona and Nina Wynne accompanied them. Luke and Daphne, though sleeping at The Cottage, lived most of the day at The Grange. Luke played the piano for those who would listen. He interested Nina Wynne in his opera. She had a pleasant little voice, fairly trained, and she learned and sang the two or three lyrics that he had composed for the soprano, to the complete edification of the party. They did foolish things. They dressed up in whatever oddments they could find. Wynne took a car up to London and came back with eight *cagoules* from a theatrical costumier's—the hooded robes of the penitent monks, with only holes for the eyes. Thus attired all assembled in the drawing-room before dinner. Strict silence was enjoined. The pointed peaks of the cowls confused identification of men and women. They all held tapers, and marched into a dark dining-room, and took places at random. On the sound of a gong—Crowe, the butler, was rehearsed by Wynne—they blew out their tapers, and, sitting in the darkness, threw off their cowls. A minute afterwards the lights were switched on. No one had recognized their chance neighbours.

It was the silliest and most childish fun in the world; but the reaction from puzzled conjecture to certainty was that of gaiety and laughter. Theophilus found himself seated between Daphne and Seagrave.

“I hadn't the faintest idea who you were,” he said to her.

“Nor I.”

“I'm glad,” said he, and squeezed her hand.

The man who had had no imaginative childhood, a hard and thoughtful youth, a manhood that had mildewed for want of life's sunshine, found himself taking an infantine pleasure in these innocent absurdities.

Daphne whispered to Luke: “If Evelina could only see him!”

“She'd drop dead,” said he—“which would be a damned good thing for all of us.”

## CHAPTER XIX

**E**ARLY in the New Year the gay company departed from The Grange, but gladness lingered in the soul of Theophilus. Some barrier between him and the pleasant social world had suddenly been swept away. His circle of friends suffered an uncanny expansion. He enjoyed their merry parties. He discovered Musical Comedy.

The hermit-crab crawled out of his shell, and, with some awkwardness, it may be admitted, invested itself with decorous butterfly wings. Here was an art of joyousness whose existence, as an art, he had never suspected. Faithful to the Evelina tradition, he had hitherto regarded it as no relaxation for an intelligent man. According to this tradition, the English theatre either wallowed in Byzantine decadence, or frittered itself away in Louis XVI frivolity. Even the so-called serious drama was an undertaking as commercial as Harrods' Stores. When he had put forward the proposition that, after all, Harrods' gave you value for your money, Evelina had turned humorous, and asked him how he could appraise art in terms of Dover soles or best quality pyjamas. The only salvation of the drama lay in the hands of the devoted remnant who produced plays on Sunday evenings at obscure theatres. Evelina being the Apostle of the Dismal, he had unthinkingly constituted himself her disciple. The gospel had persisted during the last few years during which he rarely visited a theatre. Tradition, and his selected line of study, took him occasionally to the admirable performances at "The Old Vic." But modern Revue was a revelation to the starved man. At first he went out of politeness to his guest, Howard Wynne, who gave him a box for his show of the moment. Daphne and Luke, and Mona and Nina Wynne accompanied him. He laughed as he had never laughed before. Not that he had never been present at such an entertainment. It may be remembered that he had once conscientiously visited music-halls in Paris. But then he had viewed the stage with darkened vision. Now his eyes were opened. He must make up, said he, for lost time.

Often Daphne alone went with him to the dinner or supper to which they were invited by their new friends, while Luke stayed at home, professing happiness in his music. He still shrank from publicity, even though now he was a free man, with the shadow of the ticket-of-leave oppressing him no more.

"Let her go about and enjoy herself, dear child," said he. "And you, too, Theophilus; I've had my day. You haven't—either of you."

So Theophilus and Daphne had their day. She taught the ungainly man to dance the simple steps. He joined a fashionable dining-club, and entered a new

world. He loved the fresh talk of pretty women and agreeable men. He learned that fancy was the quickening spirit of conversation. He drank deep draughts of enjoyment. The crowded, skilfully lit room, the tones of women's arms and necks, harmonizing shades of colour in their dresses, the flash of jewels here and there, the barbarous music, the rhythmic swaying of the couples on the central dancing-floor—all intoxicated the man of the dry-as-dust and joyless life. He loved to watch Daphne dancing. She was a flower laughing in the wind.

Of all the beautiful women there, none was comparable with his Daphne. *His Daphne. His flower laughing in the wind.*

Once Mona Daventry said warningly:

"If you look at her like that, you'll give yourself away."

"I know," said he; "but I can't help it. Did you ever see anything so adorable?"

One night, a night of crisp frost and still air and startling starlight, they drove back together in the early hours of the morning. The dreary tram-riddled road to Edgware was curiously free of traffic. From Edgware through Stanmore and Watford to Moorstead, they had the road and the country-side and the land and the starry universe to themselves.

Daphne, a little tired with the dancing, and the haunting rhythms of the negroid noises, and the lights and the laughter, dropped her head on his shoulder. His arm, first around her outside the fur wrap, slid for dearness' and nearness' sake beneath, so it clasped the warm and slender body. She lay content, infinitely desirable. They talked in murmurs—dangerously. He kissed her, and she responded. She was in a woman's high mood of surrender.

"This can't last for ever."

"No. It can't."

"I'm flesh and blood, my dear. No longer the dry stick. . . ."

"I know. . . ."

He held her tight. "It's your doing."

She accepted it, with low laughter, not as a reproach, but as a tribute.

"I know," she murmured again, "and I don't care."

"It can't go on. . . ."

The murmurings were monotonous and lacked originality. They must go away together. A few days—a week—a month. There was Luke. A few days—a few days here and there. Mona would cover them. Afterwards they would see . . .

“It can’t go on. . . .”

Of course it couldn’t.

“I never knew what want, awful want, was.”

“You shan’t want much longer. Didn’t I tell you ages ago?”

And etcetera, and *ainsi de suite*, and *und so weiter*, and *kai to leipon*.

After breakfast the next morning he walked along the crisp paths, through the bleak gardens to The Cottage. He found her in the drawing-room, busy over her drawings. Luke was in the office, dictating letters to the secretary.

She rose and faced him frankly.

“We were rather foolish last night. Do you regret it?”

“My God, no. I haven’t slept a wink. Do you think I’d lose such a memory in sleep? Regret—do you regret?”

She drew herself up, smiled and opened her two arms.

“Oh, you dear, you foolish dear!”

They talked as lovers talk. At last:

“When?” said Theophilus. “Why not now?”

He had forgotten. That evening was Mona’s party, her first party since the Christmas holidays, given in their honour. As it would be a late affair, and as she had promised Luke to go the next day to an afternoon concert at the Queen’s Hall, she had arranged to stay the night with Mona. . . . Mona couldn’t be disappointed. Nor could Luke.

“Of course, of course,” said Theophilus. “But, my belovedest . . .” He stood before her, a man transfigured with inspiration. “Why can’t you go on staying two, three, four, five days with Mona? Luke is happy. He’ll think nothing of it. . . . To-morrow evening . . . Mona will know our address. . . . Say you will—oh, say you will!”

“I’ll say anything you like,” whispered Daphne, enfolded in his arms.

Luke came in a little later, rubbing his hands with gleeful tidings of pigs. He had put through an almighty deal. Theophilus could not gather whether he had sold or bought sows or farrows or boars. He could only call him a good fellow, and assure him that he left all porcine matters in his capable hands. He fled as soon as he could.

The great, soul-shaking crisis of his life had occurred. He would throw off the chains of convention in which he had been bound from boyhood up. He would lead the glorious life of wonder and emotion and truly sacramental

companionship. . . . Why shouldn't he proclaim his gladness openly? Who would be the loser? Thousands of men and women, living virtuous, happy lives, and surrounded by the love and honour of the world, had done what he and Daphne were about to do. Daphne installed as Lady Paramount at The Grange, Evelina would find herself compelled to divorce him. She could then go through the form of marriage with her faithful dog, John Roberts. And Luke? . . . He shivered a little before the instinctive prescience of Luke's complaisance, as before an indelicacy. But that was a little thing after all; his acceptance of it would be a small price to pay for the big things. He walked restlessly about his study, and snapped his fingers. What he had said to Daphne was true. The old dry twig was now a man, ardent, determined to accomplish his manhood at no matter what cost. And, when he came to count it, the cost was so little. There was the wide and wonderful world before him, most of which he had seen with blind eyes. Now, with Daphne, he would revisit all the magical places of the earth, and see them as, in a hopeless way, he had suspected they might have been.

He had taken a gondola at Venice, one perfect night, and glided along the small canals, for the mere purpose of killing time. He had been oppressed by his unutterable loneliness, and had been glad when the gondolier brought him back to the landing-stage of his hotel, where, in the thinly peopled lounge, he could feel himself among human beings of his kind, although with none of them could he exchange a greeting. But now . . . now . . . a short time hence . . . that drifting through the same mysterious water-ways with Daphne beside him on the cushioned seat. . . . His heart almost broke on the thought of the adventure's concentration and revelation of beauty. And the aching blue of the Mediterranean, and the gorgeousness of Seville and Ceylon, and the scents of the East . . . all dead things to him hitherto, but now, things that were to be alive to him, more alive than living things could be to mortal man, vibrating with the infinite sensations known only to a god.

Even the famous dinner and supper Club, packed with all the boredoms and disillusionings and spites and factitious gaieties of London, appeared to him that evening as a dream-palace of sensuous delight. He sat next to Daphne at Mona's table of ten, and sought her hand in secret, and felt a thrill every time he touched it. She was in the prime of her young beauty—four or five and twenty; the perfect bloom of the slender flower that was Daphne. When she talked, she threw back her head adorably, excited, though he did not know it, by the madness of her late surrender. There was a cap to be thrown over windmills. She threw it gaily.

It was the merriest of parties. There were the Wynnes, and Horace Seagrave, beloved both of Daphne, on whose other side he sat, and of Theophilus; and an eminent violinist and his concert-singing wife, who were both loved because they had the gift of concealing the great artists beneath the sympathetic and joyous human beings; and a distinguished soldier, still young, and a pretty girl to whom he was engaged.

“I’m so glad you’re converted,” said Mona.

“To what?” asked Theophilus.

“To this sort of thing. You used to think that only the contemptible would come to such places. Do you despise anyone at this table?”

He said: “My dear, why ask? Don’t you see I’ve come into a new kingdom?”

She touched his arm. “I know. Daphne has told me.”

“And you . . . ?”

“Well, my friend, it’s damned immoral, and all that . . . and I feel I’m in danger of being dragged off to prison for *outrage aux mœurs* or what not. . . . But it’s the business of you two dears, and all I can say is: ‘God bless you, my children.’ ”

“Was there ever such a friend in the world?” said Theophilus.

His pulses throbbed ever more quickly. Mona knew. She would help him with all her loyalty. He raised his glass, and bowed to her, and whispered:

“To our fairy godmother!”

She looked at him queerly and sighed.

“I must be what I can.”

Wherewith she turned abruptly, and began to talk to her right-hand neighbour, the violinist.

He whispered to Daphne:

“My God! I’m happy.”

She responded with a glance from eyes sweetly softened.

“If you only knew what that means to me!”

And later, he waved a hand towards the crowded central dancing space.

“But for you, this would be meaningless.”

She laughed. “And now its Pan and his rout and Mænads. . . .”

“Quite true,” said he seriously.

“I’m sure, my dear, you’re the only man in the room that has the true Pagan spirit. Come and dance.”

He rose with her. The table had thinned, couples from it already dancing. They plunged into the swaying throng. He held her tight against him. She had taught him, the shy man, that if he held a woman like an upright codfish, touching her with his fins, he would be but a lumbering and undesirable partner. Even Mona, when she bade him grip her tight, if he didn't want her to be knocked out of his arms, had not quite convinced him of the modern convention. But now, with Daphne, his Daphne, he had no such compunction. Her dear slim body was moulded into his; he had all the sanctions for holding her close to him. Her eyes smiled into his eyes. He observed automatically the rhythm of the simple steps. No longer did the negroid futility and the jazz discord and the saxophone's blatant defiance of all that the culture of centuries has enabled us to define as music, shatter his nerves and make him clasp his ears against the din of Hell, as once it did. Now it was the primitive clamour of imperious human instincts. . . . Pan and his Mænads. . . . They would have danced to it.

The noise ceased. He had no other thought than to wish it to continue. Daphne stood before him in the midst of a pack of human beings. Her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes smiled. Her dainty bosom rose and fell. He was Pan with his Mænad. He joined in the hand-clapping for the encore with a boy's enthusiasm. Daphne laughed happily; perhaps a little proudly. For what woman born can be otherwise than proud at the sight of the man whom her hands and her breath and her heart have brought from death to life?

The music started again; he put his arm round her and he steered her through the maze of the senses, the intoxicating waves of sound, the flash of women's flesh, the langour of all the exotic perfumes of the world. When the dance was over and they approached their table, his arm was still unconsciously round her waist.

"Allah is good," he said.

"And Theophilus is his prophet," she laughed.

"We'll proclaim a new religion, you and I. What shall we call it?"

But she made no answer to his idiot lover question. He felt her stiffen suddenly. As they came up to the table, he drew his arm away. He was conscious of more hand-clapping insistence on an encore. There were only four people seated. Mona and Seagrave and the eminent violinist and Radna Moore, his wife, the singer.

But standing beside Radna Moore was a slimly built man bearing himself with an air of distinction. His features were clean cut, his eyes were keenly blue. He appeared to be in the late thirties.

To the surprise of Theophilus, Daphne did not accompany him to her seat,

but remained rigid and staring, with lips slightly apart, at the man who, turning round, bowed to her across the table.

“Oh, you know Miss Wavering?” cried Radna Moore.

“Of course,” said he. He came round to where Daphne stood, and held out his hand. She recovered from a momentary shock and smiled a polite greeting. He said in French:

“It’s a long time since we met.”

“Quite a long time,” said Daphne. “Have you been long in London?”

Before he could reply, Radna Moore again broke in.

“Mona, don’t you know Monsieur Claude Davray, the famous sculptor? Claude, let me present you to our hostess.”

He advanced, bowed in the charming way of a man of the world. Mona uttered a little polite phrase, then laughed.

“I’m afraid my French won’t carry us much further.”

“But in England I talk English, my mother’s tongue,” said he, with no trace of foreign accent.

“Monsieur Davray and I met in Paris,” Daphne volunteered.

“And you live in London?”

“No. In the country with my father.”

“I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing you before I go away. I’m here professionally—a commission—a child’s head. . . . Parents’ vanity, perhaps; but still, the head of a cherub. I don’t complain.”

He excused himself gracefully. He must join his party. But he had to come over and speak to his old friend Madame Radna Moore. He slipped away. And then Daphne became conscious of Theophilus standing by her side like a block of wood.

“Let us sit down.”

He obeyed automatically. Mona said across Theophilus:

“I’ve got him right, haven’t I? *The Claude Davray*—a delightful man.”

“Yes. He has perfect manners.”

Mona darted a shrewd glance at her, and another at Theophilus, and turned to Seagrave. The others joined the table.

Presently there was the usual change of partners. Seagrave took Daphne off to dance. Mona declined. She would sit out for a while longer. She was alone with Theophilus. She touched his hand.

“Cheer up, my dear.”

He started, plucked from the centre of a whirling world. He laughed in a silly way.

“Oh, I’m all right. . . . What do you mean? . . . By the way”—he pulled himself together—“do you know anything about this man, Davray? I ask because Evelina—while we were still friends—more or less seemed to have her knife in him—told me things. . . .”

“About his private life—reputation?”

“Yes. Have you heard anything?”

Mona honestly declared that she hadn’t. She knew his name, of course. His wonderful War Memorial at Platigny, where we had given so many lives, incorporating France and England. Everybody in England knew that. The photograph was in every British illustrated paper a year or two ago. . . . What was Evelina’s grievance?

He deprecated further reference, not being one to repeat gossip. So long as she had heard nothing, he was satisfied. Indeed, he drew a faint breath of relief. The scandal which Evelina had thrown in his face was not the property of the social world. Now, at any rate, Mona must not guess. He half rose.

“Shall we finish this dance?”

“With pleasure.”

They gyrated mechanically. Now and then as he passed Daphne he caught her little encouraging smile, pathetic and appealing.

They came to their places again more or less at the same time. She looked pale and tired; the flower beginning to droop. He filled her glass with champagne.

“Are you going on with the rest to the Florida, Thermidor, or whatever it is?” he asked. “I’m not. I agreed with Mona that I should get away fairly early. And you, you’re not fit.”

She smiled. “How do you know?”

He said: “Your face has been a book to me these many years.”

“And you think you’re the perfect commentator?”

He let pass the not untender gibe.

“You’re not thinking of going through with all this?”

She drank some wine and waited a little before replying.

“No. You’re right. I’m tired. I don’t quite know why. If it were necessary I could carry on until I were dead. But I don’t see much need. . . . Let us go. Our dear Mona will understand. Perhaps I may have something to say to you . . . something you ought to know. . . . You can drop me at Albert Hall Mansions.”

“Don’t let us talk till we get to the flat,” she said, as they drove off. “You can come in for a few minutes. We’ll be quiet. Oh, yes, quiet; away from that maddening noise. The lift-man has the key. It’ll be all right. . . .” She spoke with queer incoherence. “Give me the time of the run, and don’t ask questions.”

And Theophilus asked no questions, for what questions need he ask? He realized that what Evelina had told him was true. His heart was leaden. He felt the corners of his mouth droop as though about to cry like a child. The vague man in her past had taken definite and startling form. He shivered with a horrible hatred and jealousy.

The lift-man admitted them into the flat. The banked-up fire in the drawing-room needed only stirring to burst into blaze. It was not yet midnight. She threw off her cloak and dropped it on to a chair back, and fetched the silver box of cigarettes; and as he was about to decline: “Oh, for God’s sake smoke,” she said. “I’ll have to. It helps.”

They lit their cigarettes. She marched turn and turn about the room, and then came to him with outstretched hands.

“My dearest, would you mind—would it hurt you very much if we put off things—what we were going to do—for a week? I have my reasons. They’re insane reasons. A woman’s reasons if you like. But it’s a great step and I’ve not quite the courage yet for it.”

“Neither have I,” said Theophilus sadly. “Yes; better let us wait another week.”

With a revulsion of feeling she cried: “Oh, don’t look like that, or I’ll feel a brute. We’ll let things stand as they were and go away to-morrow. There. It’s only a woman’s silly nerves. For all your goodness and kindness perhaps you don’t understand.”

“Take it for granted that I do understand, my dear,” he said gently. “You’ve had a shock to-night. Believe that I know all about it. So let us leave it at that—for a week.”

She looked away from him rather hopelessly.

“How did you know?”

“Evelina told me. Gave me the name. That was the beginning of the end of our farcical life together.”

“And how did Evelina know? I thought . . . Well, we weren’t blatant. His wife was alive, though he didn’t live with her—a devout Catholic, and a woman generally impossible. And, with Luke in prison, there was enough

scandal in the family. I told you I couldn't marry him on that account. I didn't deceive you. There wasn't any necessity to go into details. I thought no one knew. I feel as though I were hunted . . .”

“It appears that you have been,” said Theophilus. “Evelina keeps a trained jackal called John Roberts.”

“So you knew—when you heard his name?”

“I knew,” said Theophilus.

“I had a horrible feeling—an intuition, I suppose, that you did.” She moved about the room, making little helpless gestures with her hands.

“Does it make such a difference to you?”

“I don't want to be disingenuous,” said he; “but it may make some difference to you.”

She suddenly threw up her arms. “Oh, my God! Why did he come in there like a ghost? Just as I was about to make a fresh start for happiness. Life's damnable, my dear, it's damnable. Sit down,”—for he had risen. “I'd better tell you everything. . . . Think of me as you like. I went to Paris. England at the time wasn't particularly pleasant for me. I had to earn money for Luke. The Bayswater tea-shop was a ludicrous way of trying to earn it. I was young then—and silly. . . . I had a school friend in Paris, who had married a French painter. I wrote to her. I said I had enough to live on, but I wanted a job of sorts. She told me to come. The first man I met at their house was Davray. Both he and Fouquet, my friend's husband, found I could draw. They got me work for Pataquin. Davray turned my head from the first moment. I was a girl. I had all the world—except you and Mona—against me. And here was a famous man at my feet. He was young too. But I never thought of . . . well . . . I never thought of it. . . .

“He talked to me of a work he was dreaming of—Daphne melting into the laurel tree. But he could find no model. He went mad at the coincidence of my name and my figure, for what it's worth. . . . He implored me almost on his knees to pose for him. He sketched his conception. With the mingling of the tree and the human limbs, it could easily be arranged for the pose not to be too—let us call it immodest. Still, the idea was preposterous. . . . I laughed. I said, by way of jest, that I couldn't do such a thing under a thousand pounds. He said: ‘I'd willingly give you forty thousand francs.’ At that time the pound was about forty. I asked him whether that was his regular rate of pay for models. But I found he was serious, dead serious. He had known a struggling artist's poverty. The Prix de Rome had established him. He was already famous when, a year before, he had come into a fortune . . . an uncle, a war profiteer, had died. He was rich. He could pay his fancies. A thousand pounds? what was that

to a supreme achievement?

“Oh, don’t despise me! I had Luke on the brain. Luke coming out penniless from prison. I had no idea of his Geneva nest-egg. . . . Luke hasn’t quite played the game. . . . But that’s neither here nor there. A thousand pounds! For Luke. As God hears me, it was only for Luke’s sake. . . . I was in his studio surrounded by the beauty of his work when he wrote the cheque for forty thousand francs.

“I posed. He made things as easy as possible for me. I showed very little more than the ordinary girl on a seaside beach. . . . The model tree was beautifully arranged. . . . You must have seen reproductions of it in the illustrated papers. It’s his masterpiece. He knew it as he was working in the clay, and I knew it.

“And then—don’t ask me how or why things happened. But before they happened I tore up the cheque in little pieces before his eyes. He had thought he would buy me and his masterpiece together. He had both of us for nothing, and he was a most astonished man. And I laughed, laughed, laughed, when I tore up the cheque, as I’ve never laughed before or since. That’s true. I’d have sold any old kind of thing for Luke. But there was a limit. I ought to have known, but I didn’t.

“Anyhow—that’s the way it came about. It lasted a year. He knew my story; I knew his—his wife, and all the rest of it. I was happy. I took a little flat at Auteuil and worked for Pataquin. That’s why I went out of all your lives.

“Then one evening I sat by my window, looking out for him, and he didn’t come. I waited two days. . . . Then there was a telegram from St. Raphael. Something about his wife. I tore it up. He wrote. I tore up his letters unread. It was silly. As I say, I was young, and life—not material but spiritual—seemed to be against me. Later I heard from the Fouquets that he had gone to New York—some big commission. I’ve never had any communication with him since. . . . When Luke came back, I came back. That’s all there is to it. Now you know . . . now you see, why, in decency . . .”

“Yes, my dear,” said Theophilus. “I see. We’ll give things time to settle. ‘My faith is large in Time and that which shapes it to some perfect end.’ Tennyson said it, or something like it. I’ve waited for you so long. A little longer won’t make such a tremendous difference.”

He parted from her very sadly. The flat door clicked behind him. She stood in the little rose-lit vestibule, her hands to her head. Then suddenly she swung the door open. She cried foolishly:

“My dear, come back.”

But the lift on a downward descent had caught him waiting, and he was

already at the bottom of the shaft. She stood, gazing down, baffled by the irony of the commonplace.

She stared into living and shuddering blackness all night long. It was only in the late winter dawn that she lost consciousness. Mona's maid coming in at ten o'clock with a breakfast tray, found her still asleep, and tiptoed out of the room. About half-past ten she awoke, after a sleep of a few hours, with the startling suddenness of one who, having a mission to fulfil, has been caught unawares by slumber. Many a soldier has known that awful shock of awakening. She glanced, horrified, at the clock, bundled on a wrapper and went to the telephone outside the dining-room of the flat. To a maid, chance encountered, she gave the order to ring up Moorstead 53. To establish connection was always a matter of ten minutes or so. Nothing in this imperfect world is perfect, and the English telephone service is a model of imperfection. She went back to bed. The maid returned with the abominable tidings that they could get no reply from 53 Moorstead.

Daphne went to the telephone and called up the supervisors and other hierarchs. She was finally told that The Grange, Moorstead, was cut off. A temporary accident on the line, which would soon be repaired. She breakfasted, rose and dressed. Mona, who had been late, was still asleep. At noon she tried again. Communication was not yet established. Exasperated, she sought in Mona's sitting-room desk a telegram form and scribbled hurriedly:

“You only count. Shall be waiting platform train arranged.”

Her first thought was to hand the message to the lift-man who would give it to the hall-porter, who, in his turn, would despatch it to the nearest telegraph office. But a sudden shyness prevented her. Outside, there was pale sunlight in a crisp, frosty air. It would be quicker to go herself. Besides, the walk would do her good. She put on a hat and coat and descended in the lift. At the entrance of the Mansions a man just driven up in a taxicab confronted her. It was Claude Davray.

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HEOPHILUS did not receive the telegram because it was not sent. A day or two afterwards Daphne appeared at The Grange. They must have everything now clear between them, or life would be impossible. He agreed to the proposition, a just though tormented lover.

Claude Davray, she related, had given full and satisfactory explanation. He had really been summoned to the bedside of an apparently dying wife. She had not died then, but humanity had compelled a sojourn at St. Raphael until her recovery. There had been some kind of sentimental reconciliation. He had written. She had not replied. . . . All that she had explained to Theophilus. Now his wife was indeed dead. He had come to London not only to execute his professional commission, but with the hope of finding her again. He might have written, yes. A letter addressed care of Pataquin would probably have found her. Those were details. The main point was that Davray had offered her marriage. She had said neither “yes” nor “no.” She had told him all that there was to tell about Luke, her father. . . .

Theophilus pictured her, with head thrown back, cheeks burning, defiant, blazoning the dishonour on her scutcheon.

And Davray had said:

“I accept. I had already heard the main fact. I repeat my offer.”

The fervour with which Davray had repeated it she did not try to convey to Theophilus. He must divine the deep sentiment that prompted a Frenchman, for whom marriage, apart from its religious aspect, is rooted in the Latin sanctity of the Roman Law—in the Family, Property, the sacred traditions of his race, to propose the status of wife to a girl once his mistress and now the declared daughter of an ex-convict. It took but the flash of half an interrupted phrase to establish between Theophilus and herself this common appreciation of Davray.

Theophilus asked in an unsteady way, trying to control the drooping muscles at the corners of his lips:

“Do you still love this man?”

She threw out her arm in a familiar gesture.

“Oh, don’t try me too far. I’ve told you everything. Good God! It’s for you to decide.”

Theophilus took up the little jade Buddha she had given him, weighed it in

his hands for some moments before replying. At last . . .

“My dear, if I said ‘Come with me,’ you would come, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “Now, if you like.”

“I’ve got to decide this,” said he. “Whether you shall keep your word now and bind yourself in an irregular tie with me, a futile man whom you don’t love—oh! my dear”—he checked a protest—“I don’t mean that. I know you love me with all the tenderness with which one human being can love another. You wouldn’t be here now if you didn’t. The faintest suspicion otherwise would be an insult. . . . Daphne, you see that, don’t you? But I must decide between that for you, and marriage with an honourable man who loves you, and whom you love . . . you must love him . . . otherwise—well . . .”

He took her by her shoulder, and led her out of the library into the hall.

“You must marry him, my dear.”

He opened the front door for her to pass through. She turned on the threshold.

“I wish I knew,” she said, “whether your love for me is too great or too little.”

He pushed her through the door

“Go, my dear. Go.”

The great door clanged behind her. Theophilus reeled back to the library. All was over. All his life and all that he loved in life had crumbled into the nothingness of dust.

There was a stack of letters on his table. He had had no incentive to open them, Daphne’s early visit, proposed by telephone from The Cottage, having taken place soon after breakfast. He sat in front of his library table, and regarded them with an entire lack of interest. At last official habit prevailed. The civilized man opens his correspondence as a matter of course. A long envelope attracted his attention. He opened it. It contained a letter and a document. Evelina’s solicitors presented a draft of a deed of separation. They proposed that he should settle half his income on her during her lifetime. He shrugged indifferent shoulders. Why not?

At half-past eleven came Luke, as had now become his daily habit, brisk and business-like.

“Well, my dear fellow; anything I can do for you this morning?”

“There’s this,” said Theophilus, throwing over the typewritten sheets. “I agree to it all. Dictate a letter to your secretary, and I’ll sign it.”

Luke read the thing through. Theophilus met his hawk’s eyes fixed on him.

“I’m not going to let you be such an utter damned fool.”

It was nearing lunch-time when, by means of some untouched brain cell that survived a general atrophy, Theophilus grasped the essence of the proposition that Luke set before him.

It was a scheme of administration of the Wavering fortune, by which all would benefit. Half a million of money was lying practically idle, earning at the most, all told, not quite five per cent. An insane amount went in income tax. Why not turn himself into a Limited Liability Company?—Wavering Estates Limited. All kinds of people had done it, why not Theophilus? A just apportionment of shares would make everybody happy. He himself would cancel his original contract. . . . Of course, the sum paid to Daphne and the two or three other beneficiaries under Aunt Fanny’s will would be a first charge on the company. . . . He put before Theophilus a schedule of figures so clear that anyone conversant with the rules of arithmetic could follow it. Of course he had not invented the scheme on the spur of the moment. He had been maturing the details for months. What was wrong with it? Look at the apportionment of shares. Theophilus, as chairman, would naturally have the enormous controlling interest. Evelina couldn’t complain. Solid shares not only would give her personal property which she could dispose of as she liked, but would yield her more than double her present income. Their dear Mona, if she liked, and their friend, Horace Seagrave, M.P., could take up the few shares at nominal cost that would qualify them for seats on the Board of Directors. He himself, should it be agreeable to his dear Theophilus, would undertake the Managing Directorship. . . . Hadn’t he done wonders already, during these few months? The farms and fruits and flowers had already turned into a paying proposition. And the cautious changes of investments. And what about the clear eight thousand he had made for Theophilus, a month or so ago, in American cotton? The matter of a cable or two? . . . Yes. But the expert behind the cables. He tapped the forehead of the expert. . . . He would be frank. He wasn’t doing it merely for the *beaux yeux* of Theophilus, still less for those of his cousin, Evelina. He was doing it for himself, as one naturally interested in the family estate.

Theophilus passed a hand over a weary brow.

“Will you stay for lunch?”

“No, no, my dear fellow,” said Luke, gathering up papers. “Daphne expects me. I can’t leave her. Well—what do you say? Yes or No? Anyhow we can keep Evelina’s lawyers waiting at least a few days. Sleep on what I’ve proposed I’ll come to you to-morrow morning.”

“Come in any time you like. I say ‘Yes.’ The Limited Company seems a sound idea. I’m only too glad to leave every thing to you.”

What did anything matter? He had lost Daphne. The Grange was but a cold prison, in which he must lead a life solitary and meaningless. He went through a pretence of lunch in the great dining-room, in the company of the drab and dull Waverings who frowned upon him from the walls as on an intruder.

“Game pie, sir,” said Crowe, the butler, handing the dish.

“Yes, play the game always,” said Theophilus.

“I beg your pardon, sir.”

“Eh—yes . . . no. I won’t have any, Crowe. I see some cold ham.”

It was then that he realized that things were happening somewhere inside his brain or his mind or his soul, or whatever it was, which clouded clear thought.

“I don’t think I’ll have anything more,” said he, rising from the table. “Order the car round for London.”

An hour or so later he entered the great smoking-room of his Club. Horace Seagrave, sitting with two or three other men, over belated coffee and cigars, hailed him with uplifted hand. He joined the table, accepted a cup of coffee, and soon found relief in the commonplace talk of men. They talked of gambling. One had just returned from Cannes with fairy tales of millions of francs won and lost again.

“I can’t afford to flutter in millions,” said Seagrave, “but I’m getting off tomorrow to Monte Carlo. I’ll have nearly a fortnight before Parliament meets. Anything to get away from this damned climate.” He turned suddenly to Theophilus. “Why shouldn’t you join me, if you’ve nothing else to do?”

The light words ran like an electric shock through his being. Why not? What was there to prevent him? Here in England, despair and nothingness, and dripping tree and fallen leaf. There, all the joys of all the earth.

“I’ll come with pleasure,” said he, in a voice that sounded as though it belonged to some other man, “if I can get a sleeper.”

“You will?” cried the pleasant Seagrave. “I’ll get you a place. You needn’t worry. . . .”

So it came to pass that Theophilus, two days later, found himself in Monte Carlo, and here began the reincarnation of Theophilus Bird. For in his ancestry there must have been one Bird who was a devil of a fellow, who squandered fortunes, broke hearts, and followed all the courses that reason bars against the

rational man.

Theophilus took to evil ways. At first tentatively, and then, finding them attractive, let himself go adrift.

He had written to Luke, his departure having been one of the most sudden things in his life:

“Shut up The Grange. Let it furnished, if you like. Do what you think best with regard to the servants. I’m going away for a long time, God knows where—anyhow, into the sunshine. I’m fed up with fog and rain and pedantry and such-like depressing things. I leave the proposed arrangement in your hands, Widdington, of course, acting for me. I’m going on a holiday. I’ve travelled a great deal, but never with a view to holiday-making. I’m very tired. . . . I shall be at the Hotel de Paris for at least a month. You’ll always get my address. I know I’ll have to read and sign and have witnessed innumerable documents, but spare me all the petty worry you can.”

The first document that Luke sent was a Power of Attorney. Theophilus signed it and, securing it in the already addressed long envelope, thanked Heaven that, thereby, Luke was saving him much unnecessary worry.

A letter came from Daphne. Did he mean what he had said when they had last met? Their lives were in the balance.

He replied, almost laconically: “Have you ever known me to say things I don’t mean? Your happiness lies in marrying the man you love, not in living with the man to whom you would give yourself out of pity. What kind of a scoundrel would I be if I made claims?”

He signed his name at the foot of the letter. He was writing at the desk by the hotel window, which commanded a view of the gay gardens, and the rococo Casino, and, away to the east, the aching blue of the Mediterranean on a still morning. It was all unreal. The sea and the sun and the pigeons perched on the cornices of the Casino were all unreal. The Comtesse Vareda, a friend of Seagrave, by speech English of the English, French of the French . . . God knew who she was, or what she was . . . who had enchanted him the night before, was unreal. He was about to plunge into a phantasmagoria of the kind in which all the meaninglessness and torture of life would be forgotten, and in which new fantastic joys beckoned him. He was not to be pitied. Let Daphne go heart-free. He dashed a postscript.

“Don’t worry about me, my Daphne. You’ve done what no other woman would do for me. You’ve taught me to live. And I’m going to get everything there is to be got out of the hitherto unimagined thing that is Life.”

Yes. As a girl she had taught him. He had not heeded her lesson till now. Her words of long ago rang through his brain: “Have a hell of a time with it.”

She was right. If he had started to have a hell of a time as soon as he had come into the fortune, he might have captured the girl's imagination. He might have struck the chord of passion that would have bound her to him eternally. He had, however, pursued his dry-as-dust way, dull, pedantic, uninspired, sexually atrophied. All that he might have given her she had found in Paris. It was only on her return that he had awakened to the awful fact of his man's need of her. And now Nemesis. Between him and her a thick curtain of cloud had descended. But all that she had stirred within him remained in a state of wild vibration.

So again, in a desperate effort to attune his mind to the new condition of existence, he stared at the poignant beauty of the most unreal spot on earth, and, with far-flung hand, rose and accepted it. Real or unreal, at any rate, it was a world of hitherto unknown sensations, of which he seemed to be a quivering register. There was colour; sky and sea and flowers and the startling gamut of women's dresses; sound, music everywhere, an eternal rhythm of strange instruments and women's voices; there was odour—the half-caught perfume of a passing woman; there was touch: between him and Elise de Vareda's delicate body there had been but a conventional thinness of the thinnest of silk; there was taste: Seagrave, kindly British soul, unconscious of acting cicerone to resorts of all the debaucheries, had taken him to dine with Lord Lethaby, prince of good livers, at his villa at Cap Martin, where the dully burgeoning intelligence of Theophilus in matter of food and wine burst into a dazzling riot of bloom.

Even Seagrave, least observant of honest legislators, when he had to part from Theophilus in order to attend to his legislating functions, clapped hands to perplexed head when he discussed his dry friend with Elise de Vareda.

“He's going the pace like a two-year-old. Look at him.”

They were standing by a Trente-et-Quarante table in the Sporting Club. Theophilus, playing heavily, was winning. There was a run on the red. He had long since passed the maximum. He played maximums now, as the saying goes, on velvet. When black at last was declared, he rose, stuffing plaques and *mille* notes into his pockets.

“I'm the spoilt child of Fortune,” said he. “Where shall we go?”

“I'm going to bed,” said Seagrave, as it was two o'clock in the morning.

“I'll go wherever you like,” said Elise de Vareda.

They went.

Elise de Vareda was not a little woman of no account. She was a woman of

charm, even fascination, and, though not unquestioned, at least not challenged position in the curious social world of all the Ciro's and all the Embassies and all the Casinos of France. Her husband, Vareda, a rich Bolivian, who claimed—apparently with justice, in view of notorious social recognition in Madrid—to be a grandee of Spain, had smashed himself up in a motor-race two or three years before. Elise, beautiful daughter of an English trainer at Chantilly and a French mother, conducted her wealthy widowhood according to the dictates of a temperament governed always by discretion.

At first Theophilus amused her as one who, verging on middle age, was taking his first plunge into the full sea of life. This she learned by the intuition of a woman of the world. Besides, there were little awkwardnesses, unsuspected ignorances, self-betrayals. He came to the game of *chemin de fer* as a confessed neophyte. Of the amazing and notorious, though supposedly secret, alliances of the Côte d'Azur, he had no notion. To him the personalities had no meaning. They were almost algebraic formulæ,  $a + b + c$ , or  $x + y - z$ , or  $e + f$ , in all simplicity. But after a while her amusement yielded to interest. Theophilus was a man of deep learning, of wide knowledge of the external things of the terrestrial globe. He had read, as it seemed to her, everything that had been printed since the beginning of civilization, and he had travelled all over the earth. He stood outside the category of gamblers, makers of money, feeders, idlers, artistic and literary birds of prey, dancers and parasites, who made up her cosmopolitan world of men. He commanded respect.

With his closely-trimmed hair greying round the temples, his heavy dark brows overshadowing clear eyes, his clean-cut falcon nose, his little grizzling moustache, even his loose and somewhat ungainly figure, he had the unmistakable air of a man of breeding, if not distinction. He seemed to wear well-fitting clothes with careless tolerance. . . . The woman's swift wit divined that the man's learning and knowledge lacked, in some sort of way, interpretation—interpretation to himself.

How could a woman of all the experiences resist the temptation of constituting herself the interpreter? To say nothing of the fact that he was a man of gentle manners, of courtly charm, and, that which mattered most, a man pathetically floundering in unfamiliar seas and clutching at any straw of salvation. When Theophilus put his arm around her and kissed her, she concluded that he had clutched his straw with commendable vigour.

Thus Theophilus had the hell of a time once ordained by Daphne. Elise de Vareda interpreted to him all manner of obscure passages in his scholar's textbook on life. It was bad, sad and mad, according to the moralists. But, when

badness, sadness and madness turn a man from a lost soul, as was Theophilus when he had parted from Daphne, into a living spirit, who shall say these dreadful things haven't their use on this incomprehensible planet?

He drenched himself in the gold and azure of the place; he yielded to the intoxication of flowers and music and food and wine and dancing and strange perfumes and the turn of a card and the spin of a ball and the new fascination of a woman of all the delights of body and all the charms of mind.

"I've lived like a bat in a cave," said he. "I've been afraid of the sunlight . . . although I've longed for it. I've always thought I was a bat. Now I'm sure I'm not."

"Anything but," she laughed.

They were driving from Cannes in the early afternoon, around the almost landlocked harbour of Villefranche. It was one of the blue, still days of March. The winding road gleamed a ribbon of pearl. The pine and cypress and palm-clad slopes, here and there dotted with the roofs, russet and turquoise, of villas, hugged the lake of lapis-lazuli. Far below lay a couple of grey French battle-ships and attendant destroyers, robbed of their grimness by the magic of sun and sky and sea. They had come from stormy oceans to find a haven of rest by the sleepy, crooked old town on the port. Cap Ferrat flashed out into the blue, a startling arrow of green. The tender Maritime Alps, for all their softness, stood out clear-cut and grey against a cloudless sky swept that morning by the last dying gusts of a mistral.

"Is all this real or unreal?" asked Theophilus, pursuing a train of thought which started, so it seemed, a hundred years before.

"Whatever does it matter," said the woman, "so long as we're happy in the Land of Illusion?"

The old-fashioned Theophilus murmured something about for ever and ever to seem falling asleep in a half-dream, in a land where 'twas ever afternoon—Tennyson's Lotus-Eaters. His memory was failing. She laughed, and quoted the passages verbally correct. . . . An ideal companion!

A fortnight later it rained dismally. The parched soil of Eastern Provence must be watered occasionally, and the high gods often choose the month of April for their divine inclemency.

They were lunching alone at *Ciro's*. The glass-covered annexe, separated from the restaurant by the covered arcade, was empty, but the room was still full of lingering lovers of the coast. Public solitude for the two of them was rare; for the Comtesse de Vareda was a personage much sought after, and

Theophilus found himself enmeshed in the weird social nets of which he had hitherto had no idea. To the pleasure-seeker, the rain beat like a signal of dismissal from the Land of Illusion.

“This is the end of it. I must get away,” said Elise.

“Where?” asked Theophilus.

She sketched her social programme for the next six months. The Italian Lakes, Paris, London,—the Derby, Ascot, visits. . . . She was a woman welcomed, with no hesitation, by the Great World.

“And I—what shall I do?”

She laughed. “You follow me. These things can always be arranged.”

Theophilus leant across the table.

“My dear Elise, I’ve given up following. You know my story. I followed my wife, with the results I’ve told you. Now I lead. It’s for you to follow me, if your heart accepts the—idea—situation.”

“What idea—situation—have I got to accept?”

This with a smile of mockery. Elise de Vareda was fair and hazel-eyed, and, as a breach of type, instead of being thin-lipped, had a mouth of alluring softness. There was no touch of the shrew in Elise.

“Come round the world with me. Round and round, if you like.”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“What about my reputation? I’ve got one, you know. Quite good.”

“You shall have full discretionary powers. In that respect, I promise to follow your directions.”

She reflected awhile, an amused smile on her face.

“It would be rather amusing. A Dutch Treaty, of course. We make our own separate arrangements; only the arrangements would happen to be the same. . . . I’m rather inclined to accept the idea—situation. You don’t want me to decide this moment minute, do you?”

A while later she warned him. “If you expect me to live on a high intellectual plane and find joy in Aztec remains, or the Poor Laws of the kingdom of Siam, you’re mistaken. I deliberately prefer frivolity, because I’m a sensible woman.”

And later still, as they were going through the Condamine:

“It just occurs to me that everybody knows I’ve got an aunt in Sydney. But nobody knows, except you and me, that she’s at the point of death. I might be summoned to Australia at a moment’s notice.”

“And I,” said Theophilus, taking her hand, “am known to be a melancholy, solitary wanderer. I might take a passage in the same ship.”

As soon as passages could be booked on the Orient Line from Toulon, they started. And thus began the voyage of Theophilus to Cythera.

He was away from England two years; but Elise de Vareda accompanied him on his voyage only for eight months. She left him in Honolulu.

“My dear,” she said, “we’ve had a lovely time—the loveliest time in my life. But London and Paris and Monte Carlo and Deauville and all my friends there call me. If I stayed away longer they’d all be wanting to know. At present I’m supposed to be dutifully in Australia. I cling to my little reputation. . . . Besides, it’s best to part before we get tired of each other. Wasn’t there some epicure who laid down the rule that one ought to rise from table just not quite satisfied? If you say that our serene, light love—for I have loved you, and do love you, *Théo de mon cœur*—is for you a devastating passion, you’ll make me cry. . . .”

Such, in condensed form, was the lady’s most gracious leave-taking. She also said, many times, in one way or another:

“If I didn’t think you’d find some one else as soon as you wanted, I’d—well, I don’t say I’d stay with you till you did—there are limits—but, at any rate, I’d stay. . . . What I mean is that, when we met in Monte Carlo you weren’t able to look after yourself. Now you are.”

Said Theophilus once:

“Don’t you know—well, you must know—Elise, you’re the only woman I’ve ever loved in all my life—in that way.”

The woman of gay cynicism laughed.

“In that way. Precisely. That’s why I’m going. That way’s the long and tragic way for fools, but the short and flower-strewn way for the wise.”

They parted the best of friends. Theophilus suffered certain pangs. But they were trivial compared with the anguish of his renunciation of Daphne.

He stared at the spiral of smoke of the steamer as it faded on the horizon; and the pangs subsided. Elise had been perfectly frank and loyal from first to last. A non-moral being, she had sailed away, without leaving the slightest scratch on masculine vanity. He could not but admire her for the taste and tact of her withdrawal. Her simile of the unsatisfied epicure pleased him. She left him with the lingering flavour of an exquisite woman of whom he desired just a little more. But only a little.

## CHAPTER XXI

**T**HUS Theophilus saw the world with new vision; the vision, if not of the voluptuary, at least of the gentle hedonist. During his queer and discreet Odyssey with Elise de Vareda, he had made many agreeable acquaintances. Indeed, he had made many American friends.

He stood on the quay at Honolulu, watching the smoke-wreath of the departing steamer, smitten by a curious sense of duality. He mourned sincerely the passing from his life of a gracious influence; at the same time he felt conscious of the power, material and spiritual, due to that influence, to enjoy the beautiful and joyous things that the world most bountifully offered.

Hitherto, in his dull travels, he had been the pedantic solitary. He had sojourned in hotels, speaking to scarce a man and never a woman. Like Addison, who travelled through Italy and wrote a series of essays known as "Remarks on Italy," and could find nothing more interesting to record of the wonders of Venice than the constitution of the Republic and its laws and customs, so had Theophilus travelled with almost early eighteenth-century cecity over an Earth rioting in splendour. He had been like Bunyan's Man with the Muck-rake—eyes concentrated on the ground where he could rake up dull facts, all the time that the celestial crown of beauty had been hovering over his head.

He strolled back to his hotel, wondering why the lesson of the Man with the Muck-rake had never been revealed to him before. He sat on the verandah in front of his room, looking out at the majesty and azure and the pure white rolling surf of the Pacific, and put his hands over a puzzled brow and tried to think.

Daphne for a hundred years had preached to him this gospel of joy, and he had not understood. He knew its interpreter to be a far lesser woman than Daphne. Oh, yes! Yet, he must be just; she was a woman of all the feminine charms and graces; of delicious subtleties; of delicacies;—he had never heard her utter a mean or unworthy word; of all the pretty, ironical flatteries that a woman can lavish on a dull man; of all the dainty protectivities that a woman's hands outspread can command against hurt to the man she loves. . . . He knew that this was Elise de Vareda. But, deep down, beneath the revelation of Elise, there worked the soul of Daphne.

He started afresh on his wanderings; but this time with the air of a man of

the world assured of the smiling company of men and women wherever he went. He passed a bright winter in New York. He was well received in Boston and Washington. He had discovered that the intellectual life need not be unhumorous, and that there was a fair amount of intellect in the social world. Perhaps he threw himself with over-recklessness into whatever was offered him of gaiety and gladness—the man was suffering the reaction of a lifetime's repression—but it was a cleaner way of drowning sorrow than the commonplace refuge of drink. Daphne torn from his arms, two alternatives were offered him: one, a life of the mouldering decay from which she herself had rescued him; and the other, this persistent intoxication with the beauty and the laughter and the lighter sensuousness of existence.

In a way during this period of Theophilus's career he may be regarded as a man under the influence of a drug. He desired to forget the past and its pain. As he was rich, the future could bring what it would. Anodyne for the present was all he cared to seek. Now, all anodynes and drugs have in their time their reactions, which generally take the form of the deterioration of moral fibre in the addict. Symptoms, for instance, of the morphine-maniac are carelessness of personal appearance and uncleanness of hands. The merry drunkard is spendthrift. The victim of cocaine loses control over elementary impulses. . . . Thus did Theophilus, in the pursuit of what our daughters of to-day would term the most normal amusement, but which was to him the drug, the intoxicating draught, lose, to a great extent, the sense of ordinary practical values.

For a couple of years he went about the world in a dream. He was having—what must be repeated if the attitude of Theophilus towards life is to be comprehended—what Daphne had counselled—a hell of a time. The hell of a time which, on that far-off day, drawing on his pauper imagination, he had envisaged as a nightmare of impossible delight. To the man of forty, the dazzling futilities, the immediate gratifications which careless wealth could command; the meretricious loveliness of stage and summer *plage*; the laughing elves that danced in the bubbles of champagne mounting from bottom to top of glass; the oblivion of pain assured by barbaric rhythmic music and the sensuousness of gliding and swaying figures; the eternal charm of women, the frank revelation of their physical selves, their wit, their pity, and often the promise in their eyes,—to the man of forty these delights, as old as Babylon, presented themselves with the same glamour as to a boy of twenty just entering into his inheritance. He overstepped bounds in various ways.

There are folks now—Horace Seagrave, his Mentor on his first Telemachus voyage—who call Theophilus God's Greatest Fool. But they judge the man *sans connaissance de cause*. They haven't the data to go on. What man can know the imperative motives that drive another to an

inexplicable course of conduct?

It was March and he was in Cannes, surrounded by English and American friends. He knew, by this time, some of the villa folk. He played at the Casino tables, rather high; lost and won, according to the chances of the day. Now and again he welcomed the gambler's thrill.

He said to Elise de Vareda, who, a few days before, had greeted him with the agreeable carelessness of an old acquaintance—she had another name now, having married a wealthy member of the Peruvian Legation in Paris:

“Look at all these dead folk round the table”—she was standing behind him—“I seem to be the only one getting any fun out of the game.”

She touched his shoulder, bent over, and whispered in his ear:

“Perhaps that's the greatest tribute I've ever had in my life.”

And she moved away swiftly.

One night he returned to his hotel after having won fifty thousand francs. The sum mattered little. He had lost count of financial values. But he glowed in the winner's victory. Most of it he had obtained from his neighbour, a fat greasy Cræsus of cosmopolitan lineage, with the manners of a hog, and the brains of a lynx. It was a joy to have triumphed over this God-forgotten fellow. . . . He hummed, very much out of tune, an air of the moment as he mounted in the lift.

On his sitting-room table lay a telegram. He opened it and read:

*“For God's sake come home at once.—Daphne.”*

No lotus-eater in the Greek myth could have been more overwhelmed by the summons of a god than was Theophilus.

For he had drifted far from English interests and friendships and hopes and fears. To him, Daphne was England, and England was as remote as Daphne. She had written him one last letter a few days before her marriage; one of those letters that command no reply. That was eighteen months ago. . . . He had ceased to correspond with Mona Daventry, whose loyal friendship no man but a fool would despise. Well, her letters had been full of Daphne, and the thought of Daphne, for all the drugging, was ever an intolerable pain.

“My dear,” he had written, “I'm trying to make a new life for myself. I'm seeking organic change. I want to forget; to reduce everything to ashes; to play the perfect phoenix. Let me do it my own way. Incineration isn't a pleasant process. It's vile, and it hurts. . . . But when I find myself with new plumage, I'll tell you, and try to repay the debt I owe you. Till then, my dear, *au revoir*.”

Luke alone, and his bankers, knew his changing addresses. He had curtly

discouraged Luke from gossipy correspondence. Luke's opera and the personalities of the wealthy Americans to whom The Grange had been leased at an exorbitant rental, were to him matters of dull indifference. His scanty correspondence with Luke was concerned with cold business affairs. So much had been invested in this, so much in that. In so-and-so was a certainty of speculative profit; Luke could not recommend it as an investment for the Wavering Estates Limited, but urged it as a personal deal for Theophilus. Naturally he would not take the responsibility except on cabled instructions. And Theophilus would cable. He had no interest in such details. Every half-year came the audited balance sheet of the Wavering Estates Limited. A child could read the tale of magical prosperity. The Grange Estate alone, inclusive of the rent of the house, showed enormous profits. The declared dividends were fantastic. Theophilus, Evelina, Luke, Daphne, were rolling in riches. He himself, the main shareholder, was on the way to becoming a millionaire. That was why he had lost count of the value of money. It ceased to occupy his thoughts. With the personal expenses of a mode of life instinctively not too extravagant, he need have no concern. The ownership of race horses, or of flats where singularly uninteresting and common little ladies lived in guilty splendour, reckless gambling, and such-like agreeable methods of dissipating a fortune, lay outside the purview of an intellectual man whose elementary puritanism still survived in the form of a nice fastidiousness. Still, if it was his pleasure to offer the gewgaw of a jewel to a charming woman; to invite a score of guests to any feast; to respond to charity appeals; to help on their path those that had fallen by the wayside—it was only a matter of scribbling a few all but meaningless words and figures on a scrap of paper.

So far had Theophilus deteriorated under the strange moral or psychological or spiritual, or whatever you like to call it, drug; so far had he weakened in common prudential fibre; so far had he lost the sense of the official trained in the vital importance of detail, that it became to him weariness and an unnecessary folly to enter the amounts of his cheques on the counterfoils of his cheque-book. With pass-books he did not concern himself. Either they had remained at his bankers, their pockets swollen with dead cheques, or Luke had dealt with them under his Power of Attorney.

Why, after all, should he worry? Finance was Luke's business. Luke's interests were inextricably bound up with those of Daphne, Evelina and himself. The greater the dividend accruing for the Wavering Estates Limited, the more it was to Luke's advantage.

From Evelina he had received no word. She had survived a couple of general elections, and was still in Parliament. Now and again he saw her name in the newspapers. She was President of one of the great Women's Clubs, and

took the chair at their entertainment of dull distinguished dogs—for the brighter distinguished dogs are wary of traps, and they like their victuals and are shy at the uneatable. She also distributed prizes at feminist athletic meetings; and, after such occasions, snapshots of her appeared in the daily and weekly press.

Sometimes he looked at these wonderingly. It was the same woman who had created homelessness in the home in the bleak Blackheath house; who had used The Grange as a meeting-ground for her unjoyful political gang; and yet she seemed a stranger woman—a figure that had passed long ago across the tapestried background of his life. She seemed to follow in the wake of a much worried and unsympathetic stepmother, long since departed from a world of childlessness and submission to the evil-tempered, Calvinistic, Church of England parson who was Theophilus's father.

Theophilus was a man to whom had been denied exquisite and consoling memories.

*“For God’s sake come home at once.—Daphne.”*

The place of expedition marked on the telegram was Moorstead.

It was a shock—an awakening. From Daphne it was a trumpet call. It never occurred to him to question the summons, to ask, by wire, the why and wherefore. He went down to the dimly lit and sleepy hall, and handed the night porter a telegram to be sent off the first thing in the morning.

*“Davray—Grange          Cottage—Moorstead—Herts—England.  
Arrive London seven fifteen to-morrow evening.—Theophilus.”*

At midday a telegraph boy bicycled to The Cottage door. He flashed past the window of the drawing-room where Daphne was drawing. She saw him; and went out to the front door.

“Davray?” queried the boy, looking hard at the envelope, and then up at Daphne.

“Yes, that’s all right.”

She entered the drawing-room and read the telegram.

“Thank God,” she said.

By lucky chance, assisted by bribery, Theophilus found a berth on the Blue Train. It was only in the morning when his man was packing his clothes—in obedience to Heaven knows what dictate of luxury he had engaged a valet

whose chief avocations were to yawn and make heavy love to the English maids in the *salle des courriers*—that Theophilus realized that, in England, he was homeless. The Grange was let to the wealthy American family. He must have somewhere to sleep the next night. The good old days had passed when one could knock at the door of any considerable inn and be sure of accommodation. He consulted his man, Burrows. The valet, an honest fellow, delighted to find some justification for existence, relieved him from foolish anxiety.

“Leave it to me, sir. I’ll wire all round, reply paid, and we’ll get the answers at Dover station, and you can take your choice.”

Theophilus commended him for a faithful servant. He seemed to have a brain.

There was always The Cottage whose hospitality he could claim. There were his own cars laid up at Moorstead, whose services he could command for the short run into Hertfordshire; or, at any rate, the excellent Burrows could arrange for a commodious hireling to meet him at Victoria and drive him down. But his mind staggered at the thought of the pain of passing a night under the same roof as Daphne, another man’s wife. No. He would put up at whatever hotel Burrows could arrange for him. Over the telephone he would then learn the meaning of Daphne’s urgent message.

It was a nightmare journey. The summons in rhythm with the beat of the wheels, danced through his head all night. “For God’s sake come at once.”

The last woman in the world to use language of hysterical exaggeration was Daphne. Her mere appeal to come at once would have brought him from the ends of the earth. The “for God’s sake” implied vital issues. He bemused himself in conjecture. Tragedy of some kind awaited him.

An amiable little lady of his acquaintance waylaid him next morning on his mechanical progress to the luncheon-car. Would he take pity on her and allow her forlornship to join him at table? She was a very pretty, charming, irreproachable little lady, Lady Pamela Despard, the wife of a distinguished man. Two days before, Theophilus would have welcomed her company with delight. He had attuned himself to the exquisite harmonies of the more cultivated woman. But now, although he expressed the fact of his pleasure and privilege in terms of common courtesy, he regarded her with impatient malevolence. At Calais he slipped on board unperceived by her, and hid himself in the smoking-room with a book whose pages conveyed no meaning to his preoccupied eyes. What news awaited him at home? He surmised death. The death of either Luke or Evelina. The news of a natural passing out of the world would have been conveyed to him by Daphne in quiet words. Her call

sounded the note of violent tragedy. The boat crawled across the Channel on a sluggish sea.

At Dover he passed through the passport gates and found his way to the Pullman. The conductor, learning his name, handed him a sheaf of telegrams. Sitting in his place, he opened them feverishly, hoping for one from Daphne. But they were all the prepaid replies from hotels. Some could, others couldn't take him in. The Grosvenor offered him a quiet suite, on which he decided. It was a comfortable hotel—he vaguely remembered it being highly praised by somebody in Cannes, and it had an entrance from the joint stations. Burrows came with the hand-luggage and the evening papers. He gave him the telegram to deal with. The train, after waiting for interminable hours, started punctually. He scanned the papers anxiously to see whether any tragedy were announced. They were filled with the world futilities of a League of Nations meeting, and International Debts, and racing news. Somebody had produced a play at a theatre the night before. That morning a cat burglar had got away with a woman's jewels. . . . All things that were devoid of interest. . .

As he sped through the kind Kentish country, just clad in its virginal spring greenery, past its red-roofed villages, its tidy fields and gardens and hedgerows, he realized that he had not been in England for two years. As he looked out on the unchanging scene, time seemed to have stood still. The same figures on the same trim bowling-greens had been playing the same game ever since he had seen them last.

It was in the late dusk of a March evening that the train entered the dim bluish glare of Victoria Station. Theophilus alighted, leaving Burrows to concern himself with hand-luggage, and wandered up the platform, skirting the eager and jostling crowd. At the corner of the Customs barrier he saw Daphne awaiting him.

She stood, as he had always pictured her, tall, slim, with a head like a flower on its stalk. She wore furs, for the evening was cold. As soon as she saw him she rushed forward, hands outstretched, in her old way.

“Oh, thank God you've come!”

He said: “Tell me. What is it all about? Who is dead or killed? That's all I've been able to think of.”

“It's not as bad as that.”

She tried to smile, and he saw that her eyes were anxious, her face thin, with little lines at the corners of her mouth. She was only six and twenty, but in the harsh light she looked pathetically old. He still kept a grip on her hands.

“Then what has happened?”

“Hell's happened—or is happening.” Porters and passengers, luggage-

laden, jostled them. "We can't talk here. Let us get home. I've got a car—Luke's car—a Rolls-Royce. Where's your luggage?"

"My man's looking after it. . . . But I can't go home. I have none—unless the Americans have left The Grange."

"No, they're still there, of course. I meant The Cottage. There's the spare room."

They were walking slowly between the Customs barrier and the waiting line of taxis and cars, and at that moment a chauffeur in smart livery stepped forward, touching his cap.

"I'm staying at an hotel, my dear," said Theophilus. "In fact, at the Grosvenor here. I can't come down to Moorstead to-night."

"Why?"

"Need you ask?" said Theophilus.

She sighed wearily. "Yes, I see. I had hoped . . . perhaps. . . . Yes, I know it was stupid of me. But where can we go? We must talk. . . . Mona's in Rome, and her flat's shut up. Well"—she shrugged despairing shoulders—"a hotel lounge—it's better than this. . . ."

"I have a private sitting-room," said Theophilus. "I don't know whether. . . ."

"The beautiful conventions? Oh, my dear! I'm past all those." She laughed with a touch of harshness. "Let us go there, by all means. . . . It's quicker to walk."

She gave the chauffeur orders to await her at the main entrance to the hotel. They walked on up the busy platform. The porters were throwing out the heavy luggage from the train, and, ant-like in thickly clustered industry, were piling it in the numbered spaces on the other side of the barrier. There was the deafening noise of impact of heavy trunks on stone, of the rattle of laden trucks, of the gears of starting cars and of motor-horns. Outside was the confused traffic of the station yard. They crossed the quieter old London and Brighton Station, talking conventionally. His journey . . . the health of Luke. . . .

It was only when they reached the sitting-room of the suite and the reception-clerk and Burrows had left them, that he turned to her, helped her off with her cloak which he threw over a chair, and said:

"Now, tell me."

"It's pretty easily told. Evelina's going to prosecute Luke for fraud. There!" She flung herself wearily on a couch by the fire. "That's practically all there is to it. I had to send for you. Perhaps you'll want to prosecute him too."

Theophilus winced for a minute or two under the unanticipated blow. Then he drew out a cigarette case, offered it to Daphne. She waved it away, and he lit a cigarette himself and his fingers didn't tremble.

"You did the only thing possible," he said. "And Luke? What's he got to say about it?"

"He's innocent, of course. Luke always is. He suggested investments, but pointed out that they were speculative, and she made them at her own risk. So she has lost a lot of money. Possibly you've done the same."

"Possibly," he agreed.

"In the meantime," she added in a toneless voice, "he has bought a Rolls-Royce, and is in treaty for Dore Hall, which is in the market, because he says The Cottage is too idiotically small for a man who wants to entertain his friends."

Theophilus bent his brows.

"Dore Hall? Why, it's almost as big as The Grange!"—it was the next property. "How could he buy it? How could he keep it up?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "That's for you to find out. Luke's full of money. He's hand in glove with the Sharrows, the Americans who've got the house. With them and their friends. Only a fortnight ago he gave an enormous dinner party at the Ritz. He goes about in public now. He doesn't care."

Burrows entered. He was off to the station to pass the luggage through the Customs. Was there anything he could do?

"Yes," said Theophilus. "Order some dinner. No, no, my dear"—he swept away her beginning of protest. "I've had no food since midday, and probably you've eaten nothing since last night. I've learned values. People must eat sanely in order to meet life sanely. Order us a sole and lamb cutlets and a *bombe pralinée*——"

She sat up. "Do you remember that?"

For, in the happy days of over two years ago, she had confessed to a childish passion for this peculiarly gritty kind of ice.

He laughed. "Of course. And, Burrows, a bottle of 1911 champagne. Whatever they've got. And don't let anybody worry me until they come in to lay the table."

She lay back on the sofa, looking queerly at him. And, as soon as the man had left the room:

"You've changed," she said.

"How?"

“Perhaps not changed, but developed.”

“Again . . . in what way?”

“I think you’re more able now to face life and take things in your own hands. . . . You’ve got to. My God, you’ve got to. Luke and Evelina—and possibly myself.”

“Of course.”

They talked awhile. What did she know? She knew nothing; how could she? She could only draw inferences from blatant facts; Luke’s sudden accession to wealth; the hints long ago veiled, but of late almost stark declarations of his intention of winning back The Grange for himself, the rightful Wavering heir; the criminal prosecution.

“I’m weary of it all,” she cried at last; “dog-weary. I’ve done my best for Luke. I’ve done all a woman could. But now I’ve lost courage. I hoped against hope. You must come in and take charge. A man’s charge. . . . I was right and you were wrong. At first I believed in him as I believed in God, and asked you to help him. Then I found him out. Then, when he came to you with his proposal to take over the management of The Grange, I implored you not to listen to him. You went against me. Then, at first, I felt I had failed in my faith and loyalty, and you were right, after all. But now”—she rose and swept her hand across her forehead in a poignantly remembered gesture—“the end has come for me. He’s in with Daventry again. They meet at Watford, in an hotel. I came up one day by train, and Daventry was in the next carriage. And at Watford station our chauffeur was waiting for him. I had words with Luke about it. Our first real quarrel. I left him and went to stay with Mona. But I had to come back to him.”

“There’s a lot in this I don’t understand,” said Theophilus.

“The main thing is that Luke’s a crook. He has always been a crook, and will never be anything else than a crook. It’s something wrong with a cell in his brain, I suppose. An expert in mental diseases, a psychoanalyst, anybody like that could explain it perfectly. But what does that matter to me—to us?”

There was a long silence. The waiter entered to lay the table. The strain of the man’s presence was abominable. Theophilus opened the bedroom door.

“Would you care to tidy up? There’s sure to be a bath-room beyond.”

Alone, he watched the deft, black-coated human abstraction of a servitor ply his trade, and wondered what cares and sorrows and hopes and joys lay beneath the trained mask of the man. He performed his perfect ministrations like a ghost and vanished like a wraith.

Presently she returned, hatless, her close-cropped brown head superb on its stalk of neck. In the man's eyes she had never appeared more tragically beautiful.

He rose to greet her.

"My dear," said he. "Tell me—I'm a bit puzzled—what does your husband say about all this?"

Her face crumpled into a piteous mingling of smiles and tears.

"I haven't got a husband. I'm not married."

Theophilus clasped his head to steady it against a rocking universe.

"Not married . . . why . . . ?" he cried foolishly

She shrugged helpless shoulders. "Oh, I don't know."

"But you must know."

"It was Evelina," said Daphne.

## CHAPTER XXII

HE told him the pitiful and simple story. When Theophilus left England, she promised Davray to marry him. Six months afterwards she had written her last letter to Theophilus—two days before the appointed date of the marriage. Theophilus put forward the obvious query. Why the six months' delay, which he had never understood? It was a many-sided question. Davray would have married her at once, and taken her with him to America, where he had two or three important commissions. But she had shrunk from leaving Luke. In Paris she would have been within an eight-hour call; but in the Middle West of the United States, it was a different matter. She felt superstitiously responsible for Luke. Perhaps at the back of her mind there had lingered the haunting fear. . . . Besides, things had happened with a dramatic suddenness that, in some fashion, had overwhelmed her. For a decent woman to fall straight from the arms of one man into those of another was an act requiring time for emotional adjustment. That was why she did not accompany Davray to America. Five or six months made so little difference, in one way; and in another, it gave her time for co-ordination. Meanwhile the engagement was not kept secret, although there was no official announcement in the press. Claude Davray had many friends in England.

He returned. The registrar's marriage was arranged, they being nominally of different religions. She was staying with Mona, getting necessary things together. And then, out of the blue, fell the thunderbolt.

She could not describe the scene. She must leave it to the imagination of Theophilus. Instead of a bride-groom there entered, one afternoon, a jealous wild-cat, accusing her of being the mistress of Theophilus, and accusing Mona of being the hypocritical intermediary. He had heard the story from the own lips of her cousin, Theophilus's wife. . . . She had written to him. There was her letter. As the first cousin of Daphne Wavering, whom she believed he was about to marry, and as a woman of some standing, being a Member of Parliament, she thought he would not consider it unconventional if she asked him to call on her so that she could have the pleasure of making his acquaintance. Would he make an appointment by telephone? He responded. She fixed the tea hour on the Terrace of the House of Commons. The hour was free. Daphne, hurrying to Moorstead for lunch, on Luke's domestic affairs, and engaged with Mona for the rest of the afternoon on final purchasings and fittings in vanity shops, had given him his liberty till dinner-time.

These stupid details Daphne must explain to Theophilus. Catastrophes are

generally brought about through the failure of apparently unimportant details in a perfect scheme. He had tried, over the telephone, to inform her of the invitation, but she was on her way to Moorstead. . . . If she had been there to receive the message, she would have said: "Don't go. The woman is my deadly enemy. Wait until I can explain." But Fate willed that no such consultation should take place. To take tea on the historical Terrace of the House of Commons with a woman Member of Parliament was in itself a mild adventure for an imaginative French artist. He went, and learned from the incisive words of the thin-lipped woman that which appeared to him to be the truth about the girl whom he was on the eve of making his wife.

"Oh, don't ask me what he said! What does it matter?" cried Daphne. "It's all too loathsome. I told him exactly how things were . . . the point at which they were between us when he came along. . . . He wouldn't believe me. . . ."

"At the end I told him to go, and I went out of the flat, leaving the door open, and I kept on ringing the electric bell of the lift until it came up. And I've never seen him or heard of him again."

She acted the scene of the lift unconsciously, and then clapped her hands before her eyes and swayed. Theophilus put his arm round her. She laid her head on his shoulder, and he felt her body quivering.

"Oh, my God!" she murmured. "You don't know I've led a dog's life."

The imperturbable ministers to the routine of well-ordered life entered with the dinner. She laughed nervously.

"I suppose eating when one feels faint is the apotheosis of common sense. If we sent all this away, in an hour or two we'd be shrieking, hysterical maniacs."

They were about to sit down when the waiter handed a couple of cocktails.

"I didn't hear you order them," she said, with a touch of sharpness.

"My man Burrows is an excellent fellow. He knows my ways."

She drank the stimulant greedily. It steadied her nerves. She was famishing. As he had surmised, she had eaten nothing that day. The black-vested symbol of convention cast over them his subduing influence. So long as they did not disturb the quiet hotel room air with melodramatic utterances, their talk was a matter of indifference to the automaton who handed them their food.

"Why haven't I known all this before?" asked Theophilus.

"There's a certain quality—I believe it's one of the Deadly Sins—called Pride."

"I see. You've been guilty of it."

“What would you have me do? Write you: ‘My dear friend, I threw you over for another man. Now he has thrown me over, and I’m ready to come back to you’? No, no, no. That’s trying a woman rather too high. Besides, I don’t reproach you—God forbid!—but you had already found consolation.”

“In what way?”

“My dear, do you suppose your voyage to the ends of the world with Madame de Vareda isn’t known to all London?” She took a sip of champagne. “There’s only one lesson in life for you to learn, and that is to de-ostrich yourself.”

“Consolation. It was too butterfly a thing to last long.

“I’m not reproaching you, as I’ve just said. It’s natural. Whatever experiences you’ve gone through have done you all the good in the world. Perhaps if you had come back looking like the Knight of the Rueful Countenance, sighing for the Dulcinea del Toboso, I might have been flattered. But coming back as you are, I’m much happier as a sane human being.”

The meal went on. He said:

“Still I can’t understand. I see things from your point of view. But what prevented Mona or Luke from telling me?”

“I insisted on their silence. Besides, you gave little encouragement. Mona is hurt—dreadfully hurt. You’ll have to make your peace with her. . . . You’re no longer, my dear, the Model of All the Virtues.”

“Perhaps that’s rather a good thing at the present crisis,” said Theophilus grimly. “I’m sorry about Mona. I’ve treated her infamously. But—perhaps it’s hard for you to understand—I couldn’t bear to have news of you as Davray’s wife. There are primitive things, my dear, that won’t bear discussion. . . . We’ll leave that alone. There’s heaps of time to make my peace with Mona. She’s one of God’s best, and will forgive me. But there’s the other woman, Evelina. . . . Yes, thank God, I’m not the Model of All the Virtues.”

He withered her in a word which Daphne had never dreamed of hearing from his lips.

“She shall pay for it!”

“What are you going to do?”

“You’ll see,” said Theophilus

“And Luke?”

“I’ll deal with Luke, too.”

He met a rather frightened glance, and smiled.

“You shan’t be hurt, my dear. That I’ll promise.”

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t be,” she said wearily. “As I told you in the garden of The Grange, long ago, Luke and I are not worth thinking about. Luke deserves all he may get, but naturally I don’t want him to go to prison again.”

Theophilus reached across the table and touched her hand.

“Luke shan’t go to prison. By the way,” he said, after a pause, “what about his opera?”

She shrugged her shoulders. He had got tired of it. What could a man like Luke do on such a theme, with his amateur’s equipment? Now and then he spoke of finishing it, and played about with the score; but his heart had never been in it. . . . Luke’s heart had never been in anything save the making of money—and the crooked way of making it, at that. So said Daphne, hopeless of Luke.

The cloth was cleared. They sat by the fire awhile, talking over that which they had already discussed. Then she rose. She must be returning to Moorstead. She went and put on her hat, and he helped her on with her coat. He said:

“There’s nothing in the world I wouldn’t give in order to see happiness again in your eyes.”

She smiled sadly. “When people play the fool with life, they must pay for their folly.”

“That’s somewhat Mosaical—the eye for an eye and the tooth for a tooth. If I didn’t think humanity had progressed beyond that, I should be very miserable.”

She made no reply, walked towards the door, and held out her hand.

“I’ll see you into your car.”

Suddenly she cried: “Oh, my God! You don’t know what humiliation it is to me to bring you back from your full life into this mess of sordid thievery and dishonour.”

He put his hand on her shoulder. “It was an empty life, my dear,” he said gently. “Perhaps it served its purpose.” His other hand went to her other shoulder, and he looked into her eyes. “But now it’s going to be a full one—damned full. Don’t talk about the humiliation of calling me back to my elementary duties as a man. Just go and sit down and thank God you’ve done it, for all our sakes.”

He took her two hands and kissed them. Tears came into her eyes.

“All right,” she said bravely. “I will.”

When the car was announced they went through the revolving doors of the

hotel. The smart chauffeur stood with rug ready over his arm.

“Tell Luke to keep quiet until I come down to Moorstead.”

The door slammed, the chauffeur mounted to his seat. Theophilus had a confused picture of her bending forward, with a wave of a hand that had touched her lips, and then he stood alone bare-headed on the pavement, looking at the red light of the car until it was swallowed up in the ravenous traffic.

Upstairs in his sitting-room, the scent of Daphne’s furs, and that which was to him less physical, the spiritual fragrance of Daphne, lingered. The impress of her body remained in the cushions on the arm-chair where she had sat. It seemed absurd that she was not there still. Even the stub of a cigarette in the ash-tray by the side of the chair proclaimed her immanence.

He put up hands to a racked head, having come, he knew not how, to astounding decisions during the three hours of her humble yet compelling presence. He suffered, too, from the reaction of the forces he had brought into play. When he had taken her by the shoulders, and contented himself with kissing her hands, all his newly awakened manhood had clamoured within him the message to crush her in his arms, and to cry “be damned to every thing.” Now he thanked Heaven for his strength to resist the all but imperative command. Many things must be done before he could think of offering himself, once again, to Daphne as a lover. Many stern walls had to be confronted and scaled. Between him and Daphne lay three walls—Luke; Evelina; himself—himself not the least insurmountable. And even then there was Daphne, entrenched in her dismal stronghold of despair and humiliation. It was three o’clock in the morning when physical fatigue compelled him to bed.

At midday he called, by appointment, on a firm of lawyers—Lovell & Son—through whose hands passed currently the fleeting affairs of crisis of more reputable English families than the head, Sir Edward Lovell, considered it politic to remember. With the old-fashioned Widdingtons he had lost touch. The worldly wisdom which he had gained during the past two years took him straight to Lovell & Son. He saw the son, bald, with a fringe of brown hair, clean-shaven, bland, crisp-voiced, uncannily interpretive of statement.

“Without wishing to criticise your action, Mr. Bird,” said he, “I must ask you to admit that you’ve acted—let us say, imprudently. A man with Luke Wavering’s record . . . well . . . Oh, yes, I see,” he added hastily, as Theophilus was about to interpose. “For ‘imprudently’ let us substitute ‘quixotically.’ With the Wavering Estates Limited to interest him, you thought him safe from outside temptations. . . . Of course, the first thing you must do is to cancel the

Power of Attorney. I'll see to it at once." He made a note. "How far Mrs. Bird, in her projected action against Mr. Wavering, may be embittered by your confidence in him, remains to be seen."

"There's another aspect of the family catastrophe," said Theophilus, whose official mind had prepared his case beforehand, "which is of considerable importance. If I may trespass a little on your time, I'll put it before you."

"My time, my dear sir, is at your disposal."

He scribbled a word or two on a bit of paper, and handed it to the clerk who answered the bell.

When Theophilus had finished speaking, the trained man leaned back in his chair: summed up, telling off the points on his fingers.

"As far as I can analyse it—correct me if I'm wrong—the complicated position is this:

"(1) You came into possession of this important estate in place of the disinherited Luke Wavering, who was in prison.

"(2) There has since been a smouldering jealousy (as I am bound to deduce) on the part of the two surviving first blood-relations, Mrs. Bird and Miss Wavering.

"(3) Mrs. Bird's absorption in her public career has prevented her from being a wife—in the ordinary sense—and a helpmate, for many years.

"(4) You have been, and are, greatly attached to Miss Wavering, thereby giving extra cause to Mrs. Bird for jealousy. Your final breach with Mrs. Bird was on that account.

"(5) For the sake of Miss Wavering, you thought you would put her father out of reach of temptation, and entrusted him with the management of the Wavering Estates Limited.

"(6) The question arose of Mrs. Bird divorcing you, so that you could marry Miss Wavering. She refused.

"(7) You were about to take matters into your own hands, when the man Davray appeared, offering marriage. You retired—forgive a lawyer's dryness—and went abroad, leaving Wavering a Power of Attorney.

"(8) Now you find that, out of sheer hatred, Mrs. Bird stopped this marriage by means of slander.

"(9) Mrs. Bird is about to institute a prosecution for fraud against her cousin who is the Managing Director of the Company from which she derives her income, and to whom you, by far the principal shareholder, have given a Power of Attorney.

“(10) You have no idea, yourself, at the present moment, whether similar frauds have not been committed against you.

“Am I correct?”

“Perfectly,” said Theophilus.

“Your object in coming to me,” said the lawyer, “is to obtain legal advice as to the prevention of the threatened prosecution—mainly, I gather, for the sake of Miss Wavering.”

“That is so,” said Theophilus.

The young lawyer thought for a while. At last he said:

“I’ve been trained in this practice of ours by my father. I’m sorry he’s away on a holiday—he’s getting old—and I can’t consult him. . . . Anyhow, the cases that we have to deal with make us specialize in human motives. Would it surprise you if I ventured to suggest that the brain—you yourself admit that it’s a criminal brain—of Luke Wavering is concentrated on getting into possession of the old house—the Moorstead Estate?”

“I’m perfectly certain of it,” said Theophilus.

“Since when?”

“Since yesterday evening.”

“Also that Mrs. Bird, in reviving family scandal, is actuated by hatred and jealousy of Miss Wavering, whom she honestly believes to be what she accuses her of being?”

“That doesn’t surprise me either,” said Theophilus.

“Well, you’ll agree with me that it’s a complicated situation.”

“If it weren’t, I shouldn’t have come to you for legal advice.”

“Quite so. The point I should like to make is this. The less cloud of possible misunderstanding between us, the greater is my chance of acting in your interests. To crystallize the whole thing down, you instruct us to try to stop this threatened prosecution.”

“Obviously.”

“What are you prepared to pay, in one form or other?”

“Everything I have in the world,” said Theophilus. The lawyer laughed. “I hope to fix things much more cheaply. Now, what do you propose to do—yourself?”

“To see my wife and Luke Wavering.”

“Don’t. Let me deal with them. A message from us that we are acting on your behalf as against Mrs. Bird will bring him here at once. He must have some solicitors acting for him, and so must Mrs. Bird. In that way I can get

into touch all round. I shouldn't advise you to see Mrs. Bird yet awhile."

"I'll give you Wavering," said Theophilus. "You'll be able to appreciate the account of his stewardship better than I. But between now and our next meeting I'm going to see Mrs. Bird."

Mr. Geoffrey Lovell made a little gesture of indulgent hands. Perhaps this was the thousandth time he had suggested standing between husband and wife.

"Still a shadow between us that you'd rather not acknowledge?"

"You're a damned clever fellow," said Theophilus. "How did you know it?"

"How does one know sunshine from shade?" laughed the lawyer.

He rose, signifying the end of the consultation.

"When you've seen Mrs. Bird, come and tell me what you can. Don't leave me quite in the dark."

"I can promise you that," said Theophilus.

He drove away from the lawyer's office in a curious exhilaration of mind. He had found a machine which would winnow grain after grain of truth from the sheaves of his last night's harvesting. He lunched at his Club. At a far-off table he saw a man rise with outspread arms. He approached. It was Seagrave.

"My dear Theophilus!"

The hearty welcome awakened the warmth of his humanity. He had the support of friendship in a curiously tottering world.

"Tell me all about yourself," said Seagrave, summoning waiters to lay an extra place at his table.

It was only later that he suddenly remembered that Seagrave was a director of Wavering Estates Limited, and presently Seagrave referred to the matter of his own accord.

"Our little Company seems to be going strong."

"I hope so," said Theophilus. "It was very good of you to come in."

"Good for me, you mean. Our friend Luke has put me on to several good things which otherwise I should have missed."

"I'm glad," said Theophilus.

"On the other hand, at the last Board Meeting I don't think your wife was at all pleased. It seems she had been selling out shares and speculating with the proceeds. As Luke reminded her, that had nothing to do with the conduct of the Company. I fancy they had rather a row afterwards. But, of course, that's not my business. . . ."

"I've not seen my wife for two years. I suppose you run across her a good

deal in the House?"

"We sit on the same side; but to tell you the truth, I don't see much of her. I have all respect and admiration for Mrs. Bird. Every one has. But, to be frank, I don't like her friends."

"Neither did I," said Theophilus dryly. "It was more or less on account of them that we went our separate ways. There was one of them whom I particularly disliked—John Roberts."

Seagrave gave him a queer glance. "Yes. An oily chap; a detestable fellow; what the French call a *faux bonhomme*. He's still going. He and Mrs. Bird and a few others have organized a *bloc*, devoted to what they call Public Service, and, if you'll forgive me for saying so as a reasonable politician, are making themselves a damn nuisance. The Whips are fed up with them."

He went on rather hurriedly to expound in detail the irritating and rebellious tactics of the precious *bloc*. As soon as he could, Theophilus side-tracked the conversation to the general political system of *blocs*; the French, for instance. He had no desire to discuss Evelina further with a stranger. They ended the lunch in pleasant talk on travel, and their prospective agreeable meetings now that Theophilus had returned. Seagrave went to the House, Theophilus to keep an appointment he had made with Evelina over the telephone in the Westminster flat.

During the short telephone talk she had said:

"I don't want to see you. There's no reason why I should see you."

He had replied: "We're co-directors and principal shareholders in a Company which represents our fortune, and it's essential that we should talk things over."

She had agreed grudgingly. Half-past two. She must get to the House soon after question time, as there was a debate in which she was interested.

He was admitted into the flat by a meagre maid. It was characteristic of Evelina, he thought, to maintain a joyless janitress.

He found her standing in the middle of the pallid, unchanged drawing-room. Fires had roared up all his Club chimneys, for it was a bitter day of March east wind. But here the fire had not been lit. His mind went back to the bleakness of the little Blackheath house. Her greeting was as frigid as the temperature. She had scarcely changed. Her unfashionably cropped hair was still untidy. A line or two was added to her face. Otherwise she was the same familiar, restless woman, not devoid of good looks, who had made a kind of consort of him, without according him a consort's tenderer privileges, ever since their marriage.

Her dark eyes met his stonily. Neither held out a hand in greeting.

“I suppose it’s best we should meet and get things over once and for all,” she said. “I know what you’ve come about. Sit down, will you?”

Theophilus, in his polite way, motioned her to a chair.

“You don’t know whether I’ve come as a friend or an enemy,” said he ironically.

She shrugged. “I don’t think we’ve ever been either friends or enemies. We’ve viewed each other with feelings of perfect indifference, and I presume these remain constant.”

“I’ve come to talk business,” said Theophilus.

“‘Business’ being Luke Wavering.”

“Precisely.”

“Are you going to prosecute him for robbing you too?”

“No. And you’re not going to prosecute him, either.”

“Indeed I am,” said she, with a little scornful laugh. “Don’t I know you? Didn’t I say that I was quite aware of what you’d come to me about? Listen to me, Theophilus.” She held up her hand, and assumed a platform manner. “I’ve had enough of this thorn in the flesh—the Wavering family flesh. I’ve made sacrifices—many sacrifices—and suffered. But now I’ve suffered too much. I’m going to have it taken out. . . . He has robbed me of nearly ten thousand pounds. . . . I’m proceeding against him for fraud. I can get a warrant out against him at any moment. If he tries to leave the country, he’ll be arrested.”

“Why do you wait?” asked Theophilus.

“My case isn’t yet complete,” she laughed. “Even you must know that the preparations of financial statements and getting together of evidence is a work of time. When that time comes, he’ll be prosecuted, and finish his days in gaol, and that’ll be the end of him. I’ve been a fool, I admit, in listening to you. Now my position is assured. I shall have public sympathy. . . .”

Theophilus rose.

“You’re not going to bring this action,” said he.

Again she laughed. “Why?”

“Because I say so.” He passed his hand over his crisp hair. “After all that has happened during the last few years, do you still think I’m a damned fool, Evelina? Was it a damned fool who kicked all your beastly crew out of his house? No, no. You must remember that you’re a woman of intelligence and take a different line with me.”

She said irritably: “For God’s sake, sit down; don’t walk about.”

He smiled and obeyed her.

“You’re not going to bring this action. All that you claim to have lost through Luke, I’ll willingly repay you. What do you say to that?”

“I’m going to bring a criminal to justice,” she said in her thin-lipped way.

“If you refuse my offer, which I shall most certainly see is put forward in evidence in Court, it’ll be only because you want to revenge yourself further on an unhappy woman.”

“I was waiting for that,” she sneered.

“I’m glad to see you’ve got so much sense. I repeat my offer. I repay your proved claims—I needn’t say that the whole of the affairs of this absurd Company of ours will be reorganized—on conditions.”

“Oh, you impose conditions, do you?”

“I do,” said Theophilus. “There’s nothing new about them; we come back to an old proposition. You set me free. I’ll go through the usual abominable formalities.”

“So that you can still marry Daphne?”

“If she’ll have me,” said Theophilus.

In her turn she rose, quivering with passion. Her plump face grew gaunt with it. He had never seen her so shaken.

“Never, do you hear? Never. You can take her as your mistress again, and set her up in The Grange—my place, my place, do you hear? But never with my compliance. She has been the curse of my life ever since she was a child, with her insolence, her ascendancy over the born fool that I married—the born fool that still wants other men’s cast-off goods. What kind of a life do you think I lead? I, a woman, one of the few in Parliament—a woman known to all the world. What excuse have I, in the eyes of the world, to be living apart from my husband? For years I’ve been confronted with the necessity of humiliating explanation. My fault? Impossible. Your fault? I’ve been considerate. Since that unforgivable night, I’ve striven to shield you, to make you out a pathetic figure not quite accountable for his actions. I’ve been loyal to you. But, my God! I’m through with it. The whole lot of you shall eat dirt. You and Luke and Daphne. . . .”

She went on with her wild harangue, and at last sank on a sofa, passing her hand through her untidy shock of hair, and sat panting.

“I’m glad to find, at last,” said Theophilus quietly, “that you have passions. You have the passion of hatred. That is why you interfered in the Davray affair, Daphne’s one chance of happiness. To put things mildly, I’ve never heard of a more ignoble act in all my life.”

Spent, she shrugged shoulders as she lay. "I am what I am. I have right on my side."

"I take it then," said he, in a voice whose note of danger she did not catch, "that you refuse my proposal?"

She sat up on the couch and spat:

"You can all of you go to hell!"

He regarded her mercilessly. Why should he have pity on this woman who had withered his young life with her sexless claims on his absorption in her egotism, who, for the furtherance of her political ambitions, had later made her sexless claims on his allegiance, who, without love or a semblance of love, had allowed her intelligence to be overwhelmed by a jealousy of a girl struggling, as was Daphne, in every social condition that was most piteous?

"There's only one thing to be done," said he. "You've asked for it, and now you'll get it. I'll file a divorce suit against you and John Roberts."

She sprang to her feet, and confronted him with blazing eyes.

"You dare——?"

"Oh yes," said Theophilus calmly; "I'm going to dare any damned thing."

"You can prove nothing," she cried.

"The mere bringing of the suit will make a nasty case of it," said Theophilus.

"Blackmail!" Her voice was somewhat hysterical.

"I don't care what you call it."

"I swear to you there has been nothing," she cried, with a hand on her heart.

"So will he," said Theophilus. "Anyhow, we won't discuss this unpleasant subject further. I've been seeing Lovell & Son this morning. You ask for proofs? Lovell & Son is a very honourable firm. But it's their business to rake up the mud of Paradise, and they do it very efficiently."

"I always thought you a fool, but I never thought you a beast," said Evelina.

"I'm neither," said he. "You misjudge me entirely. It has never occurred to you that I am a man. Good-bye." And he went out.

## CHAPTER XXIII

HERE followed a period in the life of Theophilus during which he lived in the gloom of ugly and sordid things. It was a period spent in the offices of lawyers and chartered accountants; a period of hardening his heart against eloquent appeals for mercy from the misjudged philanthropist, Luke Wavering; and of supporting unruffled the indignant fulminations of his wife. The more the digging into the morass of figures that symbolized the Wavering Estates Limited, and the private incomes therefrom derived of Theophilus and Evelina, the greater revelation was there of Luke's almost childish turpitude. As far as Theophilus, sick to death of the unsavoury business, could follow the system of fraud, it seemed to be one of entire simplicity—the sale of new lamps for old; of silver plate for Brummagem; of solid shares in Wavering Estates Limited for shares in wild-cat companies promoted by Daventry, bought for a song, and sold to Theophilus and Evelina at the top of the market. Evelina had grievances most justifiable. So had Theophilus. Luke pleaded mere agency, having scrupulously in every transaction warned both of his non-acceptance of responsibility. There could be a very pretty battle in the Courts. Yet a vanquished Luke must face another spell of penal servitude.

There was also the mud, of appreciable viscosity, that Lovell & Son raked up in the past and present relations of Evelina and John Roberts. They offered such serious grounds for a divorce as to render it impossible for a judge to dismiss the case as a malicious action. . . .

Said Theophilus to Mona Daventry, who had returned from Rome:

“I feel as if I'm living in a sewer.”

He kept on his rooms at the Grosvenor Hotel and, save at his Club, saw few people. He had no humour for London gaieties, and betook himself to his old studious habits. Life became a dull monotony of waiting. Nothing could be done until the involved financial record of the past two or three years had been presented in staring black and white. Nothing could be done until Evelina, mercilessly harassed—and Theophilus, by nature, was a merciful man—had withdrawn her threat of prosecution.

And all the while Daphne was withering like a flower in the blight of renewed shame and degradation. She shrank from meeting Theophilus.

“If it hadn't been for me—in all sorts of ways—you wouldn't have had all this disgusting business to go through. You would have led your quiet life in

The Grange library. Evelina wouldn't have worried you more than was necessary. Luke would have gone to prison again, and I should have taken my life in my own hands, just as I did before. It's all my fault."

"Your only fault—if you like the word—is being Daphne, the woman I love," said Theophilus simply.

She made a weary gesture.

"Oh, my dear . . . You must forget all that."

"I'll forget nothing of it till I die," said Theophilus.

They were in Mona Daventry's flat. The rain of a London May afternoon beat pitilessly against the windows, and only a sense of the fitness of hours prevented them from drawing curtains and lighting lamps in order to shut out the gloom and depression of the day.

"It's all over. Even if you do save Luke this time, he's bound to go on in his crooked way. I must stay with him as long as I can stick it. I'm already at about the end of my tether."

"Just a little more courage," said he reassuringly.

"I don't think anyone can accuse me of cowardice," said Daphne.

The time came very soon when Luke, in the tears of a man persecuted by unjust enemies, accused her of disloyalty and filial ingratitude, and bade her begone. A spy in his house was more than human nature could bear.

"A spy, my God!" said Daphne.

This was the last of many painful passages at arms between them. Some time before, going through The Grange semi-officially with Mrs. Garraway, during the temporary absence of the American tenants, she had noticed the absence of a Meissonier which had held a place of honour, since Theophilus's ownership, by the side of the drawing-room mantelpiece. Luke, hearing her report, had reassured her. In the interest of the Wavering Estates he had sold it to a millionaire friend of the Americans. Later, while tidying up his bedroom, she had discovered it carelessly wrapped up in brown paper among his shirts on a wardrobe shelf. She took it downstairs, and, when he came in, confronted him with it.

"Why is this here?"

"The Meissonier? Why, where else should it be? Look at the frame, all chipped through the folly of that silly old woman, who stuck it in a bedroom somewhere. I'm taking it up to Town, as soon as I can get there, to have it repaired. I can't deliver it in this state."

Then other similar things had happened which caused her grave misgivings. Finally, there was the affair of the uncut emerald, a jewel brought

by an ancient Wavering from India, and kept as an heirloom together with other rubbish of more or less value, in the strong-room of The Grange. Daphne had seen it as a child. She had seen it since, during the occupation of Theophilus, who had regarded it with the interest of idle curiosity. This heirloom then, she discovered one day in the course of her customary ministrations, in Luke's jewel-box. It was astonishing how many personal trinkets he had acquired during the past two or three years—studs, links, waistcoat-buttons, tie pins, watch chains, and dainty watches. On seeing it, her heart sank once more.

She had it in her hand ready when he came into The Cottage. Before she could speak, he cried irritably, snatching it from her:

“Why can't you leave my things alone?”

“It's the Wavering emerald.”

“Of course it is. The family heirloom. It belongs to me.”

“I can't see that it does,” said Daphne.

There arose a storm of high and foolish words. In plain terms, did he understand his daughter to accuse him of being a common thief? Daphne put up hands to an agonized head.

“What do you generally call a man who robs a safe?”

He repeated that the taking of one's own was not theft. Besides, he was only going to have it properly valued by an expert.

She held out her hand.

“Luke dear, give it back to me. Don't you see you're heading for prison?”

“Prison?” He grew maniacal. If he had stolen the emerald would he have been such a fool as to keep it loose in his jewel-box for every one to see? And then came invective against the unnatural daughter for whom he had sacrificed his life. She stood up against his anger and his folly.

“Give it to me, with the keys of the strong-room, so that I can put it back, or I must tell Theophilus.”

He yielded, whimpered, broke out again into denunciation, and further, into such vulgarity of abuse as she had never before heard from his lips. He cast her out in a fury. And that was the end of her care of Luke.

She returned the emerald to the strong-room of The Grange, and the next day, in London, handed the keys to Theophilus.

“Keep them. I don't think Luke's responsible for his actions.”

“What has happened?” he asked.

“I've left him, for good and all. He's either thoroughly bad—or mad. I can

only hope he's mad. Anyhow, I'm no longer of any use to him."

She eluded his direct questioning. How could she tell him of the petty pilfering of the treasures of The Grange? The Meissonier, the Renaissance ivories—among other blatant thefts—and the Wavering emerald? There were the keys, a sign to him of the necessity for closer guard. In the matter of fraudulent finance, Luke, enmeshed in the net of the law, was henceforth powerless for evil. The least she could do, for mitigation of her own burning shame, was to hide from Theophilus knowledge of the sordid thievery.

So Daphne, after a day or two with Mona, went her ways into vaguer London, having found a little furnished service flat in Putney. She had finished with Claude Davray; she had finished with Luke; she had finished with Theophilus. She must not see Theophilus. He loved her. Of that, no woman could have doubt. But the beloved fool still regarded her with blinded eyes. How could woman, naked, scorched, unsightly, as she felt herself to be, present herself before such a man without an unbearable anguish of shame?

"I'm sorry, my dear," said Mona Daventry one day, discovering the situation. "But that's Daphne. There's something curiously primitive about her. She's wounded, and gets into a cave all by herself, so as to lick her sores."

"I know," said Theophilus.

"I'm glad you do. It's no use writing to her."

"I'm not going to write to her," said Theophilus.

"But, my dear man," cried Mona, "what the devil are you going to do?"

He laughed in a sad sort of way.

"That's my affair."

"It seems to be the affair of quite a lot of people."

"You'll see," said Theophilus.

Very soon after this conversation, Theophilus had the most vividly exciting period of his life.

It began with an interview in the office of Lovell & Son to which he was urgently invited. Young Lovell welcomed him with triumphant rubbing of hands. Victory all along the line. Surrender of Mrs. Theophilus Bird. Evidence, though not so definite as to the possibility of dotting the i's and crossing the t's, yet peculiarly damaging to politicians in the public eye, had been obtained from countless hotels during the past three years at which John Roberts and she had stayed together in the course of their political wanderings. What jury would believe that a robust man's constant attachment to an attractive-looking woman was a merely platonic bond of intellect? She had climbed down, protesting though she might against blackmail. She had withdrawn her plea of

prosecution of Luke Wavering. She was ready to accept any private occasion Theophilus might give her for divorce. But—the bald-headed young lawyer held up emphasizing hands—she claimed a devil of a lot of money.

“That,” said Theophilus, “is of the very slightest importance.”

A few minutes afterwards he said:

“Now listen to me. Your advice has been invaluable, Mr. Lovell. Your conduct of affairs, leading them to the present point, at which we have been aiming, has been marvellous. Now I’ll ask you to be good enough to take my instructions and carry them out, without question, to the smallest detail.”

He left a lawyer half-suffocated in his dingy office, and danced away as though Lincoln’s Inn Fields were strewn with daisies, which pricked up their heads at the sound of his fife. For the first time ever since he began to grope for a path, far back in his childhood, he saw his way clear. In such conditions a man may be forgiven exultation of spirit.

A Board Meeting and a Meeting of Shareholders of the Wavering Estates Limited had been called to consider the voluntary liquidation of the Company, at its registered offices, The Grange, in Moorstead, Hertfordshire.

The American tenants were still away; but the occasional use of the library had been a condition of their lease. As everybody’s interests were clearly involved in the proposal, there was a gathering of the queerly assorted members.

Evelina came down suspicious and defiant, attended by her lawyer and the faithful John Roberts. Daphne, urged vehemently by Theophilus, came with Mona. Seagrave, although his holding in the company was trivial, attended in support of Theophilus, who had brought Lovell with him in the car.

Theophilus arrived early on that bright June morning, and awaited his fellow-directors in the great hall. First came Luke, with the girl secretary, bearing books and documents. He had aged of late and thinned, and the deep accusing lines on his face gave him more than ever the appearance of a bird of prey. He had not seen Theophilus since the latter’s return to England. He took a proffered hand with an air of bravado.

“You’re looking very well and young, my dear fellow.”

“At the top of my form,” said Theophilus.

He presented Lovell. The two men bowed.

“Of course you’ve given me no details of this proposed liquidation.”

“Mr. Lovell and I thought it best to have a preliminary friendly discussion.

We may adopt the principle of the suggestion, or we may not.”

“So long as it’s only that,” said Luke.

Mona and Daphne drove up, and were shown by the attendant footman into the hall.

“My dear Daphne,” cried Luke in welcome, “how glad I am to see you. But the London air isn’t that of the country. Mona, what have you been doing with her?”

“The question is what have *you* been doing with her,” Mona replied sharply.

Theophilus drew Daphne aside.

“I know it’s a great strain for you to come down. But it’s the last time, I hope, that you need draw upon your reserve of courage.”

“Evelina . . . ?” she queried.

“It won’t be pleasant for you.”

“I’ve stopped thinking of things that are pleasant for me a long time ago.”

“I don’t think she’ll make trouble. She’s only too anxious now to get out of the whole business, and, as soon as she decently can, marry her friend, John Roberts.”

She flashed. “Are you divorcing her?”

He smiled, and shook his head.

“No. I have grounds. But it’s best that accidents should be avoided, even in the most strangely regulated families. The dismal business is all arranged. . . . As far as you’re concerned, she’s harmless, my dear. Remember that.”

Seagrave arrived, and, a few moments afterwards, Evelina with John Roberts and her solicitor. She bowed coldly to the company, and stood stiff like one on a platform about to address a public meeting in which there was a hostile element.

Theophilus and Roberts exchanged bows. The latter introduced him to Mr. Smithers, the solicitor, who shook hands warmly with Lovell, the only person there of his acquaintance.

By the foot of the great staircase a table had been set with sandwiches and odds and ends of drinks. Theophilus led the way to it with inviting word and hand. Luke alone responded. He poured a cocktail from a shaker and drank it off.

“Then,” said Theophilus, “shall we have our little meeting? I will ask these gentlemen”—with a gesture towards the two lawyers and John Roberts—“to make themselves at home during our absence. There will be lunch at one-

thirty.”

He opened the door of the library, and the little Board of Directors filed in and took their seats at the library table, austere and furnished with pink blotting-paper, paper, pens and inkstands. The only extraneous object—one which caused Daphne a curious little stab in the heart—was a white jade Buddha, acting as a weight on top of a sheaf of papers before the chairman’s place.

The sunlight danced through the great open windows, and the elms of the park flaunted their gay green proclamation of the gladness of life. The book-backs in the stately cases glowed in their calm assurance of the wisdom of all the centuries; but the air inside the room was heavy with the deadly hatred of two living people. Theophilus took the head of the table, Luke the bottom. Evelina, thin-lipped, hard-eyed, flanked herself between the two least detested members of the party, Seagrave and Mona Daventry. Daphne sat opposite, next the girl secretary. Luke sat back, lean, lantern-jawed, his swarthy face a curious contrast to his whitening hair, his chin on his breast, his hawk eyes gleaming dully. The mask of the debonair had fallen from him. For the past few months he had been harried beyond a sane man’s endurance, and towards those who had harried him—Evelina, Theophilus, Daphne, and the two ciphers who were on the side of Daphne and Theophilus—he nourished a murderous enmity. He would be called upon once more to repeat the abominable and wearisome justification of his stewardship. How could these fools understand a man of his calibre and his unquestionable aspirations?

Theophilus called upon the secretary to read the Minutes of the last Board Meeting. Sensitive to the atmosphere, she gabbled through them in a toneless voice. Theophilus, with a touch of cheerful irony, put the time-honoured question:

“Is it your pleasure that I sign these Minutes as correct? If so, signify the same in the usual manner.”

At a languid uplifting of fingers around the table, he signed the page in the Minute-book.

Then Theophilus, leaning back in his chair, his elbows on the arms and his hands clasped, spoke as follows:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,—You will see on the agenda a few trifling items arising out of the Minutes, which our managing director, for the sake of decency and order, has instructed the secretary to put down. These I propose shall be deferred to another occasion in view of the most important item to consider which you have been called together to-day—the question of the voluntary liquidation of the Wavering Estates Limited.

“But, even before we enter upon the discussion of that most important question, I should welcome your indulgence, if you would listen, without comment, to what I have to say to you, not only as chairman of the Company, but as a human being whose destiny has been linked up with the varying fortunes of the Wavering family.

“When Miss Fanny Wavering died, there were three members of her family, any one of whom might have expected to be her heir: Luke; my wife, Evelina; Daphne. All three she disinherited; Luke through a misfortune which outraged her family pride; Evelina on account, as far as I can gather, of a cordial mutual detestation; and Daphne, because the narrow-minded spinster, bred in the gloom of mid-Victorian tradition, hadn’t the common sense to appreciate the generous free spirit of the modern girl. Her choice fell on me, her niece’s husband. I accepted the fortune. I didn’t see what other course lay open to me. I was aware of its responsibilities. Whether I have fulfilled them is a matter for you to judge. I confess myself to have been, in the past, not without blame. This is not the time or place, however, for recriminations from any side. The main point, the vital point, is that I did not realize I was entering into a Heritage of Strife.

“Before the heritage, I lived in peace and companionship with my wife, Evelina. Whether those relations would have continued is in the knowledge of such high gods as mould human destinies. As it happened, from the moment I took possession of this house, we began to drift apart. Whose fault it was, is neither here nor there. If there is to be blame, I readily take it on my shoulders. The differences between husband and wife are not relevant to the present proceedings.”

“Not when you turned me out of the house?” cried Evelina shrilly.

“No. That is a matter between us two. It doesn’t concern the Wavering Estates Limited. All that concerns the Company is that I, the Interloper, didn’t fully appreciate my position. It may, however, be of personal interest to those here to know that we have drifted so far apart that soon we shall be free to go each of us our separate ways.

“I must now turn to Luke Wavering. With a dimmed appreciation of my position as interloper—to repeat myself—I did my best to smooth his path after his misfortune. I’m aware that what I’m saying may sound like the utterance of the perfect prig. I don’t care. What man trying to state in public his decent impulses can escape the charge? I did my best. To save a desperate man from desperate courses, I committed the folly of throwing the Wavering fortunes into a Limited Liability Company, with him as managing director. I had my sentimental reasons for placing in him my whole confidence. I am responsible for the misguidance of my wife, Evelina, whose grievances, as she

must admit, I have held fully justifiable. She has no reason to love her cousin, Luke Wavering. She has no reason to love me. It's all part of this heritage of hate.

"Now, only recent unhappy investigations have opened my eyes to the bitterness of the feelings which Luke Wavering has entertained towards myself. Just as Evelina could have brought a criminal prosecution against him, so could I have done."

"That's a damned lie!" cried Luke.

"Even if it is," replied Theophilus calmly, "let us pass it by for the moment. The point is that Luke Wavering hates me with the hate of hell, as the interloper who has come between him and the estate of his forefathers. His astute financial brain is bent on regaining for himself this estate, and sitting as master in this house. So that he shall not attempt to achieve his purpose by further unscrupulous means, the consequences of which we all know, I am ready, under certain conditions and provisos, to let him enter into possession."

There was a gasp of breath around the table. At the other end, Luke stooped forward.

"What the hell do you mean?"

Theophilus rose.

"I mean," said he, "that I am sick and tired of living on this inheritance. I'm sick of Evelina's dull, smouldering jealousy. I'm sick to death of Daphne's misery on your account. I am advised by my lawyers and accountants that, when I came into possession of the fortune, and held my official position, I was worth thirty thousand pounds. I now sell my whole shares in the Wavering Estates Limited for thirty thousand pounds." He looked around at the bewildered faces. "If the Company doesn't buy them, I'll sell them to Luke by private treaty. You have to choose." He tapped the pile of papers in front of him. "You'll find everything cut and dried here. For myself I only claim my books and a picture or two, and a few personal odds and ends."

He took up the jade Buddha and stuck it in his pocket.

"I should suggest you should let Mr. Seagrave take the chair to finish the meeting."

"But, my good man, this is madness," cried Seagrave, leaping up.

"Sit down, and go on with the business," said Theophilus, and he strode through the door and slammed it behind him.

In the hall, Lovell met him with a quick word of inquiry.

"I've done it. You stay. They'll want you."

He caught up his hat from the hall table, and went out into the sunshine,

and stood, breathing the pure air, while a servant went to fetch his car. At last he was a free man, with work in the world before him. As a man of the world, awakened to its beauties and emotions and responsibilities, and as a scholar, he could find congenial occupation. He could work himself out a career. With one woman's aid, a great career. He looked out at the far trees bordering the property which he had renounced, without a pang of regret. He had always felt himself an alien there. And he was a town-bred man, without interest in the details of the country. . . .

He had brought a measure of peace into conflicting and embittered lives. Evelina could have her share of the Wavering Estates, and marry the man of her intellectual heart. He smiled, finding it in him to wish joy to John Roberts, whose close sympathy and loyalty had been proved for many years. Whether he would be as happy with Evelina as a husband, as he seemed to have been as a *cavaliere servente*, that was the poor man's own look out.

Then there was Luke. Whether, having his heart's desire, and becoming master of The Grange, with an ample fortune, he would still follow his instincts into the ways of crooked finance, was a matter with which he, Theophilus, could have no concern. Short of shooting him, and thus effectually terminating his criminal career, he had done his best. The only temptation for which he was, in any way, responsible, he had removed. Before Daphne he stood, at last, a free man. She would be relieved, at any rate, of one aspect of her nightmare horror. Luke now affluent, she would have at least time to breathe an air more free, and open her heart to the things against which she had of late closed it in pride and fear. The bond between Luke and herself had been finally broken. Daphne must find happiness. That was all that mattered.

Nothing in his life had really mattered but Daphne, since the day when he had come into this Heritage of Hate. From that day he had loved her; from that day she had established herself as part and parcel of his being.

The car stationed round the corner of the house drew up; he signed to the chauffeur not to descend, and lingered, as though waiting for something. Then he took a step or two back, and looked wistfully towards the hall. Surely she must come, if only for a word of explanation. Soon he smiled, for Daphne, pale and shaken, came swiftly towards him.

"I can't bear to hear them discuss this abominable proposal in their cold-blooded way."

"I'm glad they're cold-blooded," said Theophilus. "That means they're taking things seriously. Besides, my dear, I don't see why they should quarrel over it. Everybody ought to be satisfied."

"But you—what are you going to do?"

He laughed. “I’m going to seek my fortune. There’s a Kingdom somewhere awaiting me.”

She said with a little catch in her throat: “But in all this general satisfaction, what’s going to become of me?”

“What’s bound to become of you, sooner or later. I don’t see why it shouldn’t be sooner. . . .”

He motioned to the car. Their eyes met. Hers softened with the moisture of tears.

“There’s nothing now between us?”

She whispered happily: “Nothing.”

“Then come.”

He led her across the terrace to the path where the car waited, and opened the door. She hesitated for a second, her foot on the step, her face turned towards him. He said, with a smile:

“There’s still time to draw back.” She threw up her head in her old way, radiantly.

“God forbid.”

She entered the car. He followed. The door clicked. The gears signalled the start, and they drove off together into the Kingdom of Theophilus.

**THE END**

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Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Kingdom of Theophilus* by William J. (John) Locke]