



OLD WINE  
AND NEW

WARWICK DEEPING

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*Title:* Old Wine and New

*Date of first publication:* 1932

*Author:* Warwick Deeping (1877-1950)

*Date first posted:* Mar. 5, 2019

*Date last updated:* Mar. 5, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190318

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Al Haines, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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# WARWICK DEEPING

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OLD WINE AND NEW,

OLD WINE  
AND NEW

BY WARWICK DEEPING



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FIRST EDITION

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# *Part One*

## Chapter One

THE street was as black as a tunnel. An October night, fraught with the fatality of autumn, had covered everything with a flocculent raw darkness. The pavements and roadway were greasy, and a scattering of autumn leaves, blown from the trees of Spellthorn Square, adhered to the wet flagstones. Almost this little street in Chelsea had the smell of a dark cupboard that had not been opened for many weeks.

Scarsdale hesitated.

There were no lights, no people. The place was muffled up in a silence that was beyond being melancholy, for its very muteness suggested the acceptance of things as they are and not as they seem. A moment ago there had been the sound of footsteps in the street; a special constable had passed, yawning and glancing at the windows. Scarsdale, hesitant outside an iron gate, and knowing it to be a gate because the surreptitious shape of a cat had insinuated itself between the bars, had appealed to the “special”.

“I’m looking for Spellthorn Terrace.”

“This is Spellthorn Terrace.”

“Both sides?”

“No, these little houses.”

“You haven’t any idea, I suppose, which is 53?”

“No. Somewhere further along I should imagine.”

“Thanks. Good night.”

Scarsdale still hesitated. It was as though the long thin shape of him had got caught up in the darkness and in this wet spider’s-web of silence. He stood and stared at the row of houses, and their dim windows stared back at him. His hands were sunk deep in the pockets of his greatcoat. He had walked three miles to find Spellthorn Terrace, and now that he had found it he stood still and allowed himself to become submerged in melancholy. He was tired. The whole world was tired.

But he had come to find No. 53, and he opened a gate at a venture, walked up a flagged path between privet hedges, climbed three steps, and confronted a dark and anonymous door. Again he hesitated. Obviously the easiest solution



would be for him to knock and inquire, but to Scarsdale life had somehow ceased to be easy and obvious. There had been so much noise, so much horror, so much raw flesh, and for two years he had been shedding illusions, and his illusions had been so much part of himself. He was forty-three, and at that age a man does not shed his leaves without a sense of perplexity and a feeling of nakedness. Everything was so strange, even the London that he knew so well. So many comfortable and familiar humanities had vanished.

But this blank and unhelpful door! He withdrew his right hand from the pocket of his greatcoat, and passed his fingers over the dark surface. He had long and sensitive fingers. It had occurred to him that the door might carry its numerals in brass or painted metal, and that he would be able to trace out the numbers with his finger-tips. He touched a knocker, and felt the hollow of a shallow moulding, but there were no raised numerals to be deciphered.

Well, why not knock and inquire? This idiotic groping! And for a moment he stood still and allowed himself a moment's mental groping. His temperament was as sensitive as his fingers; it had suffered considerably; it had suffered more than his fingers. For the best part of three years he had been a brown figure in a crowd; he had been dressed, fed, paraded, inspected, ordered about, and all through those years he had felt something slipping from him. It was as though the war had torn away the shreds of his essential self. He had lost his initiative, his individuality. Removed from the crowd he was full of hesitations, vague perplexities, fears.

But what rot! He unbuttoned his greatcoat, and felt for a box of matches. He extracted a match, struck it, and holding box and match in the hollows of his hands and fingers, raised this lantern of the flesh toward the door. The flame lit up his big nose, and the brown eyes that were set rather like the eyes of a hare. He was grizzled at the temples. He was smiling a little whimsical, sad smile, and he did not realize it.

No. 57. He saw it in white upon a brown surface. He retreated. He closed the gate gently. He still continued to do things gently though the war was more than four years old, for he had been created to do things gently, and to love them so, books, china, English landscapes, routine. He had liked a nap after lunch on Sundays, and buttered toast in front of a fire.

Again he stood hesitant, fingering the matchbox. His hands symbolized his lack of grip, his fumbling, tentative fingering of newness. Should he count four doors to the left or to the right? He chose the right, and coming to the fourth gate in the low brick wall, he entered the gate, and climbed the steps. They were just like the other steps, with the same iron hand-rail and the same dark door. Scarsdale lit another match, and with the same conscientious carefulness

raised the screened flame to the door.

No. 53. Marwood's house! He blew out the match, dropped it, and was lost for a moment in other darkness, other memories.

## 2

An avenue of lime trees led from the high road to the red brick chateau occupied by C.C.S. No. 37. A colony of huts and of tents had gathered around this rococo country-house with its faked towers, and sleep slated roofs, and its imitation battlements. A high road lined with Lombardy poplars disappeared over the swelling bleakness of a ploughed hill.

Scarsdale lived in a tent. He was a nursing orderly at No. 37. He shared the tent with eight other men, and when it rained, a sudge of mud decorated the opening in the canvas. The tent was the last in the row, and nearest to the chateau gate where the motor ambulances swung in from the high road. They came and they went. They were so frequent that their wheels wore hollows in the roadway by the gate, and when these hollows were full of mud and water the cars would come lurching and squelching in between the two stone pillars.

Men were detailed to fill up the ruts and hollows with broken brick and cinder. It was done, and in a month the via Dolorosa needed more brick and cinder. The cars came and the cars went.

Scarsdale, when off duty, would sit on a ground-sheet in the opening of the tent and stare at these cars. Never in his life had he done so much staring. It was as though he sat and stared while something happened to his soul. His eyes were the eyes of an animal, brown, staglike, dumb. His consciousness too had a muteness, an inarticulate, shocked wonder. It was as though some super-slaughterman had taken him and dealt him a blow that had stunned him without killing. He sat and stared; he saw things, horrible things, and unlike other men he had not grown dulled to the horror of them. It was as though the soul of him suffered daily from the same shock, the wounds that remained bleeding.

He sat and stared. To the other and cruder men he was something of an oddity. He seemed bemused, asleep. And at night he slept badly. They had known him to start awake shouting and struggling. He spoke gently, slowly, and seldom. He never went to the estaminet and got merry and tickled Josephine the fat little waitress. When not on duty he always appeared to be sitting and staring and meditating upon some strange problem that was never

solved.

Yet there were two Scarsdales, the nursing orderly and the man who sat and stared. In the wards he was known as “Hands” or “Old Bossy” because when at work he was the best orderly in the Clearing Station. He had gentleness, a quite extraordinary gentleness, strength, tenderness of touch. When some particularly ghastly case had to be handled, that poor piece of pulp was fortunate if Scarsdale’s hands were there on duty. In bending to lift some poor devil his face had a kind of beauty.

### 3

It was a hot and stuffy night in August. The tent smelt of grey flannel shirts impregnated with sweat. Brown blankets had been tossed aside. Someone snored. In the high distance an aeroplane droned.

The tent was compelled back to consciousness by the sound of a man shouting. It turned over; it grumbled; it swore.

“What—the hell—!”

In the dimness of a summer dawn the tent became aware of “Hands” sitting naked to the waist, one arm extended and with a finger pointing. He had a strange, ashy look; his eyes stared, the lean, white body of him had a rigidity. His ribs stuck out.

He said very softly—“I say, you men, the war’s going on over there.”

The tent stared, propped upon elbows, raising tousled heads. There was a silence, incredulous, gathering invective. And Scarsdale, with that air of wide-eyed illumination, repeated the words.

“The war is going on over there.”

Someone reached for a boot. Obviously a man who woke up seven other men at three o’clock in the morning to tell them that the war was in progress, was asking for trouble. The boot missed Scarsdale’s head and flopped against the canvas.

“Why, you blasted fool—”

But Scarsdale was unmoved; he had a visionary look.

“I have never seen the war. I have been here two years. It is quite wrong. Don’t you agree with me that it is quite wrong?”

The tent, challenged, glowered upon him.

“Well, of all the blasted fools!”

“You’re damned lucky, my lad.”

“Why not take an afternoon off, old son, and go up and have shrimps and tea in the trenches?”

Scarsdale’s white figure remained motionless.

“That’s just what I’m going to do.”

“What!”

“You’re balmy. Lie down you blasted old idiot.”

In the half-light Scarsdale seemed to smile, and then very quietly he lay down and pulled up his blanket. He did not utter another word, and the tent with heavings and twistings and a sense of heat and disgust resettled itself in an atmosphere of stale shirt and army blanket. It had nothing more to say about Scarsdale, just as it had nothing more to say about the war. Both were bloody, and when you had used that adjective, the English language failed you.

But in Scarsdale something quivered, the spirit of him that had been submerged, the essential self that had sat dumb and distressed watching ambulances come and go. He had been wounded in living among wounds. He was not quite like those other men to whom the war had become a kind of habit, and who could look upon its wreckage with calm and accustomed eyes. Men grew callous; a self-protecting skin seemed to cover their souls. As an orderly Scarsdale had sometimes carried messages to the officers’ mess, and he remembered one particular night when the mess had been playing bridge. He had delivered his message.

“A bad case just come in, sir.”

The officer responsible had called three no trumps.

“All right.”

The game had gone on, and Scarsdale, somehow fascinated, had stood there with his glance glued to the four figures at the table. He had watched the cards played, and the intent faces of the players. He had marvelled, and yet what was there to marvel at? Ambulances came and ambulances went, and men must drink and play.

A voice had spoken sharply.

“Orderly.”

“Sir.”

“What are you waiting for?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“Well, clear out.”

He had cleared out with a sudden strange feeling of heat about the ears, for his ears had heard other words; “The damned fool standing there like a cataleptic.” Yet he wasn’t a damned fool, but a man hurt and a little bewildered, a man who had not been able to get on terms with the war, or to regard it as normal. Ambulances coming in, and ambulances going out; routine, the business of dealing with broken bodies. For these doctors did their job; they might drink whisky and tell smutty stories and make much noise, but in the wards and in the operating theatre they had keen eyes and careful hands. They had a devotion of their own, the practical man’s pride, his credo. When the war flared to some periodic, bloody climax, Scarsdale bemused with weariness, had watched these doctors working without sleep, until their faces grew all lined and grey and their eyes were sunken or stuck on stalks. The eyes of weary men behave differently.

Ambulances coming, ambulances going, squelching and rolling in at the muddy gate.

And suddenly Scarsdale had heard a cry, one of those inward cries that startle and shatter a man’s consciousness.

“Souls—souls! My god, not broken bodies, but broken souls!”

## 4

The war was both formal and informal. Scarsdale granted a pass for the day, fraternized with the R.A.M.C. orderly of an outgoing ambulance and was taken on board.

“Where do you want to go, chum?”

“Where are you going?”

“Menin Road dressing-station.”

“How far from the front line?”

The orderly looked at him curiously.

“Three or four miles. Bit lively just at present.”

“I want to go up to the trenches.”

“What for? To see a pal?”

“No, to see the war.”

“See the war. Gosh!”

There was no accounting for some people’s tastes.

The ambulance carried Scarsdale through Flanders. It was a very peaceful day with a large and spacious summer sky and a light breeze playing in the poplars. Corn was ripening. The spires of churches thrust slim grey wedges into the blue of the sky. Women and old men were working in the fields and Scarsdale looking back saw the landscape as in a frame enclosed by the canvas tilt of the ambulance.

They came to Poperinghe and passed through it and in the grey streets of that little Flemish town Scarsdale felt the first tremor of something. There were smashed houses, a sadness, a suggestion of fear. It was as though the town listened. Great poplars lined the road, and here and there the trees were broken; the fields had a shabby look.

The country grew more shabby and desolate. There were troops on the road, transport, guns. Scarsdale met the eyes of some of the marching men; they seemed to stare at him like mute animals, sullenly, stupidly. From somewhere came a rushing sound; and the roar of an explosion.

The orderly grinned.

“The old sod’s shelling the road. Long range. We’ve been pretty lucky lately.”

But Scarsdale noticed that the man’s face had changed. He was a fair, blue-eyed lad, casual, talkative. Away there among the fields his face had seemed smooth and plump, but now it looked older; the lines of it had sharpened; the blue eyes were restless. It seemed to Scarsdale that this other man was listening, and that the drums of his own ears had suddenly grown tense.

He said, “There’s something different up here.”

The orderly stared at him.

“Different! I should say so. You’ve got to the part where there’s always the chance of a bloody mess.”

They passed through the lesser desolation that was Vlamertinghe and the

greater desolation that was Ypres. The landscape was all jagged remnants, torn earth, rubbish, blasted trees. In the roadway near the Menin Gate, Scarsdale saw a splodge of blood in the road, and near it a dead horse. Some men were clearing away the wreckage of a smashed limber. There was a sudden metallic crash among some ruins close by, and rubbish and dust surged into the air. And Scarsdale felt a contraction of his stomach; his knees trembled a little. He found himself listening.

The orderly looked at him and laughed. Scarsdale wondered why the fellow laughed. He had been watching Scarsdale's eyes coming out on stalks.

“Bit lively to-day.”

The ambulance drew up outside a row of doorways that appeared to give entrance to piles of broken brick and sandbagged shelters. R.A.M.C. men lounged uneasily. A stretcher with a body on it was being carried through a doorway under a rolled up gas-curtain. An officer came hurriedly from one bolt-hole and disappeared as hurriedly into another. Fifty yards up the road a volcanic gush of black dirt and smoke spurted into the air. Scarsdale had seen a yellow red glare in the centre of it. The crash of the explosion seemed to shake something inside him.

He got out of the ambulance. He felt a sudden urge towards one of those bolt-holes in the pyramids of broken brick. He stood in the middle of the road as though his feet had suddenly adhered to it; he felt unable to move; the conscious part of him seemed paralysed.

The car orderly grinned, and thrust towards Scarsdale a half-empty packet of cigarettes.

“Have a fag, old lad.”

Scarsdale put out a hand, and was astonished to find that his fingers somehow appeared incapable of picking out one of the white paper tubes. He stared at his own fingers. The orderly gave the packet a shake, and a cigarette protruded.

“Still on the job? You can take the next bus back.”

Something inside Scarsdale winced and hardened. His tight bowels yearned.

“No. I'm going up. Which way?”

“Right along the road till you come to Hell Fire Corner.”

“What's it like?”

“Like? Oh, it’s just Hell Fire Corner, a bit messy. There’s a duck-board track on the left.”

“Yes.”

“That’ll take you up to Zonnebeke—if you feel like it. And if you get to Zonnebeke don’t stand messing about near the church or the soda-water factory. They’re bloody.”

Scarsdale, with a cigarette between lips that were rather pale, nodded, and smiled a cracked smile.

“Thanks. I’ll be getting on. Suppose there will be buses running back to No. 37 this evening?”

“Sure. So-long, old lad.”

“So-long.”

Scarsdale walked down the road to Menin. He did not like the road to Menin, and he liked Hell Fire Corner less. My god, what a landscape! Desolation upon desolation! Horror, fear! The very shell-holes were mouths full of fear. They had crumbling, oozy lips. And there was rubbish everywhere, or an upheaval of things that suggested rubbish. The very earth seemed to have been torn to tatters. This blasted landscape, this atmosphere of anguish and of fear, while overhead the summer sky was big and blue with white clouds.

Scarsdale got away suddenly from Hell Fire Corner. He ran; he had reason to run; he sighted the duck-board track and clattered along it, until a shell blew up a section of it somewhere behind him. He fell. It was his fear that fell. He found himself half in and half out of a shell-hole, and looking down at something that floated in water that was the colour of pea-soup. A pair of legs in puttees protruded from under a greatcoat. And Scarsdale was conscious of sudden intense nausea. He stared at those legs as though fascinated. His heart was beating a hundred a minute. He could feel it. Its throbbings seemed to shake his body.

Presently he got up. Something made him get up, a little, thin, sneering pride. His lips felt razor-edged. He crammed his cap down and looked about him. His legs quivered, and he cursed them.

“Damn you, keep still.”

Abruptly he became aware of the loneliness of the landscape. There was not a human figure to be seen, no, not one. He alone seemed to be standing upright under that summer sky in a desolation of shell-holes and tumbled earth. He saw the duck-board track going on over the slope of a low hill like some



immense tape-worm squirming from east to west.

For the moment this sense of isolation frightened Scarsdale almost as much as did the ripping, metallic shell-bursts. Where was everybody? There were thousands of men somewhere. He hesitated. He wanted to go back as quickly as possible by the way he had come, and not to cease from going back until he was among the quiet, unshelled fields. He fought against the importunities of his fear. It was fierce, shameless, without honour. It would listen neither to reason nor to reproaches. It stood naked and unabashed.

Yet, he went on. He forced himself on. He did not run, but plodded doggedly along the duck-boards. By the carcass of a dead tree and under the shelter of a mud bank he saw a row of guns crouching like strange beasts in pits. Not a soul was to be seen. Extraordinary! And over this seeming solitude a kind of sinister silence was stretched like a tense skin, a silence that reverberated when a shell burst where hundreds of other shells had fallen.

## 5

Scarsdale came to Zonnebeke. He saw the red excrescence which was the corpse of the church, some dead and broken trees, a low hill pitted with shell-holes and crowned with a little mound of red brick. A road, or what had been a road, ran between the church and the hill. Away on his left front a rusty gasometer lay tilted, huge and strange and ridiculous. A gasometer! What next?

He avoided Zonnebeke. He skirted round it towards the north. He saw a few figures in khaki near the mound of broken bricks. A track led up to a little plateau. There were fewer shell-holes here, and some remnants of vegetation.

Suddenly a man came running. He appeared from nowhere; he had his head down.

Scarsdale spoke.

“Is it far to the trenches?”

The man did not stop. He slackened his pace for a moment and stared. His blue eyes had a strange, set look.

“Straight on. Sunken road.”

He ran on. If he felt any surprise at seeing Scarsdale there he did not show it. Loitering was unwholesome. And again Scarsdale was alone.

This little plateau lay sheeted with sunlight, a study in brown against the blue of the sky. It was hot, very hot, and Scarsdale was sweating, yet down there on the duck-board track he had shivered. He went on. He felt a little less afraid, for this little plateau seemed more peaceful. Actually a lark was singing overhead.

Scarsdale smiled. He stood still.

“What do the birds think of our war?”

What a fool was man! For man in the mass was fooled by a phrase, a mere catch-cry. And when the war was over would the crowd listen to other catch-cries, the apt little phrase from the lips of a demagogue? Thank God, the birds and the beasts were neither patriots nor politicians. He walked on; he came to the sunken road; he was passing a cutting in the brown bank when he saw a man sitting in the bottom of the trench. The man was all brown; so was the soil, but the sky was a blue sheet. The man had his back to the earth wall, and his grey shirt lay across his knees.

## Chapter Two

MARWOOD.

That was Scarsdale's first glimpse of Marwood, a man in a brown cleft of the earth, intently and solemnly picking lice from his shirt. It was as though the clock of time had gone back to the days when there were no clocks, and man,—primitive and unadorned,—squatted in a hole, and scratched himself. Almost it was ape-like.

Scarsdale entered the trench. It was no more than a sap cut in the earth for shelter. The man with the shirt sat in a patch of sunlight; he had slipped on his tunic while dealing with his shirt, and it being unbuttoned, showed the whiteness of his chest. So absorbed was he in the business of the moment that he remained unaware of Scarsdale's presence until the visitor was close upon him.

He glanced up. His face expressed neither surprise, not resentment, nor pleasure. It had a sallow darkness. The eyes were inarticulate, full of an infinite, dumb sadness; they were hopeless eyes, and as Scarsdale looked into them he remembered the cry of his inward voice. Broken souls.

He said, "You're busy."

The man with the shirt compressed something between thumb and finger.

"Obviously. Must do something."

He looked up at Scarsdale, and for a moment his eyes lost their dead expression, for Scarsdale was unusual. He had no steel hat, no box-respirator, no flashes.

"Where have you blown from?"

"No. 37 C.C.S."

"What! What the devil are you doing up here?"

"I've come up to see the real thing. I've only seen the other end of it."

"Good lord!"

He let his shirt lie across his knees.

"You must be damned innocent. How did you get up here?"

"I had a lift on an ambulance, and then I walked."

“Took the day off, in fact, for a nice country ramble.”

His slate-blue eyes were bitter. He had one of those large, sallow, flat faces that light up but rarely with a smile. He looked as though he had never smiled. His hands were dirty; he had shaved himself indifferently, and yet he had some quality that saved him from being squalid.

“Well, how do you like it?”

Scarsdale stared at the man’s boots.

“I’ve been afraid. I wanted to bolt. Everything’s so strange.”

“Strange!”

His echoing of the word mingled scorn and pathos.

“Well, anyway, I’m damned. Did you meet anybody?”

“One man—in a hurry. That’s what struck me as so extraordinary.”

“What, the hurry?”

“No, the solitude.”

The man’s dark head went down; he seemed to become enveloped in darkness.

“It’s nothing like the solitude inside you. Hell!”

And suddenly he snarled at Scarsdale.

“Sit down. You had better crawl under that ground-sheet there and hide in the hole if anybody comes along. You’d be for it.”

“For it. Why?”

“No tin hat, no respirator, no nothing. No business here—either. Got a fag on you?”

Scarsdale had. He sat down with his back to the earth wall, but not too close to the grey shirt. The man’s dirty fingers picked a cigarette from the packet. He tapped it on the back of his hand, and groped in the right-hand pocket of his tunic for a match. Sullenly he contemplated the flame, and then lighting the cigarette, drew the smoke in deep.

“Thanks. Nothing worth living for now but the rum and the cigs, though there’s a sort of filthy joy in a clean shirt and hot stew. What the devil made you come up here?”

“I felt I ought to.”

“Ought to! That sounds like the old brass band and music-hall stunt days. Like to stay here?”

“No.”

“That’s better. The sort of slush you get up here drowns all other sorts of slush. Pretty comfy where you are.”

“Sometimes I’m ashamed. You see—I was over forty when I volunteered, and not too fit. They made me—”

The sallow man cut in.

“Don’t apologize. Thank your blighted stars. No false modesty. Married, are you?”

“No.”

He of the shirt fell into a kind of muse. His eyes stared. He inhaled smoke and blew it through his nostrils, and his nostrils seemed to sneer. Then he unbuttoned the breast pocket of his tunic and drew out a wad of old letters and photographs. He spread them on his shirt, and selecting a photograph, passed it to Scarsdale.

“That’s the one.”

“Your wife?”

“No, daughter. Good kid. Should like to see her again, but I shan’t.”

“Why not?”

“My number’s up. I know.”

Scarsdale glanced at him as though to say—“O, rot,” but he did not say it, for the man’s eyes had a hopelessness. So Scarsdale looked at the photograph, and saw a girl with a plain, square face, and a cloud of jet-black hair. She resembled her father, and her eyes were like her father’s, save that they were young and bright, and without that lamentable hopelessness. She looked determined, and rather too square about the chin and forehead for a girl, but the face had a clarity. Across a corner of the photo was written, “Daddy, with Julia’s love.”

Scarsdale had the feeling that he ought to say something about the photograph, something that would please the man, but while he was still looking at it he heard the other’s voice suddenly blurting out words that sounded inconsequential and incongruous.

“Women! O, lord women! Seeing ’em makes you mad. Silk stockings or

high boots,—and the little aprons the French girls wear. And my wife’s a—O, well that’s that!”

He looked sideways at Scarsdale and held out his hand for the photograph.

“Good kid. Only live thing I care a damn about. And I shan’t see her again. Funny, isn’t it?”

Scarsdale felt himself penetrated by this other man’s sadness. Here in the trenches you were in contact with elemental things, and men became fatalists. They were chained to an idea. Even while cursing the war, and dragging their feet through the mud, or sharing their food with the flies, they accepted the inevitableness of the bloody business. And from being dumb and desperate they laughed, just as the man with the shirt threw his head back suddenly and laughed.

“Funny, isn’t it! Millions of men squatting in trenches and shell-holes, just because—Makes one marvel. Why don’t we all walk home? And yet when Jerry goes for us or we go for Jerry—we are just like a lot of mad beasts. Fastened up in cages, and then let out to tear each other.”

He threw away the end of his cigarette.

“You’re a Londoner.”

Scarsdale nodded.

“Same here. Chelsea. Clerk in an estate agent’s office. Used to be. Quite a sober sort of fellah. And you?”

“Canonbury Square.”

“Upper Street—Islington. O, God! Something in the city, are you?”

“What they used to call a literary gent.”

“Going back to it?”

“I suppose so.”

There was silence between them, a staring, heavy silence. Across the strip of blue sky an aeroplane flying high passed like a faint, silvery moth. A piece of earth slithered down with a dry, rattling sound. The man began to finger his shirt.

“My name’s Marwood. Look here, if you take my advice, you’ll cut and run.”

“Why?”

“Why! Because it’s nice and quiet. Fritz’s dinner-hour you know. Later he’ll get busy. If I were you I’d shin it.”

“That sounds rather like—”

“Sense, old lad. I’d cut and run—now, if I wasn’t sure I should be caught and shot.”

Said Scarsdale, drawing in his long legs.

“No, you wouldn’t. Some of us stick things out.”

He got up. He felt a sort of shame in leaving this other man there chained to his fate.

“Perhaps we’ll meet in London.”

“In hell, more likely, or your old C.C.S. Well, good luck. If Fritz starts a hate go flat on your belly. No use doing the heroic stunt with H.E. flying about.”

His sallow face cracked in a grin, but his eyes retained their intolerable sadness, and Scarsdale, dropping his packet of cigarettes on the grey shirt, walked suddenly away and did not look back.

## 2

Scarsdale raised his hand to the knocker of the door, but again he hesitated. His hand sank to his side. His consciousness was both here and there, divided and yet joined together. He seemed to see both this dark door in a London street and that bed in a ward, and Marwood’s dying face.

Yes, it had been a strange coincidence, and the eyes of the man with the shirt had retained their intolerable sadness. His eyes had beckoned Scarsdale, and the orderly had bent over him.

“Look in my pocket. Letters and a photo. Don’t want strangers messing about with them. No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace. Julia.”

Scarsdale had understood.

“You want me—?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll do it when I go on leave.”

Marwood had smiled a pinched and tragic smile at him, and had gulped a few more words.

“Damned silly. Muddle. No more lice and cold feet. O, my God, what a muddle!”

And in a little while he had died.

Scarsdale’s eyes came back to the dark door, and if a door can have eyes, its eyes were the eyes of Marwood; a man who had died believing in nothing, hoping for nothing. There was no mystery other than that of knowing that man did not know what lay behind the closed door of his consciousness. God had withdrawn himself, even the gentle god of man’s own creating, and man’s cleverness had created another god of steel and powder and gas. Cleverness and chaos. Had man ever shown himself more callously and cunningly cruel?

But this dark door in this dark street? Was there nothing behind it, no light that was not an illusion, no glimmer of faith in something or someone? For the war had rent the bowels of the world’s compassion, and left an emptiness. There had been too much death, too much dirt to dirt, and though humanity might put on the old garments of sentiment it did not feel itself to be in any sacred place. A slaughter-house and a scavenger’s cart, and people trying to be callous and nice and efficient. He could not efface the memory of Marwood’s eyes, for they were so much like the eyes of his own pre-war self staring at a pock-marked earth instead of at a picture by Millet. Scarsdale had been a sentimentalist. He had believed in love and the lamb and the lily. He had read his Matthew Arnold and his Ruskin in front of a bachelor fire in Canonbury Square while eating buttered toast. He had been a gentle, credulous sort of creature.

Again, Scarsdale raised his hand to the knocker. The rattat had more emphasis than he had intended to give it, and he stood back a little from the door like a shy man who has heard his own voice raised too loudly. He had not greatly wanted to come to No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace, or to get himself mixed up with other people’s emotions. But he had promised Marwood. He listened. He heard a sound of movement on the other side of the door. A key was turned.

The door was opened, but not too widely. He saw a dim face and a dark figure. He was conscious of being looked at, and unwelcomingly so. He raised his hand to the peak of his cap.

“I beg your pardon, is this Mrs. Marwood’s?”

The dim face had an uncompromising stillness. He was very conscious of



being scrutinized.

“We don’t want any of you beasts here.”

He realized that the door was being closed, and that the face was being eclipsed by the dark edge. Beasts! But why beasts? His astonishment protested.

“Excuse me, my name’s Scarsdale. I was with Marwood—”

The edge of the door remained motionless.

“You have come from France?”

“Yes. Are you Mrs. Marwood?”

“No. I’m the daughter.”

### 3

But the door remained for a moment like a half-closed barrier between them, while Scarsdale stood and wondered. He wondered at her silence and at her unfriendliness, and at the way she had uttered that scathing, whip-like word. He was puzzled too by her hesitation. But was it hesitation? The dimly defined figure of her youth had a deliberate solidity, and he remembered the face of the photograph, broad and open, with its squareness of chin and forehead. She could not be much more than twenty. And she was keeping him upon the doorstep as though she mistrusted life, and was in no hurry to compromise or to surrender.

“I’m sorry.”

Her voice was sudden, and it was different. It retained its frank abruptness, while discarding its hostility. Its effect upon Scarsdale was curious. It was as though he stood on the threshold of a new age and heard the voice of youth speaking, while the face of youth was veiled. She was strange, and he was three and forty, and feeling himself mute in the face of her young strangeness.

She stood aside.

“You have something for me.”

“Yes. A packet of letters. Your father asked me—”

“Please come in. You won’t mind if I close the door. They are so fussy about lights.”

He found himself with her in the darkness of the passage.

“I think all the fuss is nearly over.”

She slid past him and opened a door, and he saw her profile against the light. Her hair was bobbed, and it stood out rebelliously in a vigorous cloud, nor did it soften the squareness of chin and forehead. She wore black, with nothing to relieve it. Her strong throat had a defiant austerity.

“Come in.”

Scarsdale followed her into the front room of No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace. It was like thousands of other rooms in thousands of other back streets. The furniture, imitation mahogany, chairs and sofa covered with a fabric that suggested a reddish plush, was the obvious cheap suite bought at some suburban shop. The sofa looked as though it had never been sat upon, and would have resented any such familiarity. A chiffonier and a cheap, glass-fronted bookcase confronted each other. The grate had vivid orange tiles. A plant stand in the form of a tall tripod supported a brass pot. On the mantelpiece a marble clock separated two gaudy purple and gold vases.

“Please sit down.”

Scarsdale sat down on the severe sofa. There was no fire, and the room felt chilly. He held his cap by the peak. The girl had closed the door, and as she closed it the brass rod supporting a purple plush portiere uttered a melancholy squeak. She stood a moment looking at Scarsdale, and he, meeting her eyes for a moment, realized her as a dark and handsome young creature, but somehow strangely cold.

She too sat down, deliberately, with her eyes still on him. She had chosen to sit on one of the hard and ugly chairs that were so firmly and obviously stuffed with some alien substance, for they had no resiliency, neither youth nor age. She sat very upright, with a dignity in her square shoulders and strong young throat. Her very deep-blue eyes had a stillness; they looked black.

Scarsdale did not feel at ease under the stare of her eyes. She disturbed him, for like the war she was somehow strange and unexpected and a little terrifying, and unbuttoning the flap of a pocket he produced a small packet done up in brown paper. He rose and handed it to her.

“I was with your father when he died.”

She took the parcel and proceeded to open it, and Scarsdale sat down again as though effacing himself. He wondered whether she would shed tears over those letters, for Marwood had been dead less than six weeks. But she did not show any emotion. Having opened the parcel, and turned over one or two of the letters, she replaced them in the brown paper, and looked again at

Scarsdale. Her apparent lack of emotion puzzled him.

“You were with father?”

He made a movement with his cap.

“Yes, at the Clearing Station. I’m an orderly there. He asked me to bring these letters home. He said there was one particular letter, a letter to you.”

“The one on the top that hasn’t been opened?”

“Probably. He had written it just before he was hit.”

She sat for a moment staring at a mark on the carpet, and then suddenly she rose and stood by the door. Her eyes seemed less dark, and Scarsdale’s impression was that she was suppressing inward emotion, and that she wanted to be alone. He got up. He felt that he ought to say something sympathetic.

“I’ll be going now. Probably, you—”

She looked him straight in the face and gave him her hand.

“Thank you so much. It has been very good of you. I suppose you are going back again?”

“Yes, next week.”

Her bright young pallor offered him no illusions, and then quite suddenly her face changed. Someone had opened the street door, and had opened it exuberantly, and was making vigorous use of the doormat. A voice hailed the whole house.

“Ju, I say—Ju.”

“Hallo.”

“I trod in an awful squdge in the dark. Where are you?”

“Here.”

He came in to them with a cheerful troubling of the purple portiere, a boy with brown eyes and a little eager face. He looked at his sister, and then at Scarsdale, and his glance at Scarsdale was sudden and questioning and almost hostile.

“O, sorry—”

The girl’s eyes were different when she looked at him. Her face lost its squareness, it’s air of reserve.

“This is Harry. Harry, Mr. Scarsdale brought me some letters. Your

supper's waiting in the kitchen."

Scarsdale liked the boy's delicate little face. He smiled down at it, and a sudden smile came back to him. They had nothing to say to each other; the smile was sufficient. But the boy had left the door open, and Scarsdale had a feeling that Julia Marwood was willing him to pass through it and out into the street.

He went. She accompanied him to the door, even opened it for him, and gave him her hand.

"Thanks—ever so much. Perhaps we shall see you again some day."

"Perhaps."

He realized that he was a mere messenger, a stranger appearing out of the night and returning to it. He had fulfilled a function. She wanted to be alone with those letters and her brother.

## 4

To Scarsdale the street seemed darker than before, perhaps because he had been sitting in a lighted room, but when he had closed the gate of No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace, he felt suddenly and depressingly alone. He hesitated, and then, turning towards Spellthorn Square, he knew that his visit to Marwood's house had both disturbed and disappointed him. But why? What claim had he upon those other Marwoods, that dark young woman with the enigmatic face and the boy her brother? He had been a mere bearer of letters, and yet something in him had come away unsatisfied.

But why? Was it that he had nowhere to go save to that cheap little hotel in Bloomsbury? Was it that he was realizing that at three and forty his old self, the familiar self of the last twenty years had lost its physical solidity, and was becoming dematerialized? The change was indefinable yet somehow startling. It was as indefinable as this new London cloaked in darkness, yet menacingly there like a sinister presence. Yes, sinister, that was the word. The war had stripped him naked, and in this new strange London he felt chilled and raw and vaguely scared.

He paused under the dark trees of Spellthorn Square. The pavement was slimed with dead and sodden leaves. Not autumn, brilliant and crisp, if strangely sad, but a sense of life falling, of decay, of old things gone, and of the darkness pregnant with some strange renewal. What would happen when

the war was over? What would happen to him? Would he find himself sub-editing the *Sabbath*, and reviewing books for the *Scrutator*, and writing his weekly article for *Harvest*? The Sabbath? What a dead word! And his rooms in Canonbury Square, and all that pleasant and rather old-maidish routine!

Something in him felt frightened. He seemed to breath raw air. His very feet felt insecure on those slimy leaves.

He had strolled on. He stopped dead. Something was happening close to the railings. He got the impression of a struggle going on, of two bodies interlocked, of rapid breathing. And then one of those dark figures uttered a little spasm of a cry. It was like the low cry of an ecstatic, satisfied animal.

Scarsdale slipped past. He fled; he felt shocked, and surreptitious, yet strangely tantalized. He realized that he was walking very fast, and breathing hard like those two shadowy, interlocked figures. The damp darkness had grown muggy and hot.

This new, raw world! Or was it that he was seeing life afresh, as it was, reality? Had some conventional skin been stripped from him by the war?

And then he became conscious of a face, the face of Marwood's daughter floating in the darkness, tantalizing, strange. It was like the face of the new world, enigmatical, vivid, disturbing, real. It was youth. And he—he was three and forty.

## Chapter Three

HARRY had been persuaded to go to bed and he had been the more easily persuaded because he was a page at the Ponsonby Hotel in Cromwell Road, and had been on his feet most of the day; also, he was devoted to Julia, and his devotion made him docile. He slept with his brother Bob, in the back room at the top of the stairs, but brother Bob was seventeen and full of swagger, and earning four pounds a week and spending it on swagger. He stayed out late. He was a swarthy, awkward, sensual young brute who wore yellow boots and flaring ties, and greased his hair, and spoke with a slight snuffle.

Julia had views upon Bob, even as she had views upon her mother. Harry was different; he had mischievous, soft eyes, eagerness, a kind of fragility; he was a clean and lovable child. His smile was like the buttons down his little blue jacket, and at the "Ponsonby" people smiled at him kindly.

" 'Morning, Marwood."

"Good morning, sir. Your paper, sir."

He was a page in the book of the day's good manners.

His sister had sent Harry to bed. Julia had other things to do, urgent, secret, significant things. She had read that last letter of Marwood's and her eyes had given a dark gleam. She went into the kitchen and opened a drawer in which her father had kept an assortment of tools, a claw-hammer, a screwdriver, a couple of chisels, a gimlet and a box of nails and screws. She chose the screwdriver, and returning to the front room, she locked the door and moved the chiffonier aside. The floor-boards were stained, and in one of the boards she saw two faint lines running across the board's length, the marks of a saw. She knelt down; she found the heads of the screws, and withdrawing them, she prised up the panel. In the little black oblong cavity, a small black, japanned box lay between two floor joists. Julia lifted it out, and letting it lie in her lap, she opened the lid.

Her father's will.

She spread the stiff and crackling sheet. She read. The will was very brief and simple, and even its legal jargon could not cloud its blunt purpose. She noticed the date, and the names of the witnesses. Marwood had had this will drawn nine months ago when he had been at home on his last leave.

In it he left No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace and all the fitments and furniture

absolutely to his daughter, also a sum of two hundred pounds. His wife's name was not mentioned.

For half a minute she squatted there motionless. Her dark eyebrows seemed to come closer together; her right hand clenched itself. And then, suddenly, upon her stern young face tears trickled. She might be in confusion as to her emotions, but the thinking and purposive part of her saw life clearly through its tears. She felt very near to her father, nearer than when he had been the man about the house. She understood, as far as a young girl can understand, the moods and vagaries of a worried man who had a very indifferent mate, and a family to keep. She could remember him using these tools, pottering about in slippers, sallow and solemn and rather silent. He had had sudden strange rages, and days when he had been submerged in silence. She could remember a night when he had thrashed his elder son with a fury and a mercilessness that might have shocked her had she not been prejudiced against Bob. Poor, funny old Dad! The little house seemed suddenly full of him, and his hammerings and his slippers, and the big curved briar pipe, and his air of rather sullen wistfulness. They had been great pals. His pet name for her had been "Ju-Ju". Almost she expected to hear his voice—"Come on, Ju-Ju. Half an hour and Battersea and back before supper."

She had divined in her father a kind of secretiveness, as though the hiding of certain things had given him a whimsical satisfaction. He had had a streak of mystery in him, perhaps because his life was so very unmysterious, and like a boy he felt the lure of mischief. She could remember the way he would wink at her with an air of sallow gravity, and lure her out into the little back garden, and perhaps prod her with his finger, and whisper.

"What about a little skylark? Charlie Chaplin's on. Let's sneak out."

She had known that her father's secretiveness had been directed against her mother, but until the coming of the war she had not understood the inwardness of their hostility. Always she had sided with her father, and now, as she sat on her heels and folded up his last testament and put it back in the black box, she realized the significance of their comradeship. Something endured. Hatred and love could be signed and sealed to the purpose of life, and to the business of getting a living.

She replaced the piece of floor-board and the screws, and rising to her feet, pushed the chiffonier back into its place. She was grave, deliberate, determined. Her tears were dry. Unlocking the door she carried the box up into her bedroom, put it away in the bottom drawer of her chest-of-drawers, and covered it with underclothing. It would be safe there until the morning.

Julia Marwood was half-way down the stairs when she heard the front door knocker in action. The sound startled her, for the hand had not produced Scarsdale's restrained rattat, but a summons that was ferociously playful. She expected her mother, and she expected that young swashbuckler Robert, but Robert even in his most swaggering moments did not knock like that. For a moment she remained leaning against the banisters. She had something of the air of a cat with her fur rising, and her eyes at gaze for the possible dog.

Then she went silently down into the passage, and gliding toward the door, stood listening, her head bent forward and slightly to one side. The curve of her neck had the tenseness of a bow. She put her hand to the key, but did not turn it.

She could hear voices, surreptitious, gloating, conspiratorial. There was a scuffling sound, a little giggling laugh. She withdrew her hand from the key, and stood back, and then with a sudden and savage shake of the head, she turned the key and the handle and drew the door open with a gesture of violence.

She saw her mother, and behind her mother a man's brown slouch hat, the hat of an Australian soldier.

Her eyes met her mother's. The mere defiance of that mutual stare was but brittle glass covering infinite and hidden secrecies. Nothing and everything had been confessed long ago and in silence, and between them tacit hatreds and scorns, accusations and protests, looked out from two dark chambers. The girl was motionless, the woman in a kind of smirk of movement, her hands unfastening the buttons of her black mackintosh. Her hat seemed tilted, and under it her bland, bold face had a jocund recklessness.

"Hallo, my dear."

Julia stood back to let her mother in, but one arm was tense and waiting like a spring.

"Supper's been ready. Harry's gone to bed."

Her mother silked her way in with her wet mackintosh gleaming. It had been raining. And instantly Julia slammed the door, and locked it, and did the thing so swiftly that the man in the slouch hat was left mute and effaced upon the doorstep. There was silence. The woman's figure, arrested in its glide towards the parlour door, seemed to adhere to the wall.

A foot kicked the door. And again there was silence, and then the sound of a man saying foul things as he blundered down the steps. The two women did not move. The girl's right hand was clenched as though she clutched a knife.



Mrs. Marwood removed her hat. She had her back to the room and was facing the mirror over the mantelpiece. Her daughter had remained in the doorway.

Mrs. Marwood placed her hat on the curved back of the very hard sofa, and jabbed the two long pins through it so that the hat was speared to the cushioned surface. She looked at herself in the mirror, and raising her hands, patted her hair, but she was observing the reflection of her daughter's face as well as her own. The sleek gestures of her hands and arms both suppressed and flaunted her anger.

"Harry in bed?"

"Yes."

"Bob in yet?"

"No."

They exchanged blows in uttering those curt and purely perfunctory words. Mrs. Marwood continued to be busy with her hair. She had brought into that stuffy and over-furnished little room suggestions of perfume and heat and yellowness, and the large movements of a well-fleshed body. Her eyes were blue and slightly protuberant, and like the eyes of an impudent and greedy child. These eyes were watching the implacable pale face of her daughter. It enraged her. It looked so square and stern and resolute. Also it was the face of an enigma, of the watchful and baffling silence of youth. Also it was the face of the dead Marwood.

"Anybody been?"

"No."

Mrs. Marwood, revolving suddenly like a figure turning on a pedestal, stared at her daughter, and then, with a flaunting aggressiveness, sat down on the sofa.

"You'd better go to bed."

The stillness of Julia's figure was exasperating. Consciously and wilfully it seemed to close the doorway, even as Marwood's dull and undistinguished figure had blocked the free play of his wife's exuberant adventurousness. Florence Marwood had been married at seventeen, and marriage had become for her a kind of cage in which her mature and intense vitality had raged

rebelliously. She had been married too young; and then in the end the war had to come to tantalize her very discursive appetite for all things that could happen outside No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace.

Seeing that her daughter did not move, she gave a shrug of the shoulders. She wanted to say things to Julia; bold, bitter, hazardous things, but never yet had she said them. It is possible that she was a little afraid of Julia, for Julia had the strength of her silence. She looked and said little, and to a woman like Florence Marwood, who had no restraint, this obdurate young face was like a granite wall. Instinctively she knew that no satisfaction was to be obtained from flaring in the face of such reserve. Julia reduced her mother to a mute, exasperated restlessness.

“Well, it’s a cheerful house. Any supper left?”

She was aware of something in her daughter’s eyes, a secret, triumphant gleam.

“Yes. I thought you had had supper.”

“You would. Iron rations.”

Julia’s right hand moved. It slid forward and rested on her thigh and from its white fingers the end of a key protruded. Her mother’s blue eyes fastened upon that piece of metal. She understood that she was being shown it. Her large handsome face grew flaccid. Her mouth hung open.

“You—”

The girl appeared to nod her head.

“I’m turning in now. I’ve told Bob that if he comes home after ten he can stay outside.”

She stepped back into the passage, and quietly drew the door to after her. It closed with a soundless finality, and Mrs. Marwood sat staring at it. Her face had a suffused, red muteness. Almost she looked like a woman on the edge of a spasm of coughing, and about to extrude some irritant substance. But no sound came from her. She stood up, snatched at the pins that fastened her hat to the sofa, and putting the round black head of one of the pins into her mouth, sucked it. Her teeth bit on the steel shaft.

“The young—!”

But the explosion was noiseless. She sucked the head of the pin, and her eyes stared.

Julia's alarm was set to wake her at half-past six, and when it sounded she would lie on her back for a quarter of a minute, and then with one swift movement and swish of the clothes get herself out of bed. For she was a young woman of affairs. She had housework to do, and breakfast for herself and the two boys to prepare before her day's work at Messrs. Jimson & Stent, who were estate agents. Before the war James Marwood had been Mr. Jimson's confidential clerk, and when Marwood had gone to the war, his daughter had taken his place. She had understudied her father for a month. Mr. Jimson, a little, fat, pallid man with a worried manner and a squeaky voice, had accepted the war's inevitable improvisations.

"We'll get along as best we can. Miss Marwood will be one of our impromptus."

Mr. Jimson was musical, with a taste for light opera, but Julia as an impromptu had startled his musical ear. She had seated herself at her father's desk in the office of Martagon Terrace and in six months she had developed into a dark young symphony full chorded and confident.

But on this particular morning she allowed herself to lie for a little while and contemplate the ceiling, a white sheet upon which her consciousness projected its thoughts and plans. No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace was not the house of yesterday and she arose and looked in that bottom drawer as though to assure herself that the black box was in its place. She knocked on the wall as a hint to Harry that it was time for him to get up. Her window showed her a broken sky with patches of blueness and clouds alight with fingers of gold. An old pear-tree in the narrow back garden was still afire with leaves of amber and maroon, and from its brilliant branches yellow flakes slanted noiselessly to earth.

Julia shook out her vigorous hair. The day was full of a feeling of movement, and as she sat on the edge of the bed and pulled on her stockings she thought for a moment of the man who had brought her that packet of letters. She was grateful to him, but casually so. She had thought Scarsdale quite old, older than her father, a queer and rather ineffectual old stick, but likeable. She dressed quickly. She knocked at Harry's door before going downstairs.

"Getting up?"

"O,—rather."

Her voice changed when she spoke to her younger brother. Harry was different from all the other people in the world; he was hers. She went downstairs and began to pull up blinds and draw back curtains, and on the hard sofa in the sitting-room she discovered a dishevelled figure still grossly asleep, collarless and tousled, with the hearthrug for a coverlet. Her brother Bob! Also she noticed that a window-pane had been broken.

She looked at Robert with an ominous, still hostility. So he had broken in at some scandalous hour and in a state to be satisfied with the sofa. She did not wake him. This house was a house of realities, however ugly and merciless they might be, and she closed the door on the rouse of seventeen whom the war had provided with a precocious insolence and too much money. She knew that she was going to cleanse the house of some of its realities. She was all for reality as she saw it, but not for reality as it was exhibited by Robert and her mother.

In the kitchen overlooking the narrow garden and the brilliant foliage of the pear-tree, she filled the kettle, put a match to one of the rings of the gas stove, and took the breakfast cloth from the table drawer. She was aware of them as her cloth, her table. She heard Harry on the stairs, and her sense of new power and of possession exulted. The boy came in, buttoning up his page's jacket. His face had a brightness.

“What's on, Ju?”

“On?”

“Yes, grub.”

She could smile at Harry. She knew that with an unshocked soul she would give him Bob's breakfast ration of bacon. If love could not boast of favouritism what was the use of love?

“O, the usual. There's some margarine.”

“Your turn, Ju.”

“I don't fancy it.”

He set about helping her, getting down the plates and cups and saucers from the dresser, and her dark glances touched him. He was such a clean, happy child, sensitive, affectionate. Never was it necessary to inspect his neck, or to be suspicious as to the use of a toothbrush, whereas Bob was a sloven, flashy and unclean. Certainly young Robert worked at a garage, but oil and grease and black smudges seemed to adhere to him naturally, as did other greasinesses. And the soul of Julia gave thanks for Harry's cleanliness, for his

bright eyes and for the way he looked you in the face. Harry consoled and reassured her; he was worth while; he saved No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace from being hopeless.

As she placed four rashers of bacon in the frying-pan she confronted the reality of Harry's row of buttons. He carried them with a boyish debonairness, but that did not reconcile her to the buttons. Money had to be earned, but it might be earned with a difference.

"I say,—there's some jam."

"Secret. Not for Bob."

She admonished him playfully with the fork.

"Just a dessertspoonful. Lock it up."

She felt exultant; she wanted to laugh. The bacon began to sizzle in the pan, and it, too, seemed merry. But her gaiety had a fierce edge to it. She kept glancing at her brother.

"Boots all right?"

"O, quite, Ju. But I've got a hole in my socks."

"Put them out to-night."

He was a good child; he seemed to understand that clothes had to be taken care of and that thoughtless devastations had to be remedied by his sister's hands. He had a kind of wisdom, and he was not too old or too awkward to be kissed.

So they breakfasted together, while Mrs. Marwood remained abed, and Robert continued to sleep on the sofa. Julia had turned the key on Bob, and already she was proposing to turn the front-door key on him finally and relentlessly. He was a dirty young animal, and being somehow wise to the ways of the young male, she had taken care that Harry should not be soiled by contact with his brother. All the same, she wanted Bob out of the house; he could go and wallow elsewhere on his four pounds a week.

Harry helped her to wash up the crockery. He could handle a glass-cloth daintily.

"What about mother, Ju?"

"O, she'll be down later. Time you buzzed off, my dear."

"Right-o."

She unlocked the front door for him and saw him off, and then she

unlocked the other door and surprised Bob in the act of sitting up with his hair flopping, and his socked feet protruding from under the hearthrug. She eyed him with disrelish. Her only concern was to make sure that this young man was not late at his work; she did not want him sacked and on her hands.

She said: "Nice person you are. You'll pay for that window. Get up."

He glowered at her.

"Hallo Jujube. What about breakfast?"

"You can get your own breakfast, or go out and get it."

"Aw,—sulks!"

She left him. Always she had a feeling of being soiled and cheapened by an altercation with this lout. She might have few illusions, but she was fastidious about her realities. Some people seemed to tarnish life even as they left smears on brass handles and on linoleum and tablecloths. Having many things to do, and liking them done cleanly she had no use for messy and inconsiderate people who left trails of untidiness and slimy selfishness behind them.

She went upstairs and made Harry's bed and her own, and dealt with the slops. Then she put on her hat and coat, and slipping her father's will into the little fibre attaché-case she carried with her to Martagon Terrace, she set forth upon the day's adventure.

## 4

Martagon Terrace diverged from the King's Road. It was old Chelsea, if not quite porcelain, and the office of Messrs. Jimson & Stent had adapted the front of No. 8 Martagon Terrace to the business of real estate. Two broad windows and a glass door abutted on the pavement. Mr. Jimson and his wife lived in the house above, which was of the Dickens period, dark brick and white window sashes, though the interior had to conform to Mrs. Jimson's ideas upon art.

Julia Marwood had a key of her own and could let herself into the office. Usually she arrived about a quarter to nine, in time to open the wire letter basket attached to the door, and to deal with the morning's mail. She sat at a flat-topped desk in the right-hand window, and screened from the street by yellow muslin blinds. Mr. Jimson sat at the desk in the other window when he was not conducting some private affair in the inner office. Mr. Stent was dead. An inarticulate youth in spectacles completed the firm's staff, for Messrs.

Jimson & Stent were not in a large way of business.

After three years in this Chelsea office Julia Marwood had absorbed all that there was to be learnt about the selling and letting of houses. Also she knew much that needed knowing about Mr. Paul Jimson. The most significant and suppressing fact was that he was afraid of her. He had not been afraid of her father; there had been occasions when he had been impolite to Mr. Marwood and his clerk had swallowed the affront with an air of sombre sulkiness. But Mr. Jimson in his most fussy and worried moments had never been impolite to Julia.

For the truth was she would not lie. Had she considered this peculiarity of hers impersonally she would not have counted it a virtue. Her obstinate exactitude resembled some physical idiosyncrasy, like a loathing of fat, or a distaste for vinegar or people with pale eyelashes. It was part of a kind of personal fastidiousness, a kink in the fibre of her pride, and very early in their business relationship Mr. Jimson had found his adroit ankles entangled in the tethering rope of her veracity. There had been an argument about the state of the drains in a certain house and Mr. Jimson had shown an inclination to skip delicately and imaginatively over unsalubrious realities. Miss Marwood had pulled him up.

He should have disentangled himself and got rid of her, but he didn't. Like most people who deal in embellishments and inexactitudes, his moral courage was shaky when challenged. He had not regarded Miss Marwood's presence in the office as permanent; her father would return. Moreover, she really was a very reliable young woman, tactful and thorough; she could handle people; she was amazingly mature for her age; she did not suffer from lapses and temperamental instabilities. Mr. Jimson respected her, which was another way of saying that, as a rather circuitous person, he was afraid of her directness.

Julia unlocked the office door of No. 8, placed her attaché-case on her desk, hung up her hat and coat behind the screen in the corner, and removed the morning's mail from the letter basket at the door. She began the day's routine as she always began it. The lid of the typewriter was removed; a feather duster was whisked over the desks and letter-trays and files. Then she sat down to deal with the letters, knowing that at five minutes to nine Bates would enter, remove his bowler hat, and rub his very large boots vigorously on the doormat.

“Good morning, Miss Marwood.”

“Good morning.”

His devoted spectacles glimmered at her shyly. He blushed. He was as

unfinished and as awkward as his boots, and a suppliant at her more decided feet. He was given to self-conscious clearings of the throat, and sudden, fatuous smiles.

“Rather dull this morning.”

“Much as usual.”

She was abrupt with Bates. She suppressed him, for spectacled and nervous devotion in a closed compartment measuring some fifteen feet by twelve was apt to be a nuisance. There was no room for it. She passed him the letters to be entered up.

Then Mr. Jimson arrived from the inner office, half screened by the morning paper which his wife would not allow him to read at breakfast, and Julia saw him as a neat little pair of grey and black striped trousers, a sleek small head, and a pair of pince-nez perched on a long, thin nose. Mr. Jimson was both musical and ritualistic; he attended St. Ethelburga’s Church in South Kensington, and wore a little cross of gold dangling from his watch-chain. He had a trick of fingering that cross, especially so when he was engaged in mellifluous persuadings and reassurings. It was as though he displayed it as a hall-mark. When fingering it most nervously Julia knew that he was on the edge of inexactitudes.

Standing there with the paper spread, his little feet close together, he reminded Julia of a lectern. With his head slightly on one side, he looked at her over the top of the paper. His scrutiny was always polite and faintly anxious. He had a way of pursing up his lips. Had he not once advised her—“Miss Marwood, always be polite—but firm.”

He rustled the paper.

“Excellent news. These Huns—”

He seemed to invite her to be truculent. She should remember her poor father, and exult with him. The barbarians were broken.

Her handsome pallor was confronting other destinies.

“Nothing of importance this morning, sir.”

She called him sir. It helped to keep the official furniture properly adjusted. She had more than a feeling that she was indispensable to Mr. Jimson. He had grown fussy and careless and worried, a strange combination of qualities, but then man was a strange creature. Julia’s study of the male had uncovered in him profundities of moral cowardice. Besides, she knew so much.



She said abruptly but quietly—“Do you mind if I have an hour off this morning? Private business, sir.”

Mr. Jimson looked at her suspiciously, with his head still more on one side. Was she contemplating taking another post, a more lucrative post?

“By all means. Miss Marwood. Something personal?”

“Quite. I want to consult my lawyer.”

## Chapter Four

THERE were a few leaves left to fall, though the grass of that French orchard was stippled with them. But no wind moved. A faint mist hung in the air, and the sky was of an unbroken greyness, while in the ditches dead leaves floated in brown water. There was a great stillness over everything.

Scarsdale had wanted to be alone and in this little, deserted orchard he had found solitude, a silence that covered the horizon like the canopy of cloud. He was off duty; he had walked out of the shabby little French town that had emerged from four years of tyranny and terror, and had taken the road between the poplars, but its very straightness had depressed him. He had a yearning for secret things and places, some corner where he could be alone, and by a Calvary he had come upon a lane looping its way between hedges towards groups of trees. After standing a moment at the foot of the Calvary and looking at the desolate face of the Christ, Scarsdale had followed the lane and found this orchard.

November 11, 1918.

It was the afternoon of that most strange day, strangest of all days to the men who lived through it, a mere date in the calendar to the younger generations.

Scarsdale wandered about the orchard. A few yellow leaves drifted down, and seen through the dark fretwork of branches the grey horizon had a smoky blueness. He was alone and he was restless; it was as though a little shiver of freedom stirred in those silent trees, like the shiver of spring divined even in the restfulness of winter. He stood and stared. It seemed to him that the whole world stood and stared, and with an incredulous, still face, listened for the sounds that had ceased. Peace. No more guns, no more agonies in the mud, no more fragments of humanity laid upon bloody stretchers.

Yet the solemnity and the significance of this sudden silence affected him personally. As a little centre of consciousness under that grey sky, he was aware of himself and of man as man, millions of human particles congregated into a crowd, a vastness and yet a unity. The war had stripped him, and in this orchard he felt stripped a second time, raw, and naked and new born, and somehow yearning for the comfortable old clothes of his pre-war self. Like thousands upon thousands of other men he wanted to be back in the old days, dressed in the old habits, immersed in the old job.

He watched a leaf fall. It floated, seemed to hesitate, touched the grass, and lay still. Was there anything symbolical in the fall of a leaf? Was that his idea of the future, to touch the soft grass and lie still? What of the spring, the surging of the sap?

And suddenly he felt himself troubled by a strange unrest. He had come out here to be alone, to escape from the crowd, and this solitude had become a clamour. Questions! Such obvious questions, and yet so baffling and disturbing. Going back after the war! Was there ever a going back? What would happen? These millions of men returning in a tawny crowd to a civilization which had been subtly brutalized, tarnished, cheaply gilded. Could so crude a thing as organized murder go on for years, and the world remain none the worse for it?

He was aware of a feeling of chilliness, something like fear. Or was it that he was fey, a sensitive, a little more wide-eyed than other men? What was there to fear?

Why not be like other men? He had heard some of them shouting, and seen them throwing up their caps.

“By God, the blasted old war’s over.”

Half a dozen of them had come blundering into his billet.

“What-o, Bossy. Cleaning your buttons! What!”

“I’ll not clean another blasted button. Not me.”

Someone had shouted.

“We’re going to get drunk to-night if we have to break into the blasted stores.”

Was that the idea, the reaction? Getting drunk and ceasing to clean buttons? Would the new world be something like that? But no. He had seen other men going about with looks of silence, and with eyes that were like his own, surprised, sobered, perplexed. There was that other cry deep in the hearts of decent humility. “We want to get home.” Yes, home.

He remembered suddenly that he had no home. He had lived in a couple of rooms in Canonbury Square; he had been a scribbler, a reviewer of other men’s books, a sort of mild and kindly parasite. He was shocked. A parasite, a hack? O, no, not that, but a man of letters, an essayist, a reviewer. A cultured person.

And then it came upon him suddenly that he had missed things, women,

adventure, the larger human happenings, the fine swagger of life. He had no one to go home to, no one who cared whether he returned.

Rather extraordinary!

And what would they be doing in England on this day, especially the women of England? Going into churches, sitting staring silently into the fire? Surely it was a solemn and a sacred day for the women?

Or would they be—?

What would Marwood's daughter be doing?

A quickened restlessness possessed him. He walked out of the orchard and down the lane till he came to the Calvary. He looked up at the face of Christ. It had a darkness, almost the bitterness of disillusionment.

He thought—"Has someone or something—a faith or an ideal—always to be crucified?"

He hurried on. The face of the figure had disturbed him. Was it that men and their dreams died and did not rise again?

## 2

At No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace, Marwood's daughter sat in front of the fire. It was only a little fire, and she had lit it because the war was over, and because she had just emerged from a most devastating row with her mother. She had felt cold and a little sick after she had fought her battle and won it.

She was alone. She had been pelted with words, and some of them still stuck like gobbets of cold wet mud. Her mother had lost all self-control; she had screamed obscenities. "Your father was always a mean, dirty little dog—and you—you're just his daughter." Yes, she was alone and glad to be alone after sitting stolidly in a chair, and letting her mother tear the last tempest to pieces. She—Julia—had not spoken more than two dozen words.

"The house and the furniture are mine. I am going to run this house as I please."

"You want me out of it. I'll get out of it."

Her mother had banged doors. She had been like a furious, large noise in the house, an overheated human presence, pushing furniture about, opening and shutting drawers. Something overhead had gone over with a crash, and the

glass globes in the chandelier had rattled. Then, her mother had come down the stairs quite silently, and had gone out of the house, leaving a stillness behind her. No. 53 seemed to hold its breath.

Julia nursed her knees. She was alone, for both her brothers were out on this epic November night when a great fear died and other fears were born. She did not want to go out, but warmed herself at the fire, and felt torn, and sombre and triumphant. O, but it had hurt, as most shameful things can hurt, and yet as she hugged her knees and brooded she knew that she would not relent. She could not relent. She too had brought her war to an end. The little house seemed to draw deep breaths.

Like Spencer Scarsdale in his orchard she too confronted the future, sitting squarely over against it as she sat in front of this fire, with her eyes at gaze and her chin pushed forward. Someone had once said to her—"O, you young things never know what you want," but Julia knew what she wanted, and knew that she knew it. No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace had compelled her to recognize certain realities and to choose between them. She had chosen. She wanted her mother and Master Robert out of the house, so that No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace could be herself and Harry.

That was her first objective, and beyond it, stretched other objectives that were less definite, though her attitude to life was practical. She had ambitions, however limited they might appear. The centre point of her human purposefulness was Harry, for it was Harry who evoked in her rather hard young soul a maternal glow, a saving tenderness. She wanted Harry out of that blue jacket with its silver buttons. She wanted Mr. Paul Jimson to admit her value and to raise her salary to four pounds a week. She had more than a suspicion that she coveted a share in Mr. Paul Jimson's business, and that she could develop that business. She wanted authority, independence, results, hard cash.

For Julia Marwood had been educated in no dame-school. She had grown up in No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace, in an atmosphere of wranglings, and shabbiness, and physical clashes. She had been up against the physical most of her life, and in contact with crude appetites. She had been afraid, and had learnt that other people could be more afraid. She had had to fight, and very realistically so with young Bob whose animal arrogance had used fists and feet. She had fought him with a cold, white fury, and with a strength and a courage that had driven him down steps and into corners; she had fought him until he had flinched and covered up; she had fought him for herself and for Harry. Now he was afraid of her. She had impressed her dominance upon him.

She had fought her mother, but otherwise. Their war, until the last clash,

had been more of a siege or a blockade, silent, watchful. And she had suffered. She had suffered in the most impressionable part of her young self, in all those softnesses and flushings of sex, in the bloom of her young womanhood. Her mother had disgusted her with sex, left her with a maggot in the bud of her rose, and somehow the flower had not unfolded as it should. Bob's hands had bruised her bosom and torn her hair, but Florence Marwood's excursions into the physical had left other bruises.

So, she sat before the fire and stared at it. She did not see in it the pictures which so many girls see, but coal and flame, a blackness and a redness. She looked through the windows of No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace and the windows of Messrs. Jimson & Stent. She saw beds to be made, and Harry in his buttons, shops, and the prices of things, food, clothing, some advantage to be seized, some person or situation to be confronted. Life was reality, shillings and pence, No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace, shoe-leather, a ninepenny seat in a cinema, bus fares, bargains at shops, necessities, the urgent greeds of other people. She confronted it all; she was strong; she was ten years older than her twenty-one.

Her attitude was significant, though she did not realize its significance. Almost it symbolized the pose of the new generation towards the phase that was unfolding. She had not been to any place of worship since the age of ten. Her ethics were herself, the product of her own individual make-up, and of her parentage and her environment. She had known nothing of beauty, save her father's rather inarticulate and commonplace affection for her, and the bright and eager face of her small brother. She had had to push sturdily and stubbornly against edges and obstructions in a world that was too full of people who were hard up and in a hurry.

She had learnt to grip. She had learnt to look at the price of every article. She had meant to watch the face of Mr. Jimson, and of her mother, and to keep a sophisticated scrutiny upon a blackguard brother. Life had for her few soft edges, or purple patches. Her own face, firm and white and enigmatic, was a confrontation of reality, of circumstance.

And the war was over. She was sick of the war. It had had no glamour for her. Her practical young soul wanted it swept up and tumbled away into some hole in the ground. It had been a stupid, and abominable mess. She had no sentimental feelings about it, and she did not want to sentimentalize about its products, or about the men who would come back from it.

She wanted to get on with her own particular job.

About nine o'clock Julia heard the front-door knocker; three light taps and one final and emphatic thud. That would be Harry. She got up quickly and let

him in.

“O, Ju, what a beano! Everyone’s gone jolly well mad.”

She closed and locked the door.

“Celebrating, are they?”

“I should think so! I went as far as Piccadilly. Such a squash. And the row! An old woman kissed me.”

“Did she.”

“Funny, wasn’t it? She was blubbing.”

“Well, I don’t know. Had any supper, old lad?”

“No.”

“I left some out for you.”

He was flushed and excited, and she had to sit in the kitchen and listen to his description of the crowd and the crowd’s exultation. He had thought it all a huge joke. “Women holding their skirts up high and dancing, Ju. Kicking their legs up. And officers. And lots of ’em squiffy. And the row! I saw one girl rolling in the gutter.” She listened with an air of dark-eyed thoughtfulness, watching him and over him; he was so innocent. Life was a great joke.

When he had gone to bed, she sat down again on the foot-stool in front of the sitting-room fire which had dwindled to a meagre redness. She poked it and sat holding the poker; she listened; her figure had an expectant rigidity.

She was wondering whether her mother would come back and try that locked door.

But her mother never came back.

### 3

The eyes of Florence Marwood also saw a new world in its moment of frenzy, though it was but part of a world, and neither new nor old. Some of London celebrated. It had a silly, drunken, howling countenance. It surged and shouted and screamed, and laughed. Lights, lights, let there be lights! And there were lights and there were shadows, a hustling humanity, and overhead a canopy of darkness, and no angels from Mons. The London crowd called for reality in the flesh; the war had shot angelic pinions to pieces.

Up aloft that aerie figure in bronze, poised above this pageant of a new paganism, seemed to be preparing for flight. So had the old gods looked upon Rome and fled. Who were these new barbarians, these new English? Democracy drinking to itself, and to a world fit for heroes?

Julia's mother laughed. She laughed perpetually, and waggled her hips. She was but a part of this hot, surging mass, this blur of bodies. She was wearing the Australian's hat, and the soldier had hers crammed on the back of his head. They sidled and oozed through the crowd with their arms round each other, pushing and being pushed, rejoicing in the proud flesh of victory.

Her prophetic mouth screamed strange verities. She did not speak; she screamed.

"This is a bust up of all the blasted old humbug. Where are all the b—— y padres?"

The Australian kissed her brutally.

"Yes, this old war has let in air. We know what's what. Gosh, you smell nice."

There was a sudden surging of the crowd, and they were carried with it toward a vortex where the new world was letting itself go. There were screams, laughter, confusion. People pushed and peered and asked questions. "What's on. What's the rag?" The Australian forced his way through, like a strong animal in a cattle pen, and with Marwood's widow attached to him. His face smiled a cruel, icy smile.

"Gosh!"

"What's on?"

He heaved his way further, roughly, scornfully. He had a glimpse of a half-naked woman, and of other women.

"What's on?"

"Go it, girls. Leave nothing on."

"What's happening?"

"The totties are scragging one of the women police."

Marwood's wife let out a scream of laughter. Her face was exultant.

"That's lovely. Pity it's not my —— of a daughter. She's a sort of she-bobby. We're teaching the world something, Cobber. Where are the dear padres?"



When Scarsdale heard how a part of London had given thanks to God on Armistice night he looked pained.

He and the man who had been on leave and who had shared in that solemn occasion, were sitting warming their hands at a Canadian stove in a hut somewhere in France. The hut was in darkness save for the stove, which, emitting a sombre glow, lit up the faces and the spread hands of the two men. Scarsdale's nose looked huge. His gentle eyes stared. Almost they were frightened eyes, while the man behind them was refusing to be afraid.

He said—"But that's not England. It can't be."

The other man lit a cigarette. He was red and good-natured and well-fleshed.

"A jolly big crowd of it, anyway, Bossy."

"Well, natural enough, perhaps. People must let off steam. It's the reaction, —after all these years."

The other man seemed to give the stove a knowing smirk. He had enjoyed that particular show.

And Scarsdale sat and stared. His soft, brown eyes seemed to grow more prominent. He had thought of England as a country on its knees, silent and still and sacred. He had thought of women with tear-stained faces, women praying, women sitting in half darkness with their memories.

Piccadilly Circus!

No, England was not like that. He picked up a piece of wood and dropped it into the stove. He sacrificed to his own faith in humanity, and not to Baal.

## Chapter Five

LATE in the month of March Spenser Scarsdale was packed into a goods-wagon with some twenty other men and transported to a demobilization camp at Dunkirk. This train carried eight hundred men and a dozen officers, and the whole process suggested to Scarsdale the entraining and detraining of a herd of cattle. This brown crowd of men, gathered from various branches of the service, had lost its compactness but not its cohesion. The brown blobs cohered, and tried to arrange themselves in order when shouted at by an hectoring and somewhat scornful young major. It was a docile crowd; it was going home; but already it was ceasing to be a military formation and displaying the characteristics of a mob.

The major shouted.

“Don’t crowd, don’t crowd. Form up, by the right. Two deep. Damn you, I said two deep. You’re not a lot of sheep.”

The brown mass slowly sorted itself.

“Number. As you were. I said number.”

Scarsdale, crowded in the front rank, and watching the major’s face, saw it express impatience and scorn.

“Just like cattle!”

But at last the uneasy, jostling mass was formed into fours, and marched off to the camp. Scarsdale had a little, peaky-faced R.A.M.C. private on his right, and obviously the man was feeling bitter.

“I’ve ’ad enough of being shouted at by bloomin’ toffs. What price Lenin?”

The camp was a comprehensive affair, hutments and marquees in a big flat field that had been a meadow. The organization was admirable. Mass-man in the making was paraded and distributed, housed and fed. Hot meals were ready. The huts were scrupulously clean. Scarsdale, correctly documented, and feeling most strangely like a bale of cloth that was being handled for export, wondered how the souls of his fellow-men reacted to the process. Here was bureaucracy in action, efficient, impersonal, clean, and yet somehow damnable.

In an immense hut a variety show was provided, and it was by no means a

paltry show. An infantry lance-corporal with the face of a girl, sang the old songs, and sang them to the soul of the home-going crowd.

“I’m in love—I’m in love.”

Scarsdale was strangely moved. He slipped out and wandered up and down between two dark and empty huts, with a clear, cold sky overhead stippled with stars. The night air had the tang of the sea and the spring, and he was conscious of a strange unrest, a yearning for—what? “I’m in love,—I’m in love.” Like these other and younger men he was in love with life, and with the vision of the new world that was to be, England in the spring of the year, the freedom to do this and that, youth, woman. He was going back to work, and to the earning of a living, but almost these verities were old, forgotten things grown dusty. He felt strangely and poignantly young that night, and his youth went out towards the youth of the new world.

He found himself thinking of Marwood’s daughter. A dark, handsome, and rather inscrutable creature! Her face had remained with him.

But the morrow brought other realities, and the significance of them worked in Scarsdale’s mind like leaven. He and other men were paraded, and marched, carrying their kits, to a group of huts in which the Goddess Hygeia presided over the initiation at the gate of the new freedom. Kits were handed in over a counter. The men stripped, and their clothes were taken to be baked. Naked they passed to the baths. They washed. They waited in nakedness for the final judgment.

“Next,” said a voice.

The orderly in charge gave Scarsdale a nudge, and Scarsdale, as nature had made him, passed through a canvas doorway, and found himself in the presence of a medical officer seated on a kitchen chair. He was scrutinized, and the scrutiny was keen, efficient, impartial. He was told to stretch out his hands and spread his fingers. He was examined for any sign of venereal disease. The doctor’s blue eyes were bright and hard, and when they met Scarsdale’s eyes there was no friendliness in them.

“Right. Next.”

Scarsdale was shepherded away to another compartment where clean clothes and a disinfected uniform was ready for him. He felt chilly, both within and without. He had been passed in nakedness to the new world. The cold and observant eyes of the doctor had stabbed into him a consciousness of himself as an insignificant and anonymous body, mere flesh, a carcase. The war had stripped him of spiritual garments, and peace had insisted upon seeing him

stripped again before admitting him to its world for heroes. It was all very sensible and sound, but somehow the secret soul of him felt humiliated. Possibly his pride was hurt. He found himself wondering what would have happened to him had the examiner found him unclean.

He sat on a bench, and pulled on a pair of pants.

A voice said—"Last bloomin' baby show, chum."

Another voice spoke—"Well,—I call it damned good business. Sending you home clean."

Scarsdale glanced at the last speaker, and beheld a florid, wholesome, blond young man buttoning up a khaki shirt. He had the scar of an old wound on his left forearm, but his face had no wounded look.

"Yes, jolly good business. The war's taught me a thing or two."

The less sanguine person on the other side was pulling on socks.

"Lot of blasted red tape."

"Bosh. Got a wife to go to?"

"O, plenty, you bet."

"Well, I suppose a girl won't quarrel with getting her man back clean. Sound sense."

"I'm fed up with bein' messed about."

Both of them looked at Scarsdale who sat between them, and appeared to be in a position to give a casting vote. Scarsdale was staring at his own naked feet; they were clean feet.

He said—"Yes, it's a sound idea, but in the future I'd rather do my own inspecting."

"Quite so," said the blond young man; "but some people like being dirty. That's what the doctors are up against I guess."

## 2

Scarsdale took a bus to Highbury Station. It was one of those golden days in March when the heart of northern man renews its youth, and Scarsdale was feeling young and free. Amazing emancipation! In an hour or less he would have kicked off that khaki for ever, and scorning the issue of a civvy suit,

re clothed himself in peaceful tweeds. He had written to his landlady at No. 24A Canonbury Square; he had asked for a fire.

And here was Upper Street—Islington uncoiling itself in the March sunlight, and Scarsdale, on top of his red bus, looked at the familiar buildings like a man reviewing the days of his youth. The Angel, the Agricultural Hall, “Collins”, Roberts’s row of windows. To Scarsdale it was a street of splendour because it was friendly and familiar, and on that afternoon in March his eyes were not open to its shabbiness, nor to its air of faded and distressful gentility.

He got off at Highbury Station, and strolled across to take a look at Highbury Fields, and the row of grave old houses. Yes, this was England, solid, kindly England, decorous, a little grey, suddenly beautiful and suddenly hideous. He loved it, yes even the ugliness that man had made, for it seemed so much part of himself, and of his memories. He remembered summer evenings on a seat under those trees, with a book and a pipe, and a sense of life lyrical even in suburbia. He wanted to get back into his old self, back to that comfortable routine with its pleasant, platitudinous, go as you please philosophy.

He walked along the familiar streets to Canonbury Square. How respectable they were, a little shabby and dull perhaps, but so solid and reassuring. He came to the square and stood a moment, and thought how small it looked, with its railed garden in the centre, and its flat-faced houses with their rows of windows and doors. There were Lent lilies in flower, and lilacs were brilliant with green shoots.

No. 24A was in the right-hand far corner. Scarsdale felt excited as he approached its yellow brick and stucco, and its brown front door. He looked up at the balcony, and saw the two windows under their shallow arches, his windows. How comfortable and reassuring!

He rang the bell, and almost at once the door was opened. He saw Miss Lydia Gall standing there, the same Miss Gall, and yet she was different. He had remembered her as a tall, thin woman with prominent teeth, and eyes big and bulbous behind high-powered pince-nez, one of those women who are all edges. Her face had always been colourless, and running to nose and teeth and chin, while her hair seemed strained back from her forehead as though an invisible hand held Miss Gall well gripped. But Scarsdale’s impression of her was that of a woman yellow and thin, with teeth protruding hungrily, and hollow places even in her thinness. Miss Gall looked starved.

He saluted her. He was glad to see Miss Gall, for she was part of the comfortable past, a little too “refained” perhaps, but calculable. He was

smiling, even though he was wondering why she looked so faded.

“Well,—here we are, at last, Miss Gall. It’s good to be back. You got my letter?”

Suddenly, and with just a momentary blinking of the eyes, Miss Gall burst into tears. They ran down her flat cheeks and blurred her glasses, and she felt in a blouse for a handkerchief that was not there.

“O, dear,—Mr. Scarsdale,—I really must apologize, but I’m not quite—”

Her lips trembled; her face was all puckered up; her emotion had an absurd, pathetic futility, and she seemed conscious of its futility.

“Really,—I’m ashamed; so unlike me.”

She stood back and let him into the familiar passage with its brown linoleum and its drain-pipe for umbrellas, its fumed oak hat-stand, and its photographs in gilt frames. A draught blew from somewhere, and in that narrow passage Scarsdale felt a little chilly breath of tragedy. Something shivered. Miss Gall after closing the door, seemed to rustle by him like a pale and desiccated leaf.

He was troubled. The sun was not shining here, and there was a something in the woman’s poor, scared face that moved him to pity. She looked frightened, and her fear infected him.

He said—“Have you been ill?”

No, she had not been ill. She forced an icy animation, as though terrified by the very suggestion that she could be ill.

“It’s such a comfort to have you back, sir. I hope—I’m sure—you will be just as comfortable. I have had your trunks unpacked and your clothes aired.”

She loitered at the foot of the stairs, her hands clasped as though she might wring them, were the provocation supplied. Scarsdale’s face was in the shadow. He spoke gently.

“I’ll go up. The old rooms. I have often dreamed of them.”

He went up, and she followed him, and hesitated, and then climbed a few more steps, and stood with one hand on the rail. Scarsdale had opened the door of the sitting-room, and he saw the sun shining in on the same faded Axminster carpet, and the blue plush curtains at the windows, and his desk, and the upholstered armchair facing the fireplace. But the room was different; he missed things, a corner cupboard and its china, a mahogany bookcase, two chairs that had been christened Hepplewhite. And there was no fire.

He stood, wondering. He became aware of that figure in black hesitant in the doorway. He had a feeling that if he did not say something kind that poor starved face would crack. She was watching him so anxiously.

“Sunny and clean as ever.”

There was a moment of silence.

“I do hope—I—I had to sell one or two things. You see—”

And suddenly he did see, pieces of china going gradually, the war on the home front, a woman short of food.

He was looking at the empty grate, and his face had grown sad, and she was watching it. She thought that he was annoyed.

“I couldn’t manage a fire. You see—things are so difficult, so dear. And the rationing. One has to keep the coal for cooking, Mr. Scarsdale. I’m so very sorry.”

Her frightened voice pleaded, and he turned and smiled at her.

“O, that’s quite all right. Things must have been rather hard over here.”

Her eyes blinked and grew moist.

“You always were a gentleman, Mr. Scarsdale, so considerate.”

He wanted to say to her—“Look here, you’ve been starving yourself. You have had no butter, no sugar, no meat,” but he knew that at the moment such things could not be said. Some women are such devoted fools, they deny themselves to spoil that greedy creature—man.

### 3

In his bedroom Scarsdale found that everything possible had been done for him. His coats hung in the wardrobe; his trousers were in their press; shirts, pyjamas, underclothing, collars, ties, handkerchiefs were all in order. A pair of well polished black shoes waited at the bottom of the bed. A jug of hot water covered with a clean towel stood in the basin.

But he had observed that the chest-of-drawers was not the same, and that a painted piece had taken the place of the mahogany chest. Also, as he removed the towel from the jug he noticed a neat darn in it, the work of Miss Gall’s hands.

He poured out water and washed.

Someone knocked at the door.

“Yes?”

“Will you have tea as usual at half-past four Mr. Scarsdale?”

“Please.”

He felt troubled about Miss Gall. He had known her for some fifteen years as the daughter of a Civil Service clerk who had left her a minute annuity and no relatives of any importance. Always she had appeared to him as one of those changeless women, never young and never old, supremely sexless, plain, reliable, a sort of clock or automaton. Never before had he been moved to consider Miss Gall as a person, live flesh and spirit, but the Miss Gall of 1919 had ceased to be a mere provider of life’s necessities.

He changed into civilian clothes. He felt strangely awkward in them; the stiff white collar was very much a collar, and he had trouble with his tie. Even the pockets were different. He looked at himself in the glass as though to greet his old, original self, but somehow the familiar self was not there. He too was subtly different, perhaps because he saw things differently, without wishing to see them differently. He was conscious of a sense of protest, of vague dissatisfaction, of newness even in these trappings of the past. The coat did not fit him sleekly; it looked hunched up at the shoulders.

The thought came to him suddenly—“I’m nearly four years older. I must go to my tailor, and get something new.”

Crossing the landing to the sitting-room he stood by the right-hand window, and looked down into the square. It had not changed. The row of houses opposite were the houses of 1914, or outwardly so. The grey railings enclosed the same garden with its grass and its asphalt paths, and the same chestnut trees, thorns, lilacs. The very lilac shoots and the daffodils might have been those of yesterday, the sparrows the birds of a pre-war spring, and yet in some disturbing way this north London square had changed.

Miss Gall entered with the tea-tray. This—too—was an innovation, for in the old days Miss Gall had been very much the refined person in the background. And what was he to infer, that this was a personal oblation, a welcoming gesture, or that she had no maid?

He watched her place the tray on the table. Her hands looked cold and congested. There were four pieces of thin bread and butter on a dish, and two obscure little yellow rice cakes on another dish. No buttered toast, and no fire!



She looked at him anxiously. She withdrew towards the door, and hesitated.

“One has to do one’s best, Mr. Scarsdale.”

Scarsdale sat down. He was becoming aware of Miss Gall as a woman whose bleached and anxious face was a mask behind which many distressful realities concealed themselves. He had a feeling that she had something to say to him, that she was a human knot that yearned to unravel itself before him, and that at the same time she was afraid of offending him. Yes, horribly and pathetically afraid. She looked hungry. She made him feel uneasy. She prepared to go and yet tarried.

He noticed that there were just four lumps of sugar in the basin, and suddenly he found his voice and his inspiration.

“Food shortage still rather acute?”

Her pale lips moved.

“Everything has been very acute.”

“Everything? Your rooms,—have you let—?”

“No one since 1916.”

“No one?”

“No, sir. Of course—one doesn’t complain. One has felt that one has to try and bear—”

Scarsdale glanced at her quickly. To him Miss Gall had suddenly become woman, a pale streak of tired, scared, starved humanity, gentility enduring. He felt that it was grossly discourteous and unkind of him to keep her standing there.

He said—“Won’t you shut the door and sit down.”

She looked at him half questioningly for a moment; she was so hesitant, so apprehensive, and then she closed the door gently, and sat down self-consciously on a chair by the far wall. Her long, red hands lay in her lap. An oval mirror in a black and gold frame hung behind her head.

“Thank you, Mr. Scarsdale.”

He removed the tea-cosy. He, too, was self-conscious, and at the same time very conscious of her.

“Things are rather strange even here.”

She echoed the word. Strange! Her voice seemed to falter.

“Some people don’t understand. I’ve felt frightened.”

“No need to feel frightened with me. By the way, have you a maid in the house?”

She hesitated.

“No.”

“You have done everything yourself?”

“Yes.”

Scarsdale looked at her with his big, brown eyes.

“Well,—thank you. There are things—Yes, one doesn’t realize at first; change and all that. It’s just occurring to me. You might like some money on account.”

Her hands twisted in her lap.

“I should.—It sounds so—ungracious and greedy. You have always been \_\_\_”

“O, that’s all right. What about a girl?”

“A girl? O, they—well—girls—different. Munitions and office work. Girls, Mr. Scarsdale—”

“But you must get someone.”

And then another thought came to him.

“Money has changed, hasn’t it? I mean—the value—?”

She nodded.

“Prices. Everything going up.”

“I see. One has to adapt to a new scale. Obviously, you will have to charge me more.”

He saw her flush, and then grow pale.

“Oh,—I couldn’t do that, you just back, and—”

She looked at him inarticulately, confusedly.

“I—”

Scarsdale’s eyes were on the four lumps of sugar. He took just one lump.

“O, yes, but you must. Obviously. We have got to get things straightened out. They’ll come straight in time.”

## 4

The tea-tray had been removed, and Scarsdale lit a pipe and sat down at his desk which stood in the left-hand window facing the square. His elbows settled themselves familiarly on the blurred black leather. He noticed that the ink-pot had been filled, and that his wooden penholder lay in the tray. Some impulse made him open the top right-hand drawer, and he saw in it a pile of unused manuscript paper faintly tinged with yellow, a packet that he had opened in the early days of the war.

He sat with his elbows on the desk, meditating. He had been less than two hours in this quiet house, and its quietude was the same, and yet it was changed with mayhap and peradventure; its muteness did not spell repose, but suspense, suffering. He had come back to it as to a pleasant niche in the structure of civilization, and it was no longer a niche, but somehow a draughty passage between yesterday and to-morrow.

For Miss Lydia Gall had disturbed him. The simple and stark verities of No. 24A Canonbury Square had brought home to him with a certain grimness the problem of getting a living in the world of 1919. Four lumps of sugar in a bowl! And the woman’s starved face! Yes, she must have been short of food for months, living with her poor pride in this silent empty house. Money! Was it possible that he had lost his feeling for money, his sense of the inexorable values? He had been fed and housed and clothed, and he had returned full of a vague optimism to pick up his pen, and resume the profession of scribbler.

He glanced at the open drawer and its pile of paper. So much blank paper to be covered! And about what was he going to write? He would write as he had always written upon various aspects of life, on matrimony, and children, and going to the seaside, and on French and Italian art. His monthly articles in *Harvest* had been very well liked by people who found it nice to feel “highbrow” at the rate of twelvepence a month.

But why this sudden fretfulness? His job as sub-editor of the *Sabbath* had been kept open for him, for Taggart the editor had written to him in France less than a month ago, assuring him that he was not forgotten. He supposed that he would continue to review books for the *Scrutator* and the *Sunday Standard*, and that he would resume the production of his monthly articles for *Harvest*.

He ought to be able to earn a sure six hundred a year.

But this restless mood would not be stayed. He did not want to sit still, and he closed the drawer with its supply of blank paper, and went to his bedroom for his hat and overcoat. The hat was a bowler, and when he recrowned himself for the first time with that strange, peaceful headgear, it sat uneasily upon his head. He caught sight of himself in the glass, and was aware of a certain grotesqueness. The black excrescence seemed to make his narrow face look even more narrow.

On the stairs he met Miss Gall coming up, still anxious and propitiatory.

“O, Mr. Scarsdale, your coat! I forgot to tell you. The moth’s been in it.”

“This overcoat?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t notice anything. Will it matter?”

“There is a hole right in the middle of the back. And I had camphor in the drawers—too.”

“Well, never mind to-night. It’s rather chilly.”

“I’m so sorry. I’ll be able to get more coal now.”

Scarsdale went out wearing the coat. Let moth and rust go hang, for he felt a sudden urge toward action, and a curiosity, a desire to see and to feel, to touch and appraise the new world even in Highbury and Islington. He made his way to Highbury Grove, and walked up to where the bare trees of the Fields began beyond two red villas. Highbury Grove had a dismal sobriety, but Scarsdale had an affection for it because it was not new, and brought back memories of his boyhood, and expeditions to Maskelyne & Cook’s, and the Zoo, and the Lowther Arcade. He turned into the Fields. Yes, the trees were bigger, and on the higher ground one did gain the illusion of distance and of a grey landscape shut in by suburban cliffs. Some boys were kicking a football about, and their raw young voices reminded him too much of the war. Further on he heard a blackbird singing, and the song seemed to ascend as a plaintive and rich lament against a sky of harvest gold.

These open spaces could not satisfy Scarsdale’s curiosity. They had no seal to lay upon his mood of restlessness. They were so artificial, asphalt and iron railings, a bituminous and metallic *rus in urbe*. His urge and his curiosity tended toward the streets, even though they were the “Bitter streets”, and flowing with unfamiliar faces. This new England, even in Islington, what was it like?

He walked down into Upper Street, and strolled along it. He was not wilfully in search of impressions; he wanted to look and to listen. Dusk was at hand, and lights were beginning to shine in the street lamps and in the shop windows. But surely he had never seen this suburban highway so full of girls and of women? And he began to feel that this feminine flux perplexed and troubled him. But what was it exactly? It was not an individual crowd; it seemed to parade in little, frothy freshets, noisily, assertively. It talked loudly in front of the windows; it advertised a sort of flashy insolence.

He found himself looking at faces, and he was surprised at the number of young faces in the street. Also, what was it about these faces that challenged his sentimental attitude toward woman? Hardness? Yes, that was it, even the young faces looked hard, bright and bold and hard. Not being a sensualist he did not divine that other quality, the insurgent sex, the raw flesh that is uncovered when war and pestilence and upheaval tear away the clothes of conventional repression.

From faces his glance began to rest on legs. Legs! Yes, how very unobservant of him! This was a new world of legs. The curtain of convention had gone up considerably. It surprised him. Also it surprised him to find that legs were alluring, and quite unexpectedly shapely. They looked softer, more softly curved—than the faces.

Also, he realized that none of these girls looked at him. They passed him by as though he had lost the lure of youth, the subtle something that challenges and invites. Possibly he was a little piqued. He paused and observed a reflection of himself in a chance mirror, and saw a long, lean, dark figure with high shoulders, and a narrow face under that black bulge of a hat. He got the impression of middle age, of a vague shabbiness.

His restlessness was not relieved. He turned back at last from the lights and the flux of humanity, and diverged into a side street. It was dark here, secret, solitary. He passed the opening of a passage. Someone giggled.

## Chapter Six

SCARSDALE had bought a new hat and a new overcoat. He had his card ready, and he presented it to the boy.

“I want to see Mr. Taggart.”

The boy did not trouble to look at the card.

“Got an appointment?”

“No; Mr. Taggart knows me.”

“Mr. Taggart doesn’t see people without an appointment. No use trying that game on me.”

He was a rude child whom the war had filled with a false sense of personal values.

Said Scarsdale—“You take that card up to Mr. Taggart. He expects me.”

The boy stared at him.

“All right. You stay here. Them’s my orders.”

He left Scarsdale in the passage to reflect upon the fact that methods and manners had changed. He could only suppose that the war had spoilt many people’s tempers, and that ration cards, and queues, and a shortage of sweet and fat foods, and fighting for seats upon buses, had produced chronic irritation. There had been scrambles and scuffles on the home front; too much money in some pockets, too little in others. People’s voices were louder. Even this sniffing little urchin had the face of a bully.

The boy reappeared. He condescended.

“You can go up. Second door on the right.”

“I think I know it better than you do, my child.”

Scarsdale had inflicted upon post-war youth the grossest of insults.

As he opened the glazed door of Mr. Taggart’s sanctum, Scarsdale saw the familiar, stumpy figure in black seated at its table. Yet Taggart was different. Mr. Taggart’s head had always been untidy, and in the centre of its grizzled frowsiness Scarsdale saw a pale patch of baldness. Mr. Taggart’s hair needed cutting; it fringed his collar. He sat hunched up in front of a table that was chaotic with letters, manuscript, newspaper cuttings, a paste pot, odds and ends

of string. By the inkstand a half-empty medicine bottle showed a brown stain on its white label. Both Taggart's figure and its surroundings advertised the slovenly, scribbling haste of a man who was worried and irritable, and overworked.

Taggart had been blue pencilling a proof. He turned in his chair. His sombre face with its bushy eyebrows and loose lower lip did not light up.

"Morning, Scarsdale. So you're back."

He had the air of possessing a grievance. Even Scarsdale's reappearance grieved him.

"Sit down."

Scarsdale sat down. Possibly he was ceasing to bridle at the unexpectedness of post-war England, and to wonder at the facile optimism of the returning soldier. Presumably Taggart should have jumped out of his chair, and caught him by the hand with a "Well, old man, glad to see you home."

They looked at each other, but Taggart's glance had lost its straightness. He seemed to peer up obliquely from under the bushes of his brows.

"Glad to be back, I suppose."

Scarsdale smiled.

"Well, yes. And I suppose some of your people are not sorry to have us back. You must have been badly harried."

He glanced at the slovenly table. And then he became aware of a silence, and of Taggart tapping the air noiselessly with his pencil.

"You want to come back here?"

"Well, yes."

"Better warn you, bit precarious. Things are different."

"Difficult?"

Then Taggart exploded. He got up out of his chair, and measured himself a dose of medicine in a dirty glass, and drank it as though he were taking poison. His face was bitter.

"Difficult! We have been going to the dogs for a year and a half. We've hung on. We have decided to hang on for another year."

"Isn't *Sabbath* selling?"

Taggart stared at Scarsdale as though he thought him a fool.

“Selling? Good lord! Can you conceive anything called the *Sabbath* selling in this—? Why, man—! Yes, if we produced a paper and called it ‘Sex’—there would be some business doing. Slump. Slump upon slump.”

He flung about the room, and then came and stood in front of Scarsdale’s chair, and waggled the blue pencil at him. He had become savagely and aggressively serious.

“Mark you,—it’s revolution. What I mean is—everything is upside-down. All the old values going, the old decencies. This is a damned, new, raw world, my lad, raw as a fresh rump-steak. Why haven’t you heard the gibe?”

“What gibe?”

“The war’s two great failures, religion and somebody’s mackintosh.”

He let out a sudden guffaw, a savage, uncouth, and ridiculous bray.

“*Sabbath* indeed! O, yes, come back if you want to. Morley and I are going to fight for another year. Come back and cook up nice little pious pifflings for the multitude. And what does the crowd want? Money and women and sensation.”

He waggled his blue pencil.

“Perhaps you can bring some real blood into the *Sabbath*, my lad. Brighter Sundays, what! A parade of pimps in Piccadilly Circus! Early services at the music halls.”

Scarsdale looked shocked.

He said—“Some of you people at home seem to have lost your heads a bit. Worry and overwork, and bad food. I’m not afraid to come back. I noticed the medicine bottle of yours, Taggart.”

Mr. Taggart gave him a strange, bushy, concentrated stare. Then, with a kind of ferocious deliberation he picked up the medicine bottle, smelt the cork, opened the window, and sent the bottle whirling into the narrow courtyard. They heard it smash.

“All right, if we smash we smash. Don’t blame me. I’ve warned you.”

“When shall I start?”

“O, next Monday.”



Scarsdale walked. After that outburst of Taggart's, culminating in the smashing of his medicine bottle, he felt that the new world and the new Taggart had to be reviewed. Not that Mr. Taggart had ever been completely Sabbatarian, or so wholly a private secretary to Jehovah that the casual man in him had been effaced. The Taggart of the pre-war days had had his cheerful material moments when he had visited the Cheshire Cheese, and other houses, and had eaten and drank mightily. Some quite ridiculous association of ideas had led Scarsdale to think of him as Og of Bashan. When Taggart had allowed his gastronomic god full liberty, the divine afflatus had expressed itself in ptarmigan and port.

But what were the realities? Morley of Messrs. Morley & Taggart, had inherited from the whiskers of his father that excellent religious journal *Sabbath*, and also a publishing business that had issued Law and Church literature. It was the elder Morley who had discovered to the world those novels by a lady who was known as W.O.A.D. Not that the lady had dyed herself blue, or painted the world red. The letters stood for the Wife of a Dean. W.O.A.D.'s novels had had a perfume of their own; they had smelt of vestries, and harvest festivals, and footstools, and the roses in ecclesiastical gardens, and virginal emotion. Woad's young women had worn bustles and leg-of-mutton sleeves, and had been full of religious experiences and unborn babies. Occasionally, by way of warning, the Dean's wife had permitted her public to smell sawdust and patchouli, but only just sufficiently so to allow them a protesting thrill.

Messrs. Morley & Taggart had made considerable profits out of Woad's novels. Their publishing catalogue had been carefully edited. They had issued books that were good for children as well as books that were good for adults. "My Life among the Zulus" was a classic. "Darwin Defied" had had a considerable circulation. As for *Sabbath* it had become in the 'eighties and 'nineties a kind of habit in the homes of the nice minded, like roast beef at midday, and cold beef and baked potatoes for Sunday supper. Its familiar blue cover associated itself with the tea-tray and the muffineer. That it was incredibly dull and inhuman did not matter in that age of pleasant, placid dulness.

But the times had ceased to be dull and placid. Obviously so. A breath of reality had shaken the world, and also Mr. Taggart. He had been contentedly religious, between moments of cynicism, and splurges into ptarmigan and port, while the publications of Messrs. Morley & Taggart were productive. But when the new world reverted to a kind of bloody naturalness, and men and women wanted life and each other, and *Sabbath* ceased to circulate, Mr.

Taggart broke his medicine bottle and swore.

Scarsdale walked up the Strand, but the Strand seemed to him more crowdedly so, and still full of remnants of the khaki world. The traffic was more aggressive, the pavements less suited to the stroller. But for the moment Scarsdale was not concerned with the Strand; it was just so much noise and material hustle. He had been a little shocked by the explosion of port and ptarmigan Taggart. Of course you had to allow a man a streak of humanity, even when he edited a paper that was as decorous as a bishop's apron, but in the old days there had been an episcopal solidity about Taggart, a flatulent earnestness. Somehow you did not expect to hear a bishop squeal when donations to this or that failed to flow like Macaulay's Tiber. And Taggart had squealed, because his pocket was less well-filled. Well, and why not? The pocket is the most sacred part of modern dress, its holy of holies. Also it is human to squeal. And was not he—Scarsdale—just as much concerned about the future contents of his pocket, and had not Taggart's outburst shocked him because it had scared him just a little? Virtue, as the Greeks understood it, has a stomach, heart—and head. Also it may be the father of children.

Scarsdale came to Trafalgar Square. He walked round it as though to assure himself that the sacred place had not been violated, and that Nelson still watched over England. Yes, Nelson was up there, undisturbed by the voices of little Communist cads. The month of April, and on the wall separating the pavement from the platform, girls and Australian soldiers sat two by two, unashamedly interested in life and in each other. Some arms were around other waists. Slim legs dangled beside the stouter legs of the victors. And for some reason this mating in the open air of those brown men and the young wenches made Scarsdale feel shy and superfluous, and very much three-and-forty and the wearer of a bowler hat. He had been no warrior, but a mere scullion in the house of Æsculapius, and the Red Cross had been less expressive than the bomb and bayonet. He wandered round to the terrace below the National Gallery, and leaning on the parapet, allowed himself to stand and stare. Whitehall seemed to flow like a broad and stately river to wash the feet of the Mother of Parliaments. Yonder were Westminster and Father Thames. Nelson's lions were calmly couchant.

Scarsdale meditated. Mr. Taggart became a mere monkeyish figure surprised in a chattering rage because of a shortage of nuts, and Scarsdale's eyes saw other figures, Nelson among the clouds, the lions, Australia and its wench, the ever-moving crowd, the inevitable buses. Yes, the very buses were inevitable, and the voice of Big Ben the voice of a tradition.

There came into Scarsdale's mind the word—revolution. Taggart had used

it, but he had used it with a worried wildness. And what was revolution, a turning over or a turning round, mere upheaval or an ascending spiral? His consciousness seemed to enlarge itself under that April sky, and in the heart of this great city. These solid flagstones and buildings seemed to pivot about the slender column of the Admiral, and the clouds were like white sails set to the wind. The roar of the traffic was ceaseless.

Scarsdale had a feeling that he was in the midst of movement, and suddenly it seemed to him that this city was a great grey gyroscope steadily spinning. Almost and for him it revolved about the slender stem of Nelson's column. The roar of the traffic was the music of its motion. The piece of symbolism fascinated him. He saw the lions turning round, and the radii of the streets, and the houses, and the buses and taxis and the human crowd. All of it would go on spinning.

What was this London but a creation of man's urge to express himself, a thing willed in brick and stone and steel; alive, gyrating. And did the centripetal and centrifugal forces balance, or was there some subtle nexus holding humanity together? Habit! Yes, habit. Habit and tradition. The necessity of man to man. And it seemed to Scarsdale that he was being granted a moment of illumination. He saw such a city as London as a mystical gyroscope, weaving colours as it spun, and the colours were the merged hues of man's activities. The colours might change, as political favours change, but the swing of the wheel would continue.

### 3

But, in a little while, his outlook became personal. His vision of a whirling, predestined crowd narrowed to the contemplating of his intimate inward self and its hopes and fears, its moods and expectations.

What was he in the pattern? What did he desire? Was it security, the same old slippers before the same old fire, the same old thoughts and habits? For, if the colours of the gyroscope were changing, should he too not change? How live, how die? And in living was he to be his old, deliberate, docile self, a scribbler, Taggart's understudy, a reviewer of other men's books? What had he done with life? What had he done that could be compared with the sex swagger of those Australian soldiers? Had he not been a creature of ink instead of a man of blood?

Old Thames running down to The Nore! And ships! And speed! And the

laughing eyes of a girl, and the wind in the June grasses! And he was going to squat in a stuffy little room next door to a man who was going bald and had dirty finger-nails, and who was savagely dyspeptic.

Was it possible? Or was he to feel the whip of the new world's restlessness?

How those white clouds sailed!

## 4

Scarsdale went on walking, and his restlessness walked with him. He strolled down Whitehall, and past St. Stephen's, and struck the Thames at high tide. He followed the river, and found himself wondering at its life, at the life on a barge or a tug. Were those other men restless, or did the world of the river suffice them, with the realities of its ebb and flow, and the coming and going of merchandise?

He rediscovered the Tate Gallery and remembered days very long ago when he had known a passion for Dante Gabriel Rossetti's women. What a name, and what women! And those sorrowful, sweet, sensual mouths! He felt rather old and sad. He walked on, and rediscovered Chelsea, and the trees of Battersea Park, and Chelsea Hospital, and the Albert Bridge, and Cheyne Row. Battersea suggested nothing to him save recollections of some students' rag about a dog, though Battersea was to be famous for other rags and rednesses. Cheyne Row propounded problems. He strolled along looking at the houses, finding himself vaguely distressed by a beauty and a dignity that were like the dead leaves of a happy and memorable year. He was perplexed. He wondered why those old houses should make him sad. Was it that they tantalized him, and tempted him to yearn for something that was not his, success and the beauty of it, spacious rooms, blue doors and balconies, and calm-eyed stately windows? This was not Taggart and the *Sabbath*, nor was it Australia and young wenches with dangling legs. Nor was it Spenser Scarsdale, nor the war, nor the peace.

At Church Street he left the river, and finding himself in King's Road he ceased to be a mere piece of drifting, human restlessness. He remembered the name of Marwood. He realized that he had wandered into the Marwood world, and that on occasions he has made imaginary descents upon that world to review the face of Marwood's daughter. A live curiosity stirred in him, and something more than mere curiosity, for he stopped in front of a postman and

asked to be directed.

“Can you tell me the way to Spellthorn Terrace?”

“Cross the road. First on your right.”

“Thank you.”

In rediscovering Spellthorn Terrace the memories of that October night came back to him with sudden vividness, the darkness, the wet pavements, his fumbling at the door; his interview with Marwood’s daughter, his return to the darkness, the dead leaves, the lovers huddled against the railings. Was No. 53 still Marwood? Walking along the opposite pavement he observed the row of little houses. They were alike, yet each seemed to differ like a human face. He saw a succession of privet hedges and iron railings, minute front gardens, flights of steps going up to doors sunk under shallow arches. The doors were brown and blue and green, but brown predominated. Each house had four windows. A cornice linked up the whole row, and above the cornice a collection of strange chimney-pots posed themselves against the sky. Some were brown and some white; some were mere red tubes, and others capped and moulded. Some had cowls and elbow-shaped attachments of zinc. Their variousness gave to the row an individual aliveness.

Scarsdale, moving along the opposite pavement, passed No. 53 and observed it. The door was green, but a rather faded green, and so were the railings. There were yellow plush curtains at the lower window, and lace curtains up above. An aspidistra in a brass pot occupied the space between the folds of yellow plush. He walked as far as Spellthorn Square, and crossing the road, returned slowly along the other pavement. It was a very quiet street, almost as quiet as on that night when he had brought to Julia Marwood her dead father’s letters and photographs.

## 5

Scarsdale had lost his sense of the passing time; he had been walking and idling for two hours, and one o’clock had struck, and he should have been hungry. He walked slowly past the iron gates of Spellthorn Terrace with the feeling of a man exploring the beginnings of adventure; he glanced with a self-conscious shyness at the doors and windows. He confronted an imaginary situation. Supposing he were to meet Marwood’s daughter in the street, would she remember him, and should he stop her and revive the memories of that October evening?

He was within three yards of the gate of No. 53 when the thing happened, but not as he had expected it to happen. The door of No. 53 opened abruptly, and in the opening appeared the back of a youth or young man. It was a resisting and contumacious back, and it seemed to belong to a figure that was being forcibly extruded from the passage of No. 53. Scarsdale had paused to stare; he was not conscious of having paused. He just stood and stared, for the struggle in the passage revealed its duality, and the person of the other disputant. It was Marwood's daughter. He recognized her pale, broad face, even more starkly determined than he remembered it. The lips were pressed together, the nostrils pinched, the eyes wide and angry and set. Extraordinary tableau! He saw that she had the hatless youth by the ears, and that his head was butting against her bosom. His shortish, thick legs resisted.

The struggle between them was silent. Their two young bodies were locked together, and above the insurgent, oily blackness of the youth's head the face of Marwood's daughter had a cold, white, furious purpose. She had forced the other figure to the top step, and was thrusting it down when Scarsdale saw the youth's hands go up. One struck at the girl's face, the other clawed at her forehead and fastened on her hair.

Scarsdale ceased to stand and stare. Something was unleashed in him. He swung in through the gate and up the path, and got hold of the youth's coat collar and the flesh of one arm. He pulled. The figures came apart, and Scarsdale and the youth blundered down the steps together. But youth turned suddenly upon middle age. There was a scuffle, the upward jab of a fist. It caught Scarsdale under the ribs and well and fairly in the pit of the stomach. He doubled up.

## Chapter Seven

THAT was the first blow dealt by youth to Scarsdale in the days after the war.

It astonished him; it left him doubled in undignified helplessness over the iron railing of the flight of steps. His new bowler hat had fallen off into the privet hedge, but for the moment he was beyond preserving either his hat or his dignity. Young Marwood had retreated to the gate. His heavy, stocky figure swaggered; he had the greasy, sallow skin of his father.

“You can chuck my hat out.”

His sister cast it out, a soft green felt hat with a floppy brim. She turned her attention to Scarsdale.

“You shouldn’t have hit him like that.”

“The old fool should have kept his hands off me.”

Scarsdale’s head and shoulders raised themselves, and young Marwood picked up his hat and moved off along the railings. Discretion and insolence retreated advisedly with an upward grin at the sister.

“Ta-ta, Sis.”

She ignored him; she was standing on the upper step and looking at the rather grey face of the unfortunate knight-errant who had been put out of action most ungloriously by a boy’s fist. Scarsdale had heard youth’s judgment passed upon him—“the old fool”. He was feeling abominably and absurdly sick.

A voice said—“I’m sorry. I’m afraid you’re hurt. He shouldn’t have hit you like that.”

He realized that his hat was lying on the top of the hedge, and he recovered it. The voice had administered another blow, for he had divined in it a concern that conveyed to him a suggestion of kindness tinged with contempt,—or was it patronage? He had the feeling that it was the way in which she would have spoken to an elderly man who had slipped on a piece of orange peel. The casual, bright, cold kindness of youth.

He put on his hat.

“O,—that’s all right. He knocked the wind out of me. I suppose I—”

He was aware of her regarding him intently.

“Haven’t we—?”

“Yes, my name’s Scarsdale. Perhaps you remember.”

She did remember. Her eyes grew friendly, for she had every reason for feeling friendly toward him, seeing that he had been the messenger who had brought her the letter which had disclosed the whereabouts of her father’s will.

“You had better come in and sit down a moment.”

Scarsdale managed to smile at her, and the smile was part of his effort to recover the situation, and to remove the creases from a tumbled virility. There was something in her youth that provoked him.

“Thanks. May I? Really rather funny, isn’t it? Should never have thought a youngster’s fist could have hit me so hard. Caught me unawares—you know.”

She drew back into the passage.

“O, the young beast is always fighting. One of my brothers.”

“Your brother!”

But she was not an explanatory person. She showed him the sitting-room, and the obvious chair.

“I had just come back from the office to get my lunch. Would you like anything to drink?”

“A glass of water, may I?”

She went for the glass of water, and in handing it to him their fingers touched. Scarsdale looked up at her. His colour had come back.

“I’m afraid he must have hurt you. I was shocked.”

She gave a toss of the head.

“O, nothing to speak of. It’s not the first time I have had to throw him out. I think it will be the last. Do you mind if I go and get my lunch. I have to be back at the office at two.”

Scarsdale stood up.

“O, please go. I don’t want to interfere.”

She went, and he sat down again and sipped his water, and tried to rid himself of a feeling of resentment against young Marwood. He was surprised to find how much of the swaggering, sensational boy remained in him. Obviously, he should have taken the young lout easily by the collar and removed him to the pavement, and without even the unseemliness of a scuffle.



But the upward, jabbing fist of youth had found his solar plexus, and he had lost his hat and his dignity.

He sipped his water, and when the tumbler was half empty, he placed it on the lower shelf of the stand that sustained the aspidistra. Rather an extraordinary house this, and rather an extraordinary young woman! And what was the present position of the Marwood family, and how much of the family was there? He sat stiffly and self-consciously in the chair in a house that remained wilfully silent. He began to feel a little uncomfortable. He was becoming more and more aware of the unexpectedness of that handsome, dark, young creature. How surprisingly strong she was! He felt a little afraid of her.

He sat and waited, and presently he heard a movement in the passage, and she reappeared. She was smoking a cigarette. She had a gunmetal cigarette case in her hand, and she offered it to Scarsdale. The case had belonged to her father, and had been returned with his effects from France.

“Feeling better?”

“Oh,—I’m all right.”

He took a cigarette, and handed the case back to her, and she stood leaning against a mantelpiece which had been cleared of all useless ornaments. She was very much at her ease, and observing him. She offered no explanations while conveying to him the impression that it was his affair to explain how he came to be in the neighborhood.

He fumbled at the situation just as he had groped tentatively at Marwood’s door.

“Sure you are not hurt?”

Her very black eyebrows seemed to emphasize her stare.

“Please don’t worry. I was just calling the child’s bluff.”

“Does he live here?”

“He did.”

She flicked ash from her cigarette, and observed his clothes, and the grizzled hair above his ears. She waited.

“I happened to be in Chelsea.”

“Oh. Then you don’t live here?”

“No. Canonbury. I have only been back a few days, and I have been reviewing London. That’s one of my jobs.”

She did not understand him.

“Not musical comedy?”

He forced a little, self-conscious laugh.

“No,—books.”

“O,—books.”

He seemed to detect a tinge of contempt in her voice, and he became possessed by a desire to swagger. He wanted to impress her. She appeared so confoundedly cool and sure.

“Yes, you see I’m in the literary world. I write for the *Scrutator* and the *Sunday Standard*, and I help to edit a magazine.”

He did not tell her the name of the magazine, for he did not think that she would be impressed by the reputation of the *Sabbath*. Obviously the new world had not much use for the *Sabbath*.

She crossed the room and deposited the end of her cigarette in the brass pot belonging to the aspidistra. He had impressed her, but not in the way that he would have wished. She supposed that he had literary or artistic friends in Chelsea, and that his presence in Chelsea was natural.

“So, you’re a sort of celebrity.”

“O, not quite that.”

But he was pleased. He glanced at his wrist watch, and she, observing his glance, made her own movement.

“Sorry—but I shall have to be going. I have got my father’s job in an estate office here.”

“Why,—that’s splendid.”

She looked at him half-questioningly, but the inwardness of her glance was veiled. He seemed quite a nice old thing, for he looked older than his age, and to Marwood’s daughter anything over forty was final. But she was thinking of her younger brother, Harry of the bright buttons and the bright eyes. She wanted a career for Harry.

She said—“Sorry to have to turn you out. But perhaps you would like to sit here for a while.”

He rose instantly.

“O, no. I’m quite a tough person—really.”

He crossed to the fireplace, carefully extinguished the stump of his cigarette, and dropped it in the grate.

“Thanks for being so kind.”

Suddenly she smiled at him.

“O, not very much so. Thanks for your help. If you are ever round this way —”

He held out a hand.

“May I? Thanks—awfully.”

She grasped his hand firmly.

“You met my younger brother. He’s not like that other one. We’re great pals.”

“I’m sure you are.”

She shepherded him to the door, and smiled him out, and Scarsdale walked on towards Spellthorn Square with her smile pervading his consciousness.

## 2

He lunched at a little tea-shop in Kensington; he did not know the name of the street, and it did not matter. The tea-shop’s scheme of decoration was black, mauve and orange, and the waitresses were dressed to the same bright coloured toilet. He was allowed a plate of tongue, a roll and a tiny pat of pale butter, and a cup of very bad coffee. That—too—did not matter, for the spring had come, and in his blood were the stirrings of a second youth, a post-war rejuvenation.

Afterwards he found his way into Kensington Gardens, and sat down on a chair by the Round Pond, and watched the children, and dreamed. A westerly wind was blowing, and ruffling the water, and the incipient greenness of the trees seemed reflected in the April grass. The sky was in movement, and to Scarsdale came a sudden sense of the spaciousness of life, its blue and white fluidity, its chant of voices, its eternal youth.

“Man, what makest thou of life?”

His mood was both futurist and retrospective. He reviewed those years of gentle celibacy in Canonbury Square; bookish years, slippers years, when he had asked for nothing but the production of a nice, erudite, gentlemanly Pater

cum Stevenson essay. He had been a purist, something of a spinster working coloured wools into pretty patterns, a diner out at clubs with a mild, literary flavour.

And suddenly he marvelled. He watched the children and the flickering water, and wondered how he had been content to grow—or rather not to grow—in that particular way. He had been a topiary person, a yew tree clipped in May, its young greenness restrained, growing older but remaining the same neat formal thing, the slave of the shears.

For what was life if you did not live it, and did not thrust both hands deep into the blue water? A man might be full of information and yet be no more than a dictionary, a gradus, and as unlike life as London is like a library. He sat in judgment upon himself, seeing the pre-war Scarsdale as one of those very futile people who, with a nice complacency, criticize other men's creations, while themselves producing no live thing. Almost he had belonged to the little crowd that speaks superiorly of "fiction," while assuming it a quite cultured business to write the lives of the great fictionists. He had been one of those little sniffing, armchair pedants whom Dickens had loathed.

He had not done anything. He had not loved and swaggered and got gloriously drunk, or gone dirty and hungry, or fought nature with naked hands, or taken gulps of sea water. He had not raged with jealousy or lust. He had not thirsted to kill. He had seen no brothel or no marriage-bed. He had not kissed and been kissed as though the whole of life hung on a pair of lips. He had done nothing but scribble, or help to handle the bodies of other men who had been in the battle line. He had written with a little prim air of authority upon things he had never experienced.

Yes, he had been one of those bright little spinster men whom you meet in cities, little dogs that yap and do not understand why the mastiffs and the boarhounds pay no heed to them.

Suddenly he laughed; he put his head back and laughed.

"Even that youngster's fist got me."

But some other youthfulness had smitten him. How that girl's face lit up when she smiled!

when she caught sight of the familiar figure of Mr. Spenser Scarsdale crossing the square. She had seen him go out in the sombreness of overcoat and bowler hat, and very much the Mr. Scarsdale of the *Sabbath* and the *Scrutator*, a middle-class figure in quest of a middle-class living. Miss Gall respected Mr. Scarsdale, and her respect was tinged with affection and pride. He was literary and so clever, and always the gentleman. But on this April afternoon Mr. Scarsdale returned with a patch of colour over his heart. He was carrying a pot of red tulips, bought from a barrow at Highbury Corner, and the pot was swathed in blue paper.

Miss Gall hastened downstairs, for Mr. Scarsdale would be ready for his tea. She heard the latchkey in the lock. Mr. Scarsdale came in with his pot of tulips, and it seemed to Miss Gall that his face had a sort of sheen.

He smiled at her.

“Bought these from a hawker. Pretty, aren’t they?”

Miss Gall agreed with him. Certainly it was pleasant to have flowers in the house, and if Mr. Scarsdale could afford to buy flowers, well—the world was looking up. She had known Mr. Scarsdale for years as a man of serious good temper, a plant of steady growth, but she had never known him gaillard or gay.

“They do look pretty, sir. Shall I take the pot from you?”

“Oh, I can manage.”

He went upstairs almost with the air of a man humming a song, and when Miss Gall ascended with the tea-tray she found Mr. Scarsdale posing the pot of tulips on his desk in the window. He had removed the blue paper, and had inserted the vessel of common red clay into a white and gold pot. His face had a dreaminess.

During the week that followed, Miss Gall gathered other indications of the coming of spring. The lilacs came into leaf, and the buds of the young chestnut trees burst their sticky brown capsules, and sparrows flew about with pieces of straw. Also, there arrived for Mr. Scarsdale several large cardboard boxes, and he appeared on the Sunday morning in a suit of blue cloth with faint white lines running through it, and wearing a new type of collar and a blue bow tie with white spots on it. Also, he was wearing new brown shoes instead of boots, and dark blue socks with silver clocks to them.

Miss Gall was a little troubled. Mr. Scarsdale had not been a dressy person, and before the war she had seen him in grey or in black, and distinctly loose at the backs of the shoulders and baggy as to the knees. Even when he had departed for his holiday on one of his walking tours in the Lakes, or to

Derbyshire or Sussex he had taken with him a prosaic knickerbocker suit of a stuffy brownness, stockings of the same colour, and massive boots. She understood that he had photographed all the churches in Sussex, and that he knew the downs from Beachy Head to Old Winchester Hill. He had written a poem on Chanctonbury. Miss Gall had read it and had thought it very nice.

Also, she detected in Mr. Scarsdale a potential if not an active restlessness. In the old days she had known his habits as exactly as she had known the ways of the kitchen cat. He had sat about a great deal, and had liked to get into his slippers, and his room had been littered with books, most of them with little slips of white paper protruding from between the leaves. He had been untidy and busy and enveloped in tobacco smoke, an absentminded yet calculable creature. Now he was always going out and going out with an air of briskness and a sense of stir and excitement. He carried a neat little cane. Miss Gall had watched him from a window and had seen him go round by the railings and tap them with his stick. He did not mooch in meditation round the square; he walked with his head up and his hat at a slight cock as though he was set most definitely upon adventure. Miss Gall was troubled, for any variation in the functioning of her precious patron was of financial importance to her, and as a bachelor he had been flawless.

Miss Gall, with a little austere and awesome pointing of the lips, could not refrain from whispering to herself—"Girls." The very suggestion of such frailty shocked her, though the new world was full of such seismic disturbances. Sex and all that. But Mr. Scarsdale! Surely he did not go hunting in the garish streets with that new, feverish, short-skirted crowd? Or was it matrimony? Miss Gall felt very depressed. Her one and perfect celibate blossoming like that pot of tulips, and getting a wife, and going elsewhere, because another woman in the house was not according to Miss Gall's tradition!

"O, drat the war!"

She knew that—always—she had managed to make Mr. Scarsdale very comfortable, and he was what she had called a comfortable man. You had known just what he would do in those black-booted, sober, Sabbatarian pre-war days. And somehow she had the feeling that Mr. Scarsdale was less comfortable, and less comfortable with himself. He looked restless, as though he were searching for something, and had not found it.

Mr. Taggart and *Sabbath* were but a part of the post-war plan, and Scarsdale remembered that it would be necessary for him to call on Jewell the literary editor of the *Sunday Standard* and on Snape of the *Scrutator*. But some part of him had loitered and procrastinated, and, like a boy let out of school, he had found himself in no hurry to return to the desk. There had been a four years' interlude, and the familiar routine had been broken, and now that he was at liberty to sit on the same stool he was not so eager to sit on it.

For the war had inflated other things besides the currency, and in Scarsdale's pot of tulips there burned a little flame of symbolism. Romance! Like many other men he had a feeling that he could do other things and that he could do them differently, and perform more eminent and gallant deeds, and despise the dull old sesquipedalian tramping. The Spring of 1919 invited man to dance, to play games, and to go out as he pleased into God's own country. He felt himself a more lordly creature, with fairy gold in his pocket, and that woman was woman and never more desirable and disturbing.

Scarsdale crossed the passage to the door of Taggart's room, and opened the door as though it represented no sacred screen. In the old days Mr. Taggart had taken himself and the *Sabbath* very seriously, but Scarsdale was taking neither of them too seriously. He had his hat on.

He said—"I am just going round to see Jewell."

Mr. Taggart, hunched morosely before a new medicine bottle, looked over a black shoulder.

"Jewell?"

"Yes. He will be wanting me to take up some of the books."

Mr. Taggart's wet pink mouth opened to say something, but before he could say it Scarsdale closed the door. And Taggart sat staring at the closed door; he frowned at it, but the frown changed into a cynical, sombre smirk. He jabbed at a proof with a stumpy blue pencil, and supposed that old Scarsdale was just like the rest of the returning warriors, a little hyperborean, and full of pink flushes and barbaric self-importance. They were so young and dramatic—these ex-service men; they had lost touch with peaceful reality; they seemed to be a little contemptuous of the oily and smutty business of being civilized. They had strange misconceptions about money and work and their market value.

Mr. Taggart's inner man reverberated. He heaved in his chair, and was aware of his breakfast. He grunted cynically to his inward soul. Well, Scarsdale could stroll out in search of Jewell. Like other men from France and

Palestine and Macedonia, Scarsdale could find things out for himself. Some of those precious stones had dropped from their setting. Mr. Taggart, in the presence of his medicine bottle, doubted the validity of things precious and otherwise.

## 5

About an hour later Mr. Taggart heard Scarsdale return. His understudy went into his own room and closed the door, and Taggart's cynicism wedded itself to curiosity. He had been irritated by Scarsdale's cheerfulness, his air of sanguine self-confidence, just as though the world had been waiting for these warriors to return, and would hurry to embrace them and prepare beds of roses. Scarsdale was a little inflated; almost he indulged in gentle swaggering; he had made Mr. Taggart feel very much alone with his medicine bottle.

Mr. Taggart got up, and going out into the passage, opened Scarsdale's door. He surprised his junior in the most unexpected of attitudes. Scarsdale was standing in front of a small mirror, and adjusting the wings of his bow tie.

Mr. Taggart's bitterness and his breakfast sought self-expression.

"What about article for the next number?"

"I'm doing it. Have it to-morrow."

"Find Jewell in?"

"No. There's a new man. Jewell has been scrapped."

Mr. Taggart smiled, and was moved to say, "I could have told you that if you hadn't bolted like a rabbit."

But Scarsdale did not appear depressed. He had felt sorry for Jewell, but he did not associate himself with discarded stones. He turned to his table by the window, and sat down, and began to sort out some proofs.

"Well, they retired Jewell. He was over fifty, you know. The new man seems very decent."

"Giving you books to do, is he?"

"Probably. He has given me an introduction to Butcher of *The Babblers*. New wine, Taggart."

Mr. Taggart said something about new wine being rather raw, and with an air of sombre displeasure left Scarsdale to his proof-reading. Obviously



Scarsdale had not realized the significance of Jewell's disappearance, or suspected that the new man had fobbed him off with an easy introduction. Mr. Taggart returned to his room, glanced at his watch, and then poured himself out a dose of medicine.

He held the glass to his lips.

*"The Babbling!* Good Lord! Does the fellow think he can babble?"

## Chapter Eight

IT was Sunday, and Scarsdale sat at his desk in the window and looked down into Canonbury Square. He had breakfasted at nine, and at nine-thirty the house had sunk into solicitous stillness, for Miss Gall knew when not to disturb Mr. Scarsdale, and that the bedrooms could be left till later. She put on felt slippers. Yet, in spite of this encouraging silence, Mr. Scarsdale's pen lay idle on the desk, while he sat with his elbows at rest, smoking a pipe. The sun was shining, and the grass and the young foliage in the garden of the square had a burnished newness, the gloss of youth. Yet another pot of tulips—"Cottage Maid", rose and white, had succeeded to red "Artus". Mr. Scarsdale had opened the right-hand top drawer of the desk, and in it the white manuscript paper waited to be taken out and covered with the symbols of creation.

It waited, and so did Spenser Scarsdale's mood. It waited upon the green of the young year, and upon the flowering tulips, and upon his own feeling for the newness of things and upon the newness within himself. For he too had caught the swagger of the Spring and of the post-war streets; he had discovered his second youth, a thrill of adventurousness, the romance of reality. The new age had infected him.

He sat and savoured it. He deliberated. Life was very challenging; he accepted the challenge, and almost like a sanguine boy he lay and stared at the blue sky and dreamed of conquests. Why was it that he had never felt like this before, but had allowed himself to stagnate in the office of Morley & Taggart, helping to boil up bilious stuff for a world that was rebelling? How was it that the old pre-war Scarsdale had slipped into such a groove, a rut of routine which led from nowhere to nowhere? He had been a dull dog.

But now! Yes, the war had taught him many things. It had not been Sabbatarian, and on this Spring morning he sat and allowed himself to feel full of the to-morrow. He was going to write and to write differently. He would create. He would write about the war and the war's realities; he would write about man, and about woman. Instead of waxing pompous over other fellow's books he would produce books and short stories of his own. All that paper was waiting to be turned into life.

But there was no hurry. He sat and dreamed a little and smoked his pipe, and was most strangely young and confident. Of course, for the time being he would remain with Taggart and continue to review books and produce articles,

but gradually as the new work prospered he would abandon the old. He would cease to be an unimpressive hack. He would be free. He would make sufficient money to be able to be impressive.

Yes, he felt gaillard and young. Yes, quite like young Prosper le Gai in Hewlett's inimitable romance—"The Forest Lovers". The colour, and the mystery and the passion of life! But how extraordinary that it should have taken him all these years to discover that he had been living in slippers, a sort of literary pantaloon. Yes, he supposed that the war had blown a trumpet, and that he had started up to discover such things as horses and spears and women and castles upon hills and dim old forests. He was awake, alive.

Old Taggart and his medicine bottle!

He looked down into the square and saw a young man come out of a house, glance at the creased rightness of his trousers, and set off briskly in search of,—what?

Scarsdale smiled. He felt just like that.

## 2

Sunday at No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace was very much a day of ease, especially so on those Sundays when Harry unbuttoned and was off duty. No clamorous bells could coerce Julia into getting up early, and the blinds would remain down until nine o'clock, for to be in bed late on these Sabbath mornings was the one weekly relaxation that she allowed herself.

Though Julia Marwood was not a young woman of dreams. Her duskiness might appear mysterious and perplexing to such a man as Scarsdale, but when she lay abed late on these Sunday mornings she allowed her strong young body to enjoy its laziness. Practical and purposeful she might be, but there was a feminine element that sleeked itself between the sheets, and watched the sunlight on the window blind, and vaguely coveted things. It was her one natural and sensuous hour when she detached herself from practical affairs and became almost subconsciously herself, though hardly aware of that self's significance, for during the rest of the week she was so very wide awake.

She had to be wide awake. She was responsible for so many realities, for Harry, the domestic problems of No. 53, finance, beds, breakfasts, the woman who came in twice a week to scrub and dust and clean, the fussinesses of Mr. Jimson and Mr. Jimson's inevitable inexactitudes. Mr. Jimson was growing

more perplexingly inefficient. Almost he appeared to be the victim of a premature senility; he would talk for ever but to no good purpose. He irritated people.

Julia had noticed that clients edged away from Mr. Jimson, and gravitated towards her desk.

“O, Miss Marwood understands the situation.”

She did. And daily at Martagon Terrace she was reaching out to recapture lost opportunities, for people wanted houses and more and more houses, and houses were not to be had, while Mr. Jimson stood and fiddled, and searched the cavities of his teeth with the tip of a restless tongue. There were days when she could have assassinated Mr. Jimson. He was so brightly and fussily futile.

For she was extraordinarily self-confident. She had had to fight and to overcome difficulties, and she had succeeded, nor was she hampered by sentimental illusions. She knew that the Jimson business depended on her, and that it might be made a much more live and prosperous concern, and that Mr. Jimson was afraid of her. Already she had her plans for a partnership, and she wanted capital.

She had her eyes on other realities, a berth somewhere for Harry, and an efficient little flat for them both in place of No. 53, and its exactions. She was ambitious; she had a healthy appetite for material success; she meant to get things. She was very much the new age, without being weakened by the new age's mere passion for play, and its urge toward easiness. She did not expect something for nothing. But the post-war ideals, or rather—its cravings, did appeal to her. She wanted tangible things, not such abstractions as beauty or books or days in the country, the old, sweet, sentimental moonshine. She asked for results, hard cash, and its authority, handsome clothes, satisfying sensations, her hair in perfect order, silk, good seats at the theatre, a car. Yes, most strangely and yet most characteristically she coveted a car, her own car, and to drive herself; it was the supreme toy in her shop window. She wanted speed, and the imagined excitement of speed; to rush along the road, passing other people. The passion for it somehow expressed her, and her youth, and her generation.

She would look at cars in the street, but the shabby old war hacks did not appeal to her. Soon there would be a glut of newness; she divined it and exulted in it and lusted for it. She read about cars, and with a queer, mechanical flair for the inwardness of cars. A certain type of car thrilled her, low and long and rakish, with its swift nose thrusting its way through the traffic. She saw herself in such a car, sweeping past and through the crowd

with a kind of merciless, cold exultation.

But there was Harry, and on this spring day Harry had asked for tea in the garden. He had been cutting the grass with a pair of old shears while his sister sat and read a motoring magazine. The pear tree was in blossom, and the Virginia creeper on the back of No. 53 had begun to stipple the brickwork with reddish green shoots. Julia had no gardening in her; she was not made that way.

Harry had bought some penny packets of flower seed, and a week ago he had sown them in the two borders between the grass and the brick walls separating the garden of 53 from other gardens. He ran out every morning to see if the seeds were showing, for he was fair haired and pink skinned, and should have been a country child.

“The Virginia stock’s showing, Ju.”

She allowed him his enthusiasms, his bright eyes and his flushes. The boy had a queer passion for flowers, and she was in the act of watching him bending over his miraculous seedlings when the door-bell rang. Both of them heard it, and both of them exclaimed.

“O,—bother!”

“Who can it be?”

She was getting out of her chair when he made a dash toward the back door.

“I’ll go, Ju.”

But she had other plans for him. Always she knew that a ring or a knock might mean young Bob or her mother, and she kept the front door locked. Also there was yet another possibility, and she sent Harry in to wash his hands at the sink, and went herself to the front door of No. 53. She opened it silently and suddenly with the intention of surprising the person upon the doorstep, and she uncovered the breadth of a man’s back. It was Scarsdale’s.

He turned and raised his hat. He was shy, a little apologetic, and his eyes looked at her as though they wanted to look at her at their leisure, but were prevented from doing so by their owner’s self-consciousness. She noticed that he was well dressed, and that his collar was new. He spoke rather hurriedly, as though to justify his invasion of her doorstep.

“Afraid I have taken you at your word, Miss Marwood. I happened to be in Chelsea.”

She had met the unexpectedness of him with impassive gravity, but suddenly she smiled.

“Well, we happen to be in.”

She stood back and met his eyes, and she knew at once why he had come, and it surprised her. She was not given to thinking of men in that particular way, and as yet no man had disturbed her dark young seriousness. But this man—! She had no adjective to apply to the sudden occasion, nor was she caught up by her conjectures and moved to a little burst of inward laughter. She was not moved so cheaply. She felt alert and attentive and a little puzzled.

“My brother’s here. No—not that other one.”

He was smiling, and she noticed the fine wrinkles at the outer angles of his eyes. Yes, he was quite old.

“This time—I should have been ready. But I’m not intruding? You are sure?”

Her white teeth showed.

“We were going to have tea in the garden. Sunday’s a rather informal day.”

“Splendid. I’m not a formal person. At least—I hope I’m not.”

She made way for him, and through the open door at the end of the passage Scarsdale saw a vivid strip of grass, and the grey trunk of the old pear tree and its lower branches pendant with white blossom. It was like a little, brilliant picture hanging at the end of a long, dark room, and Scarsdale was moved by the beauty of it. He was in a mood to be touched by such swift impressions.

“How charming!”

She was standing aside to let him pass before she closed the door, and she looked up at him and was made to wonder at the expression of his face. It had a sheen, a tenderness. He looked at that green grass and white blossom almost as he had looked at her, with a kind of ardent timidity. She did not know that to such a man as Scarsdale all that was near to her, beauty, strangeness even in a London back garden, belonged to her.

She closed the door.

“Yes, quite pretty.”

But she was puzzled. She supposed that if he had friends in Chelsea he was one of those artistic people who became excited about bits of china and a bowl of flowers. The whole of him had a strangeness, his tall—thin figure, his big nose, and gently prominent brown eyes, his grizzled smile. In her young,

bright, determined way she had learnt to make mental pictures of the people who came to the office in Martagon Terrace, and to place them in their necessary frames. She had learnt to recognize the fussy and the suspicious, the capable and the irresolute, but Scarsdale did not fit into any of her frames. He was both too vague and too vivid.

They went out into the garden where Harry with clean hands was awaiting the social occasion, and not welcoming it.

She said, "Harry, here is Mr. Scarsdale."

She was aware of boy and man appraising each other, of Scarsdale's hand going out, and of the sudden brightening of her brother's face.

"Been hearing nice things about you, Harry."

"Glad to meet you, sir."

They smiled at each other. The garden became peopled with a feeling of friendliness. The pear tree was looked at and spoken to in a way that both boy and man understood.

"Well, you are a gorgeous old fellow. What about the afterwards?"

Harry laughed.

"Painful, sometimes, sir."

"Rather green. One couldn't wait, could one? Yes, I know."

Two more chairs were brought out, but Julia did not sit down. There was tea to be got ready, and when help was offered she accepted it and the informality of Scarsdale's invasion of the kitchen and his insistence upon carrying things. She had no reason to be ashamed of her kitchen. A collapsible card-table with a green-baize top was placed under the pear tree. Harry had views upon the inadequacies of the cake dish, and she did not reprove him.

"Well,—you can welsh my share."

To Scarsdale her attitude towards the boy was motherly, and into his mind came the title—"The Madonna of the Pear Blossom." The exquisite surface of her youth was flawless, and if he was falling in love with her youth and its deceptive softness, he was doing that which man the sentimentalist has always done. She was the Spring, fruit blossom, exquisite and virginal, the quintessence of youth, a creature who made a man like Scarsdale feel poignant and a little sad. The illusion of her enveloped him and his three and forty years.

It was a happy occasion because Scarsdale and the boy were merry with each other. Harry liked this new man; he had liked him at once and easily;

there seemed to be some strange understanding between them. They were man and man, and boy and boy. Julia was interested, for Harry was quick with his likes and dislikes, and there seemed to be no shyness between Scarsdale and her brother. Scarsdale's shyness was kept for her. He glanced at her with a kind of shimmery fearfulness.

He could rag Harry over the cake, but when speaking to the sister his voice had a careful seriousness. She was the Madonna, and his placing of her in the shrine of an illusion was not so easily understood. But she liked him, but not as she would have liked a younger man.

### 3

Scarsdale brought out his pipe, and while he was lighting it Harry disappeared without a why or a whither, and when Scarsdale realized the boy's flitting he thought but little of it, for to Scarsdale Harry was Peter Pan. He had noticed the motoring magazine lying on the grass, and he picked it up, and after glancing at its highly coloured cover, he looked at Julia.

"Your brother I suppose?"

She was piling the crockery on the tray.

"No,—that's me."

He was surprised. She caught him looking at her with almost a shocked air. But why? She sat down and well back in her deck chair, and lit a cigarette.

"Cars. Well, one may be interested in a thing without being able to afford it. But then—there's Harry."

She looked serious and Scarsdale thought her seriousness adorable. He wanted her to talk, and to talk to her.

"That's a very lovable child."

She stared at the end of her cigarette.

"O, very. A good kid. And I'm rather responsible, you know. I have ideas for Harry."

"Tell me."

He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and his lean face looked eager.



“One had to do the best one could. He’s at an hotel.”

“A clerk?”

“O, no, a page-boy.”

“I see. Circumstances. He can do much better.”

Her silence accepted his sympathy. She was not an explanatory person, but she could not help realizing Scarsdale as a man of some position and of some influence, and as a man who was interested, and his interest was her legitimate opportunity. Moreover, Harry was Harry, the one creature who had caused her hard young consciousness qualms of protective tenderness. It was for Harry’s sake that the unmentionable Robert had been extruded and sent to fend for himself. It was partly for Harry’s sake that she had quarrelled with their mother.

She glanced under her straight black brows at Scarsdale. How much did he know? How much had her father told him?

“The world’s so jolly crowded.”

“Opportunities.”

“Quite. I have to work from nine to six, and then there is the house. When father was away I had to do the best I could, and other things were not easy.”

He nodded. His eyes were very kind.

“Your father left you problems.”

She paused and considered. How much did he know? How much should she tell him?

“It is rather difficult to know what’s best. Father had reasons. He left me this house and the furniture and a little money. Yes, as I say—he had reasons.”

Scarsdale understood her better than she knew.

“Your father was very fond of a certain person. I know that.”

And then Harry reappeared with a little bowler hat and an air of well-washed responsibility, for on this particular Sunday he had to go on duty from six till nine.

“I shall have to say good-bye, sir.”

“What, going?”

“Yes, business, sir.”

Scarsdale stood up, and smiled down at the boy, and like men they shook hands.

“I hope we shall see you again, sir.”

“I hope so.”

In resuming his seat under the pear tree Scarsdale felt himself nearer to Julia Marwood, and more intimately concerned in her affairs. He noticed that her eyes followed the boy, and that when Harry had gone she continued to look at the open doorway through which he had passed.

And Scarsdale observed her with the freedom of a man who for the moment was a spectator, and able to take his fill of gazing at her as woman, yet as woman warmed by a tender illusion. Her lips looked more soft, her throat and forehead wise and compassionate.

She turned to him suddenly as though conscious of his stare.

“No need to worry about Harry’s collars. That’s an asset.”

Scarsdale’s glance withdrew itself.

“Yes, a clean lad.”

“Thank heaven. That’s why I had to be rather a beast to his brother. Some things one doesn’t—”

Scarsdale appeared interested in his pipe. He rubbed the bowl as though polishing it.

“I quite agree. Something ought to be found for Harry, an opportunity. I’ll keep my eyes open. May I?”

She looked him straight in the face.

“Would you? But it’s awfully decent of you. I don’t see why you should trouble.”

And Scarsdale smiled.

“But—I do.”

Afterwards he walked homewards across the park. He would pick up a bus somewhere, but he was in no hurry to board a bus. He wanted to be apart from

the crowd, and to wonder and dream and feel. The park was a lover's pleasance, and Narcissus was a flower, and the spring a chaplet of green. The outer world was both vivid and vague, a coloured tapestry, or a mirror in which he saw the reflection of life as it appeared to the lover in him. He felt both inexplicably happy and inexplicably sad. The elms might be towers of budding green, and the daffodils blurs of molten sunlight, and his heart was the heart of youth in the body of three and forty. He wandered. He did not look at any particular face or tree or flower. He was looking at the face of youth, of a beautiful illusion.

He thought, "She's splendid! What courage! Confronting life alone like that."

The picture seemed to shape itself. It had a bright foreground in which light fell upon the figures of the young woman and the boy, and out of the inner darkness the face of the dead Marwood seemed to yearn. There were other figures, obscure, sinister, a young animal with haunches, and a female shape that was muffled in mystery.

Scarsdale dreamed.

"She's splendid. I must do something for that boy."

## Chapter Nine

DURING the following fortnight Scarsdale went about hunting berths for Harry Marwood. It appeared to be his principal preoccupation, and he gave more enthusiasm and thought to it than he did to his own very hypothetical future. For he was the lover, the knight-errant, the happy warrior hoping to hasten to his dear lady with a trophy and the spoils of victory.

He attacked Mr. Taggart. He stood by Mr. Taggart's window and shut off the light, and spoke impressively and with feeling.

"I suppose you might be able to find room for the son of an ex-service man? The father was killed, yes. A rather sad case. The daughter was left to support the boy."

Mr. Taggart looked up at him over an impatient shoulder. Scarsdale was excluding the light, and during the past month he had been doing other things to Mr. Taggart. He had irritated Mr. Taggart, but in a way that had left the editor of the *Sabbath* unable to voice his irritation. For Scarsdale was so damned cheerful, and sanguine and head in air, a preposterous and exasperating optimist to have about the place, when gloom as black as printer's ink trickled and oozed down the very stairs. Moreover, the fellow was so purblind. He did not appear to realize that he was irritating his chief, or to be conscious of the heavy loom on Mr. Taggart's worried forehead.

Mr. Taggart opened his mouth to say something. He said things at night to his wife. "That fellow Scarsdale's a damned fool. Always yapping about the new heaven and the new earth. The war seems to have softened more brains —" But before Taggart could get out his growl Scarsdale was off again.

"After all—we do owe something to the children of the men who were knocked out. This boy—for instance—"

Taggart heaved in his chair, yet the rumblings of his exasperated and worried soul were inaudible to the happy warrior.

"I've got boys of my own, two."

"Quite so. I appreciate that, but—"

And then Mr. Taggart swung round on him almost like a heavy animal about to get up and charge.

"Look here, cut it out. This damned altruism's all very well. It isn't a

question of finding jobs, it's a question of keeping the old jobs—”

“Quite so, but—”

“There isn't any but, man. Some of your gentlemen from France don't seem to realize that the war hasn't made things easier.”

“I quite understand that, but—”

Taggart gave him a murderous look, and swung round again to his desk.

“You're in my light, and I'm busy.”

Yet Scarsdale could not read the signs of a murky horizon. For the first time in his life he was the devoted boy, finding life good and rich and poignant, a season of greenness and of song. He thought Taggart a curmudgeon. He ascribed Taggart's moroseness to chronic dyspepsia, and to a war diet and to overwork, for there appeared to be so many people like Taggart in whom the war had planted a turgid pessimism. Probably Taggart was best left alone to come to conclusions with his medicine bottle. For had he not surprised his chief munching a charcoal biscuit after lunch, and with lips and teeth of a grotesque and unpleasant blackness! Scarsdale's appetite for things tangible and intangible was excellent. It was as though youth, the youth of No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace had infected him with the urge to strut and sing. He was a little dazzled by the polish of youth, its exquisite, strange newness.

Also, his desire was to be impressive. He did not see himself before a mirror, but the mirror was there, and he, the sedulous bachelor, was patting his hair and adjusting his tie. He wanted to impress Marwood's daughter, to prove to her that he could do gracious, tender, authoritative things. Her youth challenged him. It was an exquisite provocation.

He was a little light in the heart and the head. He carried himself like a young man of five and twenty. His confidence in himself and in the future was slightly pathetic. So gaillard was he those days that he could shrug off significant rebuffs.

His first post-war article had been returned to him by the editor of *Harvest*. The editor had written him a personal letter.

“DEAR SCARSDALE,

“I like this thing of yours, but it hasn't quite the right atmosphere. There has been a change of atmosphere. No doubt you will soon tumble to it. May I suggest that we have become a little

more snappy. And for God's sake keep off the war."

The letter had brought to Scarsdale's lips and eyes a little, whimsical smile. It had not worried him. So, they wanted to put the war away in a cupboard! Idiots! That most insurgent, splendid, human affair! O, well, he might be able to show these editors a thing or two. He had put the rejected article away in a drawer, and resumed the writing of a short story for Mr. Butcher of *The Babblers*. He felt so full of life that he had no doubts as to his ability to write short stories. Was he not writing with his eyes on Julia Marwood?

## 2

Scarsdale's second visit to No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace was not long delayed, though a younger and more arrogant man would have waited a week. He arrived on the doorstep with a box of chocolates and an air of gentle self-consciousness. In a moment of boldness he had put on a tie of some colour and of courage, and on the doorstep of No. 53 he was not quite so happy as to the fitness of that tie.

Harry opened the door to him, and Harry's face opened like the door.

"Hallo, sir."

"Hallo, my lad. I was round this way, and I thought I would drop this in."

He dangled the neat parcel at the end of its loop of string, and made no swashbuckling attack on the defences of No. 53.

"What's in it, sir?"

"Chocolates."

"Ju is in the garden. She'll be pleased."

Harry saw Mr. Spenser Scarsdale blush.

"Perhaps just for five minutes. I shan't be disturbing her, shall I?"

Harry's eyes twinkled.

"O, rather not. It takes a lot to rattle Ju. My seeds are coming up like anything."

"Splendid. You must show me."

Julia was still in black, and Scarsdale thought her grave young dignity

exquisite in black. It set off the glowing pallor of her skin. She met him under the pear tree where branches had shed their whiteness and were growing green. The shy, grizzled kindness of his face made her think him a year or two less old. He was holding out the parcel.

“Thought you might like these.”

“Thanks—awfully.”

“Chocolates, you know. I expect Harry will help.”

“You bet he will, sir,” said the boy.

Scarsdale had whispered of five minutes, and he stayed two hours. Again they had tea under the pear tree, but the gay colours of a motoring journal were absent, and its place had been taken by a novel. Scarsdale noticed the development. Also he was made aware of a change in Julia Marwood; she was less casual; her dark eyes had a watchfulness; she was quick to see when his cup needed refilling. She prompted her brother.

“Harry, Mr. Scarsdale’s cup.”

As before, young Harry disappeared, and there was an interlude of silence, during which they sat rather self-consciously under the shade of the tree, and Scarsdale had trouble with his pipe and used an extravagant number of matches. Being alone with this young thing caused him a kind of exquisite distress, emotional embarrassment. He felt that something was expected of him, something fortunate for Harry.

He said, “I have not had any luck yet. Things are still so disorganized. Transition—you know. Besides one wouldn’t be satisfied with a makeshift.”

She observed him as though wondering at his wordiness.

“You mean—about my brother?”

“Yes.”

“It’s awfully good of you.”

“O, not at all. I am looking round. I shall find something.”

“It is so useful to have influence.”

He gave a little shrug. He was flattered.

“O, in a small way, yes. But we want the right thing, don’t we? I’m energizing my various friends and people.”

She nodded.

“I expect you are one of those who can get things done.”

When he left her he carried with him a new consciousness of responsibility. He felt a little guilty, and incredulous and happy. She had crowned him with a sense of importance, and being the sensitive and conscientious creature that he was, he returned to Canonbury Square accusing himself of false pretences. Obviously she was very grateful to him, and he had done nothing. He was masquerading as a man of force and authority; and had given her assurances, and had talked boastfully. He felt guilty.

Most certainly something had to be done for Harry Marwood, and without delay. His lover’s conscience scourged him. He began to think of other people whom he might interview and interest on Harry’s behalf. On the Tuesday he happened to lunch at The Golden Cock in Fleet Street; he did not lunch there often; he could not afford it. And at a table in a corner he saw young Bagshaw of Cairns & Bagshaw faring sumptuously. That phrase expressed the fulness of young Bagshaw’s feeding, though the fare was nothing more than rump steak, fried potatoes, and grilled tomatoes, supplemented by a tankard of ale. Young Bagshaw was still known as young Bagshaw though he was three-and-thirty and prematurely swollen.

Scarsdale did not like young Bagshaw; few people did. He was one of those vigorous animals with very black hair, a rich ruddiness and clarity of skin, and hot brown eyes. He glowed. He had thick shoulders and thighs; he had been the strongest boy at his school, and he had enjoyed it; he was masterful. He sat there chewing steak with an air of turgid arrogance.

Scarsdale knew young Bagshaw; they were members of the same Fleet Street club, a congeries of journalists, authors, and publishers. Also, the publishing house of Cairns & Bagshaw was a big concern which had weathered the war very successfully in spite of the price of paper. It was the price of paper that was helping to crush the already moribund *Sabbath*, but Cairns & Bagshaw—like young Bagshaw—had stout shoulders.

Scarsdale walked across to Bagshaw’s table. He had never asked a favour of this young man, and he would not have asked it now but for Julia Marwood and her brother. He smiled at Bagshaw, and young Bagshaw looked up at him from the midst of his feeding.

“Hallo, Scarsdale, how’s the Sabbatarian press? Wallowing rather deep in a mud hole, what!”

Scarsdale continued to smile. He possessed himself of a vacant chair, and sat down beside Bagshaw’s table.



“O, we are digging ourselves out. By the way—I am trying to get a boy placed, the son of a friend of mine who was knocked out over there. You’re a big concern.”

Bagshaw stared at him with his bull-like eyes, and went on eating.

“Why not try Taggart & Co. Most respectable firm.”

“No vacancies—just at present.”

“Why try me?”

Scarsdale looked whimsical. When young Bagshaw butted at you, a graceful, airy gesture was not of much use.

“Well you are a big concern, and I want the boy to have a chance.”

“Very nice of you, but there’s nothing doing.”

“Not at present? But supposing—? The kid’s a bright lad, and his sister has to keep him and herself.”

And suddenly young Bagshaw grinned. He broke off a big piece of household bread, and stuffed it in, and masticated.

“Sentimental reasons, my lad. Our house is simply wallowing in sentimental stuff. Widows and orphans and all that. We are booked up to the teeth with sentimental obligations. Sorry. Nothing doing.”

Scarsdale sat hesitant for a moment. Then he got up, and smiled at young Bagshaw, but young Bagshaw was in the act of applying the tankard to his face.

“Well, thanks all the same. Might I try you later?”

“Sorry, nothing doing.”

“But there might be.”

Young Bagshaw butted him.

“Look here, old man, father your own pups, and don’t try and farm ’em off on other people. I’m a business man. See.”

Scarsdale reddened. He felt like a very poor relation standing in front of the Bagshaw table.

He said, “I’m sorry. But I have a feeling that we all ought to try and help, especially those—”

But he stopped on the edge of the final accusation, for though young

Bagshaw had eluded the war, nothing was to be gained by telling him so. But Bagshaw took him up; he looked truculent.

“Especially whom?”

“Especially those who have suffered.”

“Don’t you worry. We shall be taxed for them all right.”

Scarsdale turned away, feeling somehow that he had been browbeaten and worsted, and that he had not said to young Bagshaw the things that should have been said.

### 3

Julia Marwood’s fingers were much nearer to the elusive bunch of grapes, nor had she Scarsdale’s sensitiveness in the matter of standing on stools. If a girl constructed her own stool and made it solid and steady she considered that she had every right to climb upon it and reach up above the heads of the crowd. Julia was a rather unusual young woman, not because she had ambition, but because she set herself with ruthlessness and efficiency to qualify herself for those responsibilities which the facile people shirk. Were that halcyon age to materialize, when the less efficient many shall have succeeded in stealing the cash and the creations of the more efficient few, it is probable that Julia Marwood would continue to be unusual, an Amazon among the commissars. The knout, decorated with red ribbon, would still be applied to the shoulders of the crowd.

Her gaze was very direct. She saw a number of things with distinctness and understanding. She typified in some measure the youth of the post-war period, for while possessing youth’s elusive softness she was as hard as the steel of the motor-car she coveted. She was most intelligently selfish, and yet her very selfishness somehow included her almost fierce affection for her younger brother. Her ambition held Harry by the hand. She could not say why or how. Her love for Harry was the one thing she did not question, any more than she would have questioned the beating of her heart. She had been fond too of her father, but Marwood was dead, and the day was a day of realities.

The office in Martagon Terrace closed at six, and Julia never left it before six. She had a key, and other keys that could open the secret places of Messrs. Jimson & Stent. She knew all the tricks and turns of the game of selling and letting houses, how to apply the word *bijou* to some little stuffy box of a place,

how to get the careless and confiding client to sign the back of a particular form, without letting him or her realize its conditions. People were such fools. They just grabbed a pen and scribbled a signature. And afterwards you drew a sort of perpetual fee from them largely for doing nothing. Mr. Jimson was an adept, so bright and oily, and always playing with that little gold cross.

But Julia had her fingers on Mr. Jimson's collar. She felt rather sure about her grip, and that Mr. Jimson himself was uncomfortably sure about it. He was afraid of her, and that was all to the good.

One day toward the end of May she sat on late at the office and with a purpose. She had every appearance of being busy at her desk. She remained there until the spectacled devotion of her under-clerk simpered itself out into the street. She despised men who simpered. Mr. Jimson was still in his private room and she could hear the rustling of paper and his rhythmical sniffings. Her employer suffered from hay-fever.

She heard him get up out of his chair and come toward the door. She was ready for her crisis, and she was ready to handle it as she handled an imaginary car, with a feeling of tension and swift audacity. A voice in her said, "Now."

Mr. Jimson came round the door and perked at her.

"What, still here, Miss Marwood!"

Her elbows were resting on the desk.

"Yes. May I have a few words with you, Mr. Jimson."

Her employer twitched his eyebrows and showed the sudden restiveness of a man shy of such occasions.

"Rather late, Miss Marwood."

"It won't take three minutes. I should like to suggest that I have been in this office four years."

Jimson looked at her slantwise.

"Not satisfied with the conditions, Miss Marwood?"

"That is so."

"Your salary—"

She spoke distinctly and deliberately with her steady glance holding him as to the end of a string.

"It is not a question of salary. I want an interest in the business. I have made it worth while."

Mr. Jimson pirouetted. He diverged toward the door, came back, and looked at her with an air of protest. His lips seemed about to utter the accusation—"A mere flapper," but he did not utter it. He began to finger the gold cross on his watch chain, a sign of inward agitation.

"Really, Miss Marwood, really!"

She remained steadily gazing.

"Yes, really. It is a perfectly serious proposition. I'm worth it."

Mr. Jimson closed the inner door.

"Do you mean to propose to me—?"

"A partnership. My name need not appear for a while."

"But my dear young lady! Why—your father—"

She sat very still and gazed. Her glance seemed to say, "Yes, but you were not afraid of my father, and you are afraid of me. My father belonged to another generation. I know things. I'm something more than a flapper."

She lowered her glance for a moment.

"I have been offered another post. It is a very good post, but I'm interested in this business. I know it pretty thoroughly."

His annoyance was obvious.

"Quite out of the question. Really, Miss Marwood—"

"Why should it be?"

"I don't require a partner."

She smiled very faintly.

"Only a clerk,—someone without responsibility? But I am rather responsible. Besides—"

Her pause was challenging. It held him at the pistol-point.

"Besides, I know all the ins and outs of this office."

He understood just what she meant. He was embarrassed, and very much irritated; he did not want to share his authority with a junior, and especially so when that junior happened to be a girl. And yet in many ways her proposal was reasonable; she was a very unusual young woman; she had tact, determination; she could be almost exasperatingly efficient.

He removed his pince-nez and polished them.

“You seem to be very serious, Miss Marwood.”

“I am.”

“But, one moment, at your age—there are other things to consider. Young women change their minds. Other things happen.”

“Just what things?”

“Marriage.”

She answered him decisively.

“I am not struck on marriage. I prefer to be independent. I am ready to agree not to marry.”

His mouth drooped.

“My dear young lady! Really—!”

“Is that so very surprising? I have seen something of marriage. Now, what about it?”

He readjusted his pince-nez. He wanted to temporize, clutch something that should ward off her attack. Yes, she was very useful, and she knew a great deal, a great deal too much. Ah,—that was it. Capital! He had her. He could take refuge behind her lack of capital.

He said, “One moment. Were I to take a partner I should expect that partner to put a substantial sum into the business.”

“How much?”

“At least—a thousand pounds.”

“That’s your figure?”

“Yes.”

He smirked to himself. Certainly she owned No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace, but he believed it to be mortgaged, and the house could not be worth more than four hundred to her. Marwood might have left an odd hundred or two, but the figure he had quoted ought to suppress her enthusiasm.

She was tapping her lower lip with the end of a pencil.

“That’s serious business, is it, Mr. Jimson?”

“Certainly.”

“A thousand pounds down, for how much?”

He fidgeted.

“A fifth share.”

“Not quite good enough. A quarter for three years, and after that—a third. And if the business expands—”

His little face assumed an embarrassed grin.

“Aren’t you a little previous, Miss Marwood?”

She put down the pencil.

“I’ll think it over. I shall be able to let you know in a month or so.”

And then she gave him a warning look.

“I’m quite serious. I should like you to realize that.”

## 4

After supper she sat out in the garden and reviewed the field of battle. Harry was busy with the grass shears, and the snip-snip of them reminded her of Mr. Jimson’s voice.

Yes, she supposed that she had startled Mr. Jimson, and he had begun by protesting as she had heard him protesting in the office to some client, “It can’t be done, madam; quite impossible,” but Julia knew that her employer’s protests had a way of melting like mist. He was a weak and talkative little man. Obviously he had counted on impressing her by stipulating that she should bring a thousand pounds into the business.

She faced the realities; she could not expect to obtain a share in the business without paying for it, and to her a thousand pounds represented a formidable sum. She could mortgage No. 53, but she did not suppose that she could count on getting more than five hundred on a mortgage. Meanwhile,—yes—meanwhile she would keep Mr. Jimson under observation. He was a tricky little person and she did not mean him to play tricks with her. She could make it dashed uncomfortable for him should he attempt to be circuitous.

Her purpose had other possibilities. Obviously, were she to become a partner she would be able to make a place for Harry at Martagon Terrace. She would remove the young man with the spectacles and introduce her brother. He was a bright child, and together they would possess themselves in time of the whole concern, expand it and modernize it.

But how could she put her hands on an additional five hundred pounds? Borrow it from the bank and pay eight per cent, should they consent to loan it to her? Or borrow from a friend? And what friend?

She thought of Scarsdale. He was a man of some position, and of some substance, or at least she supposed so, and he was a little touched.

And suddenly she became aware of Harry standing in front of her with the shears in one hand.

“Where’s the ghost, Ju?”

She smiled at him. Certainly she had been staring hard and far into the future.

## Chapter Ten

ON two successive mornings Scarsdale's post mingled pain with pleasure. Mr. Butcher of *The Babblor* returned the first of the bright and snappy articles Scarsdale had submitted to him, it being obvious to Mr. Butcher that Scarsdale was not made for the writing of bright and snappy articles, but as a sop he sent Scarsdale three books to review. A week previously Scarsdale had posted a short story to the editor of *Cheapside*, and a few mornings following it came back to him with the editor's regrets.

Scarsdale too felt regrets, and a little, unpleasant squirm of discouragement, but the moment of depression did not last. Your lover, and especially your romantic lover, is a flamboyant person, and Scarsdale was still full of the war's inflation. It was the year of the boom, and an extravagant and adventurous restlessness vexed the soul of the multitude, and Scarsdale had become one of the multitude. Yes, much more so than he knew. For even the most separative of men cannot be pushed into the crowd and kept there for a number of years without absorbing some of the crowd's mentality.

Scarsdale was writing a novel. The idea had come to him on the top of a bus, and it was of the same colour as the bus. It was to be a novel about the war, very sanguinary and muddy, and rather rhetorical. Scarsdale did not realize that his attitude to life had become rhetorical. Also, he had reviewed many novels, and had written—in his thirties—two very bad ones that still lay derelict in a bottom drawer. But he was full of his idea, and still more full of his post-war excitement, and for seven successive nights he had been sitting up till twelve o'clock putting his mind and his blood on paper. It pleased him, extravagantly so. The first chapter had the air of challenging the whole of civilization. Someone wept in it, and someone saw a son off at Victoria, and someone else had a head blown skywards like a star out of a Roman candle. The verve of the inspiration astonished Scarsdale. He went about thinking that he had discovered a great artist.

Miss Gall, creeping up carefully to bed at half-past ten, saw the light under Scarsdale's door and was troubled about the cost of electricity. Life in Canonbury Square had to be measured out in thimblesful. And yet she was comforted. Mr. Scarsdale was very busy, and it was part of her daily prayer that her perfect patron should continue to be busy. She depended on it. The first floor remained unlet, and her margin was a fine line.

So, Scarsdale being full of the froth of his creation, was in a mood to shrug



off Mr. Butcher and the editor of *Cheapside*. Those fellows could wait. After all there was no need for him to do pot-boiling, or to run up and down Fleet Street chattering brightly. He could do bigger things; he had life in him, humanity, the war, and the face of Julia Marwood. This novel of his was going to be a revelation, the lifting of a veil. He would teach England how to remember the war and to realize it. Almost he had a “cause”.

Carrying such secret lamps about with him, as lover and creator, he appeared to bear with him into the stuffy gloom of the offices of Messrs. Morley & Taggart an air of mystery. Almost he was the gaunt masquerader in plumed hat and Spanish cloak, gliding up narrow stairs and along dark passages. Another man seemed to look out of the eyes of Spenser Scarsdale, some whimsical and sombre grandee strolling disguised. Taggart might be gruff; Taggart might reverberate, but in Scarsdale’s eyes there would be a little sheen of mystery and compassion.

Nor was Taggart unaware of these rustlings. Dyspepsia and worry were making him acutely aware of all interruptions and disharmonies, banging doors, the way people wasted paper, Scarsdale’s air of princeliness in disguise. That was how it affected Taggart. There was something funny and mysterious about Scarsdale, a sober elation, a loose-limbed yet restrained swagger. It annoyed Mr. Taggart, especially when both his medicine and his business were bitter. At night he said things to his wife.

“Can’t make the fellow out. Makes you think of an old fool poet floating about with a harp and a laurel wreath. The way he smiles at you—too.”

Yes, Scarsdale seemed full of some secret, inward glow. He was always smiling a shimmery kind of smile. He spoke quite gently to Taggart when Taggart growled irritably. It was exasperating. With business going to the dogs a man ought to drift about a grizzled dreamy demi-god in trousers.

Mr. Taggart munched charcoal biscuits. He glowered upon Scarsdale. He asked himself half a dozen times a day why had he been such a fool as to take Scarsdale back into the office. The fellow was no use; he was not wanted. He did not appear to realize that he was on the edge of unemployment, and that the circulation of *Sabbath* was sinking steadily. He had done nothing to help this moribund journal to survive by imparting to its pages a little brightness. Nobody laughed in the office of Messrs. Morley & Taggart, and that was the trouble. You could not edit a journal on charcoal biscuits, and Taggart, realizing his tiredness, had hoped to find in the returned soldier someone who had laughter and the audacity of laughter.

He had been disappointed. Scarsdale was no damned use, and all Taggart’s

irritations began to crystallize about the person of Scarsdale. He disliked everything about Scarsdale, the way he dressed, the way he walked, his smile, his voice, his big nose, and his dreamy eyes. He raged inwardly against the man. He began to collect and cherish the material for an explosion.

And then, one morning, when there was thunder in the air, and Taggart's room was insufferably airless and stuffy, Scarsdale allowed it to be known that he was writing a novel. He made the confession with an air of mystery and self-consciousness, almost like a shy man letting it be known that he was in love. Also, he was just a little sententious about it.

Taggart was in his shirt-sleeves, and perspiring.

"O, writing a novel, are you? Most damned fools do that before they die."

That was all he had to say, but inwardly he claimed an added grievance against a man who went mooning off into fiction when he was paid to give his soul to the salvation of the *Sabbath*.

## 2

Scarsdale might be most strangely blind to Taggart's surliness, but in the presence of Julia Marwood he was troubled water. Taggart, even in the old days, had been a gloomy person, but the gloom of a girl's dark hair held other mysteries.

"I am keeping my eyes open, you know."

He had been keeping them open for more than a month, and as yet he had not sighted the inevitable niche for Harry, and his lack of success was making him feel apologetic.

"I want just the right thing for your brother."

Her gratitude was calm and discriminating. She appeared to wait patiently upon his activities; she talked to him intimately about Harry and about that young blackguard of a Bob who was employed in a West End garage, and who lived a life of his own. She did not mention her mother. She and Scarsdale were mutually perplexing, but upon different levels. He looked up, and she looked slightly down, for Julia Marwood did not understand a devotion that was apologetic. She stood squarely upon her well-braced young feet, and with a masterful head well set on her strong white neck she gazed squarely at life. She expected a man to be confident, especially a man who was supposed to have some influence in the world, and she would not have quarrelled with a

young and passionate abruptness. But Scarsdale, bewitched by the youth of her, and conscious of a feeling of inadequacy in the presence of her youth, was the over-fond and over-gentle man of the forties. Almost, without realizing it, he apologized to her for being over forty, and in the subconscious soul of each, youth and middle-age struggled together. Marwood's daughter was new wine, Scarsdale the old.

He so much wanted to impress her, and he succeeded in puzzling her, for his vague gentleness and chivalries seemed to fade away under the stare of her steady eyes. Her face, with its youthful firmness and its fresh white skin, was like the face of the full moon when no clouds are moving. She had youth's unshaded surface, its soft glare. She was not flexible. That which she did not understand she either despised or ignored, and there was so much that she did not understand.

He called her "Julia", but never yet had she called him anything but "Mr. Scarsdale". She kept her dignity; she was watchful and self-contained. She waited.

She would say, "Of course, it is only a matter of time. But with your influence—I'm not worrying."

She sat serenely rather like a young queen of the tournament waiting for her middle-aged knight to produce the trophy.

For, like Mr. Jimson, Scarsdale was a little afraid of Julia Marwood, though for different reasons and toward other ends. He was afraid of the temper of her youth, of her newness, and of all the exquisite young texture of her. She both provoked and made him tremble as a man may tremble in the presence of a desire that dare not contemplate satisfaction. He would look at her firm young mouth, and into the velvet of her eyes, and wonder. Was it possible, or was he dreaming? Would a day come when he would touch her with intimate, passionate hands?

He had moments of doubt, moods of self-mockery. He could remember a night in June when he had bought roses, and had taken a bus to Chelsea, and walked in the warm dusk to Spellthorn Terrace. He had come to the gate of her house, and had hesitated. Something had seemed to fail in him, and he had walked on and returned, and again his courage had failed him.

"Julia Marwood, Julia Marwood."

He had gone all the way back to Canonbury carrying those roses, and the scent of them, sad and sweet, had reproached him.

"Idiot,—why did you flinch?"

And he had let himself into Miss Gall's house with his latchkey, and seeing Miss Gall suddenly before him, he had presented her with the roses. She had looked quite flustered.

"O, Mr. Scarsdale, how kind of you! And don't they smell sweet?"

It is probable that nobody had ever given Miss Gall roses.

### 3

Upon Mr. Jimson, Julia Marwood exerted the steady pressure of her youth, for as a self-willed child she had discovered the potency of such pressure.

"Go on doing the thing and they'll get tired of saying don't."

She had watched and worked with Mr. Jimson for four years, and she knew him as a man who would begin an argument with spluttering vivacity, sustain it for awhile, and then surrender. He was circuitous; he could not stick things out when he was driven into a corner and kept in it. Also, during the war Mr. Jimson had grown more excitable, and less resistant; he had aged; his concentration had slackened; he made mistakes, and was surprised at them, and twiddled his little cross of gold, and said, "Dear me, it's because I'm so overworked." Julia knew instinctively that she had only to go on pressing her strong young purpose upon Mr. Jimson, and that he would grow weary of opposing her. She had known him to accept a suggestion after days of saying no, and to accept it with an air of relief and resignation. Almost the child was his. He acknowledged the paternity.

She did not worry Mr. Jimson, but she allowed him to understand that she was the potential partner. Possibly she was more kind to him, and used upon him the persuasions of her capable and worldly shrewdness. She even mothered him a little, and suggested that he should not overwork himself, and that he could leave some of the office worries in her hands. She gave him every chance to make his ultimate surrender appear both logical and comforting.

But on the question of capital her employer would not give way. He was obstinate about money; like the good little bourgeois that he was he was ready to die in the last ditch for property.

"No. I can assure you, Miss Marwood, my terms are final. Business is business."

She accepted the ultimatum. Her pragmatism approved it. She respected

Mr. Jimson's stubbornness in the face of any attempt to get something for nothing.

One evening in June, Scarsdale's courage did not fail him. He found Julia alone at No. 53, for Harry was on late duty at the Ponsonby Hotel, and with the sun setting beyond the trees of Spellthorn Square Scarsdale felt the spell of mysteries. Julia might sit in the garden, but the garden had walls less than five feet high, and other heads would become visible. Sitting with her in the garden made him mute and self-conscious.

He said, "Do you ever go and look at the river?"

She did not, but something in her consented.

"Let's go."

She went up and put on her hat and returned to find Scarsdale walking up and down the small grass plot. He had the air of a man dreaming incredible dreams. He smiled at her, and she gave him back a smile that was the glimmer of a secret impulse.

"Shall we go?"

He stood and looked at her.

"That hat just suits you, something in your skin."

And then he looked shy, and she laughed.

"I have one of those nice thick skins that don't burn."

"White vellum."

After that venture he was mute for fully a minute. The streets were either vividly sun splashed or in deep shadow. They walked to King's Road, and turned into Church Street, and Scarsdale felt his own silence growing restless upon his lips. He glanced at houses, and noticed names. There was Mulberry Walk. Yes, some lips had the redness of fruit. Also there was newness here mingled with the old, new concepts of beauty, the creations of men who sought self-expression in brick and tile and stone, in the placing of a window, or the set of a roof or a cornice.

He glanced down at his companion.

"How do you like this new stuff?"

"Which?"

"The houses? You should be an expert."

She considered.

“O, yes, they’re all right. I like things bright and new.”

He was puzzled. Was it beauty or newness that attracted her, the blurred softness of old brickwork, or the brilliancy of blue paint on a new door?

“They let better, you know.”

“Which?”

“The new ones.”

He had to be content with that financial suggestion. He found himself looking up at the dark, brick tower of old Chelsea Church, and it was warming itself in the sunset. It gave him a sense of warmth and of pleasure. He did not remember having noticed it before, or having felt moved to wonder what the church was like inside. It might be rather like Julia Marwood, full of hidden beauties and human quaintnesses. His unformulated belief was that a woman should be like a church, enclosing mysteries and shadowy, half-seen things.

“Ever been in there?”

His question was abrupt, and her glance went from him to the church.

“There? No.”

“Nor have I.”

“One doesn’t, does one, these days?”

He supposed that one did not, but he rather wished that she had.

They came to the river and the sunlight was lying like a golden patina over the slow glide of it. On the Surrey bank Hovis stood embattled, and barges piled with debris lay off Phillip’s paper mills. The trees of Battersea Park seemed to swell against the tumescence of the dusk. Westward, four great chimneys trailed smoke.

They crossed the road and the pavement and leaned against the embankment wall, and Scarsdale, suddenly smiling, pointed toward the barges loaded with waste paper.

“Funny, isn’t it. I think journalists and all scribblers ought to come and stand here and reflect upon that.”

“Hovis?”

“No, those waste-paper works. Think of all the *Daily Wails*. Whoever sees a dead *Daily Wail*?”

“One lights the fires with them.”

“The daily yell,—and then smoke. Funny, isn’t it! The power of the press! Which way shall we go?”

She turned her face toward the sunset.

“You do think of funny things. I don’t do much thinking, except about the business and Harry. Suppose that’s why I read the *Daily Wail*.”

He smiled as he took his place beside her.

“O, yes, waste paper. But I’m rather worried about Harry. It’s not such a simple business as I thought.”

She said quite softly, “Don’t worry. I’m grateful. Things will come right.”

They wandered. The west deepened to a smoky redness, and behind them the night seemed to float up stream. The sudden softness of her voice had roused in Scarsdale a kind of wondering expectancy, and in the pause he seemed to wait and listen for other music, a nocturne after the ballade of the day. He glanced at her face as he walked beside her, and thought that it had gathered a new and mysterious beauty. She seemed to gaze past the sunset toward the hills beyond the hills.

He thought, “How beautiful she is, how splendid.”

And she, being well aware of his infatuation, and while accepting it with the cool conceit of youth, yet felt kindly toward him. It was not necessary to spurn the adoring dog. Also, even for her unmysterious, young mind the evening and the river had a magic, though her magician would be some sort of super-capitalist with a golden wand. The setting of the piece was sensational; she belonged to the cinema age in which delicate and exquisite shades of colour ceases to be, and the screen displays exaggerated movements, restlessness, and the illusion of noise. The sea had always to be rough, trees swaying in the wind, cars rushing at forty miles an hour. Her urge was toward speed, sensationalism, money.

For even while they were strolling like lovers she was thinking how awfully ripping it would be to speed along that broad roadway in a machine that went “woosh” when you trod arrogantly upon the accelerator. And how Harry would enjoy it! She could hear him shouting, “Faster, Ju. Isn’t this simply topping!”

They strolled, and Scarsdale was conscious of the exquisite half-tones of that London night, the pale greens and yellows, the swelling silver of the river, and of the face of this girl. She had a rapt look, his young Madonna of the Pear

Blossom.

They turned at last and faced the hollow night, and presently some muted whim brought him to a pause against the embankment wall. A tug was coming up stream towing a string of barges, and on the tug one green light and two white lights shone. There was a troubling of the waters, a splashing against the embankment wall.

Scarsdale smiled.

“Wonderful, isn’t it?”

She nodded her casual head. She was thinking that this middle-aged lover of hers was a funny old thing. He did not try to touch her. He behaved as though she was the sleeping princess in a glass case.



## Chapter Eleven

MISS GALL had noticed long fat envelopes arriving by post for Mr. Scarsdale, and she had observed that the name and the address upon them were in Scarsdale's handwriting, but being innocent upon such matters she thought these envelopes had the appearance of prosperity and importance. Whereas Scarsdale was always eagerly looking for an envelope of less-imposing dimensions, and one morning that particular kind of letter arrived. An editor had accepted a short story, under the provision that the author would be satisfied with the sum of three guineas.

Scarsdale was quite flushed and excited. He forgot to put sugar in his tea. He was thinking, "I must tell Taggart about this. He seems rather sceptical." And he went on to reflect that even this minor success deserved a celebration, and that there could be no celebration without Julia sharing it. He would give his Madonna of the Pear Blossom a surprise. He would turn up at No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace without worrying her, and ask her to choose a restaurant, a theatre, and the night.

Accordingly he told Taggart about the short story.

"The editor of the *Regent* has taken a little thing of mine."

Taggart's face wore a sombre grin. The account was piling up against Scarsdale, and in due course it would be delivered.

"Very gratifying to you, Scarsdale. I suppose you will soon be employing an agent."

Yes, Taggart had a sarcastic and a grudging soul, but Taggart had to be lived with, and Scarsdale went to his own poky little room, and allowed himself to transfigure the day's routine with thoughts of No. 53 and Julia Marwood. Should he take her to Jules' or to the Trocadero? And what kind of play would she choose? Not musical comedy. He hoped it would not be musical comedy.

As the afternoon wore away Scarsdale felt like a boy in a hurry to get off. Mr. Taggart might have divined the lover's ardour, and out of cussedness set out to thwart it, for he sent for Scarsdale twice between three and five, and thrust typescripts upon him. "Get these read to-night, will you." He was abrupt. He pushed the stuff at Scarsdale and went on with his work, and till nearly seven o'clock Scarsdale sat reading tales of an unimaginable dulness. It

was amazing that people should write such tales, futile, flabby, undistinguished nonsense. He heard Taggart go off at ten minutes to seven, and after a wash and a brush up in the lavatory with its cracked basin and noisome old nail-brush, he hurried out upon the adventure. A bus was too ordinary, and he took a taxi, and half-way up the Strand he bent forward suddenly and rapped on the glass partition.

“Pull up a moment, will you. Flowers.”

The driver, with a tolerant leer, drew into the kerb, for Scarsdale had sighted a woman with a basket seated against a hoarding behind which excavators were creating a chasm for the foundations of some huge new building. Scarsdale skipped out and across the road to the flower seller.

“You have some roses left.”

Too much of her stock was left, and that was why she was still sitting there.

“Red or white, sir.”

“Red. Give me a dozen.”

He dodged back across the road to the taxi.

“You can drop me in the King’s Road at the end of Church Street. Know it?”

The driver crinkled up the creases round his humorous, blue eyes. Here was a gentleman in a hurry, and obviously rather excited about it, and clutching a bunch of roses! Did he know Church Street? Lord—lumme, but the gentleman was going that way inevitably and in great haste, quite unnecessary haste. It was easier to get into Church Street than out of it. The driver chose to travel by way of Pall Mall, St. James’ Street, Piccadilly, and the Brompton Road, and at Prince’s Gate the summer evening crowd moved to and from, casual and restless. Two young things dodged across in front of the taxi’s nose. Scarsdale saw one of them throw an irresponsible, impish smile at the driver, and the driver wagged a fatherly and admonitory finger at her. Girls, flappers! Going into the Park. One of them was wearing a red hat, and Scarsdale watched the hat for a moment. It was like some importunate flaunting flower. Yes, that was the word, flaunting. Youth flaunted itself upon the pavements with a light-hearted arrogance. The taxi-driver’s lips were puckered up, and he whistled a ditty that had belonged to an earlier generation. “Soldiers in the Park.” But the refrain had changed itself, and middle-age at the wheel of the taxi indulged in adaptations. Lovers in the Park. Flappers. Yes, it was a new generation, a short-skirted, feverish crowd perking along on the legs of the

new freedom. The driver was a philosopher, but he marvelled. "Girls, nothing but girls, bless 'em. Where do they all come from? Where do they all go to? Dashed if I know. Like Sarthend pier, but without any parson. It's marvellous."

They passed Pelham Crescent, the white curve of these debonair, sleek little houses attracted Scarsdale. The foliage of the trees and bushes in the garden was a green veil through which the eyes of Pelham Crescent glimmered like the eyes of women met strolling in the dusk. Yes, a house in Pelham Crescent would suit him admirably. It would be the very house for a literary man married to Julia Marwood. He was still contemplating Paradise and Pelham Crescent when the taxi driver turned into Church Street, Chelsea, and pulled up.

Scarsdale, carefully carrying his red roses, got out and paid him. He made the tip a shilling.

"Thank you, sir."

He smiled a jocund benediction upon the gentleman and his roses. Might Eros be merciful to the poor fellow.

Scarsdale arrived at the end of Spellthorn Terrace. The little houses saluted the lover in him. He approached No. 53, and not till he was within five yards of Julia Marwood's gate did he appreciate the presence of a figure outside the selfsame gate. Two or three people were looking out of windows, and a couple of amused maids stood on the doorstep of a house across the way. For Scarsdale's glance was directed obliquely at the front window of No. 53, and he was in the act of pausing at the gate when he realized that other presence.

Its black hat was a little awry. It had very blonde hair, and a complexion of adventitious richness, and its blue eyes had the angry, flaring wideness of intoxicated frenzy. For the moment it was inarticulate, holding to the iron rail of the gate, but when Scarsdale drew up in embarrassment, it addressed him.

"And who the b—y hell are you?"

Scarsdale, perplexed but always the gentleman, raised his hat. Could a man be more polite and conciliatory?

"Excuse me,—I happen to be—"

Drunk she might be, but even so she was quicker than Scarsdale in grasping a situation. She stared him in the face; she observed his bunch of roses; she swayed slightly as though her knees were made of some gelatinous substance. She gave out an ugly, strident laugh.

“Calling on Julia, are you? Take my tip, m’dear, and keep out of it. She’s—a—a—”

Scarsdale stood there looking shocked and embarrassed. Who the devil was the woman, and what was she doing occluding this sacred gate? He tried conciliation, tact.

“Yes, I’m calling on Miss Marwood.”

The woman mocked him.

“I’m calling on M—Marwood. Nice girl. I’ve been—been calling on her—too. But if you ask me—she’s a blasted—”

She broke again into ferocious laughter, and swaying towards Scarsdale, made a grab at the roses.

“Flowers, dam’ silly. Dam’ fools—men.”

Half the roses came away in her hand, and she flung them into the front garden of No. 53, and gave a kind of self-adjusting swagger, and laughed in his face.

“Dam’ fool.”

She passed him. She pulled herself together, and went with a careful yet blatant haughtiness down the centre of the pavement, and as she went she called loudly upon the world. “Taxi, hi, taxi! I want a taxi. Where—the—Taxi, taxi!”

Scarsdale felt a little overwhelmed. He stood irresolute and enormously self-conscious outside Julia’s gate. He became aware of other people, faces at windows, the two maids on the opposite doorstep. Half the red roses were still huddled in his hand. For the moment he did not know what to do, either with them or with himself.

## 2

But to publish and advertise his hesitation in the face of the whole street was impossible, as impossible as the behaviour of that most unpleasant woman. His ardour recovered itself, and became the shield-bearer of a chivalrous compassion. He opened the gate, and ascended the steps, and rang, but he kept his back to the street and to the windows across the way.

There had been some irresolution in his pressing of the bell, a tentative

reaching out towards that other presence in the house, an awareness of No. 53 embarrassments. Might she not be annoyed, humiliated? He stared at the brown surface of the door, and suddenly it opened, and disclosed her to him. She stood there with a kind of sombre calmness.

He raised his hat, and his eyes were apologetic and appealing.

“I’m sorry—I—”

She looked beyond him to the two maids on the opposite doorstep. Her nostrils quivered.

“Come in.”

She was abrupt and he understood her abruptness. She made way for him to enter, and he entered quickly with a kind of consoling and consenting flexion of his long, loose body. She closed the door, and made a sign with her hand that he should go into the room on the left. He went, and she followed him. They sat down, he on the sofa, she on one of the red plush chairs. He was still holding his hat and the surviving roses.

She said, with that same air of sombre calmness,—“Yes, that was my mother.”

Scarsdale looked at her and then looked away. He placed his hat and the roses on the hard surface of the sofa. His love for this young girl took to itself a sudden compassion. He wanted to say things to her, gentle, generous, comforting things. He thought, “How calm she is, how splendid.”

He picked up the roses and laid them down again.

He said, “I understand. One of the tragedies. I feel on your side about it, absolutely.”

She sat with her hands on her knees, and looking out of the window. Both her face and her figure had a stillness.

“One can’t help these things. One’s born to them. But that’s no reason why one shouldn’t protest.”

“Of course.”

She seemed moved to talk to him, and he wanted to listen, to fill himself with a sense of their new and precious intimacy.

“This house hasn’t been what you’d call heaven. Not what you would call nice. Well, you have seen—”

“I’m sorry. But I want you to understand.—You can tell me.”

She gave him one of her still, dark glances, and turned again to the window.

“When my father went away—I found I had to fight for it. All sorts of beastliness,—those two. The war seemed to strip some people. They were just animals, but not clean like animals. My mother—went with men, anything in khaki.”

She paused. Her face had a stark fierceness, and he marvelled. She seemed to sit there confronting all that was vile and rotten and deplorable in life; she both confronted it and vanquished it. He adored, and dreamed, and marvelled.

“I think you are wonderful.”

She did not seem to hear him. She went on.

“Some things make one mad. Or they make you feel sick. Father knew. I had to try and keep things going. There was Harry. Harry is clean. I like things clean. And father knew. That’s why he did what he did before he was killed.”

She smiled faintly.

“He owned this house; he had put his savings into it. He left the house and the furniture to me, everything. I understood what he wanted. Well,—I turned those two out.”

She observed him for a moment, and saw that he was wholly on her side. He nodded his head.

“What courage.”

“Was it? Well, you see! It seems one has to cut things with a knife. No use messing about, or putting up with other people’s messiness. So beastly and wasteful and futile. I might have put up with Bob if he had left Harry alone,—but he was—O, well, let’s leave it at that. I just got a broom—so to speak—and swept the mess out.”

Again Scarsdale nodded his head.

“You were right. It hurt you. O, yes,—it hurt you horribly. I know. I’m glad you have told me this. I’m most awfully proud and grateful. Yes, proud.”

He gathered his hat and the roses, and suddenly stood up. He felt, somehow, that if he stayed he would be creating an anticlimax.

“I had come to ask you to go out one evening. Dinner and a theatre. Perhaps you will. I’d feel it—the greatest honour.”

He moved a couple of steps and placed the roses gently on a table where

Marwood's photograph stood framed in silver.

"A tribute to both of you."

She stood up, sombre and watchful. She was aware of his ardent eyes, and outstretched hand.

"Anything I can do? Tell me."

She hesitated. Her eyelids quivered momentarily.

"No. Thank you so much."

"You'll tell me, if I can? You know I mean it?"

"Yes."

"Good night. I won't worry you now."

She went with him to the door. She appeared to be absorbed in some sudden, muted musing. Her forehead wore the slight pucker of a frown. But she smiled at him abruptly if vaguely as he went out with a devoted, backward glance at her.

"Julia, good night."

"Good night."

### 3

Scarsdale walked. He was full to the lips with a feeling of exultation and of pity, and he walked without knowing or caring whither he went. Time was an illusion, and when he found himself by the river this miraculous evening seemed to link itself to that other evening when he and Julia Marwood had strolled together in the dusk. He felt happy. Never before had he known such happiness, for had she not uncovered her soul to him, and allowed him to come so very near to her during those most strange, intimate moments. She had shown him the real Julia Marwood, courageous, heroic, putting ugliness and humiliation out of her house of dreams.

He leant against the parapet and watched the sunset. His face had a rapt look. A tug passed with its strings of barges, and the summer water was troubled, and almost the wall seemed to tremble with its plashings. He beheld a beauty, even in buildings sacred to commerce. Everything was beautiful because of the love that was in him, and with a beauty other than the voluptuous bloom on the grape.

Yes, how strangely did life's happenings intermingle, and like the pieces of a puzzle, slip into their places. He could imagine a great hand ordering the plan, because his own particular human plan was shaping so happily. Almost he felt grateful to Mrs. Marwood for providing him with that opportunity. Yes, he was grateful to her. She had given him his occasion. The sun went down. The river seemed to cover itself with a blue, vapourish dusk. Lights appeared stealthily. People passed and repassed behind Scarsdale's back, and their voices and their footfalls were no more to him than the little sounds audible and yet not heeded in some solitary place. He was like a man leaning over a gate on the edge of a wood. And then, gradually and insensibly a little restlessness possessed him; he could not say why or how. The voice of some strange bird singing plaintively in the dusk. It was poignant and disturbing, and suddenly he knew that he wanted to go back to Spellthorn Terrace. He was not satisfied. He was urged and persuaded by the lover's devoted discontent. He had not done enough or said enough; he had been too careful, too conscientiously correct. He ought to have done more, said more. Something that he had remembered about her soft and sombre face came back to him with a suggestion of appeal.

Had she expected more of him?

The doubt was like the bite of a snake. It instilled into him new, sweet poison, a more devotional madness. He turned from the river, and crossing the road began to walk towards her home, and the nearer he came to it the more sure he felt that she needed him. There was to be more of this miraculous night.

He arrived outside her gate. The front of the house was in darkness, but he seemed to know that she was there. He climbed the steps and rang the bell, and waited with his face towards the door. His expectancy was inspired. She needed him; she would understand his return.

The door opened, and she was there, and her dark young figure was part of the dusk.

He said, "I had to come back. Somehow—I felt that I had not done enough."

She showed no surprise. It is probable that she was aware of his emotional exultation without understanding the depth or the compass of it. She hesitated for a moment, and then with a consenting silence she let him in.

"Harry back yet?"

"No."



She led the way to the front room, and they sat as they had sat before, he on the sofa, she on one of the plush-covered chairs. The blind was up, and the room and its furniture a mere shadow of itself. Scarsdale saw his roses still lying on the table, their colour lost in the effacing dusk.

He said, "I have been down by the river. It was wonderful. On such a night things come to one. It seemed to me that there must be something—something—I mean—that I can do. There's Harry, of course, and that will have to be settled, but it's about you that I have been thinking."

She was so still that she seemed part of the darkness, but her face was visible to him. It made him think of a soft, white light. Her silence was like herself, to him infinitely mysterious and yet somehow right. She was like nature at night, a wood, a garden, dim, expectant, waiting.

He went on.

"You have been so wonderfully brave. You must have suffered. And you have worries, anxieties. Isn't there anything that I can do to help?"

The stillness of her white face enthralled him.

"There might be."

"Tell me."

Again she was silent, obdurately so.

"Do tell me. Between us there can be understanding. Is it money?"

She remained rigid.

"I'd rather not—"

"Then it is money? Do tell me. There's no shame in being in need of money. You're proud. O, yes, I know that."

Her head made a slight movement as of consent.

"I'm as proud as—o—well—as proud as myself. Besides it isn't always for one's self, is it? But just now—it happens that I have my chance, and if I could take it I should see a chance for Harry."

He was leaning forward in the darkness.

"Tell me. Everything."

She told him and to him her telling of the thing suggested effort, the overcoming of a beautiful reticence. Her words were transfigured into symbols; everything was transfigured, the room, its dead furniture, the

greyness of the window. She had her chance and could not take it! she wanted it for Harry. O, beautiful, tantalizing, exasperating opportunity! Five hundred pounds! He listened and exulted. He had the money, five hundred pounds, seven hundred pounds, eight hundred pounds. He heard her voice going on, and the words were meaningless; it was her voice and its message that mattered. She was confessing things to him, trusting him.

“But—of course—it’s impossible. One realizes that.”

He came back to the solid, exquisite reality, her dim face, the hard sofa, the faint perfume of roses.

“O, no, not impossible. I can let you have the money. If only you’ll deign to use it.”

There was silence. It suggested to him breathlessness, confusion. He was aware of behaving confusedly. They were out in the passage together, and she was very close to him, and he was groping for the door handle. Something was urging him to hurry, to efface himself and his exultation; to remove the mere casual man from the presence of the loved one. Almost he stammered.

“It’s all right, Julia. Don’t worry, don’t thank me. I’m the grateful one. Why, it’s quite easy. No, I’m not that sort of cad. You understand, my dear, don’t you? It’s a beautiful thing to be able to help.”

He got the door open. His hand touched hers. It was warm; it gripped his fingers.

“I can’t believe it.”

“O, yes, quite easy. I’ll arrange it. Don’t worry.”

He nearly missed his footing on the steps, and in going out he bumped against the gate.

## 4

The stars were out, and Scarsdale had gone less than thirty yards from Julia Marwood’s gate when he heard quick footsteps following him. She overtook him; he heard her call him by name.

“Spenser.”

She had an air of breathlessness. They stood together under the shade of a young tree. Her face seemed to float in the darkness.

“I ought not to have told you that. It wasn’t fair.”

He put out a shy hand and touched her shoulder.

“Dear, I am the one man you should have told. Don’t worry. It has made me very happy.”

She was motionless, tense, her eyes looking away and beyond him. She made no physical response to that touch of his, though she had been conscious of it as a caress.

“I’ll pay you back. And of course I’ll pay you interest.”

His eyes were visible to her in the darkness.

“Not one penny. Not one single penny.”

“But I must. It’s so wonderful and generous of you.”

“My dear, it’s one of the most selfish things I have ever done. It’s making me very happy. Don’t worry.”

He touched her shoulder again, and with a quick movement of the head she let her cheek rest against his hand.

“I’m not worrying. Good night, Spenser.”

“Good night.”

He stood and watched her go back to the gate of No. 53.

## Chapter Twelve

SCARSDALE opened the centre drawer of his desk and took out a cheque-book.

In the course of some fifteen years he had saved about a thousand pounds, and his investments had worn the familiar faces of a little family of children. Always he had been a careful fellow, and had parcelled his small capital into lots of a hundred or two hundred pounds, and all gilded at the edge. He had bought Colonial Government stock, and English Corporation stock, and he had known to a day when the dividends would arrive.

He had glanced at his pass-book. His balance stood at £739 4s. 7d. It had been swollen by such items as "Sale of £200 Western Australia 3½—£173 4s. 9d." His Brighton Corporation stock and his War Loan had shared in this slaughter of the innocents. Quite half his capital had been poured out to colour the romantic flood.

And yet he felt no qualms. He sat at his window on that summer evening, and the sky was as rosy as the cheque beneath his fingers. He looked out into Canonbury Square and saw it as half sunlight and half shadow, a place where children played, a friendly face, a garden in which love walked.

He dallied over the writing of the cheque. He had decided that the posting of a cheque would be more delicate and decorous than the passing of notes. You handed notes to some ambiguous and shadowy fair lady, but this was a classic occasion. "Pay Julia Marwood—five hundred pounds. Spenser Scarsdale." He took trouble in writing it, and his signature was more gaillard than usual, for he was conscious of making a dramatic gesture. He had no qualms. He was being magnificent and magnanimous, displaying power, and that cheque walked in brocade and lace with a glitter of "orders", girt with a sword.

He decided that he would post the cheque to her. That too would be a more delicate and sensitive rendering of the romance, and he smiled as he wrote the letter.

"Dear Julia

"Never have I signed my name with more pleasure. I am very grateful to you for allowing me to do this thing.

"Ever sincerely yours

Miss Gall met him on the stairs on his way out to post the letter. She was carrying his supper-tray, and he stood back against the wall to let her pass, and to Miss Gall he appeared taller than usual. There was something mysterious and adventurous about him, a largeness and a brightness of the eyes. He stood and moved as to music; he might have worn a plumed hat and a little pointed beard and a coat of black velvet.

“Your supper, sir.”

“I shan’t be a minute.”

He displayed the letter.

“Just going to post this.”

He held his head high, and smiled, and suddenly it became plain to Miss Gall that Mr. Scarsdale’s letter was going to a woman, and that he was in love with that woman. She did not know how she knew, and she continued up the stairs with the tray. She put the tray down on the table. She felt suddenly resentful, and tired. Life was always getting out of order, in spite of all your tidying and slavings. She noticed that some of the milk had slopped over the lip of the jug on to the tray.

Miss Gall said, “Drat it”, perhaps because her inner consciousness was protesting against the social revolution in all its phases and disguises. Mr. Scarsdale getting married and leaving her! There would never be another Mr. Scarsdale. He belonged to the placid, patient past.

Meanwhile, Scarsdale had found his red pillar-box. He stood in front of it with the letter balanced on the fingers and palm of one hand. He smiled. He slid the letter into the mouth of the box.

## 2

Harry Marwood, being an observant child, noticed that when Julia opened the letter that he had brought to her from the front-door mat, she opened it on her lap. They were at breakfast together, and the edge of the table and the sag of the white cloth concealed both letter and cheque. Julia’s glances were veiled. She had glanced at the cheque before refolding it and slipping it back into the envelope.

Harry stretched out a hand for the marmalade pot, but his eyes were upon

his sister. She looked “funny”. Almost she had an air of guilt. She had gone red after opening that letter, and then had begun to eat her two rashers of bacon as though she had a train to catch. Her face concealed something, and Harry, who was sensitive as well as observant, helped himself to marmalade, and held his peace.

But he was aware of her strangeness, and of her silence, and of her cutting herself a second slice of bread while half the first slice remained upon her plate. She had the air of looking at things without seeing them. Her silence and her self-absorption covered an undercurrent of excitement. She did not finish her tea, but got up with that envelope in her hand, clutched but not crumpled. She glanced almost impatiently at his deliberate knife and the little splodge of marmalade.

“All right, Ju, just finished.”

He was a tractable child, and devoted to her, and understanding, because of his devotion, that Julia was a creature apart. Julia had responsibilities and worries. She had Mr. Jimson and the office as well as No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace. Expeditiously he piled butter and marmalade upon two last cubes of bread, licked the tip of his left first finger and jumped up to help her.

In five minutes he was gone. He had put up that very bright and innocent face and had kissed her. There had been an unspoken sympathy in that kiss, a young trustfulness that refrained from asking questions, and she stood at the kitchen window, and took the letter from her apron pocket. “I am very grateful to you for allowing me to do this thing.” She glanced at the cheque.

“Pay Miss Julia Marwood—” It was incredible, and yet it had happened.

Softly she uttered the one word, “Beast”.

Yes, that first reaction of hers had been rather beastly. Instantly she had asked herself the question, “Is he good for so much?” Yes, she had questioned the honouring of the cheque, and even as she stood there in a patch of sunlight and felt the heartburn of her worldly scepticism, she knew that she would go to the bank directly its doors were open and pay in that cheque. Then—? There would follow one day, two days, perhaps three days of tense curiosity. How long would they take to clear that piece of paper.

“Beast!”

She was a complex of emotions, but her conception of life contained and controlled them. She was herself and she was Harry; she was ambition and shrewdness and laughter and strange shame. And, in a sense too, she was Scarsdale and that cheque and its opportunities, and Mr. Jimson’s ruling spirit,

and the young autocrat in a car. A part of her might twinge like a foot in a tight shoe; but shoes could be compelled to mould themselves to your measure.

Yes, she was going to accept that cheque and to use it, nor did she shirk the implications of its usefulness. She was not like the old-fashioned chorus-girl, who, having obtained all that was to be obtained from a man on the credit of her stage smile and her legs, became violently prudish and refined when man demanded the rewards of nature. Julia was through. No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace had taught her to face facts. Scarsdale's gesture might be extravagantly that of a gentleman, but it indicated other and more primitive gestures.

Besides—she liked him. He might be a little grizzled and long in the leg, but he had an air. Obviously he possessed money, and he was clean. As yet she had not let herself go with any man, perhaps because she had had to fight sex in her mother and in her brother, and no man had made her feel the inevitableness and the fury of surrender. For the loan she would pass to Scarsdale a proper receipt and a promise to repay. She would make it appear to be a business transaction. She would offer him five per cent. on his money.

He might not be satisfied. She did not expect him to be satisfied, and that was as far as her realism could carry her. For Scarsdale's figure had a haziness of outline; to Julia it was a shape seen in the dusk under trees, in the midst of a perplexing silence. She did not see him clearly, probably because he was of another generation. He stood off so from things, and moved sensitive and deprecating hands.

But Martagon Terrace waited for her. She locked up the house, and with the cheque in her vanity bag, set out upon the day's adventure. She saw it so differently from the writer of the cheque. The flower-shop at the corner of Martagon Street had taken to itself a new owner and a new technique. Here was a modern fellow who could splash the new commercial colours in the very faces of Chelsea. The florist had had the façade above the shop painted in oblongs in yellow and lilac. A signwriter had just set out in large black letters the text of the new day:

*“Say it with Flowers,  
Say it with Cabbages.  
Say it through Us.”*

Julia glanced at the shop as she passed. She liked it; she liked the bright glare of the colours, and the cheeky bravura of the text upon the wall. She would have liked a bright blue or scarlet car. Yes, that was business, youth, the wearing of the red and the green. No antique Physic Garden, and bundles of

dried herbs. Full of her youth she passed on to Mr. Jimson's office.

At five minutes to ten she left her chair, and put on her hat. Mr. Jimson was in the inner office, and she spoke to him through the open door.

"I am going out for twenty minutes. Private business."

A sound of shuffling consent came to her.

"Very well, Miss Marwood."

She walked to her bank. She stood at the counter and filled in a paying-in slip, and handed slip and cheque to the clerk.

"To my account—please."

The clerk examined the cheque a little too fussily, so Julia thought.

"Yes, I have endorsed it. All right, isn't it?"

"Quite."

"Thank you."

### 3

Scarsdale allowed his romance three days of delay, not that they might prove to Julia that his cheque was good, but because he was that sort of lover, walking delicately in the moonlight. She had accepted his cheque, or at any rate she had not returned it, and she had not written. It would not have occurred to him that her business wit dominated the situation, and that she would withhold the receipt until his signature was honoured.

But her silence perplexed him a little. Surely she did not suspect him of having offered her a mere bribe? She should be able to distinguish between love and lust. And the sensitive lover in him walked all the more gently, treading delicately beside the trailing skirts of her pride. He must not let her think gross, butcherly things, or imagine the hot breath of the prowling sensualist.

On the fourth morning he collected his pass-book from his bank and saw that significant entry. She had accepted his cheque and used it, and the devout lover in him felt crowned with a garland.

And suddenly he understood her silence. She was waiting for him to go to her. Yes, he understood her silence. It was exquisite and challenging. She



would not put bold words upon paper. He pictured her waiting for him like a dark-eyed girl in the portico of a temple.

The day was close and hot, but Scarsdale did not suffer from the heat, nor did he perspire and bite black finger-nails like Mr. Taggart. He sat at the open window of his stuffy little room, and confronted the blankness of a wall whose bricks had once been yellow. To Scarsdale the gold was there beneath the grime. Somewhere machinery lumbered and clanked, and its underchant was like the clangour of a Wagnerian world, subterranean and mysterious. There was a machine in Scarsdale that functioned, while the lover in him looked through and beyond the wall of brick to the other world where his young Madonna of the Pear Blossom sat dreaming.

He had but one glimpse of Mr. Taggart during the day. They met in the corridor just before the luncheon-hour, and Taggart, walking as though he carried a bag of broken glass inside him, glowered up at Scarsdale's beatific face.

"Thunder coming."

"Yes, possibly."

Taggart went on down the stairs, with a kind of sombre smirk under the unbrushed brim of his hat. Damn the fellow! He appeared to be so egregiously pleased with life, and unaware of other thunders.

At the end of the day Scarsdale spent ten minutes in the slipshod little lavatory. The basin was cracked, and the soap poached into a fatty mess, and the roller towel creased and smeared. He had to use the basin and the soap, but he eschewed the towel; it had been used too promiscuously and he preferred his handkerchief. He looked at himself carefully in the small mirror, and damped his hair and smoothed it with his hands. His tie was a little too Presbyterian, and he gave it a Catholic humanity. Then he returned to his room to collect his hat and gloves and umbrella, and the bunch of roses. He had bought roses during the luncheon-hour. His umbrella embarrassed him; possibly he had feelings about its wrongness, and the rightness and grace of a court-sword. But then, there was thunder in the air.

So, with roses and umbrella, and unrained upon, though a slaty sky was muttering, he arrived upon his Julia's doorstep. He rang, and she beheld him shyly raising his hat with the hand that also held the handle of his umbrella. The roses demurred. They were as shy and as reverent as the lover.

"Not disturbing you?"

She looked at him with the vivid eyes of her youth. She had been prepared,

paraded, and here he was upon her doorstep, a perplexing, shadowy figure. His umbrella and his hat seemed to embarrass him. He smiled as though they shared some wonderful secret, some pot of divine honey into which no greedy, casual finger should be dipped.

She let him in and closed the door. They stood in the half light of the passage. Had he clutched her suddenly, had it been ever so clumsily, or even thrust the roses into her hands, she would have understood him as man. But he stood off and gazed with a kind of exquisite and silly shyness, and looked at her as though she were an iced cake under a glass cover.

“I want to thank you, Julia. Yes, that’s all. Not a word. I’ve brought these.”

He held out the roses, and her face had a strange, sullen blankness. It looked heavy and obscure, and about the mouth there quivered a little quirk of incipient impatience. He was so nice and nebulous, and she liked her colours to be primary.

“Come in. Harry’s not back yet.”

She led the way into the sitting-room, and he followed her and appeared in doubt as to where to place his hat and umbrella, and finally he sat down with them upon the sofa, the umbrella lying across his knees. He had a very bright, wise face, but no words. He radiated devout light like a lamp in a sanctuary.

She put her mouth and nose to his roses.

“I say,—about that cheque, it’s simply marvellous of you.”

His hands caressed the umbrella.

“My dear girl,—that’s all right. Not a word.”

“O, no, that’s not business. I have written you out a receipt. It’s here.”

She produced an envelope from her skirt pocket, and thrust it at him almost with an air of menace.

“Take it. I insist on that. Now, when do you want me to repay?”

“O, no fixed date. Use it as long—”

“Say in three years. And the interest. I can manage five.”

He became suddenly stern.

“Quite impossible. Usury—between us! My dear girl,—I could never—”

Her eyes brightened for a moment.

“You really are too awfully good. I’ll just go and put these roses in water.

Shan't be a minute.”

She escaped. She drew a deep breath and ran out into the garden for a moment. The atmosphere in that room had seemed to her overscented with sentiment. Now, what was he at? She had been ready to meet him, and to be as real to him as his cheque was real, and he had sat on the sofa like an old-fashioned, eligible man, nursing the nice conventions with his hat and umbrella. She was perplexed, and she was irritated. She wanted to know exactly what he expected of her, and his idea of reality seemed to be to smile and to cover up the cakes.

“Fooling about!”

She put his flowers in water and went back carrying the vase. He stood up when she entered the room. He had rid himself of his umbrella, but not of his self-conscious pose. The situation was becoming more and more refined and rarefied.

“Just your colour, Julia.”

“Which?”

She gave him a challenging look. She attacked by standing close in, and looking sideways and up into his face.

“The dark one.”

He touched a particular flower with the tip of a long finger, and she waited tensely for him to show his hand, but suddenly he put his two hands behind his back.

“Dark and damask is Julia's flower.”

Her face seemed to grow as firm and solid as the white surface of the vase. Deliberately she placed it on the table. She was like a young woman on the stage to whom her opposite had given the wrong cue. She sat down on one of the hard chairs, and Scarsdale resumed his seat upon the sofa.

They talked, letting any odd subject drop and picking it up again. They tossed polite words at each other, and then suddenly the June rain came down and the room was darkened. Never had she felt so smothered and so bored. Why couldn't he be real? Was he real, or just a nice piece of sentiment in trousers?

While he was feeling the embarrassment and accepting it as inevitable, obviously she was embarrassed. Any nice girl would have felt it just as she did. Proud, silent Julia! He said to himself that a man should walk delicately,

without touching the virginal hem of her soul.

And then, suddenly, he decided that it was time for him to go. These April occasions should be brief and sensitive. He got up. The shower was a wet sheet.

She made a protest, however perfunctory she may have found it.

“You can’t go—yet.”

But he was above the vicissitudes of the weather.

“Get a taxi around the corner. Yes, really. Besides, I have a gamp.”

They huddled each other to the door with mutual and restive politeness.

“Good-bye, Julia. Don’t worry.”

“Of course not.”

“That’s splendid.”

The length of him went out and down into the rain. He opened his umbrella with a jerk, and looking back at her bumped into the gate that happened to be closed. It spoiled the impressiveness of his walking off.

She closed the door. Something gave way in her. She rushed up to her room, and throwing herself on the bed, buried her face in the pillow. She laughed, she smothered the immoderate, helpless noise of it against the pillow. O, my God!

Someone was calling.

“Ju! Ju! where are you?”

She sat up, suddenly sobered. Harry had come back, and Harry was real. She went downstairs to get her brother’s supper.

## Chapter Thirteen

MR. JIMSON was made to feel the suddenness and the shock of youth, for that which yesterday had seemed a girl had become an absurdly self-sure young woman. Perhaps she was not as self-sure as she seemed, but her chance was there and she seized it, and was ready to growl "My bone."

For that which happened to Mr. Jimson happens to most of us, and Mr. Jimson had had no children in his house to give the effect of gradualness to the eternal revolution. The old, cracked crock of him was suddenly jostled by this bright and brazen young pot, and gave out shrill protests. "Preposterous! A young wench like this! She's not more than two-and-twenty. A man of my age and experience! It isn't dignified. These young things want to begin where we left off." But the pressure of youth was upon him. At Mr. Jimson's age a man's forcefulness may have put on the pantaloons of an authoritative fussiness, while the soul of him has grown fat and cowardly. No longer can he take life by the throat. He asks for comfortable, prosy corners, and avoids draughts, and is careful about the airing of his vests and pants. Risks are anathema. The pirate in him is dead; he has become a rentier.

Mr. Jimson surrendered, and even while surrendering was astonished at himself. He twiddled his gold cross, and peeped from under irritable, bushy eyebrows. Was he dreaming, or was he in fact discussing the formalities of a partnership with Marwood's daughter? Extraordinary! He had been in the habit of bullying Marwood, but then Marwood had had a family to keep.

"I have the thousand lying at my bank."

She had mortgaged No. 53 for £500 and with Scarsdale's cheque the thing was done.

"But it's without precedent. At your age."

She did not say that all innovations are without precedent. Youth conceives itself to be original. She kept to the realities.

"Any fault to find with my work?"

He hadn't. He sat and peered at her. For she was reality, assiduous and capable and calm. She knew the business from A to Z. Also in his secret soul he knew that his grip had slackened while she had increased the pressure of her strong young hands. She had remedied his evasions and his delays. The snap had gone from him and he knew it. He had found himself inclined to dawdle

with the morning paper and to leave all the detail of the day's work to her. He had not quite realized how inevitable she had become until he had felt her fingers on his throat.

He twiddled the gold cross on his watch-chain.

"Well, sub rosa, Miss Marwood. Your interest in the business must be—well—that new word—camouflaged."

"You don't want my name to appear. Why not?"

"Isn't that policy? Are interests identical. You are rather young."

"We always are. Jimson & Marwood. But then—of course—"

She mused a moment, and the smile that arrived was bright and hard.

"A middle-aged business. Most of the old jossers would expect to see themselves here. Whiskers."

She glanced at Mr. Jimson's sharp and polished chin.

"All right. You can have it in the partnership deed that my name shall not appear officially for three years. How's that?"

He nodded.

"Very sensible of you."

"Call it cunning. When you're young you want to look older than you are, and when you get to fifty you're in a funk about looking it."

Now, how did she know that?

"Think so? Why?"

"Father used to dye his hair. Poor old dad, he thought nobody knew. He used to keep the bottle locked up."

Mr. Jimson felt that her cool glance was resting on his own thin and sandy thatch.

"Indeed! Well, a man may have reasons, very good reasons. Then, I take it that you want the business put through some time this year."

"At once."

He clicked his tongue and tried to be facetious.

"Dear, dear,—this is hustling! Well, we had better get the lawyers in. But—really—"

He passed a hand over his hair.

## 2

Scarsdale locked up Julia Marwood's receipt in the black and gold cashbox that he kept in one of the drawers of his writing-table at Canonbury Square. This was a precious and a sacred document, and from it a perfume emanated that got itself mingled with the smell of roses and the freshness after rain. He had been soaked as to the trousers, and had arrived in Miss Gall's house with squelching boots and a little whimper of vague dissatisfaction. The interview had lacked warmth, yet how could he complain when his pose had been that of a gentleman in a white nightshirt carefully shading even the flame of a chaste candle.

"Good night, my beloved."

He did wish that he had not bumped into that gate. And here was Miss Gall exclaiming, and reaching for his wet umbrella as though it were a dead and dripping fish!

"O, Mr. Scarsdale, you look like a dog that's been in the Serpentine."

The simile displeased him, for his dignity, like his boots, was feeling rather waterlogged.

"Thunder shower. Couldn't get a taxi. Nothing to worry about."

He went upstairs, and after looking at that precious document, locked it away in his cashbox.

But with the morning he woke to the freshness after rain, and to an ice-blue sky, and his mood moved with the weather. He opened his window wide and looked out upon a square that was all washed and burnished. Almost it had the smell of the country, and the grass in the garden was wet and scintillant. All was well with the world. His mood urged him to walk to the city, and not to crowd it ungraciously into some bus or tramcar, and he walked and thought of his Julia. His muse was that of Herrick, but without Herrick's wantonness.

He transmuted her into music. He tinted the memory of the previous evening, and yet left it virgin snow. Of course that first meeting between them after the giving and receiving of mere cash had been delicate and full of a mutual embarrassment. She had her pride. Her petals were sensitive. They had been shy of each other, but inevitably so, and her shyness had the delicious chill of a cold, bright morning in May. He remembered her putting her mouth

to the roses. Yes, the next occasion would be less embarrassing for them both, but it would behoove him to respect her pride. He must hold himself in. He would make her understand and trust him so that her young pride should not need to frown.

Fleet Street was its usual self. Scarsdale passed along Fleet Street without being aware of its inwardness or its outwardness. He was five minutes late. He was putting his long legs at the wooden stairs that somehow suggested that legions of cats had been sharpening their claws upon the woodwork for the last hundred years, when the office boy bobbed out of his box.

“Mr. Scarsdale.”

“Hallo.”

“Mr. Taggart left word. Wants to see you first thing.”

Scarsdale went up the stairs and along the dark corridor until he came to the two panels of frosted glass in Mr. Taggart’s door. He opened the door. He saw the usual figure black and bulging at its untidy table. Taggart was writing a letter. He did not look up.

“That you, Scarsdale?”

“Yes.”

“Shut the door, will you.”

Scarsdale closed the door, and as he did so something clouded his mood, like the unrolling of a blind. He looked at Taggart and realized that the bunched, sombre figure had put down the pen and was examining its finger-nails. As usual they were of an unpleasant blackness, and in that moment of time the thought came to Scarsdale that Taggart was not conscious of his finger-nails. Those little, unbrushed crescents were not even symbolical. The room itself had a gloom, the shadow of some inevitable shabbiness.

“Just a few words. Don’t suppose they will surprise you. We’re closing down.”

Scarsdale said “Oh,” and his mouth seemed to remain open after moulding the roundness of the sound.

“The *Sabbath* is dead, dead as—”

Taggart could find no simile to describe the deadness of the religious journal. He gave a little, irritable glance over a fat black shoulder at Scarsdale’s motionless figure.

“Last issue. We have decided to carry on the books. Shan’t need you now.



No doubt you expected it.”

To Scarsdale the silence was like a hole in a door into which he was trying to insert a key.

“Closing down—now?”

“Of course. We’ve lost enough money. I warned you.”

“It’s rather sudden. You mean—”

“There’s nothing for you to do. I’ve written you a cheque, to cover your salary to the end of the month. Also, here’s a formal letter. Wise to have these things on paper.”

He turned in his chair and confronted Scarsdale. He held out the envelope.

“Cheque’s inside. Got anything in mind?”

Scarsdale had many things in mind, so many things that no single impression was able to emerge. He had a feeling that there was a part of Taggart that gloated. But why?

He took three steps forward and accepted the envelope.

“No, not for the moment. A few private jobs. Find something all right. Am I to understand that I am free—now.”

Taggart swung back to his table.

“Well, unless you want to sit on your backside for the next ten days doing damn’ all.”

“I see.”

Taggart had picked up his pen and was hunching himself for the day’s labour, and Scarsdale with a sudden, sensitive blinking of the eyes, went out of the room and down the stairs into the street.

### 3

He walked all the way back to Canonbury, and until he arrived in the familiar square he did not realize himself as a man with a tired pair of legs. St. John Street, Upper Street, the Essex Road had been mere slits in the objective happenings of a shabby world through which his consciousness had slid like a train in a tube. He had been sacked, and the expulsion had shocked and frightened him, though he should have been prepared for the eventuality. As

much as by anything he had been astonished by his own blindness.

But here was Miss Gall's front door, a brown door that needed repainting, and he was feeling in his pocket for his latchkey when his impulse to open the door was stayed. He remembered certain things, his happy mood of the morning, rain, Julia, and the smell of roses, Taggart's black finger-nails, the shabby wooden stairs down which he had lumbered. The machine had extruded him, and as he stood staring at Miss Gall's door his sensitive self shrank from it.

For somewhere behind that door he would meet Miss Gall. She would look at him with surprised, short-sighted eyes. She would ask questions.

"What, back, sir! Not feeling ill—I hope?"

He might be suffering from a temporary absence of stomach, but he did not wish to meet Miss Gall for the moment. He could not tell her that he had been sacked, and that his existence depended upon casual hack-work and the fortunes of a half-finished novel. He turned away from the door, repocketed the key, and walked along the left-hand side of the square. He wanted to sit down, and there were seats in the garden, but the garden was near to Miss Gall. For suddenly he had felt himself responsible for Miss Gall. His problem was her problem, the problem of an obscure and elderly woman who lived on the letting of rooms. Miss Gall seemed to raise herself in the centre of his consciousness like a statue erected to the memory of all lone and needy women.

He thought, "What a damned fool!"

But even when a man may be feeling his damned foolishness he will know that there have been justifications. Julia had been his justification. Well, and why not? Where was his knightliness? If he had been showing off was he going to crumple up when a gentleman with black finger-nails called his bluff? He walked in the direction of Highbury. He arrived in the respectable, Victorian shade of Highbury Grove. The shade reminded him that the sun was shining. Obviously. He himself cast a shadow. He would sit in the sun and think.

He made his way into Highbury Fields, and avoiding the flickering shade of poplar trees he searched for and found a seat in the sun. He needed the sun and he needed solitude, and he had the seat to himself. The uproar of the streets was stilled for him, though it clattered not far from his elbow, and from some summer space rose yet another uproar, that of children at play. It occurred to him to wonder why they were not at school. Then a pigeon cooed. Surprising sound! A couple of young nursemaids passed with prams. "I'm not

taking any lip from you, I says, and I walked straight out of the 'ouse.” These voices did not coo, but Scarsdale was not paying any attention to them, for he had voices of his own.

He supposed that for the last three months he had been dreaming a dream, and that Taggart’s uncleanly hand had knocked loudly on the door. Hurriedly and with a slight sense of bewilderment he had arisen, and had found that his romantic clothes had been transmuted into realities. He was reclothing himself in the realities. But what was reality? The light of the lamp you carried about inside you? You saw life by the light of your own particular lamp.

A voice said, “Well, go on dreaming.”

But was it a dream? He was in love with Julia. He was writing a novel. He thought it a very good novel. He had delivered himself of a great gesture, and such gestures could not be recalled.

“I can’t tell her—now. I shall have to keep up the illusion—until. But why should it be an illusion?”

And suddenly he felt hungry. He left his seat, and going in search of a shop he found a confectioner’s. He bought a couple of penny buns and had them put in a paper bag by the young lady behind the counter. He returned to his solitary seat in the sun and ate his buns. Half a dozen sparrows joined him, for the sparrow is the greatest of opportunists.

## 4

Presumably, there is no great sustenance in a couple of penny buns, nor can they be considered stimulating, yet Scarsdale felt better after he had eaten those buns. He had masticated something. He sat and was warmed by the sun, but he was not persuaded to reflect upon universal. Transcendentalism, Darwinism, Behaviourism, Relativity are for the man who has a good meal inside him, and leisure to sit in a chair. Scarsdale reflected upon life’s particulars. His categorical imperative was the need for earning a living. The grim “Thou shalt labour” was for him as for the multitude, and that is the one universal that matters.

But he was the lover. He did not wish to doff his spangled cloak and to put away the symbolical plume. If you consented to wear nothing but a bowler hat, you became a bowler hat. Youth understands this, or feels it in the blood, and goes hatless as a protest. And Scarsdale’s particular adventure desired to be

perpetuated; it would have its bun and eat it; it would wear the disguise and make a mystery of things.

He did not see himself as he was, but as he wished to be. He looked at himself in the mirror of illusion, as most men do, until they come to that final wisdom, and few are those who come to it. He was still upon the stage, a dreamer, parading a gentle egotism.

Now, what was the situation? He still had some two hundred pounds at the bank, and securities worth another four or five hundred. He had been discharged from the staff of a derelict magazine. He had written thirteen chapters of his war novel. Why not dare the adventure, prove himself something better than a literary hack? Fame and Julia! Out—good sword! Let the plumes wave in the wind. His two hundred pounds, carefully husbanded, would last him a year. He would write, he would write like a hero, a Prometheus, a thrower of bombs. Heads up! Two buns in a paper bag! Nonsense. Dinner at Claridge's with Julia wearing furs.

He got up. He walked back to Canonbury Square. He inserted his latchkey into the lock, and opening the door came upon Miss Gall with a duster pinned over her head, aproned, brushing down the stairs.

Almost she had the air of a woman surprised in her petticoat.

“O,—Mr. Scarsdale,—really—!”

He smiled upon Miss Gall. He smiled upon her as from a great height. He accepted his responsibility for Miss Gall, and wore it as Hercules wore his lion's skin.

“That's all right. Home rather early. I should like some tea at four if you can manage it.”

“Tea at four.”

“Yes. Press of work. As a matter of fact I have ceased to be connected with the *Sabbath*. Other interests.”

He went up the stairs on long and optimistical legs, and Miss Gall gave her dust-pan a tilt, and felt troubled. For whatever you did life was so full of dust and trouble.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

ABOUT that time Scarsdale went to see “Cyrano” played. For the sake of economy he had a seat in the gallery, but his soul was very much upon the stage with the flamboyant Gascon. He was hungry and heroic with him in the trenches at Arras. For, in a sense, Cyrano’s case was very much his own, though there was no raw pink and white boy to be pushed like a prawn into the net of sex.

Scarsdale could echo the Gascon, though his nose was not so enormous as Cyrano’s, for he carried with him to Spellthorn Terrace the airs and inspiration of a great gentleman who could write poetry and refrain from kisses. He spread the cloak of his fine sentiment at his Julia’s feet, and was at times a little puzzled by her lack of animation. Almost she looked sullen. She possessed one of those large, dark, handsome faces that settle like milk in a pail when no excitement stirs it.

He visited her once a week. He was a mixture of playful gravity and tender politeness. Always he seemed to sit or stand at a little distance from her. He would talk books, or the theatre, or about the war. The war still obsessed him. He brought her a copy of one of George Russell’s books, and left it with her, and the mysticism of George Russell was to Julia like a score by Debussy offered to a child with a tin trumpet.

She gave the book five minutes, and discarded it with a gesture of scorn.

“What stuff!”

Nothing happened in it. The book was very much like Scarsdale as she saw him, nebulous, ineffectual, ceremonious, vague, a man who did nothing, a man without hands and organs, a fribbler. Her attitude towards Scarsdale was undergoing a change. He bored her. He had no grip. He could not talk about motor cars, or money, or real estate.

Even on an occasion when he took her to the theatre they were at cross purposes. He had asked her to choose the piece, and she had selected a musical comedy; Scarsdale had not seen anything of the sort since his “Geisha” days. He bought two “upper circles,” and his impression was that Julia was not pleased with the seats.

She was not. She had expected dress-circle or stalls. A man who could produce cheques for five hundred pounds had no right to be careful on such an

occasion. She was a young woman who was beginning to take herself very seriously, for Scarsdale had aroused her sexual self-consciousness. She had become aware of herself as a very puissant and important creature, woman, the one and only woman in the world. She was aware of her effect upon men. They looked at her in the street. She was beginning to say to herself, "How very important I am. How they do want to do things for me."

She remarked, "It's very stuffy up here."

Scarsdale was troubled.

"Shall I try to change the seats?"

"No use. House full."

But she did approve of the piece. It was highly coloured, and vulgar and tuneful. It ogled the audience. It was well-fleshed and sensual. She grew quite animated; she laughed, while Scarsdale wondered. He was glad that she was enjoying it, but how did she manage to enjoy it? It filled him with a kind of dazed weariness. It was so full of stupid nudities.

"Quite good music."

"Topping."

He bought her chocolates. He could not afford to buy her chocolates, but that was a Cyrano touch. She ate his chocolates with relish, popping them between her firm young lips. She disposed of an amazing number of chocolates. Scarsdale ate two.

Afterwards he was quite unable to get a taxi. Other people got them, but he was always a few seconds behind the other fellow. He stood on the edge of the pavement with an air of nice and patient futility. And, suddenly she laughed.

"Let's walk."

Delightful idea! They walked, and now and again she would break into a whistling. The lilt of a particular song was in her head and in the movements of her young body.

*"Gracie gave the glad-eye.  
To every little ladd-ie."*

She whistled, and Scarsdale, trying to put himself in tune with her, attempted to pipe the refrain, but found his rendering of it flat. But how happy she was! Almost she seemed ready to dance along the pavement like an irresponsible urchin footing it to the sounds of a barrel-organ. She was in an

urchin mood, and he did not know it. Inwardly she was addressing him as “Old Solemn Face”, and making a mock of his futile attempts to secure a taxi. She waggled her sleek young hips, and the insolent youth of her laughed and rebelled.

How young she was!

He looked at the yellow lights and the blurred darkness where the stars should be, and felt flattered that she should be so happy in his presence. True, he did not quite understand her physical vivacity. He would have liked to be equally young with her, but somehow he could not keep in step. The self-consciousness of the forties trailed soberly beside her.

He said, “We must have another night like this.”

“O, rather!”

Her splurge into irony was lost upon him. And so they came to Chelsea and to Spellthorn Terrace, and he stood with his hat in his hand at her gate, and was devout and chivalrous.

“Hope you’re not tired?”

Tired? What a soft egg he was! Tired! Why, had he been real he would have snuggled her forcefully into that dark house, and suddenly that which was male and female in them would have clung and kissed and pressed body to body.

“O, not a bit. You’ve got a long way to go.”

“Things to think over. Thank you for them. Good night, Julia.”

She gave him a flat hand, and left him and let herself in. She banged the door. Good lord! O, good lord! What a futile, fribbing, starched old thing he was! He bored her; he bored her excessively. And she went upstairs to her room, groping her way, and switched on the light, and felt herself suddenly in the very worst of tempers. Instead of his face she seemed to be looking at a pink and white slip of paper, his cheque. O, damn that cheque. The obligation itself had begun to bore her. Her gratitude yawned.

She removed her hat.

“I suppose he’ll come here regularly once a week—for years.”

She shook out the black blur of her bobbed hair. O, confound it! He was too much of a boiled shirt. She couldn’t stand his coming and sitting and making sheep’s eyes at her, and saying nothing that mattered. Why couldn’t he be interested in real things? Books about super-souls, the bright “celestials,” a

cosmic consciousness! Good lord! What was youth in the world for? She undressed with her own impatience, and got into bed with it, and then realized that she had forgotten to turn out the light.

She sleeked out swiftly like a young animal and pushed the switch. Yes, somehow she would have to turn him out like that. But how? There was that damned cheque. She would have to get busy and pay off that loan.

But did he expect her to pay him back?

What did an old idiot like that expect?

## 2

During those summer weeks Scarsdale worked furiously at his novel. He rose at six in the morning, boiled a small kettle on a spirit stove and made himself an early cup of tea. The open window of his sitting-room offered him no distractions at that hour, and the milkman's rat-rat and call and Miss Gall's collecting of the milk caused him no irritation. The sky was either blue or grey, the square peacefully wet or peacefully sunny.

After breakfast he worked again till twelve, either upon the novel or upon articles and reviews, for an editor was sending him a few books to review. These review copies were doubly blessed, in that he could sell them afterwards and coin a few shillings. The novel grew, it was a longish book; in one month he wrote more than fifty thousand words. And he was sure that the work was good; he had discovered himself and his craft. Or was it that the war had let loose in him a humanity that poured itself out profusely? The illusion of his great inspiration grew as the book grew, nor did he realize that his interpreting of life was like his wooing of Julia, a piece of sensitive and self-conscious sentimentalizing.

At twelve o'clock he went out, ostensibly to lunch. He bought an apple at a greengrocer's, and a couple of scones or rock-cakes at a confectioner's, and with slightly bulging pockets made his way into Highbury Field. He had a particular seat on the further side, and usually he possessed this seat in solitude. His lunch cost him fourpence. He saved money, maintained appearances, and supposed that he deceived Miss Gall. If it rained he went out with mackintosh and umbrella, and lunched on the same seat under his travelling tent. He gave a few crumbs to the sparrows, and threw the core of his apple away into a shrubbery.



He enjoyed these simple lunches, the open air, and his comparative solitude. He felt like a boy eluding the conventions, and consummating an adventure upon a bottle of ginger-beer and a bun. He meditated, he dreamed dreams. He dreamed of Julia, and of a little white house—say—in Pelham Crescent, and of marriage as a bachelor in the forties may dream of marriage. The body of his romance he handled delicately. He had a fondness for the words—“Beloved”—“Madonna.” He dreamed about his novel. He dreamed about the number of editions of it that might be printed. The novel was to be his great gesture. It would reveal things; it would be the dramatic drawing back of a curtain; it would reveal him to Julia. His fancy swaggered gently, boyishly, absurdly. Spenser Scarsdale the novelist; Spenser Scarsdale the philosopher; Spenser Scarsdale the interpreter of the great heart of humanity. He saw his success as a garland of orange blossoms; he saw himself placing it upon Julia’s head; he saw Julia looking up at him with the annunciation of love and wonder in her eyes. He saw himself her great man, Cyrano revealed.

He smoked a pipe. Then he got up and walked, but before leaving the Fields he deposited his crumpled bun-bag in a receptacle for waste paper. It was a meticulous and nice gesture, a salute to a Victorian orderliness. He walked till half-past three, up streets and down streets; he looked into shops; he observed houses and little shabby front gardens. Sometimes he would walk as far as Finsbury Park. He had his suburban days and his city days. He wore out a great deal of shoe leather. He was the sentimentalist collecting an artificial realism.

Some time before four o’clock he returned to Canonbury Square. He had his tea. He lit a pipe and sat down at his table. He added more pages to that tremendous novel. Almost he brandished a sword and shouted, “Julia, glory!” He thought that he had Miss Gall kindly and comfortably deceived.

### 3

But Miss Gall was not deceived. Women are not deceived by the Scarsdales of this world, the men with thin necks and faces, and ungreedy eyes. In her youth Miss Gall had been deceived by a round-headed man with waxed moustaches and a shiny forehead and breath of a yeasty staleness.

Miss Gall observed the details and the minutiae of Scarsdale’s daily routine. She had to have eyes for a speck of cabbage left adhering to a plate, or for dust on the hall table.

No letters arrived for Mr. Scarsdale. That is to say he received no more than one or two a week, and usually they flopped heavily upon the doormat, and the postman's rat-rat sounded like a contemptuous "That's that." These fat envelopes were addressed to Mr. Spenser Scarsdale in his own handwriting. Manuscript returned with regrets.

Also, there was the evidence of Mr. Scarsdale's shoes. He had three pairs, but one of them was out of action with a crack in the leather. Yet another pair were worn down at the heels and needed soling. It could not be that Mr. Scarsdale was careless, for in the old days he had been a little fussy about wet feet, and on Sundays he would go out looking very much the gentleman.

Miss Gall spoke to him on the subject of shoe leather.

"Excuse me, sir, but your shoes—"

"Shoes?"

"They need attention, sir. Shall I take them to the cobbler's? There's a shop in the Essex Road."

"Thanks, if you would."

Sometimes, when he was out walking and she had seized the opportunity of dusting his room, she would stand and look at the manuscript of his novel. It was very neat and clean, with very few erasures or alterations. She would read a few lines of it, and she would think—

"Will anyone pay him for that?"

She had a worried scepticism. Pages of paper neatly scribbled over looked so quiet and unobtrusive, and the age blazed upon hoardings and squawked through the large trumpets of gramophones. All the successful things seemed to make a noise or to suggest immense activity. There were jazz-bands and motor-buses. And on the picture-posters lovers kissed with immense and active zest, face glued to face. The age shouted and hooted. Even the motors eructated. And Mr. Scarsdale was such a quietist.

"Money out of that!"

It seemed ridiculous.

And then there was the question of his shirts, and not only of his shirts, but of his pants and vests and socks. Miss Gall did a great deal of surreptitious darning, spectacles on nose, sitting under the gas-jet in the kitchen. But frayed cuffs could not be darned, and those young women at the laundry were terrors. Or was it the machinery? The teeth of the age tore and mangled people like

Mr. Scarsdale and their linen.

“He’s so—so soft spoken, poor dear.”

For she had her own picture of Spenser Scarsdale. He was so long and thin and gentle. There were days when his eyes looked a little frightened. They were like the eyes of an animal that hears something predatory following upon its heels. Miss Gall thought that he was looking thinner and more grizzled. His nose looked bigger. He ate less. She noticed that he smoked his tobacco to the dusty stuff that accumulates in the bottom of a tin. In the old days he had tipped that dust into the china bowl into which he threw spent matches.

## 4

A leaf prematurely fallen from a tree is no more missed than a pebble dropped from the edge of a cliff, and if the war taught the world anything it taught it to grow accustomed to the disappearance of a face. Men vanished, just as Scarsdale vanished for a while from the little groove of a journalist’s routine. No one missed him. There was too much hurrying water in the stream, and the banks were too crowded.

No one asked, “What’s become of old Scarsdale?”

But a certain Mr. Shelby, a publisher, meeting Taggart at lunch, asked him a question.

“Wasn’t Scarsdale with you?”

“He was. Had to get rid of him. Perfectly useless. You know him?”

“O, slightly. Had a letter from him yesterday. Wants me to read a novel.”

Taggart dabbed mustard on a piece of rump-steak. His digestion had improved.

“Sort of chap who would write a novel. Last refuge of the damned and the destitute. Going to read it?”

“I suppose so.”

“Sure to be dashed rot.”

For, in the commercial scramble the finer details of life are lost or blurred, and no one saw Scarsdale sitting on his seat in Highbury Fields eating buns out of a bag and feeding the sparrows. No one watched him putting on his best suit after lunch on Sundays, and walking to catch a bus opposite Highbury station.

Cyrano dressed to the part, but a very lean Cyrano with slightly anxious eyes. If he had to give a shilling to the bus conductor he counted his change carefully. Sometimes he carried flowers, and his gloves were of washleather. In Chelsea he had the air of belonging to the fortunate class that has no need to worry about the change out of a shilling. To the maids across the way he was Julia's beau, and if not quite Beau Geste, a gent and well dressed. Obviously he was a chocolate soldier, a bouquet boy. He stood on the steps of No. 53 with his trousers well creased. They were kept pressed for the occasion under the mattress of his bed.

Though, to Julia Marwood flowers were mere foolishness. She had no feeling for them, and a flower-shop was merely a splash of bright colour in the decorative scheme of things. Scarsdale's floral offerings embarrassed her; she would grip them firmly by the stalks, and dispose of them unsympathetically in any old vase. She could not smile and say, "How lovely!" for she was not finding it easy to smile at Scarsdale. He came and sat and gazed and talked. He talked about the war, and the war was to her a memory of bad, old things. He fooled with Harry, and she found herself irritated by their fooling and by their friendliness. Harry encouraged these visits, and they were beginning to exasperate her. Whenever she saw a cheque she seemed to be gazing at the particular cheque with Scarsdale's signature upon it.

On Sundays she and Harry sat in the garden under the shade of the pear-tree. Sunday was very much hers; she stayed in bed till nine, and in the afternoon she liked a deck-chair and a magazine, and a sleek feeling of relaxation. She had to work very hard during the week, and she was working harder than ever now that she was the secret partner. She did not want to get out of her chair for anybody, or to have to be bright to a man who sat and looked at her as though she was a super-wedding-cake in a shop window.

On that very hot Sunday in August the door bell rang earlier than usual, and she was feeling drowsy.

"O, damn!"

Harry, prone on his stomach with a book under his chin, turned on one side and looked at her.

"It's Mr. Scarsdale."

She did not say, "Damn Mr. Scarsdale." What she did say was, "I've got a headache. I feel awfully cheap. I don't want to see anybody."

Harry looked at her. He looked at her with the strangely wise eyes of sixteen.

“I ought to go and tell him, Ju.”

“No, don’t. He knows other people in Chelsea.”

“He’ll feel rather hurt, you know.”

“Well, go and tell him. I’ll go and lie down upstairs. You two can have tea in the garden.”

But Harry did not go. He rolled back upon his tummy, and stared at the book without reading it, and Scarsdale, after loitering self-consciously upon his Julia’s doorstep, persuaded himself that no one was at home. He closed the gate, glanced half-apologetically at the windows of No. 53, and walked away.

## Chapter Fifteen

HARRY was both old man and child, and he saw things as few lads of sixteen see them. He saw what Scarsdale wanted, and he was not offended. He was sorry for Scarsdale.

“Mr. S. is sweet on Ju.”

Sensible fellow! There was a rightness in a man falling in love with Julia, but only in a particular sort of way, and Harry understood Scarsdale’s way of falling in love. It was the boy’s way, the first adoration, the miraculous hour. Harry had had his first stormy passage on the sea of sex, disgusting revelations in the person of Brother Bob. “O, you wait till Julia gets a fellow.” But Bob and his nastiness had been extruded, and Harry’s white rage against sexual savagery had been put to sleep. But he understood love as some children do. He understood Scarsdale, and just why Scarsdale looked at Julia as he did, and was shy of her. He was not jealous of Scarsdale.

But Julia! What did Julia want? That was quite another problem. It was obvious to Harry, that Julia did not want Scarsdale, and that she was bored with him, which seemed a pity. For old Scarsdale was such a decent chap, a gentleman; the “Ponsonby Hotel” had taught Harry to distinguish between the genuine article and the fake. But to Harry his sister was a mystery; he divined in her a mysterious, secret creature who moved darkly even in the midst of the day’s domestic dulness, casting a strange shadow. There was something in his sister that he feared, without being able to say why or how. Sometimes, he would look at her when she was cutting the bread or putting coals on the fire, and wonder. Was she his Julia? And what was that other Julia? And why did he sometimes feel shy and mute in her presence, as though there was in her a something that was disastrously strange and cruel?

Harry did not know. There were moments when he felt like a little, whimpering boy, and he wanted to rush at Julia and hug her and be hugged.

“You *are* my Ju, aren’t you?”

He wanted to keep Julia as she had always been to him, a creature protective and tender, the sexless mother. And there was this other Julia that perplexed him, and fretted his faith in the changeless and clean familiarity of her. His devotion was very real, and that was why he understood Scarsdale’s way of looking at his sister, and was not hurt or disturbed by it.

So, too, on that empty day when the door of No. 53 was not opened to him Scarsdale went away disturbed and disappointed. They had expected him, and yet when the bell had remained unanswered he had been attacked by a sudden feeling of self-depreciation. He had walked down to the river and sat on a seat in the Embankment gardens close to the bust of the Sage of Chelsea. He had decided to wait for an hour before going back to Spellthorn Terrace. But he had not gone back. His feeling of frustration had remained.

He was writing the last chapter of his novel. His romance waited for its climax. He felt the need of a compelling gesture, especially so after the debacle in front of Julia's closed door. It was both absurd and strange that a man should discover failure in the face of a mere piece of painted deal. But the thing had happened. It was as though he had divined, while standing on that doorstep, the unknown Julia, the dark and terrifying young stranger in the house, and had flinched and allowed his will to be frustrated. And by what? By an absurd and trembling self-consciousness, a silly, blushing self-abasement? What was there for him to fear in Julia Marwood?

His novel was being typed, and the typing of it would cost him eight pounds and a few odd shillings. The sum worried him, but when the clean pages came back to him in the middle of the week, and he sat down to read and correct the typing, his confidence returned. The book struck him as amazingly good, vivid, human, and compelling. It was his. He decided to send it to Messrs. Shelby & Drake at the end of the week. Shelby had written to him promising to give the book sympathetic consideration.

On the Friday he wrapped his novel "Blood and Iron" in two new sheets of brown paper. He had bought them purposely at a shop in Upper Street so that the book should make a neat and self-respecting appearance at the doors of Messrs. Shelby & Drake. He had pinned a personal letter to Shelby on the title page.

"DEAR MR. SHELBY,

"Here is the book. I hope and believe that you will like it.

"Yours truly,

"SPENSER SCARSDALE."

He did not post the parcel. He delivered it in person at the house of Messrs. Shelby & Drake in Marietta Street, Covent Garden. It was received in the inquiry office by a bored little girl, who appeared to have a cold in the head.

"What name?"

“Scarsdale.”

“Spell it, please.”

Scarsdale spelt it, and she gave him a receipt for the parcel. He pointed out to her the name of Shelby upon the neat white label.

“You will see that this Mr. Shelby gets this at once. A personal affair. He expects it.”

The flapper blew her nose.

“I’ll have it sent up to Mr. Shelby’s secretary.”

“Thank you.”

Out again in Marietta Street it occurred to him that he ought to have seen Mr. Shelby in person. Should he go back and ask for an interview with the publisher? He hesitated; he retraced his steps, but when he found himself again on the publisher’s doorstep his self-confidence failed him. Mr. Shelby was a busy man, and busy men are best left alone. They do not bless the fussy people who push in and seek interviews. Scarsdale’s hat felt tight on his head, and he removed it, and glancing at the leather band of the lining he realized that he had been perspiring. Yes, one should not interview an important personage with a damp and anxious forehead. Scarsdale put on his hat and walked away.

On the Sunday he held himself in leash, and no bell rang at No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace. Julia was spared the impatience of an exclamatory, “Damn”. Scarsdale went to Hampstead Heath, and was one of the crowd, and yet very much apart from it. He sat on the grass under a young birch tree, and ate a banana and two buns. It was a dry and sticky meal, but he was adhering to a considered purpose. He would not go again to Spellthorn Terrace until his novel had been accepted, and he could meet his Julia, carrying the trophy in his hands. He wanted to impress Julia; he wanted to shine and to blow a romantic trumpet. Triumphant love could not propose marriage on a banana and two buns.

But during the week that followed an unhappy restlessness possessed him. He walked and walked. His long legs seemed in universal motion like the legs of a mechanical figure wound up and unable to run itself down. He did not write a line. Miss Gall observed his restlessness, and was troubled by it, and found it necessary to take another pair of Mr. Scarsdale’s shoes to the repairing shop in the Essex Road. She would cast little anxious glances at him as she laid the table or came in with the tray.

“Gentlemen don’t like to be fussed.”



One morning she heard him whistling in his bedroom. He was giving the world and himself selections from "Tales of Hofmann", and though he did not whistle very well, Miss Gall felt relieved. The barometer was set at fair, and the sun shining. After breakfast she watched him set out, smoking a pipe, and swinging a stick. He disappeared down the square.

It was one of his good mornings, whereas yesterday had been a day of dejection and of strange lethargy. That little god Mr. Shelby sat enthroned in the heavens, and it seemed to Scarsdale that he had a benignant face and approving eyes. Hope chirped with the sparrows in Highbury Fields. The little god was reading his novel, or perhaps he had already read his novel, and was sitting down to dictate an enthusiastic letter.

"Dear Mr. Scarsdale, I have been much impressed by 'Blood and Iron'. I think it is a remarkable piece of work. We should like to publish it. Perhaps you will call on me, and we can discuss terms—"

For a whole summer day Scarsdale was the optimist. The world seemed to him a good world. He liked the faces of the people in the streets; he liked the noise of the traffic. Life was not solitary, shabby and sad.

## 2

Julia Marwood's desk had enlarged itself. It stood on the right of the door as you entered the office, and being new and well polished and with all its accessories crisply in order it created a good impression. For Mr. Jimson, after the first surrender, had allowed his junior partner to introduce other amenities. Mr. Jimson's office had, like his personal outlook on life, grown rather careless and frowsy, but Julia, being young, understood the importance of appearances. She had had new linoleum put down, and she had scrapped the shabby old wire blinds and replaced them with white muslin screens fastened to green rods. The walls had been redistempered a soft buff colour. Thomson the clerk was brought under observation and control. He had a liking for bright pink ties and blue collars, and boots that were too loudly yellow. Julia took Thomson in hand.

"You will wear white collars and a black tie."

He obeyed her. He was a sheepish young man. If his taste had gone astray he blushed for it when he found that Miss Marwood was offended.

Julia herself wore black, with buttons of cerise. She sat there sheathed in

the sleekness of her young authority. She manicured her hands, and her bobbed head had a richness and a gloss. Her person exhaled a faint, sweet perfume.

From her desk she had a view of this Chelsea street. The muslin blinds softened it without blotting out the detail. On the other side of the street two little Georgian houses with white doors and fanlights stood stiffly shoulder to shoulder between a shop that sold antiques and the office of a coal-merchant. Two young plane trees, planted on the edge of the broad pavement fronting the terrace, enclosed the scene like the wings of a stage.

Julia was so placed that she could get a glimpse of the firm's clients before they entered. She liked to be prepared, though nothing very unusual crossed the office threshold. There were the fussy gentlewomen with vanity-bags and small dogs. It was astonishing to Julia how many women traversed life with small dogs attached to them. She was very much on the alert when dealing with the owners of Pekingese. Experience had taught her that these ladies knew how to spin a coin.

The male was not a very frequent visitor, and when he did arrive he was unexciting. He was prone to wear a neat grey soft hat, and a black overcoat in winter. His trousers were what Julia described as "bags". He attended to business. He read things carefully before affixing a signature. He looked at her as though questioning her age and her capacity.

August brought dullness. She sat at her desk tapping her chin with a pencil, and contemplating the fact that she had had no holiday. She had had no official holiday for four years. She yawned faintly. And then something slid into view beyond the muslin blinds, a streak of vivid redness. It came to rest at the edge of the pavement. Bits of it glittered.

Instantly she was interested. The long, low, rakish two-seater was so new and so unexpected. She saw a man get out of the car; he too was long and new; and loose and casual in his movements. His legs emerged before the rest of him, and showed to Julia fawn-coloured stockings and plus fours. His garters had red tassels. He was rather large. He had one of those round, juvenile faces that float through life with a kind of surprised and whimsical smile. His eyes were very blue.

He stood on the pavement and stared at the fascia board above Mr. Jimson's office. He wagged his hands in the pockets of his brown knickers. He crossed the pavement with the casual and easy slouch of the young man who was at ease with himself and the world. And then Julia realized that he was heading for Mr. Jimson's door.

She was conscious of sudden excitement. She moistened her lips and drew

her chair in closer to the desk. She rested her elbows on the desk, and glanced at her finger-nails.

He entered. His face wore that half-impudent, half-deprecating smile. He glanced at Thomson the clerk, and then his blue eyes discovered Julia and remained with her. He closed the door and removed his hat.

“Excuse me, you let flats?”

His voice had a pleasant laziness. She looked at him and saw the whole of him in one swift, comprehensive glance. Her eyes had been dull, but now they filled with little burrs of light. He excited her. She did not ask why or how.

She said, “Please sit down.”

He sat down! he looked at her; he placed his hat on her desk; he smiled. The whole of him seemed to smile; even his tweeds smelt of the sun on the heather. She noticed that his big hands were a little grimed, for they were the hands of a man who amused himself with motor-cars.

“I want a flat.”

“What sort of flat?”

“O, not quite any sort of old thing. Bit unusual. I want a flat with a garage.”

She observed him deeply.

“A garage? But—you know—”

“Quite so. I want room for three cars.”

She pouted at him.

“Three! Well,—really—Would it do, if—?”

“Something approximate.”

“What about three lock-ups in a mews? If they were not too far off?”

“Quite O.K.”

She reached for a list and a ledger, but even while her eyes were lowered and she was running a finger down the list she was acutely aware of him and his suddenness. He sat quite still, looking at the top of her head; there was something easy and unfretful about him, and yet his very stillness disturbed her.

“Things are rather difficult just at present.”

“Yes,—I know. Same with cars.”

“What sort of price do you wish to pay?”

“Well, I’m rather vague. I want your advice.”

“We have nothing under a hundred and twenty, except—of course—”

She raised her eyes to his.

“Places that would be no use to you.”

He smiled at her. She attracted him just as he attracted her.

“O, do I look like that! Well, something about a hundred and fifty.”

“Yes, we have two or three on our list. They are not service flats.”

“Doesn’t matter. Besides I don’t want anything too big. I’m a bachelor.”

She felt herself flush, though the flush did not show on her firm, clear skin. She filled in three orders to view.

“O, by the way, what name?”

“Flood.”

“Initials?”

“Thomas.”

She wrote down “Thomas Flood, Esq.”, and then handed him the pink slips.

“Supposing you go and look at these flats. If you find anything to suit you, we can take up the garage question. O, by the way, I haven’t your address.”

“Staying at my club. Oxford and Cambridge. That will find me.”

“Thank you.”

He rose and picked up his hat.

“I’ll come back here and report. Thanks so much.”

“It’s our job, you know.”

He smiled, and giving her a friendly nod, went out with his easy, loping slouch. She watched him through the muslin blind. She saw him insert himself into one of the bucket seats, and drive away. The red machine seemed to shoot suddenly out of her field of vision. She wondered whether he would come back. Most certainly she wanted him to come back.

The postman delivered the parcel at No. 24A Canonbury Square while Scarsdale was out walking. Miss Gall took the parcel in and carried it upstairs and laid it on Scarsdale's desk. A white label attached to the brown paper bore the name and address of Messrs. Shelby & Drake.

Miss Gall rubbed her long, thin hands together, and held her head on one side. She could assume that the parcel contained the typescript of Mr. Scarsdale's book, and that it had been returned to him by the publishers. And she thought, "Poor man! As though anyone would pay him for that!" She was beginning to be very disturbed about Mr. Scarsdale.

Scarsdale found the brown-paper parcel lying there when he came in to tea, and suddenly he went cold. A kind of numbness seemed to spread from his heart. He cut the string with a penknife, and unfolded the brown paper, and his hands were trembling. He uncovered the title page of his novel—"Blood and Iron".

An envelope lay on the title page with his name and address typed upon it. He still hoped as he extracted the letter that Shelby might have sent the book back for excisions and alterations. But the letter left him without the flicker of an illusion. It was kind but final.

Scarsdale laid it on the table. He felt an emptiness at the pit of his stomach. He took the typescript into his hands; yes, it had been read, for some of the pages were dog-eared and crumpled. And suddenly he heard Miss Gall coming up the stairs with the tea-tray, and he pulled a drawer open and with shamed and concealing hands hurriedly hid the book away. When Miss Gall entered the room he was standing by the window, pretending to watch some children playing in the square.

## Chapter Sixteen

THE tea-tray had been carried off by Miss Gall, and Scarsdale's thoughts and eyes fell into a stare. He sat at his desk, smoking his pipe, and looking at the little gilded ball and spike on the arbour in the garden. A hawker was trundling a barrow of pot flowers round the square, and his melancholy, old-world cry seemed to echo in the deep well of the past.

“All a'growin', all a'blowin'.”

The sentimentalist in Scarsdale revived. Had a barrel organ begun playing in the square, his Sweet Nell of Old Drury mood would have strutted to music. After June came Julia, yes in spite of purblind publishers who could not appreciate a live, red-blooded book, and who were so desperately afraid of offending the public. He got upon his feet, the mild, highbrow hack protesting against the daily amble and the uncreative round. He would show these people! There were other publishers in London. And in imagination he ruffled his hat and cocked his sword under his soul's coat-tails like the tail of an adventurous dog. He went forth posing as a romantic reality, he—one of those futile, nicely cultured people who sit in chairs and feel the mild glow of an aesthetic superiority. He was as pot-bound as the geraniums in the hawker's barrow and he did not know it, and as yet no one had given the little pseudo-literary pot of him an adequate kick.

He made for Chelsea. He took a tram as far as Westminster Bridge, and walked along the embankment. He turned up Church Street. It was a serene, summer evening, with little flocculent clouds afloat in a mild, blue sky. He was going to sit at the feet of his Madonna of the Pear Blossom, and allow her to re-inspire him while he fixed his eyes on the figure of her youth. He would maintain a noble and a secret silence. Undoubtedly he had been posing before Julia Marwood; he had wanted to impress her, and his pose had to adapt itself to the changed situation. He could not appear before her as the author of a very notable novel, a novel that would be advertised as “great” by enthusiastic publishers, but he could appear before her feeling himself to be a secret Conrad in disguise. Almost he felt himself to be a Conrad in disguise, he,—who with a precise pen, had spent his life tickling other men's creations, a Fleet Street highbrow who had always been afraid to admire anything too eagerly lest he should be found out.

He arrived at the end of Spellthorn Terrace. He had about another hundred yards to go when a car passed him like Apollo's chariot. It carried both god

and man, but Scarsdale paid no attention to it until he happened to realize that the car was stopping somewhere near the gate of No. 53. It was a red car, a rather presumptuous and young fellow-my-lad of a car, the kind of vehicle that said “Woosh” or “Prr-ump” to sesquipedalian people like Scarsdale. A young man in brown got out of it. He entered a gate, climbed steps, and stood outside a door. He had an air of being meant to be outside that particular door.

Scarsdale, drawing near on long, shy legs, discovered the reality. The car had stopped outside No. 53, and the young man was on Julia’s doorstep. He stood there, casually expectant, half-turned, waiting for the door to open.

Scarsdale’s long legs suddenly quickened their stride. All profile, he hurried past the gate of No. 53. An abrupt and self-conscious heat seemed to trickle down his shoulders and loins. He felt that he had to get by and out of focus before that door opened. He did get by.

He seemed to hear voices.

“Hallo!”

“Yes, sure as fate. I say,—it’s a topping evening.”

Scarsdale walked fast. His neck was like a cast-iron rod; he could not look back, but at the end of Spellthorn Terrace a passage led to a small court or diverticulum, and Scarsdale inserted himself into the end of the passage. Like a man in a trench he peered over the top of a brick wall. He felt hot and uncomfortable, and absurdly ashamed of being a Peeping Tom, but peep he did.

The young man was still on the doorstep. He appeared to be waiting for someone, his hands in his pockets, youth self-possessed and in possession. Then, another figure joined his. They descended the steps together, passed out through the gate, and the young man closed it. They climbed into the car, the engine of which had been left running. There was the quickened reverberations of the “exhaust”, and the red machine came down past Scarsdale’s passage. He saw that the two in the car were looking at each other and smiling.

## 2

It was growing dusk when Scarsdale returned to Canonbury Square. He was tired and more than tired. He let himself into the house and closed the door gently, and went slowly up the dark stairs. Miss Gall had gone out, and he had a feeling for the house’s emptiness and its silence, and he stood on the

landing and listened. He could hear nothing but the steady tick-tock of the grandfather clock in Miss Gall's sitting-room below stairs, and in the silence the sound was like the beating of a heart.

He opened the door of his room. He saw the two windows strangely bright after the darkness of the stairs, and filled with the green silk of the sky above the roofs of the houses opposite. A little wisp of cloud glowed transiently, and he watched it fade to a smoky greyness. Something in him felt wounded.

He closed the door. Hanging opposite him on the strip of wall between the two windows were one of those long, narrow mirrors which some Victorian soul had decorated with bullrushes and yellow water flags. He saw himself reflected in it, and crossing the room, he looked at his reflection in the glass, but the light was growing too dim for him to see himself with the merciless clarity of a man who has said to his heart, "Thou fool". He brought out a box of matches, and struck a match, and holding it like a miniature candle he scrutinized the reflection of his face in the glass, and suddenly he seemed to see it with the eyes of a stranger. He noticed the grizzled patches of hair about the temples, the faint lines about the eyes, the deepening of the two creases between the nose and the angles of the mouth. His skin had the indefinable texture of middle age. And then the flame of the match began to burn his fingers, and he blew it out and threw the end into the grate.

Gently he said to himself, "You fool."

For something in him knew. He had been stripped suddenly of a beautiful illusion. It was as though he had been going about with the fancied face of a boy, and life had held up a glass and shown him the coarsened skin of the forties. He sat down at his desk in the window, and with crossed arms, watched the fading sky, and the awakening of the windows across the way. A light would appear and a blind be lowered, and the same thing happened within him. A light had appeared behind his blindness.

Though, after all, he had seen so little and yet so much, two young things passing by in a car, youth looking into the eyes of youth, and smiling. There was a rightness about youth, and as he realized its rightness, he felt gently and deeply humiliated. Something in him knew. And he sat and wondered at the illusion that had vexed him all these months, at his rather futile feverishness, his chasing of second youth. How strange! And his novel! Had the same illusion insinuated itself into the book lying in the drawer beside him? The illusion of youth and the mystery and the poignant beauty of April days? O, bitter, beautiful foolishness!

An impulse stirred in him. He opened the drawer and took out the



typescript of “Blood and Iron”, and pushing his chair back, carried the book to the grate. He removed the Japanese fire-screen. His impulse was to make a holocaust of that other illusion, and then the impulse died away, or was replaced by some other motive.

He was moved by sudden curiosity. He felt other shame. He had looked at youth, and he had dared to examine his own face in the glass of reality, and was he afraid of this child of his own fancy? He was conscious of having lost his dignity, and his self-regard returned to him silently and reproachfully without plume or sword. Why not launch the book a second time, expose it naked to the most merciless of mirrors? There were other publishers. He thought of young Bagshaw, red, arrogant, prematurely bloated. A sudden courage hardened in him. He replaced “Blood and Iron”, and reclosed the drawer.

He sat down again at his desk. Something went from him and came to him that summer night. He saw Julia, he saw himself, and the bloom of youth and its fallacious softness, and his own hand going out to touch that beautiful surface. And yet what did youth crave for, the youth of this post-war generation? He had a new feeling about youth and about life as he sat while the dusk flowed in and filled the familiar room. He saw life and things as in a glass, but less darkly and as though some light turned the picture into a transparency and coloured it. He felt and he understood. He saw into the inwardness of things. He saw beyond the sombre, liverish stolidity of Taggart’s face, and almost he understood the grime in Taggart’s finger-nails. He looked through Miss Gall’s spectacles at the soul behind the tired eyes. He felt the insistent, merciless urge, the cracking whips with which life drives humanity. People did what life willed. They were blown like leaves. They hungered and they lusted and they loved, and hurried to express the insurgent “I”, because life wills them to express the massed urge of a million cells. The whole business of existing was—for the many—the swirl of appetite. Youth was urged to clasp youth. Man, in the force and fury of his years, strove because of the sex and the vitals that were in him.

The night came down, and things went from him, and things came.

And then he heard Miss Gall return. She was climbing the stairs. Her approach was the stealthy gliding of age, the faded figure of a symbolic resignation. He got up hurriedly and lit the gas. He did not want to be surprised by her in the darkness.

She opened the door three inches.

“O, you are back, sir. I thought—”

“Just lit the gas as you came in.”

“Your supper, sir?”

“I have had supper, thank you.”

She closed the door gently, and with a kind of little sighing sound, withdrew.

Next morning he wrote a letter to young Bagshaw, and put up “Blood and Iron” into a neat parcel. His mood was still water, and the ripple marks made by youth’s stone had died away. This book of his should stand and dare its own reflection in the mirror of young Bagshaw’s mind. He could have devised no more mordant ordeal for “Blood and Iron”, for Bagshaw’s mind was like an up-to-date butcher’s shop, full of red meat on marble slabs. He was one of the rising gods in the publishing world, and if the reading public did not know what it wanted, the thing was to inveigle it into your shop and show it something that glittered or something that smelt good.

Scarsdale, strangely and gently persistent, managed to push his way as far as the office of Bagshaw’s secretary, but that was his Ultima Thule. Bagshaw’s secretary knew her business.

“Mr. Bagshaw gives no interviews unless they are arranged. Perhaps you will leave your name.”

Scarsdale tried to persuade her.

“I won’t keep Mr. Bagshaw two minutes. My name’s Scarsdale. He knows me.”

The secretary opened an inner door, but not more than two inches.

“A Mr. Scarsdale is asking to see you.”

Bagshaw’s rolling, rampant voice came out to them.

“Scarsdale? O, yes, quite impossible. Tell him to leave a message, or to write. Shut that door.”

The secretary closed the door, and turned her casual eyes on Scarsdale.

“Perhaps you will leave a message.”

He handed her the neat parcel.

“A book of mine. I want it read. There is a note inside to Mr. Bagshaw.”

“I see. It will be read in the usual way. I presume your address is inside. Good morning.”

On the Sunday Scarsdale went to Chelsea. He went because he was moved by curiosity and by a gentle and whimsical spite against himself. He allowed his fancy no flights to the moon, and where youth would have raged he walked softly, with desire like a faded flower in his buttonhole. He rang the bell of No. 53, and had the door opened to him by Harry, a strangely mute and almost sulky Harry.

His eyes brightened to Scarsdale, and then grew shy.

“O, Ju’s out for the day.”

Scarsdale had expected it, but he was a little puzzled by Harry’s face. The boy had an air of awkward concealment. He was sorry for Mr. Scarsdale and he was sorry for himself.

“All alone?”

“Yes.”

“How’s the garden?”

“O, all right.”

“Mind if I come and sit for half an hour?”

“O, rather not.”

He brightened momentarily, only to revert to his air of bothered blankness. He led Scarsdale into the garden, and wandered with him unhappily up and down the grass plot. Harry’s flower-beds were on the edge of autumn, and looking tashed and untidy, and he glanced at them as though they did not invite him to look at them too closely. His hands were stuffed into his trousers pockets. For so vital and frank a child he appeared strangely stubborn and troubled.

“Not much to see. Stay and have tea, sir.”

“May I?”

“Ju left it all ready. Don’t know when she’ll be back.”

Presumably his sister was out in the car for the day, and Harry, like Scarsdale, had suddenly realized the intervention of other forces. Almost the boy had the air of a child who had been frightened and shocked, but who was silent and stubborn over it. He would not blurt things out, or say just why or how he was hating a certain person. He had reticence. Quite brightly he might

have chattered out the news, “O, Ju’s gone out for the day with Mr. Flood in his car. Yes, they asked me to go. Didn’t feel like it. Let’s have lots of raspberry jam.”

He had seen more than Scarsdale had seen, and like the man he had received a hurt. Somehow he had never thought of his sister in that way, or of her behaving in that way. Her air of strange excitement, the something in her eyes. And that Flood fellow tweaking her hair! A sudden, dolorous silence had fallen upon Harry. It had been like watching a strange man messing about with your mother.

They had tea together in the garden. It was an unhappy and inarticulate meal. To both of them the Madonna of the Pear Blossom had become red flesh. The man understood and was sad; the boy stuffed his fists into his pockets and was resentful.

Scarsdale did not stay very long. He embarrassed the boy, and was embarrassed by Harry’s secret distress. It was easily divined, though few men would have understood it, and probably Scarsdale would not have understood it three days ago.

“Suppose they left him behind. Poor little beggar. Jealous.”

He went away feeling vaguely surprised at his own lack of jealousy. It was as though he had suddenly grown too old and too clear-sighted to be harrowed by such emotion. Something had gone from him. He was water, still water, reflecting things, and not the fire that burns. He was earth accepting that which the seasons imposed upon it. Youth had a rightness, and some day Harry would understand that rightness.

He walked down to the river, and leaning on the embankment wall, watched the water in movement. He felt strangely old and sad and consenting. And suddenly he remembered that cheque. “Pay Julia Marwood—” Extraordinary that he should have forgotten it! Well, he had thrown his bread upon the river and it had gone down to sea. He did not expect it to come back to him.

## 4

Somewhere in Surrey a man and a girl lay in the heather in a hollow hidden by banks of gorse. They lay face to face, the girl with her eyes closed, while the man tickled her chin and lips and ears with a heather twig. They had

brought their tea with them, and the basket and a couple of coats had been left on a stretch of turf higher up the hill.

The man was smiling. He had been talking about himself and his cars and his coming career as a racing motorist, and the girl had listened to him as she had listened to no one else. But in this secret place they were alone together, with the white clouds going over, and the wind making an occasional sighing in the furze. Against the blue of the sky a wood of Scotch firs warmed their red throats in the sunlight. The ling on which they lay was dry and fragrant.

They were alone together, absorbed in each other, two young creatures who desired only that which was desirable, each other. The girl's face had a strange softness, a glow that seemed to come from beneath her skin. Her eyes were happy and wanton. She had forgotten everything save man, this sudden man who lay with her in the heather. While he, with his whimsical, hot gaze fixed on her, smiled and was content.

“All right here, isn't it?”

“Lovely.”

She turned on her back and basked, her eyes half closed.

“How did you find this place?”

“O, known it for years. Not like this—though. Lucky for us the crowd isn't on wheels yet. Or not much of it. Will be some day.”

“Does it matter?”

“Not now.”

She turned and looked at him.

“Tommy, I'd like something under my head.”

“Right-o.”

He rose and went for one of the coats, and folded it, and looked about him for a moment over the banks of furze. His blue eyes were alert and a little fierce. Not a soul! He bent down and placed the folded coat under her head.

“How's that?”

“Perfect.”

“I say you—”

He lay down beside her suddenly. Her eyes glimmered at him. And obeying some mutual, urgent impulse, they clung together, face to face and

body to body.

## Chapter Seventeen

A YOUNG girl opened the door of Mr. Paul Verulam's room on the third floor of the Bagshaw building.

"Mr. Bagshaw wants to see you, sir."

Verulam raised his large red face and mooning spectacles.

"Very well."

He did not hurry. He might be Bagshaw's reader and literary adviser, but also he was that very eminent novelist Mr. Paul Verulam, and becoming more and more eminent yearly in the estimation of the elect. He was subtle and precious and had a taste for things pathological, and a nice way of presenting them preserved in alcohol. His largeness, and a kind of rubicund pomposity, and the sudden upward rush of his sandy hair from a round and shiny forehead, suggested that he should be impressive on a platform, though the quality of his blue eye was a little ambiguous and muddy. He rose, and with a leisurely impressiveness, descended the stairs, and this act of descent had an air of condescending rectitude. For the occasion he was descending to Bagshaw's level. He did not propose to remain much longer with Mr. Bagshaw's firm.

He passed through the secretary's room. He smiled at her, and when he smiled the long yellow teeth shone like gold in the large red countenance.

"Good morning. Miss Pearson."

He exuded sugar, sacerdotalism. He processed into Bagshaw's room, looking, so Bagshaw thought, more episcopal and Trollopian than ever, but with the suggestion of something smeary concealed under the apron. The interview between them was brief. They did not mix. Verulam wore the halo of the highbrow, and Bagshaw was wishing that he would go and wear it elsewhere.

As Verulam, pivoting on his own axis, turned towards the door, Bagshaw remembered something.

"A book came in by a fellow named Scarsdale. Read it?"

"'Blood and Iron'."

"Haven't the faintest idea what it was called. Any good?"

Verulam moved to the door.

“Perfectly preposterous book.”

“So I should have imagined. No use on the sentimental side?”

“Not even caramel.”

“Right. I know the chap slightly. Can quote you if necessary.”

He watched Verulam oil his way out of the door, and was amused by the poise and the pose of him. A good literary figure! But Bagshaw’s dislike of Verulam, and Verulam’s contempt for Bagshaw were mere incidentals. “Blood and Iron” made its way back to Scarsdale, and was delivered into Miss Gall’s hands, and was carried upstairs and placed upon Scarsdale’s desk. Finding it there he smiled a little, whimsical, self-effacing smile. He untied the string and unfolded the brown paper. The Bagshaw letter was more abrupt and less kind than the Shelby letter had been.

Scarsdale pushed the brown paper and string into the waste-paper basket, and hid “Blood and Iron” away in a drawer. He had a feeling that it would not see the light of day again for any useful purpose, and his feeling about it was right. He kept that novel as a curiosity, as a sort of human document, as a faded and foolish wreath that had crowned the forehead of an egregious second youth. The Bagshaw letter he tore up and threw into the grate.

Blood and Iron!

He carried his bag of buns into Highbury Fields and sat with his back to Highbury Terrace. In later years he came to wonder how it was that he had felt no interest in that row of pleasant, quiet houses. He had no prescience. Also, he was very much concerned with ways and means, he had no job, and Miss Gall, like a grey ghost, walked the empty galleries of his house of dreams. He felt absurdly responsible for Miss Gall, more so than for himself. He would have to work, not for Julia and glory, but to pay an elderly woman for his board and lodging.

As he emptied his bag and crumpled it up, he made reflections upon the obvious.

“Shall have to get a berth somewhere. Different. Yes, things are different. I don’t seem to get started as quickly as I used to do. Or is it that youth makes the pace, the new pace? Those old horse-trams down Upper Street! Now, motor-buses. Things much the same really, only someone turns the handle faster.”

And yet, a wayward curiosity pricked him. A man does not become a complete Stoic in the course of seven days, and the house in Spellthorn Terrace



still drew Spenser Scarsdale. It was as though twenty years had gone by since the illusion of youth had passed from him, and in visiting Chelsea he was an old man pottering about in a world of memories. Such was his reaction. The middle 'forties were to be neither "fabulous" nor "roaring", but a season when snow seemed to lie gently upon a frozen earth. The war had happened a hundred years ago. Julia Marwood was dead, dead as Cleopatra, Guinevere, and Joan of Arc.

## 2

But the other Julia lived, Tom Flood's Julia, Mr. Jimson's Julia, the young woman of the new age, hard, hurrying, vivid and urgent, with a fallacious bloom upon her skin of the grape. Velvet may be out of fashion in a world of steel, and in the bright and casual crowd of youth that envisages a new reality. Tommy Flood had his flat. Julia had found it for him, and in a Chelsea mews she had located two old coach-houses cheek-by-jowl capable of housing a couple of cars. Youth's hands met over the machine, as their mouths had met in the heather.

The new mysteries were being demonstrated to Julia, though youth has learnt to control that other mystery and to join in the festival of Venus and Adonis without the spilling of blood or the embarrassments of babies. And Tommy was decarbonizing and tuning up the precious infant, and Julia attended both as mother and nurse. Sunday was the car's Sabbath. She put on blue overalls, and rubber gloves, and the rites of the mechanical Sabbath were explained to her.

"See, that's the cam-shaft."

They bent over the crankcase together, and his right arm was round her waist.

"There's a sort of bump."

"Yes, that's it. A cam is a kind of boss on the shaft. As the shaft revolves, the boss lifts the valve tappet. The valve tappet gives the valve stem a push. Got it?"

"Think so."

He gave her things to clean, valves, valve-caps, sparking-plugs, but he would not let her touch the magneto.

"Not yet, old thing. Bit tricky."

She was as mild as milk with him over the magneto. She sat on an upturned sugar-box, and watched him busy with the magneto on another sugar-box. She watched his eyes and his hands, and the way his hair grew, and the shell-like moulding of his ears. Everything about him was good to her. She did not think of Harry, at least not as she had thought of him a month ago. Of Scarsdale she thought not at all.

Her new high priest explained the magneto to her, and she listened deeply and gravely to the new mechanical mysteries. Her seriousness seemed to amuse him. He put out a sudden black finger, and imprinted a little smudge on her chin.

“What about it?”

“Bad Tiger.”

She called him Tiger. She took his ear and pinched it, and stole a brown silk handkerchief and wiped her chin.

“No spots on me, young man.”

Their prattling would have puzzled a previous generation. They did not discuss matrimony, but the date when Brooklands Track would be reopened, and when Messrs. Millman & Co., would be able to deliver his new racing car. They were mutually exasperated by the post-war delays and disabilities. They talked of the bungalow he thought of building down at Byfleet. He had plenty of money, and that was part of youth’s new credo. Money was one of the essentials, money and mechanism.

“You’ll take me around Brooklands.”

“I—don’t think.”

But she was quite determined about it. Moreover, she was to be no mere passenger, a picturesque attachment to the male. She saw herself driving a racing car round Brooklands Track high up on the banking. She had the hundred-miles-an-hour spirit.

“I shouldn’t flinch. I’m young. I’m not nervy.”

“Yes, you’re it all right. But I might do the flinching.”

“Don’t be silly. If I can watch you doing stunts—”

“No, some things are different.”

But other things were the same as they have always been and will be. There were the seat cushions and a couple of rugs, and the key of a coach-house door could be used from the inside. Other mysteries were consummated

in the darkness. Afterwards she would hold his head down on her shoulder.

### 3

In the September dusk Scarsdale found Chelsea like a painted cabinet into which he had put away memories, little pieces of china of rose and of blue, shepherds and shepherdesses, Dresden, Sèvres, Bow and Bristol. Some of the shops were open, some closed. The soft blue of the dusk was burred with gold, and the trees of Spellthorn Gardens seemed to stand in a stillness as of dark water. Scarsdale strolled. He had a feeling that it was to be his last night in Chelsea, and that the little painted figure of his love would be shut away behind glass. His mood had no haste in it, and no anger. On the pavement of Martagon Terrace he stood under one of the plane trees, and looking at the windows and fascia board of the office, thought to see the name of Marwood there. But it was not there, and he wondered. He wondered how she had used the money. But did it matter? Of course it did not matter. His gesture had passed like a shadow moving across one of the white muslin blinds.

He walked on. He came to the florists; it was open and spaciouly lit, though its colours were crowded, asters purple and rose, marigolds, flame-coloured phlox, pots of resida, boxes of brilliant blue lobelia, cabbages piled in the background, baskets of beans, grapes, grapefruit, apples. It made him think of a huge casket into which had been tumbled sacksful of precious stones. A big woman in black seen bending with her hands in a basket of apples, had a face like a huge carbuncle.

He came to Spellthorn Terrace. He had not walked twenty yards along it before he realized that the car was there. Its tail-lamp glowed like the tail of a glow-worm, and the light splashed on the red sheen of the body. Scarsdale crossed the road, and continued along the opposite pavement. The windows of No. 53 were dark, and he was moved to think of that wet October night nearly a year ago, and of his search for the Marwood house. Was it less than a year ago? But how absurd! Time was nothing; it was life crowded into an hour or a day that made you either Harlequin or Pantaloon.

He walked on slowly as far as Spellthorn Square, and then turned and strolled back. So, youth went to youth as the poets have said, but in these later days was it not generation at play with generation? They understood each other; they asked for the same toys. And then he happened upon the most unexpected of figures, though its unexpectedness was in its placing, for here was Harry standing upon the edge of the pavement and looking across the road

at the windows of home.

“Hallo, Hal!”

The boy looked sharply up at Scarsdale, as though life had put him on guard.

“Oh, it’s you!”

“I’ve just been seeing friends. No, I’m not coming in to-night. How’s Julia?”

Harry’s eyes were fixed on the red car.

“O, Julia’s all right.”

His set face expressed many things. He may have realized the inevitableness of the red car, and the superfluousness of a small and sensitive person. O, yes, Julia was all right, and that confounded chap was always in the house, so teasing and so friendly, and so confoundedly at home. And what did Mr. Scarsdale think about the revolution, and the sudden redness of Julia?

But both of them were made to gaze at the lower window of No. 53. They saw the light switched on, and Julia at the window. She pulled down the yellow blind, and her shadow was upon it, and suddenly another shadow joined hers. They merged into each other, remained so for a moment, and then disappeared.

Scarsdale made a movement as of easing his hat.

“Well,—I’ll be getting along. Good night, old lad.”

Harry was still looking at the window.

“Good night.”

Scarsdale walked hurriedly away. He had had a feeling that Julia’s brother was wanting to blub, and was hating himself and other people for being mixed up in this emotion.

## 4

Back at Canonbury Square Scarsdale removed the Japanese screen from the grate, struck a match and lit the fire. It was an extravagance on a fine September night, but a fire may have other uses than the mere production of heat. Scarsdale’s fire was both a symbol and a furnace. He routed out his

cashbox and produced from it the receipt that Julia Marwood had given him. He sat down in front of the fire. It was burning with enthusiasm. Holding Julia's acknowledgment between thumb and first finger, he allowed a flame to lick and kindle it, and when the piece of paper was well alight he let it fall into the flames.

Scarsdale sat and watched the fire. How much poorer and how much richer he might be, he was unable to say. Life flickered uncertainly like those flames. And presently he heard Miss Gall's footsteps on the stairs. She came softly to his door and stood there, and then just as softly went away.

## *Part Two*

## Chapter Eighteen

SCARSDALE was forty-six.

He was a little thinner, more bent about the shoulders and greyer at the temples. His brown eyes were more prominent, and more full of a kind of a liquid anxiety, a gentle mistrust of life. When he sat in his office chair his shoulder-blades showed up sharply, and the back of his neck was traversed by a vertical groove.

For two years or so he had held the minor post of assistant editor with the publishing house of Hurst & Storey in King Street. He saw other men's books through the press, and performed any hack-work that was required of him. He shared the room at Hurst & Storey's with three other men who were creatures equally obscure and precarious. He received three hundred pounds a year and a fortnight's holiday.

He continued to lodge at Miss Gall's. For three hundred days in the year his routine was the same, save that on Saturdays, he sailed home to Canonbury five hours earlier. He stepped off Miss Gall's doorstep at the same hour each morning; he was sedulously precise and punctual, for he was one of the many thousands who are afraid, and to whom a lapse may be so final. He walked to Highbury Corner and caught a bus. He walked very fast, with an occasional little sharp turn of the head as though he were looking back over his shoulder at something that pursued him. In the bus he sat, if he obtained a seat, with his feet together and his hands resting on his thin thighs, and his eyes looking straight ahead. Leaving the bus at the top of the Charing Cross Road he walked urgently toward King Street. Almost he was like a pea rolling in a groove.

It never occurred to him to ask the question, "What would happen if I turned round and walked in the other direction?" He knew what would happen. He was a shuttle going to and fro. He could not travel in any other direction. That was not permitted. He belonged to the crowd that poured into the city and poured out of it, like soot emptied from one bag into another. He could not suddenly say to himself, "I will go on the river"—or "I will lie and dream on the hills". He could say that on Saturday afternoons or on Sunday, but on Sundays he felt too tired, and too unadventurous. He lay in bed till nine. He read the Sunday paper. He pottered, and the day pottered with him.

He occupied the same chair in the same room, and sat at the same untidy office table. The three other men who shared the room with him were as

familiar and unsensational as the furniture. Their names were Frater, Jeans, and Doble. Daily they made the same remarks and did the same things. Sometimes they hated each other; sometimes they squabbled. Old Frater, with his walrus head and white moustache yellowish at the roots, was the father of the family. He had gentle and humorously sad blue eyes. Little Jeans was a lean, raddled, rat of a man with the skin stretched tightly over his sharp nose, a man whose stomach and chest were concave and were balanced by the backward curve of his thin little legs. Jeans had irritable, red-lidded eyes. He was always whistling and fidgeting, and tilting his chair, or wanting to tell a smutty story. He came into the office each morning like a man who had left a quarrel at home, and had not been able to forget it. His language was peppered.

“Another blasted day! Hallo, Doble, how’s the cold?”

Doble had a thick, lispng voice, and a white and viscous face. He sniffed; he sniffed perpetually. Yet, always and with a kind of pallid passion, he would resent the suggestion that he had a cold.

“Haven’t got a cold, Jeans. It’s my catarrh.”

And Jeans would mimic him, with emphasis on the “cat”. He would make rhymes about it.

*“Doble has a cat-arrh  
And an antrum full of matt-ah.”*

They hated each other did Jeans and Doble. They sat cheek-by-jowl at the same long table, day in, day out, and Doble would sniff, and Jeans dab fiercely at “galleys” with a blue pencil. The room had a stuffiness; it smelt of paper and printer’s ink, and another perfume which Jeans insisted came from Doble’s feet.

They were there together all day, and yet went out and lunched together at a Lyons’. That is to say, the three of them did. Doble brought sandwiches and ate them in the office, for he had five children and a wife who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis. Often his sandwiches contained cheese, and it was cheese of an aggressive and powerful rankness.

Sometimes Scarsdale would wonder why he lunched with Frater and Jeans, or why they lunched with him. Almost it seemed that they were like three animals who lived in the same hutch, and who moved from one hutch to another, and were so much the creatures of habit that they would have felt chilly and vaguely uneasy without each other. They nibbled together and squeaked together, and Jeans always had the same sort of joke and the same libidinous glance for the waitress. Old Frater’s moustache got itself soiled with

egg, or coffee, or prune juice. He was a clean old man, and it troubled him.

Jeans would remark when Frater got out his handkerchief:

“Shave it off, dad. I’ll give you a safety razor for Christmas.”

Scarsdale’s recollections of this period were rather blurred, and inconclusive. The war had been a stormy sunset, and the Julia Marwood affair an illusive and vivid dawn, but the years that followed were for him numb and befogged. They had a greyness. It was as though he had a hard hat pressed tightly upon his head, constricting it and making of him a man of one idea, and causing those brown eyes of his to bulge and look frightened. He suffered from mental numbness; he lived in juxtaposition to Jeans’ vulgarity and Doble’s unsavoury person, and yet the soul of him consented. It had no dreams of escape. It had ceased to dream. It was concerned with keeping itself attached to a particular chair and the salary the chair carried with it.

Occasionally life blew against him like the scent of a flower or a scud of rain, and he was startled. He could remember the day when he had eschewed the Lyons’ lunch, and had brought fruit and walked down to Charing Cross gardens and sat in the sun, and suddenly and without any warning a man on the same seat had cut his throat with a razor. Blood, spurts of blood. After that experience Scarsdale had kept close to old Frater and his humorously sad blue eyes. Then there had been the occasion when some romping imp of a girl clerk scampering down the stairs, had slipped and come tumbling into him, and he had had to catch her and hold her for a moment, a warm, giggling, live thing. Her dark hair had brushed against his face. Then that Spring day in a Sussex beech-wood, with the earth all blue with wild hyacinths under a lacework of young green leaves, and a blackbird singing. Beauty! He had a kind of film over his eyes during those years, though occasionally the film would crack and he would see life with a strange and poignant clearness.

He had moments of wakefulness. Perhaps he would become more afraid, or be suddenly nauseated by Jean’s common little soul, or he would feel a wild desire to go down somewhere into a green world and dream. A spasm of liveness passed through him. Life hurt.

Ever and again some such spasm of alarm ran through the house of Hurst & Storey. The machines throbbed uneasily, and the walls suffered tremors. Rumours trickled down the stairs and along passages. The printers were striking, or the packers had been insulted by the general manager. Someone had refused to join a trades union. The management were said to be fed up with the whole silly show, and were proposing to lock out printers, packers, everybody. Gloom prevailed. The whole big building seemed to quiver like a



wounded organism. Doble munched his sandwiches sombrely. Jeans swore. "Damn those blasted packers! Always slacking and grouching. Blasted Bolshies!" Yet the packers were just plain, ordinary men disturbed by the spirit of greed that is the Dark Angel of these years of confusion. Greed stood on a soap-box and played the demagogue. It bawled high sounding words. It spoke of wage-slaves, and bloated capitalists, and Lenin, and the class conflict. It proclaimed a fatuous equality.

Old Frater ate his eggs on toast.

"Why can't they let things alone. You can't turn turnips into roses by shouting at 'em."

Egg streaked his moustache and he looked sad.

"Sandys told me something this morning. Not to be repeated. Don't like it."

"What's that?"

Jeans perked up like a little snappy dog.

"Rumour has it that Calder & Pearson are buying us up."

"O-ho! That means the Martinsides. Damn the Martinsides! They buy up half Fleet Street. Just another bloated rumour."

Old Frater wiped his moustache.

"More than that I think. Storey has had enough of the class-conscious swindle. Nothing but row-row-row, and interference from outsiders. I shouldn't blame him if he quitted."

Scarsdale put down his coffee cup.

"The Martinsides fight."

"Lord—yes. They can afford to," and Jeans looked truculent. "If I were the Martinsides I'd call all this Bolshie bluff. I wouldn't have a union man in the place."

Old Frater buttered a piece of bread.

"Amalgamation. That's the word. We know what that means."

They did. And for the rest of the meal there was a hard, moody silence. Each of the three were digesting that prophetic word "Amalgamation". Two staffs would be merged into one; there would be a purging of all that was superfluous. This man would go and that. No one would know. A dreadful suspense would grip the whole building, and especially those men in it who

were going grey. Because it was dreadful to become superfluous at fifty, and especially so when you had a wife, children.

Scarsdale, looking into old Frater's face, saw in the kind blue eyes a kind of frightened, hungry stare. It shocked him. And he thought, "Well, I haven't any children. Thank the Lord. These aren't days for having children."

## 2

Miss Gall had changed not at all. She had the same long, flat figure, the same high shoulders, and the same little bob of grey hair at the back of her head. Possibly she was less thin of body, and less strained about the eyes, for she had a woman in each morning to clean and make beds and to wash.

Because Miss Gall had let the first floor, and had let it very well to a gentleman who was something in the West End. His name was Bartlet, and though he had lodged with Miss Gall for nearly eighteen months she did not know what his business was. He had an abundance of money, and he paid her regularly; he enjoyed his food, and showed no inclination to hunt half-pennies up and down Miss Gall's red-edged, account-book.

Scarsdale met Mr. Bartlet occasionally. He was a very cheerful person, shortish, ruddy and well-covered, with a nice fat jowl that was easy to shave. He was compact and yet large and free in his movements. He wore a black moustache that was turning grey. When he happened to meet Scarsdale he would look him straight in the face, and with an air of genial vigour bring out a "Good morning, sir." He was the sort of man who slapped shoulders, and when in conversation brought his face very close to the face of the other fellow. He spoke with emphasis, and was somewhat declamatory, and had a liking for breaking up his periods with such phrases as—"I would beg to observe, sir —"—"As I was saying—"—"Mark you, I'm just John Citizen"—"Now, for the sake of argument?"

Scarsdale thought Mr. Bartlet completely and prosperously respectable. He was good "sausage and mash" served up hot at half-past seven. Before the war he would have sported a top-hat, but his post-war choice had fallen upon a grey Homburg, neat yet just a little jaunty. He wore a black morning-coat and vest, white shirt and collar, a tie with a diamond pin stuck in it, trousers with a faint white line in them, spats and very well-polished black boots. His dogginess was held on the leash. Wash-leather gloves would have seemed a little too flowery. He was content with plain, brown leather. Business was

business, and Mr. Bartlet, who was responsible for a particular kind of shop-window that might cause shy people to hurry past with a flush of self-consciousness, exercised professional restraint. He was a chemist; almost he spelt it with a “y”. He cultivated a succinct and impressive manner.

On the September evening before his fortnight’s holiday, Scarsdale, having discovered himself short of socks, had dashed down into Upper Street to buy a couple of pairs before the shops closed. He was going into Wiltshire for a walking holiday, and stout socks were necessary. Returning with his small parcel he met Mr. Bartlet coming out, and looking polished and prepared for a symposium with a lady.

“Good evening, sir.”

He appeared glad at the sight of Scarsdale. He drew up by the railings, and eased a glove.

“Just going off, I hear. Weather looks set fair.”

“Yes, September’s a good month as a rule.”

“Seaside, is it?”

“No, Wiltshire.”

“Ah, Wiltshire. Believe me, Brighton suits me very well. Had three weeks there. Made me very comfortable. I hope, sir, you will have nothing but sunshine.”

He had finished easing his glove, and giving Scarsdale a genial glance, remembered something. He had not remembered it too previously. Mr. Bartlet was suave, and a diplomat.

“O, by the way, sir, would it inconvenience you—or offend you, if a friend of mine occupied your bedroom for a week? Of course, only with your consent. A favour. Someone who is coming over from Paris, on business.”

Scarsdale had no reason for refusing, and he knew the let would be useful to Miss Gall.

“For a week?”

“Yes, just seven days, sir. I can assure you—”

“I am leaving clothes—”

Mr. Bartlet smoothed the air with a gloved hand.

“I assure you—everything will be O.K. I can arrange it with Miss Gall. You will find everything—*in statu quo*.”

“O, that will be all right.”

“I am very much obliged to you, sir. Yes, very much obliged. I hope you will have fine weather in Wiltshire.”

Scarsdale trained to Marlborough and put up at an inn overlooking the broad High Street. He had brought nothing with him but an old infantry pack, a mackintosh, and a stick. His pack contained a pair of pyjamas, two extra shirts, socks, a spare pair of boots, and his etceteras, and they included tobacco and Ordnance Survey Map, No. 112. He passed two nights in this Wiltshire town, tramping up to Savernake, and standing for half an hour to stare down the beech avenue. At first it disappointed him a little, until his consciousness seemed to lose itself in the distant green glooms of the great aisle. And it was so still, and would have been even stiller but for the traffic on the high road. He was to find the hills more timeless and more silent when he went on to Avebury, walking across by way of Overton Down. He came to Avebury by the lane that cuts through the temple vallum on the east. He climbed a wall and scrambling up the great grass bank, lay down in the afternoon sunlight. The turf was painted with little flowers, trefoil and scabious, gold and purple. He shed his pack and lit a pipe. The strange, still immensity of the place possessed him. He looked for and counted some of the stones of the great circle.

But no words came to him, no obvious, Fleet Street, adjectival stuff. He just sat and stared. Avebury needed no letterpress.

He put up at the “George”, occupying a front room overlooking the village street, and the green hollow of the sacred place. He was very comfortable at the “George”. They gave him good meat and cheese, and bread that was bread, and cream, and butter, that made him feel greedy. He sat on the seat with the cobbled pavement spreading before him, and smoked his pipe, and watched the village dogs, and a cat and her kittens. He talked to people; it seemed so easy to talk to people in such a place. He walked. He tramped to Barbury, and to Oldbury and saw the White Horse and the old Bath road and the monument. He sat in the beech-wood on the north of the camp, and heard it suddenly filled with rustlings, whisperings, voices of the old folk perhaps, of the multitudinous dead. “Look, man is here, man imprisoned in the flesh, not live as we are.” He lay about on the hills on the sweet, downland turf, and watched the clouds and their shadows moving over the grey-green slopes. It was another world, spacious, luminous, intimate yet strange. It made him feel curiously impersonal, freed from the fret of time. Sometimes he thought of Fleet Street and the publishing house of Hurst & Storey, and of all those little scribbling figures, and the rumbling machines, and the yelling men and boys who sold papers. “Speshul,—speshul.” How silly it all seemed! Modern man

was making such an absurd hubbub. And about what?

### 3

On a still and golden afternoon at the end of his first week he found himself in the little village of Oare, and about to climb Martinsell Hill. Someone directed him down a lane, and he saw Martinsell above him steep and smooth and solitary. He had been told to turn up through some allotments. He would find the path, and he found it going up past a little grove of Scotch firs. He noticed a lynchet; he supposed it to be a lynchet. He climbed slowly, for the turf was dry and slippery, and the hill very steep. Four times he stopped for breath and to look about him, and to see the landscape spreading, and opening like a great green leaf. It was tranquil and splendid. A faint breeze blew.

He came to the end of the spur and noticed some old pit dwellings. And then he found the Giant's Grave. It puzzled him. At first he took it to be part of a vallum, and only when he had climbed it and walked along its ridge did he realize that it was a Long Barrow.

He went on. The path skirted a wire fence, and he had walked about a hundred yards when a rabbit scuffled in the longish grass at the bottom of the fence. He was surprised, for the rabbit sat crouching there instead of bolting from the fatal figure of man. And then Scarsdale realized that the little beast was caught in a snare; its eyes were all red and bulgy; its flanks heaved. He bent down. The rabbit made a leap, was yanked back into stillness by the steel wire. It crouched panting. Scarsdale looked about him. There was not a soul to be seen, and kneeling down, he got hold of the wire. The loop had bitten deep into the animal's neck, and to slacken it he had to insinuate a finger in the loop. It aggravated the construction. The little beast gurgled and choked; almost it seemed comatose and too far gone to struggle. Scarsdale's hands trembled with excitement, but he managed to slack the noose and to slip it over the rabbit's head.

Was it too late? He stroked the fur. The bloodshot eyes had closed, but they opened again.

“Poor bunny.”

The brown body seemed to tighten and gather itself together. The animal crawled a yard, and gave a series of little tentative leaps. It crouched for a moment, and then went bobbing over the grass, to disappear over the green

shoulder of the hill.

Scarsdale stood up. He was alone with the landscape.

“Good luck, Brer Rabbit. I suppose you can be a nuisance, and that there may be too many of you just as there are too many of us.”

He strolled on a little way and then sat down on the steep slope of the hill, looking south. He could see for miles and miles, but he was not conscious of the landscape. He was thinking of that rabbit in the snare, and how instantly his compassion had gone out to the live thing, and yet—too—he had felt guilty. He had cheated a fellow-man. He had sinned against tradition.

His thinking became personal. His fingers fumbled at his soft linen collar as though to slacken it. And suddenly he had a feeling that he too was in a snare, a noose that did not immediately throttle him because he kept still and did not struggle. Fate allowed him just a little liberty, the right to travel a yard this way and a yard that. But if he struggled, if he tried to escape, the noose would tighten and choke him. Yes, he and old Frater, and Jeans and Doble were four men with steel wires round their necks. Rabbits.

## Chapter Nineteen

ON returning from Wiltshire Scarsdale discovered in Miss Gall's manner a little edge of anxiety. She met him in the hall, and offered to carry his suitcase up for him, a thing he could not allow.

"You do look brown, sir."

"Out in the sun all day."

"I hope you will find everything in order. We were most careful, sir, to put everything back."

On going into his bedroom to unpack Scarsdale found the room exactly as he had left it. There were clean sheets, clean towels, and even the bottoms of the drawers had been lined with fresh white paper, and yet there was a something. He stood with his head up, almost like a stag sniffing the wind. Yes, he could detect a faint perfume that pervaded the room, and hung in the curtains and lingered around the bed. He was puzzled, until he remembered that Mr. Bartlet had spoken of Paris, and that this perfume was like the scent of a tuberose, a French essence, feminine, white faced, and delicately powdered. It stirred in Scarsdale an instinctive restlessness.

He did not ask Miss Gall any questions. When she brought him his tea she had the face of a woman who had opened windows wide, while shutting and shuttering her disapproval. Her little grey bob of hair had an austerity. She made conversation, spreading it much as she spread the clean white tablecloth.

"You must have had good weather, sir."

"Splendid. Only one day's rain."

"And you walked a great deal?"

"Miles and miles. You can walk in Wiltshire."

She left him, and he sat down to his tea, and feeling himself still provoked by that suggestive perfume, he was moved to suppose that Mr. Bartlet was in the drapery trade, and that his business friend from Paris might have been a fashion expert, a creator of frocks, or a purveyor of lingerie.

Afterwards he went out and walked, though walking in London was very different from tramping in Wiltshire. Yet, he liked his London. Especially did he feel an affection for this neighbourhood, the newness and the oldness of it,

its mellow Victorian flavour. It had variety, quick contrasts, emotion, a tang and a provocation. Like the rest of the world it was changing rapidly; its very shabbiness emphasized the transmutation. It was noisier. There were streets in which the houses were peeling, shedding plaster and stucco, and exposing the naked woodwork of windows and doors. There were houses that lay and decayed like corpses. The scum of a slum atmosphere was oozing in. The people of twenty years ago had gone elsewhere, and their places had been taken by people who were dirtier and cheaper, monstrous fat women bulging in greasy ulsters, and carrying shiny black shopping bags. Yet Scarsdale could stroll along streets that remained much as he remembered them thirty years ago, such streets as Aylwin Place and St. Mary's Road and the Grove, and Highbury New Park. And rising like a cliff on the high ground Highbury Terrace confronted all this newness, this sliming up of a new, cheap ooze, and stood unchanged, solid and clean and pleasantly selfish.

As for the Essex Road it had for Scarsdale a fascination and a horror. It made him think at times of a canal into which life had tossed haphazard decaying cabbages and orange peel and bits of bread, and rabbit skins. It clanged and clattered. It was full of the strange, cheap feverishness of the urban age. It was both frowsy and flashy. It suggested silk stockings and plump bodies that were not often washed. Sometimes to Scarsdale the Essex Road was terrifying. It was as though it presented to the eyes of the observer, not Pallas, or Artemis, but the goddess Proletaria, a monstrous lady bulging in a greasy ulster.

But on this September evening his footsteps tended towards Highbury Fields. He sat down on the familiar seat, and listened to the strange, distant uproar of the streets. In the Fields themselves hundreds of children seemed to maintain an incessant, meaningless shouting. They played in crowds. That was the strange part of it, life was a crowd affair. Crowds of shops, crowds of buses and cars, crowds of human shapes all looking as though the factory of life turned out about a dozen brands and was satisfied.

Though the Wiltshire hills remained, and would remain, a refuge to the separative few, and yet if the Essex Road were suddenly transferred to Barbury Hill its population would flee from it back to the buses and the shops. Crowd man was afraid of the open spaces; nature bored him; stars and a vastness of sky were too challenging. Better to be snug in a pub or a cinema, and avoid the divine and shining face of reality.

Strange folly!

But had he been so wise? Could he afford to despise and to pity the rabbit of Martinsell? He had put his head into nooses. Fatuous impetuosities! The



Julia Marwood affair, and that cheque! She had never repaid him; she had never offered to repay him! Rather extraordinary! He had not seen her since the night when he and Harry had watched the confluence of two shadows on a blind. A romantic gesture had cost him five hundred pounds, but there had been further folly, folly of another order. A year or so ago someone had whispered to him "Buy Solfatara Oils. A dead cert. I've had the straight tip from the man who knows." And Scarsdale had put three hundred pounds into "Solfatara Oils," and had seen seven-eighths of the capital vanish in the slush of a slump.

What a rabbit!

## 2

Looking out of the sitting-room window next morning while waiting for Miss Gall to arrive with his coffee and bacon, Scarsdale discovered a neat little coupé drawn up opposite the door of No. 24A. The body of the car was bright blue with the wings and upper works black. A chauffeur in a blue uniform as new as the car's paint, was giving the radiator a polish.

Miss Gall came into the room with the breakfast-tray, and Scarsdale withdrew from the window.

"Who does the car belong to?"

"Mr. Bartlet, sir. He's using it to take him to and from his business."

With his after-breakfast pipe alight Scarsdale resumed the year's routine. He walked to Highbury Corner and caught the usual red bus, and as it thundered and banged along Upper Street he was moved to reflect upon the virtues of habit. The Wiltshire hills were the Wiltshire hills, and a man might dream on them for a week, or hunt earthworks and flints, and almost feel himself back in the Stone Age, but life has other urgencies. The soul of the city dweller is the soul of the city dweller, and though Scarsdale might sometimes marvel at the crowd culture, he himself belonged to it. London wore her civic crown, and round her smutty and ample skirts her children gathered. She kept them. She might wear a crown of gold and shoes and stockings of dubious texture, but she was London, immense, human, with a bosom big with milk, and in her eyes an ironic, jocund kindness.

Scarsdale felt good. He was glad to be back, most strangely glad to be back. He walked fast down the Charing Cross Road. He was making for that

hutch of habit in which he and old Frater and Jeans and Doble nibbled together, and quarrelled and argued, and yet felt it to be theirs. It represented security, warmth, food, work. It was the slip of fibrous tissue in which as cells of the great organism they functioned. Scarsdale was three minutes late. The others had arrived. Old Frater was seated at his table. Jeans was scraping out the bowl of a very foul pipe. And Scarsdale's return caused neither comment or commotion. Doble, rustling a sheaf of papers, and sniffing, did not trouble to look up.

“ ’Morning everybody.”

Old Frater's was the only welcoming face.

“Had a good time?”

“Splendid.”

Jeans, after scraping the blade of the penknife on the window-sill, looked hard at Scarsdale. His eyes had a red-lidded cynical curiosity. He said nothing, but closed his penknife with a snap, and sat down beside Doble.

The morning started on its way. Old Frater handed over some proofs to Scarsdale, and papers rustled and chairs squeaked, and Doble sniffed. Otherwise there was silence, and yet it was not quite the silence natural to that familiar room. It was uneasy, tense, expectant, and it seemed to express its uneasiness in the creaking chairs and in Doble's sniffing. Scarsdale, becoming gradually aware of a strangeness in the atmosphere, glanced appraisingly at the other three. It seemed to him that Doble's back and shoulders were heavy with depression, and that old Frater's eyes looked worried.

The morning continued. There were comings and goings. Scarsdale's chair had developed a hardness; it was not like Wiltshire turf. Then Jeans got up with an irritable glance at Doble, and began to fill his mephitic pipe.

“How's the cold, Doble?”

“Haven't got a gold.”

“You keep me fumigating. Heard the news, Scarsdale?”

“No. What's that?”

“Calder & Pearson are buying us. Official. A nice little lottery for us.”

So that was it. The room's uneasiness was explained. Amalgamation!

“Nothing definite,—I suppose?”

“Smart's had notice in the 'Publicity', and two old duds have moved out of

the ‘Accounts’.”

Almost Scarsdale felt old Frater wince.

The luncheon-hour arrived, and the three of them went forth, leaving Doble to his sandwiches. It was not a happy meal. They were uneasy; they talked uneasily, but not one of them mentioned the crisis whose shadow lay across the September day. Scarsdale noticed that old Frater lunched on a roll and butter and a cup of coffee. He was in a panic of carefulness, and he had no stomach for eggs on toast. Jeans had a tougher soul, and no incumbrances. He ate steak and kidney pudding.

They returned to Hurst & Storey’s. Old Frater led the way up the stairs. Doble was sitting as they had left him, but as they filed in he turned his head, and Scarsdale saw upon his sallow face a kind of secret gloating.

Old Frater stood by his table, staring down at something. The whites of his eyes showed big; his moustache drooped.

And then Scarsdale realized that he too had a letter waiting for him. He stared at it, and then picked it up, and tore open the envelope.

“The Management regrets that owing to the coming reorganization—”

Frater had moved to the window. He stood in a little patch of sunlight, holding his letter. His face looked flaccid, his eyes empty.

“I’ve been here seventeen years.”

He shuffled his feet.

“I’ve been here seventeen years.”

No one replied to him for the moment. Scarsdale had slipped his own letter into his pocket. It had told him that his services would not be needed after the end of the month. He was conscious of old Frater, shrinking and bewildered in the midst of an ironic patch of sunlight.

A voice said, “It’s a damned shame.”

Doble sniffed, and replaced the tin lid of his sandwich-box.

### 3

For the first time in his life Scarsdale knew that he was a failure.

But it was strange. He had lived with Spenser Scarsdale all these years, and

he had grown so accustomed to the set of his own self-regard, that when it collapsed suddenly, he was astonished. Extraordinary! Why, only yesterday he had been in the thirties and feeling himself mildly important as a critic and a contributor of literary articles. He had written for the *Scrutator*. He could remember proposing to write a biography, and to publish a collection of essays. Yes, all in good time. He had assumed that he had the cream of his career waiting to be lapped, and that in the late forties he would be one of those mild gentlemen with distinguished heads of hair and pince-nez perched rather waywardly on cultured noses. He had seen himself wearing a velvet coat.

Extraordinary! And he had been sacked; he had been sacked for the second time of asking, and he was in his forty-seventh year. His literary flavour had grown musty. He was sitting on a seat with some small change in his pocket, and about a hundred pounds lying at his bank. At the end of the month, in nine days' time, he would be unemployed. He had just come back from his holiday. Yesterday morning he had been in Wiltshire, and feeling full of butter and eggs.

Extraordinary! Was he—? What was the word, unemployable? But surely! More than twenty years of literary and journalistic experience! And old Frater? Old Frater was fifty-nine and had children still at school.

Failure. He was alone, and the September evening had a clear, and vital crispness, and yet he was made to feel that some shadowy presence had joined him on the seat. Almost he was moved to edge away. He became conscious of a sense of chilliness. He would remember seeing shabby, frowsy figures sitting on seats, reading dirty newspapers, or looking with blank intentness at nothing. The submerged. The people who had gone under. The people whose boots were derelict.

And suddenly he felt frightened, chilly and frightened. He put his hand to his collar. He remembered the rabbit of Martinsell Hill. He too was in the snare, a failure, a shabby fellow, one of the superfluous and the too many. And he was growing old.

But No. 24A Canonbury Square and Miss Gall remained to him with all the familiar physical associations, the comings in and goings out, the desk at the window, the chair by the fire, Miss Gall's footsteps on the stairs, the tray that came and went as regularly as the sun itself. Like a frightened child his impulse was to run back to that friendly house and to go up to the familiar room, and light the fire. He was hungry, and Miss Gall would feed him. She would make his bed and send his linen to the wash.

He stood up, and then sat down again. The impulse was stayed. He had not faced the ultimate reality. What would happen to him if he failed to obtain another post in a world that was so young and full of change that he was self standing on his long legs like a war cripple in the midst of the traffic. Obviously, he would not be able to remain in Canonbury Square. He could not sponge upon a woman like Miss Gall.

His consciousness became a calculating machine. How much money had he, and how long would it last? Canonbury Square could not support him on a sum less than three pounds a week. An odd hundred pounds. That would last him about thirty weeks, from the end of September till the beginning of May, and he had a pipe to be smoked and shoes to be mended and he needed new winter underclothing. Miss Gall had reminded him of it.

Besides, he could not sink to the last pound. He would have to keep something in reserve, economize, take cheaper rooms elsewhere.

What a fool he had been about that five hundred pounds. "Pay Julia Marwood—" What a damned fool! And Solfatara Oils and his splurge into speculation! What a rabbit!

## 4

It so happened that Scarsdale and Mr. Bartlet met on Miss Gall's doorstep. Mr. Bartlet was going out, jocund and adorned. He wore an opera hat, a white scarf, a black overcoat and patent-leather boots. A taxi was waiting for him. It was the very first occasion upon which Mr. Bartlet had worn an opera hat, and he was conscious of it, and feeling adequate and jaunty.

He stopped to speak to Scarsdale.

"Excuse me,—one moment, sir. I hope you had a good time."

Scarsdale's brown eyes fixed themselves upon the opera hat. He was feeling chilly and worried, and this breezy, red-faced, prosperous person challenged him as a butcher's chop full of electric light and red meat might tantalize a man who was hungry and out of work. He wanted to get away from Mr. Bartlet.

"Most successful holiday, thank you."

"That's good. I hope you will excuse me, but I have a favour to ask you. I believe in frankness, sir. I should be very much obliged—if—at any time you should think of making a change—"

Scarsdale's glance lowered itself suddenly to the level of Mr. Bartlet's blue and businesslike stare.

"I don't quite take you."

"That's all right, sir. To cut a long story short, should you ever contemplate moving, you would put me under an obligation if you gave me a hint."

He was urbane, familiar. He tapped Scarsdale on the right shoulder with the tips of two fingers.

"Not that we wish it. Mark you, I'm rather particular, sir, I like to know that the chap overhead doesn't come in at God knows what hour, and throw his boots about. You are perfect overhead, sir. You understand me, I hope?"

"You mean that you would like my rooms?"

"Only in the event of your leaving. Just the possibility, that's all. Hope you'll stay, sir. This place suits me very well."

Scarsdale's glance dropped to the level of Mr. Bartlet's white silk scarf.

"Well, just at present, I don't contemplate—"

"Very glad to hear it. No offence, my dear sir. Just a neighbourly understanding. Well,—I must hustle. Dining at the Troc."

He waved a hand and got briskly into his taxi, and bumped his opera hat against the roof, removed it, and restored it to its unincreased rightness. Scarsdale did not observe the little comedy. He was crossing Miss Gall's threshold slowly and abstractedly, and his eyes were like the eyes of the brown creature he had rescued on Martinsell Hill.

## Chapter Twenty

OCTOBER, November, December were three self-revealing months to Spenser Scarsdale, for no one in London had need of him. He drifted about on his long legs, growing every week a little shabbier and more depressed, carrying a seemingly superfluous self from one place to another. He asked for interviews, and was fobbed off by secretaries and junior clerks. He hung about and waylaid men who were in the position to give him work. By some he was treated with brusqueness, by others with sympathy, but all that kindness could say was, "I'll keep your name in mind."

For Scarsdale was not made for the forcing of doors, or built to squeeze himself into some niche when scores of other men, more hungrily fierce and vigorous than he was, fought and scuffled for the chance to live. He was too sensitive, too quiet, too much the literary gent. He approached each crisis with a polite diffidence, a shyness, a stultifying self-consciousness.

He did not push. He stood a little apologetically to one side and waited for Life to notice him, and when the voice of Life hailed him with blunt candour, he proceeded, with gentleness and modesty, to explain.

"What can you do, you devil?"

"I have had twenty years' experience—"

"But what can you do?"

Confronted thus and compelled to realize his capabilities, he had to admit that his shop window was not impressive. It was rather like one of those strange, shabby, half-derelict shops seen in back streets in which some elderly person displays an amazing collection of junk. He had nothing new to offer to a world that shouted persistently for some new thing. Newness and noise bewildered him. He would venture into some crowded building, and come forth from it repulsed with an air of deprecating sadness. He was only forty-six, but he looked much older during those winter months, because he was feeling himself senile in finding himself so superfluous. His mild eyes looked pained and surprised. And other men, regarding him appraisingly when he came to ask for a post, were wise as to his ineffectual soul. "No use, no earthly use." He had no buck, no bounce, no power to impress. Even as a sedulous hack he would have been worth much less than some younger and sturdier mule.

He drifted, he circulated. He looked up casual acquaintances and men of some small authority, and would gently explain his position, and they would look uncomfortable, and talk about hard luck, and promise to keep their eyes and ears open. He made them uncomfortable, and they were secretly glad to be rid of him, and in time he began to understand that he was one of those unwelcome persons who might be expected to cadge. The awareness of it made him go hot and cold. It intensified his moods of diffidence. It made him appear more shy and ineffectual. He went about feeling ashamed.

Particularly did he feel humiliated in the presence of Miss Gall, for she had known him when he had considered himself a person whose views were of importance. Always, for her he had worn a mild halo, his vanity, or the ghost of it, tried to stalk impressively about the house. He was very careful to keep up appearances in the presence of Miss Gall. He would go out for hours, and wander about and sit on seats, and imagine that she would assume that he had been working. He sat at his desk and wrote articles and a short story or two, and had them typed and sent out, and like faithful and forlorn children they came back to him.

Miss Gall was not deceived. She was worried about Mr. Scarsdale, but when Mr. Bartlet asked her cheerful and impertinent questions about the first-floor lodger, she resented this curiosity.

“What’s he do for a living? Seems to me—”

Miss Gall cherished Scarsdale’s dignity.

“Mr. Scarsdale is an author.”

“What’s he write? Never read anything of his.”

“He writes for the papers.”

Mr. Bartlet was not impressed.

“Freelance. Pretty precarious sort of game. Do you get paid?”

Miss Gall looked shocked.

“Mr. Scarsdale’s a gentleman. He has been with me more than twelve years. I’ve never had to wait a day.”

“Glad to hear it.”

She would have liked to say more to Mr. Bartlet, but she lived upon Mr. Bartlet, and he could not be offended.

Christmas came and went. Mr. Bartlet travelled down to Brighton in his car, and took a lady with him, and Miss Gall gave Mr. Scarsdale roast beef and



Christmas pudding. He had muffins for his tea too on Christmas Day, and perhaps—because of his problem—they lay heavy on his soul. And a most indigestible problem it was. He had about sixty pounds left in the world, and no prospect of employment, or of any employment that would enable him to live in Canonbury Square. No one wanted him. He had ceased to be astonished by the fact. He was approaching that state of mind when a man is willing to accept any sort of job, and to clutch with a feeling of fatalistic fearfulness at any opportunity. But, obviously, he could not stay on with Miss Gall. He would have to cherish those sixty pounds. He could not run into debt with Miss Gall. He would have to take cheaper lodgings, and economize until something turned up. He still believed that something would turn up.

One day early in January he met old Frater in the Strand, looking very neat and shabby. His face had the waxy pallor of the man who—for weeks—had not been getting enough to eat. Its creases had deepened, and out of the bloodless mask an old man's eyes stared wistfully.

“Any luck?”

He watched Scarsdale anxiously.

“No. There seems to be nothing doing.”

Scarsdale noticed that old Frater had had his moustache hogged, as though the flaunting, grey wings of it had dated him too obviously.

“No use grouching—I suppose. We're too old, Scarsdale, that's about it.”

Scarsdale winced. He had not seen himself bracketed with old Frater. He was thirteen years younger than Father Time.

“How old do you think I am?”

“About fifty-five, aren't you?”

“Not quite so much as that. You have pushed me on nine years.”

“The war must have aged you a lot.”

They parted, but this meeting with old Frater had a depressing effect upon Scarsdale. Good heavens, did he look fifty-five? Impossible, absurd! But the incident helped to urge upon him the seriousness of the situation. He was spending too much money. He could not afford to go on living in Canonbury Square. He ought to warn Miss Gall and warn her immediately that his professional responsibilities compelled him to live elsewhere. He need not tell her the real reason. It was only fair to her that he should give her an opportunity of reletting his rooms at once. But, of course, there was Mr.

Bartlet. He would have to communicate with Mr. Bartlet.

## 2

On that very afternoon Scarsdale discovered Astey's Row. He had passed the end of it on many occasions, where the New River ceases to be a river, and disappears beneath the Canonbury Road. He was walking up the Canonbury Road past a hideous grey church and a row of decaying houses, when his eyes happened to lift to the branches of a magnificent and patriarchal plane tree which stood at the end of the row. He paused. It was the first time that he had noticed this tree, and he was surprised by it, and by his own lack of observation. Behind him the still waters of the New River, reflecting a tangle of dusky thorn-trees and splashed by a winter sunset, brimmed their way behind the gardens and houses of Aylwin Road. But Scarsdale was looking down Astey's Row, with its footpath and its railings, and the broad space where the New River ran underground. The trees that had shaded it still stood there, planes, chestnuts, a weeping ash, and behind their branches the very red walls of a row of model dwellings emphasized modernity.

On the left were the first houses of Astey's Row backing against the houses of Canonbury Road. They were queer, little old grey boxes with low, slated roofs and groups of red chimney pots. Their walls were peeling. There were touches of faded blue here and there. They had small gardens, and trees and shrubs, and adventures in rockery and window boxes. They looked very old and rather decrepit, but there was an indefinable something about them, a soft and smudgy charm. They were human, individual, if shabby, not like the new, hygienic barracks opposite, whose windows were like rows and rows of indistinguishable faces ranged along the seats of a football stand.

Scarsdale strolled down Astey's Row, and in the front window of one of these funny little houses he saw a card—"Rooms to Let." He hesitated. He walked on ten yards or so, and pausing at the top of River Street, he turned and looked back at the house, with the card in its window. A shabby place. It crouched behind its wintry trees and shrubs, and the soil of the little garden had a blackness. A couple of box-trees had been planted in green tubs. The plaster was flaking off the walls. And yet he noticed that the muslin curtains in the windows were clean.

Well, why not explore? Astey's Row was not Canonbury Square, but he was in search of economy and this place had an atmosphere of its own. It would not be necessary for him to make any immediate decision, and so he

headed for the green gate and opened it, and found himself on the steps outside the door. He rang the bell and waited, and was reminded of the occasion when he had stood on the steps of No. 53 Spellthorn Terrace. He looked at the row of model dwellings on the other side of the hidden river. There were rows and rows of yellow-framed windows in the red façade, rows and rows of slates in the Mansard roof.

A voice said, "Yes, what do you want?"

The door had opened behind him, and facing about he saw a woman in a blue and white check apron. She was neither tall nor short, neither young nor old. Her rather solid face had a clear, calm pallor. Her hair was very black, and her dark eyes had a stillness.

Scarsdale raised his hat.

"Excuse me, you have a room to let."

"Yes."

The doorway framed her motionless figure. She looked at him steadily as though her consciousness was a mirror in which men and things were reflected. She noticed Scarsdale's grizzled hair, and his anxious eyes. She had noticed the thinness of the back of his neck.

"Temporary or permanent?"

"Well, that would depend."

She nodded. She moved. There was something pleasant and flowing and deliberate about her. She had a certain plumpness of shoulders, throat and bosom. Her voice did not hurry.

"Perhaps you would like to see the room."

Scarsdale followed her into the narrow passage.

### 3

An open door at the end of the passage showed him a strip of green curtain, half the body of an old leather-covered armchair, and the flicker of a fire. The woman was on the stairs, and moving silently up them with a hand gliding along the rail. And suddenly he knew that he was alone with her in the house, and that it was full of her presence, the stillness and the darkness of her, a kind of indolent deliberation of voice and of movement. She went up the stairs like

a shadow, but when he followed her the stairs creaked.

He saw her opening a door, and the shape of her was silhouetted against the window between the hang of two lace curtains. Her short and shapely throat seemed to match the compass of her shoulders and bosom. Her very black hair was like a wreath. Her short nose, and firm full lips and chin had the reposefulness of curves cut out of marble. She was just woman, and yet somehow strangely mysterious.

He was afraid of her, more in awe than he had been ever of any human being. She was so still, so right, just a woman in an apron, a working woman. There was something about her and the house, what it was he could not say, that was both soothing and fearful.

She stood aside. She was expecting him to view the room, and he stepped inside and looked about him with bright, shy eyes. She observed him. She smiled very faintly to herself, or at her understanding of this creature.

He said, "It's a very nice room. Rather small."

The old brown carpet had a tinge of gold. The wall paper was stippled over with faded pink roses. He noticed that the ewer was cracked and had been riveted. As for the furniture it appeared to have been bought piece by piece, an ugly mahogany wardrobe, a chest of drawers and a washhand-stand painted white, a bent cane chair, a yellow towel-horse, a mirror with a piece of the wood veneer missing from the frame. An American clock and two pink vases stood on the mantelpiece. The iron bedstead had a white quilt. There were no pictures.

"How much do you charge a week?"

"Seven and sixpence."

"Just for the room?"

"Yes."

"Are there any other lodgers?"

"No."

He stood hesitant. It had struck him that her voice was not the voice of a London woman. It was not a common voice. He walked across to the window and looked out, and she observed the thinness of his neck and the stoop of his shoulders.

"What about meals?"

"I could give you breakfast and supper. That would be extra, of course."

“Of course. No others?”

She was silent for a moment or two, as though the still mirror of her was gathering impressions.

“Don’t you go to work?”

She saw his lips move, but no sound came. She explained.

“You see, I go out to work myself from half-past eight till four.”

He turned to face her, but his eyes looked at her obliquely, and with a kind of questioning shyness. So, she went out to work. Did that mean—? Then he would have the house to himself for hours; he would be able to write. And again he felt the little house to be permeated by her, woman, a calm, mysterious presence, something that was strange to him. He was very much afraid of her, but this fear of his had a spell.

He said, “Just at present I do most of my work at home. I write for the papers.”

Her eyes remained dark and still.

“I see.”

“Could you give me a day or two to decide?”

She looked past him through the window.

“No. Someone else may call.”

“Of course, naturally—”

His decision was sudden, and yet it was not he who made the decision, but something other than himself. It was as though he felt willed and was made to utter certain words, while his conscious self listened to them and was vaguely surprised.

“I’ll take the room. I shall be able to move in in a day or two. I had better leave you something.”

He felt for his wallet, brought it out, and extracted a pound note. She watched his long and rather ineffectual fingers.

“A deposit. My name is Scarsdale.”

She took the note.

“Thank you. Shall I give you a receipt?”

“I don’t think it is necessary.”

She turned and redescended the stairs, and Scarsdale followed her, still wondering at himself, and puzzled by a feeling of inevitableness. He saw her pause in the passage and open a door.

“You could take your meals in here.”

She showed him a sitting-room furnished with one of those cheap, stereotyped suites, sideboard, sofa, six chairs, armchair, table, very red as to the wood and plushy as to the fabric.

“That would be extra, of course?”

“Not unless you had a fire. I shall have to charge you something for service and cooking.”

“Naturally.”

He looked a little frightened, and she reassured him.

“Perhaps five shillings a week. Would that—?”

“O, quite all right. Very reasonable.”

She reclosed the door, and moving along the passage, opened the front door. She gave him a sense of calm, of somehow being completely and vividly herself. He met her eyes for a moment.

“So, that’s settled. I’ll let you know the exact day.”

“Yes, I shall have to get food in.”

He descended the steps, and then turning suddenly smiled up at her with an air of deprecating and whimsical self-consciousness.

“O, by the way,—I don’t know your name.”

“Richmond, Mrs. Richmond.”

“Thank you.”

He raised his hat to her, and walked to the gate as though he knew that her dark, still eyes were watching him.

She returned to the room at the back of the house, which was both sitting-room and kitchen. The deal table, with half its surface covered by a red cloth, had been drawn up close to the grate. A sewing-machine with a length of white

flannel attached to it stood on the red-clothed half of the table. The window showed the dirty grey backs of other houses. On the grate a kettle talked to itself, and a very large tabby cat mused on the hearthrug.

She leaned against the table and looked at the fire. A tram went by in the Canonbury Road, clanging its bell, and a tremor seemed to pass through the house. She smiled. Her dark eyes stared.

So, she had let the room. She had not been very eager to have another person in the house, especially a man and a man who did not go to work. She was one of those women who, like the cat on the hearthrug, was very good friends with herself. Life had taught her to be separative and to be silent, and to prefer silence to all the back-door philosophers. She went to her work and returned from it, and like her eyes, her thoughts and emotions had a stillness.

But this Mr. Scarsdale would not give her any trouble. She was intuitive. It would have surprised Scarsdale very considerably had he known how clearly she had seen him. To her he was no mere flat surface but a figure in high relief. She saw people like that. She saw into them and round them.

“Poor man.”

She had noticed his hesitant hands, and his anxious and rather prominent brown eyes, and the grizzle of his hair, and the length and the loneliness of him. Hard up, probably. A gentle and ineffectual creature, and desperately afraid of hurting people’s feelings. She was conscious of a little tinge of pity.

## Chapter Twenty-one

SCARSDALE broke the news to Miss Gall. He called her back as she was leaving the room after placing the tea-tray on the table.

“Just a moment.”

He sat down at the table. He wished to appear casual. He lifted the tea-cosy from the teapot; Miss Gall still insisted upon tea-cosies.

“Sorry to say—I shall have to leave here in a few days. Very sorry to have to go. After all these years. You have always looked after me so—so kindly. But it is a question of business, new responsibilities. Quite essential that I should be close to the office.”

She stood by the door, rather like a piece of thin, black thread, pendant. Her hands fidgeted, and then came to rest clasped over the lower part of her figure. There was something in her silence and in her rigidity that made Scarsdale hurry on.

He slopped milk into his tea.

“Sorry I could not give you longer notice, but then I understand that—the gentleman below—Mr. Bartlet—”

He glanced at her nervously. Her face looked funny. It surprised and distressed him, and he reached for the sugar-bowl.

“As I was saying—Mr. Bartlet hinted to me that he would like both floors. No business of mine—of course, but I don’t want you to suffer financially. I have always been most comfortable here. Home—But then—business is business.”

He glanced at her again. Good lord,—she was—! Hurriedly he began to eat bread and butter.

“It’s a great blow to me, sir.”

“O, come, I know; I’m afraid I’ve always given you a lot of trouble. I’m sure—”

Her lips moved; her eyelids flickered. She seemed to be about to say something, but either the words would not come, or she felt that she had to consider the appearances. His appearances. For she was quite sure that he was in trouble, a ship in distress, and that he was leaving her because he was in



difficulties. He was short of money, and she wanted to tell him that she would not mind waiting for her money, and that Mr. Bartlet with all his ready cash was nothing but an interloper.

But she could not tell him. The very way he stirred his tea made her feel that he was making the best of a bitter business. He was always so considerate, so correct. Her throat quivered; her hands clasped each other.

“I can’t say how sorry I am, sir. Yes, it will be quite all right about the let Mr. Bartlet—”

And then she let out a little, unpardonable gulp. She saw Scarsdale’s eyes—O, how disgraceful of her! She turned sharply to the door, and seemed to slip round the edge of it.

“If ever—you think of—wanting the room—again—I’m sure—I shall be —”

Miss Gall closed the door on the broken surface of her self-control, and Scarsdale heard her go down the stairs. He raised his teacup and drank. His eyes stared down over the rim of the cup. He looked shocked. He felt hot.

“Beastly to have to tell lies, but I didn’t want her to think—What a good soul!”

Later in the evening he went downstairs and knocked at Mr. Bartlet’s door, and the fat and jocund voice bade him enter. Mr. Bartlet was very much at ease. He had his feet on a chair in front of the fire, and a small table at his elbow, and he was reading a novel, a mystery tale.

“Come in, sir, come in.”

He took his feet off the chair, and Scarsdale noticed the colour of Bartlet’s socks.

“Please don’t disturb yourself. But I promised to let you know about my rooms.”

“Sit down, sir. Have a drink.”

“Really, no thanks. I mustn’t stay. Letters to write. I shall be giving up my rooms, on Saturday. I thought you—”

Mr. Bartlet’s pipe kept up a bubbling. He was a smoker of big and curly pipes, calabash or briar, and he did not trouble to clean them. He had a strong stomach. His face glistened after his supper and a stiff whiskey; he liked a room well heated.

“Very much obliged. Do sit, sir. No? Have a cigar?”

“No, thank you very much. The fact is, I have had to arrange this move rather suddenly on account of professional responsibilities. I don’t want Miss Gall to suffer.”

“My dear sir,—no need to worry. I’ll take over from you.”

“Both floors?”

“Most certainly. This place is going to suit me very well.”

“I’m glad.”

Once again Mr. Bartlet pressed a drink and a chair upon him, but Scarsdale was finding Bartlet’s room very hot, and the reek of his pipe unpleasant. The succulence and the success of Bartlet oppressed him, and there were those twinkling black and white silk socks, and red-leather slippers. He faded out of the room, and Mr. Bartlet replaced his feet on the chair.

“Funny,—awkward fellah. All tied up with string.”

Scarsdale spent the Thursday in packing, and not till he set about the business did he realize how much he had to pack. A trouser-press was an awkward and unaccommodating article, and books could not be compressed; he had to appeal to Miss Gall, and from somewhere she produced a Tate’s sugar-box. It accepted his books, but refused the trouser-press, so the trouser-press had to be attached to the top of the case with lengths of stout string. All through that Thursday Miss Gall hovered. She came and went upon the stairs. She was as troubled and uneasy as a cat that hears the rustle of tissue paper and knows that some upheaval is in the air, and that rooms will be fireless and empty. She would appear in the doorway of Scarsdale’s bedroom, looking as though she had some message to deliver, and had forgotten how to use her tongue.

“Is there anything I can do, sir?”

“No, nothing, thank you.”

“I have pressed your trousers for you.”

After his tea he went out and walked to Astey’s Row, for Mrs. Richmond would expect to be warned of his arrival on Saturday. It was raining, and a strong south-westerly wind snored in the branches of the big plane-tree. Lights flickered, and their reflections trembled in the puddles and on the wet flagstones. Astey’s Row was less than a quarter of a mile from Canonbury Square, and their nearness to each other troubled Scarsdale. So many unnecessary things troubled him; his sensitive consciousness was like a pool

on which feathers blew about. He did not want Miss Gall to know that he had moved himself no farther than Astey's Row.

He found himself at Mrs. Richmond's gate, and as he opened it and looked at the dark windows of the little house he became a creature of indecision. His mood vacillated like wind-shaken bushes in Mrs. Richmond's front garden. Almost he was like a privet-bush in a panic.

He stood, hesitant, with one hand on the gate. There were no lights in the windows. He walked up the path to the steps, paused, looked about him. He was afraid. But of what was he afraid? Of this little dark house, and of the newness of this adventure, and of woman, and of the wind, and of the unknown future? And at his age! But something in him shivered. He began to tell himself that Mrs. Richmond was out, and that he could come down tomorrow. He would come down, early in the morning. He returned to the gate, and was closing it when he heard a voice. It startled him.

"I'm sorry. Have you been ringing?"

She was part of the wind and the darkness and the flickering lights. She carried a bag. He saw her dim white face, and the hollows that were eyes. And to him, in all the blurred, windy, wet unrest of that London night, she appeared strangely still and set, a figure that was unshaken.

"O,—I just came to let you know. I shall be here on Saturday."

She could see little points of light in his prominent eyes, and the curve of his sharp and anxious chin. Her previous impression of him was renewed. He was so easily blown about. Somehow he reminded her of a piece of paper caught by the wind and pressed against the railings.

She said, "Saturday. Very good. About what time?"

"What time will suit you?"

"Any time in the afternoon."

He stood aside to allow her to enter the gate.

"Thank you. About three o'clock, then. Good night."

"Good night."

luggage, and from his expression it might be gathered that he was not impressed by Scarsdale's luggage. Out of the corner of a bibulous eye he watched Scarsdale shaking hands with Miss Gall. His drooping moustache was wet beneath his cynical blue snout, and he wiped them both with the back of a dirty glove.

Miss Gall closed the door of No. 24A. She did it abruptly as though repressing subconscious emotion, but she hurried into Mr. Bartlet's room, and watched through the window. She saw Scarsdale get into the taxi and close the door.

But the machine did not move off. The driver leant out and opened the off door, and from under the contemptuous brush of that moustache asked Scarsdale a question.

"Goin' somewhere, are you?"

Scarsdale's long body swayed forward.

"O, yes, King's Cross station."

The driver closed the door, and Miss Gall, half-hidden behind a curtain, and dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, understood that Scarsdale had forgotten to give the driver an address. How like him! She wiped the eyes of her compassion.

Such was Scarsdale's subterfuge. It cost him sundry shillings, but Miss Gall and Astey's Row had to be dissociated. He was driven to King's Cross station, and his luggage was deposited in the cloakroom. He disappeared for a couple of hours; he walked up the Pentonville Road, and through Claremont and Middlesex Squares, and back through an intricacy of sodden, and obscure streets. He ate a boiled egg and a roll and butter, and drank a cup of coffee in a tea-shop, and returned to the station and extracted his luggage, and had it loaded on to another taxi. It carried him back up the Pentonville Road into Upper Street, and past Islington Green into the Essex Road. The trees of Islington Green trailed black tentacles against a smirched sky. For the first time in his life he noticed the statue of a gentleman, wearing a ruff and Tudor small clothes, posed on a pedestal with his back to the Green. It occurred to him to wonder why he had not observed this gentleman before. And there was Collins' Music Hall! Memories! Lottie Collins and "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay." How old and how new everything was. And how strange!

The taxi drew up at the Canonbury end of Astey's Row, and again Scarsdale's luggage became a problem. He appealed to the driver.

"Will you give me a hand?"

“ ‘Ow fur?”

“Only just down the Row.”

Between them they manhandled the two trunks and the sugar-box and a suitcase and an old Gladstone bag, and dumped them at the bottom of Mrs. Richmond’s steps. That was the taxi-driver’s limit; he was old and fat and short-winded.

“I don’t carry upstairs, gov’nor; m’heart’s not what it was.”

Scarsdale paid him and he departed. Meanwhile Mrs. Richmond’s door remained closed, and Scarsdale became worried about his baggage. There was such a damned lot of it, and possibly Mrs. Richmond would not be pleased when she came to appreciate the bulk and the finality of his arrival. And where would he stow it all in that upper room? Already a group of children had gathered. They were watching him. Extraordinary thing how rude children arrived just when you were feeling embarrassed.

“What’s ’e got in the box?”

“Rabbits.”

“Don’t be silly—’i, mister, give yer a ’and?”

Scarsdale ascended the steps and rang the bell. He was ready with his explainings and his apologies, and then the door opened, and she was there.

“I’m afraid I have rather a lot of luggage.”

He looked at her anxiously. Apparently she was quite calm, and not in the least put out by the accumulation at the bottom of the steps. She took no notice of the children pressing against the railings; she did not appear to see them. Her air of tranquillity was somehow profoundly reassuring.

“I’ll help you in with it.”

“O, no, you must not do that.”

“O, yes, I will. I’m used to moving things.”

She had her way, and Scarsdale became her supernumerary. She directed him, but without any air of authority. “You take one handle. The upper one. It’s easier to go backward in trousers. We’ll carry them all into the passage.” They carried in the first trunk, and he was surprised at her strength and at the ease with which she handled her end of the burden. She did not get flushed or out of breath. She was deliberate and capable and unflurried. And suddenly he felt less afraid of her. It seemed to him that she had an inevitableness, a kind of meaning in a world of muddle and disharmony and unexplainable physical

excitement. She did not appear to get excited about things.

The sugar-box sustained its cantankerous reputation, and perhaps Scarsdale was clumsy, but it was one of her fingers that was pinched between the box and the door. A white knuckle showed a red blur; the skin had been broken.

He looked shocked.

“You’ve hurt yourself.”

“Just the knuckle, that’s all.”

“I believe it was my fault. I’m—”

She smiled; she looked amused; and then she put the knuckle to her lips and sucked it. The act fascinated him; it seemed so natural and human in her, whereas if anybody else had done it he would have had qualms.

He said, “Hadn’t you better go and wash it. I can manage the rest. Only odds and ends.”

“I’ll put a piece of linen round it. I heal well.”

He looked at her, at the wholesome, firm-fleshed pallor of her. She was not all raddled like most of the working women; her hair had a glossiness. Yes, she looked supremely healthy; her movements had a kind of deliberate rightness. Her co-ordination was perfect, and no little inward frettings and disharmonies seemed to disturb it.

He was conscious of surprise. No longer was he afraid of her, or not in that particular way. She was so inevitable in her reactions, in her words and her movements. So—sensible. Yet that was not quite the word. He went down the steps and carried in the rest of his belongings, and closed the door on the irreverent faces of those children. And when he had closed the door he was aware of a silence, and of being shut in alone with her.

### 3

Yes, the house was extraordinarily silent. Scarsdale had carried the suitcase and the Gladstone bag up the stairs and into the room that was his, and had unpacked them, and stowed them away under the bed. He had examined the towels, and the sheets and the pillow-case, and found them after Miss Gall’s own heart. Meanwhile, the heavy baggage lay in the passage, and dusk was arriving, and he could not make up his mind about the trunks and the sugar-box. Should he unpack them down there, and carry up their contents

piecemeal? Also, he needed a light, and he had mislaid his matches.

Where the devil had he put those matches? He wandered about the little room, searching for the box, and could not find it, and the dusk deepened. He saw windows opening their yellow eyes across the way. Perhaps Mrs. Richmond would supply him with matches? He went out on to the landing and stood at the top of the stairs.

“Mrs. Richmond.”

But he did not call her by name. The silence of the house had a queer, inhibiting effect upon him. He felt shy of it. He stood there and wondered. It was as though the silence was intimately and strangely her. What was she doing? Had she gone out?

He drifted back into the room and sat down upon the bed. It creaked; it continued to creak in time with his breathing. The room grew darker and darker, and more lights were lit in the ribbon of brickwork across the way. He heard children shouting and quarrelling in the Row. Why was it that common children always shouted and quarrelled. He was glad that Mrs. Richmond had no children. He supposed that she was a widow.

The silence in the house continued. It was mysterious. From the very beginning he had felt the house to be mysterious. But why? Was it because it was her house? He became restless. He felt rather foolish sitting there in the darkness. He got up, and the bed creaked. He walked to the head of the stairs.

Suddenly he heard a faint clinking sound from below, familiar yet strangely exciting. A ray of light traversed the darkness. A door creaked.

“Mr. Scarsdale.”

He felt absurdly foolish standing there in mute expectancy at the top of the stairs. He lowered his voice so that she might think that it came from his room.

“Yes?”

“The kettle’s just boiling. Would you like a cup of tea?”

“Yes,—I should—very much, thank you.”

“I’ll put it in the sitting-room for you. Oh; one of your trunks is across the door.”

“I’ll move it.”

He hurried down the stairs.

Afterwards she helped him to carry the two trunks and the sugar-box. He noticed that she had a piece of clean linen wrapped round her finger. He felt very apologetic about her helping him with the luggage, but she appeared to be in no need of his pity or his excuses.

She found him a box of matches.

“Didn’t you light the gas?”

“No. I couldn’t find my matches.”

She lit the gas-jet for him, and lowered the blinds, and then quietly left him to solve the problem of distributing his belongings. She went down the stairs on easy, noiseless feet. It was extraordinary how silently she moved.

Scarsdale unpacked. He dealt with one trunk at a time, and realizing from the smallness of the room and the very limited dimensions of the chest of drawers and the wardrobe that a nice orderliness would be essential, he began by apportioning a place to the various articles. There should be a drawer for collars, handkerchiefs, and ties, a drawer for socks, another for shirts, and yet another for underclothing and pyjamas, and in theory the scheme was admirable, but it was rendered more complex by the existence of such articles as trousers and waistcoats. He began by hanging up coats in the wardrobe. It occurred to him that the trouser-press might find a place in the bottom of the wardrobe, but once again this piece of mechanism proved contumacious and unsympathetic, so he put it aside for a while and concentrated upon other matters. He filled the drawers of the chest, and was left with a credit balance of three dress-shirts, all his waistcoats, a woollen cardigan, a blue scarf, his boots, his boxful of books, and a collection of oddments. He had no table upon which to arrange his pipes and tobacco tin, manuscript paper, letters, stationery, pocket dictionary and notebook. The mantelpiece had been appropriated by his hairbrushes, razor, sundry bottles, a clothes-brush, a patent strop, a calendar, and a shaving-mirror.

His possessions overflowed. Obviously, the books would have to be left in the sugar-box, for—after all—literature is a luxury, and it occurred to him that the confounded trouser-press could repose on the top of the box. Also, he could use his suitcase for some of the superfluous garments. Such was the solution, a compromise, and when he had stowed the empty trunks away under the bed, and hung his overcoat and a mackintosh and a dressing-gown on two hooks that were fastened to the door, he felt that he had accomplished great



things.

But what next? He sat down on the bed, and once more he became aware of the silence, of that other presence which withdrew into a kind of mysterious shell, and yet sent out a murmuring. He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock, and he had no table to write at, and no fire, and the solitary gas-jet was aloof and unsympathetic. Yes, he would have to get hold of a table; he could edge it in there by the window between the washhand-stand and the wardrobe. He might buy some candles. Meanwhile, what next? He could not sit on his bed until it was time to get into it. The room had a chilliness, and he had nothing to do.

But how extraordinarily silent that woman was. He sat and listened and was moved to wonder what she was doing? What did women do with themselves? Was she sitting by the fire sewing? But that was the old tradition, and though he knew no other, and was nothing but a theorist, he felt his consciousness groping its way down the dark stairs. He did not tell himself that he knew nothing about women and their ways, perhaps because he had yet to discover his fundamental ignorance. He was a book man, a scribbler, a fellow who had had to pretend that he knew about everything. He had even written nice little, literary articles on "Woman", and he knew as much about woman as Adam did before the purloining of his rib. As a journalist and sub-editor he had not dealt with realities. Life was a question of copy.

But what was that woman doing? What did she do for a living? Who was she, what was she? Why did she live here? What was her history? He sat on his bed and listened, and felt rather like a small boy shut up in a cupboard. He felt lonely. The lower regions of the small, dark house assumed an immensity, the strangeness of the unknown, and perhaps of the unknowable. Mrs. Richmond. It had a pleasant sound. And what was her other name? He supposed that she had a fire to sit by, and her own thoughts to think. What did a woman think about, a woman like Mrs. Richmond? Did she think? Obviously she had a life of her own, and rather capable hands, and an air of being able to deal with her own particular problems.

But this silence! He got up at last, and opened the door, and tiptoed to the top of the stairs. He stood and listened. The loneliness in him seemed to strain toward that other live presence.

Yes, he could hear something, and the sound puzzled him. It was a sort of whirr-whirr-whirr, and his uneducated bachelor ears could make nothing of it. He had not lived with such things as sewing-machines.

He returned to his room. He decided to go out. He put on his hat and

overcoat, and turned out the gas, and groped his way down the stairs. He made a good deal of noise, and there was a vacant space in him that wanted to be filled. He rather hoped that the door at the end of the passage would open, and let out light and life. But it remained closed. He found himself in the small garden. The night seemed very dark in spite of the lights across the way.

## *Chapter Twenty-two*

MRS. RICHMOND'S alarm woke her at six. She was not the mere slave of this mechanism, for she lay in bed for five minutes and enjoyed the warmth and the softness of it before reaching for the matches and lighting the candle beside her bed. Her working day began at eight, yet, always she slipped into it as she slipped into her clothes, with a feeling of sleekness and of ease. Nature had made her that way, quiet and dark of eye, and shapely and strong in body, and limbs. She was a Dorsetshire woman; her people had been small farmers.

There was much to do before she put on her hat and coat and went out to her work. There were two breakfasts to get, her lodger's and her own, the kitchen grate to be cleaned and laid ready for the evening. She used a gas-ring in the morning, and a monster kettle that could satisfy two teapots and supply Mr. Scarsdale's shaving-water. She allowed him his shaving-water. When doing the rough work she wore housemaid's gloves, and the gaslight would shine upon her white and well-shaped forearms. Her skin was like herself, of a fine, firm texture.

She rather liked these dark winter mornings. They had an air of secrecy, and woman is a creature of secrecies where the soul of her dwells like a bird in a deep wood. She did not feel the cold. She went smoothly about the accomplishing of things, while the cat lay on the rug and watched her with eyes that were green or yellow. At a quarter to seven she knocked at Scarsdale's door.

"Your hot water."

The summons was abrupt, but her voice had a fluidity. It was never in a hurry.

"Thank you, Mrs. Richmond."

She called him at a quarter to seven, because she had to give him his breakfast at half-past seven. She had her own at a quarter after the hour. Most women would have rushed clattering at the day, but she was deliberate, and because of it the day obeyed her. It drew its breath steadily and followed.

At a quarter to eight she passed down the passage and out of the front door. She closed it gently. She wore black, and carried a black shopping bag. Her neck was white under her dark hair.

From his table in the sitting-room Scarsdale could see her walk to the gate,

pass out, and disappear along the Row. He watched her until she passed out of his view. He wondered about her. Where did she go;—what did she do? She was mysterious, though to the casual eye there was nothing mysterious about her. She was a woman who went out to work and returned, and was quietly busy about the house, and who went to bed and rose again in the morning. She moved to the rhythm of a routine, and yet the monotone of her day was like the single, wayward note of a blackbird.

She seemed so apart, so mysteriously self-sufficient. He heard her about the house; she did things for him; her life seemed to consist of doing simple things. They appeared to satisfy her, or that was his feeling about it. The house was full of her presence, and yet to him she was almost invisible. At night she sat alone in that back room, and it was like some secret place into which he would never penetrate. He had had a glimpse of her bedroom when the door had happened to be open, and he had seen a strip of brown carpet, a white quilt, and a pillow with a nightdress neatly folded upon it.

The house was full of her even when she was not in it. The silence watched with round, dark eyes. He would get up from the breakfast-table and stroll to the window, and wonder what to do with the day. Work, or go out in quest of work? He had a strange feeling of helplessness. It seemed that he depended upon something.

One morning he realized that the breakfast-things were left upon the table, and that when she came back at four o'clock she had to clear those things away and wash them up. She did it each day. She was paid to do it,—and yet—!

He remembered that his unmade bed waited for her, and the water in his basin.

How superfluous! He stood looking at the plate that had presented him with two rashers of bacon. He was conscious of feeling futile and useless, like a large and helpless child. Surely he had hands, hands that could do other things than scribble?

He pondered it all day while wandering rather aimlessly in search of possibilities. He went home early and emptied his basin, and made his bed. It was a much more puzzling job than he had imagined it to be. The result lacked precision, and smoothness.

He waited for her to come in. He heard her go into the sitting-room kitchen. He descended the stairs quietly and stood in the passage. The door was half open, and he could see her bending down in front of the grate. She struck a match; the light played upon her face.

He cleared his throat self-consciously.

“Mrs. Richmond.”

She turned her head slightly.

“Yes.”

“It has struck me as rather—rather silly—that you should have to do things when you come back.”

“What things?”

“Clear away breakfast-things. And my room.”

She was watching the flames lick the wood. She remained motionless.

“O, well, I do them. Why not?”

He watched her; he felt very large and awkward. He said, “I’ve made my bed. Is there any reason why I shouldn’t clear away those things in the morning?”

She looked at him. Her eyes were two dark pits.

“Well, you could. Put them on the table here. I wash up when I come back.”

She rose and disappeared from his view; she was taking off her hat, and he, feeling vaguely superfluous, went and sat in the sitting-room. It was growing dark, and it was chilly, and he sat there of sufferance.

She came in with his tea.

“Why didn’t you light the gas?”

He smiled vaguely in the darkness.

“Yes, I ought to have done. But one shouldn’t waste gas.”

She lit it, and left him to his tea. He heard her go upstairs. She was in his room. What was she doing? Remaking his bed? He ate bread and butter slowly. Yes, probably he had made rather an apple pie of that bed.

She came downstairs again; she paused at the door.

“You had better leave it to me.”

She was decisive, but her voice had a gentleness.

“Probably takes me half the time, and I—”

“Yes—you do it better. But I might learn, you know.”

It was the first hopeful thing that she had heard him say.

## 2

For, regarded as a self-supporting, autonomous creature, he was rather hopeless, and yet his helplessness did not annoy her. She accepted it as she had accepted him as a lodger, divining him to be one of those men who were born to failure as the sparks fly upward. She thought about him as she walked to her work at Highbury Terrace and St. Mary's Road. She had been married, and she understood men, but not just because she had been married. She understood many things, because it seemed to be her nature to understand them, and because she was never in a hurry, and did not read too much, and talked even less than she read.

She had married a man who had been a motor-engineer before the war, and who had joined the Air Force, and risen to the rank of sergeant before he had been killed by an aeroplane bomb miles behind the line in France. She had a pension, and she earned some thirty shillings a week working as help at houses in Highbury Terrace, St. Mary's Road and Aylwin Place. She let a room. She was by no means a grievous widow. It is possible that she had begun to tire of her motor-mechanic's shallow assertiveness and his little waxed mustachios and his advanced opinions. He had been one of those men who talk like a stone rattling in an empty tin. It is possible that she had begun to wonder why she had married him.

For she was not modern, and mechanical, and full of the "Daily This" or the "Daily That." She was woman. She had existed before such noisy ingenuities and she would outlast them. She was like a deep wood with its silence and its shadows, or a green valley between high hills. She lived in London, but she was not of it; she might do her shopping in the Essex Road, but she did not belong to Essex Road. She belonged to herself, the rarest form of property in these days when the social theorists would insist upon every individual adhering to a glutinous mass of state porridge.

At Highbury Terrace they called her "Mrs. Silence". She was particularly cherished there. They had tried to persuade her to become a permanency, but she was a creature who liked to be apart. She glided about her work, and when the work was done she walked home like a woman returning through wide fields.

Sometimes she would be persuaded to wait at table when Highbury Terrace

was giving a dinner-party. She waited very well, but with an air of aloof dignity. People noticed her.

“My dear, who is the treasure? Where did you get her?”

“O, Mrs. Silence.”

“What a quaint name.”

“It’s our name for her. She just comes in.”

Men noticed her. She was made to be noticed, but not to be smiled at glibly or spoken to as a man speaks to a waitress. She was deep water, too deep for facetious splashings. Yet her calmness was without austerity.

Her mind dealt much with simple things, for to her the simple things mattered. In retrospect she rescued Scarsdale’s self-made bed, and smiled over it, but inwardly so. Obviously he had been puzzled as to how to finish off the bottom sheet and the bolster, but his hands were like that, gentle and ineffectual and hesitant.

She wondered about him. What did he do with himself all day while she was away at work? He had told her that he wrote for the papers, that is to say he was a journalist or what she called a newspaper reporter, and she had always supposed that newspaper reporters were active, pushing little men who hurried about with notebooks hunting news, and especially sensational news. There was no sensational note in Scarsdale, nor could she see him hurrying, or pushing himself forward in front of his fellows. Also, he appeared to have no friends.

He had asked her to buy for him a table, a very small table.

“You see,—I have to write.”

She had suggested that he should use the sitting-room. There was really no reason why he should not use the front sitting-room.

“You can leave your papers there.”

“But the terms don’t include the use—”

She had understood his difficulty. He was both hard up and sensitive.

“Well, never mind.”

“Oh, but I can’t accept—”

“Just as you pleasure. If you care to pay me another half-crown a week.”

“That seems very little.”

“You just sit there and write.”

A cold spell arrived after he had been with her a week, and he sat without a fire, wearing his overcoat. He did not want to afford a fire, or to give her the trouble of dealing with it, but he spoke to her about an oil stove, and as though he were asking a favour.

“Would you mind if I bought an oil-stove? I could fill it myself, couldn't I? And I could use it and turn it out.”

“Obviously.”

“Why not?”

“It would save the trouble of a fire, and one's fingers get cold. But of course you understand that I pay for the paraffin.”

“It won't cost very much, especially if you only use it when you work.”

He reiterated the remark, “But of course I pay for the paraffin.”

She bought him a stove, and two gallons of spirit, and he seemed surprised that she had managed to buy the stove so cheaply. He handed over the money. He looked bothered about something.

“Where can I keep the can?”

“I'll keep it for you.”

“But I shall have to bother you.”

“It won't take me two minutes to fill the stove.”

“It's very good of you.”

After all he did clean his own shoes. He had bought a couple of brushes and a tin of polish, and he made quite a good job of cleaning his shoes.

### 3

Scarsdale cleared away his breakfast. He carried the tray into Mrs. Richmond's kitchen-sitting-room, and placed it on the table, and returned at once to his own quarters. He did not linger in that mysterious room in which Mrs. Richmond moved and breathed and had her being. It was as though he felt himself to be a trespasser.

He lit his stove, placed it near the chair, and sat down to write. He was



finding it difficult to write. The seriousness of his situation seemed to trend upon the tail of his inspiration, such as it was, and his inspiration, though trying to flee forward, would remain like an animal held in a trap. There were mornings when he felt paralysed. He would sit and stare at the red façade and the rows of windows of the model dwellings over the way. He would sit and listen to people passing in the Row. Nothing inward would come to him. His consciousness was externalized.

There were mornings when he felt restless, hunted. He would hold his chilly hands over the stove and say to himself—"I must do something. This sort of thing can't go on." And he would get up and go and look out of the window, and then return to his chair, and try to think of something original and arrestive to put down on paper.

At times his restlessness had other origins. His consciousness would concern itself with Mrs. Richmond. It seemed to gather like the dusk round a lamp, and the lamp was her face. This little house was so full of her; it seemed to listen and watch and breathe.

There was that morning when a more urgent restlessness made him get out of his chair and go gliding guiltily about the house. It was as though he was in search of something, he knew not what. He found himself in the back room, and looking at all the objects in it with a poignant curiosity, inanimate things yet somehow alive. He discovered the cat on the hearthrug, and he was startled; almost he apologized to the cat.

"Poor puss. Just looking round."

Thomas the cat was not in the least disturbed. He continued his meditations. He allowed Scarsdale to rub a finger against his neck. Obviously, the man creature meant no harm.

Scarsdale looked about him, and his glances were quick and self-conscious. So that was her chair, and that was her sewing-machine. He observed some photos on the mantelpiece, but there was no portrait of her, and his inspection was casual. He saw a small hanging bookcase and went toward it. Girl's books, a strange medley, *Pear's Annual*, a guide to Winchester, a Bible. He took down the Bible and looked at the fly-leaf.

"Eleanor Mayhill", and underneath it was written "Eleanor Richmond".

So that was her Christian name. Eleanor, Ellen, Nellie, Nella. The Eleanor expressed her to him at the moment. And Mayhill. What a green and fragrant name.

He put the book back. He retreated with a sense of haste, half closing the

door, and catching the cat's yellow eyes fixed on him. Well, cats could not tell tales.

But he felt restless. He put on his hat and coat, and was about to close the front door when he remembered that he had left the oil-stove burning. He returned and extinguished it. He turned left along Astey's Row, and reaching the steps at the end of it, dropped into the Essex Road. He walked toward Islington Green and Upper Street. He had ceased to stroll in the direction of Highbury, for he was strangely afraid of meeting Miss Gall.

He took a bus at the "Angel". He sat and stared. He was saying to himself, "I must—do—something. Positively—I must do something. When the money runs out—" The bus was cold, and he shivered slightly, and caught the eyes of a woman looking at him curiously. Why had she stared at him like that. He did not realize that he was looking frightened.

He left the bus at the Gray's Inn Road. He found himself in Holborn. He arrived at Newgate. Then Ludgate Hill, the Circus, Fleet Street. He had decided to go and see Taggart. He was feeling desperate. His long legs carried him into the narrow street and to the door of the familiar building. He found himself addressing the same, snub-nosed, cheeky boy.

"Mr. Taggart in?"

"Ain't been in for a month."

"O, how's that?"

" 'Ad pneumonia."

Scarsdale turned away.

## 4

He felt frightened. Never before had he experienced this sort of fear. He walked fast as though something pursued him, and yet his walking was aimless. Both the pavements and the roadway appeared more crowded; there was more noise, more hurry. Buses and vans loomed over you like walls on wheels. All these people! How did they live? It was amazing to him that they managed to live. And what was the meaning of it all, this vast scuffle, this rushing hither and thither, this catastrophic noise? He was struck by the absurdity of modern life, but his sense of the absurd brought a laugh that was like a grin on the face of a man who had died violently and terribly.

He came upon a crowd of men and youths half blocking the pavement outside the window of a newspaper office. They were looking at the photographs of two boxers. Football and fighting. He circumvented this human obstruction, and found himself on the heels of a filthy old man in an overcoat that had once been black; a mass of grey hair straggled; the deplorable boots shuffled; this human thing smelt. It travelled steadily along the centre of the pavement, and life diverged and avoided it. Scarsdale hurried past with a glance at the filthy, cynical, hairy old face. He turned up Chancery Lane. He found himself in Holborn, and here was the eternal crowd, faces hurrying past, strange faces had no light in their eyes.

The crowd frightened him. These thousands upon thousands of people! This desperate hanging on to the edge of existence! What chance had he? Life was like a stampede, a panic rush of animals in a narrow place. Even the traffic strengthened the simile, and he felt a sudden urge to escape from it, to break away and scramble up into some cleft where he would not be trampled upon and crushed.

He thought of Mrs. Richmond, and the quiet little house, and the consoling and reassuring inevitableness of her coming in and going out. His panic mood made her seem more real and more vivid. Fear! It seemed to him that—somehow—she was a creature above fear. She rose and set like the sun. But what was her secret, if she had a secret? Meanwhile, his confused and frightened consciousness seemed to strain towards this cleft in a world of trampling and confusion. He dissolved into naked innocence. His child's cry was, "I want to go home."

## 5

He realized the emptiness of the house when he had withdrawn his key and closed the door, but its emptiness did not trouble him. He took off his hat and coat, and went up to his bedroom, and the unmade bed reproached him. How futile of him to leave the making of it to her! He dealt with the bed, as though engaged in creating a work of art, and after much pattings and pullings the thing was done somewhat to his satisfaction. He descended the stairs. He knew that necessity urged him to go and sit at the table in the front sitting-room and attempt to produce something that might pique an editor, written words that would produce a guinea, but the will to produce was not in him. He glanced at the half-closed door of Mrs. Richmond's room, and somehow it had for him the spell of a sanctuary. He trod softly down the passage, and entered the

room. The cat was asleep on the hearthrug. It opened sleepy eyes at him. He turned her chair to face the grate in which fresh wood and coal waited for the match. He sat down in her chair; he picked up the cat and made a lap for Thomas, and stroked the warm fur. Thomas accepted the intimacy. He purred.

Scarsdale sat there for two hours. He felt guilty, yet strangely comforted. He kept looking at his watch, and half an hour before he expected Mrs. Richmond to return, he replaced Thomas on the hearthrug, betook himself to the front room, lit the stove and sat down at the table. She should find him there in the act of writing, even though nothing of value had dropped from his pen.

## *Chapter Twenty-three*

SPRING came, and with it a greenness on the privet bushes. The sticky brown buds of the chestnuts opened, and lilacs showed a tinge of gold. Looking up and through the branches of the great plane-tree, Scarsdale could see the pale and exquisite veil of the young year covering the face of April. Beyond the Canonbury Road the placid surface of the New River reflected white clouds and patches of blue sky; its water seemed to brim and swell against cushions of vivid grass! It looked more deep. The sombre tangle of the old May trees became a glimmering greenness. Somewhere a blackbird would be singing. Strange, sweet sound! Old Canonbury Tower, sunning itself on the high ground, dreamed of the days when the hills were all white thorn, and oak woods blazed bronze and gold, and the sound of a horn was heard.

Scarsdale's balance at the bank had fallen to some forty pounds. He had earned nothing since coming to Astey's Row. He had cast upon the waters of chance three or four articles and two short stories and he had heard no more of them. He had no work, and no prospect of obtaining any, for he had ceased from his mild importuning of editors and directors.

His fear of Fleet Street had become an obsession. It was as though a door had been closed on him so often that he had lost the little courage necessary to dare the reopening of that door. He was afraid of finality. He flinched from the probable rebuff; in fact, he expected it, and to save both his face and his feelings he kept away and out of reach. A kind of numbness seemed to settle on him, idleness, apathy. It was not that he refused to think; he thought with clarity and conciseness of the future, and was frightened while feeling that he was unable to escape. He was like the rabbit on Martinsell Hill. The simile suggested to him that the more you struggled the more quickly you would be throttled. He did not struggle.

Also, he had developed a fear of crowds, and places where crowds gathered, and this particular phobia had grave implications. He was becoming both shabby and eccentric. He avoided humanity. He found himself sidling with a sense of surreptitious timidity, into quiet streets, and in the avoiding of the more noisy and multitudinous highways his walks became absurdly circuitous. He did not try to explain or to justify his timidity. Probably it was but one of those strange terrors which man—the child—is heir to. As a small boy he could remember being terrified by turnstiles, and terribly afraid of a certain passage between two high, dark garden walls. It was both before and

beyond reason. His fear of crowds and of streets thunderous with traffic suggested that he was afraid of being crushed. He shrank from a something that was darkly inevitable, submergence, stifling, muddy water, darkness, death.

In likening himself to the rabbit of Martinsell Hill he might have compared Mrs. Richmond's house to a rabbit-hole. It was his burrow. He felt most strangely secure in it, and after he had emerged from it and won by devious ways to Highbury Fields, and seen the green of the grass and of the trees, he would return like an animal disappearing into a hole. He was developing little oddities, tricks of behaviour. Before taking cover he would pause at Mrs. Richmond's gate, and glance anxiously up and down Astey's Row almost as though he expected the head of a pursuing crowd to appear.

Once within he felt safe from the crowd, from the savage surge of the struggle, from those hungry faces, from the noise. He felt so lonely in a crowd. A crowd was like blown sand, hard little particles blindly rubbing against each other. No other particle cared what happened to you. The faces looked hard and unfriendly and strange. And in the crowded streets he seemed to hear a grim underchant, the growl of the beast that was hungry and out in search of food. "Get out of my way. Get out of my way." Even the buses uttered that same threatening snarl. "Get out of the way, curse you."

He sat on the same seat in Highbury Fields with his back to the houses of Highbury Terrace. He did not know that Mrs. Richmond worked at Highbury Terrace. The woman of silence had not told him so. Nor did he know that his seat was almost opposite the house in which she worked, and that she had only to look out of a window to discover him.

She had discovered him. From an upper window she could see the seat between a holly and a lilac and under the green fringe of a poplar. He sat sideways on the seat, with one arm crooked over the back of it, and in his lap a little paper bag. He had the seat to himself, for when the sparrows came to share his luncheon hour, nursemaids and children and casual folk disappeared. His isolation and his little bag of buns moved her to sympathy, for she too was separative, a hater of crowds and of the crowd's stupidity. It was her nature to resent interference. She liked to stand apart, wisely and silently, and to be the mistress of her own front door. Not that her sympathy did not go out to the individuals in the mass.

But she was independent, proud. She preferred to stand alone. She had not adopted the modern attitude, the habit of standing at the corners of life's street waiting for some state-almoner to arrive with the circus or the food ticket. Had she had children she would not have expected them to be clothed and fed and

educated by people whose houses were larger than her own. She had none of the arrogance of ignorance, its envious snarl. She went about her work with a dark-eyed, silent aloofness.

She watched Scarsdale scattering crumbs for the sparrows. His hands might be ineffectual, but they were gentle hands. They did not clutch. His was a very lonely figure, and she wondered whether his own loneliness sat with him on that seat. He seemed so much older than he should be, so finished.

For, early in the morning, she had looked at the sheets of paper on his table. They were laid out neatly. His handwriting was regular and delicate; the lines were nicely spaced, and the margin uniform. While, up above she had heard him moving in his bedroom.

But she suspected that often he must sit in his chair as he sat on that seat, killing time and throwing crumbs to sparrows. For three successive mornings she had read the same lines on the page of manuscript paper. He had not added anything to them. They seemed to project into the white space like some unfinished fence jutting into a green field. It was as though he could not carry the work any farther.

## 2

It was a May morning, and a Saturday, and on Saturdays and Sundays Mrs. Richmond allowed herself to breakfast at half-past eight. Saturday morning was given to the home; and rooms were turned out, ornaments cleaned, and floors scrubbed. She was very much the woman with the apron, sleeves rolled up, a blue and white handkerchief pinned over her dark hair.

But on Saturday mornings Mr. Scarsdale had to be turned out as well as the furniture, and on this particular May morning she had a comprehensive campaign in view when chairs and rugs and cushions were carried into the front garden and castigated and hung upon the privet bushes. It was her Spring *festa*, and she warned Scarsdale when she brought him his breakfast.

“Afraid I shall have to turn you out this morning.”

He looked frightened. It was as though in his innocence he thought that she was getting rid of him.

“You mean, I—?”

“Spring cleaning, or part of it. I am going to do this room. If you like you can take a chair out into the garden.”

For there was one corner of the small garden, which, when the leaves were out, had some claim to secrecy. An old cherry tree, a strange denizen, and still a cherry in spite of many loppings, threw a patch of shade, and privet bushes and the dark, glabrous green of a holly made a screen. The sun was shining, and Scarsdale, having lit his pipe, carried one of the kitchen chairs out into the garden, and sat down under the cherry tree.

He watched Mrs. Richmond open the window wide and loop back the lace curtains. The little room was a dark cellar in which the mysteries of her ritual were being performed. The front door stood open and he saw her appear at the top of the steps with two of the sitting-room chairs, one upturned upon the other. The sunlight touched her white arms.

He drew in his legs and removed his pipe from his mouth. Was she going to carry all that furniture out into the garden, and if so was he going to sit and watch her without offering to help? His impulse was to help. In Astey's Row it was not necessary to stand too stiffly upon your dignity.

He got up.

"Can't I be of some use?"

She placed the two chairs on the path. Yes, obviously he could be of some use if his attitude to the realities was sufficiently natural. She turned up a black sleeve that had slipped.

"There's the sofa. I can't manage it alone."

He looked quite excited.

"Let me—"

Her dark eyes surveyed him.

"You had better take off your coat. It will get dusty."

"Oh,—of course."

He took off his coat, and she saw his right elbow showing through a hole in the shirt sleeve. He was unconscious of it, for he had forgotten it, but she made a mental note of the default. Meanwhile he had folded up his coat and balanced it on a privet bush, and was rolling up his shirt-sleeves. His forearms were white and lean, and marked with veins.

He smiled at her.

"Ought to have a green baize apron, oughtn't I?"

She smiled back.



“Never mind.”

They went in and extracted the sofa, though she proved herself much more an adept in the handling of furniture than Scarsdale. He was apt to bump things, while trying to be meticulously careful. An armchair, and four other chairs followed the sofa. To Scarsdale it was most palpably an adventure.

“What happens next?”

“The carpet.”

“We get it out and beat it?”

“Yes, but the sofa and chairs have to be beaten first, and carried in and put at the end of the passage.”

He looked about him, but he did not see where the carpet was going to be beaten. There was nowhere to spread it. She explained.

“I put a line up between the cherry tree and that post.”

“And hang the carpet on it.”

“Yes.”

How admirably did she simplify life. He knocked out his pipe and put it in a trouser pocket. His trousers had a shininess.

“Can I beat the chairs?”

“You might. But first we’ll roll up the carpet and get it out. I’m going to scrub the floor.”

They went in and rolled up the carpet.

“Leave it in the passage. No, this side. That’s right.”

“I see. What do I beat the chairs with?”

She disappeared into the back room and returned with a cane beater.

“This.”

“Splendid.”

Scarsdale set to work on the chairs and the sofa, and as he knocked the dust out of them and saw it drift away in the sunlight, it occurred to him to wonder what Miss Gall would think were she to traverse Astey’s Row and see him beating furniture. Thwack, thwack, and the dust flew. Or the men who had known him in literary back-streets? Yes, they would say that poor old Scarsdale had come down in the world, and yet—after all—it was because he

was doing the thing in public, and without the protection of a high, garden wall. Thwack, thwack. He was rather enjoying it. A passing male stood to watch him.

“Knocking the moth out, mate!”

Scarsdale nodded, and the man grinned at him, and continued upon his way, and his place was taken by half a dozen children. They mocked at this Elisha, though Scarsdale was not bald, and while ignoring them, he yet reflected that some of those thwacks might not have been wasted upon their little posteriors. *Argumentum a posteriori*. But the children, finding him a dull fellow, rushed on suddenly, screaming. Scarsdale’s arm began to ache a little; he was not used to such exercise. He felt hot, pleasantly and actively warm, and sitting down for half a minute on the chair under the cherry tree, he meditated. After all, this was not a bad spot, and for London, rich in trees and becoming increasingly green. The bole of the great plane was like a vast pipe spouting a cloud of green leaves.

From the front room came moist sounds, and the rattle of a bucket handle. Mrs. Richmond was at work, and every now and again her dark head and handsome face rose above the level of the window-sill. She retained her mystery for him even when she was scrubbing a floor.

But the sofa and the armchair remained to be beaten. He had been told to be more gentle with them because of the springs, and he rose and began a gentle tap-tap upon the upholstery. Mrs. Richmond, transferring herself and her kneeler to another part of the floor, knelt for a moment to watch him. The unusualness of him, and his obvious and happy absorption in that original part brought a little shimmer into her eyes.

She was about to resume her scrubbing and swabbing when she saw a man’s figure appear beyond the railings. The man paused at the gate. He stood with his hands in his trouser pockets, his bowler hat well back on his head. He was observing Scarsdale. And suddenly Mrs. Richmond let her head sink below the level of the window-sill. She sat sideways, supporting herself on one arm. She listened.

### 3

Someone was watching Scarsdale from the gate, a shortish, thick-set man in navy blue who wore his bowler hat pressed down upon his ears. The subconscious in Scarsdale reacted to that scrutiny, he glanced over his shoulder

and met the man's eyes. They were curious eyes, sleepy, dissipated and edged with insolence. They regarded Scarsdale with cynical hostility. He stood there with his feet apart, and his fists bulging out his trouser pockets; his eyes stared.

He had nothing to say, and Scarsdale resumed his beating of the sofa. He supposed that this impertinent and unpleasant-looking fellow would pass away, especially if no notice were taken of him, and Scarsdale kept his back to the gate, but he had a feeling that the man was there. After giving about twenty taps to the sofa, curiosity made him turn his head.

The man had not moved. He was in exactly the same position as before, and in exactly the same attitude. And Scarsdale was annoyed. He did not like the look of the fellow, and he did not like the way the fellow looked at him. What the devil did the chap mean by standing there and staring!

He said, "Good morning, sir. Nice morning for loitering."

The man at the gate did not respond to Scarsdale's irony. He continued to stare. His sallowness was both impassive and challenging, and Scarsdale was beginning to feel more seriously annoyed. Was it possible that the fellow was behaving like this on purpose?

He turned his back on him and proceeded to deal with the armchair. He whacked it with more energy than was necessary. Dust flew, and suddenly he heard a queer ventral squawk of laughter, one cawing note. He faced about sharply. He saw the man moving off in the direction of the Canonbury Road. Like many shortish men he lifted his heels when he walked; he had a haunchy, oily swagger, and Scarsdale watched him go. He felt both relieved, and angry, and a little puzzled.

"Plenty of damned fools in the world."

For it did occur to him that the man in navy blue had discovered in Mrs. Richmond's garden a figure of fun, a long, lanky, studious person busy in his shirt-sleeves with a cane carpet-beater. His activity knew a moment's pause. He stood with the end of the carpet-beater resting on the back of the chair; his eyes looked through and beyond the magenta coloured upholstery. If he happened to be a figure of fun, did it matter? Did a little, oily, insolent cad like that fellow in a bowler—?

"Are you ready for the carpet?"

He came to life with a little, startled smile. Mrs. Richmond was on the steps. She looked pleasantly warm and alive; there was a fragrance about her, an inevitableness. Her blue and white handkerchief had slipped back and lay about her throat and neck. Her movements had an easy, liquid rightness.

He smiled.

“This job seems to amuse people.”

She put into words the thing he had said to himself.

“Plenty of fools in the world. I have brought the line.”

She threw him one end of it; he went to fasten it to the cherry tree while she carried her end to the blue post near a lilac bush. Each made an end fast, and to Scarsdale the rope became a suggestive link between them. Almost he felt that he could send her a message along that line. A little, pleasant, secret tremor passed through him. He was ready to forget the cad in the bowler hat.

“How’s that?”

“Just right.”

He saw her with her arms still up, and her head thrown back. The attitude pleased him. He thought how good she was to look at, and he was caught staring. He was aware of a sudden seriousness, a something about her face, and then she smiled.

“I—am—making use of you.”

“Not at all. I’m enjoying it.”

She stood for a moment, readjusting her handkerchief. She appeared, deliberate,—thoughtful.

“Are you going to do the carpet?”

“Of course!”

They went in for the carpet, and carried out the roll, and slung it on the line. Its pattern was blurred and worn, it had been turned; the grey of the fabric showed where feet had passed to and from the door. Scarsdale picked up his beater, and gave it a tentative rap. A cloud of dust flew.

She said, “One ought to have a Hoover. So much more practical.”

He did not know what a “Hoover” was.

“What is a Hoover?”

She looked at him with an air of quiet amusement.

“An electric sweeper. Expensive. Besides we’re not wired.”

He nodded his head.

“O,—that’s it. I see. Well,—I’ll deputise for the Hoover,” and he gave the

carpet a cheerful but pensive smack.

## 4

Scarsdale did not go out for his lunch, for from Mrs. Richmond's air of purposefulness he assumed that this business of spring cleaning was to continue during the day. He remained there to help her in this good deed, and for his lunch she gave him bread and cheese and a cup of tea, and he carried a small tray out into the garden and sat under the cherry tree. The clothes-line was still attached to the blue post by the lilac bush, and though the lilac had no blossom, some of the chestnut trees by the old New River had lit their candles of white wax. Sunlight sifting through the foliage of the cherry tree, made a pattering of light and shadow on the path. Spring, lilac-time, and into Scarsdale's head drifted one of Schubert's songs.

Assuredly, it had been a day of adventure, and as he ate his bread and cheese he sat and reflected that adventure was to be found in a little patch of garden in Astey's Row, with a carpet-beater to be wielded instead of a sword. And was a carpet-beater more symbolical, and also more essential to the hand of man, than was the sword? He understood that operations were to be continued. His bedroom was to be attacked, and the soul of him consented.

It consented until six in the evening. He helped to carry things down and to carry them up again. He was bidden to remove all his books into the lower passage, and to clap them together like cymbals, and to dust their tops. He beat his bedroom carpet on the line between the blue post and the cherry tree, and as the dust departed and was blessed by the sunlight, he felt that the day was sacred to woman. Her presence pervaded it. She remained mysterious even in the midst of her simple activities.

About six o'clock she met him on the stairs. He was ascending with a last pile of books. She carried a dust-pan and brush.

"That's the last lot?"

"Yes."

Her eyes seemed to express some strange, inward satisfaction.

"I think we've done enough."

He stood aside to let her pass.

"You must be tired?"

Tired? No, she was not tired, at least—not so tired as he was, and as she went down the stairs she spoke of supper. She had an air of suggesting that they had earned their supper, and that the preparing of it would be her concern and her pleasure. She paused at the foot of the stairs; he had remained with the pile of books slanting against his chest, her voice came up to him. She said, that if he did not mind he could have supper with her in the kitchen; it would save time, and the carrying of things into the sitting-room. Did he mind? He minded so much, and with so surprising a sincerity, that the topmost book slipped from the pile and fell to the floor.

“No, very good of you. I shan’t be intruding?”

The falling of that book seemed to have a sudden significance for her. It was like Newton’s apple, demonstrating to her how the force of gravity exerted itself up above there on the first floor.

“I shan’t be ready just yet.”

She understood him to say that he had to put his books in order, and that he was going to change his clothes. His remarks had a naïveté, a sort of boyishness, and she smiled and passed on into the kitchen where Thomas the cat had remained entrenched against all the upheavals of the day. She put the dust-pan and brush away, and bent down to caress the cat, who got up, and with tail erect, rubbed himself against her. She too had breathed in more than dust. The day had been an unexpectedness, a kind of wide-eyed, laughing innocence. She went and washed herself at the sink, face, throat, arms and hands; she looked to her hair, using the small mirror that hung on the scullery door.

Meanwhile, the man was keeping very quiet. He had put his books away; he was sitting on his bed, and looking as though he too were some obscure astronomer meditating upon the appearance of a strange planet. His face had a haggard, tired gentleness, and presently he got up and opened drawers and wardrobe, and became busy. He changed his shirt and collar. Had he been going to dine at Claridge’s the occasion could not have been more exalted.

## 5

The bell rang. It was growing dusk, and their eyes met across the kitchen table. They had been talking, and in talking to her Scarsdale had found strange, self-revelations emerging, for somehow she seemed to have made him talk about things in a way that was new to him, and yet she herself had said so

little.

She looked at him. Her eyes had a wideness. It was as though they reflected both him and some imminent invasion, some otherness from the outer world. She rose.

“Who’s that?”

He pushed his chair back.

“Shall I go?”

“No, I’ll see.”

There was deliberation in her movements. She went out, closing the door after her. She opened the front door, and then Scarsdale heard voices. He had struck a match to relight his pipe, but a moment later he had blown out the match. He was listening. These two voices were not happy together, and one of them was a man’s. He listened. It struck him that the man’s voice was turgid and threatening; the sort of ugly and menacing voice that can be heard outside a public house when some alcoholic row is brewing.

He laid his unlit pipe on the table, and suddenly he heard Mrs. Richmond calling him.

“Mr. Scarsdale,—Mr. Scarsdale.”

He got up quickly and opened the door. He found himself close to her in the half darkness of the passage.

“Mr. Scarsdale,—would you see that man outside the gate.”

That was all. She brushed past him and entering the kitchen, she half closed the door, and sitting down, waited upon this strange occasion. She heard Scarsdale’s voice, and the sound of a scuffle, and it appeared to her that the sound diminished in the direction of the garden gate. She drew a deep breath and remained very still.

A few seconds later she heard the front door closed. Scarsdale came down the passage and into the kitchen, looking pleased and surprised. It was too dark for him to see his face distinctly, but obviously the man in the bowler hat and the navy blue suit had been extruded.

She said, “I’m so sorry. You managed—?”

There was a touch of gaiety in his voice. It was as though he had found the accomplishing of such a labor astonishingly good.

“It settled him. He was rather drunk. I’m awfully glad I was here.”

“So am I. Drunken little beast.”

She rose and taking a box of matches from the mantelpiece, seemed about to light the gas, but she did not light it. She sat down again in her chair.

“I have had trouble with him before. A friend of my dead husband’s. He’s a steward on a ship. Little blackguard.”

Scarsdale picked up his pipe and proceeded to light it.

“If he comes here again—But I don’t suppose he will come here again.”

He held the flame of the match to the bowl of his pipe. He had a feeling that she was pleased with him. He was pleased with himself, surprised and delighted with himself. Almost he felt grateful to the little cad in the bowler hat. Almost he loved him.



## *Chapter Twenty-four*

SCARSDALE began to write.

Not that the inspiration came to him easily. Far from it, because he was writing differently, and not with the glib, conventional niceness of the Canonbury Square days. Something had happened to him. The rabbit in the snare had had the loop of wire removed, and just as on Martinsell Hill it crouched and was absorbed in the business of breathing, while its bloodshot, swollen eyes reflected reality. So, Scarsdale made his first tentative movements; he trotted his first few yards, and crouched again with ears laid back. He was free. Something had happened. No longer did he feel wired to a peg, and paralysed.

On the contrary he was conscious of feeling sore. The soul of him hurt like a hand that aches when the blood flows again freely after exposure to cold. He had come into a warm room. A mystic might have said that his spirit had re-entered the womb of a woman and been born again.

He felt an urge in him, a painful urge. Life itself had a kind of rawness. He was conscious of being hurt and impeded in the midst of a new sense of struggle. He sat down at his table as though he was afraid of it; he bit hard at the stem of his pipe; he twisted his legs; he was moved to curse. Noises distracted him, the shouting children over the way, the trams in Canonbury Road, the hooting of motors. But his very distractions aggravated the urge in him. He was raw, alive, a creature clawing its way up out of a dark hole toward a point of light.

He wrote.

He read what he had written, and tore it up, and began again.

The stuff seemed so crude, and yet it had a quality that had been lacking in his neat, highbrow prosings. It was like raw meat, but it was meat, not mere wood pulp. He had a most strange feeling as of being in a glass case, and able to see things happening outside the case, and he wanted to break through and become part of the things that happened. He wanted to be and to describe, and in being to be able to express. His pen seemed to peck at the glass like the beak of a bird. For life had suddenly become vivid, fruit, colour, flesh, perfume, greenness. He wanted to get at it, and as yet he was only pecking at a surface. He was conscious of inward effort, thwartings, irritations, hope and despair. The thing was there, if only he could get at it. There was something in himself

to be got at and expressed. He felt that he had to get at it or die. He knew that he had to sweat and dig at the thing with his naked hands, for the labour was more than mere labour. He was working against time. He was working against the inevitableness of future shame and submergence. He knew now that if he failed there would be no Mrs. Richmond.

Early in the morning she would pick those pieces of torn paper out of the waste-paper basket, and straighten out some crumpled fragment and read it. She knew nothing about literature, which was a virtue, but she knew a great deal about life. She knew how things happened. She knew what people did and did not do, what they felt, what they said. She knew how the pot boiled and the fire burned. She was reality.

And these scribblings of his were both real and unreal. Sometimes, when she read the words that he had written she saw nothing but words, but sometimes she saw things happening. Almost he made her think of a child trying to draw, though the child was a middle-aged man, groping and clutching his way toward reality. Sometimes it seemed to her that he was getting nearer to it, that he would tear the conventional cloth away and uncover the white body.

He, too, was different; he had been different since that evening when he had hustled the man in the bowler hat out into Astey's Row. It was as though the successful manhandling of a little cad had revived his confidence. His long, loose figure had been fitted with a new spring. Every evening between six and seven he went out and walked, and sometimes she watched him start off along the Row. He walked as though he had an object in view; he looked younger, more resilient.

Also, she observed that the pages of manuscript upon his table were accumulating. He still tore sheets in half, but a balance remained in his favour. He was writing a short story; she read his short story, page by page as it arrived. It was not like life as she knew it,—but it was getting nearer to life. As she expressed it to herself, “There's too much sugar icing on the cake”, and she wondered why he plastered on this confectionery stuff. Why not be content with good sultana or sponge?

Also, she observed his economies, and found that they caused her little twinges of compassion. He went out and bought himself scones or buns for lunch; she discovered the crumbs, and the paper bags that had been crumpled up and dropped into the waste-paper basket. She supposed that he had to be careful, and she did not quarrel with his carefulness, for her nature did not run to waste. She supposed, too, that he had private means. He paid her regularly.

She spoke to him about his lunch.

“What do you do for food in the middle of the day?”

He treated the question with assumed casualness.

“O, just buy something. Doesn’t stop my working.”

“Yes,—I’ve seen the bags. From Gadder’s in the Essex Road. Buns.”

He echoed her softly.

“Buns. Yes, and why not?”

“Much better let me leave you out some bread and cheese.”

He agreed with her that bread and cheese would be more wholesome and sustaining.

She did not like masterful men, or rather—she preferred a man who exercised his masterfulness upon things and not upon people. The square jaw, the shiny and energetic face, the shallow, pragmatism eye did not attract her. As a woman who had come to cherish the sanctuary of her self, she would have resented the interference of the too active male. Scarsdale’s shyness entered her house on quiet feet. She liked to be alone at times during the day, alone with herself; and a man child who could play happily by himself suited her temperament. She liked Scarsdale’s shyness, his way of looking at her, his ungreediness. When he was in the house the house remained hers and the same.

She understood his shyness, but not the whole of it. She understood his sensitive, and rather ineffectual hands, but to her they had ceased to be ineffectual. She understood his little awkwardnesses, the gentle timidity of this tall, unaggressive creature who was so loth to hurt people, and who was so easily hurt.

His approach to her was hesitant.

At seven o’clock she heard the front door open and close. He hung up his hat, and entered the front sitting-room, and stood by the table, turning over the pages of manuscript. He wandered out again into the passage, hesitated, and then he approached her door.

“Mrs. Richmond.”

“Yes?”

“May I come in?”

He smiled at her defensively.

“Wonderful evening. I’ve been watching them playing tennis in the Fields. You ought to come out sometimes.”

“I might.”

He sat down on one of the kitchen chairs, and picked up the cat. Thomas was growing accustomed to these blandishments. He reposed upon Scarsdale’s chest, supported by an arm, his head on the man’s shoulder. Scarsdale’s other hand passed gently over the cat’s head and back, and Thomas purred.

“There’s something right about a cat in a house. Comfortable creatures.”

She was mending a pillow-case, and her calm eyes looked across at him from under the darkness of her hair.

“There are cats and cats.”

“Just as there are men and men.”

“Naturally.”

## 2

He had persuaded her to go out with him. It was an evening in June, and the great plane tree at the end of Astey’s Row stood serenely still against the sunset. It was flecked with touches of gold, and as Mrs. Richmond passed under it she looked up into the hollows of its mighty crown. She passed under that tree each day in summer and in winter, and being a woman she was friends with that tree, and knew its moods and the manifestations of its varying expressions. Very few people noticed the tree. It was too aspiring for the level gaze of the crowd, or for a glance that hugged the flat earth.

Scarsdale saw her look up at the tree, and it seemed to him that her face grew strange and dreamy. The large, dark, liquid iris of each eye absorbed the light. And at her feet the Canonbury Road was clamorous and crowded. A tram clanged its bell behind the stupid, scrunching bulk of a heavy cart, and behind the tram two shabby Ford vans hooted impatiently. Contrasts. This woman with her large, calm, dreamy face, and this highway full of mechanical futility, noise, and shabby haste.

He said to her, “It seems strange, doesn’t it?”

Her eyes came to earth. She smiled.

“Do you ask yourself that question?”

“O,—often.”

“What’s it all for? What does humanity get out of it?”

“Yes, and that old tree. Do you know I have watched people, and hardly a soul ever looks up at this tree.”

“Too busy.”

“But it shouldn’t be so, should it?”

In Highbury Fields there were other trees, but trees less old than the great plane of Astey’s Row, and he and Mrs. Richmond, who as a child and a young girl, had looked out each morning over English parkland and high woods and hills, could give thanks to this open space for the sake of its greenness. The trees and the grass did their best, but it did occur to her that the Fields had been dealt with by a draper who had taken a tape measure and reeled off so many yards of gravel and grass and iron railing, and had added trees and shrubs by way of embroidery. A utilitarian space for dogs and children, a “Lung” as the journalists love to call it. And behind her stood those austere, gracious houses with their windows looking at life so steadfastly. Being a woman, she could love and understand the soul of a house, were it in Highbury Terrace or in a Dorset valley.

She was wearing a black suit and a red hat. Like most dark women she looked her best in black. It set off her height and her carriage, the whiteness of her skin, and the large and liquid calmness of her eyes. And Scarsdale was aware of the red, white and black; he was aware of her shoes and her gloves, and of the way her black hair made a shadow under the red brim. She had beauty, a quiet, capable comeliness that is not sudden and obvious, and for that very reason is all the more inevitable.

Looking across the grass to the rows of trees in the middle distance, she asked him a question—

He leaned back with one arm over the back of the seat.

“Have you been working to-day?”

“Yes,” and with a slow smile he added, “That sort of work must seem queer to you.”

She was silent for a little while.

“Well,—I don’t know. I remember a man who used to come and paint in the country where I lived. He painted the mill, and the woods, and the fields by the river. I suppose writing is something like painting.”

“You used to watch him?”

“Yes.”

“And what did you think of his pictures?”

Again she remained silent, and her face had for him a mysterious stillness.

“They were real pictures.”

“Real.”

“I mean—you could look at them and see all the things that you knew, and yet he made you see them—differently.”

“How—differently?”

“You seemed to see all around and into them. You saw things in a way—as you hadn’t seen them before. He’d taught himself to see the trees and the water—and the clouds.”

“They were real to you.”

“Yes, reality. Just as you might go into the Essex Road and take the real people there.”

### 3

She had given him a word. Reality. He took it back with him to Astey’s Row, and looking out of his bedroom window at the rows of lighted windows in the model dwellings beyond the open space that had once been river, he realized that each room over yonder contained a fragment of reality. They were little boxes full of life. The foliage of the old trees hid some of the windows, and imposed upon that formal and utilitarian façade moments of mystery. Yes, life was both mysterious and real, and through the eyes of a woman he was endowed with a new perception of reality. The people in the Essex Road.

He heard Eleanor Richmond go to her room and close the door, and to him that other room in Astey’s Row was mysterious and sacred. His thoughts were not the thoughts of the casual lover. They did not sidle in and gloat over shoulders and breasts, and the white amplitudes of the female shape; they stood outside her door and wondered; they were like the imaginings of a sensitive, idealizing boy. And yet they were real. He saw sex symbolized. It was the Dea Mater and the Beloved. It was that other sacred self in a London back room, woman putting a match to the fire, busy with endless simple

things, serving reality while remaining the mother of man.

He went to sleep with the word "Reality" written in letters of white upon the dark page of his consciousness. He got up in the morning with it, and pulled up the blind and saw trees, brick walls, iron railings, paving stones, people. Thomas the cat was sitting under a bush, watching the sparrows. Footsteps came and went along the Row, and Scarsdale was conscious of a queer feeling of excitement. He was like an alchemist to whom some magic formula had been revealed; he wanted to hurry down into his workshop, and try the thing out in crucible and retort. He heard his jug of hot water placed softly outside his door.

He thought, "Why should she do that for me?"

Yes, why should she do all the things she did? Why did the sun rise, why was a plane tree a plane tree, why did it cast a shadow? Why could he not cast reality upon paper just as that tree patterned its shadow on the ground?

He washed and shaved and dressed, and even these familiar activities had a freshness. He went downstairs and into the sitting-room and picked up a sheet of manuscript. Words strung together, sentences. But the effect was indistinct and blurred, and suddenly he seemed to see just how and why it was blurred. It was not real.

He did no work that morning. He went out and wandered. He walked up and down the Essex Road. He watched an old woman buying a cabbage and potatoes and a pound of onions. He listened to the conversation between her and the greengrocer's assistant. Their voices had a human flavour, almost they spoke of Cabbages and Kings. There were other women with bags. There were the butchers' shops, red meat and sawdust, and oddments in trays, and a lad hacking at some lump of flesh with a cleaver. There were the grocers' shops, tubs of butter, cheeses, packets of tea, tinned fruit, slabs of cake. He observed two young things outside a draper's window, pink legs, two little hats poked close to the glass. What was it,—stockings, some feminine thrill? There was the incessant coming and going in roadway and upon pavement, modernity in full flux, noisy, alive. Things seemed different to him. He saw into them and round them just as Eleanor Richmond had seen the painter man's pictures. The Essex Road was reality.

## *Chapter Twenty-five*

MRS. RICHMOND was going away. Each year she allowed herself a fortnight's holiday, and she was travelling into Dorsetshire to stay with an uncle who had a small farm near Shaftesbury. On previous occasions she had locked up the house, and left Thomas to be cared for by the next-door neighbour, though Thomas was very well able to look after himself. This man creature was different. She had presumed that he too would be able to remove himself to the seaside or the country, but when she broached the matter he looked troubled.

For Scarsdale could not afford a holiday. His resources were running out like sand from the upper globe of an hour-glass, and he was engaged in a furious wrestling match with reality. He was trying to capture reality and to behold it bound hand and foot upon his writing-table. Something that he had seen in the Essex Road had given him an idea for a book.

He was troubled. She was busy clearing away the supper-things, and he prodded tobacco into his pipe, and remembered Thomas the cat. He and Thomas were in the same quandary, bachelors both of them. He lit his pipe.

“What about the cat?”

She swept the crumbs from the bread trencher onto a plate.

“They look after him next door.”

“I see. As a matter of fact—”

She stood still, with her eyes fixed upon the back of Scarsdale's neck. It was not quite so thin as it had been, and she smiled.

“Perhaps you would like to stay and look after Thomas.”

“Could I?”

She saw how eager he was to stay.

“I could picnic, you know.”

“Buns and bananas.”

“O, no. I could go out for some of my meals. And I could look after things.”

“Yes, you could. So, you are not taking a holiday?”

“Not this year. Besides, I don't need one. You do.”



“Why?”

“O, you work so hard. You deserve every day of it. I’m sure the cat agrees with me.”

He gathered Thomas to his knees; they were rather bony knees, but then the man had a gentle and caressing hand.

Mrs. Richmond did not make use of a taxi. She proposed to carry her green fibre suitcase as far as the nearest tram halt, but Scarsdale modified her plan. She found him waiting on the front steps, and he held out his hand for her suitcase.

“I’m carrying it for you.”

She did not play at piquing him by protesting. She allowed him to take possession of her luggage, but before closing the door she made sure that he had his key. She had discovered that he could be absentminded. Her suspicions appeared to amuse him, and as he held the gate open for her he smiled at her shyly.

“No, not guilty, Eleanor.”

It was the first time that he had called her by her Christian name. She did not retaliate, for the response would have been too obvious, but as they passed under the shade of the great plane tree, she allowed him other indications; her voice had a softness.

“Now, remember, no buns and bananas.”

“I’ll remember. And Thomas has a saucer of milk twice a day.”

“Thomas will ask for it. He’s much more greedy than you are.”

He gave an almost soundless laugh.

“Thomas has a better appreciation of reality.”

The tram carried her away, and Scarsdale returned to Astey’s Row and let himself into the empty house. He had work to do, but when he sat down at his table and took up his pen, his thoughts began to wander. They followed Eleanor Richmond, as though in removing herself from Astey’s Row she had taken other keys away with her, and left him either locked in or locked out, and though he rallied himself—“Come now, get on with the job,” his consciousness refused to concentrate. Because, it was borne in upon him that Mrs. Richmond was reality, reality supreme in the spirit, and in the flesh, and now that he was so completely alone he realized with sudden fear the infinite significance of her. But why was he afraid? He sat with his elbows on the

table, and with level eyes stared at the red building opposite. He did not see it as a red building. He was visualizing other realities.

How much money remained to him? Unless he earned more money his resources would come to an end. How many weeks were left to him? Somewhere about the end of October he would find himself derelict so far as ready cash was concerned. He Would not be able to pay her for his board and lodging.

A seedy sponger?

Yes, that was why he felt afraid. Either he would find a market for his stories or persuade someone to employ him, or he would have to leave Astey's Row. He had had to leave Canonbury Square, but Eleanor Richmond was not Miss Gall. Inexorable indictment! He pressed his hands to his head. He wanted to stay. Good God, how much he wanted to stay in this funny little old house. He had grown into it. He had felt happy in it. It was like no other house that he had known. It was teaching him things.

Eleanor Richmond! Yes, he realized now—But just what was it—? Julia Marwood over again? And suddenly he pushed his chair back and got up, and wandered about the room with a queer smile on his face. His hands sank into his trouser pockets. Julia and Eleanor? But the difference? New wine and old; youth, crude and greedy, woman in the ripeness of her wisdom. Raw April, wide-eyed June.

He trailed round and round the little room, moving slowly and silently as though the physical part of him walked in its sleep. But Julia would never have been Eleanor, and Eleanor was not Julia. Dark women, both of them, but how different in their darkness. What a mystery? And why was it that he knew and felt so sure, and realized that the real tragedy of life might be upon him? To fail, to lose, to disappear. To become—just rubbish. And he was afraid, most terribly afraid, dry throated and chilly with fear, while something in him clenched itself. He sat down again in his chair.

## 2

But this book? He had drawn out a scheme for the first ten chapters, but of what use would a book be in the crisis that was upon him? It would take him months to complete this novel, and even if the amazing thing should happen, and a publisher should accept it, he would have to wait many more months before he would receive a penny. A book would be too ponderous and slow a

vehicle. He needed something lighter and more swift upon which to escape.

Short stories? Or better still a long short story. As an obscure scribbler he might receive three or four guineas for a short story, but for a tale of some twenty thousand words they might pay him twenty or thirty guineas. Twenty pounds! He could live for two or three months on twenty pounds. Twenty currency notes, added to the sum he had left, would carry him on till Christmas.

Well, he would write a long short story, something dramatic and human, and he gathered up the sheets upon which he had begun to map out the framework of his novel, and put them away. He lit a pipe, and got out his notebook in which he had jotted down possible themes for short stories. He read them through, but not one of them piqued him. No spark crackled in the dark void of his consciousness.

He sat and stared out of the window. He fidgeted. He found himself watching sparrows, or people passing in the Row, and he got up and pulled down the blind. But his head was as empty as the house, and almost he could hear the heart beats clicking in it as he could hear the clock ticking in Eleanor Richmond's kitchen. Confound that clock! But no, it was her clock, and he sat on and on, and his imagination was like a groping hand feeling for something in the darkness, yet when no live inspiration came to him he grew restless. This restlessness expressed itself physically. His chin tickled; the chair assumed an unsympathetic hardness; his right shoe felt too tightly laced. The white sheet of paper tantalized him. He began to be afraid of the emptiness and the silence of his self.

This would not do. Sitting and sitting in a room with the blind down! His restlessness took control of the situation. It suggested that if life would not come to him in this empty room, it was because he should be setting out in search of life. And the spark was kindled. He rose and pulled up the blind, and wandering into the passage, looked at the half-closed door of the sitting-room kitchen. Something seemed to beckon him in. He entered, and upon the table he saw a white cloth covering some objects. He raised the cloth and found that Mrs. Richmond had left out half a loaf of bread, cheese and butter, and the heart of a fresh lettuce. His lunch.

Why should she have troubled?

He felt touched, and more than touched. A deep and devout tenderness began to glow in him like a sunrise, and in feeling this emotion the void in him was filled. The over-tense strings were slackened. He went and took down the Bible from the bookshelf and opened it at the fly-leaf and read the two names.

Eleanor Mayhill. Eleanor Richmond. He found himself wondering whether she ever read this ancient book. But did it matter? Some women were of the age of Rachel and of Ruth, red earth, inevitable.

He put the book back and stood looking at the various objects that represented her, and then an impulse moved him to go quietly up the stairs and to open the door of her bedroom. He did not enter it; he stood on the threshold and gazed. It seemed to him that he breathed in the human reality and the mystery of her. This room was so clean, so simple. The white quilt covering the bed and drawn up over the pillow had been washed before she went away.

He stood with his hands together. Almost he seemed to be praying to the soul of woman, invoking the spirit of the place. His eyes grew tranquil. It was as though a hand had been passed over his face and had smoothed out the troubled lines. He felt that something had been renewed in him.

Courage.

Silently and deliberately he closed the door of her room and redescending the stairs, took his hat from a peg and went out.

### 3

He had a most strange feeling that something was going to happen. But what could happen? He turned down River Street and into the Essex Road. He walked along the Essex Road in the direction of Upper Street. The Essex Road was just the Essex Road on a hottish day early in August, mildly perspiring and full of multitudinous and obscure activities. Butter would be feeling the heat, and flies invading the butchers' shops, and fish smelling a little more fishy. Could salvation come to him by way of the Essex Road?

He walked as far as Islington Green, and here in the V-shaped space were seats under the shade of trees. The seats were somewhat full, and mostly their occupants were shabby old men, but Scarsdale found a place between a man in a smeary frock-coat and an old lady whose black bonnet looked too small for her large grey head. They edged up and made room for him. They sat. There was silence. The whole seat sat and stared; it supported August apathy and so many pairs of vacant eyes. Occasionally the man in the frock-coat sat up and spat. The elderly woman in the bonnet grew oppressed. She heaved; she glanced at her neighbours; she sighed. And suddenly she addressed herself to Scarsdale, and her remark sounded preposterous and irrelevant.

“It ain’t exactly the weather for sheep’s head, but I’ve got the money on me.”

Scarsdale gave her a dubious look. The intimacy of the remark was rather baffling.

He said, “Sheep’s head. O, yes, I don’t think I have ever eaten sheep’s head.”

Her vacant eyes widened. What innocence!

“Not,—really? Now isn’t that coorious! Whenever I feel down I says, ‘Em’ly, you go and buy a sheep’s head.’ There ain’t nothing to touch a sheep’s head—to my way of thinkin’.”

Scarsdale nodded politely. Indeed—a remarkable confession. He had not explored the virtues of the head of a sheep.

“This hot weather—”

The man on his right spat viciously.

“Only thing that got’s a drink, sir, is your shirt. I haven’t got the price of a wet on me.”

He looked at Scarsdale out of leering, sodden eyes, but Scarsdale appeared to be interested in watching a passing bus.

Slowly the seat emptied itself. The bonnet went in quest of its sheep’s head. The frock-coat perfected a final expectoration and shambled off into a dry world, and Scarsdale was left alone. He sat; he stretched his long legs; he was wondering whether there was a tale to be got out of the bonnet or the frock-coat. The material was not promising.

He was still groping for a theme when someone else joined him on the seat, a young woman in black. He observed her all the more carefully, because she took not the slightest notice of him; he did not appear to exist. She too sat and stared; she had an ivory skin, rust-coloured hair, and eyes that were so darkly brown that the iris seemed to merge into the jet of the pupil. She looked delicate; she had an air of not belonging to that seat; even her slim legs had a pretty fragility. Yes, she was bothered about something. She had a ring on one finger, and she kept turning the ring round and round with the finger and thumb of the other hand. Scarsdale might have been no more than a sack of shavings. The little pale curve of her chin jutted out.

He saw her remove the ring. She wrapped it up in a handkerchief and tucked the handkerchief away in her bag. And suddenly she seemed to become

conscious of being watched. Her very round dark eyes darted a nervous and protesting glance at him. She got up, and walked quickly away with a kind of fluster of slim black legs.

Scarsdale followed her, but at a sympathetic distance. He followed her quite a long way; he saw her pause, hesitate, and disappear into a shop. Later he realized that she had vanished into a pawnbroker's.

Some sentimental occasion! Whether she had entered that shop to sell or pawn the ring, or what the motive was behind the act were things he could not know. What mattered was that he had observed a human incident and had been made to wonder about it, and in wondering his craft had become alive. Presumably she needed money; she might need it for a man or for a child or for herself. It was a piece of life and in it he realized that he had the elements of a story.

## 4

That fortnight in August passed very slowly, and Scarsdale's work unfolded itself with an equal deliberation. Reality, the life of a great city, challenged him to set it down on paper. He wanted to describe things as he saw them. He was less easily satisfied than of old; the journalist's facility had become an abomination. He wrote a paragraph where he would have trilled out three pages. He sat bolted to his chair. He strove for words, words that should fit themselves like a live skin to the warm flesh of his human interpreting. His urge was to be vivid, simple, inevitable, and he found that simplicity was the last and the most terrible of virtues. It was so easy to be flowing and facile and rhetorical, and to skip to the right and to the left, and to shrink those glowing embers. Simplicity was both ice and fire, and as a journalist he had dealt in wood pulp.

The easy phrase would not carry. For, somehow, when he sat at his table, he seemed to be possessed by another spirit, the inexorable shadow of some other self. There were times when he felt Eleanor Richmond moving in the house, and he would become conscious of what he described as "her rightness of rhythm". Often he had sat and watched her performing the simplest of acts, filling a teapot, or cutting bread, or moving a chair, and always it had seemed to him that her movements had a beautiful and deliberate precision. When her hand moved to touch or to grasp it had the lightness of a bird coming to rest upon a bough. It seemed to him that one ought to be able to write as Eleanor Richmond moved. He wanted to teach himself to write in that way, so that the

word-picture should have the inevitableness and simplicity of some perfectly co-ordinated movement.

Also, these fourteen days were lonely days. He seemed to have lost the self-sufficiency of the bachelor. He was his own housemaid and cook, and as a maker of beds, he improved by reason of necessity; he tried his hand at frying bacon and at toasting Welsh Rarebit, and becoming more ambitious he attempted scrambled eggs. They were rather too scrambled. And he found that it did not do to put the hot frying-pan down on the kitchen table; that black mark took a lot of erasing. As for the washing of greasy plates, and knowing nothing of the virtues of soda, before putting the plate in the wash basin, he attempted to expedite and simplify the process by removing the grease with pieces of old newspaper. Those fourteen days helped to educate him. He discovered a new respect for the woman who dealt with the debris and the disorder of domesticity.

But he had an ideal. Eleanor's house should not suffer by his presence and her absence. He used the carpet-sweeper, he learnt quite a number of things about carpet-sweepers, and how the brushes collected an incredible mess of hair and flocculent filth. With commendable conscientiousness he dusted the sitting-room, and on the morning of Mrs. Richmond's return he performed a wonderful act.

He woke early that morning. He had meant to wake early, and when he saw that the yellow blind was bright with diffused sunlight, he was conscious of excitement. She was coming back. And he had written more than half of his long short story, and he was proposing to wash and whiten the front steps.

He had seen her do it. He put on an old pair of trousers, and drew his bucket of water and collected a swab and a slab of bath-brick. The hour was six o'clock, and he had every right to assume that he would be able to deal with those steps before Astey's Row grew wakeful. He opened the front door, and got to work, beginning at the top step and working downwards. He was ambitious for the whiteness of that flight of steps. He became absorbed in the business.

Two men going upon the day's affairs caught him upon his knees, sleeves rolled up, and minus one button. They were disrespectfully tickled by the sight. One of them mocked him.

“What-o, mate! Ol' woman gone on strike?”

They went off laughing loudly, but Scarsdale completed the cleansing of his Scala Santa.

Mrs. Richmond had written him a letter, and in it she had said that she hoped to be home about four o'clock. She had asked him to order in some things for her, bread, milk, a dozen fresh eggs, a couple of pounds of bacon, half a pound of butter, cheese, two mutton chops. He had done this for her; in fact, he had gone out with the marketing bag, and shopped in the Essex Road, and to colour the adventure he had bought two bunches of purple and rose asters and had arranged them in a vase on the kitchen table.

At half-past three he placed himself at the window of the front sitting-room. He had the kettle simmering and the tea-things laid out. He had put on his best suit. He kept looking at his watch, and his restlessness was such that he could neither sit nor stand for thirty consecutive seconds. And strangely enough he was feeling a little afraid of her home-coming, even while he longed for it. Would she be the same? Might not a fortnight in Dorsetshire have produced some incredible change in her? He was most absurdly nervous, hesitant upon a thread of suspense.

Supposing some other fellow in Dorsetshire had realized the uniqueness of Eleanor Richmond? He went hot and cold.

And then he saw her. Reality arrived miraculously at the green gate. She had her suitcase in one hand, a great posy of flowers in the other. He stood for two vivid and momentous seconds absorbing the tremendous reality of her. Then he rushed for the front door and opened it, and stood at the top of the steps, waiting.

Never had he seen her look so well, so summerlike, with a tinge of brown in her white skin. She came up the path, she smiled; her dark eyes held his. And he stood and absorbed the completeness and the comeliness of her. No, she had not changed.

He held out a hand for her suitcase.

"I'm so glad you're back, Eleanor."

"It's good to be back."

She gave him a deep, appraising glance. His gladness could not be concealed.

"Been feeling lonely?"

"It wasn't the same here. Let me take the suitcase."



She allowed him to take it from her.

“You’ve had someone in to whiten the steps.”

“I did it this morning. I didn’t want you to come back and find them—”

She held up the posy of flowers, sweet peas and phlox, and a few roses.

“Smell. Yes, it’s good to be back.”

## *Chapter Twenty-six*

FOR two months Scarsdale worked at his short story. It had for its central figure the girl who had come to sit beside him on the seat on Islington Green. The theme was as old as commerce, but into it Scarsdale contrived to breathe a newness, the tang of personality, the frayed realism of the Essex Road. He was beginning to see life, to penetrate it, to be part of it, and what was more his understanding of it was beginning to express itself on paper. He laboured at that tale. He rewrote it no fewer than four times, and then continued to polish his paragraphs. He wanted it to have balance and brilliancy, a vivid compactness, an inevitable simplicity.

It had some of these qualities. Even its crudities were alive. It was human, green grass, red meat, blue and white sky. It surprised him, for there was that in him which knew that the work was good. He could not say how he knew this, but know it he did. Almost, it was not he, Spenser Scarsdale, who had set these words on paper, but some other intelligence, a shadowy communicator speaking by and through him. Life was that communicator.

But the completion of the tale carried him to the end of September. His funds were slipping away, and yet his concentration upon that one particular effort was such that he did not think of the many other functions that he could have performed. He contemplated no alternative way of earning a living. There was something sheeplike in his urge to struggle through that particular gap in the hedge. Always, he had been a scribbler, and if he saw no salvation save in scribbling, he was wiser than he knew.

He did not try the tale on Eleanor Richmond. He had yet to learn that as a reader she was to be of more value to him than all the wise men in London. He maintained a secrecy. He was a kind of literary Robinson Crusoe. He was building a home-made boat, and whether it would sink or swim was his concern, and no one else's.

But Eleanor Richmond read his tale. She too maintained a secrecy. She read it in the early morning before Scarsdale was down. It puzzled her not a little. Parts of it seemed right, parts of it quite wrong. She could have put a finger on the paragraphs where Scarsdale and life had lost each other.

“Now, a woman wouldn't have done that.”

But the tale moved her. Almost it convinced her, and she was not easily convinced. She knew her part of the world too well. She had lived and worked

among the realities. It seemed to her that in writing this story Scarsdale had been playing a game of blind-man's buff. Sometimes he caught reality; at other times it eluded him.

But if he could get rid of that bandage?

She wanted to talk to him about it, but she had a feeling that it was he who would have to open the conversation. Besides, that tale of his had impressed her. It had aroused her curiosity.

The day came when it was finished. The manuscript disappeared. It returned in due course with a typed copy. Mrs. Richmond read the typed copy, and felt that the tale had gained in vividness and interest. She stood, looking out of the window.

What would he do with it? Would it get into print? She had more than a feeling that he was both living and dying by that tale. In her way she had divined its significance. The thing was bread and meat, a beginning or an end, something dared and accomplished, a desperate challenge. He had sat for so many hours at that table. She had seemed to see things in his eyes. He was a craftsman who had constructed a piece of furniture, and the supreme test was yet to come. Would he be able to sell that story?

She was a working woman; she used her hands. The work of those who labour is their one reality. She did not live in an art for art's sake world. Necessity opens the factory door. Yet—too—she was woman, woman who can watch a man-child at play and understand that play has some esoteric meaning. She could not use words to express her intuitions, but the light was there. Children do not play for money. That is manhood's fate, the old inevitableness of Eden. Man had to play usefully or starve. Some men do things because they must, but the doing of them may have a double purpose. Scarsdale wrote because writing was in him. She did not call it the passion to express life, but she understood it so. No doubt words were to him what her simple, daily household doings were to her. She would not have felt herself without them.

She noticed in him a sudden restlessness. The thing was done and the urge to do had left him. He had washed up his crockery and put it away. What next? In the evenings she sat like a woman with her needle ready to look up from her work with attentive and wise eyes, but he had grown hesitant. She would hear his door open, and she could picture him standing in the passage, unable to make up his mind. She had a feeling that he wanted to come to her, and that something was holding him back.

He went out and walked, for his restlessness had other promptings. He had finished a piece of work, and the tension of effort had relaxed, but now that the

thing was done he found himself face to face with finality. He had hammered out his tale, and the product had to be taken to market and offered as merchandise.

He was afraid. Almost he shirked the crude test of his work's marketable value. He had had so many doors closed on him, so many manuscripts returned. That his financial affairs were desperate, made the crisis all the more poignant.

He hesitated. He could not make up his mind as to how he should set about marketing his tale. He had had so little success with personal interviews, for he did not impress people; he was too deprecating and too anxious. Should he try a literary agent, persuade some intermediary to do for him that which he shrank from doing? He walked. He walked into the gathering dusk, and the gradual galaxy of a city's lights. He returned by way of the Essex Road, and in the Essex Road he came upon a hawker with a barrow. The man was selling fruit. He had no hesitations about the selling of fruit. He bawled in the public face.

And Scarsdale thought, "If only I had the assurance of that fellow. If only I had a barrow of bananas."

But why was the assurance lacking? Why should not the product of his brain be as marketable as bananas? He stiffened. He walked on to Astey's Row, and let himself in, and saw that the door of Mrs. Richmond's room was ajar. A streak of light showed. He stood hesitant, and yet inspired.

Why shouldn't she read his tale?

Now, as a stylist he might be nothing, and as a man—everything, provided that he was not concerned in the mere cutting of capers, but when he went softly down the passage and knocked at her door, he was mere Adam asking to be reassured.

"May I come in?"

She was open to his shy mood. It really was extraordinary how his shyness remained with him; for it was like an English sky gently clouded, and seldom boldly blue. She saw him standing there, the long fingers of a hand clasped over the edge of the door, his eyes asking for something. What an incalculable creature he was, and yet—in a way—so calculable. He had nothing brazen about him; he was made of much softer metal.

"Had your walk?"

"Yes."

Strange that they should have lived together in this little house for so many months, and that he had remained so unpretentious even while the inevitable intimacy was unconfessed. There were moments when he was more shy of her than ever. He just sat and stroked the cat, or made quiet conversation. An assertive and confident maleness would have caused the daily invasion to become more significantly physical, but this man was most strangely like a soul without a body, a grey and gentle shape that drifted in and remained in her presence. Almost he was transparent, and yet—to her—so much more human than mere solid flesh, the obvious male so egregiously proud of its one prophetic emblem. She liked him as he was. She had had her three years with the other sort of man and had remained unsatisfied.

She had to prompt him.

“Come and sit down.”

He picked up the cat, and holding Thomas as he would have held a baby, he sat down. He was silent. He appeared to be absorbed in caressing the cat. And then he made the most irrelevant of remarks.

“Just seen a man selling bananas.”

Now, what could be more idiotic! But she did not raise an eyebrow. Some men and some children must be allowed their fancifulness.

“Off a barrow?”

“Yes”, and then he added, “it seems quite easy to sell bananas.”

For a moment she wondered. Surely he was not thinking of turning hawker? He would be a foredoomed failure as a street-hawker; he had not the voice or the face for it.

“Possibly.”

She moistened the end of her cotton and threaded a needle. No, it was she who had lost the thread. She recovered it.

“Easier than selling—other things.”

She had got it. His eyes regarded her with relief and gratitude. How oracular she was, how quick and yet how deep!

“Yes, that’s it. I’ve just finished a short story. Wish you’d read it.”

She did not tell him that she had read it.

“Of course. But I’m not what you’d call—”

He stroked the cat.

“No,—but you know about things. I’d rely a good deal,—yes,—I would, really. You’ve got understanding. I haven’t tried the tale yet, on an editor,—I mean.”

She concealed an inward smile. Instantly she had confronted the issue, and chosen her attitude. Somehow she knew what he needed. Almost she could see him pushing that tale of his about on a barrow, and with an air of gentle hesitancy offering to the world the fruit of his labours.

“Won’t you fetch the story?”

“May I? It’s rather long. You won’t want to read it now?”

“Why not? I want to.”

He looked at her; he put down the cat and disappeared. He returned with the typescript, and handed it to her, and stood irresolute.

“I think I’ll leave you alone with it. I’ll go out and buy some tobacco.”

She answered him gently.

“Yes, go out and buy some tobacco.”

He was away for the best part of an hour, and when he returned with a face that tried to veil both its eagerness and its anxiety, she had her white lie ready. Besides, the lie was not very enormous. What he needed was the glow of a suggestive confidence.

“I think it’s a wonderful tale. It made me want to cry.”

She glanced at him momentarily from under careful lashes. She saw something happen to his face. His eyes grew luminous.

“Really! I’m so awfully glad. You see,—I—”

He recovered the typescript from the table. Almost, he caressed it. The thing had become different.

“I’d rather please you, Eleanor. You see—you’re—you’re so wise in a kind of way. I’m awfully glad.”

And suddenly he smiled.

“Perhaps I’ll sell my bunch of bananas.”

His courage returned to him. It could not be said that his self-confidence swaggered, but it moved him to consult a copy of the "Literary Year Book", to run a finger down the long list of magazines. His finger came to rest opposite the *Golden Magazine*. Possibly he found the name arresting, and so significant so far as his own needs were concerned. It suggested golden gates, and the Apples of the Hesperides, and it caused him to remember that the name of the magazine was not new to him. It had been launched since the war, and with some éclat, and it had had considerable success, a success that had surprised Fleet Street, because a man who was considered to be an outsider had been given the editorial chair. Yes, one Arthur Raymond. And for all that Scarsdale knew Raymond still edited the *Golden Magazine*.

He asked himself why he should obey his finger, and try his fortune with the *Golden Magazine*. It had the colour of a banana. He might even dare to ask for an interview with Arthur Raymond. Previously he had had no luck with editors; he had not found the sympathetic presence, the particular personality that would match his shyness. He had been too much discouraged by the Taggarts and the Bagshaws. But there was nothing to prevent him from attempting the adventure, nothing but his own diffidence. His necessity was a scourge.

He went. That a man should discover terror in so mild an adventure might appear absurd. In a sense it was absurd, but then man is a wonderful and a ridiculous creature, and to Scarsdale a little success would mean the slackening of a noose. He was not one of those poor sodden devils who had ceased to care; he cared acutely, and especially now that there was something to care for. He came to the building that housed the staff of the *Golden Magazine*; he had a glimpse of two mahogany swing doors with brass handles and glass panels, and of a commissionaire, a very smart and polished veteran sitting on a high stool. And suddenly Scarsdale's purpose seemed to fail in him; his blood was water, his stomach an empty sack. A little, whimpering voice cried, "No, I can't go in there. No justification. I'm nobody."

He traversed the length of street three times. He stood in front of a window in which copies of last month's *Golden Magazine* were displayed. It had an opulent air. It could boast of the names of a number of distinguished authors. It frightened Scarsdale. It made him feel like a ragged and futile creature with his nose glued to the window of a goldsmith's shop. He felt so inferior.

He turned again towards the door. His intention was to pass it, but some access of self-shame, a sudden rage against his own cowardice, impelled him into the entrance. He was aware of the very polished commissionaire pulling open one of the swing doors. It was done for him, Spenser Scarsdale!

“ ’Morning, sir.”

Scarsdale’s mouth felt dry. He heard a little throaty voice asking a question. It was his own voice.

“Mr. Raymond in?”

“I think so, sir. Got an appointment?”

And to Scarsdale came no vision of a cross in the sky, no symbol fit for emperors to gaze upon, but the remembrance of a barrow of bananas, and of a little red-faced man blaring his assurance in the face of the Essex Road.

He pulled out a wallet.

“No. I’ll send up my card. Mr. Raymond will see me.”

No one was more astonished than Scarsdale when the commissionaire returned to the little waiting-room at the foot of the stairs, and informed the gentleman that Mr. Raymond would see him. The event lacked credibility. There was no reason why Raymond should see him. As a matter of fact Arthur Raymond had acted upon impulse, he, a very busy man, had had to teach himself to say no, because the natural kindness of his heart had always been for yes. He had glanced at Scarsdale’s card. Possibly the name attracted him. He had five minutes.

Scarsdale quaked. He went up the stairs, and was met by a girl secretary. He said good morning to her, and she gave him the vaguest of smiles. She opened an inner door, and he found himself with Arthur Raymond.

They looked at each other. One man was frightened, the other quietly alert. Scarsdale’s figure had an awkwardness, a rigidity; his feet had the appearance of being attached to the floor.

“Sit down, Mr. Scarsdale.”

The voice was very quiet; so was the man. He was tall and thin, with a finely drawn face, and a pair of bright brown eyes. There was something staglike about him. His thin hair curled back from a sensitive forehead. His mouth was the mouth of a priest.

Scarsdale sat down. He nursed his hat. His bony knees seemed to stick out hugely.

He said, “It’s very good of you to see me. I won’t waste your time. I used to do work for various magazines. I have written a tale. I don’t think it’s a bad tale. I wondered if I might send it to you to read. I’m not asking for favours.”

Raymond observed him, but gently so. He noticed something, little beads



of perspiration on the other man's forehead, a glisten of anguish.

"Certainly. I should like to read it."

His long thin fingers played with a pencil. Always he felt the need of gripping something when he had to be hard.

"But just a word. You understand, the work has to carry itself. There is no other test."

Scarsdale nodded.

"I know. You have to set a standard. But all I ask is—"

"You can send the tale to me. Perhaps you have it with you?"

"No."

"Address it to me personally."

"I am very grateful to you. It means—opportunity."

He got up. He had been less than two minutes in that chair. He looked down at Arthur Raymond, and seemed to see in him that which other men were not. He smiled as though some spasm of anguish had passed.

"Must not waste your time. I'll send it at once. Good morning. I am very much obliged."

He caught Arthur Raymond's upward and merciful smile, and got himself out of the room, and past the impassive secretary, and down the stairs. The commissioner dismounted from his stool and wished Scarsdale good morning. Scarsdale wished him it back with a glory of harps and of halos.

Upstairs Raymond was looking at his finger-nails.

"Poor devil!"

The editor and man in him added, "I hope it's possible. Not hopeless tosh. Quite damnable that a man should sweat like that. What am I—anyway? A doorkeeper? But I have to respect my door."

### 3

Scarsdale had some ten pounds left in the world when that tale was posted to Arthur Raymond, but for the moment he possessed more than mere cash; he was the owner of a little optimism.

He dared to hope. Certainly, hope was a very fragile plant placed so as to catch all the London sunlight that there was in Eleanor Richmond's window, nor was it a plant that grew or flowered, but just kept itself alive during those autumn days. Scarsdale cherished it, for never before had he been granted so precious an opportunity. To him Arthur Raymond was a god, yet somehow frail and human. There had been an instant of unexpressed sympathy between them, the mirror-flash of two sensitives.

Scarsdale returned to his novel. The urge to work was less self-consciously tense and troubled. He had his idea, a very human piece of inspiration, and during the first few days of waiting for the Raymond verdict he worked out a rough synopsis. His thinking had more fluidity. He was tempted to believe that his luck had turned, though luck was only the right adjustment of place and time and person. He began to believe a little in himself.

He even dared to tell Mrs. Richmond about the interview with Raymond. He spoke of it with a furtive facetiousness, just because the affair was so intensely serious.

"I have offered my bunch of bananas for sale. Of course, one never knows."

She understood that he hoped and hoped considerably. He needed it, poor man. And yet he was not wholly poor to her, though she was wise as to an increasing shabbiness. He had socks that were past darning, yet though the sensitive texture of him might be frayed, the pride of him remained. It might be tenuous and shadowy, but it would be careful not to cast a shadow upon others. His money went to her each week. He was incapable of sponging.

She allowed him to feel that his success mattered.

"When will you hear?"

"Oh, in a week or two. Editors have to take time. It is a high-class magazine. I'm rather hopeful, because the editor's rather unusual."

She wanted the unusualness explained to her.

"Just how?"

"Perhaps because I liked him. Not a pound of flesh man, and at the same time not soft soap. If they take one tale—"

"They'll take others."

"Well, I hope so."

She mused. To the multitude, money is the dire reality, and he had never

once spoken to her about money, his need of it, his resources, and for that very reason she suspected that his resources were growing like his clothes, rather threadbare. She was conscious of compassion, nor was it a mere negative kindness; it had hands and a heart, and a part of herself was hurt by it. Because he could be hurt so easily, and something in her winced, and was ready to run out as to a child, though he was so much more than a child. He was man, rather forlorn and helpless, both futile and fine. He was the sort of lovable fool who would rather sell his shirt than owe the world anything.

But she was a quietist, deep water, no chattering brook.

She said, "I'd go on working just the same. You'll write even better stories than that."

## Chapter Twenty-seven

SCARSDALE waited a month, and though his funds were running low, hope remained with him. He knew that editors can be very deliberate, and that Raymond was a busy man, and that his silence might be significant. The tale had not been returned, and he could infer that either Raymond had put it aside for acceptance or for further consideration.

He watched the post, and so did Eleanor Richmond. These editors were dilatory creatures. She wished that Mr. Arthur Raymond could see Scarsdale's anxious eyes.

On the first of November in the grey on the morning the tale returned. The long white envelope slid through the letter-box and fell with a kind of dismal flop upon the hall floor. Mrs. Richmond picked it up, and carrying it into the sitting-room, stood by the window to examine the envelope. She saw *Golden Magazine* printed in the left-hand top corner. There could be no doubt about it. The tale had been returned.

She felt shocked. He would be so terribly disappointed and depressed, and her impulse was to ward the blow off, to put herself between him and this unhappiness. But what could she do? She had to place the thing on the table beside his breakfast tray, and leave him to find it there.

She heard him come down the stairs. It was time for her to leave for her day's work at Highbury Terrace, but on this November morning Astey's Row held her, and Highbury Terrace could wait. She sat down on a chair in front of the kitchen fire. The news might be better than she feared.

Scarsdale had seen that long white envelope, and suddenly all desire to eat had gone from him. He had a sinking feeling. He slit open the envelope, and drew out the typescript of the tale; it had a letter attached to it, a personal letter from Arthur Raymond. He read it.

"DEAR MR. SCARSDALE,

"I have read your tale with a good deal of interest, and I have had it reported on by two members of my staff. May I be frank? There is some arrestive and vivid work in the story, but in our opinion the latter half falls away. It does not convince. I am not quarrelling with the theme, though it is one that requires a delicate touch.

"Perhaps you might be willing to rewrite the second half of the

story, and to submit it to me again.

“Yours truly,

“ARTHUR RAYMOND.”

Scarsdale felt sick. He poured himself out a cup of tea and gulped it. He was not angry; he had ceased long ago to be angry over the return of a manuscript. The reaction was so complete that he read into Raymond's letter that which was not there. It was a rejection, though kindly conceived. And they had kept him waiting more than a month.

He gulped more tea. He looked at the rashers of fried bacon, and his stomach squirmed. It was a sick void overweighted with reality. In a week or two he would have no money to pay for rashers of bacon. Rewrite that tale? Good God, he felt incapable of writing another word. He was a burst bag, utterly defeated, hopeless.

He tore Raymond's letter across, and going to the table by the window, dropped the pieces into the waste-paper basket. He sat down at his table, and stared blankly at the red buildings opposite. Everything else looked grey. He felt cold, most horribly cold. A pipe would have made him sick.

Rewrite half that tale. He could not do it. It would take him a fortnight, and then there would be more waiting. And again the tale might come back to him. He crumpled. He sat there and confronted reality, or what he took to be reality. He was done for; he was ashamed. In a week or two he would have no money.

He might pawn a few things, or sell his books.

O, yes, stave off the inevitable, indulge in a last kick or two like a rabbit in a snare. Shameful, surreptitious wriggings.

But she would know.

And suddenly he had a horror of her knowing, of realizing him as a futile, shabby creature, one of the absurd failures, the sort of fellow who opened cab-doors and carried sandwich-boards. Good lord, not that! He had the raw edge of his self-regard. He was not going to let her know. He was not going to explain or to excuse.

He got up suddenly. He was strangely jerky and inco-ordinate in his movements. He found himself in the passage taking down his hat and coat; he went out; he had meant to close the door quietly, but somehow he banged it. There was silence.

She invaded that silence; she explored it. She found his cup half full and

the bacon untouched, and the typescript of his story lying on the table in the window. She glanced at the waste-paper basket, saw the white halves of the letter, and extracted them.

She read Raymond's letter.

Her face had a sudden sorrowfulness. She mused.

## 2

Highbury Terrace expected her, and having cleared away Scarsdale's unfinished breakfast, she went to her day's work. She was troubled, and beyond margins that were calculable and easy. Her quietude had been invaded, and yet she was not resenting the invasion. The thing had happened. She found that she was not just sorry for Scarsdale, nor was her pity half-patronage; on the contrary she felt herself involved with him in this obscure and petty disaster. Women may have qualms over an old cab-horse going to the slaughter yard, and yet allow that such things have to be, but those little details, the half-emptied cup and the untouched bacon, had moved her in other ways.

She worked. That morning she polished the walnut and mahogany furniture in the Highbury Terrace dining-room, and it was very beautiful furniture, a Queen Anne bureau and wig-table, a Sheraton sideboard and chairs, knife boxes, a wine cooler, a late Georgian table. Craftsmen had had their joy in the making of this furniture, and to her there was a joy in adding to its lustre. She was made that way. Things came to her when she was at work, things about Scarsdale, his feelings and hers, the sudden impulse that had made him leave his breakfast, and hurry out.

He was hard up. She was sure now that he was desperately hard up, his poor resources bitten to the quick. He was the kind of man who would—But her intuition paused there. She knelt with her polishing cloth pressed against one of the drawers of the sideboard. She looked shocked, intense. Yes, the kind of man who would do something desperate.

At a quarter to one she broke her usual routine. She went back to Astey's Row. She had a feeling that she would find the house empty, and she did so. The typescript of his tale lay where he had left it. He had not been back.

Thinking that Scarsdale might return at his luncheon-hour, she made herself some tea, and ate bread and cheese, but he did not return, and at two

o'clock she walked back to her work, and all that afternoon her hands felt heavy.

The dusk was settling when she came again to Astey's Row. There had been a frost, and the great plane was dropping its leaves; they lay palely patterned on the pavement, and as she entered the Row a falling leaf almost touched her face. Lights were being lit, but to Eleanor Richmond all those other lights were mere anonymous and strange faces. A child's memory had emerged and associated itself with the present, a picture of Christ crowned with thorns, a picture that had hung in a rather dark corner of a Dorsetshire parlour. The eternal outcast, the rejected. This emotional linking up of Scarsdale and the Christ might seem fantastic and feminine and of no more significance than the falling of a leaf, but she was in a mood for such mysticism. She was more than London and the Essex Road, and the windows of model dwellings. If the blackbird's song is a mere mechanism, so was her mood. A leaf was more than a leaf.

She came to her gate and paused. The windows did not welcome her; they were dark, but she could say to herself "He may be in the kitchen." She let herself in, and the darkness and the silence met her, and suddenly she was aware of a sinuous soft shape rubbing against her legs. It was the cat.

She spoke to the cat.

"Poor Tom all alone."

She made her way into the kitchen and lit the gas. She had things to do, but before she took off her hat she explored the darkness of the sitting-room. The light of a match showed her the pale shape of Scarsdale's tale still lying there on the table.

She had certain things to do. She lowered blinds and drew curtains, and relit the kitchen fire, and prepared tea. She set cups and plates for two, and sat by the fire for an hour waiting for Scarsdale to return. She had begun to wonder whether he would return. She began to envisage possible happenings, the tragedies of impulse, the wounded perversities of a man badly hit. Despair! But what was despair? After all, that letter of Raymond's held out hopes; she had not read it as Scarsdale had read it. He had rushed off like a passionate and bitterly disappointed child, but there would be more in his distress than in the anguish of a child. He was at the end of things. It was as though he had tossed the last coin, and the call had been against him.

She sat quietly waiting with the cat on her lap. The clock ticked. The silence of the little house should have been reassuring, a calm hand laid upon her shoulder. "Don't be so silly. He's just upset. He's the sort of man to take

things rather too seriously.” Yes, but that was her justification; her sensing of the situation; her appreciation of Scarsdale as a man who would take life like a sudden cup of poison. She sat and waited. The clock struck seven.

She put Thomas down on the hearthrug, and taking the kettle from the stove, filled up the teapot. She filled it for two, as though by filling it for Scarsdale as well as for herself she would be exerting some mysterious pull upon him. He might be quite near, loitering in the Row. So strong was her feeling that he was quite near to her that she went to the front door, and out through the little garden to the gate. The night was very still save for the sound of the traffic in the Canonbury Road.

She stood there like a country woman at a cottage gate far away in some valley. She did not see the lights across the way. She called as she might have called to a man loitering in a lane.

“Mr. Scarsdale, tea’s ready.”

No one answered her. She waited awhile, and then turned and went in, and her forebodings seemed to quicken in her as she closed the door. She had her meal, cleared it away, washed up, and sat down with her sewing. She sat there sewing until midnight. He did not come back to her.

She put her work away and went out once more into the garden. She called to him, “Mr. Scarsdale”, and her voice had a kind of secrecy. It was for him alone. It was like the breathing of the wind in the branches of the plane tree.

She went in and closed the door and stood in the passage. He had some reason of his own for not returning to her. She groped for it; it seemed very near to her, part of her, something inside her that struggled to be expressed. And suddenly she felt that she understood. He had gone away because there was a bitterness in staying; because he was just what he was.

### 3

It might have been said of Scarsdale that for a period of forty-eight hours he was not quite sane, but since a man’s sanity is taken for granted provided his conduct does not offend against the social order, Scarsdale’s crisis passed unnoticed. He walked; he sat quietly on a seat in the Embankment Gardens, and he remained there for hours, a sack of self-abasement. His bony knees stuck out, but the rest of him had a crumpled flaccidity. Already he had the appearance of one of those derelict figures that attach themselves to seats in



the public parks and gardens. His mood was one of morbid self-abasement, a variant of the shameful that overwhelms those who suffer from strange and unclean delusions. He was not quite a man; he was a sort of sexless, shabby failure; he had no power to possess or to plead. His one privilege was the right to disappear.

He had disappeared. He was not going back to Astey's Row; he had no right there. He found that he had a horror of being despised by the woman who—to him—symbolized woman. He and his silly bunch of bananas! He sat there and supposed that he had always been a mild and preposterous fool, a slippered person, the sort of man whom no woman could stomach. He remembered a character in one of Thomas Hardy's books referring with scorn to that sort of dusty, precise, unconvincing male.

Apathy! Yes, he was conscious of apathy, a kind of miserable torpor. What was going to happen? He did not know and he did not care. He made no claim upon life; he would not even claim the possessions left at Astey's Row; Mrs. Richmond could sell such of them as she pleased. And some absurd quip of the mind introduced into the field of his consciousness the figure of his trouser-press. Yes, probably she would sell that trouser-press.

He sat. He did not want to eat anything; he did not want to move. Dejection glued him to the seat. He did not notice any of the other people who came and sat beside him. Life seemed very far away; he did not belong to it.

But even a melancholist cannot sit for ever. That most patient part of his body will complain, and Scarsdale's glutei grumbled, for he was a bony creature. He got up to walk, and having put the mechanism of himself into motion, it continued to move, for the physical part of him was cold. It uttered mute reproaches against Scarsdale the man, and like a patient ass it ambled along, vaguely conscious of appetizing smells. It carried Scarsdale into Voysey Street, and in Voysey Street Scarsdale's consciousness was brought by a peculiar coincidence into contact with the outer world. He found himself looking at the broad, black back of a man who was walking in front of him; he seemed to recognize it, and also the short, stocky neck and the grey Homburg hat. It struck him as strange that the back of a neck should be so familiar, and then the man turned to the right and entered the doorway of a shop, and Scarsdale saw him for a moment in profile. It was Mr. Bartlet of Canonbury Square.

A vague curiosity was aroused in Scarsdale. He paused by the window of the shop, and saw that it was a chemist's, but not quite a chemist's in the orthodox sense, for it catered for the new philosophy of adventure with economy. It sold rubber goods as well as patent medicines and soap and tooth-

brushes. A label pasted on the window advised the passing male to take "Viroids". Also, it offered to the interested and the discerning a little library, and when Scarsdale read the titles of those books he had a moment of whimsical bitterness. Obviously, he had missed his inspiration. "What a Wife Should Know."—"Sex and Health."—"Strange Nights in Paris." It occurred to him to wonder whether Mr. Bartlet had entered the shop as a purchaser, and he waited, but Mr. Bartlet did not reappear, and when Scarsdale elected to stand close to the shop door and look through the plate-glass panel, he saw Mr. Bartlet hatless behind the counter. He had a proprietary air; he was wagging a finger at another man who assisted.

Scarsdale strolled on. His melancholy had taken to itself a little tinge of bitterness. This man Bartlet knew his public, and having set out to supply the new age with certain products of industry, as a merchant he had prospered. Yes, Mr. Bartlet himself suggested the smell and the resiliency of rubber; he was an elastic person; he could adapt; he was like a well-filled hot-water bottle. His neck was rubber. Hence prosperity and Paris, and a motor-car and week-ends at Brighton with a bright little lady who appreciated the physiological values of Mr. Bartlet's shop.

Scarsdale walked, and he continued to walk until his protesting body persuaded his legs to carry him into an A.B.C. He sat and drank a cup of tea and ate a scone and butter, and then—once more he walked. The dusk came down, and his body pleaded with him; it asserted that it was tired; it wanted to sit down or to lie down. It compelled Scarsdale to make the discovery that the streets of a great city were bitter because the man in the street was not permitted to sit. The very climate was unsympathetic toward the sitter; you could not squat on the kerb, for it was not done, and the traffic saw to it that etiquette was revered. Doorsteps were out of bounds. A penny ride in a bus lasted such a little time. Scarsdale tried the parapet in Trafalgar Square; but after five minutes its aggressive coldness satisfied him that he was no Australian soldier and that the month was November. He went on walking, and once again his body protested. It begged him to consider the realities; he could not walk all night; it objected to sitting on an Embankment seat, even if the police chose to be kindly blind. It said that it wanted to lie down; it wanted to be warm and to go to sleep.

Piccadilly Circus. Red, green, and yellow lights coming and going like smiles on professionally pleasant faces. Scarsdale stood in the recessed doorway of a boot and shoe shop, and felt bewildered. His legs ached; his eyes had begun to ache; the very Circus seemed to revolve, going round and round with its human figures and faces and its traffic. He wanted to lie down, to get

away into some dark corner by himself. But how and where? The separatist in him remained prejudiced. If he had glimpses of Rowton House and Salvation Army Shelters he could not bring himself to accept some cubicle or a bed in a dormitory, the communal blanket and the tin basin. He had seen such places; as a journalist it had been a part of his business to explore such places, and he had written approvingly upon them, but now that the issue was personal, his secret soul refused to enter. At least, not yet, and between him and such last refuges lay the river.

He had thought of the river, or rather it had insinuated itself into his consciousness as something large and shadowy and flowing, a kind of soft grey bed into which you threw yourself and sank. It would be so easy provided that the whole of you would consent to sink and to forget, and not begin suddenly to struggle. He had sat and wondered about such an experience. There would be the wilful leap, the falling, the impact, water, wetness, a smothering. But what then? Supposing the body refused to submit, supposing it fought to live? Supposing the tired and consenting soul had to fight both body and river?

His aching legs reminded him that they were weary of propping him up in the doorways of shops closed for the night. It was all very well for a melancholy soul to expect to be carried through this city meditating upon life and death, but all that Scarsdale's muscles asked for was relaxation. They suggested to him that he had some money in his pocket, and that it was his business to find a bed. He left his doorway, and started to cross the Circus, and with the carelessness of a man absorbed in his own melancholy. There was the hoot of a horn. He glanced to the right, and saw the great red bulk of a bus right on him. His long legs became suddenly active. He bolted like a rabbit, and arrived with a sense of shock upon the opposite pavement. He realized that he had been terrified by that great snout and ponderous wheels. The soul of him had squirmed away from the horror of being crushed. Life! Yes, the urge to live was still in him.

He found himself trembling. He turned up Shaftesbury Avenue. A woman's figure brushed close to him, staring in his face, and he passed without being conscious of her perfume or her challenge. He turned up Wardour Street and penetrated into Soho. He walked, but he was walking with a purpose, searching for some niche into which he could insert himself for the night. The narrow and obscure streets were strange to him, but at last in the window of a high and narrow house he saw a card.

“Beds.”

His weariness welcomed the black letters. It might be a surreptitious and

shabby house, but what did that matter. He stood on the doorstep and rang the bell.

## 4

A face appeared. The door had been opened stealthily, and the face itself had a stealthiness. It seemed to hang there in the dark entry like one of those waxy, deathlike countenances that appear in spiritistic photographs.

Scarsdale addressed it.

“I want a bed.”

He got the impression that he was not expected to loiter upon the doorstep, and that the house did not encourage such loitering; it made a practice of swallowing visitors and of swallowing them quickly. The face spoke to him in English, but with a Latin flavour.

“For one?”

“Yes.”

“Come inside.”

The door was closed, and for a moment there was darkness. Scarsdale heard a match rubbed against a box, and a gas jet flared, and he saw a very full-figured woman in black filling the passage. She surveyed him. She had a little black moustache, and a smeary obliging pallor.

“You—all right?”

Scarsdale believed so. He asked how much the bed would be, and she explained with an air of heavy familiarity that usually she received ten shillings for a bedroom, but since Scarsdale was alone she would accept three. And the money was to be paid in advance.

He brought out some silver and counted out three shillings, and was led up two flights of stairs and shown into a back room. The gas was burning, but turned low, and the details of the room were indistinct.

“Ver’—good room. Let you have it cheap.”

She breathed heavily, for the bulk of her made the climbing of stairs a serious business; she seemed to breathe herself out of the room, and behind the closed door her descent was a heavy shuffle. Scarsdale turned up the gas and looked at the bed, and when he had looked at it he did not wish to undress. He

spread his overcoat over the pillow, lining upwards, and sitting down on the one chair, took off his boots, and his collar and tie. He noticed that there was no key in the lock and no bolt on the door, so he wedged the back of the chair under the handle, turned out the gas and lay down.

The bed seemed broken in the middle, but it was a bed. His tired body relaxed itself; his melancholy consented. He was on the very edge of sleep when he heard a creaking of the stairs, and voices. They sounded in the room next to him, a man's voice and a girl's. The man's voice was a heavy, rumbling base. There were creakings, a little squeal of laughter, intimate murmurings. The partition wall seemed no thicker than cardboard, and Scarsdale felt a sudden anger against those two. His wakefulness protested irritably. He listened, while trying not to listen, and presently there was silence, a pause in the intimate ritual next door. He relaxed again, he dozed, he fell asleep.

He woke again some time in the night. Again there were voices in the next room. The woman's voice was the same, but the man's voice was different. It was silly and rather shrill, and vinously amorous. Almost, Scarsdale could hear what it said.

“Come on, you bit of Turkish delight.”

His sudden anger died away into a kind of tired disgust, and presently he fell asleep again, and in spite of the provocations of that other room he slept till daylight.

## Chapter Twenty-eight

THE second day of Scarsdale's sojourn in the wilderness presented him with other problems. He removed himself early of that smeary and surreptitious house, and was shaved for the sum of threepence by a little Italian barber, and spent eight-pence on his breakfast. He had some tobacco left in his pouch, and he went to smoke a pipe in the Embankment Gardens, but the wind had veered to the east and the day was grey and raw.

Someone on the same seat, intrigued by the smell of Scarsdale's pipe, cadged a fill from him.

"Haven't had a whiff for two days."

He crammed as much tobacco as possible into the bowl of a briar, and then borrowed Scarsdale's matches.

"Blasted cold this morning. Where did you doss down?"

Scarsdale's hand waited for the box, for matches were precious.

"Lodging-house."

"Cost you something. I know a garage where the chap on night duty lets you doss down in a toff's car for a tanner."

It was not the cadger who persuaded Scarsdale to go elsewhere, but the raw east wind. His meals had been scrappy, tea and bun affairs, for the last twenty-four hours, and he was feeling the cold. It seemed to trickle down his spine, and he supposed that if this second day was to be a day of sitting, it would have to be done indoors. He wandered into Charing Cross station, and tried one of the waiting-rooms, but the place was like himself, so utterly depressed, that he went elsewhere. He discovered that it was a free day at the National Gallery, and he took refuge there, and sat on one of the red plush seats. He did not look at the pictures, not even at the Duchess of Devonshire or Mrs. Siddons, for his eyes were aching, and any object that suggested colour and beauty seemed to add to his inward ache. He sat in that particular room for more than an hour, and then he got the impression that one of the attendants was watching him suspiciously, and he rose and removed himself to another room. He sat in five successive rooms until an emptiness reminded him that he would have to squander a few more pennies.

The day dragged on. Another night was approaching, and Scarsdale's

melancholy became tinged with fear. He realized that a man's impulse to submerge himself might soon recoil upon itself when it found itself in contact with slimy, tarnished things. He had the horror of that room upon him, and there were other horrors from which his fastidiousness shrank, even as the soul of a child shrinks from certain strange, succulent, smeary objects. A man may be more afraid of dirt than of death, and as the day drew on this liveness asserted itself. He grew restless. He went out to face the coming of the London night, and he stood a moment under the great portico. He saw the buses, and the queues waiting on the pavement, the clerks, typists and shopgirls. London was crowding home, and in him there glowed a sudden anguish, a yearning. He too wanted to go home. He wanted to feel that someone waited for him, that he mattered, that he had a corner in this distressful and thunderous city into which he could steal. Home, somewhere where a man could wash, and take off his clothes and lie down, a door that could be locked, a little silence, a friendly and familiar face.

He was conscious of something breaking in him. It was as though the sack of his self burst open and spilled its load of melancholy upon the flagstones. His knees shook, but not with fear. He yearned. The impulse was vehement, and he did not attempt to control it. He began to walk. He walked fast and jerkily like a man moved by some inward and passionate urge. He went up through Soho and Bloomsbury into St. John's Street, and up the gradual ascent to Islington. He was conscious of excitement, a kind of thickness of the throat when he found himself in the Essex Road.

He came to the flight of steps leading to the lower end of Astey's Row. He had always thought this end of the Row ugly and bare, with its row of houses close to the New River railings. Scarsdale hurried past these houses, but as he drew towards the other end of Astey's Row his pace slackened. He had obeyed an impulse, but now mere impulse was at an end, and he was confronting finality, a gate, a door, a person, failure, shame. What was he going to do? He realized that he had had no clear purpose in his mind; he had allowed emotion to move him, to carry him back to Eleanor Richmond's gate.

He came to her gate. He rested his hands on it; he looked at the dark windows, and up at the dim branches of the great plane-tree. A great yearning tempted him. He wanted to pass through that gate and open the door and go in, but something in him resisted. He felt that he could not do it, and admit to himself that he was willing to return as a self-confessed sponger, a fellow who could cadge from a woman. And from her! He stood there in anguish. A part of him was cowardly and unashamed. It could not compel the whole Scarsdale to enter, but it loitered, and hoped. If only she would come out and find him

there! It was possible. If he could cling to the knees of a coincidence. He shivered with a kind of suspense. He watched the door, and his eyes stood out like the eyes of a rabbit on Martinsell Hill. He allowed his poor, beggarly self to wait at her gate, hoping and yearning.

And suddenly he turned away and walked on. Misery overwhelmed him. Never had he known such a pang, such gulpings of despair. He crossed the Canonbury Road, and diverged along Aylwin Terrace. His legs were a mechanism carrying him along. He staggered; he brushed against railings. He felt that he was walking toward the end of things, toward a vague, obscure finality, blackness, oblivion.

Yet, a minute after he had left the gate, the door of the little house had opened, and she had stood there looking out into the night. She had listened. It was as though she had felt the nearness of him, his hesitant, helpless anguish.

## 2

Scarsdale's legs carried to the old familiar places. They were reminiscent legs, prosy and platitudinous and reproachful. They took him into Canonbury Square and placed him opposite Miss Gall's house, and allowed him to look at the lighted windows, the comfortable glow that was Mr. Bartlet. They moralized. They as much as said "Had we been blessed with any sort of headpiece better than a bag of rice we should not be loafing about here in a pair of tired trousers, but being the legs of a sentimental idiot we bear what we bear. That man Bartlet knows his public. Our lord and master is a fool."

They moved Scarsdale on. Since he had always been such a creature of habit they considered that it was sufficient for them to carry him along the old grooves, down St. Mary's Road and into Highbury Grove. They brought him to the Fields, but at this hour of the night the Fields were closed, and no seat was available. Scarsdale followed the railings, and in due course he came to Highbury Terrace, its cliff-like façade patterned with windows, some bright, some dark. He walked the length of the terrace, thinking of his luncheon seat beyond the railings, and the sparrows and the bags of buns. He returned. He found himself looking for the number of the house to which Eleanor Richmond came each day. He recognized it and paused. The house had a massive green door and a graceful white fanlight over it, and two spacious, arched lower windows. They seemed to stare blankly at Scarsdale. "We do not know you, seedy stranger." He walked slowly on.



But what of the night? It was November, and a ground fog had settled over the Fields, a thin mist that was sufficiently raw to make the night less sympathetic. Scarsdale felt cold, though he had arrived at that state when a man accepts the strangest of happenings, and is ready to resign himself to doorsteps. But a London doorstep was too public and too chilly, and Scarsdale discovered a lane or mews at the back of the Highbury Terrace gardens. There were dark old walls and stables and outlines of holly trees, and on the left a row of cottages set well back. This diverticulum was silent and deserted, and Scarsdale explored it, vainly imagining that some stable door might have been left open. The black hood of a van loomed up out of the darkness, and from the wall close to it a familiar aroma and a suggestion of warmth rose from a pile of steaming horse-manure which had been flung out of a stable and stacked against the wall.

Scarsdale paused. It occurred to him that he might explore the van, and as he moved toward it a sudden voice addressed him. It was a child's voice, solicitous and apprehensive.

"Please, sir, we ain't doing any 'arm here."

Scarsdale was astonished. He bent down, he peered.

"Who's that?"

"Me, sir, and 'im."

Scarsdale felt for his matchbox and struck a light. He beheld a very small girl wearing spectacles cuddling a fat and solid infant on a pile of empty sacks between the manure heap and a canvas sheet that hung from the tail-board of the van. The infant was asleep. The round spectacles glimmered.

"Oo,—I thought you was a policeman."

"No,—I'm not a policeman."

"Speak soft, sir, and don't wake 'im."

The match went out. Scarsdale spoke softly.

"That's all right. I'm not interfering. But what are you doing here?"

"Dad's in drink."

"Oh."

"'E don't know what 'e's doing when 'e's in drink. 'E broke the lamp one night. 'Taint safe to stay in the 'ouse. I brought Bert out 'ere."

Scarsdale was touched, and beyond his own pain.

“Haven’t you got a mother?”

“No. She died when Bert was born. I’m his mother.”

Scarsdale’s nostrils were full of the pungent scent of the manure. What a sentimental occasion! The shapes of the two children were dim to him. He wondered.

“But haven’t you any neighbours, friends?”

“I just ’ad to do a guy, sir. Dad, ’e frightens people when ’e’s in drink. ’E’ll be all right tomorrer.”

“But—the cold?”

He lit another match and examined the pair of them huddled up close to that steaming heap. Then he blew out the match and took off his overcoat. He thought, “What does it matter to me? It simply doesn’t matter what happens.” In the darkness he spread the coat over the two.

“You take this. I don’t want it. I’m out for the night too. I’m going to try this van.”

“Oo,—thank you, sir. I’ll put it over ’im. But won’t you be wantin’ it.”

“Not till the morning.”

Scarsdale scrambled over the tail-board of the van. He found some straw there. It occurred to him that the two children would be warmer in the van. But no. They lay in that little nook with the pile of manure radiating heat. They had some sacks with his coat. He scraped up some of the straw and lay down.

### 3

Scarsdale did gather together some fragments of sleep, in spite of the cold and the hardness of the floor-boards. He had dreams, bad dreams. He woke up in a pit of unmentionable gloom. Once, he scrambled to his feet and lit a match and looked down at the two children, and saw that they were asleep, and completely covered by his coat. A thin vapour seemed to rise from the pile of manure. He lay down again, and in spite of his misery felt a little warmth of exultation over the lending of that coat. Youth mattered, whereas he was at the end of things, one of the very superfluous, and not like that gallant little mother in spectacles, the small madonna of the manure heap.

He fell asleep again, as he had fallen asleep at times during the war, with a

feeling of disgust at life's hopelessness, and again he had bad dreams. He was stodging about in an icy and chaotic mud patch; his feet seemed to adhere to the squelch, and as he pulled at them his legs and back ached. And he was cold, cold to his inmost vitals. He woke again some time before dawn, and his waking state was the semblance of his dream transmuted into reality. His head and eyes ached, and so did his back. He was cold, but this coldness was different; it seemed part of him, in the very midst of him, and not a superficial chilliness, a stagnation of the blood in skin and feet and fingers. He understood the phrase—"Cold to the marrow." It was as though he would never be warm again in this world.

And suddenly he knew that he was going to be ill, and he was afraid. His aching, half-frozen body protested. It assured him with qualms of inward nausea that it had suffered sufficiently, and that it would bear no more. He sat up and felt giddy. He noticed that his overcoat was hanging over the tail-board of the van. So, the little mother in spectacles had carried "'im" home, and had not despoiled the stranger of his coat. Scarsdale reached for it; he put it on, and buttoned the coat up and turned up the collar. He stuffed his hands into the pockets. His teeth were chattering.

The van became a place of horror. He realized that someone would come and find him here and perhaps make a scene, and he felt too weak and too cold and too sick for such adventures. He would try and warm himself. He got up and proceeded to scramble over the tail-board of the van, and nearly fell over it. His hands clawed at the edge. Those half-frozen members—his feet—hardly seemed capable of appreciating the solid earth. He staggered. He clutched. And then he remembered that he had left his hat inside the van; it would have to stay there; he was incapable of recovering it. It did not occur to him that the tail-board of a van could be lowered.

A little greyness had come into the sky, and Scarsdale turned away from the black van. He began to walk, and he had not covered fifty yards before he realized that his legs were not going to carry him very far. He felt giddy and sick. The personal "I" of him ceased to struggle and to resist; it was a mere numb and acquiescent member carried along by the instinctive urge of an impulse that was more primitive. He was going somewhere; he had to get to a particular place; he had ceased to question the niceness or the shamefulness of surrender. He felt so sick. His very nausea impelled him along those grey streets and through the rawness of the November morning. He had no legs, but a pair of strange and pulpy appendages that somehow seemed to drift with him as in a dream. The pavements had the consistency of cotton wool. More than once he had to stop and cling to some railings. Things went black. He wanted

to be sick, and yet the nausea could not vent itself.

That particular stretch of the Canonbury Road seemed to go on for ever and ever; it was timeless, spaceless. He did not notice the few people who passed him in the greyness of the morning; they stared. He had some whisps of straw in his hair; he looked ghastly. He endured. His legs sagged at the knees. He came to the end of Astey's Row, and was vaguely aware of the great plane tree. He arrived at Eleanor Richmond's gate, opened it, staggered up the path. Hardly could he get his feet up the steps. His hands fumbled.

## 4

She opened the door.

He looked ghastly. His eyes stood out in his chalky and unshaven face. His neck was like a cord. And when he tried to speak to her his lips were the lips of a stammerer.

"Eleanor, I'm so cold."

His eyes expressed a kind of anguish. He was shaking.

"I—I oughtn't to have come here,—but I'm so cold."

And suddenly he collapsed. He seemed to crumple up on her doorstep, and before her hands could catch him. Almost his forehead struck the upper step. He did not make a sound. She bent over him, her face had a strange, tragic tenderness, and her strength was sister to it. She got her arms round him, and half raised him and dragged him in, and down the passage to the fire, and even while she was doing it she was aware of how his feet trailed along the polished linoleum. But his hands fumbled at her dress.

He mumbled.

"Shouldn't have come. Not right. Feel so cold, so sick."

She laid him in front of the fire, snatched a cushion and put it under his head.

"You ought to have come before. I've been waiting, Spenser."

He made a gasping sound.

"Eleanor,—I—I'm sorry, I'm going to be sick."

## *Chapter Twenty-nine*

THE doctor sat on a chair beside the bed. He had examined Scarsdale's chest, and he had found that which he had expected to find, for Scarsdale's trouble was obvious to the trained eye. His eyes were glassy; he lay propped on two pillows with a bright red patch on either cheek, breathing rapidly but shallowly, because breathing hurt him. Especially did that sharp knife pain in his right side catch him when he coughed.

The doctor was a little, stumpy, commonplace man with kind eyes. He folded up his stethoscope and spoke reassuringly.

"We shall have to get you into hospital."

Scarsdale had turned on the pillow. His glassy eyes stood out; his neck was like a stalk.

"Hospital."

"Certainly."

"O, just what you think best, doctor."

He watched the doctor's black bulk remove itself from the room. His forehead wrinkled itself up, and his hands lay palms upwards on the coverlet. They too consented. The fever was strong in him, but his grasp upon life was very weak, and he wanted nothing but to be allowed to breathe without pain, to sleep, to sink into forgetfulness. They were sending him to hospital, and he was going to die. He wanted to die, it would be so right and final, the logical solution, the gentle closing of a door.

The doctor was speaking to Mrs. Richmond in the passage.

"I think I can get him into the Royal Free. I'll telephone, and arrange for an ambulance."

Her face had a stillness.

"Couldn't he stay here?"

"Too much nursing—you know. Besides—"

"Day and night?"

"Exactly. He may have a better chance there. He seemed worried about my fee."

“He would be. You will let me know, doctor, and I’ll tell him it is all settled.”

She put a hand to her cheek.

“What do you think—? Will he?”

“O, these thin people do pretty well. He’s not been a drinker, I gather.”

“No. I have never seen him touch anything.”

“Good. I’ll get along and ring up the hospital.”

She stood at the window for a moment after the doctor had gone, and the window showed her the backs of other houses and a small strip of sky in the north-east, that so very English sky. Could anything be more grey and deplorable and dead? It might be November, but then more than half the English year was November, a cold wet blanket ready to be applied to any illusion, and especially the illusion of happiness. But she caught herself up; it was useless to allow oneself melancholy musings, idle regrets in the cold green sadness of a northern May mood, for the English sky was like life, rain on the meadows, wind in the woods. She crossed the landing to the door of Scarsdale’s room, opened it and went in.

His glassy eyes fixed themselves on her. His breathless voice uttered her name.

“Eleanor.”

She sat down beside the bed. She had every appearance of calmness.

“Don’t worry. The doctor wants you to go to hospital. He is sending an ambulance.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll go. I’ve been such a nuisance to you.”

She laid a hand on one of his.

“No, nothing of the kind.”

“Eleanor,—I owe you a week’s money, and the doctor. If you look in my suitcase you’ll find a tobacco tin with some money in it.”

Her hand exerted gentle pressure.

“Don’t worry, Spen. There is nothing to worry about. You have got to keep your strength. And don’t talk. Just give up.”

He was silent, but his hand moved itself and clasped hers. His anxious face showed a little flickering smile.

“You don’t mind, Eleanor, do you? I’ve often wanted to hold your hand. You’re so—so different.”

Her fingers closed on his.

“Now, just lie still.”

“Yes,—I’ll give up. I’ve always been such a failure, Eleanor. It’s as it should be—somehow—this. I shan’t be any more bother to anyone, no more bother to myself. Such a failure.”

She bent over him and kissed his forehead.

“No, not that.”

He lay still; he was exhausted, and she sat beside him till the ambulance men came, and wrapped him up in blankets and carried him to the ambulance that was waiting in Canonbury Road at the end of the Row. She walked with them to the ambulance. She laid a hand for a moment on one of his.

“You are going to get well. I shall come and see you. Remember.”

## 2

For five days Scarsdale’s consciousness was blurred. The fever ran high, and the business of breathing was always with him; he coughed, and his head ached, and thirst was upon him. He lay in a long ward, with a red screen round his bed, for a case of pneumonia can be distressing to others. For two nights he was delirious, and uttered strange cries and was full of a busy, breathless anguish. Fantastic delusions drifted about inside his head. He was lying next to Marwood, and Marwood would keep talking on the most preposterous subjects, though Scarsdale’s delusion was that both he and Marwood were dead. They were broiling somewhere in a place of stuffy heat where the air steamed, and on occasions an imaginary Marwood persisted in sitting up in bed while picking his shirt. Also, there were times when Marwood had no face, but a sort of formless bag of pulpy flesh that emitted sounds.

But on the eighth day Scarsdale came back to life. It was as though he had drifted suddenly over a bar into calm water where everything was still, and the bed itself had ceased to rock and leap, but lay like a boat in the midst of tranquillity. Scarsdale saw the windows and walls, and his own hands lying on the coverlet, and the two hummocks that were his knees and his feet, and the faces of the patients on either side of him. People came into him round the screen, nurses, and the matron, and the doctor. They were kind people,

astonishingly kind people. Their kindness made him want to weep.

The face on his left lay and regarded him. It was an old face with a grizzled moustache and wrinkles and haze-blue eyes. It spoke to Scarsdale.

“Well, mate, you’ve done it.”

Scarsdale’s response was vague and perplexed. Almost, he felt accused.

“Done what?”

“Pulled through. You’ve cheated the old gentleman. Good biz.”

And suddenly Scarsdale wept. The tears ran down his face, though he did not know why he was weeping. He was so weak, and even a kind and casual voice affected him absurdly. He was like a very small child. His consciousness seemed to grope at all this newness, nor did he yet grasp life as a thing that was very old, a repetition, a beginning all over again, the same old sum on the same old slate. The anguish of that realization waited for him.

It came to him suddenly when they took the screen away. He saw the rows of beds, and the ward tables. He was alive and among other men, and some of them were sitting up and reading. One old fellow had spectacles perched on his nose. He was alive among other men, horribly and nakedly alive, and confronting other faces and other problems, the weary business of living, and of getting a living.

He was horrified; he was afraid. He closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep, but the blackness was peopled with a hundred distressful thoughts. He felt paralysed with fear, helpless in the presence of the dreadful reality, the knowledge that he had to go on living. What would he do? What could he do? He shivered. And then he was aware of a presence. He opened his eyes and saw the face of the doctor; he stared at it like a very young child.

He asked a question.

“Doctor, am I going to get well?”

“Why, of course. You are doing splendidly.”

And Scarsdale wept. He did not want to get well.

The night that followed was the uttermost edge of misery. He could not get to sleep. He lay quite still, with his eyes shut and his hands clenched, and his consciousness was a mirror in which all the woes of the world were reflected. He did not want to live. He was a preposterous failure. He would always be a failure. He had no prospects of earning a living, and no home to go to. He could not return to Astey’s Row, and Eleanor Richmond was well rid of him.



She had been kind, just as these nurses and the doctor had been kind, perhaps because he was too futile a person to be trodden on. He was an old skin that had burst when the new wine was poured into it.

He lay awake half the night, while the life of the ward went on. Someone was snoring exultantly; here and there a figure moved restlessly under the bedclothes; the night-nurse sat by the fire. She too reacted to the sound of snoring, and she rose and going to the bed of the snorer, shook him gently. He woke with a start and a grumble.

“What’s wrong?”

“You are snoring terribly; you are keeping some of the others awake. Lie on your side.”

The man answered her in a husky whisper.

“Sorry, Miss. I’ll try it.”

She came down the ward and paused at the foot of Scarsdale’s bed. She had been watching Scarsdale; she was one of those women with gentle, patient souls, and a strange love for the sick. Her intuition walked the ward, and she seemed to know by instinct when some case was in distress or trouble. She had divined Scarsdale’s agonized wakefulness; his eyes might be shut and his body still and stiff as a board, but she felt that all was not well with him.

“No. 12, you are not asleep.”

Her accusation was whispered.

“No, nurse.”

“Any pain?”

“No, nurse.”

“You must go to sleep.”

She fetched something in a glass, and supporting his head, made him drink it.

“Doctor’s orders. Sleep’s what you want.”

He gazed up at the gentle dimness of her face.

“Yes—I know. Thank you, nurse. You’re all so good.”

Her gentleness and her voice soothed him as potently as did the sleeping draught. His spirit consented; it lay still; a drowsiness descended upon him, and intermingled with it was a sense of surrender. He seemed to divine some

presence that transcended all the shameful and the sorrows of life, its little sordid scuffles, its cynicism, its jealousy and greed. A figure floated near him, woman, a face of compassion, hands that ministered and strengthened. He fell asleep, and beyond the closing wings of his consciousness were other wings.

### 3

The sun was shining. It might be only a transient and a November sun, and the lord of a frosty morning, but it penetrated into the hospital ward and fell upon human faces. Even the coverlets of the beds looked the brighter for it, and the man next to Scarsdale indulged in a surreptitious, muted whistling.

“No Number 13 in this ward, mate.”

Scarsdale was propped up on pillows, and his eyes were regarding a vase full of chrysanthemums on the ward table. Marvellous things—flowers. They did not ask you for anything.

“No Number 13. How’s that?”

The whistler quizzed him.

“What! You’re twelve, and I’m fourteen. Ain’t you noticed it?”

“No.”

“Well, it’s a fact.”

But how significant a fact, and Scarsdale found himself reflecting upon it with a childish innocence. He and his neighbour, by some marvellous interposition of providence, had eluded that unlucky number. And what was the omen? Were they to be immune from all the thirteens of life, like the flowers on the ward table? How very pleasant to be a flower, to arrive at that state of perfection without any display of effort. What an absence of fuss and of fury, for flowers had not to fight for motor-buses, and think of shoe-leather, and frown over exports and imports, and worry about the rent. What a pity that the product of man’s toiling and moiling could not evolve like a flower.

The voice at his side interrupted his sentimentalizing.

“Wash and brush up—tuppence.”

Scarsdale observed an amazing thing. The fellow was busy on his fingernails, and using a match end and a pair of scissors. What was this absurd ritual?

“My gel’s coming to-day.”

“Oh!”

“Visiting day. Got to do somethink abart it.”

Visiting day! Was it conceivable that he too might have a visitor? There was but one visitor in the world for him, but even while envisaging her possible coming he felt both eager and afraid. His heart beat faster, and its contractions were too violent for his weak body; they shook him; they seemed to shake the bed. He tried to calm himself, and lying very still he looked at the flowers and told himself that most certainly she would not come, that she had work to do, and that he had no right to hope for anything. And were she to come what would he say to her? That he was getting well, that he would have to begin life over again and try to find work to do? But Astey’s Row was closed to him. He could not dream of going back there, and of imposing himself upon her.

He began to feel very sad. He both yearned and feared, and when they gave him a book to read he tried to fix his attention upon it, but the book would not possess him. It was a crime story, rather crude and unpleasant, and he laid it aside and made it appear that he was asleep. He envied the chirrupy optimism of his neighbour with the scissors and the match-stick. He lay there pretending to be asleep until the doctor and the attendant matron and nurse arrived on their official round. He opened his eyes with an assumption of innocence.

“Well, how’s No. 12?”

Scarsdale smiled a little, wincing smile.

“Better, doctor.”

“How did you sleep?”

“Very well.”

He was examined, and his state was approved of. Pulse and temperature were down, the chest clearing, the bowels open. The doctor patted his shoulder.

Scarsdale looked anxious.

“Doctor, can I see people?”

“Well, that depends. Not a whole crowd. Ten minutes perhaps, but not much talking.”

Scarsdale’s eyes transferred their anxious glance to the face of the matron. She nodded at him consentingly, and smiled.

Scarsdale's suspense concealed itself in scepticism. He lay with his eyes closed, pretending to be asleep, because he both feared that she would come and that she would not come. He could hear the voices in the ward, and the footsteps of the visitors making their way to the various beds. There were salutations. From somewhere close to him came the sound of a hearty and wholesome kiss.

“O,—Jim.”

“Give me another one, Sally. Some tonic, what! Talk about peaches!”

He of the match-stick had not laboured in vain, and Scarsdale tried not to listen to the simple, unselfconscious chatter. But his ears were troubled, and in the wilful darkness he waited for footsteps to draw near to his own bed, but no one came, and a sudden sense of desolation descended upon him. He felt abandoned. But what right had he to feel like that? He had no claim upon Eleanor Richmond; he had no claim upon anybody. He wanted to weep.

A voice said, “Spen, are you asleep?”

He turned his head and opened his eyes with a start. She was sitting there beside him, and for a moment he could not believe it. She had come to him so silently, but then she was always so silent and easy in her movements. He lay and looked at her. She was in black. He felt that he could lie and look at her for ever, at the calm, dark-eyed comeliness of her. He moved a hand. And suddenly two silly tears trickled.

“Eleanor, you’ve come.”

His poor face twitched. She put out a hand and took hold of his tentative, unsure fingers. Her eyes dwelt upon him.

“Of course. I have been here before.”

“Have you?”

“But they wouldn’t let me see you.”

He looked astonished. He glanced at the hand that held his. Almost he had the eyes of a child. And then he noticed that her other hand held flowers. Were they for him? How wonderful! She had brought him flowers.

She noticed his glance. She placed the flowers on the bed.

“I bought them in the Essex Road, Spen.”

He smiled, as though the thing was not credible.

“Did you? Are they for me—really?”

“Of course.”

His face had a thin and timid gladness.

“I’d like to smell them.”

“Chrysanthemums haven’t much smell.”

But she held them for him to smell. Her eyes were deep and strange. She noticed that his nose looked huge, and that his cheeks were sunken. His poor neck was like a cord, and over these failings of the flesh her love bowed itself.

She said, “I have had a talk to the matron. She thinks that you will be able to come out in a fortnight.”

The change in him was instant. His face clouded over. His eyes looked afraid.

“Shall I?”

She spoke softly but swiftly.

“Yes. You will have to be careful. I’m having a gas stove put in your bedroom.”

He stared at her. His forehead was all puckered up.

“But,—Eleanor, I have nowhere to go to. Of course—I shall find some place.”

She repeated her words as though he had failed to hear her.

“You will have to be careful, Spen. I was saying—I have had a stove put in your bedroom.”

He looked tragic.

“But, Eleanor, I haven’t any money. I can’t—”

He felt the touch of her hand.

“That will come later. O, yes, it will. I shall have to look after you, Spen.”

His eyes grew dim. The ward and its inmates were blurred to him. He was not conscious of anything but her face, and that too was blurred.

He said, “Do you mean, you will let me come back, just for a little while?”

I'll try again, Eleanor! I'll try so hard."

"Of course—you are coming back. I want you to come back."

He drew her hands toward his face, and kissed her fingers.

## Chapter Thirty

SOME things are not done, but when they are done successfully and with an air of inevitableness the world closes both eyes. Arthur Raymond had a visitor. She sat in the chair that was used by authors and illustrators and other fry, and extracting from her handbag the two halves of a letter, she passed them across the desk to Raymond. It was his own letter to Scarsdale, rescued from the waste-paper basket, and cherished against some critical occasion.

She observed the man while he glanced at it. She watched his eyes and his mouth, and her examination of him pleased her. She did not say to herself, "This man is good" or "This man is persuadable", but the colour and the texture of him were to her liking.

"But this is my own letter."

She explained the case at once, and in a few simple words, and then sat silent and attentive.

"You see, sir,—if there is something for him to hope for."

The face on the other side of the desk had a stillness. He looked again at the letter, and then he glanced at her, and his eyes seemed to widen. It was as though her presence made the raising of blinds possible.

"But this letter is hopeful. In it I say that the work has vividness and appeal."

"I think he had hoped so much, sir."

Raymond waited.

"He had no money left, or very little money. It is very kind of you to see me. I only wanted to ask if you—"

She paused and he smiled at her.

"If I meant what I wrote?"

"Not now. But if he were to improve the end of the story."

"I should accept it."

Her eyes held his for a moment. She consented; she was satisfied.

"That is what I wanted to know. I'll persuade him to rewrite the end of it. I'm so very grateful to you."

She rose, and he rose with her.

“Remember,—I haven’t accepted it yet.”

“No. You have to fill that chair.”

“Quite. But if he can better the ending, there should be many other stories.”

He opened the door for her. They shook hands, and she passed out leaving him wondering, and with a feeling of refreshment. A woman of the people and yet how singular, how deep and deliberate and apart. She had promised not to waste his time, and she had not wasted it. And he thought, “How easy”. For so many people were like tangles of twine that came to untwine themselves in his presence, and got themselves into worse tangles. Circuitous, plausible, unsure people who wanted to impress, or to pick the end of a favour. They had made that editorial chair of his uneasy, but this woman was different.

“Profoundly simple,” he thought, “but then simplicity is profound.”

Back in his chair he followed the incident into further human possibilities. She had asked him to treat this visit of hers as a secret affair, but in remembering Scarsdale—and he remembered him very well—he was moved to kindness. He called in his secretary and dictated a letter.

“DEAR MR. SCARSDALE,

“I am wondering whether you have humoured me and remodelled the ending of the long short story you submitted. If so, I should very much like to re-read it with a view to publication. Your work has a quality of its own.

Yours truly,”

The typed copy of the letter was laid on his desk, and he read it through, and in choosing to make that human gesture he was more than the man in the office chair. Was he exaggerating? Perhaps—a little, but he remembered Scarsdale’s eyes and his anguished and perspiring forehead, and the risk seemed worth taking. He saw it as a critical moment in the life of a poor devil whose flame was faltering for lack of oil, and if oil could be supplied the lamp might go on burning. He signed the letter. He rang for his secretary.

“Look up Mr. Scarsdale’s address. You have it, I suppose?”

“Yes, Mr. Raymond.”

“Have this letter posted to him.”

The coincidence was a happy one, for Raymond’s letter arrived in Astey’s



Row on the day before Scarsdale's return, and Mrs. Richmond placed it on the sitting-room table.

## 2

The taxi carried them up the Pentonville Road, and into Upper Street, and as it diverged to enter the Essex Road, Scarsdale seemed moved by some spasm of emotion. He had been sitting very still beside her, his eyes pretending to watch the life of the world to which he was returning, while realizing that his world—the world that mattered to him—was here at his elbow.

“Not much change, Eleanor.”

“The Essex Road doesn't change.”

She had been aware of his stillness and his rigidity. He was shy of her, but with a shyness that expressed deep matters. He wanted to say things to her, and no words seemed to him adequate, for his wonder at life and at her was steeped in humility. She was miraculous and yet somehow so exquisitely real. She remembered. He had gone to the hospital without a hat, and she had come to the hospital to take him home, bringing with her a suitcase that had contained a hat, clean underclothing, a shirt and collar. How could so wonderful a creature remember such trivial things? But perhaps that was why she was what she was, and like Raymond he divined her profound simplicity, a subtlety of rhythm that was so right that it had the appearance of being elemental.

He smiled.

“That—astonished me.”

“What astonished you, Spen?”

“The hat. That you should remember. I wonder who found the other hat? But I didn't tell you, did I?”

“How you lost it.”

“I left it in an empty van. Couldn't go back to fetch it, somehow. What an idiot!”

She was looking at his thin, white hands.

“No. That's not true. You shouldn't say such things.”

And suddenly they realized that they had arrived, and that the taxi had stopped at the end of Astey's Row. She got out first, and paid the taximan, and

reached for the suitcase, and for a moment there was mute argument between them, for he wanted to carry the suitcase and she would not allow him to carry it. They entered the Row. The bare branches of the old plane tree curved over them, and Scarsdale, with cheeks that were faintly flushed, threw quick and sensitive glances right and left.

“Same old tree. Seems years—somehow.”

“Just a month.”

They came to the gate and she opened it, but he paused inside the gate, and looked about him. Almost he was like a man returning from the ends of the earth to a corner of life beyond the edge of dreams. There was the cherry tree and the blue post and the holly bush, and the two green boxes with their shrubs, and the privet hedge, and the steps and the door. Of course these things were here, but how strange they seemed, strange yet beautifully familiar. His eyes felt hot. He wanted to say things to her, gracious, tender, humble things, and just two words came.

“Home, Eleanor.”

She understood.

A bright fire was burning in the kitchen, for she had arranged with a neighbour to come in and mend it while she was out, and Thomas waited for them on the hearthrug. He looked at Scarsdale with yellow eyes that appeared searching and unfriendly, and then came rubbing round the man-thing's legs.

“Hallo, Tom, remember me?”

“Of course he remembers you.”

She carried his suitcase upstairs, and lit the new gas-stove which she had had fitted in his bedroom. She went to take off her hat and coat, while Scarsdale stood on the hearthrug, nursing the cat, and listening to her footsteps overhead. Tea was laid, with the familiar blue and white china, and the brown teapot, and the hot-water jug with pink roses on it. He noticed a plum cake, and four squares of bread that had been cut ready for toasting. He noticed everything, her sewing-machine, the shelf of books, the towel and apron hanging on the scullery door. Considered æsthetically the room was a little, shabby, commonplace apartment full of ugly things, but to Scarsdale it had beauty. It was like the life of some working man or woman, crude in its externals, but possessing an inward fineness, secrets of courage and patience and compassion. He felt that there was no other room in the world like it. It was full of a presence.

She came down to him.

“I have lit your stove. I don’t want you to go up till the room is warm.”

He caressed the cat.

“Some things can’t be said, Eleanor.”

“Well, never mind.”

“But I do mind. I haven’t the right to say the things that I want to say. You have been too wonderfully good to me.”

“That may be because I like it, Spen.”

She lit the gas, and turning to the fire, put the kettle in its place. She lowered the flap of the grate, and the glow played upon her hands. She mused a moment.

“Shall we make toast?”

“I’d love to. May I?”

“That won’t hurt you. I’ll get the fork.”

She fetched it for him, and he put down the cat, and adjusted a slice of bread on the fork, and knelt down. She drew up a chair; she was very close to him, and his consciousness was divided. He was responsible for the toast, but also he was responsible for himself and for her.

He said, “It’s so good to be here. You don’t know what it means.”

She leant forward.

“Why shouldn’t I know?”

“You couldn’t. Because—I’m—”

The fork was a little unsteady and he appeared to concentrate all his attention upon it. His hair was all grizzled above his hollow temples, and his eyes seemed to have grown bigger. The hand that held the fork looked all knuckles.

His lips moved. “I’ve been a wretched failure. Give me one more chance, Eleanor.”

She laid a hand on his shoulder.

“What is failure, Spen? You might have made a lot of money, and grown fat, and yet been horrible. People don’t understand what life is—I mean—not the living of it. There is such a thing as being worth while.”

He glanced up at her devotedly.

“How—worth while?”

“In our selves. You haven’t failed yet. Perhaps—you haven’t begun.”

“My dear, I’ll try. I’ll try so desperately hard.”

Hesitantly he let his head rest for a moment against her arm, and her arm was warm and soft and consenting.

“Eleanor, I can’t say the things I want to say. But perhaps—some day—you’ll let me say them. I’ve got to get work. I must get it.”

“Yes, you’ll get it. Don’t worry, Spen. Look, the toast’s smoking.”

It was she who buttered the toast, and she was generous with the butter, for this was a special occasion, and the ways and means of life could be left till to-morrow. She had figured things out; she could manage, she could give to him space to breathe in and time to find himself his opportunity. He had to be taught to believe in himself. Meanwhile, there was that letter of Raymond’s lying on the sitting-room table, and though that letter might be the making of his to-morrow, it belonged to to-day.

“O, by the way a letter came for you yesterday. It’s on the sitting-room table.”

But he showed no live interest in the letter. He was not expecting to hear from anyone. The post had never been kind to him.

“I don’t suppose it is anything important.”

She agreed.

“It looks rather like a circular. I’ll fetch it for you.”

“No, I’m capable of that.”

She waited. She believed that the letter was from Arthur Raymond, for on the upper left-hand corner of the envelope was printed “*Golden Magazine*”, but how much helpfulness there might be in the letter she could not say. Scarsdale came back to her. His face expressed excitement, but at the same time he was trying to restrain and to conceal it. His effort was to appear casual.

“It’s not a circular.”

“Isn’t it? I just put it on your table.”

She was willing him to open it. She watched him open it, using a knife to slit the flap of the envelope. She bent down to take the plate of hot toast that

was keeping itself warm in front of the fire; she heard the crackle of paper. If his fingers trembled a little she could sympathize.

“Eleanor—”

“Yes?”

“It’s from Raymond. He wants to know if I have written the end of that story. He wants to see it.”

“Why, that’s splendid.”

“He sounds quite keen.”

“Then, you’ll rewrite it, Spen?”

“I’ll begin work on it to-morrow.”

### 3

She let him have his way, but it was by no means an easy way, for when he lit his first pipe, and sat down at his table, his stomach refused to tolerate tobacco. The week nauseated him; it made him feel faint, and he was constrained to lie down on the sofa. At midday Mrs. Richmond came back from her work at Highbury Terrace, and found him depressed and the colour of vellum.

She had to be told what had happened, and gently she scolded him.

“Of course—you can’t begin just where you left off. You mustn’t be in such a hurry, Spen.”

He looked at her sorrowfully.

“I’ll give up smoking. Besides, I can’t afford it. But I have always been used to a pipe when I’m writing.”

“Well, go on smoking, but half a pipe to begin with. Remember you have been very ill.”

“Yes, Eleanor.”

He displayed the docility of a sick child.

“In future you will have your breakfast in bed. I can manage it before I go out. Also, the doctor said that you were to get as much fresh air as possible.”

“Yes, Eleanor. But I want to begin—”

“But not all at once. You can’t expect it.”

He obeyed her. He allowed her her wisdom, though his impatience to justify himself was like a pain. Almost he could not bear it, this procrastination, this hurt to his pride. He felt like a parasite. He was eating her food and using her house. She worked, while he potted and planned, and loathed his own ineptitude. His very love was ashamed. He watched her go out and he watched her come in, and sometimes he was afraid, for he could not believe that she could bear so generously with the poor, broken thing that was Spenser Scarsdale. And yet he consented. He accepted her wise tyranny. He suffered her to bring him his breakfast before she went to work; he made himself eat; he ate as though he were performing some sacred act. He went out and walked, and each day he walked a little farther, and returned feeling less tired. He did not smoke. He was like a man hardening himself for a race.

He suffered, and was silent, and she, calm and capable and kind, understood much more of him than he knew. She kept emotion out of the house. She made this season of his reprieve seem right and natural.

“You are looking ever so much better, Spen.”

He was. Moreover, the great urge was banking up in him, like a furnace fed by her wise and quiet hands. It was more than courage and desire. It had the inevitableness of a new manhood, devotion, will force, self knowledge, the strength of humility. He ate and walked and slept in order that he might justify himself to her.

One evening she took a packet of tobacco out of her bag.

“You haven’t smoked for a week, Spen.”

“No. But I’m going to smoke only when I work. Just a little to begin with. I’m going to try to-morrow.”

“I think you might.”

“I’d like to come down to breakfast, Eleanor.”

“Well, try.”

“It hurts me,—your doing all this—”

She looked down at him, and her eyes were deep.

“Does it? But—some men—”

“I didn’t realize, somehow, Eleanor, how a woman—”

She put the kettle on the fire.

“If you understand that—well—that’s half life.”

## 4

At a dusty little stationery shop in the Essex Road Scarsdale had bought two penny bottles of ink, one blue-black and one red, though red ink should have been a superfluity. Its colour attracted him, and when he sat down at his table on that December morning, he dipped a new nib into the red ink, and tried it on the back of an old envelope. This whimsical adventure in colour pleased him. It had a newness. For years he had scribbled in black, and his mood was for colour, new means and methods of self-expression, a more virile fancifulness. Red ink was to him more than red ink. It seemed to transmute itself into wine, blood, nectar.

He found himself scribbling on the envelope.

“In vino veritas.”

Yes, but both his wine and his red ink were mystical fluids. He was going to dip his pen in life and extract reality.

He filled a pipe and lit it, and pulling at it softly, re-read the story. He had discussed the story with Eleanor. He had asked her to criticize it, and to tell him just how and where the climax was at fault.—She had gone on with her sewing. “I don’t think the girl would have done that.” He had asked her to tell him just what the girl in the tale would have done, and when she had given her version, a voice in him had cried, “Of course.” He had seen it instantly, the rightness and the inevitableness of the ending. But why had he not seen it before?

Yet did that matter? He saw it now. The ending capped the tale as convincingly as Eleanor’s red hat crowned her head. He very much admired that red hat of hers, for the colour of it contrasted with the whiteness of her skin, even as this red ink stood out upon the paper, but more crudely so. Quite an original idea this producing a manuscript in red. Or was it just a whim, a provocation, a strange stimulus, like the smell of De Quincey’s apples?

He wrote, but at the end of the first day he tore up the two and a half pages, for the prose had a jerkiness and a rigidity, and it did not satisfy him. He went out and walked. He was vaguely dissatisfied, he had felt balked; he had encountered a sense of resistance. His imagination was stiff in the knees. Yet he was to learn that this very sense of resistance was to be a kind of mystic

wall within himself over which he would have to climb into that other world of seeing and understanding. It was to save him from a dreadful facility, from collecting the obvious and the easy as the press-gang collected men.

While warming his hands in front of the fire it occurred to him to reflect upon their uselessness. They did so little beyond manipulating a razor and fastening buttons and raising food and drink to his mouth, and setting words on paper. Somewhere he remembered coming across the phrase "Frustrated Hands". It recurred to him, and with a suggestive significance. Was it right and essential that a man should use his hands upon the stone and timber of life, and that mere words were empty symbols lacking reality? He stood up and looked round the room; he realized that the supper-things were still on the table and waiting to be washed up and put away. Eleanor was upstairs, turning down the beds.

He was moved to action. He found a tray and collected the cups and plates, the spoons and forks and knives, and carried them into the scullery. He made his first attempt at washing up.

She came downstairs and discovered him at the sink. He looked at her whimsically.

"Thought I would have a shot at this, Eleanor. Seems to me, a man's hands ought to be of some use, not mere scribbling machines."

She stood and watched him for a moment. He was very deliberate and careful. He used the glass-cloth almost as though he were applying a silk handkerchief to a piece of valuable glass.

"Easier to break things than one would have thought. I nearly dropped a plate."

She suffered him to complete the ritual.

## 5

In much the same delicate and deliberate way he completed his story. It was a pattern in red ink upon white paper, and when he contemplated it he realized that the creation possessed a quality that all previous work of his had lacked. It was like a circle; it had no jagged points and crumpled edges. A sense of the inevitableness of certain human happenings permeated it like blood.

He had the tale retyped, and to pay for the typing he sold half a dozen



books to a dealer in the Charing Cross Road. He delivered the typescript in person at the offices of the *Golden Magazine*. His letter to Arthur Raymond bore the date of the new year, January 1, 1924. He walked all the way back to Astey's Row, and saw a red sun set and impress strange patterns of light upon that stretch of water beyond the Canonbury Road. He stood for half a minute under the great plane tree, and wondered at life.

Arthur Raymond's letter came to him three days later. It was quietly enthusiastic. He accepted the tale; he offered Scarsdale thirty guineas for it; he suggested that Scarsdale should submit other stories.

And Scarsdale sat at his window, and waited for Eleanor to return from Highbury Terrace. He was happy. Never before had he known such happiness as this, thankfulness, joy, tenderness, a sense of escape from some deep pit. Life was renewed in him.

She came to the gate as the dusk was falling. He stood up; he went out into the passage. The door opened.

"Eleanor, my tale's been taken."

She closed the door gently, while feeling that some other door had opened. His voice had a resonance, a happy pride, but it spoke to her in other ways.

"Spen,—I'm so glad, so very glad."

It was dark in the passage, and suddenly she found that he had got hold of her hands; he was kissing them, the hands of a woman who worked.

"O my dear, it's you who helped me to do it."

One of her hands freed itself and rested on his head.

"We've done it together, Spen. I'm so glad."

## Chapter Thirty-one

SCARSDALE'S became a familiar figure in Astey's Row and not only in Astey's Row, but also in the Essex Road, though in Upper Street it was more anonymous. That winter he wore a loose, coffee-coloured overcoat and a faded blue scarf, and under the brim of a rather floppy black felt hat he showed to the world a kind of pensive pallor, and a brightness of the eyes. His figure had a singularity; it was intensively individual; it differed. It moved with a length and a loose leisureliness along pavements, pleasantly shabby, yet somehow suggesting colour and curiosity. Most obviously it did not belong to a shop or an office. It caught the conventional glance and puzzled it.

Moreover, Scarsdale's figure was always diverging. He would stop to stare. He indulged in what he had come to call "Intelligent gaping". He watched every sort of obscure activity, the trivial incidents of the streets, a hawker with a barrow, women gossiping, young men and girls, a carter unloading a van, people getting on and off buses, people in funny shabby motor-cars, children, shop windows, a man polishing the windows of a pub. He was as inquisitive and as interested as an urchin, because in writing about life he had discovered life and all its amazing and queer suggestiveness. The streets lived. If some old fellow picked cigarette-ends out of the gutter, Scarsdale picked them up with him in the spirit.

He wrote, he walked, he sat on seats. He became a specialist upon seats and their occupants. He found them more catholic and useful than the reading-room at the British Museum, for on the seats in Highbury Fields he discovered people who used or had used the reading-room of the Bulk in Bloomsbury. He had ceased to be solitary sitter upon seats. Almost, he sat on them with a purpose, though his pragmatism was not self-conscious and self-confessed, for he found those seats significant.

He did not take down books from a shelf, he took down people. He discovered the camaraderie, the clubbishness of this sitting world, its astonishing variousness, its unexpected qualities. Mostly the sitters were elderly men; most of them were shabby; some were hairy and belonged to the order of the rag-bag. They did not sit upon the tails of a nice and conventional dignity. They sat and spat and read and talked and smoked, and ate things out of bags and screws of newspaper. They discoursed upon the most unexpected matters, while looking like the world's discarded scarecrows. A superficial shabbiness might conceal strange learning. Scarsdale met among them an

Oxford don who would roll off Greek verse with a sonorous, dreamy persistence. An old fellow with no collar lectured him on bimetalism. There was a strange, starved creature with his hair in a fringe who was obsessed by Debussy.

In Highbury Fields on a seat in the main walk, and not far from the bathing pool, Scarsdale discovered “Smith”. He christened the man Smith, for he never heard the other fellow’s name. Smith was a tall, thin, gentlemanly person with bright eyes and a little hungry smile, who came and sat on a seat and ate his luncheon out of a paper bag. They met daily; they chatted. Smith’s whimsical wisdom was a plant that had had to live on air, and his black coat and trousers suggested that they were carefully brushed and put away directly the work of the day was done.

Scarsdale never discovered where Smith lived. Most of the sitters upon seats were reticent on this particular subject, but this obscure gentleman did impart to Scarsdale some of his secrets, and in Scarsdale’s consciousness there grew a picture of this quiet, sensitive, courageous creature. Smith had been this and that. He had worked as a barman, a bookie’s tout, a taxi-driver, a dishwasher in a restaurant. He had crowded all these activities into the years since the war. He had been submerged, and he had come up spluttering and fighting. He had his inspiration.

“You can’t chuck your hand in, you know, when you have got kids.”

The man’s face suggested effort, strain, and yet his eyes had a kind of inward happiness. He made Scarsdale think of a fellow climbing endless stairs with a box on his shoulder, doing things beyond his strength, and yet finding the doing of them good. At the time when Scarsdale met him, Smith had contrived to possess himself of a job with possibilities. He was managing the local branch of a big concern that sold furniture and household gear on the instalment system. He kept a little pocket-book in which—among other things—he recorded the ebb and flow of the weekly takings.

He would bring it out and study it as though it was the most eloquent book in the world.

“Twenty-three pounds up on last week.”

Scarsdale could reciprocate. He too made confessions.

“That’s good. I had another tale accepted yesterday. Does your job ever make you think of climbing stairs?”

Smith’s thin face had a moment of fierceness.

“By God, doesn’t it? With something clawing at your heels, and trying to pull you down again. I seem to have been climbing stairs for years.”

Scarsdale smiled.

“If we ever get to the top—I wonder what it will feel like?”

“To be able to sit still, my dear chap, and get a breather!”

Scarsdale liked the man. He admired the courage behind that little, thin, starved smile, the restraint of those long-fingered hands picking frugality out of a bag. Smith’s credo might be a very simple one, and Smith himself no intellectualist, but the spirit of the man mattered. His history was an epic of the shabby streets and of the crowds’ scuffle. And the inspiration came to Scarsdale. Why not write a book on Smith, and on the struggles and sorrows of Smith? Here was reality sitting on a seat, and waiting to be rendered into prose.

Scarsdale fell to the theme, or rather—he rose to it. He knew that he had gripped life, and that to write the story of John Smith,—gentleman—would be a fascinating business. The urge in him was sudden and strong and inevitable. He would produce what the world calls a human document. He was inspired; he wanted to hurry home and put Smith on paper; he felt that he would grow to love the Smith of his own creating. He did not think either of the public or the critics; he thought only of Smith. The days were far ahead when Mr. Paul Verulam,—stuffed with jealousy to the level of his yellow teeth,—would declare in print that “The stuff was not literature”, and that both Scarsdale and his Mr. Smith were sodden sentimentalists.

This happened in the spring of the year, and Scarsdale hastened back to Astey’s Row, and knew that his urge was to tell Eleanor about it. Almost he wanted to tell the great plane tree about Smith, and to talk Smith to Thomas the cat. It was a Friday and he found woman preparing for the great domestic ceremony of the year. To-morrow she would spring-clean.

Whatever Eleanor chose to do was right, and Scarsdale, remembering the exertions of a year ago, assumed that he was to be her partner.

“I’ll help. Suppose we get up early.”

But with a kind of grave finality she informed him that his co-operation would not be needed. She poured out his tea.

“I’m having a woman in.”

“But can’t I—?”

“No. You had better go out for the day.”

She was mysterious; pragmatical, but mysterious, and for the moment he put Smith aside and gave his attention to her order. Why wouldn't she let him help? And he was to go out for the day, and escape the dust and the disorder. But he had a feeling that there were other principles involved, and that she had some reasons of her own, and that he ought to be able to react to them. Now, what exactly did she mean? Did she consider that the beating of carpets was not his job, that it was not dignified, or did she think that he was not equal to it? Of course, the situation was intimate and subtle, but his essential shyness still stood outside a kind of sacred circle. She was a superlative creature, she was woman, she was the woman; her implications were inevitable, but Scarsdale himself had not yet come to the point of regarding himself as inevitable. He remained the diffident creature, the boy in his late forties. He had written and placed four stories in the last three months, and his income promised to be nearly two hundred pounds a year. He carried inside him a kind of blind and devoted humility. Eleanor was a miraculous person. Here was the veritable Madonna of the Peach Blossom, and he sat and gazed. He was most absurdly innocent. Somehow he did not realize that Astey's Row was not peach blossom.

But her decree was final. He accepted it, though its significance eluded him. He was just a little bothered and puzzled. He had come by the knowledge that hands are to be used, and that frustrated hands make for a feeling of futility. In his odd way he had taught himself to be a domestic creature, and Mrs. Richmond allowed him his usefulness; she allowed him to make his own bed and clean his own shoes, and to help her with the washing up.

But why would she not allow him to move furniture and to take up carpets, and to beat them in the front garden?

He filled his pipe. He said, "All right. I'll go out for the day."

She put coal on the fire, and he watched her. Was there any other person in the world who could put coal on the fire as she did? And suddenly he began to tell her about Smith.

"I think I've got an idea, rather a human idea, for a book—I mean. It's about a man I met in Highbury Fields."

She sat down and listened to his exposition of Smith. She listened with interest. She watched his face.

"Do you see the idea, Eleanor? Just the life of plain Smith, quite simple and human and real."

Her hands smoothed her skirt.

“Well,—that’s worth writing about, Spen. About real people. You do it. More your job than spring-cleaning.”

He was both pleased and perplexed.

“But spring-cleaning’s just as real, Eleanor.”

“O, yes, for me. But you might make a great story of that. You can do it.”

He wanted to get up and kiss her, but he had not yet arrived at the realization of the fundamental reality that his miraculous woman wanted to be kissed.

## 2

They breakfasted early, and to his surprise and puzzlement Scarsdale found that his breakfast had been laid in the sitting-room, and that he was to take it alone. Already, a lady in a cloth cap was busy rolling up the rugs and linoleum in the kitchen. Scarsdale heard her in action, and emitting a nasal bleating. She asked questions.

“The gen’leman’s goin’ art?”

Mrs. Richmond was monosyllabic.

“Yes.”

“’E don’t look very strong. What’s ’e do fer a livin’?”

“Mr. Scarsdale’s an author.”

“Aufor! Writes for th’ papers?”

“Yes.”

“Well, ’e don’t seem t’grow fat on it.”

There was the sound of a door being closed, and the lady’s twanging voice was muffled, but apparently it could not be suppressed even by Mrs. Richmond’s brevity. Scarsdale finished his breakfast. He felt rather superfluous, and in a mood to escape from that intrusive voice. It did not belong, and he had resented its remark upon his lack of adiposity either in body or in possessions. He lit his pipe, and observed that the sun was shining, and suddenly his mood was for the open air and for some spaciousness that eschewed houses. Smith and he were parted for the day so far as paper was concerned. He fetched his black felt hat and his coffee-coloured overcoat, and

went out. A voice prompted him, suggesting that a tram would carry him within a hundred yards of Waterloo station, and that from Waterloo station trains ran. He took his tram. He travelled down to Hampton Court and spent the day there, a meditative and musing day, for his problem was not Smith. It had a domestic flavour. What was the mysterious inwardness that he had divined in Eleanor, this mood of non-consent, her refusal to allow him to whack carpets?

Snobbery? No, there was no snobbery in Eleanor Richmond, and as he strolled in the grassy spaces between the tilting-yard and the tennis-court, where the trees were powdered with green and the grass was full of daffodils, he saw Eleanor apart from Astey's Row. She belonged to the country, to hills and valleys and the open sky. She had dignity, that strange, natural dignity that is like the beautiful poise of a stag or the composure of a cat. Also, her dignity was a quality of the soul; it enabled her to make the most commonplace acts appear gracious and beautiful.

And being what she was, so unlike one of the crowd figures, those things of gristle and of sinew with their unfinished faces and their dead eyes, she yet could move among the crowd with a silent and singular rightness. She was straight where the woman in the cap was crooked, woman among the apes. Yes, apes, though good apes. And suddenly he seemed to discover the ape in his secret self, the chattering, busy, picking creature. Yes, he could imagine an ape squatting and whacking a carpet. There might be that in her which willed him to be otherwise.

He went and looked at the Dutch garden. He insinuated himself into one of the arched gazebos and stared. He saw tulips, myosotis, aubretia, a beautiful nude figure against sombre yews. This exquisite thing was an artifice, man-conceived and man-made, and yet very beautiful in the wilfulness of its order. In the main, man made such a mess of his environment; he seemed to be so satisfied with a utilitarian squalor, and commercial hideousness. But Eleanor Richmond? He could imagine her making of life, the simple happenings of yesterday, to-day and to-morrow, a pattern like this garden. Yes, even in Astey's Row.

He returned about supper-time to find the little house itself and in order. He had ridden on the top of a bus, and watched the lights blur a soft, blue gloom. He had seen a full moon rise over London. The lady in the cap had departed, and in the sitting-room he found his table and his papers nicely ready for to-morrow.

“Supper, Spen.”

He joined her in the kitchen.

“Everything over, Eleanor?”

“Yes.”

“You’ve been amazingly quick.”

She placed a hot dish on the table.

“O, that woman was better than her voice. Where have you been?”

“Hampton Court. Lovely down there.”

He was about to tell her that she should have been with him, and then he understood that—in a sense—she had been with him.

“Daffodils out. Just a little green on the trees. Those places have their uses. Good for the crowd soul.”

She looked a little tired after that day of dust and disorder, and he noticed it. She had forgotten the bread, and she rose to get it, but he forestalled her.

“No, I’ll get it. You sit still. You’ve had a long day. I sometimes wish you wouldn’t work so hard.”

“Work doesn’t tire me, Spen.”

“But you are tired to-night.”

“That woman. The poor, silly soul of her. It’s people who tire one.”

He cut the bread, and for a moment he looked troubled. Was it possible that he tired her? Did she have to bear with a personality that was ineffectual and exhausting? He glanced at her as he held out the bread.

“Yes, people do. The people who won’t let you be your self. And the terrible thing is that a bore never knows—”

He paused, and she was quick to appreciate his hesitation.

“No, you don’t bore me, Spen.”

“Sure?”

“You let me be myself.”

He looked at his slice of bread as though it was too good to be broken.

“Well,—I should be a fool, shouldn’t I?—to interfere with a work of art. Obviously. I’m not quite such a long-legged fool. I’m growing up.”

He stole a glance at her.



“I’m going to start on Smith to-morrow. I have a feeling that Smith is going to be rather helpful. You know—it’s a funny thing, Eleanor—”

She waited.

“Writing about life seems somehow to teach one about oneself. Funny, isn’t it?”

“It might be quite natural. Why shouldn’t it be?”

“Yes, getting at yourself through other people. You know, I’ve got a lot of myself through you. It’s a fact.”

She buttered her bread, and her face had the stillness of inward consent.

“Perhaps it’s mutual.”

He raised his cup, drank, and put the cup down again. He wanted to say certain things to her, and he couldn’t.

### 3

But Smith was not inarticulate like Mrs. Richmond’s lodger in the presence of Mrs. Richmond, nor would Astey’s Row have suffered from Scarsdale’s inhibitions. It referred to Scarsdale as “the lodger”, and it supposed that Mrs. Richmond and her lodger cohabited. It inferred the obvious. As the lady of the cap put it, “Yus, there be two beds, but that don’t mean anythink. Besides, if she got married agen, suppose she’d lose ’er pension. Dry sort o’ stick too. Not the kind a ‘fella, I’d chuck two bob a day for. But then, there’s no accountin’ fa’ tastes.” It is more than probable that Mrs. Richmond knew to the last adjective what Astey’s Row said about herself and Scarsdale. Not that it mattered, and yet there was a fastidiousness in her that disliked other people’s dust on her skirt, and resented pawings and intimacies.

Moreover, Scarsdale was absorbed in Smithiana. He breathed and ate and dreamed Smith, and it was admirable and right that it should be so, for she understood the significance of Smith. This strange, shy, hypersensitive lover of hers was wooing her through a book. It was to be his gesture, his justification, his marriage settlement. She was curiously wise as to what was at the back of his shy mind.

He wrote and wrote and wrote. He would come into the kitchen at night with a look of exultation.

“Another chapter, Eleanor. I don’t know what has happened to me. The

stuff never came like this before.”

In a way his inspiration paid her homage, but her deep eyes saw not only the book but the man. Sometimes she would wonder at herself and at the way things happened, and at the incalculable why and wherefore, for even a year ago she was quite sure that she would have no more marriage. Marriage could be a messy state, and it involved you with that messy creature—man. It was too dominant and absorbing a business in which an overgrown and conceited boy had to be flattered lest he sulked, and if you did not flatter him some other woman would. Man was such a disturbing, door-banging creature; he interfered with your apartness, and did not even consider that woman might be different in the moods of her aloofness. He wanted everything at once and immediately when the humour was on him. His buttons came off at the most inconvenient moments, and straightway he accused you of neglecting him. He took your ministrations for granted, and threw things at you, “Here, Nell, mend this—will you. I’ve got to be off.”

She liked her own bed, her own sheets, her own pillow. She had come to love her independence and her apartness, and then life had thrust at her this rather helpless creature, and she had found herself involved. She had been moved by his frightened eyes. The obscure little tragedy of him had imposed itself upon her. Also, he was not like the previous man, the red and brown male with brisk mustachios and an air of flat infallibility. He was not sexually complacent. He did not wallow in a woman’s sacred self as though it were a bed—his—and ever ready to accept him.

Never again could she suffer that sort of man, and his shallow assumptions, and penny-press mentality. She had seen all round such a man and through him. But Scarsdale was different. She had a feeling that he wanted to give her things, and not merely material things, but bits of himself, moments of understanding, silence for her silence. He did not trample and neigh.

Yes, life was a funny business. She had begun to realize that it would not be complete without this sensitive creature, and that without him she would feel lonely.

## *Chapter Thirty-two*

SCARSDALE wrote and wrote. He got up early in the morning to work before the voices of the dear little children were heard in the land. He wrote after breakfast, and blessed compulsory education. He went out and walked for an hour and came back again to his pen and his manuscript. No longer did he use red ink, for there seemed to be sufficient red ink in "Smith" to make that obscure and struggling person vivid and alive. He was obsessed by Smith and by the sorrows and the sufferings and the pertinacities of Smith. The fellow smiled his thin, little hungry smile, and brushed the coat collar of a patient shabbiness, and cherished his shillings, and ate his bread and cheese.

Scarsdale discovered romance in Smith, the glamour of the seemingly sordid transmuted into an obscure heroism. Smith was so English in his emotional simplicity, in his decencies, in his superstitions, in his sort of boyish belief that cricket should be cricket. In some ways he was so Victorian, the sort of fellow who exasperated the neo-realists because he had a silly preference for clean shirts, and was stuffed full of middle-class illusions. Smith believed that a chap ought to stick it and not go wallowing. He was Thomas in civies, the fool fellow who got stuck in the Flanders mud when the bright and superior young men adhered ingeniously to other softnesses. He grouched and stuck it; he sang songs and stuck it, he was absurdly pleased when he got a dry pair of socks. He was a quite disgusting creature moved by an absurd goodwill, obstinately convinced that there were decencies in life that mattered, and that it was neither clever nor intriguing to go off with your friend's wife and send him the bill for the motor-car. In fact, Smith did not think sufficiently about his own fleshliness, or about complex this or complex that. His complex was courage, and the Paul Verulams who had eased their haunches in chairs, found Smith an emetic creature. He wasn't real, he wasn't literature. He was sottishly decent instead of being sottishly and interestingly decadent. He wanted to love and to be loved. He wanted to do good things for the people he loved. He endured like the man at the plough. He was the sort of silly fool who had not contrived to be the possessor of a useful neurosis within ten miles of a belt of barbed wire.

But on one Sunday morning Scarsdale looked out of his sitting-room window, and instantly Smith disappeared. Someone was ill at Highbury Terrace, and Eleanor had put on a hat and gone up to inquire. She had returned, but not alone. A man stood with her outside the gate, a florid person

with a rust-red moustache and a shiny face, a breezy yet substantial person very much in his Sunday clothes. Obviously, he was interested in Eleanor; his very shininess was a flattering effulgence. He wore gloves; he had a buttonhole; his fascinations had all the airs and graces of a premeditated strutting.

Scarsdale felt shocked. He supposed that he ought not to be looking out of the window, and he lowered his head, and fiddled with his pen. But who was the fellow, and what business had he smirking there, yes, just like an enormous shopwalker uttering words of welcome, "Step this way, madam, the whole world is yours." Beastly occasion! And Scarsdale felt suddenly hot and savage with himself for feeling as he did. Besides, the man had looks, a certain presence, a pawkiness. A florid, excuse my glove fellow. Damn him! And Scarsdale took another look through the window, and saw Eleanor coming in, and the man with the buttonhole holding his hat six inches above his head. He was slightly bald. Scarsdale was glad of his baldness.

He made an effort to revert to Smith, but Smith had disappeared round the corner and could not be recovered. But how very absurd! Obviously, he was jealous, and of that! How very young and elemental of him. He sat listening. He heard Eleanor go up the stairs, and presently she came down again and entered the kitchen. Not very significant happenings, certainly, but he felt feverish, incomprehensibly restless. He wanted to go and look at Eleanor, to reassure himself about something, to discover whether she was just Eleanor, his particular Eleanor.

But he did not go. He sat and felt foolish and uncomfortable and self-conscious. He sat there for more than an hour, staring and fidgeting, and trying to convince himself that he was a ridiculous creature. He listened. The little house had a pregnant stillness. What was she doing? What would she be doing at half-past twelve on a Sunday morning?

And suddenly he heard her voice.

"Spen."

He pushed his chair back with unnecessary haste. He went and opened the door.

"Yes."

"Dinner's ready."

He saw her. She was unfastening her apron, and for some strange reason that apron reassured him, but not wholly so. There was no mysterious change in her. Her eyes met his.

“Working all the morning?”

“Yes.”

There was a savoury smell. He entered the kitchen and sat down at the table. He began to talk, and he felt that he was talking the most salubrious nonsense, but it appeared to have no effect on her. She carved the small loin of mutton with rich composure; she passed him his plate.

“Hungry?”

“Not so very.”

“Sitting in a chair all the morning. And Sunday too.”

He glanced at her obliquely. Now what did she mean? Did she mean anything? He tried to digest her words and to assimilate them.

That same evening the gentleman with the buttonhole recurred. It happened after supper, and Scarsdale had lit a pipe and was helping Eleanor to wash up, when the front door bell rang. Scarsdale did not drop the plate that he was drying, but the glass-cloth felt very damp in his hands. He did not look at Eleanor, but went on polishing that particular plate. He did not make any remark. He did not say—“Now, I wonder who the devil that is.” He knew, or he thought that he knew. Neither he nor Eleanor had mentioned the man with the buttonhole. She dried her hands on the roller towel. She said, “I’ll finish these things if you like, Spen, when I come back.”

He polished that plate.

“No, quite all right. I’ll go on with it.”

She left him. He heard the sound of voices, and somehow the man’s voice suggested to Scarsdale the yellow yolk of an egg. It had rotundity, fatness, self-assurance; it seemed to speak across a counter with breezy optimism; it was the sort of voice that would accompany the slapping of butter into neat pats, or the dumping on the counter of packets of tea. Also, it was a gelatinous voice; it adhered, it clung. It followed Eleanor Richmond into the sitting-room; it continued there for a while; it adhered to the silence of the house like a kind of eggy smear.

Scarsdale was still polishing that same plate. He both listened and tried not to listen. He hated that voice and its owner as he had never hated anything in his life before. Smearly, yes, smearly and arrogant. It was a sacrilegious presence; it had dared.

The two voices grew louder. They were moving from the sitting-room to

the front door. Scarsdale heard the man laugh, and the laugh was less round and easy than it should have been.

“All right, my dear, think it over. Any evening—you know.”

Scarsdale put the plate down and picked it up again. Damn that fellow. Damn his—. The front door closed, and Mrs. Richmond returned to him; she resuming her washing up; she noticed that Scarsdale could not have been very industrious during her absence. The big blue and white basin contained just as much crockery.

She said, “That was Mr. Fogwill.”

Scarsdale’s voice was a flat echo.

“O,—Mr. Fogwill.”

“He has a shop in the Essex Road.”

“A shop. A grocer’s shop.”

“Yes.”

Her hands were busy. She was douce and serene.

“He wanted me to go to the theatre with him.”

Scarsdale wiped the interior of a teacup. Damn the fellow! Asking this supreme woman to go to the theatre! And with that egg and bacon voice of his.

“Which theatre, Eleanor?”

“But I’m not going.”

“Not?”

“No.”

“You mean—you don’t want to?”

“No,—I don’t want to?”

Scarsdale put down the cup, and he put it down very gently, yet had it contained the yolk of an egg he might have felt urged to smash it exultantly against the wall. His pipe had gone out, and he went to the fireplace and lit a spill. The vase full of paper spills was his own idea. Economy. He relit his pipe and a sudden inspiration came to him.

“Eleanor.”

“Yes.”

“Would you let me take you to the theatre?”

Now, what a question to ask! But his asking of it was an event in the life of that small house. She smiled at him over a firm and deliberate shoulder.

“Of course. I’d love it.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

## 2

Scarsdale bought upper circles at the Haymarket. He had asked Mrs. Richmond to choose a play, but she passed back the choice to him, saying that she did not know much about plays and theatres. In fact the play was of no consequence at all; it might have been “Cock Robin”, and the great occasion would have been just as significant and singular. But Scarsdale was in the clouds, and transcending the eggy radiance of Mr. Fogwill. He and Eleanor were going out together, and she wanted to go with him, and he had money in his pocket.

He said, “I think we ought to have a little dinner. Say, somewhere in Soho. My evening, you know, Eleanor.”

She consented, and Scarsdale took a bus and travelled all the way to Great Compton Street to reserve a table at “Le Petit Prince”. Coming home on another bus he was a little bothered about the clothes that should be worn. Evening-dress was not necessary; besides, the moth had got into his dinner-jacket, and his two white shirts had not been worn since they had been laundered three or four years ago. They were rather yellow. Besides—Eleanor. But somehow he was not worried about Eleanor, or her dress, or her atmosphere. Eleanor had an inevitableness; what she did she did, and it would be right. He decided to wear his black suit, and his usual hat and overcoat. He had no other overcoat; it might be the colour of coffee, but in Soho—in Soho you might be anything.

Eleanor surprised him. She had a new black dress, or—at least—he could not remember having seen that dress before; she had a black velvet cloak lined with what appeared to be cherry-coloured silk. She had a little cherry-coloured hat and a black vanity-bag with an ivory catch. She looked—well—he couldn’t get the adjective. There was no adjective fit to be applied to Eleanor. And she was so calm, so quietly right, so—Yes—mature was the word, but by mature

Scarsdale's wonder chose to place itself in front of a statue, a thing that had the quality of astonishing rightness. A voice murmured in him, "She could go anywhere. But—of course—she could go anywhere."

He cleared his throat.

"Eleanor,—you look—"

Again the adjective would not arrive, but adjectives can be superfluous on certain occasions. She understood. If man is inarticulate and just gazes, the lily needs no tinting.

Scarsdale had ordered a taxi. It was to be at the end of Astey's Row at half-past six, and at half-past six they closed the door of the house, and Eleanor dropped the key into her black silk bag. They entered the taxi, and were driven down into the Essex Road, and along it into Upper Street. Scarsdale looked proud; he was proud of Eleanor and of the taxi, and of the style in which this spring evening dressed itself. Even the Pentonville Road had a glamour.

He stole a glance at Eleanor. She was sitting there with the black bag in her lap, and her hands folded over it. She did not fidget or chatter, and he marvelled at his being in a taxi with her, and sitting beside her, yes, just as though he belonged.

He felt that he ought to say something.

"Nothing like doing a thing comfortably."

"Yes, Spen, especially at the end of a day's work."

They arrived in Compton Street, and Scarsdale paid the taximan, and hurried to open the door of the restaurant for Eleanor. A waiter met them. He eyed Scarsdale, and then discovered the lady; an incipient superciliousness changed to unction.

"Table reserved, sir? Yes. Good evening, madame."

He gave Eleanor a little bow. They were conducted to their table; the waiter was absorbed in settling madame into her chair; he left Scarsdale to deal with his own hat and coat.

Scarsdale asserted himself.

"You might take these, will you."

The waiter took them.

Eleanor was presented with the menu. It was the sort of menu in which brussels sprouts are translated into heaven and presented to St. Peter as flowers



of sanctity. The waiter stood at her elbow. Would madame take grapefruit, or hors d'œuvres, or smoked salmon? Eleanor appeared deliberate, judicial. She would have grapefruit, yes, and thick soup. There was an entrée with a long name, and she indicated it with a finger and waited till the waiter uttered the mystic words. Then, she nodded. The main alternatives were mutton cutlets or veal a la something. She could deal with the cutlets, and the vegetables did not need rendering. The scroll ended with an ice. Yes, Eleanor liked ices.

Scarsdale observed her and adored. He asked for the wine list.

“Now, what about a little claret?”

With an air of serenity she confessed that she preferred Burgundy. Of course, then Burgundy was the wine of the gods, though her prompting had been inspired by an advertisement of Australian wine, a purple flagon surrounded by very green vine leaves. She was a woman of resources.

“A bottle of Beaune, waiter.”

The evening felt smooth, and Scarsdale was moved to remember that other evening when he had taken Julia Marwood to the theatre, and how ineptly he had emerged from his adventure with that five-hundred-pound young woman. But Eleanor was not Julia; she sat there looking happy with the evening and herself and with him, and when the waiter poured red wine into the glasses, Scarsdale raised his glass.

“Eleanor”—that was all he said and it was sufficient. They drunk to each other; they were together.

As for the play, it was a middle-class comedy, quite obviously human and pleasant, but Scarsdale did not give his whole attention to the play. Something was happening down there on the stage, and people came and went, and people laughed and talked, but the reality of the evening was that he was sitting beside Eleanor in the half-darkness, that his arm touched hers, and that he could steal little looks at Eleanor. She had taken off her hat, and her hair looked like a black wreath, and her face had the softness of acceptance. Sometimes she smiled. She was silent and shadowy, yet solid and real.

His left hand touched something, and was touched in return. His fingers closed on the object, and other fingers closed on his. Almost he held his breath; he looked at the stage and it seemed a mere transparency. He was sitting holding Eleanor Richmond's hand, and she was holding his.

Scarsdale found a taxi, but as he opened the door for her she said, “Just as far as the ‘Angel’. Then, let’s walk.”

Strange old memories! Scarsdale could remember how in the days of his youth the “Angel” at Islington had associated itself with golden wings and a smile of Victorian felicity, but now the rampant streets ascended to no calvary. Light refreshments for the long-legged and the shingled dispensed by Messrs. Lyons’ Nippies. Did the weasel ever pop in the City Road? Pentonville still had its prison, but the church of St. John stood behind chained and rusty gates, with its windows boarded or broken, and even its door a derelict sign—“God is Love”. But God is petrol. And the Agricultural Hall may house a Grocers’ Exhibition, and red coats have fled to Olympia, and the Bailiff’s Daughter died long ago. Was it possible that he—Spenser Scarsdale—had seen Tree play Hamlet at the Islington Theatre? He had been a lanky boy in an Eton jacket, and his collar had felt too tight.

But Eleanor Richmond was reality. She was no memory. She wore short skirts, and her hair was shingled; it had glossy undulations. They were walking arm-in-arm along Upper Street, and if Islington Green was asphalt and iron railings and plane trees, spring still happened. The night had softened or effaced an almost universal shabbiness; it hung spangles of light upon ugly surfaces; it turned even the thundering buses into silver coaches.

Scarsdale did not feel the paving-stones. He floated, and yet was aware of the warm solidity of Eleanor’s arm. Even the Essex Road transcended itself. Woman and life persisted.

He said something banal to her. Probably it was about beauty, and beauty may cease when it is talked about. It is better left to the senses, and her silence was mystical.

“We can’t help things, Spen.”

It was by the lower railings of Islington Green that he discovered his inspiration.

“That’s true, eternally true. I can’t help one thing. I don’t want to help it. What I mean is—”

She knew quite well what he meant.

“It just happens.”

He pressed her arm.

“Yes, just happens. Amazing. I mean—to me. Though nothing could be more logical—from my point of view.”

Logical! Well, of course, and she smiled at the Essex Road, and at his quaint tentative tenderness. She liked him that way. She preferred his inarticulate exaltation to the glibness of complacency.

They walked; their steps seemed in perfect rhythm. They passed the Islington Free Library, and ascended the steps into Astey's Row. Behind the iron railings the New River had ceased to be a river, and odd litter lay about below the finality of a blank brick wall. Over the way was Pleasant Place, and suddenly Scarsdale's left arm grew tense.

"Eleanor—"

"Yes, Spen."

"You're the most wonderful thing in the world. Yes, what I mean is, I—well—you're just—well—just wonderful."

Her arm answered his.

"I like you to feel like that, Spen."

"Really?"

"Yes."

He said again, "How wonderful."

They arrived at the gate. It seemed as solitary as a gate on the edge of a wood. He paused; he pushed the gate open and held it. He looked at the small house.

"I feel I oughtn't to come in here."

"You need not feel like that, Spen."

He trembled.

"Eleanor, you won't think me a slow ass, will you? But I'm so sensitive about some things. I want to make good.—Now, supposing, supposing—I make good—"

"Why, yes—"

"I mean,—if I can get my book taken, would you—?"

"Would I—?"

"Yes. Marry me?"

Her consenting face seemed very near to his, and suddenly he kissed her, and then stood silent and still and shocked.

“O, my dear, how wonderful, how very wonderful. I can’t think of anything else to say—somehow. But how very wonderful.”

## Chapter Thirty-three

APRIL, May, June, ninety-odd days at a thousand or more words a day, and “Smith” was finished in type. In more senses than one it was a *tour de force*, a book written with blood and tears, and with a purpose within its purpose. Its structure may have been old-fashioned; it had a beginning and an end; it rambled a little at times, but its ramblings were human. It contained elements of Scarsdale, simplicities, nuances, a sort of essential faith in the decency of man the animal. It had a naïveté, the prominent and gentle eyes of its interpreter, the colour of his coffee-coloured coat and old blue scarf. In a sense it was very personal.

But when he had written the last page Scarsdale sat in his chair and stared out of the window. Something had gone out of him and registered itself upon paper, but whether it was good or bad in its potentialities, for the life of him he could not say. It had not the objectivity of a bunch of bananas. He sat and wondered whether his soul’s merchandise had value.

Also, he was afraid. In fact, fear was the predominant emotion. He had finished, and he might be finished. “Smith” might be his final reaction against years of futility. And what was “Smith”—after all—but the stuff which the intellectually genteel describe as fiction, though Scarsdale was not writing for the intellectually genteel. He was writing for the man in himself, and the man in the other fellow across the way. He had tried to put the quintessence of the Essex Road on paper. He did not quite know what he had done.

And he was afraid. “Smith” was a longish book, some hundred and twenty thousand words, and when he sat and considered this preposterous piece of prose in which the obscurities and ingenuities of a shabby little fellow were recorded, he was the creature of doubt. Who would publish such a book, who would read it? He had tried it on Eleanor, and Eleanor had said strange, sweet things to him about “Smith”. She had said that there were happenings in the book that had made her want to cry, but then Eleanor was prejudiced, and not a publisher.

His fear was an urge. He was learning not to sit with his neck in a noose like the rabbit of Martinsell Hill. If “Smith” was a book in praise of courage, of the valour of the doss-house and the coffee-stall and the London seat, it behooved its creator to try and play the Smith. Scarsdale’s hare’s eyes might have a natural timidity, but there were other urges in him. He had given Eleanor a ring; they had chosen it at a jeweller’s in Upper Street, diamonds and

sapphires. It had cost Scarsdale the price of a short story.

Exquisite extravagance! Yet it was the beginning of other extravagances, of an adventuresomeness that would send this long-legged creature tilting at windmills.

He tore himself from his chair. He went down by bus, and sought an interview with Arthur Raymond. He was both apologetic and desperate.

“Awful cheek my troubling you. The fact is I have just finished a novel. I don’t think it is so bad. I was wondering whether you would advise me.”

He was rather breathless. He had put his hat down on Raymond’s desk, and suddenly he recovered it as though he felt that he had been guilty of discourtesy.

“About a publisher?”

“Yes. Very difficult to get a first novel read. Naturally. But if you could advise me.”

Raymond glanced at the clock. He was always glancing at the clock, and yet finding time to be kind.

“If you like,—I’ll read it.”

“Oh, I couldn’t ask you to do that.”

“As a matter of fact I have a quiet week-end. If you care to send it along.”

Scarsdale stood up, sat down again, while his hands crushed his hat.

“Most awfully generous of you. I—I accept. Of course—you may think it rubbish. It’s about a fellow named Smith, a seedy, obscure chap, and his struggles. I’ll let you have it at once.”

“I’ll give you an honest opinion.”

Raymond did more than that. He read “Smith” in the orchard of his Sussex cottage, and he found Smith an astonishing fellow. Now, how the devil had Scarsdale—! But, then, life sprang surprises upon you, especially in the world of creation, and a soirée of some learned society might tempt you to believe that you had trespassed by mistake into a private asylum. Freaks. Raymond took the typescript of “Smith” back to town, and wrote a letter to Malcolm of Makin & Malcolm, and had Scarsdale’s manuscript packed up by his secretary and despatched to Messrs. Makin & Malcolm.

His letter ran as follows.

“DEAR MALCOLM,

“I may be wrong, but I’m of the opinion that I have made a discovery. Read this novel. I think it is the most human bit of work I have struck for years. I know the author and I have reason to believe that he knows what he is writing about. To me ‘Smith’ is a creation.

“Possibly you may not see eye to eye with me. Still, I would like you to read this book.

“Always yours,

“ARTHUR RAYMOND.”

He dictated a letter to Scarsdale.

“DEAR MR. SCARSDALE,

“I congratulate you on ‘Smith’. The book so moved me that I have taken the liberty of submitting it to Malcolm of Makin & Malcolm. I can promise you nothing. But I believe in that book, and if Malcolm sees it as I do, you should hear something.

“Sincerely yours,

“ARTHUR RAYMOND.”

When Scarsdale had read this letter of Raymond’s he felt strange. He went out into the garden and walked round and round the path, though the path’s orbit did not exceed ten yards. So, the conscious part of him went round and round Raymond’s letter, and marvelled and walked softly, hardly daring to find the earth so solid. “Smith” had been introduced to Malcolm, and even Scarsdale knew that Malcolm’s reputation for flair and energy was exceptional. So, Scarsdale went round and round the path, feeling that he could go on walking for hours, and that he would not cease from walking until the crisis was over.

But—Eleanor? He decided to say nothing to Eleanor. If the great thing comes to pass—well—he would have still greater things to say to Eleanor. And if Malcolm refused the book—!

He went in at last and wrote to Raymond. He thanked him; he felt that he could go on thanking Raymond for ever and ever. And when Eleanor returned from Highbury Terrace she found him scribbling at his table in the window. He looked up at her with a little, secret, dim smile.

“I put the kettle on, Nellie.”

Yes, he had remembered to put on the kettle.

A week later the incredible thing happened. Mr. Malcolm had telephoned Raymond for Scarsdale's address, and the following conversation had taken place between them.

"I say—that you, Raymond. Yes. About the author of 'Smith'. Got his address?"

"What about the book?"

"Extraordinary bit of work. Rather crude and emotional in places. A kind of innocent book, and yet so damned real. Good of you to send it along."

"Going to take it?"

"I am. I have a flair about that book. What's this fellow's address? Who is he?"

"He has done journalism. Has written me some good short stories. Rather an odd fish. His address is,—wait a moment, here we are,—c/o Mrs. Richmond, Astey's Row, Canonbury. Got it?"

"Yes. Thanks, Raymond. Lunch with me at the 'Garrick' on Wednesday, will you?"

"Love to."

"Right-o. Good-bye."

Malcolm's letter arrived by the first post. It was like Malcolm the man, frank and abrupt, both shrewd and impulsive. Malcolm was one of those unusual persons, a hard-headed enthusiast. He wrote things about "Smith" that made Scarsdale go all tremulous and tight inside. He asked Scarsdale to lunch on Tuesday. He said—that provided they could agree upon terms, he—Malcolm—proposed to publish "Smith" in the late autumn. He emphasized with complete frankness the risk involved in the publication of a first novel and the problematical extent of the book's success.

Scarsdale had read the letter in his sitting-room. Mrs. Richmond was upstairs putting on her hat before walking to Highbury Terrace, and suddenly she heard Scarsdale's voice at the foot of the stairs. It had a breathlessness.

"Eleanor,—Eleanor."



She came out on the narrow landing.

“Yes,—Spen.”

“The book,—Malcolm wants to publish ‘Smith’.”

“O, my dear, how splendid.”

His long legs carried him swiftly up the stairs. Almost he seemed to crouch at her feet; his arms embraced her knees.

“Eleanor,—I can hardly believe it. O, my dear, isn’t it wonderful.”

She bent over him.

“Spen,—I believed it would. I’ve been praying.”

“Praying! How wonderful, of you and everything.”

### 3

“Smith” was to be published in October. The agreement had been signed; Scarsdale was to receive £100 as an advance on royalties, and the royalties payable were ten per cent. per copy sold on the first five thousand copies, fifteen per cent. on the second five thousand, twenty per cent. after ten thousand copies had been sold, but Scarsdale’s imagination never mounted that twenty per cent. Pegasus. He supposed that “Smith” might sell some two or three thousand copies, and that for a first novel by a thoroughly obscure person such a sale would be considered a success. The hundred pounds advanced to him by Messrs. Makin & Malcolm would be covered by the sales.

He was honest with Eleanor.

“I don’t expect that we shall make more than the hundred pounds out of the book.”

She accepted the “we.” The partnership deed was to be sealed.

“If you wrote one book a year, Spen.”

“Short stories pay better. Supposing I had a dozen short stories accepted at eight guineas apiece. A hundred for a book, and roughly a hundred for stories. Of course I might do more.”

“Two hundred a year. We could live here on that, Spen. Besides, I could go on working.”

“But I don’t want you to,—Eleanor, unless—of course—”

“We can see.”

So, Scarsdale sat down and wrote short stories. Raymond had given him other introductions, and he had placed three stories with other editors. It was not in his mind for the moment to produce a successor to “Smith”; in fact, he had no idea for a second book, no fructifying theme or character. For the moment “Smith” sufficed him and filled the future. Moreover, Scarsdale had other and more moving matters on his mind. He and Eleanor were to be married.

## 4

To Scarsdale his marriage was an extraordinary event. He was very innocent about it. The mild highbrow, the precise and prosy person had disappeared to re-emerge as a rather boyish creature. He had very little vanity. He was surprised at things, at his creating of “Smith”, at the acceptance of “Smith”, at Eleanor, at the wonder of Eleanor, at the supreme wonder of her wishing to marry him. It was not that he had the makings of an eager and uxorious ass, but—rather—he was the rabbit of Martinsell released from the snare, and finding every clover leaf and grass blade marvellous.

They travelled down to those same uplands, after being married unsacramentally at a Register Office. The thing in itself was a sufficient sacrament. The little house in Astey’s Row was locked up for a week.

Scarsdale put his wife into the corner of a third-class carriage. In a sense she allowed herself to be put there, and to remain there while he went off on some secret adventure. The whole of life had become an adventure to Spenser Scarsdale.

He returned with two monthly magazines, one of which contained a story by him, a copy of a weekly journal, and half a pound of chocolates. He got into the carriage and looked at his wife as though to convince himself of the astonishing reality that she was his wife and that she had not melted into air. He placed the magazines and the carton of chocolates in her lap.

“Something to read, Eleanor.”

She smiled at him.

“Mustn’t spoil me, Spen.”

“Impossible.”

She was wise as to his innocence. She had more than a feeling that she was going to be happy with it, and that his very innocence made him real. Strange he might be, and she liked him strange, his hare’s eyes and his big nose and his grizzled temples, and his sensitive and rather ineffectual hands, She preferred him to the very obvious he-man with his cut-from-the-joint views upon everything, and his shiny masculine chin and his conviction that nothing mattered like trousers. It is possible that she found in Scarsdale a pleasant picturesqueness, outlines that were both vague and vivid, an eternal surprise, quaint and lovable oddities, a sensitive and growing joy in life. Always he was so surprised. She liked his air of surprise and of wonder. It was not mere silliness. Almost it was reverence, or the wonder of the child.

She tried one of the chocolates, and then offered him the carton.

“You must have bought the most expensive ones, Spen.”

Almost he looked sly.

“Well, for you—of course. I should like it to be that way—always—Nellie. The best I can do,—you know.”

And suddenly he became a little sad.

“Two hundred a year, not much, dear. Wish it were more.”

They were alone in the carriage, and she reached out and touched his knee.

“Nothing to worry about, Spen. What you give—is you. I don’t happen to be greedy.”

They were bound for the “George” at Avebury, Scarsdale having written and arranged for rooms. A car met them at Marlborough station, and the undulations of the downland road carried them toward a September sunset, grey gossamer hills in a larger web of gold. Scarsdale pointed out the round borrows on Overton Hill.

“You see those.”

He was surprised to find that she knew what they were, but—then she was a Dorset woman. He was always discovering something fresh in Eleanor, and at the George Inn at Avebury he discovered her normality. They had the front bedroom overlooking the road and a sector of the green vallum, and for the first two evenings the parlour below was theirs, and Eleanor made friends with the cats, and with the Wiltshire girl who waited, and with the very pleasant wife of the padrone. She was Wessex as well as Astey’s Row.

Her normality rested upon the virtue of a healthy body. She enjoyed things, the country food, the bed, her husband's shyness, his shyness in loving her, her hot bath, the hills, the beech trees, tea and home-made jam. She brushed her fine black lustrous hair as though she enjoyed brushing it, which she did. She enjoyed his almost boyish embraces.

The weather was kind to them, as kind as the George Inn. On Silbury Hill, which reduced both of them to breathlessness, they lay on the flat top of the great cone of the turf and chalk, and watched the clouds, and their shadows. Scarsdale, who had read all that he could find upon Silbury, explained the various theories, that it was a "sun hill", or a fire-hill, or a pyramid, and that—obviously—it had its relation to the great stone circle. Eleanor christened it The Tower of Babel.

"Besides," as she said, "it seems rather strange, Spen, that they should have taken so much trouble to pile up this hill when there were so many bigger hills ready made."

Scarsdale had his moment of humour.

"Man and his molehill. If you take a child down to the sea-shore, Nellie—"

"Oh,—I know. He digs a hole or makes a mound."

"While mother looks on. Probably Stone Age man assumed that the great earth-mother or sky-mother was looking on. I say, it is half-past twelve! We ought to be getting back."

He scrambled up and gave his wife a hand.

"This air makes me jolly hungry. Hungry, Eleanor?"

"O,—yes."

He put an arm round her, and for half a minute they stood like some mystic two in one upon the top of Silbury, a silhouette against the sky-line for all the world to see. Adam and Eve on Silbury Hill. But a big car had pulled up on the main road below, and other invaders were storming the hill. Eleanor and Scarsdale passed them as they descended. A lanky and sallow youth, with flopping grey flannel trousers and gaudy scarf, and his bare head very much in the wind, was facetious at Silbury's expense.

"I say,—this is some pimple! Wonder what the old jossers were at. Sort of primitive wireless station, what!"

Farther down the slope middle-age had paused to get its breath. It eyed Eleanor appreciatively. Yes, somehow, Silbury was woman, a breast, a

provocation, a mystic thing conceived against reason.

Scarsdale made a remark.

“How that old bounder stared at you.”

They laughed.

## 5

On the last day but one of the honeymoon Scarsdale arranged for them to be driven to Oare village. He wanted to revisit Martinsell and to take Eleanor with him. They would walk back.

They climbed Martinsell. It was much more approachable from the high ground on the north, but on that previous occasion Scarsdale had attacked it from Oare, and the effort of climbing the steep turf slope had its rewards. It was a breathless business, more breathless than the ascent of Silbury, but when they reached the solitary thorn bush and the scattered pit dwellings on the brow of the hill, they felt triumphant.

“Spen, my heart’s thumping.”

He looked at her anxiously.

“You don’t feel faint, Nellie?”

She laughed.

“Nothing quite so steep in Canonbury. But isn’t it lovely. Are we going to have lunch here?”

Scarsdale was blown, but he was not going to say so. He was carrying their lunch, sandwiches and fruit and two bottles of stone ginger in a little old attaché-case.

“No, farther on. Old thorn trees and bracken, you know.”

They passed the long barrow and came to the spot where Scarsdale had found the rabbit of Martinsell in its snare and had released it. A little smile came into his eyes. That symbolical act remained with him, and it had gathered a peculiar significance. Now, who would have dreamed that he would walk past this very spot with Eleanor?

He said, “I found a rabbit in a snare here once. I’m afraid I let it go.”

He pointed to a grass tussock under the wire fence.

“It might have been just there. Its eyes were all bloodshot and starting out of its head.”

She glanced consideringly at his face. Yes, he was just the man to let a rabbit out of a snare. She loved him for it, though he had sinned against reason.

“Poor Bunny. He must have been glad.”

“Oh—I suppose so. I suppose rabbits have joys and sorrows of their own. He was a little bit weak on his legs—to begin with.”

They arrived at Scarsdale’s chosen spot, a little island of velvet turf in the midst of thorns and bracken, but open to steep fall of the hill and to the south. A few flints lay about like the bones of some very ancient world. The attaché-case was opened. A green yaffle went past them, laughing, rising and falling with characteristic flight.

Eleanor watched the green shape disappear.

“I haven’t seen one for years.”

Meanwhile, Scarsdale had made a discovery.

“Eleanor, we haven’t any glasses. Bottles—!”

His shocked voice delighted her.

“Bottles! Well, does it matter?”

In the midst of that rather silent meal on Martinsell, Scarsdale, after applying a handkerchief to his chin and wondering how it was that she did the thing so much more gracefully, made a seemingly irrelevant remark.

“I have felt like a rabbit, Eleanor.”

She smiled at his absorbed and pensive head. Dear, funny, old thing!

“A rabbit, Spen.”

“Yes, like the rabbit I found in the snare. Horrible feeling, something round your neck, throttling. You can’t run, you can’t breathe.”

“When was that, Spen?”

“Oh, in London. Down and out. Feeling very hopeless. Fact is—I was a rabbit, Eleanor.”

“My dear—!”

“And you slipped the noose off. Yes, you did. Sort of prophetic act, my doing the thing to the other rabbit. Bread coming back. Damn this bottle, it will

bubble!”

## Chapter Thirty-four

“SMITH” was published on October 10, Messrs. Makin & Malcolm issuing a first edition of 500 copies and waiting cynically for something or nothing to happen. They had distributed review copies generously, and had spent more money upon advertising the book than was usual in the case of a first novel. Malcolm believed in “Smith”, but he knew that a publisher might just as well believe in God and find his faith lost upon indifferent press and public.

During the first week “Smith” sold one hundred and seven copies.

During the second week it sold sixty-three.

Scarsdale, who had subscribed to a press-cutting agency, received two minute reviews, one of them in the *Newcastle Observer*, the other in the *Puddleton Herald*. The north-country reviewer described “Smith” as “A nice story.”

That adjective jabbed Scarsdale’s soul. It made him angry, even in the thick of a deepening depression, and even while he was accepting the conviction that “Smith” had been moribund at birth. He smoked furiously during those critical days. He said nothing to Eleanor about his disappointment and his dread; he pretended to be cheerful, and his face was like a frosty morning with a fogbound and feeble sun shining somewhere in the sky.

His helplessness exasperated him. Here was his book bleeding to death, and nobody paid any attention. In another week or two “Smith” would be dead, dead as old Marley, and Malcolm would print no more copies and ask for no more books. Moreover,—he—Scarsdale—might not feel the urge in him to write another book.

In a mood of desperation he took a bus and went to see Malcolm. He was admitted to Malcolm’s presence. He found his publisher strangely busy and cheerful, and apparently quite pleased to see him. But then—of course—Malcolm had other books.

Scarsdale winced under this cheerfulness.

“We’re not doing very great things, are we?”

Malcolm smiled a little, crinkled smile.

“Wait a bit. I have been putting in some private spade-work on ‘Smith’. You may see results in a day or two.”



“O,—how? Notices?”

Malcolm was reticent. He appeared to be enjoying some inward joke, but he did not share it with Scarsdale.

He said, “I told you, I believed in ‘Smith’. A book with some big human stuff in it doesn’t snuff out. Besides, there are men in London, my lad, who are approachable.”

“Approachable? You don’t mean—?”

“I mean that we aren’t all cynics and jackals. There are men who will shout when they think a thing is worth shouting about. Just you sit tight and pray.”

On the Wednesday one of the big penny dailies gave “Smith” a paragraph, and “Smith” was in the news, and not mere literary bric-à-brac. The paragraph had for its title “Hats off to Smith”. It went on to say with emphasis and enthusiasm that everybody should read “Smith”, because Smith was a great little shabby person, the child of his generation. Most certainly “Smith” was the book of the year. On the Thursday the *Daily Gazette* had half a column on “Smith”. Eleanor saw it; she fell upon it by chance while waiting for the kettle to boil.

“Spen.”

Scarsdale was upstairs putting on his collar. He came to the bedroom door.

“Hallo.”

“Come down at once. Something to show you.”

He arrived, still settling the knot of his tie, and he saw the paper in her hands.

“What is it?”

She passed him the paper.

“Read that, Spen. Isn’t it splendid?”

On the following morning Scarsdale received a letter from Malcolm enclosing these two notices. He wrote, “They have let off the fireworks. Buy the *Observer* or *Sunday Times* on Sunday, and look at the advertisements.” Scarsdale bought the *Sunday Times*; he went out and found a man selling papers in the Essex Road. He stood with his back to the shuttered window of a shop, and spread the pages, and searched. He found “Smith”, and “Smith” was easily found, for he stood there in big black letters.

# SMITH

BY

SPENSER SCARSDALE

READ WHAT THE REVIEWERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT "SMITH".

Scarsdale read these half-dozen sentences. They were incredibly kind and flattering. Their adjectives were iridescent. Smith was "A gorgeous person." Mr. Mackinder of *Faith*—the great Mr. Mackinder—found Smith—"The most human and moving thing I have read for many years." J. J. of *The Sunday Swift* said, "Here—at last—is the epic of the ex-serviceman." Scarsdale leant against the shuttered windows of the shop, and knew that he was in the Essex Road on a Sunday morning and that the Essex Road suggested emptiness and early bottles of milk and cats and orange peel and "Smith." He did not feel quite real. Nothing was quite real on that October morning.

He folded up the *Sunday Times* and walked back to Astey's Row. "The most human and moving thing I have read for years."—"An epic of the ex-serviceman." It was amazing. He felt a little exultant, and a little bewildered, but not at all puffed up. Almost, he was a little frightened. Besides, after all, it might be nothing but a momentary pyrotechnic display, an ebullition of words. The advertisement had nothing to say about the sales of "Smith", and without sales all this wind would be wasted.

He went in and found breakfast ready, and Eleanor waiting. He handed her the paper. He tried to appear casual.

"Rather a good advertisement."

He watched her out of the corner of an eye as she read it. What would she make of it? Would it convince her?

And suddenly she got up and kissed him.

"I always believed it would happen, Spen. You are going to be a great man."

## 2

"Smith" became the creature of one of those strange crowd crazes; a boom. The book was talked about; it was preached about. In some mysterious way it

developed mass suggestion, and over bridge-tables and tea-tables and dinner-tables people were asking, "Have you read 'Smith'?" It was "Trilby" and "Main Street" and "If Winter Comes". Malcolm was able to advertise that seven thousand copies of "Smith" had been sold in one week. As the boom developed "Smith" in its yellow and green jacket was to be seen in bookshop windows all over the kingdom. There were wads of "Smith" on sale, chunks of it. Malcolm advertised edition after edition.

Scarsdale remained innocent. He was excited, astonished, but still the child of simplicity. He scribbled figures on the backs of envelopes. He was able to say to Eleanor—"We've made over a thousand in royalties. Extraordinary, isn't it?" They looked at each other across the kitchen table, and were mutually aware of the strangeness of such a sum, though the sum was to be much more strange and perplexing in the not very distant future. Astey's Row boggled at it. Such arithmetic was out of all proportion.

Things began to happen.

Letters arrived, forwarded through Scarsdale's publishers. Every photographer of note in London seemed to be in dire need of Scarsdale's face. Rhapsodical young women wrote for autographs. People wanted to borrow money. Charities thrust their necessities upon him. Other people sought to interview him. Editors of papers were eager to hear his views upon God and marriage and Chelsea buns. He was asked to answer questions. Was he a Vegetarian? Did he believe in the gramophone as an instrument of culture?

He received abusive letters. "I have read your beastly book, and I have burnt it. God has given you great powers, and you have abused them." Scarsdale came to know that when a large "God" appeared early on the written page the letter would be from a lady and an abusive one. Paul Verulam attacked him in the *English Observer*. The article appeared under the title of "Slum Literature". Paul Verulam flashed his yellow teeth at Scarsdale, and displayed the bishop's apron. It was a disgusting book; already it had sold more than twenty thousand copies. Paul Verulam had never sold more than seven.

But amid all this froth other solidities floated. Scarsdale received an urgent letter from Mr. Cassidy, the literary agent.

"I can place your novel 'Smith' in America. If the rights are still available, I shall be very glad to handle this book."

Scarsdale knew nothing about Mr. Cassidy, but that was because Scarsdale was ignorant. His education was taken in hand. He went to see Mr. Cassidy, and found him at the top of a big building, a large, eupeptic person, with two

very bright little dark eyes. Mr. Cassidy was polite to Scarsdale. He took him out to lunch at the Grosvenor Club.

He said, "You are only at the beginning of things. If this book succeeds in America as it has done over here, you may sell a quarter of a million copies. Perhaps more, perhaps less. Now, what about it?"

Scarsdale succumbed to Mr. Cassidy, for Mr. Cassidy was overwhelming. He began to talk about the film rights of "Smith", and the dramatic rights, and Scarsdale's next book. "Keep it human. Give it the same heart-beat." He talked about articles and short stories. The price? O, well, it was probable that Mr. Scarsdale would be able to command big prices if this boom developed and continued. Sixty guineas for a short story. O, certainly. And Scarsdale accepted a liqueur and a cigar, and felt a little fuddled.

He said, "It's all rather—disconcerting. It rather puts one off one's perch."

Mr. Cassidy smiled upon him. He was a very shrewd person.

"You'll grow used to it. Don't get rattled."

Returning to Astey's Row after that lunch, and remaining rather full of wine and cigar and the voluminities of Mr. Cassidy, Scarsdale confronted the little house in which he and Eleanor lived. But, on the other hand, the house confronted him rather like a cat with two enigmatic eyes, and almost he spoke to it gently and reassuringly. "Yes, I'm all right, very much all right. I'm not too big to get inside you. I'm satisfied, thank you." And he was. He had become attached to this queer, shabby, decaying little place. It was home; it was Eleanor; it was "Smith", and as such he felt at home in it.

He opened the gate and went in. He hung up his hat and coat in the passage.

"You back, Nell?"

"Yes."

He found her in the sitting-room, sewing. They had a fire in the sitting-room every day now, and when Eleanor lit it she addressed it as "Smith". She went to Highbury Terrace three days instead of five, and Scarsdale was always suggesting that there was no need for her to go there at all.

She looked at him.

"Well,—what's Mr. Cassidy like?"

Scarsdale went and kissed her, and he smelt of the Grosvenor Club.

"O, rather large and important, rather like a big drum. He took me out to

lunch.”

Eleanor had gathered as much. Her eyes were considering her husband’s clothes and his tie.

“What about America?”

“I expect to hear to-morrow. It seems to be a certainty. There’s an American publisher in London.”

She rethreaded her needle.

“Spem, I think you might buy a new suit.”

He looked surprised.

“But what’s wrong, Nellie, with this one?”

“It’s all right for Astey’s Row, Spem. But you are not all Astey’s Row. West End clubs,—and other men. You’re a celebrity.”

He sat down. He looked very serious.

“All right,—I’ll go to a tailor, Eleanor, but only on one condition.”

“Bargaining, are you?”

“Yes, if you’ll give up Highbury Terrace.”

She sat sewing. She was a quietist, and yet behind her tranquillity a multitude of possibilities were as active as motes in a sunbeam. Smith was proving a very revolutionary person, and she was thinking very seriously about Smith and his implications.

“You really want me to, Spem? You know, I’m a working woman.”

He got up suddenly and stood over her. He looked down at her bowed head.

“Yes. Not because I’m a snob, Nellie. I don’t think there’s much of the snob in me. For instance,—I’d like to stay here.”

She went on sewing.

“Sure?”

“Quite. But—of course—that depends on you.”

She allowed a little silence to elapse.

“Yes, we’ve got to know each other here, Spem. I’m not one for chopping and changing, unless—Well, there’s no hurry, is there? I don’t believe in being

fussed out of myself by things—”

He kissed the crown of her head, and added—

“By things like Smith.”

### 3

The little gossips became busy with Scarsdale. Some of his old acquaintances remembered him, and tried to resuscitate old memories, but Scarsdale was shy. He was a poor diner-out. Meanwhile, a bright young fellow in search of copy, had produced a character study of Scarsdale, a mildly sensational caricature. This young gentleman started a number of superstitions about Scarsdale; he christened him “The English Tolstoy”, and hailed him as the author who lived among his characters in their natural and shabby surroundings. Scarsdale was the Slum Magician. And so, a number of quaint rumours circulated concerning the eccentricities of the creator of “Smith”. He lived in a slum, and dressed to the part; he had married a woman of the people; he refused to be photographed; he consorted with cab-washers and cocottes and Covent Garden porters. He wore a blue scarf instead of a collar. Also, it was whispered by the wise that “Smith” was auto-biographical, and that Scarsdale was a man of one book, and that he would never write anything else worth reading.

Malcolm did not object to the patchwork publicity that was foisted upon Scarsdale. It amused him; it was intimate and picturesque, the kind of thing the public liked, but when the quidnuncs put it about that Scarsdale’s one explosion was solitary and final, Malcolm had to take up the challenge.

He asked Scarsdale to lunch, and afterwards from the depths of a big chair in the club smoking-room he put to Scarsdale that most pregnant question.

“What about the next book?”

Scarsdale had been waiting for that question. The problem of his next book was worrying him considerably, if secretly, for—as yet—there was no successor to “Smith” either on paper or in the air. He had been hunting about for themes, and he had not been able to capture a theme that convinced and inspired him.

He bluffed.

“I don’t want to be hurried.”

“We must publish something in the autumn—at the latest. You’re for it, my lad. That is going to be your critical period.”

“Quite so. Everybody will be ready to say that my second book is not a patch on ‘Smith’.”

“That’s the supposition. A lot of people are sure to say it, even though you produce something far better than ‘Smith’. I suppose you are working on a book?”

Scarsdale allowed Mr. Malcolm to assume that he had a book in being, and when Malcolm pressed him to let him see it as soon as possible, Scarsdale became conscious of a queer, empty feeling inside him. He repeated the statement that he did not wish to be hurried. He was even a little peevish about it, possibly he was not feeling comfortable about this unborn book, nor was he showing Mr. Malcolm the candour of complete confidence.

His publisher was more candid.

“Well, it’s up to you. The ball’s at your feet. Don’t be surprised if you are attacked and abused, or if they try to ignore you. People like to make a discovery and to pat the discovery on the back, but when it grows rather too big for their pattings—they are apt to get peevish. Besides, some of the attacks won’t be meant for you, they will be aimed at me through you. I’m rather too successful.”

But Mr. Malcolm had quickened an impulse to panic in Scarsdale. He walked all the way back to Astey’s Row and he walked almost as he had walked in the old days when he had been the victim of his crowd-phobia. His long legs hurried, but the conscious part of Scarsdale seemed to have been stricken with sudden paralysis. A large, white surface loomed in front of him, the blankness that was a book, four hundred odd pages to be packed with words. And he had not captured his idea, some moving, inevitable, human theme. He had been hunting it for weeks, following elusive inspirations into blind alleys. No clap-trap, melodrama, unconvincing stuff. He knew that he had to discover some human creature like Smith, and that without his particular and sacred Smith no book would materialize.

He was frightened.

He foresaw catastrophic failure following upon sensational success. He heard all the knowing people declaring, “O, yes, ‘Smith’ was a sheer blind bunk. The fellow had just one sort of emotional kick in him, and after that he was finished. Just a squib.”

But Scarsdale did not liken himself to a squib. Deep down in him was the

conviction that he could write other books like “Smith”, but the noisy success of “Smith” had made him hypersensitive and self-conscious. He was too conscious of his public, of a vast crowd-face looming up against him like a “close-up” on the screen. It goggled its eyes at him. “Now—then—for the sob-stuff.” It was as though he suffered from a form of aphasia, an inability to think in words, or to conceive happenings that were convincing and real.

He arrived in Astey’s Row. He entered the little house, feeling strangely like an impostor, a dog whose tail should have been crisply curled, and not between his legs. It was tea-time. He hung up his hat and coat, and in attaching his coat to the peg he was moved to the fantastic thought that he was hanging up the husk of himself, the absurd repute of Spenser Scarsdale. Or was it the ghost of a dead and departed Smith? He dawdled in the passage. Almost, he was afraid to face his wife.

But directly he entered the room any fear of the hypothetical and unknown woman in Eleanor vanished. She continued to be mysterious while remaining exquisitely calculable. She burned steadily like the fire; she had a serenity; she was as refreshing as grapefruit treated with just that sufficiency of sugar. Besides, she enjoyed life; her appetites were normal.

Scarsdale sat down. She had brought in the teapot, and she poured out his tea. He looked tired, and a little more than tired, for already she had begun to regard “Smith” as an exhausting gentleman. Not only did people rave about “Smith”, but they quarrelled about him, and wrote letters to Scarsdale and tried to quarrel with the creator of “Smith”. Scarsdale passed over all these letters to his wife, and her sense of humour had been increased at the expense of the writers. Eleanor was inclined to classify the epistolary public under the headings of “Fools”—“Nice Fools”—“Nasty Fools” and lastly but inexorably, “Good Women.”

For one letter would come to say that in the opinion of the writer the ending of “Smith” was equal to anything in English literature.

Another letter would arrive to inform Scarsdale that his final scene was bathetic and vulgar. The last chapter should never have been written.

One letter would hail the climax as beautiful; the next, foam over its blasphemy.

And they were so very patronizing, many of these people, who wrote complacently from Tooting, and Croydon, and Golder’s Green. They appeared to know exactly what Scarsdale should have done or should not have done with Smith. Often, they had all the impertinence of ignorance, and Eleanor, with a calm and smooth movement of the hand would deposit the letters in the



fire. She kept a few, the very few from people who had suffered and who understood.

Meanwhile, Spenser had finished his tea, and was filling his pipe with those little jerky movements of the fingers which had become associated in her mind with worry. He was vague and distraught, and he had been so for days, and with a gentle inevitableness she made her suggestion.

“You are worrying about the book, Spen.”

He glanced at her sharply.

“About ‘Smith’?”

“No, the next book.”

He lit his pipe and sucked at it with a sudden air of relief.

“You’re a bit of a witch, Eleanor. Fact is,—I haven’t got the next book. They are worrying me about it.”

“You mean—it won’t come?”

“That’s it. I can’t get the idea, the one, right, inevitable thing that seems to set one off.”

“The story?”

“Well, in a sense—just that. I want someone like Smith, a person, a character, a vivid bit of life.”

She turned to poke the fire.

“I see. Something to set you alight. I could tell you a tale. I have never told you about Molly Redhead have I?”

“No. Real person?”

“Very much so.”

“Tell me.”

So Eleanor told him the tale of Molly Redhead, and as he listened the look of worried, vacant searching for something disappeared from Scarsdale’s face. His eyes were seeing things, Molly and her shop and her struggles, and the toss of her head, and her sturdy little storms and her triumphs.

He exclaimed, “Great! What a setting! Why it’s—it’s the very thing,—what I’ve been digging for. Yes, like a dog scratching in a rabbit-hole. Molly. There’s the inevitable title.”

He got up and kissed his wife.

“Your book, Nellie. Sleeping partner in the firm of Scarsdale and Scarsdale.”

She laughed.

“I sleep very well, Spen. I enjoy sleeping.”

## *Chapter Thirty-five*

“SMITH” was published in the United States by the New York firm of Duggan & Muller, and for the first two months “Smith” exhibited an elusive slowness, but this deliberation was that of the stranger exploring new worlds. In a little while “Smith” was multiplying himself at an astonishing rate. He was English and national, and yet he had a universality, the red earth of Adam. For three successive months in a number of States “Smith” headed the list as a best seller.

Astey’s Row had seriously to consider the effects produced by the growth of this enormous child, and the size and the extent of his reactions. For the ideal of Astey’s Row, so far as the Scarsdales were concerned, was tranquillity. Someone was to describe the Scarsdales as an absurd pair of budgerigars in a cage, though—obviously—the bright young person who exercised his wit upon the couple knew nothing of the inwardness of Eleanor. She was one of those souls who are quick to realize that it is possible to have too much of everything, and that the curse of modern life is that there is too much of everything, too many Ministries of This and That, too much Legislating, too many new Fox-Trots, too much Chelsea Show, too many new roses and narcissi, too many buses and motor-cars. Each day had its new gadget. The scientific gentlemen were always providing the public with some new toy. Everything old had to be pulled down. Even the cut of God’s trousers had to be altered yearly. The Prayer Book needed plus-fours. Hoardings shouted at you, “Buy a refrigerator”—“Visit Spain”. Even beer was bewildering. Walking was out of date, and hurtling upon wheels becoming so. It was your duty—in the course of progress to fly to Paris and to be sick into a sponge-bag instead of into a basin. The voice of the announcer hunted you into your home. “Try a little Bach to-night—” Or “Professor So and So will give you a little talk on Vitamin B in relation to the weekly budget”. London calling, Paris calling, Berlin calling! The Shouties! Rush here, rush there, listen to a chaotic splurge of information even in your armchair. Bewilderment, a sense of something heavy on the stomach, mental dyspepsia, a voice singing —“I want to be happy”.

Eleanor’s impulse was to simplify. She liked doing simple things, and feeling herself the mistress of her activities. Like the Georgians she wished to control her environment, to produce repose, to cultivate texture and polish. She liked polishing furniture, and sewing, and arranging flowers, and cooking,

though she could not pretend to like washing up, but in contrast to the new youth she faced her realities. The new youth is apt to demand its flowers, while refusing to do the digging. It expects to be presented with a car, but does not concern itself with cleaning that car. And, in a sense, man has lost control of his car. Or he is like an ant perpetually picking up a new fragment of something or other, and trying to lug it through a jungle of grass. At the moment there is rather too much grass for him, and too many objective things lying about.

Now, “Smith” in his innocent yet monstrous growth was threatening to do to Scarsdale what “progress” has threatened to do to the soul of man. It was proposing to overwhelm the essential “I” of him in a splurge of trivialities, of complex fuss and fluster. Scarsdale’s own public were conspiring to make of him a sort of monkey, to put him in a cage and cart him round, and to make the creature chatter.

He was creating “Molly”. He was making every effort to concentrate upon that most critical book, and the little world of his cult, instead of leaving him peacefully at his table, kept tweaking him by the hair.

Editors suggested that he should write them articles.

People wrote and asked him to lecture. They wrote from Glasgow and Newcastle and Brighton. He was invited to lecture on sociology and politics and vivisection, and secondary education, and on the Jews, and on the modern mind in literature, and on factory hygiene, on the sex contract, and upon diet.

Mr. Cassidy was trying to persuade him to broadcast a series of talks upon Smith and the Suburbs.

People were asking him to dine and make speeches. Rarely had he made a public speech, and he hated oratory, his own as much as other people’s.

The American letters were arriving. They came in wads. They expected to be answered. They came with books to be autographed, books that had to be done up and returned. They came with or without stamps for a reply, and when stamps were sent they were American. A school posted fifty neat slips of paper upon each of which Scarsdale was to write his name.

There were the strenuous, culture-craving ladies. “I am leading at the New Sparta Women’s Literary Club on Saturday—May 5, and your great novel ‘Smith’ has been selected for discussion. I shall be much obliged if you will send me complete biographical details, and a précis of your philosophical point of view.” Scarsdale received dozens of such challenges.

Then there were the people who attempted to inveigle him into lengthy

debates on paper upon the morality of “Smith”, or the social significance of “Smith”.

There were the young things who wrote for free photographs at half a guinea apiece. “Dear Mr. Scarsdale, oh—I do want to see your face. There was a picture of you in the *Oklahoma Post*, but it looked as though bees had stung it.”

To begin with, Scarsdale was a little excited about these letters. He had had so much failure that success had a pleasant perfume, but when the incense was burnt daily and in clouds, he became oppressed by it. The letters bothered him; they wasted his time; they were like assertive flies buzzing in his mind when he wanted to keep his consciousness clear for “Molly”.

He complained to Mr. Cassidy.

“These letters, an absolute pest. And I don’t want to lecture and dine out. My business is to write novels.”

Mr. Cassidy’s large face registered amusement. He did not believe that Scarsdale was quite sincere.

“Well, get a secretary.”

“A secretary!”

Scarsdale seemed to regard the proposal with horror.

“A secretary! Somebody messing about. Have to find her things to do. Worry me to death. Besides—”

He did not go on to explain to Mr. Cassidy that a secretary would not tone with Astey’s Row, but Mr. Cassidy knew all about Astey’s Row, and wondered how long Scarsdale would stay there. A fellow who already was making twelve thousand a year! Odd fish—this. Wasn’t he going to celebrate, to dispense cocktails and give dinners, and buy a super-car with a super-body, and have his photograph taken sitting in it? What about a colourful publicity, and editors and critics and the press? The fellow was like a rabbit in a hole who came out occasionally to nibble grass.

Mr. Cassidy made a suggestion.

“It’s the age of publicity, my dear chap. You ought to go out and show yourself. Every picture in the papers counts. Of course, self-advertisement can be done gracefully.”

Almost Scarsdale looked shy. He twinkled.

“I shouldn’t advertise well. Not my job. Besides, my wife doesn’t care

about sensationalism.”

Mr. Cassidy’s bright little eyes were enigmatic.

“Is that so. Suppose you have bought a mink coat?”

Scarsdale took the quip seriously.

“No. But there is no reason why I shouldn’t. Rather do that than give people dinners.”

Mr. Cassidy smiled a kind of stomachic smile. Yes, probably, as rumour had it, Scarsdale had married his housekeeper, and she might need a good deal of camouflaging. But what sort of woman was Mrs. Scarsdale? Unless she was a rather extraordinary person she might have much to say about Scarsdale’s quietism. She would have him into a house in Kensington or St. John’s Wood, and into an Isotta or a Stutz, and down to Cannes, and even to Ascot. She would bring domestic pressure to bear upon this producer of best sellers, for Mr. Cassidy had read the first twenty chapters of “Molly”, and he was shrewdly convinced that “Molly” would hold fast to the coat-tails of “Smith”.

Scarsdale might be no sensationalist or speed-merchant, but he did foresee that life had many possibilities that were to be explored, and his conviction was that he and Eleanor would explore them together, and in their own way. Yes, and in spite of Mr. Cassidy and the pictorial press and all the various mechanisms. And yet Scarsdale was moved to wonder whether Eleanor was expecting him to make some dramatic gesture.

He arrived in Astey’s Row on that summer afternoon and found it sun-flecked and noisy and in the possession of very vigorous children. He was beginning to notice the noise, and to be a little irritated by it when he was at work. Astey’s Row! He came to Eleanor’s gate and found that someone had thrown a dirty newspaper full of bread crusts into the garden. He was annoyed. Even in his most derelict days he had not disposed of his rubbish by heaving it into other people’s gardens.

Though he missed the full significance of the act, for Astey’s Row was growing class conscious with regard to the Scarsdales, and in sensing a certain aloofness in Eleanor and her husband it had joined reality to rumour. Astey’s Row was becoming sarcastic and not a little hostile in its attitude toward this author-bloke and his woman. Hence, rubbish thrown over garden railings.

Scarsdale joined his wife in the sitting-room. He was tired; he found Mr. Cassidy rather exhausting. They sat at the open window, and the voice of Astey’s Row was with them.

“Letters for you, Spen.”

He saw a little pile of letters on the table.

“There seem to be about six posts in the day. Nellie.”

“Not quite.”

He opened the first letter, and discovered that it was an invitation from the “Atalanta Club,” a woman’s club. The secretary wrote to say that the club committee wished Mr. Scarsdale to be the guest of the evening at their next literary dinner.

Scarsdale passed the letter to his wife, and she read it, and left it lying in her lap.

“Going, Spen?”

“No.”

He was reflecting upon the point that the club had not included his wife in the honour of that evening. It annoyed him. He was not going anywhere without Eleanor; he did not want to go anywhere without her.

He asked her a question.

“Eleanor, do you think you would care for this sort of show?”

“What do they do there, Spen?”

“Do? O, eat and talk—I suppose. Make funny speeches. Feel rather select and superior.”

“But I’m not asked.”

“And I’m not going. I’m not a public person.”

## 2

Developments were gradual, and their exploring of the new content of life as unpremeditated as the unexpectedness of life itself. There arose the question of a holiday, and Scarsdale wished Eleanor to make the choice.

“I’d like to go to Scotland, Spen.”

He was a little surprised, but why be surprised?

“Scotland? Why—of course.”

So to Scotland they went, and saw Melrose and Edinburgh and the Bass Rock, and traversed the Trossachs, and found Loch Lomond rather too full of Glasgow. Eleanor described it as being at the bottom of a basin, and not feeling like washing-up. They went on to Oban; they discovered the islands and the purples and amethysts and greys of this northern Greece.

The great idea occurred to Scarsdale. Other people drove about in cars; why should not he and Eleanor drive in a car. They could afford one. It had all the freshness of a unique discovery. He hired a car, one of the best cars in Oban; he sat in it beside his wife, feeling surprised and pleased, and just a little proud.

“Rather an idea—this, Eleanor.”

“You just sit and look, Spen.”

They visited Dalmally and Tyndrum and Rannoch Moor. They drove to Glencoe, and Glencoe proved climatic. Their car punctured twice, and the Scotch boy had to change a tyre, and while he growled and perspired they sat on the moor among the heather, and let life come to them. They explored the impersonal and the mysterious, and touched the unpremeditated, in each other.

“I can hear it, Spen.”

“What, dear?”

“The silence.”

She had a rapt look.

“It’s like going back to the days when I was so high. But—then—you’re not country, Spen.”

He observed her, and looked thoughtful.

“I don’t know about that. Astey’s Row, you know—”

She let a little silence go by.

“Perhaps we’re not Astey’s Row any longer, Spen. They feel that about us, Spen.”

“Who do?”

“The people in Astey’s Row.”

“Oh, is that why they sometimes throw rubbish into our garden? Perhaps it is.”



They returned to Astey's Row and it seemed strange to them. Somehow it was not the Row as they remembered it, and even the great plane tree seemed less large and tranquil. There was the noise, and an overflowing neighbourliness that was not neighbourly, and the trams and the cars in the Canonbury Road, and the children, and intrusive humanity hatched and teeming. Yes, rows of hutches, not Martinsell Hill.

It was growing dusk. Eleanor stood at the window, and suddenly she pulled down the blind.

"It isn't us any longer."

She did not utter the words, but she had a feeling that Scarsdale heard them, and that his mood matched hers. She could have added, "We've grown out of this. It is we who change, not things. And—after all, isn't everything us, what we see and feel? There's nothing wrong in it either. It just happens so."

Yet between them was a tacit consent. They were workers, careful people, with no inclinations toward sensational splurging. They were apart from the crowd, while understanding the tragic inevitableness and the fated limitations of the crowd. The crowd makes itself. Meanwhile, Astey's Row had sufficed; it had had its beauty and its significance, and in the mystic "I" of each of them Astey's Row would continue. They were wise as to foundations. The crowd does not let you escape unless you have the wisdom and the patience of the husbandman, and the husbandman is apt to be out of fashion these days.

Eleanor was country.

"We'll put it by, Spen, and see how the crops come in."

Corn in the granary in contrast to Rome's annona, free tickets for bread and games.

"Molly" was published in the early autumn. Its reception was patchy so far as the applause was concerned, and one eminent critic who had praised "Smith", described "Molly" as a gross literary lapse. *Punch*, who had treated "Smith" with benign playfulness, displayed a little petulance in its playfulness toward "Molly". But Mr. Malcolm collected a sheaf of good reviews, and was

able to quote them lavishly in his advertisements. Moreover, neither praise, dispraise, nor a studied silence appeared to make any difference to the popularity of the book. The advance sales in England had been round about thirteen thousand copies, and in America some thirty thousand, but within a month of publication Malcolm could advertise that over seventy-five thousand copies had been sold.

Scarsdale's letters thickened.

Mr. Paul Verulam delivered another attack on him under the heading of "The Sentimentalist of the Slums."

Eleanor had bought a new carpet for the sitting-room, and had renewed her stock of linen.

Mr. Cassidy was suggesting that Scarsdale ought to go to America and show himself.

The "Divine Dollar Film Company" was in treaty for the world's film rights of "Smith".

The content of life was changing, and Scarsdale was constrained to consider the realities, the compelling casuistry of cheques. His big money was beginning to flow in, and there was every prospect of the flow increasing and of continuing. "Molly" had assured the set of the tide. Mr. Cassidy was talking of seven thousand pounds for the film rights of "Smith"; editors were offering a hundred pounds for a short story, and two thousand pounds for a serial.

Scarsdale sat by the November fire, and scribbled figures in a notebook. Almost he looked worried.

"It's perfectly preposterous."

"What is, Spen?"

"Our estimated income for this year."

"How much?"

"Close on seventeen thousand pounds."

He brooded, and tapped the notebook with his pencil.

"Bit of a problem, Eleanor."

She smiled at him.

"Is it! What are we going to do with it?"

"Invest—most. Don't you agree?"

She nodded.

“Yes, foundations, Spen. Solid.”

“Quite. My damned income-tax and super-tax are going to be ghastly.”

“It does seem rather hard, Spen.”

But he gave a little laugh.

“O, well, the jackals have to get it somehow. We’ve been lucky. By the way, someone threw an old mattress in a sack into our garden, last night. A love offering—I suppose.”

“What did you do with it, Spen?”

“Do with it? Why—just tipped it over the other railings.”

## 5

Eleanor could not murmur the mystic word “entelechy”, and yet the meaning of some things revealed themselves to her just as a pear tree reveals the significance of blossom, or as Spring is kissed on the mouth by the wet west wind. She was country, a pot of flowers in a London window, and yet so much more than that. Things grew, and if you found yourself growing unexpectedly and in the grace of faith and understanding, then the soul of you could stand early and late at its window and hail both sunset and dawn. Life might have the sweet texture of silk, and the warmth of a fire, and the smell of the thorn blossom.

For Scarsdale was in love with two things,—his wife and his work. They intermingled; they were hand and flower, stock and scion, earth and water; they were part of the essence of things, and in life it is the essence that matters.

For when Scarsdale looked upon a pound note he did not see it as a pound note, but as a complex of perceptions and feelings, a symbol, a slit in the wall of seeming. He would never look upon the dollar until his eyes grew dull and the soul of him base metal. His work gave to him, and so filled him that he overflowed in giving.

He wanted to give to Eleanor.

Yet the first gesture suggested the materialist, though its inwardness waved aside the scorn of sensational man. Mr. Cassidy’s mink coat had remained in his mind, and Scarsdale understood that the crowd understands no success that

is not dressed in mink. The woman must be befurred and ride in her chariot. Something in Scarsdale laughed, but with a tremor of tenderness. Nothing was too grand for Eleanor.

The memories of that visit to one of the most Parisian of the West End establishments were to remain with him with a quality of strangeness and grace.

“We want a fur coat.”

He had an appearance; Eleanor had seen to it; and they sat on a settee, and a gracious person attended on them, and slim young creatures paraded in furs. The very first coat took Scarsdale’s fancy. He asked the price.

“Two hundred and fifty guineas, sir.”

He swallowed ecstatically. He was not at all scared. He met Eleanor’s eyes, and they were questioning.

He said—“I like that coat. Why not try it on.”

Yet another quality was impressed upon him, the rightness of his wife’s dignity. She was equal to all these women, and to the mirrors and the white enamel, and the hush of the sanctuary. She had a stillness. All her movements were quiet and right.

She did not question the extravagance. She entered one of the fitting-rooms, and in a minute or two the gracious person reappeared and summoned Scarsdale.

“Madame would like you to see the coat, sir.”

Scarsdale joined his wife in the fitting-room. He looked at her. She and the coat were one.

“I like you in that, Eleanor.”

She liked herself in it, and the temper of her husband’s extravagance. The gracious person controlled the chorus.

“Madame looks superb in it.”

Scarsdale purloined the word. Superb. What an amazing occasion! He heard the gracious person declaring that the coat needed no altering; it had been created for the ideal figure, and madame had that figure, the height and the carriage.

Scarsdale made a movement as of easing his neck and his collar.

“We’ll take that coat. I’ll give you a cheque.”

A ledger was produced.

“What name, sir.”

“Scarsdale,—Mr. Spenser Scarsdale.”

The gracious person gave him a bright glance.

“The Mr. Scarsdale?”

“Perhaps.”

“I have just been reading ‘Molly’, sir.”

He had to give the address. Astey’s Row! He wondered whether the gracious person would boggle over it and raise her eyebrows. She did neither. But it was strange.

In the taxi, Eleanor laid a hand on her husband’s knee.

“Spen, you shouldn’t—”

“O, yes, I should. I like it. Besides—”

He held her hand, and a little smile came into his eyes.

“It’s so easy, isn’t it? But the address! It gave one to think.”

She looked at the fat back of the taxi-driver.

“Yes, not in Astey’s Row. Quite impossible, quite vulgar. Not that I mean, Spen—dear—”

“Of course not. We have grown out of Astey’s Row, Eleanor. Where next? Don’t want to splurge. Think it over. It’s so much the woman’s affair. I’d like to get away from the noise.”

She said, “I’ll think it over.”

## *Chapter Thirty-six*

WAS there any place in London without noise? Would there be any place in England without noise?

Scarsdale consulted Malcolm over the club luncheon-table, and Malcolm, who was a man of many cultures, happened to have purchased a property within half a mile of an aeroplane factory, and its testing ground. He had purchased the property previous to the erupting of this pimple of progress, and he had a grievance.

“The damned things boom overhead. I understand the mood of the fellow who got out a gun and had a pot at one of them. Infernal mechanical blow-flies.”

He cautioned Scarsdale.

“Quiet? You want quiet? My dear chap, you’ve been born a hundred years too late or too early. Well, get a place half a mile from any main road. Even then some damned new concrete canal may get you. London? O, no, I’d get out of London. It eats you up.”

Scarsdale explored. There was no harm in exploring while Eleanor was thinking it over, and he called on various agencies, and being in Chelsea he nearly stumbled into the office of Jimson & Marwood. Miss Marwood was very much there, and still Miss Marwood, very short in the skirt and wearing black, and a green-jade necklace. Her eyes had become a little hard and swollen and glassy; her very red mouth was a petulant streak in the perfect pallor of her face. She had the air of being perfumed and powdered. She owned a car coloured black and scarlet. She trailed about with her at her leisure a suggestion of Brooklands and burnt oil, and a collection of male entities, and all the symbols of a contraceptive freedom. She had driven a racing car at Brooklands, and her portrait had appeared in one of the picture papers.

Scarsdale did not come face to face with Julia. He crossed the road hurriedly and was glad.

Returning to Astey’s Row after one of these expeditions he found his wife and a strange gentleman entertaining each other in the sitting-room. The stranger wore a blue lounge suit very much buttoned in at the waist, a pink carnation, a bright blue collar and tie, spats. His hat and malacca cane and

washleather gloves lay on the table. He had his back to the door, and when Eleanor said, "My husband", the stranger rose with a kind of *éclat*, twirled, and held out a soft pink hand.

"Mr. Scarsdale, pleased to meet you. My name's Blaney—Osbert Blaney."

He was an announcer and a loud-speaker. He had a hazel and round eye, and a face that was boyish yet water worn. He was full of movement, undulations, gestures. He was always drawing himself up and squaring his shoulders, and putting back a straggle of hair from his moist forehead.

"Mr. Scarsdale, Osbert Blaney salutes the creator of 'Smith'."

Now, Scarsdale knew with whom he had to do, for Mr. Blaney was the all-star soul of the Divine Dollar Film Co., and a producer of super-films. An agreement had been signed between Scarsdale and the Divine Dollar Film Co., and Mr. Osbert Blaney was producing "Smith". He had come all the way from America to interview the creator of "Smith".

Scarsdale shook Mr. Blaney's hand.

"Pleased to meet you. Mr. Cassidy should have warned me."

Mr. Blaney tapped Scarsdale on the chest.

"Leave Cassidy in the elevator, sir. When two artists get together—Beauty, the soul of humanity,—tears."

His face crinkled up; he appeared to be on the edge of over-powering emotion; he turned, and leaning an elbow on the mantelpiece, soliloquized to Eleanor.

"Beauty, dear lady, the great urge, the great heart-beat. Weep? Yes,—I shed tears over 'Smith'. I jumped right up, I took a car and went straight for Einstein. I said—'Einstein, here is the story of the century. Tears in it,—tears I say. Sure—we must make a picture of that book, a marv'ulous picture.'"

He brought out a green silk handkerchief and dabbed his eyes and forehead. Both had the suggestion of moisture, and Scarsdale saw that his wife was watching Mr. Blaney like a puzzled and disapproving cat. He too was a little perplexed and on one leg. What did you do with such a magnate, so flamboyant and flowing a soul. Cigars? Yes, you offered him a cigar, and Scarsdale did possess a small box of cigars. They were in a drawer in the chiffonier. Hurriedly he collected the box and presented it to Mr. Blaney.

"You smoke?"

Mr. Blaney looked at Scarsdale as though he had flashed in from another

world. He took a cigar. He dreamed.

“Sir, do you know what is going to happen to Smith? I—shall make Smith the soul of fifty million people. Smith shall sit down in every home in God’s own country. Your Smith was a book Smith. I shall make him a picture Smith. I will create Smith over again.”

He bit off the end of the cigar, sat down, got up again, accepted a lighted match from Scarsdale, and then forgot about it till it begun to burn his fingers.

“Now, let me say right here, Mr. Scarsdale, that you and I have got to sit right down and put the soul of that book into our scenario.”

Scarsdale offered him another match, and this time Mr. Blaney did light the cigar, but in two minutes the cigar had gone out again, not because Mr. Blaney did not like it, but because he talked so continuously. Never had Scarsdale heard a man talk as this man talked. There was no end to it and to him. Meanwhile Eleanor got up discreetly, and slipped out to prepare tea, but she had no intention of being absent very long. She wanted to keep an eye upon Mr. Osbert Blaney.

Mr. Blaney talked. He could not or would not remain put in the same place for more than a minute, and he was in a sort of perpetual motion, getting up and sitting down. Even when he sat upon Eleanor’s sofa he squirmed and undulated, and took all the smoothness and the order out of Eleanor’s new loose-cover. He dropped cigar-ash everywhere, but impartially so, for much of it fell upon his own waistcoat. He harangued Scarsdale. Scarsdale must visit America; he must spend three weeks at Hollywood, and there they would show him the great art and heart of the age, the one supreme crowd-compelling art. Novels! What were novels? Dim happenings upon paper. The screen made the whole world see and feel and hear. O, yes, there would be voices very soon. The gods would speak to the crowd.

But if Mr. Osbert Blaney perplexed the Scarsdales, he too suffered from a slight obliquity of vision when he regarded their externals. He could not quite rationalize their surroundings. He had expected another sort of Scarsdale overblown on the Blaney model, and parading his success like a Valentino or a Chaplin. What was the fellow at, anyway? Living in this stuffy, obscure rat-trap with a few sticks of cheap furniture! Almost Mr. Blaney doubted the authenticity of Scarsdale, the solidity of Scarsdale as an author.

But suddenly Mr. Blaney understood the stunt. He got up in a hurry, spilling half his tea, and while Scarsdale and his wife wondered, Mr. Blaney made an abrupt exit. He appeared in the front garden; he surveyed the house; he walked round the small path with his head cocked and his thumbs hooked



into the armholes of his waistcoat. He returned, leaving the front door open. His round smile suggested that he was wagging a sly finger at the Scarsdales.

“Well, it’s very cute of you two people. Best bit of publicity I’ve swallowed for months.”

He indulged in one of his oily, rotatory movements.

“This—is—the house of Smith. It’s it! I’ve got your gag, sir. Being Smith in a Smith house. Why, that’s just the location to put the public in your pocket. We’ll have pictures of this little place all over America. Smith at home.”

He was delighted with his own acumen.

“You’ve staged it to the last cent. A touch of genius, Mr. Scarsdale. Publicity, what! Whose idea was it, yours or your lady’s? Never mind. I’ll plagiarize the publicity idea. We’ll take this very house for Smith’s house. Yes, absolutely.”

He stood over Eleanor.

“And now—my dear,—you’ll come and lunch with me at Claridge’s and meet my crowd. We’ve got to get your husband to come to New York. Sure. Smith’s going all over the world in my picture, and this little house with it. Yes, sir, I am telling you.”

When Mr. Osbert Blaney had left them Scarsdale and his wife looked at each other and gathered up the scattered fragments of themselves. They put the pieces together, and once more became Scarsdale.

Eleanor brushed the cigar-ash from the sofa, and tried to smooth out her poor, crumpled loose-cover, while Scarsdale lit a pipe.

“If he didn’t talk so fast he’d swallow everything. Are you going to America, Spen?”

“Certainly not. It’s not in my philosophy.”

“What did he mean about the house? I couldn’t quite make out what he was at?”

“He thought we didn’t live here.”

“How do you mean?”

“He thought we had another house, a real, big, swanky house somewhere else, and that this place is just a pose, a stunt. He thought we’d planned to squat here just to get talked about.”

His wife understood.

“I should be careful, Spen. He’ll want to photograph you in bed in your pyjamas. He’ll swallow ‘Smith’, and bring it up again all Blaney.”

## 2

And that—to a point—is just what happened, Astey’s Row was dragged into the picture, but Scarsdale was shy; he refused to go to America, and in a little while Mr. Blaney was going about saying that Scarsdale had no ambition.

He discarded Scarsdale and appropriated “Smith”. He became so full of Smith that in a very short time he gave to the world the impression that it was he—and not Scarsdale—who had created “Smith”. He improved Smith; he put Smith into new clothes and a super-film setting, and in due course “Smith” was shown to the world as Mr. Osbert Blaney’s “Smith”. “To all the Smiths in the world with Mr. Osbert Blaney’s love and compliments.” Scarsdale was squeezed into a few small letters. He had written a book, but how could “Smith” belong to such a pusillanimous and ambitionless creature? An Osbert Blaney Production—“The New and Improved and only Original Smith”.

Scarsdale smiled. He had his philosophy and some thousands of pounds, and he had Eleanor, and a new book. It was Eleanor who showed resentment.

“He might have written the book, Spen.”

“I rather fancy he thinks he has. Anyhow, he has improved it. And he has given me a huge puff.”

She was obdurate. She was much more jealous of him than he was for himself.

“You don’t need it. And you don’t swagger, my dear.”

“Not built for it, Nellie. It’s not virtue. I’m simply not made that way.”

## 3

Eleanor, meanwhile, was thinking it over. Her growth was toward greenness and tranquillity, the idea of being somehow yourself in a little corner that was not Woolworth or Tottenham Court Road. She might shop at Woolworth on occasions, but she did not want to live Woolworth. She was a person, and Scarsdale was a person. Neither of them were loud-speakers.

She said, "Spen, I've been thinking it over."

"About the new home, Nellie?"

"Yes, I think I should like to have a garden."

That was final, symbolical and significant, and subtly imbued with the essence of living. For when a woman can ask such absurd questions as "Why is an oak an oak, and a poplar a poplar?"—or—"Why do birds sing", she is close to the essential mystery of things, and to the mystery of the "I" and the "You". But Eleanor did gaze at this seemingness of things, at the glimmer of the veil, at the strangeness of a leaf and a wing, and ask these questions, questions that even the *Daily Mail* could not answer. Perhaps she did not wish for an answer, or knew that there is no answer save the murmur that breathes in the little silent sanctuary of your self.

Inevitably Eleanor should have her garden, and Scarsdale called upon estate agents and was supplied with lists of properties that were for sale in Surrey and Sussex, Berks and Bucks. Everybody wished to sell, and Scarsdale was ready to buy, provided that the estate agents could provide Eleanor with her predestined garden.

"Just a small house and two acres, Spen."

Scarsdale hired a Daimler car and they set out upon their pilgrimage, and at the end of the first day Eleanor quoted the old tag about all men being liars, but for men she substituted house-agents. "They simply don't listen to what you say, Spen. They just serve up tinned villas." The Daimler was chartered for a second day, and at Eleanor's suggestion they called at the offices of a local firm in Surrey, and it was Eleanor who went in to seek for information.

She came out with a pink slip and an air of serenity.

"I found someone sensible in there. She waited to hear what I wanted and did not want."

"Something possible?"

"The Mill House—Shillford. She says it is a rather funny old place. They want to sell. Three thousand pounds."

"Let's go and look."

Scepticism had been instilled into them, but when the car turned up the lane past Shillford Church, and they saw the little old white house with its green shutters and rambling roof, and the stone wall and the iron gates, and the faded blue door, and the pollarded limes and the yews, and the cedar tree, their

faith was renewed. There was something meant about the house. It sat down in that green valley like a bird on its nest, with a small stream running between willows, and a smother of fruit trees about it. It was a house for people who had no ambition save to be together and at peace.

Eleanor looked flushed.

“Spem, I do believe—”

Her husband unlocked the padlock and chain fastening the iron gates.

“Off the main road, Eleanor. Well away from Main Street. Let’s see, it says here, an acre and a half of garden, a small orchard and a paddock.”

She breathed the word paddock. Milk and buttercups, and the poas and fescues, and ox-eyed daisies.

“A paddock, Spem.”

They loitered. The garden had brick paths and box edging, two lawns that seemed to flow round about trees and banks of shrubs and into odd secret corners. The little fruit garden had a wall. There were old red-brick outhouses with undulating roofs and shabby blue doors. There were masses of ivy. A thrush was singing in the cedar. The whole place had a dim brightness, a feeling of having been lived with.

They did not hurry. They wandered as though they had arrived at the one place in the world that was essentially I and You. They looked into stables and potting-shed and a rather derelict greenhouse. They discovered a little old red-brick garden house at the end of a nut alley.

“Spem, you could work here in summer.”

“I could.”

Then they entered the house, and the very first room they explored seemed somehow to have been waiting for them. It was a long room beautifully proportioned; it had a French window at either end, and each window was filled with the tranquillity of the garden.

Scarsdale slipped a hand under his wife’s arm.

“Nellie, does it strike you how quietly this house breathes?”

She smiled.

“My dear, it’s never been hurried.”

“No ambition, what! Fancy Mr. Blaney here.”

“Don’t. There have never been any Mr. Blaneys here.”

They went over the whole house. They lingered in every room. The place was shabby, but with a kind of contented shabbiness. It was like Scarsdale himself, an old book, old-fashioned flowers, old wine.

He said, “We shall have to spend some money. What about the drains? Life generally has a snag somewhere.”

Eleanor had a notebook with her. She made a number of notes in the kitchen.

“This is the one part that needs modernizing, Spen. That old grate, and the sink. Lead, and those silly taps. That’s one thing I do believe in, being wise in the kitchen.”

He watched her writing in her book. He knew now that the house was to be theirs.

## 4

One van was sufficient to empty the house in Astey’s Row of its furniture, and when the little place was empty they stood at the window of the sitting-room and felt both sad and happy. It was a spring day, and a powdering of green was appearing upon these London trees, and overhead there were craters of blue sky, but now that the house had been stripped it seemed to have lost its padding. All the noises of Astey’s Row and the Canonbury Road swarmed in and rattled their shoes.

“Just a little sad, Nellie?”

“Not really. I shall come here again sometimes.”

“Just to look?”

“Yes.”

“Suppose I shall too. Treading in the footsteps of Smith.”

A protesting meow came from a hamper standing behind the door. Thomas the cat was in that hamper, and ready to travel by taxi and train to a new world in Surrey. Eleanor bent over the hamper.

“Poor Tom, poor darling. I do hope he will like the new house, Spen.”

“Thomas will have to learn to be a country cat. He’s even more of a

Cockney than I am, but I'm not worrying. I say, it's four o'clock, that taxi was to be at the end of the Row at four."

He went out to look for the taxi, and finding it there he entered the house for the last time and took charge of Thomas and his hamper. He was the first to leave. His wife loitered a moment, and as she closed the little, shabby front door, her hand glided down the edge thereof with a caressing, soothing movement. She had a feeling that the funny little place would never be as happy again. She withdrew the key, and without looking back, followed her husband.

## Chapter Thirty-seven

THAT summer Scarsdale worked in the garden house, with his table under a lattice window, and the green hoops of the nut walk enclosing a distant vista of grass and flowers, and sometimes he would sit there and reflect upon life and its strangeness. He had attained tranquillity, or rather he had been given tranquillity by Eleanor.

Would he ever tire of tranquillity? Would she? He thought not. They had escaped from the bitter streets and the thunderous traffic, and whenever he walked down the nut alley and entered the house by one of the French windows of the long room, he was conscious of wonder, a little tremor of secret exultation.

He wondered at many things, that men should live in cities, that mystery should have ceased for them, that words should satisfy them, masses of meaningless and mechanical words that thundered to and fro, like traffic, explaining nothing. He wondered at the little cold bright face of the thing called science. He wondered at his wife, at his garden, at himself turned gardener. He had such a long way to stoop. He had had to teach himself which were weeds and which were flowers.

He wondered at Eleanor. How was it that she had been able to furnish the house as she had done, with old furniture and soft fabrics and colours that were dim and gentle? How was it that she could accomplish that most amazing *tour de force*, discover two good maids and keep them? Yes, in Shillford! What machinations, what magic did she employ? How was it that she had been able to slip so doucely into the life of Shillford? She was learning to play tennis. She had taken charge of the local branch of the Women's Institute.

Mrs. Spenser Scarsdale, the daughter of a small farmer in Dorsetshire, yet somehow supreme and adequate. Of course he was a little celebrity in his way, but when he considered his books and Eleanor they were mere stones in the grass for the passing of her feet.

He had settled six thousand pounds on his wife, presented her with the capital, and had asked no further questions, yet he always remembered the evening when he had spoken to her of this project.

“I want you to have a little money of your own, Nellie.”

It was sunset, and the light lay on the beech-wood down the valley. They

could see this wood from one of the french windows. And Eleanor had gone to the window and had stood there with such a stillness that he had wondered. Suddenly she had turned from the sunset and come to him, and held his hand for a moment.

“Thank you, Spen.”

## 2

Scarsdale bought a car. It was a mild and inoffensive car, grey, a two-seater. He drove it himself, though he employed a gardener-chauffeur. There were characteristics that united Scarsdale and his car. He sat up rather straight at the wheel; he drove slowly and with deliberation well on the left-hand side of the road. He drove solemnly, and almost with an air of surprise that he should be doing such a thing.

Modernity passed him easily, and perhaps with a twinge of scorn.

“Look at this old josser dawdling. Get on with it, for God’s sake get on with it.”

Ironic, amused impatient glances were cast at him. He had no sense of speed, no urge to rush from nowhere to nowhere to fetch nothing.

The Scarsdales did not take the car out at week-ends, and Newlands Corner and its Sunday squelch of humanity and orange peel and waste paper was unknown to them. They drove out on Mondays and Tuesdays and Thursdays. They pottered along lanes, and visited old churches. Often they took a tea-basket.

They liked to boil a kettle over a stove.

Scarsdale would say, “We have taken two hours to get here, Nellie.”

Scandalous admission, and yet she was contented.

## 3

Scarsdale continued to carry on his business as a prowler and a sitter upon seats. The funny people might raise their eyebrows and say, “Old Scarsdale, stuck in the country, scooping strawberry jam out of a pot!” But it wasn’t so. Two days a week Scarsdale’s gardener-chauffeur drove him to Shillford



station, and Scarsdale caught the nine-forty-three to town. It was a source of wonder to Garrod the chauffeur that his employer should go up to London looking so anonymous and shabby, and there were occasions when Garrod felt himself better dressed than his master.

As a prowler and an observer of humanity, Spenser Scarsdale was an adept, stepping back into the world of the Essex Road and Astey's Row. There were districts that had a particular flavour for him, Bloomsbury, and any side-street within three miles of Canonbury Tower, and the Charterhouse and Smithfield, Covent Garden and Soho. He prowled like an expert; he could stuff his hands into his overcoat pockets and slouch. Even the underworld did not resent his presence, for he was without any appearance of succulent and polished complacency. No one would have been surprised to see him pick a cigarette-end out of the gutter.

He had a queer collection of friends, people whom he had met upon seats, and in cheap eating-houses and at coffee-stalls, and in the world of understanding he was one of them. They knew him as Mr. Spenser, a derelict journalist. They would have been shy of him, and perhaps too matey, had they known that he had an income of some fifteen thousand pounds a year.

Occasionally he explored the East End, touching the limits of all hideousness in Plaistow and the Barking flats, but even his prowling, sympathetic soul would return from such places feeling smeary and saddened. Here were obscure, smelly chunks of buildings where soap was made. There were chemical works, and on one occasion he discovered a sort of slimy creek, but he never went there again.

He appeared at strange functions, weddings, out-of-door meetings, a Jewish christening—he had a Jew tailor acquaintance in Soho, and once—because it was necessary for the sake of his craft, he attended as an out-patient at the Charing Cross Hospital. Probably there were few men living who knew his London and its human intricacies as he did.

Eleanor's London was different. She shopped in Oxford Street, and though she might walk down Bond Street she was shy of its shops. Never could she be persuaded to lunch luxuriously and *à la mode*, but her choice remained faithful to a certain tea-shop in Sefton Street where in summer they would give you a plate of tongue and salad that was not too tired. The shop was run by two women who had to live, and Eleanor always gave the waitress sixpence.

Twice a year she took a bus to the "Angel", and walked along Astey's Row. She looked at the little houses and the great plane tree. She loitered, she gazed, she wondered a little at life and then went home.

The Scarsdales were going to Italy and Egypt.

On that particular November day three weeks or so before they sailed, Scarsdale went up to town to make certain final arrangements, and to walk—as he loved to walk—somewhere in London. It was one of those dead days, raw and foggy, and Eleanor, looking through one of her windows at a blurred red sun vanishing below the edge of a winter world, felt that the room was cold. She put coal on the fire and glanced at the clock. Spenser was coming back to tea, and suddenly, for no reason at all, she felt anxious, and mistrustful of the dusk, and switching on the shaded lamp beside her husband's chair, she lowered the blinds, and drew the curtains.

She sat down to listen. She could not say why she felt uneasy and on edge, and when she heard the sound of the car, and footsteps coming up the path she knew them to be Scarsdale's, and the little knot of tenseness in her relaxed. She rose and rang the bell for tea. She was aware of the room as a pleasant place, secure and warm and curtained, with the fire burning brightly.

Scarsdale came in. He looked tired and in the shadow. He kissed her, but he kissed her as though his thoughts were elsewhere. Almost, his eyes looked frightened.

“Cold, Spen?”

“A little.”

He sat down on the big tuffet in front of the fire, and she felt his silence and suffered it. Tea was brought in and placed on the table beside her chair. Her hands moved over the tray.

“Have it there, Spen?”

“Yes.”

He reached for his cup and a plate. She saw him in profile, and his face had a haggard seriousness. It was as though something had shocked him and he could not forget it, and was glad of the warmth of the fire.

Suddenly he spoke. “Extraordinary thing happened to-day. In the Gray's Inn Road. Saw a man run over by a bus.”

She waited.

“Gave me a shock, Eleanor. I helped to pull him out. You see—”

“Dead?”

“Yes. You see—he did it on purpose.”

A little silence passed. He was staring at the fire.

“Extraordinary thing. It was an old chap who used to work with me, old chap named Frater. Suppose he was desperate. One ought to do something about this sort of thing, Eleanor. I’ve got to do something about it, you know, find out if he’s left anyone behind.”

A clock struck with a rich, deep deliberate rhythm. She said softly, and her voice was like the clock’s, “Of course we must do something about it, Spen.”

He spread his hands to the fire.

“Buses, red buses. They used to frighten me at times. Just like life, modern life, thundering along, always in a hurry.”

He looked through his long fingers at the fire. He was thinking of Eleanor, feeling her and the room and its tranquillity.

“Yes, if it hadn’t been for you I might have been old Frater,—all smashed up and bloody.”

## THE END

### TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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 *Old Wine and New* by Warwick Deeping]