

**THE
DARK
HOUSE**

WARWICK DEEPING

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LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

SECOND YOUTH
COUNTESS GLIKA

THE MAN WHO WENT BACK

Warwick Deeping

THE DARK HOUSE



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To

NATHAN MUTCH

THE DARK HOUSE

I

Ruggles, the night porter, who went on duty at seven o'clock, and who remained in charge of the college doorway until seven o'clock next morning, occupied a kind of sentry box in the college vestibule. The big, green door opening into Gifford Street, was both Ruggles's responsibility and his challenge to fate. He was a hairy and a rather surly old beast who wore a dark green frock-coat with brass buttons, unofficial trousers, and a peaked cap which he shed when the official world had gone to bed, and he could doze decently in his corner. As a sergeant in the Coldstream Guards Ruggles had fought in the Crimea, and if his knowledge of life and of London was adequate for the duties he endured, he did, perhaps, discover a sour delight in exercising a cynical authority.

The exercising of authority may be both pleasant and profitable, and though Ruggles was held to be incorruptible, he was not Sea Green to particular persons. Ruggles showed a shrewdness and a knowledge of men and things in the accepting or the refusing of largesse. He was responsible for that door, and for those who might wish to go out, and even more so for those who might wish to sneak in. Young men in general, and medical students in particular, are not gilded saints, and Ruggles had no personal quarrel with wild youth in pursuit of petticoats. He had been wild himself, and could gloat over his adventures, and he had no high opinion of pious young men. He mistrusted them. They were the fellows who would sneak on you, whereas your wild lad was a sportsman and would not give you away.

Ruggles's other responsibility was the maternity bell, for the maternity clerks lodged in the college, and had to be called when a message came in. Ruggles both loved and loathed that bell. It rang at all hours, and sometimes several times a night, and Ruggles and the bell played a game with each other. The bell-ringers displayed a varying temperament and technique. When the bell rang vigorously and insistently, Ruggles would get out of his box like a fierce dog preparing to enjoy administering a fright. He could tell a dago or a Yid when he heard that bell ring in a particular way.

It rang that evening about three minutes to nine, and Ruggles got out of his box with his teeth showing in his beard. He tiptoed to the door, and opened it suddenly and fiercely. The expected figure stood revealed on the doorstep. It

wore a huge bowler hat, a long black overcoat almost down to its feet. It had a sallow face, and a hook nose, and a black retriever beard. It lisped.

“The doctor, pleath, mithter, at once, pleath.”

It tendered a card, but Ruggles did not look at the card. He held a large fist close to the Hebraic nose.

“Here, you foot it, Moses. Shin off, and don’t you show yer ruddy face ’ere for a week, or I’ll smash it. Get out.”

The Jew cringed and whimpered.

“But I vant the doctor, pleath. My wife——”

Ruggles put a large hand on the creature’s chest, and pushed him off the doorstep.

“’ook it, and come back in a week, Slimy. This ain’t Jericho. Blow off,” and he slammed the door.

Sentimental people might have been shocked by Ruggles’s seeming brutality, but then Ruggles knew that gentlemen of Hebrew persuasion arrived inconsiderately on that doorstep days before the babe was due. They were prepared to cause you infinite trouble, without paying for it. They were both servile and sedulous. Also, Ruggles knew that the young gentlemen cursed whenever a Jewish card came in. It meant squalor and hysterics, and hours of procrastination, and squeals and old women clawing at you on the stairs. And the young gentlemen were grateful to Ruggles when he drove Israel from the door, or clumbered upstairs and made the happy announcement.

“Case, sir, name of Smith.”

“Good biz. English.”

“Yessir. Not forty ruddy years in the desert!”

Ruggles sat down again in his box, and thought of the pipe he would smoke when the hospital world had gone to bed. Yes, when you arrived at years of discretion, or was it of impotence? a pipe replaced petticoats. By the way, young Mr. Tate was out, treating Florrie the college’s pet waitress to an evening at the Oxford. Young Mr. Tate was a broth of a boy, and needed watching, bless him! He did not ring the maternity bell, but knocked in a particular way upon the Gifford Street door, and Ruggles’s recognition of that knock might be worth half a crown, if Mr. Tate wasn’t stony.

The porter cocked an ear. Deliberate footsteps were descending the college stairs. This would be Dr. Richmond, Sir Humphrey Jolland’s house-surgeon,

setting out on his nightly walk. Regular as an officer doing sentry-rounds was Dr. Richmond. He went out at nine each night and returned at ten. He sat up reading till midnight, for, often when going upstairs to call the maternity clerk on duty, Ruggles had seen the light under Dr. Richmond's door. Dr. Richmond was St. Martha's admirable Crichton, its multi-medallist and winner of prizes. St. Martha's said that in ten years' time young Richmond might be a senior surgeon on the staff, and in twenty years Sir John Corrie Richmond, with a practice second to none, and an income that ran into five figures. Nor was he a mere sallow swat. He had captained St. Martha's rugger team during his last year as a student, and was very handy with his fists. Wasn't it young Richmond who had thrown a truculent dago down the stairs when the Italian gentleman had produced a knife and informed the doctor that he would be expected to remain in that Soho house until little Antonio or Maria should be born?

"Evening, sir."

There were certain people to whom Ruggles gave a military salute, and Dr. Richmond was one of them.

"Evening, Ruggles. Babies booming?"

Ruggles grinned.

"One Shylock, sir."

"Sent him off with a bee in his beard?"

"That's about it, sir."

Ruggles got up to open the door for Dr. Richmond. Yes, Dr. Richmond might be the smartest student St. Martha's had known for many years, but he wasn't smug. He had a joke and a smile for you, what's more he was a comely lad, straight in the back and thick in the shoulders, a little stocky perhaps for his height, which was five feet nine. He was black of hair and fresh of face, clear-cut, and steady and blue of eye, the sort of man who would not flinch in a tight corner. He had a hot temper, but he rode it like a lad who was the master of a mettlesome horse.

"Thanks, Ruggles."

"Thank you, sir."

Dr. Richmond stepped out into Gifford Street, and the porter closed the door, and sat down in his box. Yes, Dr. Richmond was a toff, and seriously so, and Ruggles, reflecting upon the adventures of his own hot youth, found himself wondering how Dr. Richmond managed about women. Rumour had it

that most of the nurses were sweet on him, and that even that old Gorgon, Sister Sangster of Victoria smothered herself in smiles when Dr. Richmond appeared with his dressers in the ward.

John Richmond turned from Gifford Street into York Place, walking fast, a man out for exercise and fitness, arms swinging, head up. Half-way down York Place a woman loitered under a street lamp, sidled towards him, and looking in his face, dropped words of harlot's honey.

“Hallo, darling.”

Richmond gave her a blue-eyed stare, and without slackening speed, passed on. He had no words for that sort of woman, and she, sensing his scorn, turned about and cursed him with a kind of husky shrillness. Richmond smiled, for there was a hardness in him that would not pause to consider the soul of some poor Magdalene. He was not that sort of damned fool. He had a future, ambition, a supreme self-confidence which was rare in so young a man. He was not afraid of tackling a tough problem, nor did he mind other men watching him while he worked, for he could lose himself in the craft of his hands, while knowing that his hands were more clever and confident than the hands of other men.

He turned into Oxford Street and went west towards Hyde Park. One could walk fast in London in those more spacious days, without being balked by loitering, idle women. Shop fronts were decently dark, pavements almost empty. Richmond liked to move swiftly, as though letting his strong urge spend itself, but while he walked his brain was active. He thought of his cases, of his future, of the latest things he had read, and of that eternal problem—money.

His immediate future, as he saw it, was a gamble with Time. He had one brother, Lawrence, five years older than himself, and the brothers had been left orphans while at school. Each had inherited about fifteen hundred pounds, trust money, the principal of which had become theirs at the age of twenty-one. Lawrence was married, and a junior partner in a firm of solicitors who functioned in the fashionable world, and Lawrence possessed a house in Kensington and ambitions. John still had a thousand pounds behind him, capital, a war-chest that he guarded with cold ruthlessness. He had lived hard and cleanly, helped by scholarships and prize money. As a house-surgeon he received no salary, but St. Martha's provided him with food and a bed. That sum of money was being hoarded for the great adventure; in that it would enable him to live during those lean years while he hung on in London waiting

for the world to recognize and accept him as a consulting surgeon. He was ready to deny himself most things in order that the greater thing might be his.

Coming to the Marble Arch Richmond turned down Park Lane. The day's traffic had died away. An occasional hansom-cab or growler or a horse bus cruised by with a clop-clop of hoofs upon the wooden surface. Richmond passed a private carriage standing outside a house; the door was open, emitting a flood of light, and down the steps came a regal young woman in a cloak of Venetian velvet, with a coronet brilliant about her hair. A sedulous footman was carrying the lady's train. Another footman waited at the carriage door. Richmond paused for a moment, and looked back to watch that figure of serene and lovely opulence sheath itself like a flower in the dark interior. She belonged to a world which he, an obscure young doctor, was determined to conquer. He walked on, head up, smiling to himself, conscious of these great splendid houses, and of the dark Park, mysterious under the stars. He was youth, challenged by romance and its achievements, eager to ride into the lists like some unknown knight, and give blows and receive them. He asked for the flowers that were thrown at prowess and at power. There was nothing in him of the little, predestined underling, nibbling with envy, and ready to chatter like some angry ape when Achilles rode by in splendour. There was too little in him, perhaps, of the sacramental healer, signed with the seal of compassion. Some day he would enter these great houses, be welcomed, appealed to. Supreme skill would be his justification. A brougham and a smart horse would wait here by the kerb, while Sir John Corrie Richmond went up the steps to see a door opened by a flunkey. No suppliant he, but a man whose reputation and whose capacity would put him among the great.

An agitated nurse, whisking her starched skirt in by the courtyard door, was met by the smell of tobacco.

“Ruggles.”

Damn the wench! The porter tucked his pipe away in a corner of his box, and prepared to receive cavalry.

“Ruggles.”

“Yes, nurse.”

“Is Dr. Richmond in?”

“No, he ain't.”

“Oh, bother! A case of secondary hæmorrhage in Victoria. Who's in?”

“Mr. Joplin’s upstairs.”

The nurse clicked her tongue contemptuously. Mr. Joplin, that moony, spectacled Simple Simon! Mr. Joplin would be worse than useless in such a crisis. Her starched uniform seemed to squeak, and Ruggles eyed her almost malevolently. Women shouldn’t function dressed up in tin-plate and starched cotton. Something softer and more downy was what unregenerate man asked for. Moreover, this particular nurse was all vinegar and piety, the kind of woman who would sneak on you and report you to the Warden for having three pulls at a pipe.

“Is anybody else in?”

Ruggles produced a silver turnip of a watch and peered at it.

“He’ll be back in three minutes.”

“Who?”

“Dr. Richmond. Always back by ten. Reg’lar as my old watch.”

“Then, for God’s sake send him across. Tell him No. 7 in Victoria is bleeding.”

Ruggles tucked his watch back into its pocket.

“I’ll tell ’im. It’s two minutes to ten. Bet you he’ll be in Victoria pretty well as quick as you, nurse.”

“If he doesn’t come in at ten, send Mr. Joplin.”

“I will.”

“But when Dr. Richmond does come in, tell him.”

“O’ course I will. I’m not loony.”

Ruggles recovered his pipe, but hearing those familiar footsteps passing the vestibule window, he again laid his pipe aside and got up to open the door. That was a quality in Dr. Richmond that Ruggles approved of, a crisp, marching step that did not conceal itself, but gave you frank notice of its advent. The porter swung the door wide with a spacious gesture that was not accorded to lesser mortals.

“You’re wanted, sir. Case of bleeding in Victoria.”

Richmond paused to ask one question.

“When did you get the message?”

“Only about a minute ago, sir.”

The house-surgeon walked straight on and through to the courtyard door, as though he and a human crisis were natural counterparts. He disappeared, and Ruggles lit his pipe, and said to himself that if he was in a tight corner Dr. Richmond was the lad he would choose to pull him out of it. Ruggles stretched himself, and sucking away at his pipe, remembered that Florrie and young Mr. Tate would be due at the door in an hour or so. Then, it might be safe for him to remove his boots and allow himself a snooze.

II

Man is a jealous beast, and Mr. Bernard Steering, strolling across the college court towards the hospital's back entrance, saw that familiar and detested figure ten yards ahead of him. Bernard Steering was a very tall young man, supercilious, sandy, with pale blue eyes that never varied their expression. He was a dressy person, cool, debonair, and assuming even in the presence of his intimates an air of infallibility. He walked with his hands in his trouser pockets, and stared at Richmond's back. That was the offence. This other man had always been a step ahead of him, beaten him on the tape, and but for Richmond Mr. Steering would have felt himself *facile princeps*. Not that this tall, cold-eyed lad had taken the rivalry as casually as he demonstrated a case to his dressers. He cultivated a casual, princely facility in everything that he did, but the whole hospital knew that Steering had worked his eyelids red to snatch from Richmond that final and most notable of prizes, the Lester Medal.

And he had failed.

Yes, that damned fellow Richmond had always been in his way from the first year to the fifth, in chemistry and physics, in anatomy and physiology, in surgery and medicine. And he was still obstructed by him in the competitive scramble for possible honours. Sir Humphrey Jolland had chosen Richmond as his house-surgeon, and Steering had had to be content with an appointment under old Hobson, that garrulous, hairy and rather ineffectual veteran who blew upon his scalpels and was known, with irreverence, as Old Sepsis.

An iron bridge spanned the deep area between the courtyard and the hospital building, that cliff of yellow brickwork smudged with London soot, which many a country doctor riding his horse or driving his gig along English lanes remembered with affection. Strange, that this rather gaunt Georgian building should retain for its students a glamour and mystery, and Richmond, pausing to look up at those rows of windows regimented under the smoke-blackened stone cornice, was conscious on this spring day of the potent smell of the place. Not that its smell was singular, but a plurality of odours, floor polish and carbolic acid and soap and the scent of flowers on the ward tables, the vinous odours of the dispensary, the stuffy reek of unclean humanity and of foul clothes associated with the out-patient and casualty departments. The scent of blood could be included, and those other more sinister smells attached to the dissecting and the post-mortem rooms. Love was a word that the hard young pragmatist in Richmond had not yet learned to use with understanding,

either about places or about people, but Richmond's momentary loitering upon the steps of the iron bridge brought his enemy level with him.

"Morning, J.C. How are miracles this morning?"

Steering was the hospital's wit, as well as its Beau Brummel, and if Richmond's initials had always suggested the rather obvious jest, the supercilious young man gave to it the distinction of wearing an eye-glass. Richmond smiled at him. It was easy to smile at the fellow whom you had licked, and could lick again if needs be.

"Ever notice how bricks are laid, Steering?"

"Does it matter?"

"Oh, just a question of observation. We're taught to cultivate it."

Steering lounged up the steps and turned about.

"Oh, by the way, did that case in Victoria survive?"

"Which one?"

"One of Sir Humpty's latest eggs. Brittle shells, some of them, what?"

"No, it didn't."

"We rather thought it wouldn't. Nasty, dirty thing to interfere with. Miracles don't always materialize, J.C. You can tell Sir Humpty that, with our compliments."

Richmond was still smiling.

"Thanks, I will."

Steering might now be floating ice to Richmond, but if it did not chill him, it may have helped him to divine the prime source of professional prejudice, professional jealousy. Doubtless it is irritating to established complacency to discover its ordered world thrown into confusion by some bounder with a new theory. Adaptation demands effort. If you have given years to the doing of difficult things you become cautious, and perhaps too ready to defend the city of convention. Moreover, most men are so ready to accept that which is fed to them, and may resent a change of diet. The eternal why is both a purge and a provocation, and Richmond had a curious and a questioning mind. He could not be hoodwinked with words, sonorous and reverberating phrases that explained nothing. Professional complacency! Was not the tale still told of an eminent physician who, when the wooden stethoscope first came into favour, appeared in his ward with one of the new, silly trumpets stuck in the breast-pocket of his coat and adorned with a rose. That was all the damned thing

deserved, to carry a buttonhole and display scorn. The new can always be made to appear impertinent and ridiculous.

Richmond found his dressers waiting for him in Peel ward, three young men as unlike in their faces as they were in their capacities. A number of new cases had been admitted, and Richmond portioned them out to his dressers, but before these youngsters touched them, he examined each case himself. Damage could be done by clumsy and unenlightened handling, and Richmond had no faith in two of his three students. To Snaith, of the eager head and the bright eyes he could allow some latitude, for Snaith was sensitive and had hands, but Bullock and Webster were rather turgid oafs, particularly Bullock. Richmond took trouble with his dressers, for he could teach these younger men many things, yet he would sometimes wonder whether the effort was worth while. Snaith would make a surgeon, but the other two were more fitted for driving cattle.

“Bullock.”

“Hallo.”

Bullock halloed to everything. He had no manners, and like many large and muscular males was devastatingly stupid, and just as devastatingly self-satisfied.

“Come here. See anything?”

Richmond was curt with this young steer. He had drawn back the bedclothes from one of the new cases and turned up a red flannel night-shirt. The man’s abdomen lay exposed, rising and falling as he breathed. The skin had a faint, yellowish tinge, and the face on the pillow was starved and sharp.

“Observe anything?”

Bullock stood at the bottom of the bed and stared.

“Bit adipose, isn’t he?”

Richmond’s smile was revealing.

“Snaith. Just a moment.”

Snaith came across from a neighbouring bed, and stood beside the hulking Bullock.

“What do you see?”

Snaith’s bright glance ran over the figure on the bed.

“Skin rather yellow. Some emaciation. Distinct swelling there under the

right ribs.”

“Good! Now, hands, feel, gently. Can you see anything now, Bullock? Or only just what you call fat?”

Bullock’s heavy lips moved.

“Lipoma.”

Richmond’s mouth was scornful.

“Like your head! No use guessing. If you can’t learn to see, what’s the use?”

John Richmond’s college window looked towards the west, and he kept his table in this window, and upon it his microscope, notes and books. It was a sunset window, for over the London roofs and chimneys he could watch the sky flush or fade in all its moods and cloud drapings. Richmond was no mere sedulous ape, and to say that the sunset was a study in red or gold was neither adequate nor pure poetry, and from that window the young doctor discovered all manner of colour shades in the sky, and with the same exactness of observation that would have chronicled the characteristics of a skin-rash. At this period of his life he saw things photographically and without mystery. The colours of the spectrum were scientific verities, but he did not see God in the spectrum.

He possessed a biggish bookcase full of books, and some of his confrères twitted him on the contents of his library. It was the Darwin-Huxley age, and Richmond was all Darwin and Huxley. Certainly, he had laughed and exulted a little over Huxley’s smashing of Soapy Sam. But there were other volumes on Richmond’s shelves that dealt with architecture, the Italian and Flemish painters, history, Gibbon, Cobbett, and a few of the poets. All John Keats was there. At night a colza lamp with a green shade would stand upon John’s table. He was more interested in what could be found in books than in the smutty stories of the college common-room.

He sat and watched the sunset fade and die on this particular spring evening, and as he watched it his spirit leapt over roofs and chimney pots to the wild west country where he and brother Lawrence had bathed, and tickled trout, and raided orchards, and scrambled about the moors. He was fond of brother Lawrence, and admired him, for Lawrence possessed some of the graces that he himself lacked, social gifts, a conversational cleverness. There was more of the Celt in Lawrence Richmond. John dined once a month at his brother’s house, and maybe John realized that Lawrence and his decorative

wife were people with ambitions that were subtly different from his own. Already, the Lawrence Richmond dinner-parties were occasions of distinction where Lawrence's wines and his witty tongue, and his wife's blonde beauty, pleased people who could be useful in the social adventure. Not that Lawrence was a snob. He was an æsthetic person who preferred to play upon the most perfect of pianos, and who liked his colours exquisite and rich. The Law was a ladder which might carry him to the notable and oratorical House to which so many lawyers tend. Lawrence was a master of words. The danger was, though John did not know it, that his facile, brilliant brother was a young man in a perilous hurry.

When the sunset had faded, and the branches of the big plane tree in the college court had become black against the cold sky, John Richmond went down and supped in the college dining-room. He might be a laconic person, attending to the business of eating, and not easily provoked into argument, but he was popular with these other men. They accepted his silences in granting him his significance. Appealed to, he was always ready to help a confrère who might be worried about a case.

"I say, J.C., I wish you'd have a look at a woman in Alexandra. She was sent in as a gastric ulcer."

"And isn't?"

"I'm not sure. Symptoms pretty acute. I don't want to bring old Murray round unless it's urgent."

"All right. After supper."

"Thanks, muchly."

Richmond having visited the case in Alexandra, examined the patient and reassured the young and worried house-surgeon, returned to his room, lit the lamp, drew the curtains and sat down to read. Sir Hector Ross had just published a monograph on the latest developments in antiseptic surgery, and Richmond sat at his table, making notes as he read. If he was happy in such work, that was its justification. He had the fierce pride of the craftsman. In half an hour he would turn down the lamp, put on his hat, and set out in search of exercise.

Ex-Sergeant Ruggles, squatting in his box, spectacles on nose and laboriously enjoying an account of the latest murder horror, heard footsteps approaching the Gifford Street door. They were crisp and hurried footsteps, suggesting to Ruggles a young husband in a hurry. They stopped, and the bell above his head jangled. Ruggles put his paper aside, and emerging from his

box, opened the door. There was a gas lamp over the door, and its light played upon a tall, slim gentleman wearing a top-hat and a fashionably cut grey overcoat.

“Evening, Sergeant. Dr. Richmond in?”

Ruggles grinned. He recognized the gentleman.

“Yes, sir, not gone out yet. You’ll find him upstairs. Y’know the room.”

“Second floor, first on right.”

“That’s it, sir. You’re just in time. The doctor takes his walk at nine.”

Lawrence Richmond crossed the vestibule and made towards the stairs, and Ruggles, watching him rather like a shrewd and hairy old dog with his head on one side, told himself that Mr. Lawrence Richmond seemed tucked up about something. Yes, rather like a nervy sub. just before a bayonet charge, when bullets were going plop into other fellows’ bodies. Ruggles returned to his box and his paper.

John Richmond was not conscious of having heard footsteps in the corridor. Someone was in the room, and he turned sharply in his chair.

“Hallo, Lawrie! You came in like a ghost.”

As he raised the lamp shade and looked at his brother, the words that he had uttered seemed to fit themselves to Lawrence’s face. Lawrence Richmond was a handsome fellow, dark as a Cornishman, with a narrow face amplified by what were known as Piccadilly Weepers. He was apt to be a little over-mannered, and as his enemies described it—“Too Frenchy.” He had much more of the woman in him than had John. He had taken off his glossy hat, and his black and wavy hair looked as glossy as the hat. His brown eyes were bright in a face that concealed some inward strain.

“Still the slave of the lamp, John.”

He sat down in his brother’s one arm-chair, and placing his very beautiful hat on the floor beside him, unfastened his coat, and feeling in an inner pocket, produced a gold-washed cigar-case.

“Mind if I smoke, my dear fellow? Try one. A Sir Jonathan Harvey recommendation.”

John was standing by the table with his back to the light, observing his brother. He saw that the long, delicate fingers were faintly tremulous as they

handled the cigar-case. Lawrence appeared to be suffering from some secret excitement, an excitement that over-stimulated him, and exaggerated all his little mannerisms.

“Sorry, Lawrie, but you know my idiosyncrasy.”

“Still cigar-shy?”

“Yes, they lay me out. I can smoke three pipes one after the other, and not feel the effects.”

“Well, smoke your pipe.”

Lawrence lit his cigar, and putting the case away, lay back in the chair, and crossed one leg over the other. He wanted to appear at ease, and he wasn't. His cocked right foot jogged up and down.

“We have always been pretty frank with each other, Jack.”

John Richmond sat down astride the chair he had been using.

“We have. Good reasons.”

“Thanks, old chap. Well, I'll come to the point. I want you to help me, if you will.”

“Of course. And how?”

Lawrence lay back, blowing smoke.

“I want your financial backing for a week. I suppose you won't object to making a hundred pounds?”

“Hardly. But——”

“Oh, I'll explain. I have been given private information about a new mine, and I backed myself to take up shares. It's a big thing, but I find I'm just short of my guarantee. I want cover for a week.”

“How much?”

“Could you manage a thousand?”

John's eyes narrowed a little.

“A thousand!”

“Yes. You see, this is a confidential affair. I don't want to have to go to my bank. If you could do this for me, I can promise you——”

“Look here, Lawrie, you're not in Queer Street?”

“Good heavens, no, my dear man. I just need this extra bit to bring off the big thing. You’ll have your money back, with a pretty profit, in a month.”

“I shall have to sell out.”

“Well, you can re-buy again, and more. Can you manage the thousand?”

“Yes, if I realize all I have.”

“My dear chap, I knew you would trust me. I came to you because of that. You see, in my position, one likes to keep secrets in the family. By the way, have you a broker?”

“My financial affairs hardly require——”

“Oh, well, go to Bird & Massingham. Sound people. I’ll write down their address. A pen, thanks, and an envelope. There you are. What’s your money in?”

“Railway debentures.”

“Saleable in an hour. Bird & Massingham might arrange for you to let me have a cheque in a day or two. I suppose I had better send you an IOU.”

John Richmond took the pen and envelope from his brother, and placed them on his table.

“Hardly necessary between us, is it, Lawrie?”

His brother laughed, and putting out a hand, patted John’s sleeve.

“No, hardly, when one remembers all the scrapes we have been in together. Now, I ought to be getting home. I have some stuff I brought back from the office, a rather complicated case. Walking?”

“Yes, it’s my hour.”

“Come along. Walk my way.”

Ruggles let them out into Gifford Street, and glancing at the half-crown Mr. Lawrence Richmond had left in his palm, was sure that the doctor’s brother was a real toff, full of money and easy with it, as a gentleman should be.

John Richmond walked with his brother as far as Lancaster Gate, and there they parted, Lawrence, debonair, and carrying any obligation that had been placed upon his shoulders with the air of a man who had conferred a favour. After all, John was his younger brother and Lawrence had no mean opinion of himself. Success had come to him so easily that he had learnt to play the part of the man of fortune, even when a too-sanguine faith in his own cleverness

had made him forget that other men might be equally clever and more unscrupulous. He stood under a street lamp, lighting a second cigar, his hair as glossy as his hat. It might be considered bad form for a professional man to smoke in a public street, but, after all, it was half-past nine, and Lawrence had saved his face.

“Good night, Jonathan. I’ll do the same thing for you some day when you want a lease in Harley Street.”

He smiled at his brother, and they parted, and John Richmond walked back towards the Marble Arch, vaguely dissatisfied with the evening’s adventure. Had Lawrence been more worried than he had seemed? Undoubtedly, he was worried about this affair. A gamble? Yes, but Lawrence was a clever beggar, and knew people who were wise as to the world’s affairs. He had always trusted Lawrence.

Good heavens, was he doubting his brother’s good faith? That was inconceivable. Lawrence was the last man to take advantage of him, especially when he knew how precious that money was. John hated meanness, a grudging gesture, and discovering these in himself, was challenged, and to counter the challenge he walked back to St. Martha’s, and sat down and wrote a letter to Messrs. Bird & Massingham, instructing them to sell his railway debentures, promising to forward the certificates, and giving his brother’s name as a reference.

John carried the letter downstairs and passed it to Ruggles.

“Post this for me, Ruggles.”

“Now, sir?”

“Yes, it’s important. It won’t take you three minutes.”

“Very good, sir.”

III

John Richmond's railway stock was sold, and the proceeds lay in his bank. There was no need for him to indulge in elaborate calculations in order to arrive at his credit balance. It stood at about one thousand and seventy pounds, with a few odd shillings and pence thrown in, and when he sat down to write that cheque he smiled over it.

"Pay Lawrence Richmond, Esq.—One thousand pounds."

Almost, the writing of that cheque, made him feel like a man of destiny. He did not think of it as being a hostage to fate. In a few years' time other men might be writing him cheques of like solidity, and any vague uneasiness he had felt about his brother's adventures in finance, had faded. Men who are masters of craftsmanship are not given to suspicion, and perhaps John Richmond's faith in himself included a faith in the man who was his brother. If he remembered those tremulous hands, and a face that had appeared a little more pale and tense than usual, he had assured himself that old Lawrence had been just a little excited over the business, and naturally so. Lawrence was not dull clay, but passionate and finely strung, like one of those gentlemen of Devon or of Cornwall who had sailed out in their tall ships to singe the Spaniard's beard.

Dr. Drake, who was in charge of St. Martha's casualty department, looked into the college common-room just before lunch, and finding no one there but Bernard Steering with his feet on a chair, reading the *Morning Post*, asked a question.

"Richmond anywhere about?"

"Upstairs, I think."

Other men were not moved to ask Mr. Steering to do them a favour, and Drake left that very superior young man to his paper, and climbing the stairs, knocked at Richmond's door.

"Hallo."

Drake opened the door and found Richmond at his table, making notes on a case, a particularly interesting case which was puzzling the whole hospital.

"I say, Richmond, could you take over for me this afternoon?"

"I think so. We're not operating."

“I want to run down into Kent and see my people. My gov’nor’s not at all well.”

“Of course I will.”

“Thanks, old man. I shall be back by nine or so.”

“When are you going?”

“After lunch.”

“After lunch.”

Richmond was called only to two cases during the earlier part of the afternoon, both of them trivial. He spent half an hour in one of his surgical wards, easing the splints on a fractured thigh. At half-past four he strolled across to the college for tea. Pretty Florrie who admired him, perhaps because he did not plague her with sentiment, like so many of the other young gentlemen, brought him buttered toast. He was eating his toast, and discussing a case with Bennet, one of the house-physicians, when Tombs, the casualty-porter, came running across the courtyard.

Tombs put his head into the dining-room.

“Mr. Richmond, sir, urgent case. Gentleman shot in a cab. The cabby drove him here.”

Richmond left his tea unfinished, and followed the porter into the courtyard.

“Alive, Tombs?”

“Well, just so, sir. Shot himself through the head. The cabby heard the shot, pulled up, had one look, and whipped up for here. Happened in Oxford Street.”

The casualty room had two long windows opening on the hospital forecourt. It was a bleak, austere room containing a couch, a table, two hard chairs, a sink, and a dresser for dressings. The afternoon light was pouring in, showing every board and crevice in the uncovered floor and making the yellow walls look still more jaundiced. Richmond saw a cabman standing with his back to one window holding a shabby topper, and staring like a shocked animal at the figure on the couch. A nurse was bending over the couch. The figure had a towel under its head, and the face was a vivid red smudge.

The nurse turned, and straightened. Her lips moved. She gave a slight shake of the head.

“I’m afraid it’s over, sir. He was just breathing when they carried him in.”

For a moment that mask of blood concealed from Richmond the identity of the dead man. Then, something terribly familiar about that glossy head, and the bleached, long-fingered hands, shocked him into action.

“Give me a sponge, nurse.”

Richmond had his coat off, and while he was turning up his sleeves, his eyes remained fixed upon that disfigured face. The man had been shot through the right temple. The nurse brought a basin of water and a sponge, and Richmond, bending over the dead man, washed the blood away. He did not utter a word, but the nurse, watching his face, suddenly became frightened by it.

“Do you know him, Doctor?”

“It’s my brother.”

There was a strange silence in the room. The cabbie still staring, made a noise with his tongue like a man brisking up a lazy horse. Richmond dropped the sponge back into the basin. The nurse stood with a shocked and vacant face, her bosom rising and falling.

Richmond turned suddenly to the cabman.

“Was he alone in the cab?”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“Sure?”

“As sure as fate. And we found the pistol on the floor.”

“Where had you come from?”

“I was called to the Palmerston Club, sir. The gen’leman came down the steps, and told me to drive to Killigrew Terrace.”

“Did he seem worried?”

“Looked a bit pale and serious, sir, sort of sick. And in Oxford Street I ’eard a bang, and pulled up, and when I saw ’im all ’uddled up in a corner with blood on his face, I whipped up and druv on ’ere.”

“Who’s got the pistol?”

“The porter, Doctor. It’s one of them little revolver things, all silver-plated.”

Richmond turned away, and going to the sink, washed his hands. He was looking almost as white as the dead man, and the nurse, watching him,

wondered if he were going to faint.

“Can I get you something, sir?”

“No, I’m all right. And, nurse, tell Tombs to have my brother taken to the mortuary. And he had better warn the police. I—I’d like to be alone, for an hour.”

Then, bending over the sink, he remembered his brother’s wife, and the house in Kensington. Good God, someone would have to tell her! And that would be his business, if anybody’s.

Richmond was conscious of a kind of inward numbness as he walked across the Park on his way to Killigrew Terrace. Life did not seem quite credible at the moment, though Hyde Park was full of it. The sun was shining, the young green of the year gay and tender, and through the trees he could see the water of the Serpentine aglitter. Richmond cut across the grass where dogs and children were playing. A small thing threw a ball, and a terrier, chasing it, stopped and looked up into Richmond’s face as the ball trickled to his feet. “Balls are made to be kicked or thrown, master.” Richmond, coming out of an inward stupor, gave the ball a kick, and the dog went scampering after it. A voice within him said: “So goes my thousand pounds.” Was it gross meanness to think of such a thing when brother Lawrence was lying dead? And yet, there was bitterness in the thought; it seemed to penetrate and poison his compassion. So, Lawrence had been in Queer Street, and had lied to him as desperate men will lie, and that precious sum of money had been used as a last stake, or thrown to the wolves in a gamble to gain time. Richmond’s head seemed to clear as he walked across the Park. He accepted with a mordant clarity the conviction that this bitter thing had happened to him, and that to cherish any illusion as to the future would be futile. His war-chest was empty. He was as sure of it as if he had raised the lid of a strong-box and discovered the emptiness within.

But Richmond had another crisis to confront, and as he turned into Killigrew Terrace he saw three broughams drawn up near the gate of No. 7. Killigrew Terrace had been built in the early days of Victoria, and its tall, flat-faced houses had a sallow sententiousness. Each possessed the conventional area protected by iron railings, and a flight of steps leading up to a pompous, stone-pillared porch. Indubitably, the three broughams were waiting outside No. 7. Eulalia Richmond had visitors, and as John climbed the steps, he wished the owners of those broughams at Jericho. He rang the bell, and waited with his back to the brown door, and it occurred to him to wonder how Eulalia’s

fashionable friends would react to such a tragedy.

The door opened and Richmond turned to confront a maid who was strange to him.

“Mrs. Richmond in?”

“Yes, sir, but she has company.”

“I’m Mr. Richmond’s brother. I must see Mrs. Richmond. It is urgent.”

The maid made way for him.

“She’s in the drawing-room, sir.”

“I’ll wait in the dining-room. Will you ask her to come down.”

John Richmond walked into the familiar room. It was one of those overcrowded, bric-à-brac rooms which the Victorians loved—fussy, beribboned and pretentious. There were too many pictures on the walls, too much china on the mantelpiece. Two rather grim arm-chairs, seated in maroon-coloured leather, had their backs decorated with bright yellow antimacassars. The sideboard was like a mausoleum. The legs of the dining-table bulged, and as John Richmond stood on the red and yellow hearthrug, still holding his hat as though it would give him formal and moral support, he seemed to feel the pale dead soul of poor Lawrence in the room. Lawrence had been in so great a hurry to be and appear somebody. He had hurried to impress the world, even in this Kensington dining-room. Was that the secret of his tragedy, success at any price, a success that crashed down upon flimsy foundations?

There was a rustling on the stairs and Eulalia came into the room in mauve silk and lace. She seemed to crepitate, with inflated sleeves and bustle. She was one of those large, cold, fair women who look impressive under a chandelier, and whose smile comes and goes with artificial precision. She looked at John, and she looked at John’s hat. She smiled, and he realized her complete and awful innocence.

“Why, John, so ceremonious? I’m afraid I am entertaining. Lady Manser is upstairs, and Miss Gates.”

Richmond cut her short. Life had taught him that when pain had to be inflicted, a seeming ruthlessness and swiftness may be more kind.

“Won’t you shut the door, Eulalia. I have rather serious news.”

And suddenly she looked stupid. Like many brainless women she was all façade.

“I do hope you are not in trouble, John. Lawrence should be back at six.”

“No, it is about Lawrence.”

He saw her mouth go flaccid.

“There has been an accident. Lawrence was brought to our hospital.”

Her eyes were round blue marbles, like a young child’s eyes.

“He’s not——?”

“Yes, he died soon after they brought him to us.”

She did not utter a sound, but sat down suddenly in one of the arm-chairs. Her colour had gone, and her skin looked almost as yellow as the yellow wool in the antimacassar. Yet, there was a stiffness about the silk-sheathed figure that made Richmond think of the perfume, and hard and waxy artificiality of a tuberose.

“Was it an accident?”

He hesitated, and she showed sudden petulance.

“Why don’t you tell me? It is better that I should know.”

“It may have been an accident. A pistol was found in the cab.”

“He had shot himself?”

“I’m afraid so.”

She sat quite still, rigidly still. She showed no emotion. Her tightly-laced corsage seemed to creak under its sheath of silk. Eulalia had a small waist and she cultivated it. Richmond noticed that her lips seemed to have disappeared; her mouth had become a thin, bloodless line. Her eyes stared. Her hands lay knotted together in her lap.

“How horrible of him! How could he have done such a thing to me?”

Richmond was shocked. She was angry! But was it the revolt of a creature in unbearable pain?

“Lawrence may have been in some trouble.”

“Trouble! How could he be? How could he do such a ghastly thing?”

Richmond was frowning. Surely she was not so completely selfish? And then, he remembered those three waiting broughams, and Lady Manser, and Miss Gates.

“Eulalia, would you like me to go up and get rid of your visitors for you?”

She was staring out of the window.

“No, certainly not. If I have to bear this insult——”

Richmond’s head gave a little jerk.

“I see. Well, I am supposed to be on duty. Of course, if——”

He glanced at her, hesitated, and then walked to the door. She did not move or speak. She was like a woman frozen with a cold, bleak, unforgiving anger. Poor Lawrence! No wonder he had not sought succour and comfort from his wife.

Richmond, sitting at his college window, and confronting all the happenings of that catastrophic week, could not help feeling some bitterness against his brother. Society had enjoyed its scandal and its ritual. Two letters had been found upon Lawrence Richmond, one to Eulalia, the other to the senior partner in his firm. He had asked for forgiveness. But he had left no letter for John, the one person whose opportunity he had stolen and thrown into the melting-pot of his own stricken ambition. The whole story had been revealed at the inquest. Richmond still could see Eulalia sitting there, sheathed in black, and listening with a kind of implacable, frozen composure to the story of poor Lawrence’s folly. Now, Lawrence was dead and buried, and John’s thousand pounds had vanished in the fog of a speculative nothingness. His brother had left debts behind, and Eulalia, who had a small private income of her own, was refusing to recognize those obligations. Well, let these wretched tradesmen whistle for their money. The furniture was hers. It had been purchased in her name. People who forced credit upon you should not complain if they found themselves in the position of being disgruntled creditors.

John sat and thought of many things.

The loss of his capital had been revealed at the inquest.

All the hospital knew of it. Mr. Bernard Steering knew it. A certain eager smugness in expressing sympathy had betrayed that young man’s supercilious satisfaction. Had not his enemy received a mortal blow! There were other men who had been kind, and genuinely sorry, as sorry as the ordinary mortal can be expected to be about somebody else’s misfortune. As the Latins like to put it, the English are always sorry for somebody, but rather like a superior person patting the head of a dog. They have a genius for ascribing blame and for feeling a high, moral indignation, and often, instead of patting the dog, they administer a pious kick to the poor brute’s rump. Hence, our reputation for

coldness and hypocrisy.

The situation had to be faced, and Richmond was facing it without illusions. It was not a question of waiting upon a career, but of earning money, immediate money. The capital upon which he might have lived during five lean years, had vanished, and he had no one to whom he could appeal. His only remaining relatives were two old aunts, each living upon an annuity of a hundred and fifty pounds a year. Moreover, Richmond was a devil as to pride, passionately and dangerously so. Other men in his position had cheated fate by marrying women with money, and using the wife's income as a ladder to carry them over the wall of waiting and obscurity. Richmond neither knew a woman whom he wished to marry, nor one who could supply the needful capital, and being hot-blooded the compromise would not have appealed to him.

No, he was not going to sell himself to anybody.

Sir Humphrey Jolland had asked him to dine at No. 303 Harley Street. Sir Humphrey was a handsome, jocund, debonair old man who had enjoyed success, as few men had enjoyed it. He forbade his patients to drink port, but drank it himself with discrimination and immunity. He would go with you a long way down the road of travail, but not to the bitter end. He was kind, but he liked his compromises, and being a very busy man, was shy of incurring obligations. If you were baulked of the big thing, well, accept the next best thing, especially if you were young. Life should not be too easy for other people. He had known half a dozen good men driven down into the provinces, only to return to London and distinction after they had served their term for Rachel.

Richmond drank Sir Humphrey's port, and explained to him the nature of the crisis. Sir Humphrey had not been compelled to live upon husks in the days of his striving, for he had been the son of a wealthy father, and though many humiliating experiences had been spared him, he could sympathize with Richmond. He had had many house-surgeons in his time, and his opinion of Richmond was a very high one. Richmond was one of those rare men who dare to do. He had hands and a head, and courage. Men of less courage and capacity who shrank from doing, saved their faces, or pretended to, by teaching. Sir Humphrey was a superb surgeon, but a damned bad lecturer.

"It seems a pity, Richmond."

"That's rather the pith of it, sir. One resents being pitied, or looked on as a half-starved careerist."

“God forbid that I should have given you the impression——”

“Oh, not you, sir. After all, I suppose surgeons are needed in the country. My idea is to save money, and come back.”

“I, for one, shall always be ready to welcome you. One word of advice, Richmond.”

“Yes, sir?”

“Don’t marry. Ambitious young men shouldn’t marry.”

Richmond smiled.

“I’ll remember that, sir. I suppose you do not happen to know of anyone who wants an assistant, with a view to partnership?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. I had a letter yesterday from a contemporary who is thinking of retiring in a year. He wrote to ask if I could recommend a young man, especially one capable of tackling surgical work.”

“Whereabouts, sir, is the——?”

“Southfleet. Only forty miles from Town. You would still be in touch with life. It is a two-man practice, and I have known it for years. Dr. Davidson is finding the work too heavy. Long drives in all sorts of weather.”

“And the other partner, sir?”

Sir Humphrey twiddled his wine glass.

“Ah, Burgoyne, a very decorative person. Keeps his hunters. Burgoyne has, I believe, been one of Davidson’s problems. Decorative, dramatic, but not too efficient. That is why the practice would need a man with some surgical skill. The clearing up of other men’s mistakes, Richmond, with discretion, is one of our problems.”

“If Dr. Davidson is retiring, why should he worry?”

“That is a question I did not think you would ask me, young man.”

“I’m sorry, sir, but I think I understand. Without being smug, it’s the tradition.”

“Exactly. No craftsman who has built up something of which he is proud likes to leave a bungler behind him.”

Richmond was silent for some seconds.

“Would you do me the honour, sir, of recommending me?”

“With pleasure, my dear fellow.”

“I should like to look at the place, and meet both my superiors, before deciding.”

“Of course.”

“And I expect that they would like to look at me!”

IV

John Richmond, wearing a new frock-coat and top-hat, opened the railway-carriage door, and stepped out on to the platform of Southfleet station. Southfleet was a terminus, and its station rather picturesque improvisation in wood and glass, somewhat like an overgrown greenhouse. It was painted white. Richmond, surrendering one half of a return ticket to the collector, asked to be directed to the High Street and the house of Dr. Davidson. He was told that neither the High Street nor Dr. Davidson's house could escape him; he had only to follow his nose across the station-yard and the High Street would welcome him.

It did, with a very new yellow brick public-house on the left, and a thatched white cottage with a greengrocer's shop attached to it on the right. A pretty girl with fair, fluffy hair was weighing out the year's first green gooseberries in the shop scales. Richmond walked down Southfleet High Street between shops, and an occasional garden, and past a comely old white house with green jalousies and veranda. Ahead of him he saw a silver streak meeting the thin blue sky, the broad waters of the estuary gleaming in the sun. He passed a timber-yard shaded by trees, where a circular saw screamed as it ripped through a tree trunk. Over the way The Royal George Hotel spread its quiet dignity behind a white, pillared portico. The High Street spread out here into a pleasant, sunny space with a shrubbery between it and the sea, one road descending towards the pier and the old town, the other turning right to serve the Regency houses of Queen's Terrace. On the left a tall, bow-fronted old house with a balustraded cornice gazed placidly over the estuary. This was Prospect House, the home of Dr. Davidson.

Richmond pulled a brass bell-handle in the shape of a clenched fist, and as he waited on the doorstep of Prospect House and looked at the estuary and the shipping and the pier like some immense black centipede crawling out to sea, he thought that both house and vista were such as Dickens would have loved. Dr. Davidson's was Nicholas Nickleby, The Royal George, Pickwick, though to Richmond life seemed more Thackeray than Dickens. But the door was open, and a large, fresh-faced maid waiting upon his pleasure.

"Is Mr. Davidson in?"

"He's in the surgery, sir."

"He expects me. I am Dr. Richmond."

So might he have announced himself to Southfleet, as a rather masterful young man to whom this little sea-coast town was but Jericho on the borders of Canaan. The maid showed him into a prim little room with a bow-window, on the ground floor. It was Dr. Davidson's consulting-room and study, with an oak desk, a revolving chair, two other chairs, a big glass-fronted bookcase full of solemn medical literature. There were Landseer engravings on the walls, and the windows were protected by wire blinds so that rude and inquisitive children should not peer in when the doctor was applying a stethoscope to some chaste and naked chest.

Dr. Davidson bustled in. He bustled everywhere, upstairs and downstairs and into my lady's chamber, a little man with a large head, like a white owl fitted with spectacles. In his hospital days he had been known as Fanny, but life had made of him a shrewd Fanny, kind and capable. Also, it had tired him, and rendered him prematurely old.

"Dr. Richmond?"

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Davidson's mild blue eyes summed up the younger man as he would have summed up a new patient. So, this was Sir Humphrey's recommendation? And, with the instinct of the physician, Dr. Davidson approved it. Dr. Richmond had looks and a manner, a young dignity that stood straight and still, and did not fidget.

"Please sit down, Richmond."

Probably, their liking was mutual, and Richmond took the patient's chair, Dr. Davidson the physician's. They looked at each other across the desk, and suddenly each of them smiled.

"Your house is well christened, sir."

"Prospect, eh, and pleasant. This is not a bad spot, Richmond, to work and spend your life in. May I say that Sir Humphrey Jolland's recommendation was very emphatic."

"Thank you, sir."

"Excuse me if I ask a few questions."

"Certainly."

"Married?"

"No, neither married nor contemplating it."

"Can you ride or drive?"

“Both, sir.”

“Excellent. We cover a lot of ground. I gather that you have had considerable experience for your age.”

“I have held all the house appointments, and deputised as casualty officer. Sir Humphrey sometimes allowed me to perform a straightforward operation.”

“Drink or smoke?”

“I smoke a pipe, sir, sometimes when I’m off duty. An occasional glass of beer satisfies the other interrogation.”

Again, they smiled at each other, and more broadly.

“Well, I think it is your turn to cross-examine, Richmond.”

This was a likeable old man, pithy and humorous, who did not ascend a pulpit when he spoke to the young. Certainly, Dr. Richmond had every right to know what was expected of him, and what he might expect. The firm’s ledgers were also open for inspection. Dr. Davidson stated that the practice was worth close upon three thousand pounds a year. He and Dr. Burgoyne had been drawing each half a share, but on Dr. Davidson’s retirement Dr. Burgoyne would be assigned three quarters of the proceeds, and the junior partner a quarter share for a stated number of years. Also, he would be expected to buy himself in, and the capital required would be a thousand pounds.

“I have not got it,” said Richmond frankly.

“Well, that could be arranged. You could pay a stated amount off yearly, or insure your life and raise the money on the policy.”

“Meanwhile, I should act as assistant for a year.”

“I think that would be fair to everybody concerned.”

“Quite fair, sir. And what would my salary be?”

“A hundred and fifty pounds a year.”

“I could manage on that. I suppose I should be provided with a horse.”

“Of course. The practice does that. But before we come to any decision, I think you should meet Dr. Burgoyne.”

Richmond agreed. If he and Dr. Burgoyne were to be future partners, it was very necessary that neither of them should regard the other as Dr. Fell.

Meanwhile it was the Davidson dinner hour, and Richmond was taken to join the family in the dining-room of Prospect House. Mrs. Davidson in lace

cap and side-curls, and the mother of five marriageable daughters, smiled upon him, and introduced him to those same five daughters, Anna, Marion, Edith, Charlotte and Caroline. Anna and Marion, at a time when anything over thirty was regarded as completely old maidish, had dedicated themselves to good works. Edith was willowy and shy, Caroline stolid and black-browed, Charlotte as much of a minx as convention and her mother allowed her to be. It was a considerable ordeal for John. He was the new sensation, and all through the meal those five young gentlewomen observed him and were mute, while their mother chattered, and Dr. Davidson gazed benignantly upon the company through his spectacles. Who could blame either of the parents if they hoped that a prospective partner might take one of the dear girls off their hands?

With dinner over, Dr. Davidson put on his hat and walked John off to interview Dr. Edward Burgoyne. It would be a good moment for the new man to meet "Teddy," for Dr. Burgoyne enjoyed his dinner, and drank a tankard of porter with it, and felt genial towards his fellows. Dr. Burgoyne lived at No. 9 Queen's Terrace, and each house in Queen's Terrace possessed a minute front garden protected by iron railings, and a balcony upon which the french windows of the first floor opened. Queen's Terrace was Southfleet's Park Lane. Its windows looked out over Caroline Gardens to the estuary and the far coasts of Kent, and the dignity of its seclusion was enhanced by white posts and a white bar that closed its western end. No through traffic was permitted. Even the donkey-boys and their beasts were forbidden to use Queen's Terrace as a highway. The Victorians believed in discipline and enforced it. John Gage, Esq., a very active old gentleman who owned No. 20, had on occasions chased the rude urchins who had attempted to drive their donkeys along this sacred way and had administered corporal chastisement in good old English fashion.

As they stood on the doorstep of No. 9, Richmond heard a fine, full, throaty voice breaking into song.

"Juanita, Juanita——"

Almost, Dr. Davidson winked at the younger man. He said, with thin-lipped asperity: "Burgoyne is musical, very musical indeed." The voice died away as the door opened, and Richmond saw a large, florid man in the act of descending the stairs. Dr. Burgoyne was a flamboyant person; his red hair flared, so did his bright blue eyes. He wore a green velvet waistcoat under his frock-coat; Dr. Davidson abominated Dr. Burgoyne's waistcoats, but it was said that his lady patients liked them. Teddy Burgoyne was very much a lady's man. He sported mutton-chop whiskers, and a flower in his buttonhole, and a smile that always seemed a little overheated. He drove a very smart dog-cart with yellow wheels, and hunted twice a week in the season and, thanks to his

choler and his flow of language, was known in the hunting-field as “Dr. Vesuvius.”

His manner was hearty, and his voice had a ripeness.

“Ha, Davidson! Mr. Richmond, I presume?”

He held out a large, pink hand to Richmond, and stared him in the face.

“How de do?”

Now, Richmond, being a young man, and perhaps more wise as to the functions of the heart than as to the ways of men, was impressed by this handsome, confident person. Burgoyne’s grip was firm and friendly. Their contrasts in colour were complimentary. Richmond returned the hand-grip.

“Come in, my dear fellow, come in. I hope my senior has given you a complete list of my sins? Tra-la! Now, Davidson, I insist on a glass of port.”

Dr. Burgoyne took them into his dining-room where the midday meal had not yet been cleared away, and rang the bell, and opening a wine-cooler under the Hepplewhite sideboard, lifted out a dusty bottle.

“Best Cockburn’s, Richmond. Ever been to Oporto?”

Richmond had not.

“Boo-tiful place. Dark-eyed Juanitas,” and he winked at the younger man behind Dr. Davidson’s sedate back. “Ah, Florrie, three port glasses, please. Well, well, and how’s Sir Humphrey? Wonderful old man. Does he still tell naughty stories in the operating theatre?”

Richmond laughed. Dr. Burgoyne certainly was a cheerful person, though Richmond did not realize how much of Teddy’s charm was exercised for effect.

“I have never heard one.”

“Is that so? I’d tell you a fruity one, but I fear Dr. David would be shocked. Ha, Florrie, thank you, my girl. Now then for red and white wine and French brandy. That’s what port is dispensed from. Two fluid ounces per diem, p.p. or more if you feel like it.”

He filled the glasses and, raising his own, held it to the light.

“Bouquet and colour, what! Well, here’s to your joining us, my dear fellow. I presume our senior has made the position plain.”

“Quite, sir.”

“That’s good, very good.”

Richmond returned to London as the accepted assistant, and a potential partner in the firm of Davidson and Burgoyne. He had his books and his few belongings to pack, and he assigned to ex-Sergeant Ruggles the task of procuring a packing-case from some neighbouring shop or warehouse. As to the hospital, Richmond had no desire to parade it for sympathy, nor to acknowledge that in leaving it he was accepting defeat. His going should be like the going of hundreds of other men who drifted down into country practices and married, and begot children, and grew old, and died. It was Ruggles who offered to pack for him, and who uttered the words that were at the back of Richmond’s thoughts.

“I reckon we’ll see you here again, sir.”

“That’s on the knees of the gods, Ruggles.”

The porter looked puzzled. He had heard of the Trinity, but he did not connect those solemn and mysterious essences with knees. Knees were apt to be knobly and uncomfortable things, unless they were those of a comfortable wench, nursing you or a baby.

Richmond’s last contact with Mr. Steering was made in the college common-room. The supercilious young man, strolling in after supper, posted himself on the hearthrug, and asked Richmond a question.

“Do you want to sell any of your books, J.C.?”

Richmond was lying back in an arm-chair and smoking his pipe.

“I had not thought of it.”

“Well, I’ll take some off you. Might be useful, you know.”

“How?”

“Oh, ready cash.”

There were other men in the common-room, and they were silent, expecting, and perhaps hoping for an explosion. Steering was not popular, and he cultivated insolence.

Richmond smiled.

“Not necessary, thanks. Besides, I shouldn’t read too much, Steering. Gives some fellows swollen heads.”

“Mine being that way?”

“Quite so. And not worth reducing.”

Steering waggled his fists in his trouser pockets.

“I shouldn’t try, if I were you.”

“Oh, go and boil it harder.”

So, early in June, when the red may and the laburnums had ceased flowering in Caroline Gardens, Richmond and a large brown leather portmanteau arrived at Southfleet, and were driven in an old four-wheeler down the High Street and Pier Hill to Pier House. Pier House was a big white Regency building, buxom and broad-breasted with its bow front and green balcony, and was kept as a very superior lodging-house by a Mrs. Kemp. Mrs. Kemp, under persuasion from Dr. Davidson, had agreed to let the dining-room floor to Dr. Richmond, seeing that he would be no summer bird of passage, but resident through all the year. Richmond’s portmanteau was a heavy one. It had been in the Richmond family for many years, and it too suggested permanence, though its master’s dream might regard Southfleet merely as a place of exile. Richmond had to help the puffing old cabbie to carry this piece of baggage up the steps of Pier House. Mrs. Kemp, in white cap and black satin, waited for him above. She was not quite sure whether it was proper for a doctor to help in the handling of his own luggage, for Southfleet was a very proper little town.

She gave Dr. Richmond a prim greeting.

“Welcome to my house, Doctor. I trust that you will find it clean and comfortable. You should have allowed my girl to help you with the luggage.”

Richmond smiled at his new landlady. Perhaps it did not occur to him that a professional gentleman in a new top-hat and frock-coat was expected to cherish a rather particular dignity.

V

Life might be very real to John Richmond, but as he climbed the Pier Hill on those first mornings, no clear vision of the future was vouchsafed him, nor did he foresee that this little sea-coast town was to be for him a Prometheus's rock. Southfleet was famous for its sunsets, which turned the sky red, and dyed the estuary the colour of wine. It was famous for its bracing air from the north-east, the ozone from its foreshore, its Victorian correctness in morals and politics, save perhaps in high summer when the East End of London descended upon it and ate cockles and shrimps, and drank much beer, and fought and made love, and sometimes got itself drowned in the sea. Richmond had gathered certain data as to his position, but being rather full of himself and his future he had accepted these restrictions with some vagueness, and no fore-consciousness of inward revolt.

He was expected to go to church, when professional duties permitted, on Sundays.

He must not permit himself to smoke in public.

He must not be seen in a public-house.

He should not be seen out of doors without a top-hat.

His language must be decorous.

No married woman patient could make love to him or be made love to by him.

All such adventures were unprofessional and forbidden.

The playing of cards or of billiards was not advisable.

Shooting, and cricket were permitted. Also, croquet, if it happened to come his way.

He was expected to be a Conservative in politics, and a member of the Established Church.

It would demean him to receive any hospitality from tradespeople.

It would not be good form to sit on a seat in Caroline Gardens.

Discretion advised that he should not be seen walking alone with any young woman.

Between Prospect House and the white front of Miss Lovell's Library and

Toy and Fancy Shop a passage led to the surgery of Drs. Davidson and Burgoyne. It was attached to Prospect House, and the dispensary window looked out upon a narrow, walled garden where Mrs. Davidson delighted to grow geraniums and lobelia, white daisies and calceolaria. A weeping ash occupied the centre of the lawn, and here, in sunny weather, the young ladies and their mother would bring their needlework and books, and sew and read sedately. The windows of the surgery and waiting-room gave upon the passage, so that the garden's privacy was not disturbed. Mr. Charles Byng, known to the Southfleet fishermen and watermen as "Dr. Byng," was in charge of the dispensary, a thin, round-shouldered, mordant little man with a pale face that looked too small for its huge, drooping, sandy moustache. There were days when "Dr. Byng" seemed to be all moustache, and a strange deep voice that grumbled at you from under it. He lived among the firm's books and bottles, in a savour of tinctures and infusions. He had very nimble hands that ran over things like white mice, wrapping up bottles and deftly adding dabs of sealing-wax, or mixing ointments or rolling pills. He kept a row of stock-bottles on the dresser, labelled One, Two and Three. The habitually and penuriously sick who strolled in for sympathy were dosed by Mr. Byng from these bottles. No. 1 contained a brisk purgative, and was his favourite remedy when certain people pitied themselves too much and too often.

Southfleet possessed only one other medical practitioner, Dr. Sylvester Soames, a sleepy, grey-bearded, elderly gentleman who, as a competitor, had never stimulated Drs. Davidson and Burgoyne. Nor had Dr. Davidson needed any such stimulus. In that corner of the country no man was more respected and beloved. Quiet in manner, skilful, conscientious, kind, he was the ideal of what a general practitioner should be. Funny, brusque little Charlie Byng would have slaved for him until Domesday. Also, Mr. Byng was troubled. A man whom he knew and loved was passing, and into his place was stepping this unknown quantity, this youth, this stranger. Charles Byng was peculiarly proud of "The Practice." He always spoke of it in capital letters, and during those days of Richmond's initiation the younger man was a little puzzled by the way the dispenser's small grey-green eyes watched him. Almost, they were unfriendly eyes, puckish and shrewd above the roll of that huge moustache. But Mr. Byng knew many things that Richmond did not know. Mr. Byng asked the dark future questions. When Dr. Davidson departed who was to confront the sick world's shocks and surprises? Whose confident and clever hands were to unravel the tangles of other men's mistakes? Who was to save a woman when she was in dire danger, and her child was refusing to be born? Dr. Burgoyne? No. "Dr. Soft Soap?" Hardly. Besides, that would have been an insult to "The Practice." This young man from London? Charles Byng was

troubled, though why he should have vexed his soul about a show in which he was an unqualified supernumerary is one of those mysterious manifestations that confound the cynical and the mercenary-minded.

Dr. Davidson had a dry humour of his own.

“Better drive round with me this morning, Richmond, and spy out the land.”

So, Howell, the bewhiskered ex-artilleryman in his blue coat with its silver buttons and his top-hat, was relegated to the dog-cart’s back seat, and Dr. Davidson took the reins. Kitty, his favourite mare, was between the shafts, and went spanking up Southfleet High Street for the road to Willowell. Southfleet, that Georgian and Regency improvisation, had become the mother town to nearly a dozen villages, Willowell, Richford, Danesfleet, Kingsfleet, Wickering, Hayleigh, Ashersdune, Canutesdune, Eastness. The great grey tower of Willowell soared up over the fields above a cushion of red roofs. All this was fat farming country, wheat, barley, oats, beans, with great elms lining the hedgerows. Flat it might be, but it had a beauty and a richness of its own, and it smelt of the fruits of the earth. A late field of beans was still in flower as they rattled into Willowell, and the scent drifted across the road. Dr. Davidson sniffed it.

“Always makes me feel young, Richmond, that smell.”

Kitty trotted them through the village, and down the hill on the Richford road, and as though knowing the road as well as her master, she swung right through the gates of Willowell Priory. The Neaths lived here, cultured pleasant people of good family. Sir Hector Neath had helped to govern India, and now pottered about this corner of England, growing roses and prize strawberries, and dabbling in water-colours. The Neaths were Dr. Davidson’s most eminent patients. When the dog-cart pulled up outside the porch of the rambling grey building, old Neath himself came out, a white-haired, handsome, Roman-nosed old gentleman with a high colour and jocund eyes.

“Ha, Davidson, that mare of yours will run away with you some day.”

Dr. Davidson smiled.

“Spirit, sir, but no temper. May I introduce my new assistant to you? Dr. Richmond. He may join Burgoyne.”

Richmond raised his hat to Sir Hector, smiled and was silent, and Sir Hector’s quick eyes observed and liked him.

“Glad to meet you, Dr. Richmond. I think you have come to a good place.

By the way, Davidson, Hart my second gardener has a poisoned thumb. Perhaps Dr. Richmond will have a look at it while you are seeing her ladyship?"

The two doctors left the dog-cart, and Richmond reached for the surgical bag that lived under the seat.

"Where shall I find Hart, sir?"

"Oh, round there by the glass-houses, Richmond, I think."

"Thank you, sir," and Richmond went off in search of his case.

Sir Hector took Davidson by the arm. They were on affectionate terms, these two.

"I like that young man. Goes straight to the job, and remembers a name."

"He has come to us with a very good reputation."

"Nous, Davidson, nous. We are all rather interested in the man who is to _____"

"Yes, I understand."

"Between ourselves, we have not too great a faith in a certain person."

"I'm sorry."

"So are we, at the thought of losing you. Ursula is a little sensitive on the subject of physicians. She so hates being bluffed and talked to like the village child. Well, well, we will postpone the problem."

Dr. Davidson went up the wide oak stairs to visit a very charming lady who in face and hair was so very like that tragic queen Marie Antoinette, and Sir Hector wandered out and round to the potting-sheds and glass-houses to see whether Dr. Richmond had discovered Hart and his sore thumb. Richmond had. Already, he was unwinding an improvised and dirty bandage from the aforesaid thumb, while Hart, a little, loquacious, hairy-faced man, babbled to him.

"Got a thorn in it, I did, Doctor. And she be jumpin' so at night I can't sleep nowhow. And she be that swollen."

Richmond, intent upon the job in hand, had uncovered the injured member, without realizing Sir Hector's presence. The thumb was red and swollen, and Hart winced and made a clucking noise when Richmond felt the swelling.

"Tcha, Doctor, she be that tender. Don't 'ee press too 'ard."

“You’ve got a whitlow. Matter in it. Afraid I shall have to give you a nick, Hart.”

“What be that, sir?”

“Just a little prick with a knife. You’ll be in pain till it’s done, and ever so much easier afterwards. Besides, that thumb’s dangerous.”

Hart looked up, and seeing his master, grinned, and Richmond, turning his head, discovered Sir Hector behind him.

“Oh, it’s you, sir.”

“Better go back to your cottage, Hart, with the doctor, and stay off work for to-day. I’ll leave it to you, Dr. Richmond. Can you manage at the cottage?”

“Quite well, sir, thank you.”

“Good. It’s no distance; only just beyond the old tithe-barn.”

So, Richmond went off to play upon Hart the old trick of knifing a whitlow, and most successfully so, though Hart did take God’s name in vain, and stamp a bit. “Gawd, sir, you did catch me afore I thought you was doin’ anythin’.” “That’s the joke, Hart. Now, you’ll be much easier. Hold your hand over the basin.” Hart’s wife had provided a kettle of hot water, and Richmond washed and dressed the thumb, and repacked his bag, and took a stroll through the fruit garden. It was a very old garden surrounded by immense stone walls with ancient espaliers nailed to them. Also, it had box hedges that were emitting a sweet pungent scent, and nut-trees and roses, which, trained in a succession of arches, gave the effect of a green and flowery tunnel. It was a sweet place, and remaining somewhat monastic, and as Richmond emerged from the further doorway in the great grey wall he saw the priory fish-pond or stew all brown and green and glassy under the shelter of old trees.

He found Sir Hector and Dr. Davidson waiting by the dog-cart, chatting together.

“I hope I haven’t kept you waiting, sir?”

The older man looked at him kindly. Sir Hector had been saying to Dr. Davidson that Richmond was both a man and had manners.

“No, Richmond. How is Hart?”

“I lanced him. He will be much easier soon. I should like to look at him tomorrow.”

“I’ll send him in,” said Sir Hector, “the service cart is going in to Southfleet at nine.”

The two doctors re-entered the dog-cart, and drove on to Richford, a large, old, red village lying upon a little river amid towering elms. Dr. Davidson was feeling pleased with the morning and with the way Richmond was shaping. There was no shrewder judge of character and capacity than Sir Hector Neath, and Sir Hector had liked the new assistant, which was helpful.

Three patients needed visiting in Richford, and Richmond was taken in and introduced. He was easy in a sick-room, quiet, self-composed, ready to smile. Davidson asked him to examine one of the cases; it was an abdominal case, problematical and with obscure tenderness, and as Dr. Davidson watched both the woman's face and Richmond's hands, he, who was so wise in the physician's technique, realized that this young man had both skill and understanding. He was gentle, deliberate, thorough. In three minutes he had won the woman's confidence. The very way he looked at her was sufficient.

"Appendix, sir, don't you think?"

They were descending the stairs, and Dr. Davidson smiled dryly to himself. Burgoyne had examined this case, and had asserted that the good lady was suffering from nothing but flatus.

"Yes, I agree, Richmond. She will need careful watching."

Kitty took them on towards Eastness, and Dr. Davidson confessed that in winter the drive to Eastness or to Wicking could be an ordeal that he dreaded. A bitter north-east wind would meet you, and cut your face like an ice whip. You needed a muffler and a high collar that turned up to your nose. But had not Dr. Davidson a brougham? He had. But Dr. Davidson did not confess in Howell the groom's hearing that he was sensitive about exposing another man to hardships that he did not himself face. Besides, the dog-cart was more speedy than the brougham.

They were passing Burnt Farm when Dr. Davidson made a pertinent remark to the younger man.

"I see, Richmond, that you have learnt not to hurt people."

"Yes. But sometimes one can't help it, sir."

"I agree. May an old man give you a hint? Though you may not need it."

"Of course, sir."

"Always try and relieve pain. That's the first thing a patient asks of you. He or she won't forgive you if you don't. Opium is a blessed boon."

"I'll remember that, sir."

Pier House, with its white bow front, rather like a stout and placid matron in a white frock, gave Richmond from its windows a view of the great estuary from The Nore to the Isle of Oats. The old wooden pier, straddling half a mile of mud when the tide was out, blinked black and white against the water. Every sort of sailing-boat lay at anchor, and at the old town jetty tubby black brigs or schooners unloaded coal, timber, lime and coke, and took off bricks, potatoes, grain. Along the shingle-bank below the sea-wall the local watermen kept their boats in summer. All this life was visible to Richmond as he stood or sat at his bow-window. Behind the house, an earth cliff rose steeply, capped with hollies and the stunted steeple and wind-vane of St. Jude's church. Richmond had no complaint to make about the house or his landlady. She fed him well and without fuss. A local bell-hanger had fitted an additional bell which jangled not too loudly at night just outside John Richmond's bedroom door. Mrs. Kemp had not exactly welcomed that bell, fearing it might disturb the occupants of the drawing-room floor, but since Dr. Richmond seemed to be a very likeable and well behaved young man who might remain with her for years, she tolerated the night-bell.

Asked by her neighbours what manner of man the new doctor was, she adopted a judicial pose, hands crossed over her white tummy.

“A most worthy young man.”

Whether Richmond would have accepted that adjective was quite another matter. He might have laughed and confessed to carrying a fair dose of original sin, but those were days when original sin was something to be deposited discreetly in the dust-bin.

Meanwhile, “Dr. Byng” was still challenging the dark future. Dr. Richmond appeared to have a way with the club-patients, and the old chronics, but so had Dr. Burgoyne. Charlie Byng was demanding a difference, a very great difference. The man who was to take Dr. Davidson's place had yet to be tried out and tested.

Now, “Dr. Byng” was capable of tackling minor injuries on his own, for at that time a factotum and dispenser was not debarred from rendering first-aid. Charlie Byng could extract a fish-hook, or dress a cut finger, or even set a simple fracture, but he had the sense to recognize a responsibility that was beyond him. Dr. Davidson happened to be away, inspecting a house at Hastings, to which place he thought of retiring, when that very bloody mess was rushed in from the timber-yard up the High Street. The man had come into conflict with the steam-driven circular saw, and his right arm seemed to be

hanging by shreds.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and Charlie Byng, having taken one look at the case, sent two of the man's mates running for Dr. Burgoyne and Richmond. He got the man on to the couch in the surgery, whipped a tourniquet out of a drawer, and applied it to the brachial artery just under the arm-pit. The man's shirt-sleeve had been ripped to pieces, and Byng cut away the bloody shreds, and packed a clean towel under the limb. He turned on the gas-heater for water, brought out the case of surgical knives, prepared dressings, and mixed up a solution of carbolic acid.

Dr. Burgoyne was the first to arrive. His florid face lost some of its colour when he looked at that mutilated arm. In the Davidson-Burgoyne practice, Dr. Davidson had acted as surgeon. Dr. Burgoyne took off his coat, and with much deliberation turned up his shirt-sleeves.

"Dr. Richmond been warned? Shall want help. I suppose he can give an anæsthetic."

"Dr. Richmond has been sent for," said Charles laconically.

The man on the couch turned a blanched and frightened face to Burgoyne.

"You're not goin' to take my arm off, Doctor?"

Dr. Burgoyne's blue eyes seemed to bulge.

"Afraid that's inevitable, Jackson."

"Don't do it, Doctor. What'll I be with one arm? Give me a chance."

"We have to do our best for you, Jackson. I'm sorry, my man, but——"

"I won't 'ave it off, sir. Can't you——?"

Burgoyne puffed out his cheeks.

"Now, don't argue. I know it's rough luck, but that arm hasn't a chance. Make up your mind to it, Jackson."

"I won't 'ave it took off, Doctor."

Richmond had come into the surgery, and was standing in the doorway, listening to the argument. Dr. Burgoyne's red neck seemed to bulge angrily above his collar. He was preparing to soak his hands in a basin of carbolic.

"Do you mind if I look, sir?"

Burgoyne turned on him.

"Ha, Richmond! Yes, you can look. I shall want you to give chloroform."

Richmond bent over the man.

“Don’t let ’em take it off, sir.”

“Lie still a moment, there’s a good chap.”

Richmond was deliberate and cool. Very gently and carefully he examined the arm. His face was very grave. Charlie Byng, waiting in a corner, watched the scene.

Richmond turned to Burgoyne.

“Do you mind if I have a word with you, sir.”

The elder man’s blue eyes stared.

“Do you think it necessary?”

“I do, sir. I’d greatly appreciate it.”

Now, for a mere pup to suggest to a mastiff like Teddy Burgoyne that he was barking up the wrong tree, was no easy matter. Richmond expected to be told to mind his own business, and not to insult his seniors by assuming himself to be wiser than they were, but this other man’s anguish had moved Richmond very deeply, and he felt that personal pique had to be countered. The two doctors had gone together into the little consulting-room attached to the surgery where private patients were seen, and Richmond assumed an air of deference, for, after all, discretion suggested that he should consider a future partner’s feelings.

“Do you think the man has a chance, sir?”

“With my experience, Richmond, I should say, none at all.”

“You have had so much more experience than I have had, sir, but I have seen an arm like that in hospital, and Sir Humphrey Jolland managed to save it. I don’t think anybody else could have saved it, but I know how he did it.”

“And was the fellow’s arm any use?”

“The result was quite good, sir.”

Richmond was expecting that flamboyant face to explode upon him, but nothing of the kind happened. Dr. Burgoyne stood with his bare arms akimbo, gazing impressively at an old photograph above Richmond’s head as though deciding with dignity upon the fate of nations. And suddenly he smiled upon Richmond, as from a great height, condescendingly, graciously.

“You would like me to permit you to make the experiment and take the risk, Richmond?”

“I should be very grateful to you, sir. I know all this must seem very impertinent.”

“Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all. Well, shall we give Jackson his chance?”

They returned to the surgery where Charlie Byng was administering comfort, and Dr. Burgoyne, standing by the couch, and laying a paternal and Olympian hand on the man’s shoulder, confessed that he had been so moved by his appeal, that he and Dr. Richmond were going to attempt the saving of the arm. The poor, blanched face lit up.

“God bless you, sir.”

Burgoyne beamed upon him, and then turned that beaming glance upon Richmond.

“You shall take the case, my dear fellow. You see, Jackson, Dr. Richmond knows a new trick or two. We are going to try on you what Sir Humphrey Jolland, the eminent surgeon, might have suggested. Go ahead, my dear fellow. As a matter of fact, Lady Feygate expects me at half-past two.”

So Dr. Burgoyne turned down his sleeves, and put on his coat, and washed his nice pink hands of the case, and did not even stay to watch Richmond cleanse and draw together the torn tissues, and carefully ease the tourniquet to discover whether the vessels had plugged themselves. And all the while he was thinking that Dr. Burgoyne had behaved with great magnanimity, but Charlie Byng who was passing him dressings and bandages, thought otherwise.

Dr. Burgoyne had funk'd the case. If he had been at all offended, his secret relief at Richmond’s intervention had overborn any feeling of pique. Charlie Byng was silent, nibbling at his big moustache, and watching Richmond’s hands at work. He was satisfied. This young man had knowledge, skill and courage. He was not a decorative and flowery bluffer like Burgoyne.

VI

Not only did the sawyer recover, but his arm was saved.

Dr. Davidson, returning from his short holiday in the quest of a new home, heard the whole story from Mr. Charles Byng. Dr. Davidson and his dispenser were such good friends, and trusted each other so completely, that for years their confidences had been exchanged with mutual candour and discretion. Charles Byng did not exactly say that Dr. Burgoyne had shirked the issue, but that he had delegated the responsibility, and presented Dr. Richmond with the problem, but Dr. Davidson knew just what Mr. Byng meant. He was not conscious of any surprise, but he was conscious of pleasure. As a self-ordained healer he had long ago taught himself to transcend the qualms of professional jealousy.

He went with Richmond to visit Jackson, and though at that time the saving of the man's arm was still hypothetical, the sawyer's gratitude to Richmond was obvious. He lay in bed and looked up into the young doctor's face with the eyes of a man beholding his saviour. Moreover, Jackson's tail was up. He was sure that he was going to keep his arm, and Dr. Davidson, bracketing the man's sanguine spirit with the cleanliness of the wound, believed that all would be well.

Walking down the path of Jackson's little garden the elder man said to the younger: "You ought to be pleased with that case, John."

Richmond's face went suddenly soft. It was the first time that Dr. Davidson had called him by his Christian name.

"I am. It was worth chancing."

"More than that, I think. May I confess that it is a relief to me."

Richmond opened the gate for Dr. Davidson.

"How, sir?"

Dr. Davidson might smile his dry and slightly austere smile, but he laid a hand on Richmond's arm.

"Because, when one has worked for more than thirty years with and for people, one does feel some responsibility when one leaves them. That sort of feeling gets into one's marrow. It is not cant, my lad."

"I know, sir."

“This is absolutely between ourselves. Burgoyne is a good fellow, but no surgeon. That worried me. In our world, John, life and death do sometimes depend upon a man’s decision and skill. That is why one tries to set one’s self so high a standard. We may not prate about it, but the pride is there.”

“I think I hate humbug as much as you do, sir.”

“Ah, humbug, John, yes. But toleration is sometimes necessary. Also, a little compassionate deceit. Spiritual opium. But I am glad you will follow me.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And be patient with Burgoyne. He is rather like a large baby. The ladies like him. He is admirable when a little cossetting is indicated. But in a crisis — Well, you’ll understand.”

Now, Southfleet was very much a closed community, save when the summer season brought an influx of visitors. Southfleet was interested in itself and in the things that happened in Southfleet. Sensational happenings were rare, and became local history, to be talked about for years, even in the hearing of the younger generation. Southfleet still spoke of the Dutch barque that had been wrecked on the Camplin Sands, and the Martyr’s Grange murder, and the fire at Dashwell’s Drapery Shop in which a girl assistant had jumped from a window and been killed. It remembered how, some thirty years ago, a portion of the West Cliff had, at the end of one wet winter, slid down tumultuously on to the foreshore. Southfleet gossiped, and its gossip was by no means always unkind. Even a conventional community has its heroes, and perhaps a secret admiration for those mischievous and merry rascals who must cut an occasional caper. All Southfleet had heard of the accident at Clements’ Sawmill. It understood that the new young doctor had saved Jackson’s life and his arm. No doubt the town exaggerated the details. People love to be dramatic, but Richmond, without realizing it, had become, either for good or evil, a figure in the place. People looked at him with interest, and were eager to wish him good morning. Young gentlewomen ran to windows when he passed, to see, but not, of course, to be seen.

For in those Victorian days any community that was somewhat isolated, and had no body of metropolitan experts to call on at five minutes’ notice, had every reason to be deeply interested in its doctor. Davidson was going, and there were many people in Southfleet who deplored his departure. Dr. Davidson had been to them, and especially to the women, a father and a friend. There were those who had said to him: “I don’t know what I shall do when you

go, Doctor.” Burgoyne was not Davidson. He might be decorative and genial, and a lady’s man, but the common sense of the community had not been fooled by his fine feathers. Dr. Sylvester Soames was a good old sheep, but not quite the man you would be glad to see when you had had a smash in the hunting-field, or a horse had kicked you, or when you had fallen off a ladder, or your wife looked like dying in childbed.

Especially so did the common people ask for a man with courage, resource and skill, a man who had hands, for the men who labour with their hands are more liable to life’s mischances. They can trust and respect a fellow-craftsman. Dr. Burgoyne might be ready enough with a bottle of physic and florid sympathy, but when a real job of work had had to be done, Dr. Davidson had been the man for it. Labouring folk had tales to tell of Teddy Burgoyne. There was the case of Mr. Lukmor’s gardener who had run a digging-fork into his foot. Burgoyne had pooh-poohed the accident, and in three weeks the man had been dead of lockjaw. There was the case of Tom Smith’s wife—— So, when Southfleet gossiped about the affair, and said that the new doctor had made a pretty good job of Jackson’s arm, the verdict had a communal significance. Davidson was going, but here was a young man who appeared to be capable of filling Dr. Davidson’s place, and of dealing with any disaster that might overtake any member of the community.

It did occur to both Davidson and Richmond that Dr. Burgoyne might be jealous but, as a matter of fact, Teddy Burgoyne was so floridly and perpetually pleased with himself that he was not much troubled by such emotion. Moreover, he was not deeply interested in his professional work. He had private means, and he was much more interested in his own person and its appearance, and in his social successes. He hunted, and he gave dinner-parties, and sang sentimental ballads, accompanying himself on the piano. Actually, he had no wish to quarrel with a capable young man who would deal with the dirty work, while leaving him two-thirds of the practice’s receipts. Dr. Burgoyne would take care of the decorative details, give tone and colour to the partnership, and pose as the beloved physician. He described himself to himself as “A sensitive sort of fellow,” a little bit of a Bohemian, and superior to the blood and bones of life’s more messy manifestations. He was capable of cracking up anything that was his, or that was associated with his affairs. In a little while he would be going about the neighbourhood declaring that The Practice had obtained the services of a most able and valuable surgeon. “Yes, m’am, Sir Humphrey Jolland’s protégé. But, of course, a practice such as ours needs such a man.” Almost, he pocketed Richmond’s virtues, and was ready to

produce them as personal attributes and favours. He, Dr. Edward Burgoyne, had seen to it that Southfleet should have its Tom Bryant or its Jolland. He was ready to wear Richmond as he wore one of his colourful waistcoats.

His lady patients thought him exceedingly magnanimous. Yes, Dr. Burgoyne was a dear creature, so generous and so very good-looking. Young Richmond was lucky to have such a man for his senior partner. They hoped he appreciated it.

Moreover, Teddy Burgoyne was particularly pleased with himself at the moment. He was attending that interesting widow Mrs. Borrowdale, of White Lodge, a golden-haired and jocund lady whose antecedents were something of a mystery. Teddy and Mrs. Borrowdale were liking each other. Dr. Burgoyne was so very sympathetic.

Petticoat Lane was interested in Dr. Richmond, in his looks, in his age, and particularly in his future. Was he heart-whole, was he genuinely single, was he engaged to be married? He was considered to be very good looking, and all the more so because he did not tout for favours. If there were young ladies in Southfleet who were ready to regard him as Prince Charming, he was not at all conscious of it. He was finding the work more absorbing than he had expected it to be, and he walked, and he rode, and he drove to it in Dr. Davidson's dog-cart. He sat a horse well. He turned out for the Southfleet Cricket Club, and scored twenty-three runs in his first match, including a six that he hit over the club marquee. Feminine eyes were sure that he looked very well in flannels. And he was so strong. He smote the ball hard and lustily. The club-patients accepted him; he took trouble, and did not fob them off with two minutes and a bottle of pink medicine. Those who made a hobby of being sick were not so sure that they liked him. This young man was no fool, no suave sympathizer with the exponents of self-pity.

It was Ursula, Lady Neath, who made to her husband that very significant and penetrating remark about Dr. Richmond. He had been sent to see her by Dr. Davidson, partly because she had expressed a desire to meet the new doctor.

"A clever young man, but hard, Hector."

"Hard! I shouldn't have said so. Why hard?"

"Because my feeling about him is that he is more interested in the case than the patient."

"But isn't that rather admirable?"

"No, my dear, not from the patient's point of view, especially so if she

happens to be a woman.”

“Oh, shame!”

“Oh, Hector! But the young man interests me. I wonder what he will make of life in Southfleet.”

“From what I hear he is making a very good showing.”

“Yes, my dear, for the first year, perhaps. But afterwards? I divine a kind of turbulence in that young man, urges that won’t sit easily in a dog-cart.”

It was indeed a fact that women had not entered intimately into John Richmond’s life, and he did not intend that they should so do. He had not forgotten Sir Humphrey Jolland’s advice, nor did he need to remember it. As he walked through Southfleet or rode his horse to Danesfleet or Richford or Eastness, and looked at tongues and felt pulses, he reminded himself that he was merely serving an apprenticeship to fortune. For a certain number of years he would partner Dr. Teddy Burgoyne, and save precious money, and seize every chance of gaining surgical experience and reputation. It was his very definite plan to become known both as the consulting surgeon and the practising surgeon in this particular part of the world. And his reputation should spread, gradually but inevitably nearer and nearer to the metropolis, until the transition became actual, and the provincial surgeon found himself re-established in London.

The Misses Davidson, or rather the two younger sisters, Charlotte and Caroline, were, it must be confessed, not a little disappointed at the apparent absence of any romantic feeling in Dr. Richmond. He was asked to tea and a game of croquet on the Davidson lawn, and he came and he played, but rather ruthlessly and efficiently so. He sent balls flying into Mrs. Davidson’s geranium beds, but it appeared that he was more interested in the game than in the players. Not that he showed himself anything of a hobbledohoy, a shy, farouche young man in the presence of so many petticoats. He was too honestly at his ease, and almost brotherly in the naturalness with which he treated the young ladies. He joked and laughed. He teased his partner, who happened to be Caroline. “Now then, Miss Caroline, into the geraniums with the enemy.” “Good shot. Now, let’s see if I can ring the bell.” But he had no sentimental tricks, no amorous graces. He did not offer to place your mallet for you, or drop soft glances, or stand close to you as though promising to be a yet more intimate partner. Caroline went into supper peeved and disappointed. She let it be known that she considered Dr. Richmond a very conceited young man. Oh, yes, he did everything well, rather too well, except make love.

Miss Caroline was quite ready to remain in Southfleet as a wife, and neither she nor her sisters were welcoming the prospect of increasing the unmarried population of Hastings. Caroline might declare that Dr. Richmond was very spoilt, but she did contrive to find it necessary to go out and collect a book from the circulating library just when Dr. Richmond would be due at the surgery. It was indeed remarkable how often they happened to meet, but beyond a lift of the hat and a smile, poor Caroline's trophies were not encouraging. She was a rather pale girl, with sandy eyebrows and eyelashes, but she was not without intuition, and her passion for new literature ceased when she realized that she had no romantic meaning for Dr. John Richmond.

July brought London's East End to Southfleet, and August even more so. Ladies in large plumed hats, and black velvet dresses shaped to the figure, danced to the strains of the concertina with gentlemen who, though the temperature might be eighty in the shade, had a passion for overcoats with black velvet collars. Such was the fashion. Whitechapel bathed in the sea, and sardonic people asserted that you could smell the act, as well as behold it. Much beer was consumed. The East End went sailing and was sea-sick. Fond mothers fed infants upon whelks and cockles, and then marvelled that their little interiors rebelled. Twice in one week Richmond was called out to resuscitate men who had chosen to bathe after indulging in heavy dinners washed down with lots of liquor. The second case of cramp refused to be resuscitated. Towards evening Southfleet's old town, especially in the neighbourhood of the Ship Hotel, was prone to riot and recrimination. Language became completely red, and sometimes incredibly filthy. There were fights. Ladies tore off each other's plumed hats, and even portions of each other's hair. The few police were kept busy, sometimes so busy that they needed medical attention.

Dr. Davidson would say: "Thank God, life isn't all one August Bank Holiday."

He was not a believer in the masses being capable of assimilating or utilizing leisure.

It happened that one summer evening Dr. Richmond was sent for to visit a patient in Jessamy Lane. Jessamy Lane led from the High Street and ran as though it had no ultimate purpose past Clements' Timber Yard, and a nursery garden to the old houses on the hill above and behind the old town. Eventually, it did reach the old town near the saltings beyond Lukin's boat-yard. Jessamy Lane linked up a number of pleasant old houses and cottages, and since it did

not possess a single public-house, it was spared the intrusions of the East End trippers. Richmond found his house, one of a series, queer, white, two storied places with green verandas and holly hedges. He saw his patient, gave advice and instructions for the medicine that was to be called for, and then let himself out into the little front garden. Dusk had come, and in the dusk he heard loud and unpleasant voices, laughter, animal noises, the makers of these noises were riotously drunk. Richmond had reached the white gate in the holly hedge when he heard another voice, sudden and frightened, a girl's voice.

“Oh, please, let me go.”

There was loud laughter, neighing laughter.

“Garn, Bill, kiss the little tart. Maul 'er.”

Richmond opened the gate and stepped out into the lane. He saw a girl crushing herself into the holly hedge, rather like a bird trying to escape into a bush. She was being held by the wrists by a large man with a brutal and unfinished face, who wore a white handkerchief knotted round his neck in lieu of a collar. Two other men were standing in the roadway, guffawing and gloating and urging the other fellow on. All three of them were nastily drunk, but sufficiently masters of their legs to be a dangerous nuisance.

The girl turned her head and saw Richmond. Her face was very white, and in it her eyes looked huge and dark and frightened. She was wearing a little black bonnet, and under it her copper-coloured hair was drawn back smooth and sleek to a knot at the back of her head. Her mouth was open, but no sound came from it. It was like a little dark crevice in a voiceless, tragic mask. And by her dress and face Richmond realized that she belonged to his own world.

He turned sharply towards the group.

“Take your hands off that lady, damn you.”

The rough swung round, lower lip out, eyes bulging.

“ 'Ere, you 'op it. I don't want any bloody sauce from toffs.”

Richmond walked straight towards them, and when he was within a couple of yards of the pair, the fellow let the girl go and faced the obvious intervention. He squared up to the doctor, his large fists as red as his face, knees bent, jaw thrust forward.

“Want a lickin', do yer.”

His first blow was a staggering, clumsy lunge. Richmond's fists were up. He stepped back and avoided the blow, and the gentleman in the white

neckerchief nearly lost his balance. It was violently restored. Richmond drove his fist into the fellow's face, and as he rocked back, the doctor stepped in on brisk feet. The great flabby throat was exposed, and Richmond's knuckles smashed against the fellow's larynx. He went down and rolled into the gutter, gasping. Richmond turned on the other two. One of them had his fists up, and he lurched oilily towards the doctor. Richmond floored him with a straight left. The third blackguard, hands hanging, mouth open, stood and stared at his fallen comrades.

Richmond turned to the girl.

"I'm so sorry this has happened. Do you live near?"

Her large, hazel eyes seemed to swim before him.

"Yes, quite close, Holly Lodge."

He thought that she was going to faint, and he stepped to her quickly, and took her gently by the arm.

"Can you manage?"

"Yes."

"Which way?"

"Down the lane."

He turned to glance at the drunken three. The first fellow was being incontinently sick in the gutter, the second was squatting bemused, the third still had the gapes. There would be no more trouble from that quarter. Richmond looked at the girl.

"Feeling all right?"

"Yes, now."

He found himself wondering at her exquisite pallor, and at the lambent richness of her hair. She had a little, fragile face and the lips were still tremulous. Her hazel eyes met his.

"Oh, thank you very much. I——"

"I'm glad I happened to turn up. I had just been seeing a patient."

"It is Dr. Richmond, isn't it?"

"Yes. But you have the advantage of me there."

"Oh, our name is Lancaster. I had been out to post a letter."

“Here’s your gate. I suppose somebody is at home?”

“Yes, mother and the maid. Please don’t trouble to come any further, Dr. Richmond.”

He opened the gate, and slipped his hand from under her arm.

“No trouble, you know. Now, go in and lie down. I’ll walk up and down outside and see those blackguards off the earth. Better leave it like that, don’t you think?”

She looked at him intently for a moment.

“Oh, yes. It is the kind of thing one wishes to forget.”

“Of course. Forget it.”

“I shall not forget what you did.”

She put out her hand, and he held it for a moment, thinking that he had never seen any creature so mysterious and appealing as she was. He saw her eyelids flicker, as though his gaze disturbed her. She withdrew her hand, smiled dimly and turned to walk up the path. Her home was one of the little low white houses with a green veranda. He watched her open the door and enter, but she did not look back. The door closed, and Richmond was conscious of a curious sense of stillness.

VII

Mrs. Lancaster was a widow. A year ago she and her daughter had appeared in Southfleet as residents at The Royal George. The dining-room windows of The Royal George Hotel gave upon Queen's Terrace, and a certain impressionable small boy, whose parents lived at No. 11, had made a practice of trotting along the terrace in the evening to gaze at the exalted beings who sat and dined in state like figures in a tableau vivant. The small boy had been fascinated by the Lancaster table and the two ladies who had sat at it. The elder lady was what used to be described as queenly and well preserved, high-busted and handsome, with a face whose complexion owed something to artifice. The younger lady, her daughter—— Well, the small boy had fallen in love with Lucy Lancaster at first sight. Small boys do fall in love, and fasten their adoration upon ladies of all ages.

To Southfleet, Mrs. Lancaster, like the flavicomous Mrs. Borrowdale, was something of a mystery. Her hair was black, brilliantly and imperiously black. She had a Roman nose, a rather mean little mouth, and large restless black eyes which, to the small boy, had seemed to roll like marbles. Mrs. Lancaster, after spending a month at The Royal George, had so far approved of Southfleet as to take a seven years' lease of Holly Lodge. On the other hand, Southfleet did not wholly approve of Mrs. Lancaster. It understood that she was partly French, and that one of her Christian names was Josephine, which perhaps explained her dressiness and continental texture. What Mr. Lancaster had been no one knew. As for the daughter, Southfleet thought her a shy and pretty thing who appeared to look at life with watchful and questioning eyes, as from a distance. Southfleet did comment upon the vivid unlikeness of mother and daughter, but could only suppose that Mr. Lancaster had been responsible for that.

When John Richmond walked back up Jessamy Lane he overtook the drunken three making slow progress towards the High Street and Southfleet station. The fellow with the white neckerchief and the brutal face was being supported by his two friends, but the progress of the triune beast was unsteady and wayward. They did not appear to recognize Richmond as he overtook and passed them. All three were cursing in a maudlin, unclean chorus, and their foul language might as well have been applied to their castigator as to life and fate in general. Richmond walked on. He had not lost even his hat in the scuffle, and most certainly he had not lost his head. As for his heart, well, that was another matter.

The East End crowd flowed past him in a dark mass stippled with pale faces as he walked down Pier Hill. Gas lamps in Southfleet were few and feeble. Not only could Richmond see the crowd, but he could smell it, and as though some sudden new fastidiousness had been born in him, he was conscious of qualms of disgust. These unwashed, sweating animals! He was capable of quick scorns. Not yet had life taught him that without compassion nothing can be healed or comprehended.

He went to bed that night, thinking of a certain person. He woke in the morning, to think of the same person. He was aware of an inward voice making suggestive promptings. Surely, he would be justified in calling at Holly Lodge and inquiring as to a certain person's state of health? Yes, just a courtesy call. He might be asked in and so meet her mother. He could not remember having seen Mrs. Lancaster in the flesh.

He was under the impression that no one in Southfleet had witnessed the romantic rescue, but he was wrong. Miss Gates's cook had had her head over one of the garden gates, and after watching the battle, had bolted in breathlessly to tell her mistress. Miss Gates was one of the most irrepressible gossips in Southfleet. Also, old Mr. Murrell had witnessed the affair from an upper window, and Mr. Murrell was not without a tongue. In a couple of days the story had spread, with embellishments, far and wide. Dr. Richmond had fought, single-handed, three huge London roughs, felled the three of them, as the champion of beauty in distress. The Davidson ladies heard the story, and were secretly displeased.

“Who was it?”

“Oh, that Lancaster girl!”

Said Caroline, with some acidity: “Well, of course, with hair like that, and a mother—— Some provocations can be justified.”

Richmond was in an absent mood during the surgery hour, so much so that he ordered old Mrs. Trout bromide, when all that she needed was a strong dose of senna. Charlie Byng knew his Mrs. Trout and hated her. Had she been pandered to, Mrs. Trout would have consumed more physic in a year than any three privileged patients. Mr. Byng kept a special stock-bottle for habitual moaners like Mrs. Trout. The stuff was intended to be an active deterrent, and to maintain the patient in a state of occupation for some seven days.

Charlie Byng remonstrated gently with Richmond over the lapse.

“You ordered the old woman Pot. Brom., sir.”

“Did I?”

“Yes. We’ll have her sitting on the doorstep if you give her soothing syrup.”

“There is nothing much wrong with her.”

“Never has been. Her face never got her any attention, so she has to get it in other ways.”

Richmond laughed.

“Well, give her what is usual.”

And then, in his innocence, Richmond asked Mr. Byng a revealing question.

“Oh, by the way, is Mrs. Lancaster a patient of ours?”

Mr. Byng squinted at the measuring-glass he was holding. Yes, Mrs. Trout was going to get it hot and strong.

“Yes—Dr. Burgoyne.”

“I see. Old residents.”

“No, not very.”

Mr. Byng’s laconic replies should have warned Richmond that Holly Lodge might be considered a little equivocal.

He had a patient to visit in Jessamy Lane, and strolling on to the gate of Holly Lodge, he became suddenly conscious of acute shyness. Richmond was not given to gusts of hypersensitive self-doubt, but he did hesitate outside that gate. One or two heads were being craned over other gates. He was being observed. Well, damn the curious! He supposed that he could pay a courtesy call without committing himself to romantic insinuations, but as he walked up the garden path he remembered Sir Humphrey Jolland’s Nestorian wisdom. Ambitious young men should eschew sentimental entanglements, especially marriage.

Marriage? What nonsense!

The veranda contained two garden chairs, but they were unoccupied. Richmond rang the bell, and stood squarely confronting the solid green door. It had a lion’s head in brass for a knocker, and the particular lion appeared to be a supercilious beast.

No, there was no need for him to go in. He would inquire and leave his name.

The door opened, and a stout, pleasant-faced maid in a mauve print frock

and cap, smiled upon him.

“My compliments to Mrs. Lancaster.”

“Oh, please come in, Doctor. I’m sure the ladies would like to see you.”

Doctor! So, the woman knew him. She seemed to wear a kind, conspiratorial face. And Richmond succumbed. He took off his hat and entered, and was ushered by Sarah into the drawing-room. It was empty, save for its furniture and garnishings that had a strangeness, an un-English decor, for they were French. The room had a long window opening upon the veranda. Richmond placed his hat upon an occasional table, and sat down on one of the gilded chairs. There were French prints upon the walls, Madame le Brun, Watteau, Greuze. Richmond’s hat shared the table with one of Zola’s early novels. Zola! Richmond had not read him, but he suspected that Southfleet would hardly stomach Zola.

A swishing sound, crepusculations, and Mrs. Lancaster swept into the room. She was in purple, and very much flounced, and somehow suggesting the Tragic Muse.

“My dear Doctor, I am so gratified that you should have called.”

Richmond stood up, and found himself holding the lady’s hand. In fact, she held on to his for nearly half a minute.

“Of course, I want to thank you. So shocking and disgusting. These horrid, drunken trippers. And you behaved with such manliness, and if I may say so, with such nice discretion. My poor child was terribly upset. So sensitive, you know. I put her to bed. Believe me, I am full of gratitude and admiration.”

Richmond tried not to fidget or to appear embarrassed. It reminded him of being presented with a prize, while listening to the eminent prize-giver’s oration.

“I assure you, Mrs. Lancaster, I did very little.”

“My daughter would not agree with that, sir. If you describe fighting three horrid, common men as very little, your modesty is almost immodest.”

Richmond laughed.

“They were very drunk, you know, Mrs. Lancaster. One hit them and they fell over.”

She released his hand, and smiled upon him, and when she smiled her rather too massive face seemed to break up and become old.

“But do sit down, Dr. Richmond. Yes, I am one of the firm’s patients. Dear

Dr. Burgoyne has attended me for migraine. Such a charming man.”

Richmond sat down. He was asking himself two things, whether he was to see the daughter, and how it was that he disliked the mother so completely. She was being very gracious to him, but she made him think of some large and artificial object like an iced wedding-cake that had stood too long for show in a confectioner’s window.

She was watching him with those very round, big eyes of hers. They were like camera lenses.

“Yes, Lucy will be down in a moment.”

Lucy! How exactly the name suited her! And how exactly this formidable and decorative lady appeared to have interpreted his thoughts! Richmond, in order to digress, glanced at the pictures on the walls.

“You have a very charming room, Mrs. Lancaster.”

“Relics, Doctor, the salvage of other days. When my dear husband was alive and we lived in Paris, and during the dreadful Commune our house was plundered. Do you admire Greuze? My daughter is said to be—— Why, Lucy, my darling, here you are.”

Richmond rose with one quick yet easy movement, like a hand being drawn out of a glove, as the door and green plush portière swung open, and the girl came in. She had more colour than yesterday, but Richmond realized that this very exquisite pallor was natural to her. Her strangely lovely hair had a lambent smoothness. She smiled at him, and then glanced at her mother, and instantly the expression of her eyes seemed to change. For a moment Richmond was puzzled by the change. A little later he was telling himself that Lucy Lancaster was afraid of her mother.

“Do sit down, Doctor. I know we must not keep you long. You doctors are always so very busy. Do let me give you a glass of sherry.”

Richmond accepted the sherry, and the excuse for lingering.

“Lucy, dear, please fetch the sherry decanter. And two glasses.”

Miss Lancaster went for the wine, and her mother, assuming an expression of dark appeal, fixed her gaze upon Richmond.

“My girl is very pale, Doctor, don’t you think?”

“Perhaps it is natural to her.”

“I always hope so. That is why I left London. This sea air, you know. Dr. Burgoyne has examined her, and assures me that she is a very healthy young

woman. Of course, with that Venetian hair of hers, a certain pallor is natural.”

Richmond nodded. Mrs. Lancaster might speak of certain things being natural, but Richmond found it difficult to feel at ease in her presence. He was glad when Miss Lancaster re-entered with the sherry decanter and two glasses on a silver salver. She placed the tray on the table beside the copy of Zola, and Richmond, deciding that his hat was trespassing, leaned forward to remove it.

“Lucy, my darling, take the doctor’s hat and hang it up for him. Perhaps, you will pour out the sherry, Doctor.”

Miss Lancaster took his hat, and Richmond, filling the two glasses, carried one of them to the lady.

“What a steady hand you have, Doctor.”

Richmond smiled.

“Yes, nature, not virtue.”

She ogled him.

“Steady hand, steady head. As to the heart, it is one’s private affair! Yes, that is your glass. Lucy does not take wine.”

The daughter returned, and sitting down in a corner, seemed to watch her mother. Richmond had to move his chair so that he could face both ladies. He was quick to gather the impression that Lucy Lancaster was mute in the maternal presence, rather like a bird in a cage that may be scolded either for singing or for not singing. There was a piano in the room, and to help the conversation Richmond glanced at it.

“Do you play?”

He put the question to the girl, and was struck by the way she answered it, not looking at him but at Mrs. Lancaster.

“Yes, but not like my mother.”

“Dear child, she flatters me. But at one time in my life I was almost a professional.”

Something in Richmond winced at the word. Professional! Professional what? But, confound it, he was being absurdly receptive and diagnostic about these two women. Almost, Mrs. Lancaster was a case, a case to be felt and divined. But the conversation had to be continued.

“Classical.”

Mrs. Lancaster made a dramatic gesture with her glass, and so gracefully

that she spilled no sherry.

“The passionate Pole, Doctor, dear Chopin. And Liszt. No, though Gounod is half my countryman, I cannot interpret Gounod. Too much sugar, too obviously sugar. And you, Doctor, do those strong fists of yours also strike the piano?”

“Oh, I strum a little.”

“Dear Dr. Burgoyne is very musical. He sings the English ballads perfectly. Does Southfleet ever indulge in drama?”

“Drama?”

“Theatricals.”

“I really don’t know. I believe there is a choral society.”

Mrs. Lancaster laughed, and her laughter was harsh.

“All the dear unmarried ladies standing in a row and singing The Messiah. The Messiah, Doctor, who never appeared on earth to them! But that is rather vulgar of me!”

Richmond smiled, finished his sherry, replaced the glass on the salver, and stood up.

“Yes, I expect it is rather like that. But I’m afraid——”

“Of course we must not detain you. So many patients must be waiting for your skill. Lucy, my dear, do please accompany the doctor to the door. And perhaps, some evening, sir, you will join us in a little music?”

“I shall be very pleased.”

Mrs. Lancaster bent to him as he bowed over her hand. Her corsage creaked, almost suborningly, like that French voice of hers that went up and down like a wood-pigeon’s. Her daughter was watching them with a face frozen into youthful austerity. She turned and hurried out into the passage, and opening the front door, stood rigid, pressed to the wall.

Richmond paused there, hand outstretched, but her hand did not come out to his, and her glance remained fixed upon his collar.

“Good-bye, Miss Lancaster.”

“Good-bye.”

He was puzzled, a little huffed. Why this almost sulky reserve, this unfriendliness that hugged the wall, and would neither smile nor look?

“May I hear you play some day?”

She answered him curtly, farouchely.

“My mother is much more musical than I am.”

He gave that pale, aloof little face one questioning glance, walked out and put on his hat. He heard the door close behind him. Well, well, why this thusness? Was she jealous of her mother? Good God, how could one be jealous of such a mass of insincerity and throaty artifice, the professional charmer, the creaking operatic star?

Something with yellow wheels stopped outside the gate of Holly Lodge as Richmond reached it, Burgoyne’s dog-cart and his spanking grey mare. Burgoyne descended, also operatic, the jovial, throaty tenor.

“Ha, my lad and hero paying respects, what? Yes, Oh gallant fellow, I have heard the story.”

He twinkled and winked at Richmond, and Richmond wanted to kick somebody, Burgoyne, himself, anything.

“Oh, just a courtesy call, sir. I’m not poaching.”

“And why not, my lad, why not? Beauty blooms in the spring, tra-la.”

VIII

It was not that Teddy Burgoyne sang the curtain down upon any possible romance, or warned youth away from all houses with green verandas and windows that were suggestively French. Southfleet might allow Dr. Burgoyne his cap and bells and his tra-las, and his baritone voice, for Dr. Burgoyne had a particular way with him, nor need a little naughtiness offend the most prudish of patients. Teddy Burgoyne might be no very profound physician, but he carried with him into parlours and bedrooms the perfume of sentiment, and stirred even in elderly breasts little tremors of excitement. Dr. Burgoyne was superabundantly male. He could not help being gallant to any woman, whatever her age might be, or however austere her reputation. And women liked it. Southfleet was so severely correct that a doctor who squeezed your hand and sat by your bed and felt your pulse as though its flutterings flattered the occasion, might be wine instead of barley-water. Even the old pussies saw to their caps and curls when Dr. Burgoyne was expected. "What a man! Dear, naughty Dr. Burgoyne, so handsome and so sympathetic." Quite a number of ladies who were bored with the infinite correctness of middle-class morals, perhaps, without realizing the elemental causes of the complaint, found it pleasant to be a little out of sorts when Dr. Burgoyne could be called in. It was not the pharmacopœia that mattered. Dr. Burgoyne instilled into them that subtle stimulus which every woman craves for, and will swallow, even though she be eighty.

But to young Richmond, of course, no such temperamental colourfulness could be permitted. As a doctor he was as new as his hat, and like his hat he had to be stainless and polished. Even Dr. Davidson, when he heard of the brawl in Jessamy Lane, asked Richmond to dinner, and taking him to his study to smoke a pipe, became the paternal philosopher.

Had John considered marriage? No, and Dr. Davidson twinkled. He was not speaking as the father of five unmarried daughters. Marriage, in the profession, could be likened to a kind of insurance.

Richmond did not confess that his Rachel was Fortune, for whom he might be willing to serve for seven years.

"Is it so very important, sir?"

"To marry the right person, John."

"Someone socially acceptable."

There was irony in the remark, and Dr. Davidson did not like irony, for he had found it not very helpful in dealing with the diseases of women.

“Not in the shallow sense. Don’t misunderstand me. There are many good reasons why a professional man should be married.”

“Double harness, sir.”

“Oh, come, come, I’m not playing paterfamilias. A doctor holds a rather particular position. He receives confessions. He has to learn to hold his tongue.”

“Even to his wife?”

“Of course. There are pitfalls. We have to tread a very narrow and sometimes a rather perilous path. Women sometimes fall in love with their medical attendants.”

Richmond smiled. He did not ask dear, prim Dr. Davidson whether that had been his experience.

“And if one is married?”

“That does safeguard the conventions.”

And then, Dr. Davidson laughed, as though he had seen Mr. Pecksniff in the mirror, and was not enamoured of the creature.

“Life’s so relative, John, like our results. I don’t think one realizes what a groping business it is. You are young, full of new knowledge that must seem so actual. It did so to me.”

“In the beginning?”

“Yes. One is quite convinced that one is a devilish clever fellow. Everything is going to be according to the text-book.”

“And it isn’t. Of course—I——”

“Wait a moment. I am not a destroyer of the faith to heal. But sometimes one feels oneself pottering about a dark house with a candle. But haven’t we slipped away from the marriage question? Not that I want to over-emphasize it. But we doctors, even in our home life, do owe something to our patients. I don’t think the results we gain are ever what they might be unless our patients believe in us not only as doctors, but as men.”

Dr. Davidson appeared to be having trouble with his pipe. He kept a vase full of feathers on the mantelpiece for use in such emergencies, and while he was prodding the pipe stem with a feather, Richmond observed him,

suspecting that he had said more than he had proposed to say, and was suddenly feeling uncomfortable about it.

“Well, keep it in mind, John.”

“I will. Love as social insurance.”

“No, no, no, don’t misunderstand me. If you marry the right woman, other people will think her right.”

“And if they don’t?”

Dr. Davidson had his pipe alight.

“They will let her know it, poor dear.”

Richmond did not talk the Victorian lingo. Young men do not, unless they are prigs, but he was not so innocent as to forget that a top-hat and frock-coat were sacred symbols. The fact remained that he was not inveigled into Holly Lodge by the mother siren, perhaps because when he and the daughter happened to pass each other in the street she appeared to hurry past him. All that they exchanged was a lift of the hat and a faint and half-stifled smile. Her aloofness should not have perplexed Richmond, but it did so. Nor should it have left him with the impression that, for some reason or other, and in spite of the rather intimate incident that had brought them together, she did not wish for any other intimacies. Richmond was not Burgoyne. He too was superabundantly male, but with a difference. When a face such as Lucy Lancaster’s floated past him behind a veil of hypersensitive coolness, he supposed that she was feeling as she looked. Oh, very well, then, he was not going to solicit that which she did not wish to give! No easy cynicism paraded the old cliché that a woman may turn her back on you to make you more eager to see her face. Nor did he divine the mother behind the daughter, or realize that a young girl may suffer from subtleties of feeling that do not penetrate the thicker skin of the striding and pragmatical young male.

In September Dr. Burgoyne took his holiday, a shooting holiday, as he let all the world know, spent with his brother-in-law who had an estate in Norfolk. Dr. Burgoyne’s brother-in-law was no more than a gentleman farmer, but, after all, did not the Norfolk tradition justify a little stretching of the longbow. And while Teddy was shooting at partridges and hitting only half the number that he claimed, some of Teddy’s patients agreed in feeling with Dr. Davidson that the new young man should be sampled.

Richmond, making up the day’s visiting list in the surgery with Dr.

Davidson, had Mrs. Borrowdale assigned to him. Also, Lady Feygate and Miss Shallowbrass. He did not comment on the assignment. He understood what was in his senior's mind, and felt himself quite capable of dealing with any patient.

“Anything particular about the cases, sir?”

Dr. Davidson rubbed his chin.

“I believe in the open mind. Besides, women like talking. Listen. It's an art.”

Richmond smiled. He supposed that the manner and the length of your attention depended upon the social status of the patient. You had to harmonize the cunning of the serpent with the Grace of God. But should that be so? You gave an old club-chronic, three minutes and something active in a bottle, but gentlewomen expected other values from you. Well, he was feeling that his attitude might depend upon the nature of the case. Maybe he was in that phase when an over-confident young man feels justified in resenting humbug, without having analysed those elements that elude a too dogmatic diagnosis.

Not yet would he understand those words of old Davidson's, that the human body is like a dark house which you explore by the light of a little, flickering candle. That he would come to understand it, both as the physician and the man, with heart-searchings and tribulation, was part of his destiny, but on this September morning he set out to visit these ladies with all the confidence of that cock-sure age. He belonged to the generation that followed Darwin, Pasteur and Lister. Nature's battlements were being stormed. Everywhere she was surrendering to that little potent person, man.

Richmond began with White Lodge and Mrs. Borrowdale. He found a very golden-haired, succulent, high-bosomed lady sitting up in bed, and very much prepared for the occasion. She had blue eyes that popped between fat eyelids, and a voice of tonsillar refinement. She extended a little pudgy hand to Richmond, and was gracious to him.

“Ah, Doctor, our first encounter, I think. Take that chair. What particularly pleasant weather.”

Richmond sat down, observing the lady, and conscious of being observed by her. No doubt she was conferring upon him a very great favour, and his impulse was to respond to her patronage with a dose of sincerity.

“I am a great sufferer, Dr. Richmond. No doubt you have been advised by dear Dr. Burgoyne.”

Richmond had not. No Burgoyne diagnosis was likely to appeal to him, but he was prepared to listen to the lady.

“It is my dyspepsia. So distressing. Dr. Burgoyne could tell you that I am the most self-denying of women.”

Was she, indeed! Richmond sat and listened to her description of her gastric disharmonies, and appraising the flabby texture of her, was inwardly and cynically amused. Might he see her tongue? He gazed at it and realized how great was the honour she was conferring upon him.

“Yes, a little furred. How are the motions?”

Mrs. Borrowdale closed her blue eyes for a moment as though such indelicate things needed veiling.

“Oh, a little difficult, doctor.”

“Do you take anything?”

“Yes, but my organs are so delicate.”

Richmond stood up, and laying a hand upon the bedclothes, suggested that he would like to examine her. She smiled at him, with a little tentative ogle.

“Oh, yes, certainly, but, please, be gentle.”

Richmond’s hand explored that warm fat pillow of an abdomen. H’m, yes, flatulence. Too much sugar, probably. Too much of everything.

“Any tenderness here?”

“Just a leetle.”

“You suffer, after meals, from discomfort.”

He wanted to say wind, but the word promised to be too indelicate.

“Yes. Terrible discomfort. A little lower down, too.”

Almost, her face suggested that she liked these explorations, and very gravely Richmond withdrew his hand. One should not go too far with such a lady!

“Now, please tell me, what do you eat?”

She lied to him serenely, and he felt that she was lying. To all intents and purposes Mrs. Borrowdale was a healthily selfish woman. What she needed was a week scrubbing floors on a diet of plain bread and water. Should he tell her so? He wanted to tell her so. And after all that was his business.

He sat by the bed in silence for some seconds.

“Oh, Doctor, why so serious? Don’t tell me you have discovered something dreadful.”

“No, madam, I was considering your diet.”

“Diet! But I never eat anything unusual.”

“No chocolates?”

There was a box of bonbons on the dressing-table, and realizing that Richmond had seen it, she became arch with him.

“Oh, Doctor, you are too quick. Yes, one or two a day.”

“I suggest you refrain for a week. No rich cake. No rich puddings or pastry, no heavy wine.”

“How Spartan! But didn’t I assure you that I am not at all greedy.”

He smiled, and looked at her in a particular way, and she was shrewd enough to realize that he did not believe her. Well, really! When dear Dr. Burgoyne was so sympathetic and full of comprehension, and would even pop a chocolate between your lips, and sing “Tra-la, sweets to the sweet.” She did not think she liked this grave, severe young man who stared at you as though you were just a case.

She said: “I don’t think you quite understand me, Dr. Richmond. No doubt a little medicine is what I need. Dr. Burgoyne’s special. It always does me so much good. Please see that Mr. Byng sends me a bottle. He knows what I have.”

Richmond rose and gave her a little bow. Why the devil had she sent for a member of the firm when Dr. Burgoyne could function even when absent? Had mere curiosity prompted her? Well, he hoped she was satisfied.

Descending the White Lodge stairs, he heard the angry snarling and yapping of a dog. Richmond felt capable of letting himself out of the house, but as he opened the front door, another door opened, and a fat and bad-tempered fox-terrier, escaping from the maid who had tried to grab him, charged furiously at Richmond’s legs. This was not dear Dr. Burgoyne, but a wicked interloper.

“Be careful, sir, he bites.”

Richmond, seeing that the little brute meant business, and was the spoilt cur of a spoilt mistress, waited, right foot poised, and as the dog charged in, he gave the animal a nicely timed swing of the foot. It bundled him over, and he

retired snarling and yelping, unaccustomed, like his mistress, to such frank treatment. Richmond walked out and closed the door.

Another door opened, and Mrs. Borrowdale's voice was heard.

"Florrie, is that poor Gyp?"

"Yes, m'am."

"What has happened?"

"He tried to bite the doctor, m'am, and the doctor kicked him."

"The brute! I'll never have him inside my house again. Bring the poor dear up, Florrie. Poor Gyppo, poor pet, did the nasty man kick you! Yes, most certainly I shall write to Dr. Davidson and complain."

Richmond's next visit was paid to Miss Shallowbrass who lived at No. 8 Tenterden Terrace. Miss Shallowbrass did not expect him, or rather, she had expected Dr. Davidson, but since Miss Shallowbrass was described as the lay-vicar of St. Jude's, she was capable of dealing or misdealing with every problem that arose. Miss Shallowbrass was a hard, sandy-faced, sinewy little woman with an ecclesiastical mouth, and a nose that was red at the tip. She was exceedingly active in Southfleet, energizing, organizing this, that and the other. She ran the Choral Society, and the various Missions, and St. Jude's Sunday School, and Richmond found her sitting at a desk covered with tracts and pamphlets and correspondence.

Not that Miss Shallowbrass was embarrassed by the unexpectedness of his presence. Nothing embarrassed her, and that may have been why she was the most unpopular person in Southfleet. She appeared to be so infinitely sure that it was her business to manage everything and everybody that her interferences could be incredibly impertinent.

Miss Shallowbrass boasted of her candour. She looked Richmond up and down as though inspecting a boy who was attending her bible-class for the first time.

Richmond stood hat in hand, considering the lady. Possibly he liked her as little as he had liked Mrs. Borrowdale, but differently so. He was quite ready to assure her that he was not eager to act as her physician.

"Dr. Davidson asked me to call."

Miss Shallowbrass put down her pen, and observing her fingers Richmond surmised that she suffered from chilblains in winter.

"Oh, very well. Sit down, Dr. Richmond. I gather that this is a kind of

introduction. Well, let us make the best of it, even though you are rather young.”

Richmond smiled upon her.

“Even doctors must be born.”

Miss Shallowbrass looked puzzled. She was one of those stupidly acute women who spend their lives in picking up pins and sticking them into pincushions or people.

“Experience is so important. I am a rather candid person, Dr. Richmond.”

“Sincerity should always appeal to a doctor.”

“Presumably, but one may be a little fastidious, shall we call it?”

“Perhaps you would prefer to regard this as merely a social visit?”

Miss Shallowbrass sniffed. It was a habit of hers.

“Well, Dr. Richmond, perhaps I had better regard you professionally. Young men must begin. My trouble is a very usual one. It is constipation.”

She threw the word at him like a Christian virgin defying a pagan mob, and Richmond was moved to sudden, inward laughter. Could so active and peripatetic a person suffer from sluggish bowels? But might not that explain her waspish energy?

“A most usual complaint. And may I ask what you do for it?”

“Do for it? I suffer for it. Salts, my dear young man, and senna, and sometimes aloes.”

“Habitually?”

She gave him a sandy stare.

“Of necessity. Would you suggest——?”

“I would only suggest, Miss Shallowbrass, that that which goes into the body may matter.”

“Sir, I regard my body as a mere Balaam’s ass.”

“But why whip it?”

The lady bridled. It was only too evident that she had no sense of humour, not a speck of it.

“I have many occupations, many duties, Dr. Richmond. I hold that one should not fawn upon the flesh.”

“May I write you a prescription, and suggest——?”

“You may write me a prescription. I will try it. But as to my habit of life, Dr. Richmond——”

“That is inviolable.”

She puckered up her eyes at him. She frowned. This was a somewhat presumptuous young man.

“Indubitably. Write your prescription, Dr. Richmond. I have an open mind.”

Richmond made a note in his little case-book and escaped. Ye gods, was private practice to be all flatulence and constipation? Oh, possibly! Probably. And he was wishing life to be all Cæsarian section and compound fracture and colotomy. Well, at all events no dog had tried to bite him at No. 8 Tenterden Terrace, even if the lady had been more than a little acid. Those shiny, stringy, interfering fingers! He did not like Miss Shallowbrass, and he was to like her less in the days that were to come.

Richmond drove next to Martyr’s Grange, the house of the Feygates, feeling that as a physician he was somewhat superfluous so far as the ladies were concerned. The Grange lay on the outskirts of the town, a James I house, old and tree sheltered and gracious. It had a garden which was notable for its roses, and the ancient hedges of yew and of box, and an immense fish-pond upon which water-lilies floated. Would Lady Feygate be like those other women, ready to patronize his newness, or to resent it? He stood in the brick porch, with its oak seats, and felt himself raw and a little resentful. He heard the door open, and turning to meet a servant, found himself confronting a handsome old gentleman dressed in the style of the forties. The old gentleman had very fine white hair, a fresh face, a club foot, and rather exquisite manners.

“Dr. Richmond, I believe?”

“Yes, sir. Dr. Davidson wished me——”

“Of course, of course. It is a pleasure to meet you. My wife is upstairs. Oh, John, please show Dr. Richmond to her ladyship’s room. You see, Richmond, I am something of a Byron.”

Sir Roger Feygate went out into the garden, and Richmond followed the manservant up the broad oak stairs to a long gallery with many windows. This house had mystery. It seemed to be penetrated by some essence that was peaceful and fragrant. It was exquisitely still.

He found himself bowing to a pale woman with grey hair who was lying

on a sofa. She had a fragile face, and very gentle eyes. She smiled and spoke to him at once, and held out a hand.

“Dr. Richmond. I have been looking forward to meeting you. I feel that I know you already through Dr. Davidson.”

Richmond felt moved to kiss that very delicate hand.

“Sit down, and let us talk.”

He sat down beside the couch, facing her obliquely.

“About yourself, your ladyship?”

“Oh, no. When one has been an invalid for years, as I have, one wishes to escape a little. Doctors are for emergencies, and not to be taken daily!”

He rose to her spirit. This was a woman who was sick in body, but not in soul, and to such a woman you could give your uttermost.

“One has a preference for emergencies.”

She surveyed him calmly and kindly.

“I imagine so from what I hear. Surgery, Dr. Richmond. Eclat, the difficult thing.”

“Your ladyship is teasing me.”

“Am I? But at your age accomplishment should seem so important.”

“I like to feel so.”

“And at mine, it is contemplation. So, extremes meet. My trouble is my heart. I mention it to forget it. There are times when the wretched thing needs assistance.”

“I shall be very proud if, at any time, I can assist.”

She was silent for a moment, observing him.

“Yes, I think you would be. When life flutters in one, one asks for calmness. So, Southfleet is to be your home.”

He nodded at her.

“Yes, it seems so.”

“That sounds rather impermanent.”

“I had other ideas, I admit it.”

“A career?”

“Oh, perhaps.”

“What is career, Dr. Richmond, but finding yourself happy in finding something to do? But, forgive me, that sounds like Miss Shallowbrass.”

And Richmond laughed.

“Yes, if the things one does seem adequate.”

Her fingers played with the gold chain she was wearing.

“I think, Dr. Richmond, that had I your destiny, I should find it with the common people, those who labour with their hands.”

“Are heads excluded?”

She gave him an almost roguish glance.

“No, exceptions do occur. Were I a physician I think I should become bored with imaginary ills, if imaginary ills do happen. That is a thing that has puzzled me. And these people who prefer to be sick.”

“I think so.”

“I wonder. Some disharmony which you doctors don’t discover. But those who labour to live are rather different, I think. I wish you well of them, Dr. Richmond.”

When he left her it was with a sense of strength and refreshment, for, sick woman though she was, Richmond had brought more out of that room than he had taken into it. What was the secret of such charm? Here was a woman whom life chained to a sofa or a cushioned carriage, and yet her spirit was more active for your happiness than all the scratching of a dozen Shallowbrass hens. Richmond, letting himself out into the garden, met Sir Roger in the drive leading to the lodge-gate, doing dot and go one with that shortened leg, and helping himself with a stick.

“Well, Doctor, and how is the patient?”

Richmond, looking into that fresh old face, would have said that he was speaking to a young man, not an old one. Here was no absurd, middle-class hauteur, but a kindliness and a courtesy that hailed God in all men.

“I am ashamed to say, sir, that I did not examine her. I think it was her ladyship who——”

Sir Roger cocked a jocund eye at him.

“Who did the examining? The spirit that heals, Richmond, and is never afraid. You doctors should welcome it.”

“I do, sir, even though I am supposed to be young.”

“Ah, age is relative, Richmond, and wisdom somehow the gift of the gods. Do fools ever cease from being fools, especially do the dear ladies? But how ungallant of me! Have you read *Don Juan*?”

He used the soft, Spanish J, and for a moment Richmond was puzzled.

“Byron’s gentleman, sir?”

“Yes, very lame stuff. The cynics, like the critics, seem to live so much on sour grapes. And the moral is?”

“Never eat grapes until you are sure they are ripe, sir?”

Sir Roger tapped the gravel with his stick.

“Good, very good, Richmond. If you are wise as to that you will be good for yourself and for others.”

IX

Frustrations there might be in this little world, but to Richmond they did not betray themselves as limitations until the autumn merged into the winter, and all those normal ills that afflict humanity began to manifest abundantly. Richmond's retort to life was so much that of youth, impetuous and confident. "The knife, the knife, and always the knife." Solution by excision or amputation! No doubt he would have essayed to treat all rotten things in that way, men, institutions, snobberies, stupidities. He may have asked that healing should be dramatic, like waving a sword at the head of a forlorn hope. The more subtle and moving elements of the human drama had not yet been revealed to him.

His seniors left to him the surgery work. He was strong and young, and the spade was for such hands.

Each morning as he walked up the passage between Prospect House and Lovell's Library, and opened the surgery door, he would be greeted by those flock-noises, coughings, sneezings, bleatings, a suggestion of creaking sinews. He would put his head into the dispensary.

"How many this morning, Mr. Byng?"

"About two dozen."

"Anything interesting?"

"Just chronics, sir."

In a little while he was ceasing to ask such questions. He peered down throats, and listened to wheezings, and pulled out teeth that the east wind had provoked. He felt rheumatic joints, and gave ear to the complainings of the weak and the old. Here were old bodies that were worn out and withering. And women brought babies and children that stuffy cottages had filled with wet wool. He waded through the work twice daily, conscious at times of a feeling of impatience. What were cough mixtures, and liniments and gargles but pure palliatives? And was this man's work, ministering to the old and the feeble, propping up dying trees? No doubt he did not ask himself this actual question, but the significance of it was instinct in him. He was conscious of pity, but a pity that was tinged with impatience. Was one to spend one's life paddling through this stagnant water that could never be drained from the lees of a life that was ended? Conscious he was of anxious, strained old faces, and sometimes their eyes seemed to accuse him of not being the god he wished to

be. And old people grumbled. Their souls seemed to complain like the poor, failing bodies.

Twenty cases dealt with in an hour, three minutes or so apportioned to each patient!

In a moment of irritation he confessed to Charlie Byng that such functioning was a farce.

“Is every winter like this?”

Mr. Byng, who was still watching his young warrior hardening himself to harness, gave him laconic comfort.

“Mostly. But don’t take it too seriously. Our surgery’s a kind of club. They can come and sit by the stove and gossip.”

“You mean they like it?”

“Of course. When an old woman can’t talk about her baby or her husband, she falls back on her rheumatics or her bowels. If it gets too bad you can leave some of the old ones to me. I know ’em better than I know my Bible.”

Winter came early, and was bitter. A fierce frost early in November brought the autumn leaves to earth in one yellow sheet. Mrs. Davidson’s geraniums had retreated into winter quarters. The little gardens of Queen’s Terrace lay tucked up under brown blankets. The wind settled into the north-east and showed every sign of remaining there. To Richmond fell most of the country work, and Dr. Davidson, loaning the younger man Howell and the dog-cart, gave his attention to Southfleet, unless the more important patients called him into the villages. Each day Richmond faced that north-east wind which whipped your face and found your very vitals. The flat country spreading towards Wicking and Eastness was bleak and bitter on such mornings, with the wind cutting over the hedges and roaring in the bare elms. Old Howell the groom would go blue about the nose and gills, and collect a dewdrop. Your eyes watered. Rugs were strapped almost to your chest, yet hands and feet grew numb. Richmond would hurry into some cottage and try to warm his hands before laying them upon a patient’s body. The groom would flap his arms, and perhaps get down and stamp to and fro after throwing a rug over the horse’s loins.

A man’s life, oh, certainly, not like strolling through the warm wards of a hospital, or being driven in a brougham about Mayfair! Richmond reacted to it. The wind seemed to whip him into a little hardness. If Dr. Davidson had

endured through all these years, well, so could he. And yet, while the youth in him set its face against the weather, he did not realize that in the houses of the sick he was different from the older man. These country-folk did not feel to him as they felt towards Dr. Davidson. There was an element of haste and of fierceness in this younger doctor. They would say of him that the new man seemed clever, but that he didn't look at you or speak to you or touch you as Dr. Davidson did.

“He be hard-like.”

He came in like the east wind, keen and cold, but bringing no human warmth with it.

Burgoyne used his brougham if he had to take such a journey, or was called out at night. He wore a fur coat with a collar turned up almost to his eyes, yet the strange thing was that when Teddy went hunting the weather did not seem to scare him. On these red-coat days Richmond would find half Burgoyne's patients assigned to him, or rather, the people who were of no particular consequence.

One morning, early in December, when Richmond was busy with his club-patients, he heard Burgoyne's voice in the waiting-room.

“Richmond. Just a moment.”

Richmond went out to him. Burgoyne had a box-cloth coat over his red jacket. He was booted and spurred.

“Meeting at Richford Hall at eleven, my lad. A call has just come in. Take it, will you.”

“Country or town?”

“Oh, the Lancaster lady. Better see her early, Richmond. Ta-ta. My horse will get cold.”

He swaggered off, leaving Richmond wondering whether he was pleased with the task that had been assigned to him, and whether, in the future, all the Burgoyne leavings would be his. Doing more than half the work, and receiving a quarter of the pay! But Holly Lodge? Would he be *persona grata* there after his eluding of Mrs. Lancaster's musical evenings. Would Calypso welcome him? And the daughter? Oh, well, did it matter? He would be attending at Holly Lodge as a doctor, not as a young man whose emotional possibilities were to be considered.

Dr. Davidson had been seeing half a dozen private patients in his study at Prospect House, but he came into the surgery just as Richmond had dealt with the last of the morning's bunch.

"You can take the dog-cart, John. I'm walking. Burgoyne been in?"

"Yes, it's a hunting day."

"Can you manage?"

"Oh, yes. By the way, I am seeing Mrs. Lancaster for Burgoyne. She has just sent a message. Any advice, sir?"

Davidson rubbed his chin.

"I have never seen the lady, professionally, John. Feeling shy?"

"Not in the least."

Dr. Davidson had to have his joke.

"No snappy dogs there, I think."

Richmond smiled, more to himself than at Dr. Davidson's joke. *Cave canem*. But was it possible that there were other things to be feared?

A cold drizzle had set in, dimming both estuary and sky, when Richmond left Prospect House. Old Howell, wearing his white rubber cloak, looked like a human pyramid. Richmond glanced at the sky and the wet pavement, and wondered whether it ever ceased from blowing or raining during a Southfleet winter. He was in a mood to notice the weather which, in youth, may be a symptom of emotional unrest. He swung himself up into the dog-cart beside the groom and drew the apron over his legs.

"Holly Lodge, Jessamy Lane, Howell."

"Yes, sir."

"How many winters have you spent down here?"

"Twenty-three, sir."

"All like this?"

"Like what, sir?"

"Rain, sleet, north-east wind."

The groom was attending to business, and weather was just weather.

"One gets used to it, sir."

Howell's laconic acceptance of such hardships made Richmond feel that he had been reproved. After all, he did get a chance of warming himself at fires, and the groom did not, and for driving out in all weathers and at all hours and for feeding and grooming horses, and washing traps and cleaning harness when the rounds were over, Mr. Howell received eighteen shillings a week. Yet the man did not grumble. One got used to things.

The dog-cart swung right into Jessamy Lane. The holly hedges were wet and glistening. Howell pulled up outside Holly Lodge, and Richmond sprang out, opened the gate and walking up the path to the green door, rang the bell. He was expecting to be met by a maid, and was unprepared for the face of Lucy Lancaster.

"Good morning. Dr. Burgoyne asked me to call."

If she had surprised him by opening the door, his presence on the doorstep was equally unexpected by her. She stood and stared at him with a suggestion of helplessness.

"Isn't Dr. Burgoyne well?"

"Yes. It's a hunting day. I'm afraid you will have to accept me, unless _____"

Her eyelids flickered.

"Oh, I did not mean that."

He got the impression that she was afraid. But of what? Of him? What had she to fear in him? Was there something in his make-up that antagonized her? He felt piqued, yet moved to sudden gentleness. She had the same curious effect on him that she had had on that evening when he had intervened so brusquely on her behalf.

"Thank you. May I come in?"

She stood back, and tried to smile.

"Please do."

"It is your mother, I think?"

"Yes."

She closed the door, and he took off his hat, gloves and coat, and laid them on the hall chair. She had slipped past him with a kind of shrinking movement to the drawing-room door. She opened it, and with her back to it, looked at him with large, wide eyes.

“Will you come in for a moment, Dr. Richmond?”

He walked into the room, and stood with his back to the fire. So, Madame Josephine was not in bed. And then he was aware of the daughter closing the door. She stood there, with her white face and glowing head in relief against the dark background of the green velvet portière.

“My mother——”

She uttered those two words, and became mute. It was as though something she wished to say hung smothered in her throat. Richmond was conscious of sudden inward tension.

“Your mother is not up?”

“No. In bed.”

“I see. Is there——?”

“Such very depressing weather. She feels it.”

Undoubtedly she was trying to tell him something, and could not bring herself to do it. Her embarrassment affected Richmond. Her pretty, inarticulate, flinching face was like a tragic mask, crying mutely for help, and for the life of him he did not know how to help her. He was too young to play the paternal friend, as Dr. Davidson might have played it—“Now, my dear child, just tell me what is troubling you.” Also, he was hindered by the consciousness of being suddenly and personally involved in any thing that troubled or hurt her.

“Shall I go up and see Mrs. Lancaster.”

Her face expressed instant relief, as though he had rescued her from her dilemma. Also, his voice had become different, not professionally and perfunctorily so, but like a strong and impulsive hand stretched out to help. She did not utter a word, but her eyes thanked him. She opened the door, and drawing a quick breath, turned and leading the way upstairs, pointed to a particular door.

He nodded. He understood that this was the door of mystery, hiding something which she was passionately concerned in concealing. And perhaps, at that moment, he began to understand the reason of her seeming aloofness.

He knocked, and she fled down the stairs.

“The doctor. May I come in?”

A turgid voice answered him.

“Yes, Doctor, dear, come in.”

She was sitting up in bed, and under her towelled hair her huge eyes were two glassy circles of vacuous astonishment. One glance at her face was sufficient. Moreover, the windows were tightly closed, and the stuffy room smelt of the cause of her trouble. There was a table by the bed, and on it a decanter and glasses. For some seconds she continued to stare at Richmond, her stupid, inflamed face that of a fuddled and incipient hag. He could imagine her screaming and fighting if a certain thing was denied her.

Her lips fumbled.

“So, so, it’s the young doctor. How do, young man. Y’see, a leetle indisposed. This *triste* climate.”

And then, suddenly, she began to laugh, and somehow Richmond knew that this laughter was about the most dreadful thing he would ever have to deal with. Nor did he know how to deal with it in such a person and in such surroundings. In the casualty department of St. Martha’s a wet towel might have been used to flick the patient back to a sanity and self control that would have advertised itself in foul language. How did Teddy Burgoyne deal with the lady? Richmond stood at the foot of her bed, conscious of nausea, and of sudden profound compassion for the girl downstairs.

Her laughter continued. It appeared to be uncontrollable. With mouth wide open, blue eyes bulging, the spasm seemed to shake the bed. Richmond’s two hands gripped the rail. His young face had grown infinitely stern, perhaps because his own profound perplexity angered him.

“What can I do for you, madam?”

Another splurge of laughter. Then, she found a lace-edged handkerchief and wiped her mouth.

“St-stockings, please.”

Drunken fool! He realized that he was suggesting a shopwalker to her, and that her sense of the ridiculous mocked his young, professional austerity.

“Silk, I presume. This way, madam.”

He walked round the bed, picked up the table, and placed it out of her reach.

“I think you have had enough of that medicine.”

She flared at him.

“How dare you! Put that back.”

“For the moment, madam, I am your doctor. You will be good enough to do what I tell you.”

He went and opened the window.

“A little fresh air is indicated.”

“S-shut that at once.”

He took a chair and sat down beside the bed. He fixed his eyes on her, and suddenly she grew sullen and turned her head away, as though his scrutiny was not to be borne.

“Mrs. Lancaster, is this necessary?”

Silence.

“Won’t you let me help you?”

She lay still a moment, and then her shoulders began to jerk. She gulped, clutched her handkerchief, and suddenly began to weep. Tears rolled down her ravaged face.

“I—I’m so miserable, Doctor. I, I’m growing old. What is there left for me in this stupid little town? I wish to forget.”

He put out a hand and grasped her wrist.

“Why forget in this way?”

She sobbed.

“Oh, you are young; you would not understand. How can you understand. I believe in nothing. What does it matter, then?”

He felt helpless. Somehow he could not produce all the pious platitudes to this woman for whom life had lost its meaning.

“Might it not matter to others?”

She turned her head and looked at him with a cynical and bitter smirk.

“Oh, yes, my daughter! The conventions! What does one care for the conventions when one is a little zig-zag. My dear young man, I am quite hopeless, yes. Put that table beside me.”

He stared at her.

“No.”

“Why be so strong and silly? Do you not understand that when the spirit is

dead, it is better that the body should die also?"

"And the spirit?"

"My dear, there is no such thing, save the spirit in that bottle. What, you believe in the good God? How droll! The wise physician should let those who wish it die of their own poison. How long does it take? Tell me that?"

He got up, walked to the window, and stood looking out, and on this grey day it seemed to him that she was profoundly right, and that her philosophy of nothingness was unanswerable.

Presently, he turned and replaced the table beside the bed.

"Is that what you really wish?"

Her head rolled wearily on the pillow.

"Yes, oh, yes."

What should he say to her daughter? As he closed the bedroom door and walked across the landing he knew that the inevitable confrontation awaited him below. Was she expecting him to help her, to solve her problem as easily and as forcibly as he had thrashed those drunken cockneys? Yes, but that had been a simple affair, not like this malady of the soul, this savage ennui that must drown itself in drink.

She was waiting, standing in the drawing-room doorway, and he was afraid with a fear that was new to him. Her eyes watched his face as he came down the stairs, and suddenly she covered her own face with her hands. She shrank away from him into the room.

He followed her. She had dropped down into a chair beside the fire, and her young body seemed to crumple. Her hands still covered her face. For a moment there was silence.

"You know now."

"Yes."

"Can anything be done?"

He closed the door, and went and stood by one of the french windows.

"How long has it been going on?"

"Oh, months and months. I tried to—— But she is like a wild creature if I try to——"

“Yes, I understand.”

Her hands had fallen now, and she was watching him.

“What can one do?”

“Often, so very little. Your mother tells me she has no faith in anything. That gives one no hold.”

“You mean?”

“One might let her live as she wants to live.”

The pupils of her eyes dilated. She looked at him almost with horror.

“You say that to me?”

He winced, took a step forward, paused.

“Believe me, it is not what I wish to say. And the alternative, struggle, the horrible game one has to play with such a crave, hatred, rages. Oh, you know, I expect. But Dr. Burgoyne has seen your mother.”

Her hands were clenched.

“He pretends not to see. He——”

“Good God!”

“It is all so horrible. Is there no medicine that will take the crave away?”

“Nothing of much use. There are places, of course, where such cases can be sent.”

“Oh, yes, I—she refuses that.”

And suddenly she stood up, straight and slender, with a brittle calmness and dignity.

“Thank you, Dr. Richmond. I see that you cannot help me. If I must bear it alone, I will.”

He made a sudden movement towards her, but the look in her eyes disarmed him.

“Please go now. I should like to be alone.”

X

Richmond drove out to Eastness in the rain and wind in a mood that was not likely to be helpful to his other patients. He could not forget the way Lucy Lancaster had hidden her face in her hands, and sat broken before the fire, and the shock of her horror when he had shrugged professional shoulders. He felt that he had failed her, and that there was a fastidious and fine temper in her that had risen against his seeming cynicism. Yet, what had she expected of him? That he would play Mesmer to her mother, and conjure away a crave that is as difficult to eradicate as any cancer? When a woman such as Mrs. Lancaster said: "Let me drink and die," might it not be kinder to suffer her to drift out as speedily as possible?

On the way home he took the reins from old Howell, and as they passed Burnt House Farm he asked the groom a question.

"What would you do with a woman who drinks, Howell?"

The groom was silent for some seconds. He was a widower, and Richmond, when he asked that question, did not know that he was probing a plain man's tragedy.

"There's nothing to be done, sir."

"Nothing."

"Well, you can try pleading, sir, and the strap, and the parson, but when a woman gets that way——"

"It's like drowning, Howell."

"Yes, sir, just like that."

"The quicker the better?"

"Well, in a way, sir, yes."

When Richmond handed the reins back to Howell outside Prospect House, he saw Dr. Davidson and his umbrella crossing the road from The Royal George. Yes, Davidson might be the man for such a problem, and professional confidences could be laid upon his shoulders. But what of Dr. Burgoyne? Oh, damn Burgoyne! And yet, was Tra-La Teddy as purblind and facile as he seemed? Richmond stepped out of the dog-cart, and waited for the older man, and when Davidson saw the younger man's face, he gathered that all was not well with the world.

“Can I have a few words with you, sir?”

“Trouble, John? Something cropped up?”

“Yes. It’s not for other ears.”

“Come into my study.”

Yet, when Dr. Davidson had heard what Richmond had to tell him, he picked up the poker and stirred the study fire as though the doing of something positive might counteract a tendency to pessimism.

“I would rather have any sort of case to deal with than that, John.”

“No solution.”

“I have had a dozen such cases in my life. Two broke the habit, the others _____”

He shrugged, put down the poker, and warmed his hands at the blaze.

“If you have something strong and elemental to appeal to, there’s hope. If you haven’t——”

“How did you appeal?”

“I didn’t. The salvation came from elsewhere. In one case a little curate we had in Southfleet then got the woman cured. Managed to give her religion instead of alcohol.”

“And the other?”

“Rather different. A farmer’s wife, a young strapping woman. Her husband thrashed her into sobriety.”

“Rough medicine.”

“But in that case it worked. You see, he was fond of his wife. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. He said to her—’I’ll thrash ’ee, my lass, until I belt the devil out of ye,’ and he did.”

“In this case, there is no such chance. Couldn’t you see her?”

“It is Burgoyne’s case.”

“I know, but can’t you defy etiquette, sir?”

“All right, I’ll see her, John. You say that the daughter——?”

“It’s pretty terrible for her. I’m afraid I shocked her.”

“How?”

“Oh, by wondering whether the kindest thing was not to suffer the crave to spend itself as it pleased.”

“That’s what the good people call devil’s philosophy, John.”

“I dare say they do. Let them try to treat such a case with little tracts and texts.”

Dr. Davidson called at Holly Cottage, but he did not see the lady. Lucy Lancaster was out, and the maid who carried Davidson’s message upstairs, returned with a reply that could not be conjured into courtesy. Mrs. Lancaster begged Dr. Davidson to remember that Dr. Burgoyne was her doctor and that she desired neither under-strappers nor over-strappers. The stout maid excused herself for the rudeness of the message; she was a Southfleet woman and knew what was due to the doctor. “You see, sir, she isn’t quite herself to-day.” Dr. Davidson accepted the snub, and exonerating Sarah, took himself off with the intention of tackling Burgoyne on the problem. He did not see Dr. Burgoyne until the evening, and Teddy had had an undignified and an unlucky day. His horse had thrown him at the second hedge, and in view of half the field, and Teddy, with a telescoped top-hat and a muddied face, had been left to watch his horse gallop into space. He had fumed back to Richford on foot, hired a fly, and left his damned horse to fate and some farmer.

Therefore, Dr. Burgoyne was sore and remounted on his dignity.

“What! The Lancaster woman? Of course I know what is the matter with her. I shall be obliged, Davidson, if you will not interfere with my cases.”

“I have no wish to interfere, but Richmond was rather bothered.”

“My dear sir, he would be. Too young for such matters. It’s a question of tact, Davidson, tact and experience. I know how to handle the lady.”

Dr. Davidson did not want even to seem to question his partner’s capacity. Teddy could be very trying when his vanity was out of sorts.

“There’s the question of the daughter.”

“My dear sir, I do know something about women. The daughter’s a nice child, but apt to be a little hysterical. I’ll have a talk with her. And tell Richmond, with my compliments, not to worry about cases that are a little beyond him.”

And there the matter rested, though Dr. Davidson, while admitting to John that Dr. Burgoyne was naturally a little touchy about interference, toned down the abruptness of Teddy’s message to his junior.

Richmond was soon to suspect that Southfleet referred to Mrs. Lancaster as "That dreadful woman." That, no doubt, would be the Shallowbrass attitude, and it was so. Dreadful women often are those whom Life has loved as she loves the sturdy beggar and the artist, and the elemental envies of thwarted sex spills itself in the passion to blame. Miss Shallowbrass, meeting Lucy Lancaster walking in Caroline Gardens, stopped her and with peering impertinence, asked after her mother's health.

"My mother is much better, thank you. It is the cold, wet weather."

Miss Shallowbrass gave the girl a sandy smirk.

"I am so glad."

Miss Shallowbrass always carried with her a little black-leather bag in which she kept improving literature. She opened her bag and, picking out a tract with black-gloved fingers, presented it to Lucy.

"May I ask you to give this to your mother. Good words do help."

Miss Shallowbrass passed on, to tuck two or three more pamphlets into the holly and laurustinus bushes, where their little protruding white noses might attract the curious, leaving Lucy to glance at the paper in her hand. "Be warned. God is not fooled. Strong drink rotteth the soul." Miss Lancaster tore the smug thing into pieces, and dropped them into the heart of a holly bush. So, even Miss Shallowbrass knew, and had assumed her to be a liar, which was Christian of her, but in Lucy's heart there was a blaze of anger against these people who could not help, but were so eager to condemn.

Did anyone think of her and for her, and care?

Was it tacitly assumed that she too suffered or might suffer from the same taint?

"Poor young thing, but of course such a tendency is in the blood. The mother's sins shall be visited upon the children."

What could one do? Endure, suffer, keep a frozen face, strengthen yourself with your scorn of these self-righteous people? Sensitive she might be, but in Lucy Lancaster there was a courage that could confront humiliation, even while it shook at the knees. Nor did she believe that all the world was Shallowbrass and Burgoyne. She had one good friend in stout, sober-faced Sarah, for Sarah had not been born a superior person, a genteel prig who put God into a white choker, black coat and gloves and walked out arm-in-arm with Him to patronize and admonish the poor.

Yet, someone was thinking of her during those winter days, a young man who belonged to a generation that had begun to ask life pregnant questions. Why this, why that? What lay hidden in that Dark House, Man? Was there anything supramundane in him, some mysterious and vital essence that eluded the scalpel and the microscope? And in Lucy Lancaster there seemed to shine that strange light which reaches man in love, in colour and in sound, and imbues him with the illusion that things matter, and that faith and courage and honour are not mere tawdry vanities. That he was in love with her he would not allow, for there was a hardness in John Richmond that flattered itself that it could not be fooled, and there is no greater fool than he who thinks that he is wiser and stronger than nature. He had his plan, and was determined that sentiment should not spoil it. Marriage, no, thank you! Had he not been warned, and was he not wise as to the wisdom of the warning? A wife, a house, children would double the chains of convention, and doom him to be anchored in this backwater like some dull hulk. So, John Richmond suffered himself to think of Lucy Lancaster rather as a man may think of an appealing heroine in a novel, but a novel that would never come alive. Maybe he did contemplate her more closely than that, finding her exquisite pallor and her strange hair and Cassandra eyes moving to his manhood. As Lady Neath had said, he was a hard young man, though the hardness was more willed than actual. He had himself in hand; he was ambitious, confident, no dreamer who would watch the moon and walk over the cliff edge while watching it.

He could think of her to himself as "Poor kid," and remain unchallenged by the patronage in his compassion. He was the young and self-sure physician in his chair, contemplating a pretty patient, but convinced that patient and physician should remain apart, even though there was provocation in the patient's prettiness. Therefore, during those winter days John Richmond was a dark house to himself, and he did not know it, a house most intelligently and brightly lit, yet, holding in its foundations laughter and tears and anguish. For, no man is truly man until he has come face to face with the strange, dark creature in himself, and striven and prayed and despaired with it for good or for evil. Strangest of all, that which may seem dark and disastrous is like nature's child in the womb, the beginnings of the somehow and ultimate good.

Dr. Burgoyne had a wife whom he bullied, and two young daughters whom he spoilt, but Mrs. Burgoyne was one of those indolent, fair women who are content to lie about on sofas, and like a soft cushion to receive the impressions made upon her by her Edward's tantrums, and to be no more affected by them than a cushion. Burgoyne became genial and charming outside his house, but

put off silk when he re-entered his own door. The Burgoyne had social significance, and each winter they gave a New Year's party in the Assembly Room of The Royal George. It was supposed to be a children's party, but quite a number of grown-ups were asked to it, the Neaths and the Feygates, and the Ransfords of Richford, the Rev. Herbert Creavy and his wife, the Kays of Willowell, the Davidsons, the Moneys of Money's Brewery, the Misses Pinhook who kept Southfleet's school for young gentlewomen. Even Mrs. Borrowdale had her invitation, and rich old Miss Megson, and the inevitable Miss Shallowbrass who was too holy and venomous to be offended. There was dancing, with Sir Roger de Coverley, and such good old games as Nuts in May, and Oranges and Lemons. Teddy was always in great form, wearing a white silk waistcoat, and dancing with everybody save his wife, and a wonderful fellow with the children.

This year Holly Lodge received its invitation.

"Dr. and Mrs. Burgoyne request the pleasure——"

Mrs. Lancaster giggled at it, and flicked the piece of pasteboard across the table at her daughter.

"There you are, my dear. You should see me dance the polka, you should see my coat-tails fly. The dear doctor in his element!"

Lucy glanced at the card and saw that her name was included in the invitation.

"Shall you go, Mother?"

"I? Children! So ennuiant. You can go."

Lucy refilled her mother's coffee-cup, and Mrs. Lancaster observed her.

"Yes, I shall go."

"Of course. Young women should be seen in the market."

Lucy did not respond to that cynical flick. If she had reasons of her own for confronting social Southfleet, that was her affair. There were deeps in her that no other woman could assess. She was afraid, yet moved to take fear in her two young hands and throttle it.

Richmond too had his invitation, and a personal reminder from Burgoyne that the Burgoyne party should be considered an affair of the practice. "Come up and be kind to the lasses, my lad. We haven't too many bachelors in Southfleet." Richmond, like many men who are doers and not talkers, was apt

to be shy and reserved upon social occasions, and to get in a corner with his back to the wall and to observe life instead of sharing in it. People might interest him as specimens, but he did not always want to talk to them. He could not patter and pun and flatter like Burgoyne. It was late when he walked across from Prospect House to The Royal George, for he had to write up the books and leave Charlie Byng some prescriptions.

The Royal George still wore its Christmas decorations, swags and festoons of holly, with mistletoe hanging from the lantern in the hall. It was a shabby, comfortable, solid house, suggestive somehow of hot muffins and great rounds of beef, blazing fires, Turkey carpets and side-boards shining with Sheffield plate. A manservant took Richmond's hat and coat. "Straight up the stairs, sir." The Royal George stairs wound in a placid spiral to the large landing on the first floor, and on the stairs Richmond met sounds of revelry, a Waldteufel waltz, human chatter, the frou-frou of dresses and feet. He wanted to put his hands in his trouser pockets and stroll unceremoniously upon the stage, but that could not be. He was on parade, and realizing more and more how public was the life of a professional gentleman. Through the high doorway he saw whirling figures, children and their elders, a parterre of parents flowering in the recess of the big bow-window opposite. He saw Burgoyne go by, dancing with Mrs. Borrowdale, and doing it as though all the Royal Families in Europe were watching him.

Richmond paused in the doorway, head up, shoulders squared, a young man feeling self-conscious and misliking it. For a moment he posed as an observer of the show, and then, somehow realizing himself as a figure stuck in a niche, walked in and looked around for his hostess. He saw her seated at the end of the big room between Lady Neath and Miss Shallowbrass. Mrs. Burgoyne was rather like a large, yellow rose, and overblown at that, but she was a kind woman and she had breasts. She was not like Miss Shallowbrass, a thin copper pot coated with verdigris.

Richmond threaded his way along the wall, and stood before his hostess.

"I'm afraid I'm rather late. Work kept me."

The three women looked at him, and one of them at least understood his shyness, and that brittle young dignity that could not even bend its back.

"So pleased," said his hostess.

She was monosyllabic, perhaps because of her indolence, but her smile did not mean what it said. Miss Shallowbrass, who had put on her nose-nippers, in order to see all that was going on, uncovered long yellow teeth at him, and to Richmond recurred that one word "Constipation." His glance passed with

relief to the face of Ursula, Lady Neath. She too smiled upon him.

“Devotion to duty, Dr. Richmond.”

Richmond slipped in beside Lady Neath’s chair. She gave him one look, and then those serene dark eyes of hers seemed to fix themselves upon some distant object. Her glance had challenged the young man. It had not merely observed him, but had seemed gently to indicate other duties, or even a subject for professional interference. Richmond’s eyes went down the room, and then he saw the figure by the fire-place, standing alone with one hand on the black edge of the marble shelf. The other hand hung limply, holding a white fan. Her hair was piled in glowing coils on her little head. Her face had a frozen look, and her eyes were watching the dancers, as though she was compelling herself to confront the scene, while realizing the significance of her own aloofness. Almost, she suggested Ariadne chained to a rock.

The Waldteufel waltz was being repeated, and Richmond was aware of Miss Shallowbrass’s voice making a sound like a creaking door.

“Shockingly overdressed. Quite absurd.”

Her dress was of apple green, and it seemed to catch the light, and exaggerate her pallor and the sheen of her hair.

“Rather charming, I think.”

Lady Neath’s soft voice, emphatic as a bell in contrast to Miss S’s tin-can sneer, made Richmond glance down at her. And suddenly her eyes were raised to his, held them for a moment, and then swept a look of meaning towards that lonely figure at the far end of the room. Richmond straightened. Her challenge was in tune with his impulse, an impulse so quick and strong that it seemed to possess him to the exclusion of all self-consciousness. He went straight, as to his destiny, head up, face strangely set. Lucy Lancaster did not appear to see him until he was close upon her, and then her eyelids trembled and for a moment she seemed to shrink.

“May I have the very great honour?”

She looked at him wide-eyed for an instant, as though divining an exaggeration in the words, and questioning it, but his face somehow was compelling. She gave him the shadow of a smile, gathered her skirt, and gave herself to him. They swept into the crowd of children and grown-ups, and suddenly the whole room was watching them, though, for each other they had not a word.

“How well they look together,” said Lady Neath.

Mrs. Burgoyne smiled indulgently. Miss Shallowbrass's reaction was a sandy, acid smirk.

"Very showy, like the mother. Men always seem to——"

Lady Neath's lips curved.

"Some men, I think, have excellent taste. She dances beautifully too. Dear Miss Shallowbrass, were I a man, really I should ask for such a partner."

Richmond was aware of many things as he waltzed with her, of the two great chandeliers hung with lustres, of her floating face, her eyes half closed, of the mirrors and the colour and movement reflected in them, of Burgoyne still whirling with Mrs. Borrowdale, of the childish couples who had to be watched and avoided, of the five Davidson girls sitting in a row, unfriendly and critical. Not a word had they exchanged as yet. The lashes of her half-closed eyes seemed to cast two shadows. He looked at her from time to time, and wondered.

"Do you notice how seriously the children take their dancing?"

Her eyes met his for a moment.

"One can be so dreadfully shy."

"Were you?"

"Yes."

"So was I. I would run a mile from a party."

She smiled.

"Then how did you learn to waltz?"

"Just grew into it, somehow, as one grows into trousers."

This time she put her pretty head back and laughed, and to Richmond her laughter was mysterious and revealing. He became almost poignantly aware of the exquisite texture of her. And then, the music ceased, and it was as though a curtain had fallen. He was faced by a blank question. What did he do now? Return her to her cruel isolation by the fire-place? What did she ask for? Not to be too conspicuous? His glance fell upon Lady Neath's face, somehow comprehending and beneficent.

"Do you know Lady Neath?"

"No."

"Let me introduce you."

He armed her through the dissolving crowd towards the three ladies at the far end of the room. Mrs. Burgoyne beamed and nodded. Miss Shallowbrass's little face was all Pecksniff.

“Lady Neath, may I introduce Miss Lancaster to you?”

Lady Neath put out a hand.

“Come and sit, my dear, and talk to me. Dr. Richmond, can you find a chair?”

Richmond found one, dragging it ruthlessly from the impending stern of one of the Misses Pinhook. He was off with it before she could fix upon him a protesting stare that said “Well, really! I might have sat on the floor!” So, Lucy had her chair and a new friend who was capable of showing Southfleet what she thought of that dreadful woman's daughter, and Richmond, suddenly wise, walked off to ask Miss Caroline Davidson if she would favour him with the next dance.

But games were the order of the moment, and Burgoyne, having shed Mrs. Borrowdale, came down the room with a little mob of children round him. Teddy was a great man with children; also, he had cast an eye upon Miss Lancaster now that Richmond seemed to have made it safe to dance with her.

“Now then, children, Oranges and Lemons. No, I'm an apple. Not my game.”

He glanced at Miss Shallowbrass, and Miss Shallowbrass jumped up, for, somehow, it had become a tradition that Miss Shallowbrass should be a leader in the children's games at Southfleet parties. She was forty-nine, but leathery and persistent. Burgoyne looked at Miss Shallowbrass as though the Jove in him saw no Leda there. His glance passed to the girl who was sitting by Lady Neath.

“Miss Lancaster, may I call on you to be an Orange?”

She looked confused. What of her frock?

“Oh, yes, if no one else——”

“Splendid. Miss Shallowbrass will play Lemon.”

So, the issue was joined, and the dreadful woman's daughter, and Southfleet's saint joined hands and made their arms a living bridge. The children were romping into a queue. And once again Richmond received his inspiration. That pretty, fragile frock of hers might suffer, and with a sudden, laughing face he put himself at the head of the file of children, and was the

first to be caught by the arms of the ladies.

“Lemon or Orange?” croaked Miss Shallowbrass.

“Orange.”

How very disgraceful and partial of him, but he took his stand behind Lucy and putting strong arms round her, was there to take the strain, and so safeguard her frock. The Misses Pinhook and Davidson looked shocked. Not so the children, though the tug-of-war between sinner and saint was to prove a pretty fiasco. Each child, caught, and listening to the whispering voices, and looking up into those two faces, must have seen ugliness and orange blossom, and smelt the sweet savour of that contrast. Lucy had seventeen children behind her, Miss Shallowbrass three, and when the tug came, and Richmond took the strain of the youngsters behind him, victory, save in its more subtle implications, proved a farce.

Miss Shallowbrass was not pleased. She joined the Misses Pinhook under one of the mirrors, leaving Lucy with a mob of children round her, children who rallied to beauty, and who had found a new heroine. The cry was for Nuts in May, and the two ranks were paraded, Burgoyne coming into the picture, and cutting out John with Lucy.

“You take the other army, Richmond.”

Everybody joined in, save the elder ladies, the Misses Davidson rising to support the junior partner, but here, it must be confessed that Richmond played them false and deserted.

“Here we come gathering Nuts in May.”

“We choose Dr. Richmond for Nuts in May.”

“We’ll send Dr. Burgoyne to fetch him away.”

And Richmond, laughing, allowed himself to be pulled over by Teddy, and slipped in as a recreant beside Miss Lancaster, whose left hand he held.

Said Miss Shallowbrass to the Misses Pinhook:

“The young man cheated. Of course he is stronger than Dr. Burgoyne.”

He danced with her again before the party came to an end, though to save her face and his own he led out two of the Davidson girls and Miss Nancy Burgoyne. Nancy was a precocious child, and looking up solemnly into his face, she asked him whether he did not think Mrs. Borrowdale very

overdressed? This was a poser, but Miss Nancy capped it by asserting that she thought Miss Lancaster very good-looking. The shrewd little sly-boots! Well, why not admit it? He was in a mood to admit everything about her, suddenly and impetuously so, with all a young man's ambitious reservations reduced to ashes. They waltzed together. It was The Blue Danube, and he felt that the fear had gone from her heart for an hour or so, and the shadows from her eyes.

What of Sir Humphrey Jolland and his paternal warnings?

He said: "I'm afraid Oranges and Lemons was a walk-over. The kids knew whom to choose."

"You?"

"Hardly. I was just the guardian of your frock. How did you like Lady Neath?"

"Ever so much. She asked me to go and see her."

"And you will?"

"I don't know."

Her face grew clouded and secret again, and he understood, or thought that he understood.

"Oh, but you must. And there is somebody else I should like you to know."

Her lashes seemed to hover over the I.

"Lady Feygate. She's rather unique."

"But you see, I——"

He smiled at her.

"Won't some of the pleasure be theirs?"

She did not answer that question. That he had rescued her and made her afternoon a little triumph was neither here nor there. Nor did he speak to her or look at her like a man who had played the part of hero. He was looking at her like a lover, gravely, almost diffidently.

"You forget one thing."

"Do I?"

"Where my mother can't go, I——"

Did the arm about her waist increase its protective pressure? Possibly. He was silent, profoundly perplexed, and in his perplexity sharing her secret.

“It’s as you feel. Do you think I might come sometimes and see your mother, not as a doctor but as a friend?”

“Would you?”

“Of course. By the way, how are you getting home?”

“A cab is calling for me.”

When the Burgoyne party was over he walked down The Royal George stairs with her, and after seeing that her cab was there, waited for her in the hall. She came out cloaked in black, with a little white shawl over her head, and to Richmond that woollen coif suggested an exquisite purity. For a man asks that a woman should be like that.

“Your cab is here.”

He armed her out of The Royal George and saw her to her chariot under the eyes of half a dozen interested ladies, and so Miss Shallowbrass was able to tell Southfleet that the dreadful woman’s daughter had bewitched the poor silly young doctor, which indeed was true, but not quite as Miss Shallowbrass saw it. For, though love may be blind, it does not squint, nor need spectacles to divine the loveliness of such a dream.

XI

It may be, that without recognizing it, John Richmond had been very near the edge of one of those bogs of boredom into which a young man with ambitions may tumble, for trumpets did not sound in Southfleet, nor banners wave across the sky. Even its ailments had seemed petty to a man whose urge was to do things that were difficult and singular. The daily round was devoted to coughs and wheezings and aching joints, and even if these disharmonies responded to treatment, the process was either desperately slow, or non-existent. These chronic cases were so balking, and youth is apt to be vexed when no arrow will light on the target. Children developed croup, or suffered from sore tummies after too much Christmas. Tonsils became inflamed, teeth ached, hypersensitive ladies developed neuralgia. Dr. Davidson was doing less and less, and preparing to flit in April. Richmond knifed two whitlows, set one Collis's fracture, and one broken collar-bone in the course of three months. Nothing dramatic or stimulating occurred to challenge his resource and his skill. Perhaps he had begun to feel like a young boxer in training with no one to fight. The Dark House had not yet revealed to him its intricacies.

But when he fell in love with Lucy Lancaster, as a young man should fall in love, with incredible earnestness and the conviction that nothing else in life is worth while without the winning of the beloved object, all this was changed for him, for a season. Sir Humphrey Jolland became dry-as-dust. John ceased from regarding his sojourn in Southfleet as a wandering in the desert before the conquest of Canaan, and if he still saw it as an interlude, the distant hills were vaguely there, to be climbed perhaps with a predestined partner. Love is all for the moment, until its roots have reached down into the soul, and it becomes, not a rose-bush but a splendid tree.

Snow was on the ground and upon the roofs and hedges, and the stars were shining, when, with the day's work done, and no one to spy upon him, he opened the gate of Holly Lodge. The good Sarah had swept the path, and it was Sarah who answered the bell. To Richmond she was a plain, solid woman suddenly become glamorous because she was the keeper of the sacred door, nor did he suspect that Sarah was to be of any significance in his life, or see her as buoy to which storm tossed ships might come for anchorage.

"Is Mrs. Lancaster in?"

Of course she was in, and Sarah, who had ears to hear with, had heard

music in the air.

“Come in, sir,” said Sarah.

Solid, sensible woman. She took Richmond’s hat and coat, and with a smile that shone upon the future, showed him into the drawing-room, and gave a poke to the fire.

“Seasonable weather, sir.”

Richmond agreed that it was, and remembered to warn Sarah that he had come as a friend and not as a doctor. Sarah crinkled up her nose at him. Did it matter? If your doctor wasn’t a friend, what good was he?

“I’ll tell her you’re here, sir.”

She left him in doubt as to who the “her” might be, but after she had ascended the stairs, he heard voices, and a sound of movement in the room above. Would Mrs. Lancaster see him? Did those sounds indicate tidying and preparations?

Sarah returned.

“Miss Lucy will be down in a moment, sir,” and Sarah gently closed the door, as on some very young romance that was not to be disturbed in its cradle.

When she came into the room it seemed to him that her face was different, and that it had a quality that he was unable to define. But how exquisite was this otherness, a mood and its mystery that surprised you. Some faces always could possess a strangeness. They stood and looked at each other. To neither did any of the formalities seem necessary.

“Mother will see you.”

“I’m glad.”

“It is a good day. I think she——”

Her eyes fell for a moment beneath the frankness of his homage.

“Again I’m glad. May I go up?”

“Yes, please go up.”

Josephine Lancaster was sitting up in bed, and if to Richmond the daughter’s face was different, so was the mother’s. Her skin had a sallowness, a creased, worn look. It was the face of a woman who had suddenly grown old and had surrendered to inexorable nature. But if her face was faded, her eyes had a brilliancy, an almost mocking fearlessness that somehow made Richmond feel like a small boy who had been pushed into a room to be

catechized by some formidable grandmother.

“Sit down, Dr. Richmond. Do you find the room too hot?”

“No.”

“Sit there, where I can see your face.”

He humoured her, conscious of those great, southern eyes gazing at him steadfastly. Surely, this was not Mrs. Lancaster as he remembered her, either on their first or second meeting.

“Have you come to see me or my daughter?”

He met her eyes, not as a man who was embarrassed, but who suddenly divined behind that ravaged face an ultimate and merciless sincerity.

“Both, if you will believe me.”

She was silent, staring at him.

“Yes, I do believe you. Are you in love with my daughter?”

“I am.”

“And how?”

“It matters to me so much that nothing else seems to matter.”

She smiled, gave him a slight inclination of the head.

“Ah, that is as it should be. Not for to-day or to-morrow?”

“No.”

“So men say and think. But, believe me, Dr. Richmond, that I, a woman without reputation, can tell you that there is one supreme thing in life, compassion. Does that surprise you?”

“Why should it?”

“Because—— Oh, well, you would not expect me to be on the side of the angels. But I happen to love my daughter, as much as it is possible for me to love anything. I have always loved myself, but now this old ruin is not worth while. My daughter, Dr. Richmond, is not as I am or was. She has in her a capacity for giving all that should make life good.”

“I grant her everything.”

“And yet, you will hurt her.”

“Never, if I can help it.”

“My dear, all men do, even the best of you. But if you could try to remember that she will be hurt, and yet that she will forgive. You see, I know her.”

“Mrs. Lancaster, I want to marry your daughter.”

“In spite of everything?”

“What is everything?”

“Prejudice, my dear man, the poison that is stewed up in a little town like this.”

“I do not see how prejudice can be felt against Lucy. Let anyone try to hurt her!”

Her great eyes became gentler.

“Dr. Richmond, I am not long for this world. I will tell you something that I have known for quite a little while now. Do you notice nothing about me?”

“You look thinner.”

“Yes.”

“And a little sallow.”

“Does that convey nothing to you? And pain.”

“Are you in pain now?”

“Somewhat.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“But, surely Dr. Burgoyne has——”

“Dr. Burgoyne, my dear, sees little but himself. And then, my depraved habit! Some men see just what they wish to see, or what seems obvious. I shall not live very long. I shall have to suffer.”

Richmond stood up.

“Why didn’t you tell us before. Something might have been done. Let me _____”

She put up a hand.

“No, not to-night. And believe me, I know what my fate is. This, somehow, is Lucy’s night. She will not have much money, Dr. Richmond.”

“Please don’t think——”

“No, but she will have a little. Most of mine dies with me. And now, hold my hand for a moment. That’s good. You have a strong hand, a warm hand. A hand that is flabby and cold is no use to a woman. Yes, and now you can go downstairs and see Lucy and ask her.”

He continued to hold her hand.

“No, not to-night.”

“And why?”

“Because, oh, well, there is a kind of seemliness about things. You have been—— Yes, more than I deserve. Isn’t it your night, not mine or hers?”

She pressed his hand.

“If you do not despise me, you can kiss me, John Richmond.”

When he went downstairs to the daughter he said nothing to her of what had passed between him and her mother, nor did he stay long with Lucy. He told her that he had some serious cases to visit for the second time that day, but as he stood buttoning up his coat he said to her: “Your mother and I are friends. Be kind to her. But that you have always been and will be.” She opened the door for him, and gave him her hand, and as he passed out she saw the stars and the snow, and stood a moment taking the cold clean air into her bosom. He turned at the gate and waved, and closing the door she went back to the fire and knelt before it. This too was good and clean and elemental, like the starlit sky and the snow.

Presently, she heard a rapping overhead, and rising from her knees she went upstairs to her mother.

“Has the doctor gone?”

“Yes.”

“Did he say anything to you, poppet?”

“Only that he had visits to make, and that you and he have become friends.”

“No more.”

“No.”

“So, he kept his word. That is a man, my dear, not a good man, but a man. Some day you may understand the difference. He wishes to marry you. Will you marry him?”

She stood very still, looking at her mother.

“Yes, if he asks me. I think there is nothing that I would not do for him.”

“That comforts me. And here is a secret, be gentle always, but not weak. Be yourself, even if you have to go against him. Men loathe silly women who try to be sugar always and everywhere. Love him, but make him honour his love. You may have to wound him sometimes. Now, come and kiss me.”

Meanwhile, John Richmond trudged back through the snow, thinking at the moment more of the mother than of the daughter. This woman indeed had been a dark house to him, and in discovering that which he had not divined in her, he was moved to accuse himself of superficiality. Did life often surprise one like this, display fortitude, generosity, insight when you were prepared to see no more than a glass and a bottle? But her confession? Pain? What was to be done about it? How was he to enlighten that facile fool Burgoyne? But, even so, would careless Teddy be capable of dealing with her case? Would any drug mask the pain she might have to bear? He was the physician, not the lover, as he walked back to Prospect House, and sought out Dr. Davidson, who was in slippers, and reading *The Times* in front of the study fire.

Dr. Davidson was entering those calm seas where human happenings do not raise the storms and terrors or tear emotions to tatters. He had seen so many children born, and so many people die. He himself was looking towards the sunset. He asked now for tranquillity, a pleasant pottering about a garden, no night-bell, no other people's strains and stresses. So, Mrs. Lancaster had cancer, or thought she had it, and Burgoyne did not know it. Well, well, well! He let that august journal lie across his knees, and remembered occasions in his youth when he too had felt somehow responsible for the woes of the world, and had asked his God bitter questions. But now his mood was more serene. It asked to sit in the sun, and even was prepared to wonder whether God was actual, or if he vexed Himself over humanity's little ills. And was John sure that Dr. Burgoyne was so crassly ignorant of Mrs. Lancaster's condition?

“But she is convinced of it, sir. And surely——”

“You think our friend's eyes should be opened?”

“Something might have been done.”

“Do you think so, John?”

“Well, the case ought to have been diagnosed.”

Dr. Davidson removed his reading glasses and polished them.

“Diagnosed. Yes, that is our most pontifical word. What is the diagnosis,

gentlemen. And the treatment? Opium and a shrug of the shoulders!”

Richmond looked at him almost angrily.

“But what a confession!”

“My lad, how often will you have to make it?”

Dr. Davidson polished his lenses, and staring at the fire, found himself wondering why John seemed so disturbed about this particular case. Was it just youth and its passionate refusal to accept compromise or finality. Was it——?

“You seem to have taken it to heart, John.”

“Well, sir, I am going to marry her daughter. And she has shown me a courage that made me feel——”

Dr. Davidson appeared much more startled by this live piece of news.

“You are going to marry Miss Lancaster?”

“If she will have me.”

“Have you asked her?”

“Not yet.”

“Tut-tut, rather sudden, John, isn’t it? A very charming-looking young woman, but——”

“I hope you are not going to object, sir.”

“Object. What right have I to object? After all——”

“My mind is made up.”

“So I see, John. God forbid that I should play Jehovah.”

None the less, Dr. Davidson was disturbed, for both he and Dr. Burgoyne had agreed that Richmond was satisfactory in every way, and the contract for the new partnership was to be signed at the end of the month. Moreover, though he would not confess it, Dr. Davidson was a little disappointed that Richmond had not taken one of his daughters off his hands. But, Mrs. Lancaster’s daughter! Almost, the romance could be described as a misalliance. There were people in Southfleet who would regard it as such.

Meanwhile, Richmond stood over him like youth determined to confront and crush prejudice even in the person of this mild old man.

“What is your objection, sir?”

Dr. Davidson began to fidget.

“Well, my dear John, you know yourself that Mrs. Lancaster——”

“And does that damn the daughter?”

“Don’t be so touchy. I would remind you that people can be strangely offended by——”

“Well, let them be. Who wants to be patted on the back by Stiggins.”

“John, you young men exaggerate things.”

“Oh, no, sir, isn’t it you? But I beg your pardon. You have been very kind to me. That’s why I want you to feel to me as a friend.”

“But I do, my dear fellow. It’s only that I am a little more cynical than you are. People love to blame.”

“And what will they have to blame? How long would their silly smugness last? I see what I ought to do, sir. I must put the problem to Burgoyne. If he objects, well, I can go elsewhere. I realize that there are certain matters upon which one is expected to conform.”

Dr. Davidson was wagging a foot up and down. He felt himself to be both right and wrong, and this suggestion of Richmond’s seemed to ease him of responsibility.

“Yes, I think I agree, John. Put it to Burgoyne.”

“And if he does not object?”

“I shall not. That goes without saying. We don’t want to lose you, my dear fellow. You have shaped admirably.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll go and see Dr. Burgoyne.”

A minor incident at a children’s party had prepared the way for the solution of this social problem. Teddy Burgoyne had been excessively pleased by his little victory over Richmond in Nuts in May, and by having been suffered to shine as the potent male before the ladies. Moreover, Teddy was not quite the fool that some people thought him, and he was so healthily vain that he was not easily put in a flutter. He had a feeling for social values. Both he and his wife had noticed that Richmond was *persona grata* to Lady Neath, and that Miss Lancaster had received marks of favour from that very charming lady. Richmond had manners. Burgoyne could go about saying—“I like the lad.” Indeed, he was liking him much more than Dr. Davidson suspected, for Burgoyne had a selfish man’s secret understanding of his own limitations. He

was no surgeon. Bluff and confident in the presence of women, he did not like blood, or urgent and critical cases. He preferred to elude them, or rather to delegate them delicately and with dignity to some other man. He excused himself to himself by saying that he was too soft-hearted, and in Richmond he divined the man to whom he could assign these too elemental responsibilities. So, when Richmond was shown into Teddy's consulting-room, and found him, feet up before the fire, reading a French novel, the stage was set for the Burgoyne blessings and a happy ending.

"My dear fellow! Object? Well, well, well! A very charming child. The mother, a little French, of course, but a cultured woman. Rather above Southfleet's standard. Between you and me and the gate-post, my lad, I can't stand the old hens. Too much scratching and cackling. And they're so damned ugly."

Richmond laughed. Never had he liked Burgoyne so well, or felt drawn towards his easy and flamboyant heartiness.

"I take this very kindly, sir."

"Tut-tut, I'd prefer my future partner to be married. Settled in life, and sober, and all that, tra-la. And you'll be marrying looks, my lad, and a little money, perhaps. Yes, she's a sweet creature. Ring the bell, Richmond; we'll have in the sherry. I like the way you have confided in me."

Richmond rang the bell.

"I took it to be a duty, sir, and find it a pleasure."

"Splendid! We'll run this practice together, my dear fellow, like a couple of spankers in double harness. Oh, yes, Florrie, the sherry, the old brown sherry. Sit down, John. As a matter of fact, I'd like to have a chat with you about the elder lady. I suppose you have seen her?"

"As a friend, yes."

"Notice anything particular?"

Richmond bent towards the fire.

"Solace in—— Well, you understand what I mean."

"Yes, poor dear, life's antidote to dullness. But anything else?"

"She looks rather thin and cachectic."

"That's it, my dear fellow. She's a sick woman, or I'm no physician. Rather secretive about herself. I think I'll press her to be frank with me."

“I should, sir. I should say that you have very good grounds for your suspicions.”

“May be only liver, my dear fellow.”

“Yes,” said Richmond quietly; “it may be only liver.”

A blue and white world, crisp and scintillant. Boys were tobogganning down Cliff Road on soap-boxes fitted with home-made runners. The ice was bearing on the Priory Pond at Willowell and also at Richford on the great poplar sheltered lake owned by the Ransfords. The frost and the sun were in Richmond’s blood, and to him came a young man’s inspiration. Dr. Davidson had received a note from Sir Hector Neath—“Our ice is bearing. Send your girls over and any friends they may like to bring,” but the Misses Davidson were away, staying with two maiden aunts from whom legacies were to be expected, and Dr. Davidson passed the note to Richmond.

“Care to go, John? It would be tactful. I can do the afternoon round. Take the dog-cart. By the way, do you skate?”

“Sufficiently so.”

“Not to lose professional dignity! Sir Hector is an expert.”

“Is a professional man ever allowed to drop his dignity?”

“No, John,” said Dr. Davidson with one of his dry twinkles; “not even in his night-shirt!”

So, Richmond called at Mr. Deacon’s the ironmongers and bought a pair of skates, and following his inspiration, paid Holly Lodge an early visit. Sarah met him at the door. Yes, Miss Lucy was in. Would the doctor step into the drawing-room. Miss Lucy was with her mother.

She came down to him, almost with the air of a child concealing something that she would not admit even to her secret self, perhaps because it mattered so profoundly. There were subtleties here that a mere man could not fathom, little sensitive reservations and self questionings. For a moment she stood before him as a stranger.

“Have you come to see my mother?”

“No. I think Dr. Burgoyne will be seeing her. There is skating at the Priory. Will you come?”

She held her breath.

“With you?”

“Is that too much to ask? I am driving over this afternoon. Do come with me, Lucy.”

She flushed suddenly to her hair. She was trembling.

“I don’t skate very well.”

“Nor I. I have just bought a pair of skates, as a challenge to fate. May I use them?”

“But, I——”

“You haven’t a pair?”

“No.”

“Well, Deacon has plenty in stock. If you won’t go with me I shan’t use mine.”

“Oh, but——”

“Do come, Lucy.”

She stood confused, hesitant, and then suddenly fled from him towards the door.

“I’ll ask mother.”

“Yes, ask her.”

He heard her footsteps on the stairs, and feeling like a young husband whose first-born is about to see the light, he walked up and down the room and round it, poked the fire, stared out of the window, and listened to the voices in the room above. How exquisite was this suspense! Would she or would she not? If not? And then he heard her on the stairs. She came half down them, and paused.

“Dr. Richmond.”

“Yes.”

“I will come.”

He was out in the hall, looking up at her, and somehow knowing that she would come no nearer for the moment.

“I’m so very glad. I’ll call for you at two with the dog-cart. Warm clothes, mind.”

“Yes, John.”

He smiled up at her.

“Thank you, Lucy.”

She was wearing a little round cap of blue cloth and brown fur, rather like a miniature shako, and a black jacket edged with fur of the same colour. He looped the apron over her, and gave the horse a touch with the trailing whip. His eyes said: “You look adorable,” and perhaps she knew it. The dog-cart turned into the High Street where the snow had been piled into the gutters, and gravel scattered on the pavements, and people turned to look at Dr. Richmond and Miss Lancaster driving out together. Well, well, that was as good as a betrothal, for a professional man could not commit himself so publicly in Dr. Davidson’s dog-cart without advising Southfleet that romance was in the air. They passed the Misses Pinhook’s young gentlewomen parading in crocodile formation past Victoria Square, and all the girls looked at them, as did the Misses Pinhook who brought up the rear.

“I think she’s terribly sweet,” said one girl to another.

“And doesn’t she think it too,” said the other.

But the Misses Pinhook did not approve. It was not easy to discover of what the Misses Pinhook did approve.

But there was no doubt about John Richmond’s way of thinking, or of feeling. He drove the horse at a spanking pace along the flat road to Willowwell, for the beast’s shoes had frost nails in them. O glorious day! She sat there beside him, shy and silent, with the cold air bringing colour into her cheeks. Her eyes were dove’s eyes, her forehead serene as though secret faith dwelt in her. So, infinitely conscious of each other they came to the park and house of the Neaths, and saw the glittering trees and the silent snow, and the figures swinging around the pool, and heard the shrilling of the skates on the silver grey ice.

Richmond drove into the stable yard. He knew the Priory groom, and he left the horse and trap there, and carrying their skates walked with her across the snow. Her colour had gone suddenly, and her eyes looked frightened, and instantly he was utterly her protector and her lover.

“There’s Lady Neath. Shall we——?”

“Will she mind?”

He wanted to say “My sweet, who could be unkind or unwelcoming to such as you?”

Lady Neath had seen them. She was standing on the bank watching Sir Hector cutting figures of eight.

“Dr. Davidson could not come, Lady Neath, and the girls are away. He passed me your invitation. Are we trespassing?”

He had his hat off, and his anxious yet rallying glance touched her. She put out a hand to Lucy.

“My dear, I am so glad. How clever of Dr. Richmond to bring you. They tell me the ice is perfect.”

Lucy wanted to kiss her, and her ladyship would not have quarrelled with being kissed.

Two or three kitchen chairs had been brought down to the edge of the ice for the use of the ladies, and when Lucy sat down on one of these chairs for Richmond to fit her skates for her, he found that no holes had been bored in the heels of her boots to take the screws of the skates.

“Oh, dear, how silly of me! I forgot.”

A gimlet was required and Lady Neath was the person who supplied it, laughing over the uniqueness of her foresight in remembering what so many people forgot.

“You are not the only one, my dear. I always carry a gimlet about with me on these occasions.”

Richmond, down on one knee in the snow, was busy with the tool, and Lady Neath stood by and watched them both like a Christian Venus blessing two young mortals.

“Don’t you skate, Lady Neath?”

“Sometimes, when Jupiter is not looking. I broke a leg two years ago, and Sir Hector won’t let me on the ice.”

Lucy’s skates were on, and Richmond, strapping on his own, stood up.

“Have we your permission, Lady Neath?”

“Yes, and my blessing.”

She watched them launched on the ice, a little hesitantly so far as Lucy was concerned, but in a little while they were skimming round together with hands crossed and linked.

Lady Neath thought it a pretty sight, and wished them no falls in life, and that Richmond should understand. But wasn’t that rather priggish? She called

softly to her husband—“Hector, do you want to see romance?” Sir Hector, suddenly ceasing his graceful gyrations, stood, saw and smiled. “Well, I think I have shown off enough for the moment. Blessed be the young. Ask them in to tea, Ursy, afterwards. And put on your skates. I’ll see there are no more fractures.” Sir Hector might tell her to put on her skates, but he came ashore to serve her.

Lucy was happy. She had found her feet, and something far more wonderful. Hands clasped, they sailed together over the ringing ice, with the sun and the frost in their faces. And presently, courage came to John Richmond, courage and an impulse that could not be stayed.

“Lucy, I love you.”

It was all so very simple.

“And I love you, too, John.”

XII

The candle-lamps of the dog-cart shone upon the snow as he drove her back to Southfleet. They had skated together until the flush of a winter sunset had faded beyond the great, leafless elms, and Lady Neath had called them in to tea. Their faces had been revealing to her, though, with the innocence of the young seriously cherishing inward treasure, they had not suspected themselves of revealing anything. Lady Neath had seen one look pass between them, and that one glimpse had been sufficient.

Richmond drove, with his eyes on the white road, for the light from the candle-lamps reached hardly to the hedges, and there were sharp corners where a moment's inattention might land them in a ditch. A sudden sense of strange new responsibility had come to him. He held the reins for her and for himself. Life had a new texture and unfamiliar outlines. Worried he was not, either by the material future, or as to the things that the little town in which they were to live might say of them. Hypothetical social verdicts would have seemed utterly unimportant to a man very conscious of the girl beside him, and of the shadow that lay across her immediate future. Did she know or suspect? Had her mother spoken to her? Should he? But that was Burgoyne's responsibility or her mother's, and yet, in his new young tenderness he wanted to save her pain.

The lights of Southfleet were throbbing ahead of them through the trees, when he spoke those three words.

“Has your mother——?”

At that very moment the mare chose to stumble, and Richmond pulled at the reins.

“Hold up, old girl.”

The mare gave a toss of the head and swung on, as though suggesting to this young man that she knew her business better than he did, and that a loose stone on the road did not of necessity bring you down.

“Yes, John?”

“Oh, nothing,” for he had changed his mind, yet feeling that the broken sentence needed completing, he said that he would like to see her mother. He would leave her at Holly Lodge, drive on and stable the horse, deal with the surgery patients, and come back. All his life he was to remember the way she put up her face to him as he turned the apron aside for her to slip out. It was

done so simply, so trustingly, like a child, as though she had given herself, and had no fear. All through his life that very exquisite and sacred memory was to come back to him, always with tenderness, sometimes with secret shame and savage self-reproaches. Her face was cold and clean to his lips, and if he realized that something very precious and lovely had been granted him, he was wiser in his wisdom than he was to be during some of the years they were to spend together.

“Come back, John.”

“Yes. We shall be together always, now.”

He drove on to the stables and saw a light in the harness-room window, and old Howell reading his daily passage from the New Testament. Patient, devout, austere old man! Richmond left the mare with the groom, and walking to Prospect House and down the passage, opened the surgery door. Familiar odours met him, and the stuffy heat engendered by crowded humanity and the surgery stove. A dozen patients were waiting, sitting on the benches round the walls. Richmond went to hang up his coat and hat in the passage. The dispensary door was ajar, and he could hear the clink of bottle-necks against the measuring-glass, and the splashing of water into the lead-lined sink.

Charlie Byng’s head came poking round the door.

“That you, Dr. Richmond?”

“It is.”

“They want you in the consulting-room. Asked me to tell you directly you came in.”

Richmond knew who “They” must be, Davidson and Burgoyne in consultation. And about what? Was the firm reconsidering its attitude towards his romance? And, if so, did it matter? Nothing could matter after the thing that had happened to him in the starlight outside that little white house. He walked down the passage to the consulting-room, opened the door with a quick and decisive turn of the handle, and saw the two senior men, Burgoyne straddling before the fire, with his back to it, his thumbs in the arm-holes of a purple velvet waistcoat; Davidson sitting heavily in the Bergere arm-chair with the look of a man who was tired.

“Ha, Richmond, come in.”

Burgoyne’s blue eyes looked bluer and more protuberant than usual. He stared at Richmond, and seemed to stiffen his legs. Dr. Davidson merely turned his head slightly, and glanced up at Richmond almost with an air of

relief.

“Take Miss Lancaster home?”

Richmond paused in the middle of the room, conscious of an inward sense of tension. Were these two staging a crisis for him?

“Yes. Lady Neath gave us tea.”

“We have been seeing the mother.” It was Burgoyne who spoke. “When I had examined her, I wanted another opinion.”

He paused and glanced down at Dr. Davidson as though inviting him to take up the story.

“Carcinoma, I’m afraid, John.”

“If it isn’t cirrhosis.”

“No, I don’t think so, Burgoyne. I think those nodules on the liver are too definite. A sad business. Too late to do anything, if anything could ever have been done. We’d rather like you to go round, John, and see what you think.”

“Now, sir? As a matter of fact, I was going back.”

“Yes.”

He stared at the fire between Burgoyne’s legs, and his face had a profound and peculiar tenderness.

“Perhaps I may as well tell you at once that I have asked Lucy to marry me.”

The other two men watched him in silence.

“She said yes. I’m glad. I may be able to help. Of course, if this makes any difference——?”

Dr. Davidson gave a little jerk of the head.

“No, John. It seems a strange time to congratulate you.”

“Thank you, sir. I believe that I am more than lucky.”

Burgoyne, more dramatic, stepped forward, and patted Richmond on the shoulder.

“Blessings, my dear fellow. A very sweet girl.”

“There are the club-patients, sir.”

“I’ll attend to them. Go round, John. The daughter does not know yet. Yes,

you may be able——”

But Richmond was at the door, he opened it and went out without another look or word.

Sarah met him, a Sarah who had been weeping, and whose tears again spilled over as she spoke to him.

“Yes, she’s expecting you upstairs, sir.”

So, Sarah knew, and had tears for this Dreadful Woman and her tragedy, which proved, perhaps, that Sarah had a more catholic taste than her superior sisters. Sarah took his hat and coat and Richmond climbed the stairs. He knew the particular door well enough by now. He knocked.

“It’s Dr. Richmond.”

A voice, full and resonant, said “Come in, John.”

Here was another human picture that would never fade for him. A fire was burning, and the room was brightly lit. He saw the bed and its pink quilt, and Lucy kneeling there, both arms flung out across the bed, and her face hidden. She did not move, or make any sign or sound. Mrs. Lancaster was sitting up in bed. Her black hair had been dressed, and her cheeks and lips had an unnatural colour. Her eyes looked huge. There was a kind of brilliancy about her, a glow that seemed to illumine both the spirit and the flesh. A tragedy queen! No, the words were shallow and inadequate. She was a woman conscious of other things beside life and death, a woman in pain, yet enthroned above it and transcending it, and staring her crisis in the face. Even that pile of hair and those rouged cheeks suggested courage, a vanity that could take the stage and hold it, while watching itself with steadfast and smiling irony from the wings.

Richmond saw her lay a hand upon her daughter’s head.

“Go down, poppet; leave us together.”

Richmond held the door open for the daughter. They did not look directly at each other, and yet he could always say that he remembered the face that floated past him, white and dry and flinching, somehow like a pale leaf blown past him by the wind.

“Sit down, John. Or do you also wish to lay hands upon me?”

“Yes, if I may.”

“Why so fierce, my dear?”

Was he looking fierce? He sat down beside the bed, and tried to smile at her, and gently turning back the clothes laid his hands upon her body.

“Yes, just there, John. As lightly as you can. It brings the pain on, and your two partners have been busy. Yes, just there. You have gentle hands, my dear. Dear Dr. Burgoyne has paws.”

Richmond was staring at the opposite wall while his fingers explored that tender surface, but she watched his face with a kind of whimsical intentness, as though she knew all that was to be known without the wise frowns of physicians. Yes, there was no doubt about it. From the sensitive pads of his fingers the message was carried to his consciousness. He was frowning, his eyes stared, as though confronting the eternal challenge of man’s helplessness. He was young, young enough to resent finality, or to believe that certain disasters had to be accepted. His urge was to do something. But what? This damned disease! It kept you groping in the dark.

“Nothing to be done, my dear.”

He looked at her suddenly, almost with a sense of shame. She was smiling.

“Why so fierce? You dear doctors can do so little in some cases. Does it anger you? Why should it? How little we know. And yet, you know and I know.”

He nodded at her.

“I’m afraid it’s true.”

“Of course it’s true. I used to love this body of mine, and now I can laugh at it. You see, I dressed the wretched thing up for the occasion, painted the poor doll’s cheeks. But let us speak of other things, happier things. Lucy loves you.”

He turned away from her.

“Yes.”

“That comforts me not a little. And you?”

“Who could help loving her. If I ever cause her pain——”

“Try and remember that. How long have I to live?”

He could not face her for the moment.

“Heads up, my dear!”

“Perhaps four or five months.”

“Well, the incumbrance that I am will soon be put away.”

“You mustn’t talk like that.”

“Thank you, my dear. There are other things I want to say. How are finances, John?”

“I haven’t a penny. I mean——”

“I understand. But you have much more than that. I suppose your share in the practice——”

“I shall pay off the purchase money as I go.”

“How much will it be?”

“About a thousand pounds.”

“I will leave you that.”

“But——”

“Don’t thwart me. It brings on the pain. Then, there will be the furniture. Lucy will have mine. But young people like some new things of their own. Lucy shall manage that. Find your little house, John, and begin. Now, don’t argue. It will make things easier for me.”

He turned and faced her.

“You make me ashamed. Yes, I will do everything you wish. I will settle the value of everything you have given us on Lucy, when I can.”

“Thank you, my dear. Now, leave me alone for a little while. Go down and be kind to her. I did not know she would care so much about a rotten old hag.”

He looked her steadily in the eyes.

“How could she help caring? I understand now. May I come up again presently?”

“Yes, both of you come up.”

The little house seemed very silent to him as he went slowly down the stairs. It was a listening house, and as a doctor he would come to know such houses, and the sad sounds and the suspense they smothered. Such houses sighed and had frightened eyes, and moments of impatience when suffering pressed too deeply into the conscious wound, and the soul cried out “Enough, oh, enough!” He paused at the foot of the stairs. She, whom he loved, was in there. What if such a thing should ever come to her! But she was young. They both were young. Oh, thank God! Youth, laughter and love, not the

unsubstantial, slimed darkness under your feet.

He opened the door and saw her crouching on a footstool before the fire. She had turned out the gas. She did not look round, and her stillness made him feel that she did not want to be touched.

He closed the door.

“She asked me to come down to you.”

He could see her dark head and a part of her face. It looked haggard, frozen.

“Can nothing be done?”

“Nothing,” and again the young urge in him felt balked and angry.

“Will she suffer much?”

“We shall try not to let her suffer, Lucy. She’s brave, almost terribly brave.”

He heard her sigh. Her head and shoulders drooped.

“Oh, John, why should such things be?”

“God knows!”

“But would a God dare to? Oh, John, I’m feeling so very bitter against myself. One doesn’t see, one doesn’t think. I’ve been such a selfish wretch.”

He kneeled down beside her, but he did not touch her.

“You never were that. You never will be. Some things make one feel so helpless, and there’s a sort of shame in helplessness. I want to fight it, my dear, fight all the dark things that baffle us. And you will help me.”

She put out a hand to him.

“Oh, John, I do love you. And it seems so selfish, so unfair, so heartless just now. But if——”

“I think it will help her, Lucy. She wants all the help we can give.”

“But it makes me ashamed. She’s so much greater——”

He held her hand and was silent, but in this silence he could finish that sentence for her: “She’s greater than either of us, greater than you or I believed.”

Dr. Davidson and Dr. Burgoyne were still talking before the consulting-room fire. Burgoyne had dealt with the surgery patients, and Dr. Davidson had slipped into the dispensary to write up his portion of the day-book and pass on sundry prescriptions to Charles Byng. But Burgoyne had said to him: "There's a thing I ought to tell you. Yes, it concerns those two. A piece of gossip. I'm not the man to worry about what the nice old women say, but this—— Let's have five minutes together later. I'd like your point of view, old fellah. Charlie's dispensing two of my specials."

In a dark cupboard of the dispensary lived a bottle of old brandy, with a dozen bottles of soda and two Bristol rum-glasses, and on cold nights or after a long round Mr. Byng would dispense a dose for Dr. Burgoyne. Dr. Davidson was the most abstemious of men, but he was in a tired mood, and he did not refuse his glass of brandy and soda. Burgoyne placed his pick-me-up on the mantelpiece and spread his tails to the fire. Davidson kept his glass on a little table beside his chair. He was a man who sipped his drink with an air of austerity, whereas Burgoyne sniffed at it and licked his lips over the flavour.

"Well, well, old fellah, now for the scandal."

Davidson gave his partner a nervous, upward glance. Scandal was a word he had been taught to fear and to loathe.

"Not about Richmond?"

"No, the girl. Some of the old beauties are saying that she is a bastard."

Dr. Davidson flinched. Why use that beastly word? Teddy was apt to be a little unbuttoned when he held the hearthrug and a glass of liquor.

"Impossible! Who?"

"I heard it from old Mother Thackray. You know what an infernal quacker she is. Quackery not Thackray, ha-ha. Apparently, it is all over the town. That sandy old cat, the Shallowbrass woman, has been——"

"But this is very serious."

"Demned serious. 'Pon my word, I don't believe a word of it. Mrs. Lancaster may be a bit colourful, but she's a gentlewoman, my dear sir. Fact is, Davidson, in a place like this if a woman doesn't look God's own dowd, the old cats can't keep their claws off her."

Dr. Davidson looked worried. He sipped his brandy, and ran the tip of a finger round the glass.

"Disgraceful, if it is not true. Very bad for the practice, Burgoyne. These

things—— But if it is a lie, it is a very cruel lie.”

“Well, the quackers are all in the duck-pond together. Question is, what ought to be done about it? If anything. That poor soul with cancer, and her Christian sisters spilling poison. Think we ought to warn Richmond?”

“Most certainly not.”

Burgoyne took a pull at his brandy.

“Well, well, if the child’s legitimate, and damn it, even if she weren’t, she’s a rosebud compared to all those old stale cabbages. Could one whisper a word to the mother?”

“Rather brutal.”

“Yes, demned unpleasant. Poor woman.”

Dr. Davidson was frowning over his glass.

“I think I would leave the rumour alone, Burgoyne, but, if it shows its head to me, I’ll put my boot on it.”

Burgoyne brandished his glass.

“Splendid. That’s my idea. ’Pon my word, dear fellah, there are times when I would like to see Miss Shallowbrass turned into a little yellow snake. Bring one’s heel down on her head, what!”

“These things die, Burgoyne. I have a feeling that that girl could live anything down.”

“Yes, a sweet creature, but, dash it, why should she have to? I’m no saint, but ’pon my soul——”

Davidson nodded in his chair like a little toy mandarin.

“Yes, yes, I know, but the more you noise these things abroad——”

“The more the ducks will quack.”

There was another person in Southfleet in whose hearing Miss Lancaster’s legitimacy had been questioned. How it came to Sarah’s ears is a matter for conjecture, but it is a fact that Sarah boxed someone else’s ears, and added to the chastisement an indignant warning. Sarah had the arms of a man, and a tongue that could flame when affections were outraged. The offender cringed and whimpered.

“I didn’t mean no harm.”

“Nor does a toad when it spits, my beauty. And who told you?”

“Miss Shallowbrass’s Mary.”

Sarah said things about Miss Shallowbrass that were biblical in their candour, but it was Sarah who crept up to her mistress’s room when Miss Lucy was out, and putting a big red hand on one of Mrs. Lancaster’s made her confession.

“I’m ashamed to tell it, but I’m thinking you ought to know.”

The black eyes blazed.

“They might have spared me this. Find my keys, Sarah.”

Sarah found them.

“Open that top right-hand drawer, and unlock the walnut box you’ll find in it. Then give me the box.”

The box was carried to the bed, and from under a tray made for reels of silk and cotton Mrs. Lancaster’s hands sought for and found a faded piece of paper.

“Read it, Sarah.”

“I don’t want to, m’am. I don’t believe the lie.”

“Read it, woman.”

So, Sarah read it, spelling it out with her lips, and when she had read it, she held it out to her mistress for replacement in the box.

“No. Put it on my table, Sarah, under that book. There is someone else, at least, who should see it.”

She was not speaking of Richmond but of Burgoyne, and when dear Teddy paid his next visit to her she showed him that document.

“It has come to my ears, Doctor, that a certain lie has been circulated about my daughter. Will you please——”

Burgoyne went red.

“Dear lady, I assure you——”

“Read it. You have been kind to me, Doctor, and I trust you. Read it, that you may be able to say, if this rumour should ever be spread in your hearing——”

Burgoyne carried the paper to the window.

“Preposterous, scandalous, of course, dear lady. I’ll admit it had come to

my ears.”

“Did you believe it?”

“No.”

“Thank you, Doctor. That is the best dose you have ever given me. So _____”

Burgoyne was dramatic. Being what he was he could not help it.

“Leave it to me, dear lady. I know how to deal with some of these old squaws.”

“Not too obviously.”

“No, no, the velvet glove, the silken cord. I’ll throttle the damned thing.”

“They might have spared me this.”

Burgoyne folded up the paper and presented it to her like a courtier handing royalty a dispatch announcing victory.

“There’s nothing so deuced ugly, m’am, as a real good woman.”

XIII

Dr. Davidson's time of active service was drawing to a close. He was going into retirement, and Southfleet could suppose that he was both glad and sorry and that he would miss his work and the warm kindness of the human scene. No more night-bells, no more freezing drives, no more crises when other lives hung upon the thread of your knowledge and your skill! Dr. Davidson was glad, for he had come in his later years to know how thin was the thread upon which the faith of your patients was suspended. He could say that all results were relative, all solutions approximate, and that nothing saddened you so much as the knowledge that as a professional healer you were something of a humbug. In those good Victorian days, and especially in provincial Southfleet, a doctor was not expected to say: "I do not know," and for many years Dr. Davidson had realized that the virtue of Victorian infallibility had departed from him. In his early years when baffled, he, as a religious man, had been able to declare with confidence and unction: "God knows." But now the inflection had changed. "God knows!" The inward voice was questioning, exclamatory, gently ironic.

In retirement he would be able to potter in his garden, and meditate upon the mystery of things, without having to meddle with them. He would be casting that meddlesome cloak upon the shoulders of a younger man, and sometimes Dr. Davidson would be moved to wonder how John Richmond would wear it. Would it become a poisoned garment, seeping its poison slowly but surely into a young man's brisk complacency, until he became a happy blurter of phrases like Burgoyne, or a conscious humbug, or a man secretly embittered by a sense of failure and frustration? What could you say to such a man as Richmond? Speak of the Dark House that was the Body of Man, and bid him remember that at your best you were only a groper, hoping in your gropings to touch for a moment the somehow good? Dr. Davidson had come to mistrust the bedside or the platform manner, the gentleman who wrote learnedly and finally about everything. He could say to himself: "Man knows a little and nothing." But was it not better that a young man should find that out for himself?

Yet, if Dr. Davidson was departing from his world with a disgust for dogma he could still get into his dog-cart and set about nailing up a lie in God's Keeper's Larder. Burgoyne had passed on the truth to him, with Burgoyne embellishments, and Dr. Davidson made it his business to sweep the path for the young. He went to the Neaths and to the Feygates, and to these

two great gentlewomen he told his story, and here the results were not relative. Sir Hector and Lady Neath gave a dinner-party to which most people who mattered were invited, especially so those people who considered that they mattered. Lady Neath made it appear that Miss Lancaster and John Richmond were somehow the guests of the evening, and that the occasion was a happy and congratulatory feast. There was dancing, very mild dancing, and Sir Hector danced the first dance with Lucy. She would not have come to the party had not a dying woman persuaded her.

“I insist on your going, poppet. I have reasons.”

Neither Miss Shallowbrass nor Miss Thackray were asked, but they heard about the occasion. Well, of course, Lady Neath was a rather frivolous woman, and she read such dreadful books! And poetry! Not dear Martin Tupper, but the verses of that horrible, dissipated person, Swinburne!

Nor did Dr. Davidson know that the light in his own Dark House would soon be growing dim, and that within three years he would be dead of the fell disease that was killing Lucy’s mother.

To John Richmond, no doubt, the adventitious gossip of Southfleet would have sounded supremely unimportant at this period when he was holding both life and death by the hands. If Lucy’s mother was undergoing martyrdom she bore it with a courage and a selflessness that were extraordinary. She had her hair dressed, attended to her face, and put on pretty-pretties and still used her favourite scent. Poor old Dr. Creavy of St. Jude’s, who was instructed by his autocratic wife to call upon the Dreadful Woman and do his duty by her, was astonished and nonplussed. He came into her room like a mild, old, emasculated ram expecting to be confronted by a wolf, only to discover a woman of the world who spoke a language that the suppressed saint in him understood. He had mild, bulbous blue eyes, like one of the Georges, and ineffectual pink hands, and a habit of nibbling and smiling at nothing, yet the sick of Southfleet loved him. He was kind, comfortable, serene. Mrs. Creavy was otherwise. She wore hard little bonnets, and corsets that creaked, and she strode about the place with a big, aggressive, wagging bustle, and a bosom that was equally large and solid. She talked at you, not to you. She had a slight squint, which somehow emphasized her extreme directness. She was an exhausting lady. She seemed to be about to chivvy you into repentance and paradise with a broom. Teddy Burgoyne referred to her irreverently as the Bumboat Woman.

Dr. Creavy, toddling home after his interview with Mrs. Lancaster, found

his wife and two other ladies very busy mending the church hassocks. He had essayed to escape into his study, and the book he was compiling on the history of the Rose, but the dining-room door was open. Mrs. Creavy seemed to delight in draughts.

“Herbert.”

“Yes, my dear.”

Dr. Creavy knew that he was expected to report, even in the presence of those other ladies. Mrs. Creavy did not believe in slippered reticence, or the cult of the velvet glove.

“Well, did you see the woman?”

Dr. Creavy would sometimes assume an air of bland stupidity. He was not the fool his wife thought him, and he had discovered that it was better to elude Emily than to bump against her.

“What woman, my dear?”

Mrs. Creavy seized a hassock and plumped it on her knees as though picking up a child to be spanked.

“Why, Mrs. Lancaster, of course. I hope you were able——”

Dr. Creavy stood smiling. The other ladies made him think of fish waiting to be fed. Really, Emily should not dangle her worms so publicly! Dr. Creavy’s one secret sin, if it could be called a sin, displayed itself in a secret urge to snub his wife, but, if you trotted out the snub too obviously she butted you, and if you attempted to be subtle she failed to understand.

“Yes, I have seen Mrs. Lancaster, my dear. She converted me.”

Mrs. Creavy squinted and stared, and gave the hassock a smack as though to persuade it to betray to the full its shames and inconsistencies.

“Converted? You? What do you mean, Herbert?”

“Exactly what I said, my dear. I came away with the impression that the lady is a better Christian than any of us.”

The other two ladies goggled at him, and Dr. Creavy, somehow feeling that for once he had played the Angel of the Lord to Madam Balaam, smiled benignly upon the three, twitched his hands under his coat-tails and toddled off.

Richmond, though Burgoyne continued to be Mrs. Lancaster’s professional

attendant, was touched and challenged by her courage. Teddy, kind creature that he was, brought her flowers, snowdrops, early daffodils, pots of tulips. His attempts at comfort and assuagement were equally flowery, and just as transient, but Lucy never forgot the florid man's kindness, even though he wore it like a flower in his buttonhole. Burgoyne was at his best when all that life could ask of you were gestures which did not commit you to any ordeal of skill. But he was not blind as so many of the very clever people are blind. He hated and feared pain; he would storm up and down the room when he had toothache; he wanted everyone to sing tra-la, and be happy.

He ordered Lucy a tonic.

The daughter's face was an open book to the mother. How bitter, it was, and yet how sweet, that your pain should wring other vitals!

"Go out and walk, my dear."

But there was a kind of languor in Lucy, a stillness like that of a creature paralysed with fear. She was very pale these days; her face grew smaller, her eyes more big. Sometimes her lips seemed pressed together as though smothering some inward cry. "I can't bear it! I can't bear it!" How much did her mother understand?

"John, take the child out, walking, driving. She must get out."

To bear her own pain was enough without that other stifled pain that was like a hand pressed over an anguished mouth.

"Go and look for the house."

"Now?"

"My dear, anything like that is alive, and helps me. Take her out. Look at furniture, carpets."

"It won't appeal to her."

"Make it. She's too sensitive for this sort of ordeal. Sometimes, when she looks at me, I feel——"

"Yes?"

"Oh, never mind. I don't like to see things tortured. She's so frail for this. Leave me to Sarah."

"Sarah's a good creature."

"She's biblical, John. Keep her when I go. She has the hands and the heart of a common woman. Common! How words come to be misused. Go and look

at houses. Walk on the pier, make her feel the future and the sea wind on her face.”

With his hands on the bed, he bent over her.

“I will. Much pain?”

“Not too bad.”

“Good.”

She looked up at him in a sudden, stricken way.

“Will it be much worse, John?”

He lied to her.

“I believe not.”

Southfleet was waking from its winter sleep. The estuary ceased from being sullen and began to smile. Distant slopes across the water grew dimly green with the freshening of the winter wheat. The old pier was having its wooden bulwarks whitened, and the lower town smelt of paint and varnish. Birds sang in Caroline Gardens. Daffodils were out, and Willowell Priory was tussocked with them, their yellow heads bending to the wind. Richmond took Lucy driving with him on some of his afternoon country rounds, and they found early primroses on a sheltered, sunny bank, and Lucy picked a bunch and took it home to her mother. She looked at them lovingly, whimsically. They were to be the last primroses she would see.

Dr. Davidson was packing up. Burgoyne was to move into Prospect House when the Davidsons had left, and the lease of No. 11 Queen’s Terrace was offered to Richmond. It was beyond his means for the moment. There was a little empty house in Tenterden Terrace, No. 9, and he and Lucy explored it.

Tenterden Terrace stood at the back of Tenterden Square, a patch of grass surrounded by a low brick wall, iron railings and hedges of euonymus. Just why Tenterden Square had been created was a problem in æsthetics. It had neither beauty nor purpose, save that it gave the little houses of Tenterden Terrace a view of the sea. Nursemaids brought their prams and children there; it was a kind of open-air nursery, and that perhaps was its justification. Tenterden Terrace was made up of some twenty mild, spiritless little houses in yellow brick, with slated roofs and stumpy chimneys, and little gardens dressed with iron railings painted green. It was as completely conventional as any terrace could be, bonneted, bespectacled, going to church twice on Sunday. It knew everything about itself, and nothing about anything in particular. The Misses Pinhook’s school occupied Nos. 1, 2 and 3. Miss

Thackray lived in No. 10, Miss Shallowbrass in No. 8. Richmond was not greatly attracted by Tenterden Terrace, but No. 9 appeared to be the only vacant house in Southfleet that was sympathetic to his pocket. It had far less atmosphere and friendliness than Holly Lodge, but Holly Lodge and its memories would not be happy, and two young people could not begin their life together in a house where pain and death had been.

They stood in the empty front room on the ground floor, and looked across Tenterden Square to the sea. Richmond's arm went round her. In those disciplined days middle-class lovers had so few chances to be alone.

"How do you like it?"

It was a coldly put question, as cold as the little house, and he was not feeling cold towards her.

"Could we manage, John?"

"You and I and Sarah."

"But your consulting-room?"

"That little back room will do."

"Isn't it rather dark?"

"I might persuade the landlord to put in a french window."

Looking down at her, he was conscious of the purity of her profile, those clear sad eyes and perfect lips. Yes, innocence! And that very innocence was like a pale flower whose perfume disturbed him. Would not any house, even this little box of a place, seem sufficient when it contained her and his desire? And, as he stood there, holding her, he was moved to remember his more strident days as a student, those surges of sex, the smut of the college common-room. Well, all that was past. She would be light to his forceful darkness, a cool clean pool into which the heat of his youth could plunge and find assuagement.

He turned her gently so that they stood face to face. He held her close.

"Lucy, let's say yes to this house."

Her hands were pressed against his shoulders.

"Will it——?"

And suddenly he kissed her on the mouth, as a man kisses a woman when he desires her. Her lips seemed cold. He became aware of her flinching. She drew her head back and away, and her eyes avoided his.

“I can’t, John, not yet.”

Sudden compassion surged up in him, reproach, tenderness. He had a feeling that she would not melt in his arms. She could not. She had that shadow upon her. He let her go, but he took the pale face between his hands, and spoke to it. He would not try to kiss her again like that until——

“We are going to be happy here, Lucy.”

“Yes, John.”

“I’m a little strange to you yet, my sweet. Yes, I wouldn’t have it otherwise. Let’s always tell each other everything.”

“Am I a little strange to you, John?”

“Yes. Like a—— Oh, well, words won’t come. We haven’t been upstairs yet. Suppose you go, while I have a look at the vast back garden.”

“The drawing-room will have to be upstairs, John.”

“Yes, and our—— Well, go and look. I’ll inspect the kitchen again, and see that the——”

And suddenly he laughed a little self-consciously and let her go. There seemed to be so many things that were too elemental for the moment’s mood, and for the virginal face of the child who was to marry him.

Richmond let himself out into the back garden. It contained one fruit tree, a patch of scraggy grass, and two long borders innocent of anything, but weeds, the whole surrounded by a yellow brick wall about five feet high. All the gardens of Tenterden Terrace were walled in this way, and if you stood above five feet six you could command the whole series of them. Richmond strolled across the grass. There was no privacy here. A head could bob over a wall, and catch you in your shirt-sleeves. Tenterden Terrace would not approve of a gentleman going about in his shirt-sleeves. Almost it might expect you to walk in your garden wearing a frock-coat and top-hat.

Well, did it matter? This little patch of ground was of no significance. No. 9 would have to be accepted as a half-way house to something more individual. He faced about where a weedy path and that silly wall set a limit to his strolling, and looking up at the backs of the houses with their rows of windows he became conscious of being observed. There was a face at the landing window of No. 8, and two faces at the corresponding window of No. 10. These dim white masks were watching him, nor did they appear to be disturbed by the thought that their peeping eyes might be obvious to Dr. John Richmond.

An urchin's impulse stirred in him. He would like to have spread his fingers at those faces. Instead, he walked back down the garden with a casualness that challenged curiosity, and suggested that he did not care a damn. He went in and climbed the stairs, running a hand along the dusty rail. He heard Lucy's voice.

"John."

"Hallo."

"It's rather small, this front room, but you can see the sea and the pier, and the ships and those dim hills."

He joined her by the window.

"Not so bad. Would the furniture——?"

He paused, remembering that Mrs. Lancaster's French furniture was to be theirs. Would Southfleet approve of it? Again, did it matter? Moreover, a dead woman's furniture! Lucy's fingers were lying along one pale cheek.

"I think, John——"

"Wouldn't you like to begin with something new? We could store what was——"

"Yes."

"Until we move to something else."

"We could. Oh, the spare-room, John. There's a dreadful place in the ceiling."

"Is there? Let's look. Burst pipe on some occasion, I expect."

She went to show him the spare-room ceiling. A large, yellowish stain decorated it, and some of the plaster had crumbled away.

"A job for the landlord. By the way, is there a room for poor Sarah?"

"Yes, but it's very small."

"Why not put her in here? We shan't need a spare-room, shall we, to begin with?"

She walked to the window and looked down into that ugly little back garden. Nor did she answer his question, and he wondered. Was she thinking of——? Children? Well, perhaps. The problems of fatherhood had not presented themselves to him. Strange, that! He had not considered himself paternally. Children! Did he want them? Embarrassments, little hands holding

you back. For the moment his feeling was that he wanted only her.

Southfleet pier was a favourite parade-ground for those active souls who asked for exercise and the sea wind. It ran for a mile, a straight ribbon of timber carried on great black piles, and bulwarked with wooden railings painted white. Fishermen, muffled up in ulsters and scarves, caught dabs and starfish and crabs. Children bowled hoops. In summer an old horse-tram rumbled up and down, passing through a tented structure where a local band made metallic music thrice a week. You could walk here as on the deck of a great ship, with the waves rolling round and under you, and the gulls sailing and screaming, secure from all qualms. When your face was on the outward journey you saw the estuary and its shipping and the dim hills of Kent. Returning, Southfleet was spread before you, the old town, Queen's Terrace, the genteel dullness of Victoria Parade. St. Jude's squat spire pointed a thick finger heavenwards. Caroline Gardens hung like a woolly green apron from the decorous fronts of Queen's Terrace. Some houses were white, some grey, some red or like faded leaves. Yachts and boats lay at anchor. The ragged cliffs on the west looked as though great guns had been fired at them and left tawny scars in their green slopes.

Twice a week Richmond would snatch an hour in the afternoon and take Lucy on the pier. They would meet at the funny old wooden pier-house that looked like a deck-house salvaged from a ship. Old Rawlins who sat here and took your penny and passed you a ticket, had a smile and almost a wink for these two. Old Rawlins had a very red nose, and eyes that seemed to peer and twinkle from a mass of hair. Lovers, well, good luck to 'em! Pity there were no kissing-corners on the pier. Rawlins liked his grog and his bits of colour, and in winter this wooden highway was not romantic. Children and nursemaids, yes, but Rawlins was too old for nursemaids. No gladness was forthcoming. He was just a hairy old man.

“Ar'ternoon, sir, ar'ternoon, miss.”

The wooden turnstile clicked, and Rawlins would peer out and watch the doctor and the lady go down the broad wooden ramp to the pier. Fine young couple! The doctor walked like a sodger, shoulders well back. The lady was the willowy sort, honeysuckle with a face that looked as though it smelled sweet. And, Jehovah, what hair! Sort of lit you up, and made you think of the days when you were a sailorman and landed at strange ports. Yes, but dang it, after all, the English girls were quarter-deckers for looks. Portugooses! Fat and swarthy. Frenchies, the Marseilles breed, got you drunk and robbed you, and

then had you pitched into the harbour. Italians? Yes, old Rawlins could remember an Italian girl, Genoa, wasn't it? almost with hair like that.

A north-east wind was blowing, and Lucy was wearing a little fur tippet that nestled under her chin like brown moss supporting a white rose. It was possible to meet Southfleet's idly active population on the pier, and on this particular afternoon Southfleet had taken to the sea. They met the Pinhook school, thirty young things of all ages walking two and two, and pretending not to giggle or to show too vulgar an interest in John and Lucy. Richmond looked these young things straight in the eyes, as a man should do, but Lucy went by with head averted, too conscious of the school's irreverent curiosity. Richmond took off his hat to the Misses Pinhook. They gave him brittle little bows. Lucy was looking at the sea, and no acknowledgment came from her.

The Misses Pinhook exchanged significant glances. What manners! Or no manners? How very gauche!

Later, they passed Miss Shallowbrass and Miss Megson, and again Richmond raised his hat, and Lucy, compelling herself, gave the ladies a flickering smile.

"How do you do, Doctor. Very cold, is it not?"

"Very," said Richmond, with emphasis, unable to disconnect Miss Shallowbrass from memories of aloes and senna.

Said one lady to the other: "What the poor man sees in that girl is beyond me. Nothing in her."

"Yes, men are such fools."

"I am afraid he will regret it."

Lucy walked with her chin tucked into her fur collar, and her hands clasped tightly in her muff. She was in pain, not physical pain, but suffering a dull anguish that was of the heart and the eyes. She could not forget that bedroom, and her mother's drawn and stricken face, and those restless, squirming movements. A body on the rack! Oh, if one could only help, do something, and not stand paralysed, dry-eyed and staring.

Richmond watched her. She seemed to flag after they had walked half-way down the pier. She had no youngness in her on this cold spring day.

"Tired, darling?"

"A little."

There was no one near, and he slipped a hand under her arm, and for a

moment she faltered against him, her head almost on his shoulder.

“Mother wants to see you when we get back.”

“Much pain to-day?”

Her lips looked bloodless, and still with the cold, or the words that would not come.

“Oh yes. She can’t keep still. It——”

He looked at her questioningly.

“Let’s go back, Lucy.”

“Would you?”

“My dear, of course.”

He turned her gently, and keeping hold of her arm, did not look too closely at her face.

“I’ll see if I can do something.”

“Oh, do, John. It’s so terrible.”

Old Rawlins, seeing them return so prematurely, and struck by their stern young faces wondered if there had been a quarrel.

“Very cold ar’ternoon, sir.”

Richmond smiled at the old man. He had attended old Rawlins that winter for a heavy cold on the chest.

“Keeping well, Rawlins?”

“I am, sir. That last bottle o’ physic you gave me swept my chimbley for me, proper.”

“I’m glad.”

They passed on, and old Rawlins wanted to say: “That’s a sweet young lady you’ve got, sir. No, I reckon it wasn’t a quarrel. Feeling the cold, maybe. She’s got a face like a flower, not like that——”

Rawlins squirmed on his stool, and glanced at a little white sheet of paper that Miss Shallowbrass had pushed through his window. “Be warned. The Devil and Drink——” Old Rawlins had left it lying there. Did the old cat suppose that because his nose was red she had a right to be religiously rude to him? Rum creatures these good, unmarried ladies! Sour old sauceboats! Who gave ’em the right to go about playing Lord God Almighty in petticoats? Lord

God Almighty should know a man when he saw him. Hadn't He made him? And if heaven was to be full of Shallowbrasses beating tea-trays and squealing "Alle-lujah," well, tother place might be a bit more human. Well, well, well, old Rawlins thought that he would like to have locked up Miss S. in a Marseilles brothel with a Lascar. Rather rough, though, on the poor coloured fellow.

Old Rawlins put out a man's hand, and turned the tract upside down. Bloody bit of waste-paper! Should he take it home to the old woman? No, he would use it for sanitary purposes.

She was on her knees before the fire, warming her hands. Her tippet and muff lay on the table. Richmond saw her shiver, or rather, it was a little shudder that seemed to rise like a bubble through still water.

"Cold, darling?"

He touched her cheek. It was icy. She seemed to shrink from any contact.

"Do go up to her, John."

He turned to the door, and glancing back at her, saw her two hands holding to the mantel-shelf. It made him remember some picture he had seen of a woman clinging to a rock.

"Sure you are——?"

"Yes, John."

He went out and slowly up the stairs, wondering whether her sensitive nature would stand the strain of this long-drawn tragedy. Yes, it was bad business to feel things too acutely. The flabby and complacent people, well padded with selfish fat, were sometimes to be envied. Did she hope that he could do something? But what? He stood a moment outside the mother's door, and his young face looked stern. But for the sentimental pietists—— And was not a physician taught to preserve life? He knocked gently.

"It's John. Can I come in."

"Come in."

Her voice was toneless. He saw her lying there with an air of exhaustion, hands spread, her poor face drawn and ravaged. He noticed a medicine bottle and a glass on the table beside the bed.

"Pain, Mother?"

Her large dark eyes both blessed him for that word, and seemed to ask for help. She pointed to the bottle.

“The pain has gone a little. It is like a knot, or a hand, John, that grips you for a while, and when it has squeezed your heart to nothing, lets go.”

He nodded.

“Does the——”

“John, Burgoyne is a kind creature, but I don’t think he has ever suffered much pain. He doesn’t understand.”

“No.”

“If the medicine could be a little stronger.”

Mechanically he picked up the bottle, looked at it, frowned, put it down again.

“I’ll go back and look up the prescription. I may be able to make it stronger.”

“Don’t tell him.”

“I won’t.”

That was the beginning of a compassionate conspiracy between them. Dear Teddy had prescribed ten minim doses when a more merciful twenty might have brought drowsiness and peace. Richmond said nothing to Charlie Byng. He dispensed the opiate himself, and carried the new bottle round to Holly Lodge. It was just a matter of substitution. Dr. Burgoyne’s medicine was delivered regularly, and stood upon her table, but the bottle that Richmond smuggled round to her was the one in use. It was kept concealed in a cupboard, and a sufficient number of doses were emptied from the Burgoyne bottle, to maintain the illusion.

But she blessed him.

“You have given me peace, John, as much peace, I suppose, as I can expect.”

XIV

Southfleet had made its farewell presentation to Dr. Davidson, a gold watch, a silver inkstand, and an illuminated address framed in oak, and the removers' vans were standing outside Prospect House on the day that Richmond received that flurried message from Dr. Burgoyne. It came to him at Pier View House just as he was sitting down to dinner, a dozen words scribbled in pencil upon a page torn out of a visiting-book.

“Most urgent. Come round at once.”

Had Teddy Burgoyne been taken ill? Richmond ate his dinner, wondering what this hurried scrawl portended, and never suspecting that fate was turning a strange page upon which was recorded a part of the pattern of three lives. He strolled up the Pier Hill to Queen's Terrace, and along past the little railed gardens that were fragrant with wallflowers in bloom. Someone was playing the piano in No. 9. A canary in a cage was singing on the balcony of No. 11. Richmond rang Burgoyne's bell, and the door was opened to him by a little maid who looked frightened.

“Oh, you be to go upstairs, sir, straight to the doctor's room.”

“Is Dr. Burgoyne ill?”

“I couldn't rightly say, sir.”

“You had better show me the way.”

Richmond left his hat and gloves in the hall, and the maid closed the door, and scuttled upstairs ahead of him. What was the strange smell? It met Richmond on the stairs with a familiarity that would not be denied. Sulphur. Fumigation? What the Dickens——? But they had reached the landing, and the maid, pointing to a particular door, turned and fled.

Richmond knocked. The smell of sulphur in the upper part of the house was strong enough to make his throat and nostrils tingle.

“Hallo.”

“It's Richmond.”

“Come in.”

He opened the door and beheld a most strange sight, his senior partner squatting stark naked in a hip-bath. The room stank of sulphur, and Burgoyne, looking like a large boiled red baby, sat with a bath-sponge balanced on his

head.

“My dear fellow, terrible case, most terrible case.”

Richmond was trying not to laugh, but in a few seconds all desire to laugh had gone from him.

“What kind of a case, sir?”

“Alma Row. They called me in as I was passing Smallpox, confluent, a man. Terrible! I came straight home, John, and ordered Mrs. Burgoyne and the girls to stay in the drawing-room with the windows open. Yes, all my clothes are upstairs in the box-room. You can smell the sulphur, what?”

There was no Tra-la left in poor Teddy Burgoyne. He squatted there, with his blue eyes bulging, a very frightened man, for beneath all his colourfulness was concealed the soul of a very vain yet timid small boy. Richmond had closed the door, for, obviously it was not fitting that his senior partner’s panic should be spread to anyone who might be listening on the stairs.

“Better get everybody vaccinated. Have we plenty——?”

“Yes, Byng ordered in a new supply last week. I’ll send for more. When were you last——?”

“Ten years ago, my dear fellow. That’s what makes me a little nervous. And you?”

“Eighteen months ago. And Mrs. Burgoyne and the girls?”

“Not for some time, John. You had better vaccinate the whole house at once. Terrible case. Face like a suppurating pumpkin. Highly infective.”

Burgoyne’s blue eyes were fixed on him. The man was frightened, and though ashamed of his fear, he had a confession to make. Crouching in the steaming bath, with a sulphur candle burning in a saucer behind him, and with that sponge crowning his gingerish curls, he looked like some ridiculous yet pathetic child.

“Terrible thing, Richmond, if my wife or the children——”

And suddenly, Richmond understood what this frightened man was trying to say to him.

“Had I not better take over the case?”

Burgoyne made a sudden movement, and the sponge fell off his head.

“My dear fellow!”

“Well, I haven’t a wife and children.”

“My dear fellow, I couldn’t allow——”

“I’m quite ready to take over. After all, I think I should do so, especially since neither you nor the household have been vaccinated recently.”

“Most generous of you, Richmond. I’ll confess that——”

“Let me take on the case. I’ll vaccinate everybody here at once. Many contacts at Alma Row?”

“Thank God, no, John. The fellow is a casual labourer lodging at No. 3. Only came into the place last week. A lodger. Was taken ill three days after he arrived.”

“Good. I’ll isolate all contacts, and vaccinate them, and the whole of Alma Row, if I can persuade them. I think I had better regard myself as something of a leper, until——”

Burgoyne stood up in his bath.

“Richmond, you’re a great fellow. I’ll not forget. Yes, I had better take over all the paying patients. Damned nuisance about Davidson. He might be persuaded to stay on for a week or two and see us through.”

“I expect he will.”

“And now, my dear fellow, for God’s sake go and collect some vaccine and scratch all our arms. By the way, better keep your mouth shut. People are so apt to panic.”

Richmond smiled gently.

“Yes. People had better not know.”

Poor Teddy’s dread of disease, disfigurement or death was to cut John off from Holly Lodge at a moment when he of all men was most needed there. Dr. Davidson, warned of the crisis, decided like a soldier to remain at his post until it was known whether the pest would spread. Mrs. Davidson and the girls departed for Hastings, and Dr. Davidson put up at The Royal George. Richmond, when he had vaccinated the whole Burgoyne household, hurried off to Alma Row, a string of rather squalid little cottages on the outskirts of the old town. No. 3 was occupied by a bricklayer’s widow with two children, who took in washing and an occasional lodger. She was a large, ominous, red-faced woman with angry, stupid eyes, pale eyelashes, and the mouth of a scold. No doubt, fate had involved her in a very nasty mess, and Richmond was not to find her helpful.

She stood in the doorway and harangued him. She was a poor, hard-working woman with two children and she wanted her wretched lodger out of the house.

“It ain’t fair on me and the kids. And ’e ’asn’t paid me a penny.”

Richmond persuaded the woman out of the way, and climbed the steep, carpetless stairs to the back room where the man lay sick. Richmond had seen many unpleasant sights, but never one more terrible or hideous than this. The man had a face, but as a human face it was hardly recognizable, and had become a great, swollen, pulpy suppurating mess. The eyelids were like swollen bladders over the hidden eyes. The mouth was just a hole in that turgid, filthy mask. So fiercely had the disease flamed that it had stricken the fellow dumb and blind and senseless. He lay there wallowing in semi-coma with blubbering mouth, and plucking fingers. The room stank, and Richmond could understand the sheer terror that had seized Teddy Burgoyne and almost tumbled him down the stairs.

Richmond stood by the wretched bed, and felt the man’s pulse. It was racing. His doom was obvious. The attack had been so massive, the dose of poison so overwhelming that death could only be a matter of hours.

Richmond threw up the window and went downstairs. The woman was waiting for him in the little front room.

“You must get out of this at once, you and the children. Anywhere you can go?”

“Go?”

“Yes, the man will be dead in twenty-four hours, but your cottage is reeking with infection. It, and the furniture, will have to be disinfected.”

She pulled at her heavy lower lip.

“I’ve got a brother at No. 7.”

“I’ll see him and try and persuade him to pack you all in. And now, I’m going to vaccinate you and the children.”

She loomed at him.

“No, yer don’t. Not if I know it.”

“What’s your objection?”

“I don’t ’old with it. Scratching muck into kid’s arms.”

Richmond was fierce with her.

“You ignorant fool. What do you know about it? I am going to vaccinate you all.”

“No, yer don’t, young man.”

“Very well. I’ll leave you alone with that thing upstairs, to do the best you can. Good day.”

He turned to walk out of the house, but the virago clutched at his arm.

“Yer couldn’t do that, Doctor.”

“Oh, yes I can. People who won’t be helped——”

“Oh, all right, Doctor. I’m that upset. But who’s going to look after ’im?”

“I’ll get Nurse Garner in.”

“Will she come, Doctor?”

“She’ll come.”

Southfleet, though it had no hospital, did possess a parish nurse, and as a nurse Miss Jenny Garner was an institution. A little brisk, wiry woman with a Roman nose and bright brown eyes, she assisted babies into the world and persuaded ancient and semi-bedridden people to be somewhat clean, and was capable of rendering first-aid in a crisis. Her tongue was sharp, and her hands gentle. One most valuable quality she did possess, that of complete fearlessness, and when Richmond had hunted her down in the back bedroom of a cottage where she was dressing an ulcerated leg, and explained the case to her, almost Nurse Garner looked pleased.

“I’ll go up at once.”

Richmond blessed her, but he took Nurse Jenny down into the parlour and told her the whole truth.

“It is a pretty horrible case. The man won’t last another twenty-four hours. Been vaccinated, nurse?”

“Three times. Besides, I don’t worry.”

“Great woman! I am trying to move the woman and the children into another cottage. And I want to persuade the whole of Alma Terrace to be vaccinated. I think you could help in that.”

“I dare say I could.”

“And, nurse, I think we shall have to treat you as a contact. Is there anybody in the place who can deputize for you, say for two or three weeks?”

“Yes, I think Mrs. Barter could. She used to be a nurse.”

“Excellent. Could you see her before going to Alma Terrace?”

“Yes.”

“And you won’t talk, I know. We don’t want people frightened.”

“I’ll do all I can to help you, Doctor.”

As Richmond walked back through the old town with the sea aglitter and making a soft prattle on the shingle, his thoughts went suddenly to Holly Lodge. He found himself pausing by Cotgroves boat-house from which floated the smell of paint and varnish. He saw the old black pier straddling out towards the deep water, and the yachts floating like gulls, and the distant greenness of far hills. Had sudden fear come to him, as it must come to all men, especially to the young, when spring is in the air and life seems clean and good? Yes, fear of a kind, but not for himself. What if he were to carry that foul infection into a certain house? Love’s face defiled! He walked on, the decision instant and sure in him. He would not go near Lucy for a month, or suffer her to come near to him. And had she been vaccinated? He would get Davidson to see to that. But, firstly, he must tell her, and turning about and retracing his steps he made his way up the lane that climbed the hill at the back of the old town and joined itself to Jessamy Road.

He reached the gate, and stood wondering how to make contact with those inside the house. The little garden was empty, save for its wallflowers and the white daisies in the grass. Should he go up and ring the bell, and then retreat to the gate, and speak from there? He had a hand on the gate when he saw a face at a window, Sarah’s face, and he waved to it.

The face disappeared. The green door opened.

“Is Miss Lucy in, Sarah?”

“Yes, sir. She’s with her mother.”

“Will you tell her that I want to speak to her for a moment.”

“I will, sir.”

“Here, in the garden.”

Sarah disappeared, leaving the front door open, and a moment later he saw that other figure appear in the shadow-frame of the doorway, looking almost pale and ghostlike after Sarah’s blue-printed solidity. What a little, fragile

thing she looked, even though she was taller than Sarah! For three seconds she seemed to hang there in the shadow with her pale face and her lambent hair, and then she came floating out to him in her white frock, with a band of colour round her waist. He could see her eyes now, and they smiled at him out of the deeps of their tired sadness. She came quickly down the path, and somehow it hurt him to repulse her.

“Lucy, please stop there.”

He was coming to know how quickly her face could change. It had such a quality of sensitiveness that it could be called a study in light and shadow. It was a young face, mobile, flexible, not like an old face that had been sculptured and ground into set lines by the sands of time. She did not utter a word, but her lips seemed to repeat the words “Stop, John?”

“Yes. Don’t be afraid, dear. I mustn’t come near you for a while. Don’t come any nearer. A rather bad case, and I don’t want——”

He saw that she was frightened.

“Not. Oh, my dear, I’m not afraid.”

“But I am. I’ll come to the gate every day. How is she?”

Her face seemed to grow thin and pinched.

“Oh, suffering, a bad day. But, John, I——”

“Have you been vaccinated?”

“Vaccinated?”

“Yes.”

“Three or four years ago. I don’t quite remember.”

“I’m asking Dr. Davidson to come round and do both you and Sarah. Don’t look so frightened, my sweet.”

She took a sudden step towards him.

“Oh, John, I’m not afraid.”

“Stay there.”

She paused, rigid.

“Not for myself, I mean. But——”

He made himself smile at her.

“Doctors never catch anything. It’s a fact, my dear. We’re too tough and

salted. But I wanted you to understand. You see, you're rather precious."

She answered his smile, but it was like light on the edge of deep shadows.

"I'll remember, John."

"I must go now. So much to do. Wait, throw me one of those sprigs of wallflower."

She turned aside, bent down and picked a little bunch, ran into the house, wound a piece of yellow wool about the stems, and returning, tossed the bunch to him. It fell short of the gate, and with a lover's look at her, he opened the gate and picked up the flowers.

"Sweet herbs! I'll be here to-morrow, about three," and putting the posy to his nose and mouth, he left her.

All this happened just when she needed him so greatly, and when she was learning to lean on him and turn to him. Old Rawlins had called her honeysuckle, and so, in a sense, she was, clinging without constricting, gentle and sweet-scented and without thorns. No doubt the strong, world-improving ladies would have called her a cloying creature, but that she most certainly was not. She had spirit, and a high and sensitive courage that could confront life's fiercer issues, and stand shaking yet unshaken before them, while not vexing her mate or herself over petulant trifles.

She and Sarah had chosen to see this other tragedy through. Mrs. Lancaster had asked that no strange woman should be brought in to fuss about her bed, and if she asked much of Lucy, Lucy was ready to give. How much this giving cost her she was beginning to understand, and that even love, though it might give you comfort, could not bear the burden in your stead. These things were for your secret soul alone. You were shut up with them in a dark chamber. You waited and listened for those sounds that wrung your heart. You woke in the night, and lying cold and still, heard those little whimperings and moanings, and divined the twistings and strainings of a body that was on the rack. You rose and lit a candle, and slipping into a dressing-gown, stole into the room where a night-light was burning. You saw rumpled clothes, and a haggard and anguished face, and felt torn and helpless, and sometimes very weary.

"Some medicine, darling."

Yes, there was always that bottle and its blessed opiate, though Lucy was realizing with a kind of horror that its power of assuagement was growing less and less. Doses had to be more frequent, her mother's cry for it more

desperate.

“Give me a little more, dear.”

She did not dare, though she pretended to humour this woman who was dying, and dying so slowly.

Why did she not dare?

What sort of cowardice was this? A fawning before convention, or some other priggish moral stricture invented by those who had never suffered pain?

Why?

She was haunted by this challenge. It seemed to stand beside her bed, it looked at her from her mother's eyes, it seemed written in pale, vibrant letters upon walls, the pages of books, the sky. It both horrified and fascinated her. Where did pain belong, to the Devil or God? Was she being tempted?

And then, the ghastly thought came to her after one of those poignant visits to her mother's room that it was she, herself, who was trying to escape from this perpetual pain. It was her secret, wounded self that was crying out, not for her mother, but with rebellious and exhausted self-pity. How horrible! Did she want her mother dead in order that she might sleep in peace and not be harrowed? Was it that she could not bear this dreadful burden?

Can ye not watch with me for one hour?

She knelt by her bed and prayed that this selfish shrinking should be taken from her, that she should not be a traitor to the woman who had given her life.

Richmond did not understand.

He came daily to the gate, sometimes twice a day, to speak to her, but they were not suffered to meet in peace and privacy. All Jessamy Lane appeared to be interested in the young doctor's visits. Heads drooped over gates, and faces loomed at windows. Old Miss Protheroe, a severe and arid person, would choose this particular hour to come out and potter in her garden. She could see over the hedge. So could the Smith children who lived next door, and if they preferred to peer through the hedge and giggle, that was their nasty little prerogative. There were occasions when Richmond felt greatly moved to invade the Smith sanctuary and distribute resounding smacks.

Almost, it was like meeting her in a prison, with all this unpleasant curiosity like a grille between them, and a warder listening to all they said.

She would stand very still, hands clasped in front of her, something concealed behind her eyes. Was he well? Oh, yes, he was very well. He tried to let his love reach out to her through a display of young cheerfulness.

“How are things?”

She could not tell him in that little garden how things were. Had she spoken her secret thoughts to him, Jessamy Lane might have held up hands of contempt and of horror. She wanted her mother to die. How daughterly of her!

Yes, he did not, perhaps could not, understand.

Even his standing there made her feel more lonely.

Sometimes it was unbearable.

Often, she was glad when he left her.

He had things to do, people to help.

How could she expect him to feel as she felt? Such a martyrdom was too bitterly personal, flesh of your flesh, like a child waiting to be born.

And he, somehow balked and conscious of profound frustration, would march off to the cases that called him. The casual labourer was dead and buried. Three other cases had developed in Alma Terrace, none of them fatal, and there the matter ended. He would sometimes wonder whether he could take the credit for preventing the spread of the disease. He liked to think that the credit was his, and that he had behaved rather well, and as a physician should.

Dear Dr. Burgoyne plucked up courage as the days of the incubation period passed, and no tremor of fever whimpered in him, and no damned spots erupted. Spring was with them, and Teddy was beginning to sing Tra-la. As for his desertion in the face of the enemy, he had persuaded himself that he would have remained in charge of the case had not that good fellow Richmond stepped in to safeguard the Burgoyne complexions.

Since the crisis had fizzled out, Dr. Davidson had packed his trunk, and after wandering through Southfleet shaking hands with all and sundry, had left to join his family at Hastings. Southfleet missed Dr. Davidson. A familiar figure had passed from the place, a man of kindness and of wisdom. Burgoyne was not Davidson, and perhaps Southfleet began to look more eagerly to this younger man who in his turn might become a second Davidson. The working world spoke well of Richmond. Nurse Jenny had been singing his praises.

Southfleet was a possessive little place, and apt to regard with jealous eyes the persons of those to whom faith and affection were accorded. No saint may slip, even for one second. Human nature is naïve, in that being full of frailties, it cannot suffer frailties in any of its little heroes. Richmond, going about the day's work, did not yet realize that he was becoming a hostage to the conventions, and that humanity is prone to make both slaves and shackled saints of those who serve it well.

Burgoyne was attending at Holly Lodge, and Dr. Burgoyne did not understand. He was flowery and genial and platitudinous. He could be emotional, but without imagination, and there had been some bungling over the substitution of those medicine bottles. Richmond, discovering it, strolled round nightly after dark, and deposited the right bottles under the hedge just inside the gate. As a contact, he would soon be free. Another day or two, perhaps. Meanwhile, the tragedy in that little house was exhausting itself in bitter anguish.

“Sarah, I want to die.”

Poor Sarah was dry-eyed, and doing all that a woman could, shaking up the pillows and smoothing them and the bedclothes.

“Yes, dearie, I know, I know.”

“Give me another dose, Sarah.”

“You only had one two hours ago.”

“My God, does it matter? Where's the child?”

“Taking a little walk.”

“I'm glad. I wish she hadn't to suffer this. One shouldn't be allowed to be a vile nuisance to——”

“You mustn't talk like that, dearie. Try a little warm milk.”

“Oh, Sarah, I wish I could die.”

They did not hear Lucy creep up the stairs, nor suspect that she heard those last bitter words. She stood there, motionless, her hands pressed against her bosom. Then, very slowly, she turned and went silently down the stairs and out into the garden. The Smith children were playing some vigorous and strident game next door, but so stricken was she that she did not hear them.

In the small hours of the night she woke to the sound of moaning in the

room across the passage. She lay a while as though paralysed, and then, sitting up in bed, sat staring into the darkness. Her dressing-gown lay ready on a chair, and she left her bed and, putting the gown on, felt her way to the door. The moaning, that almost animal anguish ravaged her. Oh, it must stop. Neither of them could bear it any longer.

She opened her mother's door, and saw the night-light burning, and to her mother she looked like a ghost.

"Such pain."

"Oh, poor darling."

Those tortured eyes were turned towards the table beside the bed.

"I've tried not to. And why? Pour it out for me."

The bottle was a new one. She withdrew the cork and heard the neck of the bottle make a chattering sound against the glass. She must try not to tremble.

"Give me more, poppet."

"Yes, dear."

"More, more."

The glass was in her mother's hands. They were cupped round it, the fingers interclasped. What had she done? She stood beside the bed, voiceless, paralysed, watching her mother slowly swallowing the dark fluid. The glass was empty. Her mother passed it to her. She was panting.

"God bless you. Now, I'll sleep. Kiss me."

She put her face to that other face, kissed it with passion, and fled. She threw herself into her own bed as into deep dark water. She pulled the clothes over her head. She was shivering. Her teeth chattered. She knew what she had done, and was torn between horror and exultation. "Oh, Sarah, I wish I could die." Had she——? Oh, those moans! Would she ever forget them? And those last words: "Now I'll sleep. Kiss me." She began to weep, shuddering and sobbing. Presently a kind of calmness came. She lay stretched out, rigid, listening. The house was soundless.

An hour went by, and then another, and still she was listening. Not a sound. She threw the clothes aside, crept out to her mother's door. Strange, heavy breathing, slow and sometimes irregular. For a moment it seemed to stop, and she clutched her bosom. Then, it went on again. Was she listening to the wings of death throbbing gently and compassionately? She could bear no more. She fled back to her bed, and pulling the clothes over her, tried to

smother all sounds. She was exhausted. She could do no more.

She fell asleep.

A note was brought to Dr. Burgoyne as he sat at breakfast. It had been scribbled in pencil on a page torn out of a tradesman's book. The scrawl was Sarah's.

Sir,

My mistress died in the night. She's at peace, poor dear. Miss Lucy wished you to know.

Yours respectfully,

Sarah Fortune.

Burgoyne laid it aside and helped himself to marmalade.

"Poor woman. Happy release. Though, I didn't think she'd go quite so soon. Well, well, she's in no more pain."

Mrs. Burgoyne looked out of the window, and smiled. She was so placidly sweet-tempered that she could smile as kindly over a corpse as over a bridal pair. Besides, it was a beautiful spring morning, and she was expecting her milliner in half an hour with a new frock.

"Does Richmond know, dear? In a way it will be—— No, perhaps one should not say that."

"What?"

"Oh, never mind. How is the toast this morning, Edward?"

"Excellent."

Sarah had left another little note at Pier View House.

My poor mistress is dead. Could you come, sir? Miss Lucy doesn't know I've left this.

Richmond was lighting a pipe when the note was brought to him. He put the pipe away unsmoked, and taking his hat, went out into the May sunshine. The day was without a flaw, the sea calmly glittering, red may and laburnum out in Caroline Gardens. How strange was life! The beginning and the end of things!

It was rather sudden, this end. Somehow, he felt vaguely accused by it, as

though he had not understood the nearness and the pathos of finality. Had it been peaceful? Peaceful! He was young in experience, but even he had discovered that death was neither the agony nor the bliss the pietists loved to describe. So often it was no more than a fuddled drift into oblivion, like a candle guttering out.

Poor little Lucy! Could he assume that it was safe for him to come close to her? He was conscious of quick compassion. Also, of a shadow that had passed. They would be free now, free to live their new life. But, good God, that was a rather graceless thought! How self rose up and stood looking at you in the mirror.

He came to the gate of Holly Lodge. The blinds were drawn, but Sarah was watching for him through a chink that she had left. She had the door wide open before he reached it. Her eyes were swollen, and her nose red.

“You’ll come in this morning, sir.”

“I think I must, Sarah. How did it happen?”

“In her sleep, sir. I just went in and found her looking happy.”

“I’m glad it came like that. And——”

Sarah had closed the door.

“It’s Miss Lucy I’m worried about. She’s in her room with the door locked. She——”

“Taken it to heart.”

“She won’t let me in. She just said: ‘Please go away, Sarah.’ ”

Richmond moved towards the stairs.

“Do you think I——?”

And Sarah burst out at him.

“Oh, be a man, sir. She wants somebody. She mustn’t stay like that. You’re the one——”

But Richmond was climbing the stairs. He reached the landing, paused, and then, as though making his choice, opened the door of Mrs. Lancaster’s room, and stood looking at her. She might have been asleep. Her face was calm, infinitely serene. The lines of pain had passed from it. Richmond closed the door, and going to the other door, knocked very gently.

“Lucy, it’s John.”

Silence.

“Lucy, I’ve seen her. She looks happy, at peace. Won’t you speak to me?”

Again, silence, and a sudden fear attacked him.

“Lucy, my darling, speak to me. I want to be with you.”

He tried the door and it opened, yet Sarah had said that it was locked. The blind was down, but the room was full of suffused sunlight. He saw her huddled in the bed, her arms over her face. Her back was turned on him.

“Lucy.”

Her voice had a dry breathlessness.

“Don’t speak to me. I’m not—— I killed her.”

“My darling, you——”

“She wanted to die. I gave her——”

He closed the door, and going to the bed, sat down on the edge of it, and put his hand on her hair.

“God forgive me, how blind I have been. How very brave of you, my dear.”

“Oh, John——”

And suddenly she turned to him, arms out, her face anguished and wet. His arms went round her. He took her on his knees, and held her while she sobbed.

“Lucy, I’ve been very blind. Forgive me. It was I who failed.”

“John, I——”

“I know, I know, now. It was too much, for her and for you. I ought to have done this thing, not you. Forgive me, my darling.”

She clung to him, shuddering and weeping.

XV

Tenterden Terrace sheltered so many people who were superfluous so far as any creative intelligence was concerned, that even good Dr. Creavy was sometimes puzzled to know how providence and Tenterden Terrace could be reconciled. Tenterden Terrace helped to fill his pews, and to decorate the church for harvest festivals and at Christmas, and attended his wife's working-parties, and supported the various missionary societies, but Dr. Creavy was moved to confess that Tenterden Terrace did not fill him either with joy or the peace that passeth understanding. Doubtless he would have made a better shepherd of sheep than the spiritual father of these elderly ladies whom a Victorian convention had foisted upon the world, and even dedicated as heirlooms to the coming generation. Dr. Creavy had desired children, and his wife had given him none, and maybe, when contemplating Tenterden Terrace, he may have murmured: "Perhaps it is as well." Nos. 1, 2 and 3 had a significance in that the Misses Pinhook's school contained potential mothers. No. 9, too, the home of Dr. and Mrs. Richmond was a live house and somehow appealing to good Dr. Creavy. He liked young people. He did not like Miss Shallowbrass and Miss Thackray and their fellows, though this shameful prejudice had to be carefully concealed. Miss Shallowbrass flustered him. She was like a wasp in the plum tree when you were minded to peacefully pick plums, or a blue-bottle bumping and buzzing against the window when you were trying to compose a sermon.

Tenterden Terrace had so little to concern itself with that it was deeply concerned in observing and criticizing the affairs of others. It cultivated the trivial and hunted it to the nth degree. It studied the obvious and commented on it, and produced every sort of petty and distorted conclusion. It knew what you had for dinner on Sunday. If you drank wine, it was a little shocked, and assumed that you drank too much. It was charitable with all the uncharity of the complacent Christian. It suffered from endemic self-righteousness. It delighted in assigning blame, and in assembling and discussing other people's sins. It was supremely unconscious of the sin of being ugly, and perhaps that explained why, when a pretty creature like Lucy Richmond came to live in Tenterden Terrace, it was ready to spy and probe for the fly in the honey-pot. The dreadful woman might be dead, but Lucy remained the dreadful woman's daughter.

At five minutes to nine each morning Dr. John Richmond would appear at the door of No. 9 and walk down the gravel path to the iron gate. Sometimes

his young wife accompanied him to the gate, holding to his arm. Sometimes they held hands. What dreadful affectation! Tenterden Terrace was convinced that Lucy Richmond was a mass of affectation, the real reason being that she had no affectation. She was happy. And she was comely, and to people like Miss Shallowbrass feminine comeliness was a secret offence. It postulated vanity. How could a pretty young wife be anything but artifice, frivolity, and a fool?

It was Sarah who had a name for ladies of Tenterden Terrace. She called them Scrag-ends.

Lucy was loving her little house, because it was hers, and so wholly hers, yet ministering to her mate. It had Kidderminster carpets, and a mahogany hatstand in the hall; the dining-room suite was solid, polished oak seated in red leather. There was much French polish about No. 9, though Mrs. Lancaster's French furniture had been put away in store, all save the pictures, which hung on the drawing-room walls, and failed, somehow, to harmonize with the new drawing-room suite, a study in mock-walnut and black and yellow upholstery. The arm-chairs had antimacassars, the mantel-board a fringe of red and yellow tassels. A queer, tripod settee held the centre of the floor, an unfriendly piece of furniture suggesting that some visitors might prefer to sit with their backs to each other. A polished chiffonier displayed some of Mrs. Lancaster's Sèvres china. The curtains were of some dark red material looped back with gilded chains. But it was Lucy, her house, and she loved it, and somehow, because of it, it must have loved her. Lady Neath, when she paid her first formal call, may have thought the decor rather young, but Lady Neath herself wore balloon sleeves and a bustle, just as Lucy did, and it was a privileged age that was happily uncritical of anything save morals.

Nos. 8 and 10 observed the Priory carriage and pair waiting outside No. 9, and were agreed that Lady Neath had committed an indiscretion.

"But one can assume it to be a formal call, my dear."

"Yes, I understand that Dr. Richmond sometimes attends there."

"With dear Dr. Burgoyne's permission, of course."

"But he goes in by the back door."

And how did the dear ladies know that? Nor was the statement a true exposition of the facts. Dr. Richmond entered by the front door, but to Tenterden Terrace a golosh was only half a golosh.

Richmond would walk across Tenterden Square, down Victoria Parade and Queen's Terrace to the narrow passage between Prospect House and Lovell's Library. The day's routine was ushered in for him by that sunless little passage. He left the sunlight and the sea behind him, and the ships that came and went, and for an hour he was absorbed in attending to the minor ailments of the poor and the old. Routine had become the order of the day. He could not escape from it, and during the first year with Lucy he was not tempted to think of escape. Quite two thirds of the work had fallen to his lot, and as a young professional and married man an income was important to him. He was not even allowed to linger and look at unprofessional things. At ten o'clock old Howell and the dog-cart stationed themselves outside Prospect House; he had inherited them from Dr. Davidson. Also, according to Southfleet, he had inherited an increasing share of the Davidson tradition. From ten to half-past twelve he was driven round Southfleet and its environs, visiting patients. At half-past twelve he returned to the surgery to write up his prescriptions and pick up any message that had come in. Howell drove him to No. 9 Tenterden Terrace. He would find Lucy and lunch waiting for him, and perhaps a casual patient or two who knew that he was catchable at that hour. He and Lucy would face each other across the table. Sometimes he had not much to say to his wife, and she did not vex him with words. After lunch he would smoke a hurried pipe and look at the daily paper. At two o'clock Howell would reappear with the dog-cart. The afternoon round was a country one, Willowell, Richford, Wickering and Eastness, or Danesfleet, Westwood and Kingsfleet. He might be back at Tenterden Terrace at five for tea. At six he walked to the surgery to see more surgery patients, write up books and prescriptions, and prepare the next day's programme. Lucy saw him again at seven. At seven-thirty they had supper. If a serious case had to be watched, he might pay a late visit between half-past eight and nine. Nor did the claims the community made on him end here. Children were born, and they seemed to have a preference for arriving in the small hours. It might be a country case, and old Howell would have to be knocked up, and a horse put into the dog-cart. Also, a doctor must try to keep in touch with all the latest medical literature, and there were occasions when Richmond took a medical journal to bed with him, and read it while his young wife lay patiently still with her head on the neighbouring pillow.

Richmond did seriously attempt to snatch from the week's routine his Saturday afternoon, and the greater part of Sunday. Lucy went to church, and if the morning had to be given to his patients, he walked with her to evensong, top-hatted, frock-coated, gloved, a serious and somewhat silent young man who was still conscious of his wife's comeliness and proud of it. They stood

side by side in a little pen of a pew, and shared the same hymn-book. He listened to dear old Dr. Creavy's credulous and conscientious sermons. The choir sung lustily, and somewhat through its nose. Bald-headed Mr. Bellamy played the organ. The plate came round, and Richmond put in his florin. Then, all Southfleet, or orthodox Southfleet, walked decorously back to cold Sunday supper, mostly a round of cold beef, beetroot and boiled potatoes, and apple pie. Southfleet took itself and its Sabbath very seriously. Toys and story books were put away. The working world yawned, and did not wholly regret Black Monday.

Did the youth in him ever cry out and curse and long to go berserker? There were times when he would come in tired and worried, and find some exasperating bore of a patient waiting to buttonhole him. There were mornings, sunny mornings, when the light played upon the ships in the estuary, those ships that went all over the world, while he was anchored for life in this dull little town. He had his restless moods. There were times when he would remember St. Martha's, and the big things that were done there, and the big things he had planned to do. Why did he not go up and resume his contact with that other world, even for half a day? He shrank from it, perhaps because a part of him was savagely afraid. What would he find? That J. C. Richmond was forgotten, as hundreds of others were forgotten. Sir Humphrey Jolland would have had three or four house-surgeons since his day. The young men were in charge of the ship. He would find himself a mere country doctor, regarded with casual tolerance as a back-number, a provincial. He might meet that old enemy and rival of his Bernard Steering, now, as he had heard, surgical registrar, and ripe for a staff-appointment. Yes, that was a confrontation that he could not suffer. He could imagine Steering putting out one finger to him and drawling—"Hallo, J. C., how are pills and poultices and all that?"

Perhaps he was too busy to think too much of the blind-end in which he found himself. Frustrations had given place to responsibilities. He had slipped into a particular rhythm, and the tune to which he danced was always the same. Certainly, he had not abandoned moments of adventurous dreaming. The story began like a nursery tale—"When I have saved some money," not "Once Upon A Time." But the hypothetical provocations of the future were like the ships that passed out at sea, while he walked dutifully from No. 9 to Prospect House, and felt pulses and looked at tongues, and auscultated chests, and heard Charlie Byng make the same dry jokes, and listened without listening to Burgoyne's professional bravura.

Moreover, there was a thing that continued to keep life sweet for him, the face of his wife. He could not remember an occasion when he had seen Lucy

peevd or out of temper, nor was she that most cloying of creatures God's sweet woman. She could be full of laughter and mischief, and she could play the tease, but whatever her mood might be she contrived to mate it to his. Moreover, she did possess that virtue of virtues, the joy of living, a youthfulness that could assume the young matron's dignity, without becoming the young, Victorian madam. He still felt passionately protective towards her, because he was conscious that she needed it. He held her great secret inviolate. He would never forget the way she had clung to him on that spring morning.

"Oh, John, you will never tell."

He did understand how certain ladies would have flopped down upon that tragic incident like carrion crows. The girl who had murdered her mother! What gestures, what pulling of faces, what Christian horror! Those whom God crucified were supposed to hang decently and unassuaged upon the cross.

For he and Lucy had come together during that one holiday they had shared in a way that would never leave him unmoved. She had given herself to him with such innocent simplicity. She had been woman to his man, neither a shocked nor smutty schoolgirl, shuddering at nature or making a sensual mess of it. Honeymoons can be difficult affairs, but their honeymoon had been wholly good. They had fallen into each others' arms both emotionally and spiritually without any feeling of strangeness or frustration. For both of them it had been the first holiday abroad, an escape into another world, a voyage of discovery, mutual and impulsive. They had taken it in Switzerland, and Richmond, who knew about three words of French, had smiled over his young wife's eloquence in that language. He had insisted upon her giving him lessons. They had sat on sunny hill-sides together, and recited "J'aime, tu aime, il aime," and laughed and yodelled. Richmond had left his top-hat and other things behind in England, and Lucy had been milk and wine and honey to him.

Now, he came in tired, and sometimes harassed, and sat opposite her at table in that decorous little house, and was fed and considered, and talked to, if he looked like it. No little domestic worries were put upon his plate. Sometimes, he was conscious of his young wife's silence, and would look across at her and wonder and perhaps be challenged by the serenity of those eyes. Wasn't Lucy ever bored? Did she never resent his rushings in and his rushings out? Was she happy? It seemed so.

"You don't get much out of this show, my sweet."

"I? How?"

"Well, you've married a kind of public call-boy. We'll try to get away in

September. Or maybe it will be August. Teddy will want to shoot in September.”

“How will you manage?”

“Oh, hire a locum for a fortnight. How would you like Scotland?”

“I’d love it, John.”

“You seem to love everything.”

“Well, perhaps I do.”

In fact, when Miss Shallowbrass asserted that Mrs. Richmond was spoilt by her husband, the arrow was completely off the target. The age had many virtues, though it has been described as a period of domination by the old women of both sexes, but, in the main, it did not spoil its children, and perhaps Lucy was unspoilt because she was happy, and happy because she was unspoilt. She did not quarrel with John’s lack of leisure; he could not help it; hard work postulated success, and she loved him. She asked to respect the thing she loved. A drawling, dawdling Champagne Charlie, however decorative and amusing would not have satisfied her. She had the swift discrimination of a sensitive child.

She liked to help Sarah in the house, go about with a duster and care for her possessions. She kept her accounts meticulously. She liked to have a vase of flowers on the table. She darned John’s socks. Even in a very enlightened and liberated age, socks have to be darned by somebody. Sarah was the best-fed maid in Tenterden Terrace. Miss Shallowbrass half starved her poor Martha, but fussed considerably over the souls and the nudities of the heathen. Sarah could say and did say “There’s no Scrag-end about No. 9.”

Lucy’s love flowed over into her garden, but in her treatment of it she was not conventional. She did not ask for lobelia, marguerites and red geraniums. She liked to grow all sorts of things, sow them herself, or buy boxes of plants from a nurseryman, stocks, Sweet William, Canterbury Bell, candytuft, asters, petunias. The garden of No. 9 was the only garden in the terrace that seemed to enjoy itself. Nos. 8 and 10 could watch Lucy working in it, and if it could not wholly disapprove of such innocent activities, it reserved the right to criticize Mrs. Richmond’s conception of wifely good form. Was she doing her duty? Tenterden Terrace was extremely interested in the state of Lucy’s figure. She had a very pretty figure, but it would not be so pretty if she bore babies.

“I think, my dear, there is a little something below the waist.”

“It’s an absurd waist for a married woman. But if you are right, all that

bending is most reprehensible.”

“Yes, I really think someone ought to speak to Dr. Richmond about it. Isn’t it notorious that a doctor’s wife and children——”

“But, my dear, he is still very young, you know.”

“Old enough to know, surely, when his wife is in an interesting condition.”

As a good housewife Lucy did her own shopping. That is to say she visited grocer, butcher, and fruiterer and inspected her meat and her fish. She did not know much about either, but the strange thing was that her pretty smiling face produced better results for her larder than did Miss Shallowbrass’s virtue for her. Mr. Berry the butcher, a handsome old John Bull of a man, would serve her in person as he would have served Lady Neath or Lady Feygate, and see to it the joint he sent was worthy of her smile. Mrs. Richmond was becoming popular in Southfleet with those who had work to do. She did not complain, and perhaps because of it men of good will gave her no cause for complaining.

Miss Shallowbrass was always complaining. She scolded the milkman and the baker. She even scolded Mr. Berry, and was told with John Bull bluntness to go elsewhere for her meat. She was fond of saying that all tradesmen were rogues, and would sell you sanded sugar or watered milk, if they could. She never seemed to discover that sourness begot sourness.

Now, Tenterden Terrace did agree that Mrs. Richmond was neglecting her social duties. She did not attend working-parties or teach in the Sunday School, or pay visits of Christian interference to the lower orders. It was agreed that Mrs. Richmond ought to be spoken to on the matter, and have her duties indicated to her. Miss Shallowbrass, dressed and ready, watched for Lucy to appear in her little front garden on her way to the Southfleet shops. Lucy crossed the road to Tenterden Square, and Miss Shallowbrass followed her. Nursemaids and children had arrived in Tenterden Square. Miss Shallowbrass was always complaining about the noise these children made. She saw Lucy stop and speak to a nursemaid. Two small things ran to her, and one of them held on to Lucy’s skirt.

“Pretty, pretty.”

Lucy picked up the child and kissed it. Ha! wasn’t that a little indicative? Did not Mrs. Richmond’s figure betray, h’m, a slight buxomness. Miss Shallowness joined the group, but no children ran to her.

She was ingratiating.

“How do you do, Ethel. Come and kiss me.”

Small Ethel's eyes goggled at her.

"Don't want to."

Which was final, so final that the lady said something acid about a certain small person's lack of manners. Ethel took refuge with the nurse, who was quite of Ethel's opinion.

"Are you walking, Mrs. Richmond?"

Obviously! Lucy put down the child, and gave it a final kiss.

"Yes, shopping."

"I will walk a little way with you."

They passed on across Tenterden Square to Victoria Parade, and Miss Shallowbrass, having put her face in proper order, proceeded to do her duty.

"Do you mind if I am a little personal?"

Lucy smiled.

"I see you don't come to the vicarage working-party."

"Ought I to?"

"Dear Mrs. Richmond, we gentlewomen have responsibilities."

"I think I have responsibilities, Miss Shallowbrass."

"And the Sunday School. Surely——"

Lucy's smile died away.

"Does it not occur to you that I owe something to my husband? Sunday is the only day that he and I——"

"A day of rest, I know, but——"

"I think you can leave me to manage my own——"

Miss Shallowbrass glanced obliquely yet obviously at Lucy's figure.

"Oh, of course, if there are other expectations."

Lucy looked blank.

"I don't quite know what you mean."

"I mean, Mrs. Richmond, that if what might be expected of a young married woman——"

And, suddenly, Lucy understood her. She began to laugh, but her laughter

was tinged with anger.

“Oh, I see! Don’t you think, Miss Shallowbrass, that so very personal a matter is not for discussion.”

“It is a most solemn matter.”

“I agree. Forgive me, if I rather prefer—— Yes, I am going into the garden for five minutes. Old Mr. Beckwith gave me some young plants he had over. Good morning.”

And Miss Shallowbrass walked on seething, knowing that she had been both snubbed and dismissed.

Lucy, having escaped into the gardens, found a favourite seat of hers that was recessed into the bay of a holly hedge. If her young dignity had repulsed Miss Shallowbrass most successfully, she, Lucy, had not escaped scatheless, for this vulgar and intimate handling of her most secret life had shocked her. Was everything so very public in a little world like this? Did impertinent hands pull curtains aside, and peer at you, even when you thought yourself alone with your sacred thoughts? Lucy had the quick temper of the sensitive, an anger that was more of the spirit than of the flesh. She could and did show herself gentle and patient with children, and with anyone she loved, but cruelty and meanness and vulgar curiosity made her flare.

Ought she to tell John about this? Compassionately wise even in those early days of her marriage, she knew that her husband had worries of his own, and that hers, if she had them, need not be added to his. Possibly, it is the impulsive, chattering fool, who, more than the scold, kills her man’s love. Lucy, after ten minutes’ solitude in that quiet corner, sought out old Beckwith and thanked him.

“You’re more than welcome, m’am.”

His kind old eyes somehow comforted her. She was drawn to these simple folk who did things with their hands. If she were John her happiness would lie in helping them. She left the gardens and went about her shopping, and was served with what Lady Feygate described as “With affection.” She returned to No. 9 Tenterden Terrace, and opening the gate, was suddenly conscious of all those other windows, like prying, cold, unfriendly eyes. But windows should not be like that.

Sarah was busy in the kitchen, and suddenly conscious of feeling tired, she sat down in Sarah’s chair.

“I don’t think I have forgotten anything, Sarah.”

“No, m’am.”

Sarah gave her a mother’s look.

“The spring’s always rather trying, dearie.”

“Oh, it isn’t the weather, Sarah. Tell me, Sarah, do my neighbours ever ask you questions about me?”

Sarah crinkled up her broad nose.

“They’d like to, but I—— Who’s been worrying at you, dearie?”

“Oh, it’s nothing in particular. Miss Shallowbrass seems to think I neglect my duties.”

Sarah slapped a wad of pastry on the pastry-board.

“Oh, she! Don’t you worry about that old sandy cat’s claws. No kittens, and no Tom.”

“Really, Sarah!”

“That’s what the trouble is with them. Nothin’ real to do, but messin’ about with matters that don’t concern ’em. Skimmed milk, dearie, sour cheese, vinegar. Neglects y’ duties, indeed! Mangy old cats.”

Sarah could be Rabelaisian on occasions. And didn’t she know that Martha and Jane had been deputed by Nos. 10 and 8, to pump her about the privacies of No. 9? Sarah had spoken her mind about it. If Miss S. and Miss T. had not anything better to do than poke their noses into places where such noses were not wanted, let ’em keep a couple of Tomcats and amuse ’emselves. Yes, Tenterden Terrace understood that Mrs. Richmond’s Sarah could be a very rough and vulgar person.

But Lucy did tell her husband about Miss Shallowbrass’s attempt at interference.

“Do you think I ought to, John?”

“Ought what?”

“Teach in the Sunday School, and visit, and——”

“Bosh, my sweet! If you heard what some of the cottagers say about these good ladies——”

“Then it wouldn’t help the practice?”

Richmond came round the table and kissed her.

“Just walk about the place and smile. You’ll improve people more that way, if they want improving, than giving them rhubarb and soda and Gregory Powder. These pious ladies are good only as emetics.”

XVI

ABOUT this time John Richmond began to be perplexed by the inconsistencies of the sick. At St. Martha's diagnosis had been so satisfying and so final, and so according to the text-books, that Richmond had seen his Dark House rather like a human skeleton hanging on a bracket, and used for demonstration purposes. A rib was a rib, a tibia a tibia. But in this other world, where a pontifical wisdom did not function, and did not blandly accept and explain the contradictions of the post-mortem room, the academic skeleton had covered itself with mysterious flesh. It did not behave according to plan, or react to treatment as you expected it to do. It even played macabre tricks, and indulged in fantastic dances of death. It smirked at you: "How's that, young man? So clever, and yet you cannot catch me!"

Richmond, the young professional priest, presiding at the beginning and the end of things, was entering that dark, dim country where the sun of a serene confidence ceases from shining. He had not confessed it to himself, but he was conscious of being baffled and frustrated on many occasions. Was the fault his, or——? But of course, even if a case posed you, you could not reveal your inadequacy to the patient. Was not confidence in the physician essential? No, etiquette compelled you to keep a grave and solemn face, and use words—— Yes, words, long, comfortable phrases that might mean nothing. You paraded with the wig and the cane and the pouncet box of one of those old historic charlatans who had talked about vital fluids and emanations and what-not. Richmond could remember despising those old worthies with their hocus-pocus and their verbiage that was like a cloud of incense concealing ignorance and superstition. But now? What had Carter of Burnt Farm died of? He had written it down as Fibrosis of the Lungs and Syncope. Words. He had not known. He would dearly have liked to have cut into poor Carter, but the family had objected. And that strange case at Rose Cottages! The woman had gone to her grave nicely certified, but Richmond had felt dissatisfied. Of course you had to consider a patient's relatives, but for months he had been troubled about that case. It had occurred to him afterwards that the woman might have been poisoned. And he had not spotted it! For months afterwards any case of gastric disharmony roused in him an unpleasant feeling of suspicion.

Moreover, Burgoyne was capable of making the most distressful blunders and talking himself out of them, and you had to exercise tact with Burgoyne. As the senior partner he was somewhat touchy. He became pompous and huffy if you disagreed with him, and sometimes disagreement was a disagreeable

duty. Old Pontifex at Wickering was also a creator of professional tangles, and had to be rescued from them without loss of face. Sylvester Soames, their one rival in Southfleet, was of a different complexion. He was like a bland and gentle sheep who, somehow, had been born to perplexity and yet had the simple shrewdness to accept it *sub rosa*. Almost he winked at you behind the patient's back. He called in Richmond on occasions for a fraternal consultation. He would not call in Teddy, for Burgoyne was a sheep who butted his head at things, and baaed, and would not admit that the wall was tougher than his head. Such obtuse complacency made you look inferior. Dr. Soames said to himself: "After all, we can't work miracles. Why shouldn't a fellow be allowed to say 'I don't know'?" For years Dr. Sylvester Soames had been asking himself that question, and receiving no answer to it. The trouble was that an improperly educated public would not permit you to function as a professional negation.

Dr. Soames actually did blurt out this truth to Richmond in the private parlour of The Ship Inn. They had come down to consult, after examining the lessee of The Ship Inn who was a very sick man.

"Nothing in the water, Richmond. Can't feel the liver. Can't make head or tail of the chest. Fact is, we don't know."

Richmond gave a sharp glance at Dr. Sylvester Soames's sly yet simple face.

"Well, I'm not sure. Rather a confession of failure."

"Can you give it a name?"

"No."

Almost Dr. Soames sniggered.

"When you have been at this game as long as I have, Richmond——"

"Isn't it that we haven't been at it long enough?"

"Find out everything in time?"

"That's the urge, isn't it?"

"Well, what are we going to say about it? We have to say something. They don't pay us for saying we don't know."

"I'd like to look at the case again in a week. Would you object?"

"Only too glad, my dear fellow."

"There might be a mediastinal growth."

“That’s so. Dash these things that won’t be diagnosed. Well, shall we say we rather suspect something of that kind?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“You see, Tibbits is worried. He wants to know whether he’s for this world or the next. Lease has to be renewed next month.”

“Naturally. From the look of him I should say there will be no renewal.”

Dr. Soames stroked his beard.

“If only one had eyes that could look inside a chest or an abdomen.”

“Yes. But we may have them some day.”

Lucy had become wise as to her husband’s face, and could tell when he was case-absorbed or worried. He might forget to kiss her, or he would kiss her as though her face was not quite there. He would sit down at the table, and stare at the cruet-stand or at the bowl of flowers, or at his plate. He never discussed a case with her, and she asked him no questions, but she could divine in him sometimes a sense of frustration, a spirit that grappled almost angrily with an enemy whose slippery body would not be thrown. She could hold her tongue. She understood the assuaging balm of a silence that did not sit there as though waiting for the clouds to pass and the sun to shine. It was a positive silence, not a negative one; it did not challenge or make exactions. It was as though she walked hand in hand with him through the dark forest of a mood, and instilled into him a peace that might be beyond his comprehension. She created an atmosphere. It was that she wished him to come home and to her. Whether he realized as yet all that she gave him was neither here nor there. Men are strange, restless creatures. They may accept a cushion without asking themselves just how the cushion happened to come there, but a wise woman will continue to provide cushions. Why should she? Well, that is just the question of loving someone better than yourself, and if man is man, and not a chattering ape, he will not always remain blind to the hands that minister to him.

Yet there was one woman in Southfleet who had accepted the fact that you could not explain a mystery by spinning about it a cocoon of words. Lady Feygate was very near her end, and gently conscious of it, but her eyes could look at life with kindness and understanding. While Burgoyne shot partridges, Richmond came to see her. He had not been in the room a minute before she was conscious of a change in him. Here was the stern young Stoic who was finding his philosophy inadequate as a yard-stick for the measuring of the

mystery of things. He seemed less sure of himself, a man who listened anxiously to whisperings that would not be translated into phrases. He listened to her heart. It was a very hesitant heart, and she knew it. He frowned as he listened, and when he put his stethoscope aside his eyes appeared to avoid hers.

“Much as usual, I think, Dr. Richmond.”

“Yes, much as usual.”

“One doesn’t expect you to perform miracles.”

He looked at her sharply. Her eyes had a smile in them as though she were looking at a very young child.

“One doesn’t profess to.”

“But it irks you.”

He got up and walked to the window.

“How long have you been taking digitalis?”

“Oh, for months, I think. There is nothing else, is there?”

“No, not really.”

“Does that worry you?”

He stood looking down into the garden.

“Yes. I don’t want you to talk too much, Lady Feygate.”

There was silence for a moment. Then she said: “Some of us do understand your difficulties. One wants to be kind to one’s doctor.”

He swung round.

“Kind? No, I mustn’t talk to you about this.”

“Why not? It won’t tire me. A doctor may not be able to help a dying woman.”

“No.”

“But a dying woman may help the doctor.”

He was silent. Then, he took the chair beside her bed. His young face looked stern and overcast.

“It means that you know we are humbugs.”

“It means nothing of the kind. A man who is trying to do very difficult

things need never be a humbug.”

“But people——”

“Expect results. You have to give them words.”

“Yes, and stuff in bottles that can do no good. Lady Feygate, I sometimes feel that it would be better to lay bricks.”

“Oh no, my dear. That is limited. Healing is unlimited. The trouble is that the poor sick are so eager to be well.”

He put his head down between his hands.

“Yes, and we have to humbug them.”

“Humbug, as you call it, sometimes helps. Are you happy at home? You should be.”

He raised his head and gave her a startled look.

“At home? But, of course.”

“Cherish it. And think, my dear man, think of the things you have done well. There have been, and are cases——”

“Yes. Obvious cases. When one can use the knife.”

“Obvious to you to-day. May not some of the mysteries become obvious to-morrow.”

He sat in thought for a while, and she lay quietly breathing, and somehow feeling that the bitterness was passing from him. Presently, he stood up and walked slowly to the window.

“I suppose it takes years to make a garden such as that?”

“Yes, years. That is why gardeners always seem to be old.”

“And the young?”

“So impatient. Impatience is right, but don’t let it vex you too sorely.”

He came to the bed and took her hand.

“If other people understood, as you do.”

“Perhaps some of them understand more than you think, Dr. Richmond.”

When, a week or so later, Lady Feygate died in her sleep, Richmond was more hurt by her death than a doctor should be. The news came to him during

the surgery hour, and his first visit was paid to Martyr's Grange, a visit of courtesy and of homage. Would Sir Roger care to see him? The maid, who had been weeping, for her ladyship had been greatly loved, showed Richmond into the panelled dining-room with its Queen Anne furniture and beautiful Chinese lacquer. It was a gentle and gracious room, and as Richmond stood at the window and looked at the garden he seemed to feel a presence here. Yes, no one had understood him and his difficulties and his urges as the dead woman had understood him.

"Will you come up, Doctor."

He found Sir Roger Feygate sitting in the room where his wife lay dead. The curtains had not been drawn, and the sun shone in. On the pillow lay that serene face, hair parted, eyes closed. Somewhere in the room a clock was ticking.

Sir Roger was very calm.

"Sit down, Richmond. Yes, she loved the light."

"I am very sorry, sir. She was——"

"Yes. She is at peace. No more distress and breathlessness. The end for both of us."

Richmond was silent. What was there to say? He could understand that these two old people had so grown together that when one passed it meant the passing of both. And perhaps it would be better so.

"She was very good to me, sir."

"She was good to everybody, Richmond. The sort of goodness——"

"I know, sir, help, not interference. It was kind of you to let me see her."

"Have you ever seen anything more peaceful?"

"No."

"God is with her."

There were footsteps in the gallery. Someone knocked, ever so gently.

"Yes, Mary?"

"Someone for Dr. Richmond, sir. Urgent."

Sir Roger smiled at the doctor.

"The living need you, Richmond. She might have said that."

Richmond rose.

“Yes, it is the kind of thing she would have said. Good-bye, sir. I’m very grateful to you both.”

In the porch he found a thickset man waiting for him, a man with a red face and anxious eyes. “Thank God I’ve caught you, Doctor. I’ve ridden in from Eastness. Marsh Farm. My little gel is choking.”

“Swallowed something?”

“No, she’s had a bit of a sore throat for a day or two. But she can’t get her breath; she’s going blue. You’ll——”

“At once. I have the trap outside.”

“I’ll show you the way. For God’s sake be quick.”

“Right. Get on your horse.”

They hurried out together, and Richmond, swinging himself up into the dog-cart, gave Howell his orders. “Let her go. Urgent. Follow the man on the horse.”

Had the dead spoken? Did she know, as she lay there with closed eyes, that life had spoken in his ear. “Hurry. You are needed. There are miracles and miracles. Help.” The dog-cart swung round corners behind the cantering mare, following the farmer on his clattering cob. Elms spun by. They turned down a lane short of Eastness village, and three tall Lombardy poplars marked the place where Marsh Farm waited. A woman was at the door, a woman whose agonized hands were tangled up in her apron.

“Oh, Doctor, she’s dying.”

Richmond had grabbed the surgical bag. He had divined the nature of the case. He had scalpels, but no tube. The woman scrambled up the stairs ahead of him and into a room. A child was lying in a cot, the face dusky, lips blubbering, the sound of its breathing a kind of rattling anguish. Richmond took one look and knew. He had his coat off and his bag open.

“Send your husband up. I want a table, a small one will do. And stay outside.”

The man came up with a small deal table.

“Want me, Doctor?”

“Yes. Got the courage to hold your child’s head steady? It’s life and death. Mustn’t let her move.”

The man's eyes did not flinch.

"I'll do it, Doctor. Got to cut her?"

"Yes. Hold the head, as in a vice. I'll show you. Absolutely still."

"I'll do it, Doctor."

"I want a hairpin. Oh, here's one of your wife's. Now then."

He had the child on the table. He made the man sit at the end of the table with the child's head clasped between his countryman's hands.

"Hold the chin up and quite straight. Like that. I've got to open the windpipe. Don't look, if you don't want to."

"You can trust me, Doctor. She's the only one we've got."

"That's the spirit. Steady, absolutely steady."

The man watched, fascinated, jaw set, his big hands like two lumps of oak. He saw the knife dip into the child's throat with speed and precision. It seemed to go in and in, and then cut upwards. Blood oozed, bubbled. Richmond had a finger in the wound. He slipped the pin in, turned it so that the slit was held open. There was a kind of crowing sound as the air was sucked into the child's heaving chest.

"Got it. She can breathe now."

He and the father looked at each other. The man was as white as a turnip.

"Saved her, Doctor?"

"Hope so. Feeling all right?"

The father put his head down close to the child's.

"God, yes. Shall I hold on, Doctor?"

"Yes, for a while. I'm going to send the groom back for some tubes. I'm not leaving till I've got one in."

"Doctor, you're—— Tell the wife, will you."

"I will."

Richmond found the mother waiting at the foot of the stairs, and when he told her that the crisis was over and that the child might live, she caught his hand and kissed it. Richmond, embarrassed, patted her shoulder. "That's all right. Go up for a minute." He scribbled a note to Charlie Byng and sent Howell off with it, and returned to the bedroom. The child was breathing

through the wound that opened into the trachea, and bleeding hardly at all, and the little face had lost its duskiness. The man was still holding her head between his hands, the mother standing beside the table, staring and weeping.

“You’ve saved her for us, Doctor.”

Richmond felt the child’s pulse, and then taking a swab of wool, cleaned the blood away from the wound.

“I think so. Anyhow, she can breathe.”

“What was it, Doctor?”

“Diphtheria.”

Within an hour he had a tube in the child’s windpipe, and she was breathing steadily, and back in the cot. Richmond gave the mother her instructions; she would need help; the child must not be left for a moment, and the silver tube must be kept clean. A feather would do, and he showed her how to use it.

“I’ll drive over again this evening.”

The farmer followed him downstairs, a creature who had become dumb, but whose eyes were eloquent. He watched Richmond drive away, and then went upstairs to his wife who was sitting by the cot.

“That’s a fine young man, Mary. Take heart, my dear, I guess he’ll get her through.”

His wife lifted a mute face to him, and he kissed her.

Richmond was late for lunch, and Lucy, who was watching for him, saw him come up the path with an air that was almost jaunty. He was smiling at something and nothing, and Lucy jumped up and ran into the hall to warn Sarah.

“Master’s in, Sarah.”

She turned to the opening door, and saw her husband’s face suddenly strange and tender. He put out a hand and touched her hair.

“Mustn’t kiss you, my sweet.”

“No, John?”

“Bad case. Diphtheria. A kid.”

Her eyes were loving.

“Will you?”

“I hope so. Pretty near thing. Will Sarah forgive me?”

She put her hand in his.

“Oh yes, John; we’ll always forgive you.”

XVII

Sarah, duster in hand, was polishing the dining-room furniture, and happening to look out of the window she saw the little lawn, the bright beds of petunias and asters, the iron railings, the respectable formalism of Tenterden Square and in the distance the open estuary. It was one of those calm, vapoury days when the sea seems to swell like a big bubble of quicksilver. Children were playing in Tenterden Square, nursemaids sitting on the seats, sewing and chatting. Sarah's plain face blessed the scene. She discovered a smear on a window-pane and was removing it with the duster when two figures glided along the railings and met at Dr. Richmond's gate.

Sarah saw them in profile, two faces, poked close up to each other under black bonnets, two noses and mouths that nibbled, and Sarah glared at them. Had there been a cabbage-leaf between these nibbling mouths the picture would have been complete. She saw the two faces turned suddenly towards No. 9, and Sarah, let it be confessed, pulled a grimace at them. Nibbling old does who had never known the buck! Sarah could have told you exactly what they were saying.

She saw Miss Shallowbrass's bonnet give a jerk and a little indicative nod. Miss Thackray turned her head, and Sarah caught sight of her mistress's figure coming towards the gate of No. 9. The two ladies observed her, especially that most revealing part of her. Yes, there was no doubt about it. Mrs. Richmond was in an interesting condition.

The two ladies drew apart.

"Good morning, Mrs. Richmond."

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Richmond. We were just admiring your petunias."

Petunias indeed! Sarah made a clucking noise, and watched her mistress pass between those two black, corvine figures, and open the gate. Lucy's face had a "Get thee behind me" look, a shy, cold dignity. She had been so conscious of being stared at and appraised.

"Good morning. What a lovely day."

She passed through the gate, and behind her back Sarah saw the two bonnets come together. Old scrag! Sarah flicked her duster, as though to relieve her feelings, and hurried out into the hall. She opened the door for her

mistress.

“You come and put your feet up, dearie. You ought to leave me the shopping.”

“Thank you, Sarah. Going out does me good.”

There is the old saying that a cobbler’s children always go badly shod, and that a doctor never wastes physic and sympathy upon his wife or children. That’s as it may be, but when Richmond was sure that Lucy was with child, he was, perhaps, far more concerned about it than Tenterden Terrace would have considered necessary. As a very busy young man who had found home a place that gave him cushions, and better food than he had enjoyed at any time in his life, he had been taking Lucy and No. 9 rather for granted. Meals appeared as by magic; the fire was always bright, his clean linen put out for him, his socks always as they should be. That millions of women had borne children all through the ages was a mere historical fact, but when a particular woman was obeying nature the problem became poignantly personal. Richmond was startled by the realization of how profoundly fond he was of Lucy. He was never a man who loved easily, and he was to discover as the years went on that the people who matter in your life can be counted on the fingers of your hand. Moreover, he was a doctor, alive to all the disasters, possible and almost impossible, that can occur in such a crisis, and to Richmond all things were possible. Lucy might—— But that was absurd. His wife was a very healthy young woman.

But he was very tender to Lucy. There are peaks and hollows, exaltations and depressions in all intimate human relationships, and if there was to be a time when John Richmond was to make his wife desperately unhappy, this was a period in their lives when he made her conscious of his love for her. Moreover, there were other problems. Should a doctor deal with a patient who was too dear to him? Yes, if he was nothing but ice, one of those dreadfully impartial people who are always right, and who are detested by their more frail fellows. Over one of the first winter fires, and with his arm round his wife, he talked the problem over with her.

“I would rather you had someone in.”

He found that she agreed with him. She was fastidious, and at the same time she was a little afraid.

“Will it have to be Dr. Burgoyne?”

Burgoyne! The craftsman and lover in Richmond shuddered at the idea. Trust such a crisis to Burgoyne?

“I think not. There is Roper of Hayleigh. A very sound man. You’ve met him?”

“Yes, I think I should like Dr. Roper. But won’t it be rather awkward.”

It would be, though Richmond did not admit it. The only excuse he could think of was the suggestion that someone outside the firm should attend in a case like this.

“I’ll have a talk with Burgoyne.”

“I’m afraid he will be hurt, John.”

He was.

Richmond waited for one of those mellow occasions, when, after a day with the hounds, Burgoyne came back mud-splashed and happy, and eager to give anybody who would listen to him a picturesque account of his prowess. “In at the death, my lad. Best run we have had this season. Found in Hart’s Wood, and went hell for leather over Asher’s Farm. Splendid scent. Old Tribute had a devil of a spill at Archer’s Brook. The mare took me over like a bird. But then, I’ve got hands, my lad, and the mare and I take a jump like one.” Burgoyne stood straddling in front of the fire, with a glass of hot brandy and water. He was in a heroic mood.

“You ought to take a run with ’em, some day, John. Tra-la! What music! A man’s game, my lad. No funkng your fences. What! Not up to it? Nonsense. We all have a spill or two. *Verbum sap.*”

The occasion seemed propitious, and when Teddy had displayed himself as the fearless horseman, and was warm with liquor, Richmond seized his chance.

“Have you a minute to spare?”

“Of course, my dear fellow.”

“A private matter. Lucy is expecting a child. I don’t know whether you _____”

Burgoyne winked at him.

“My dear fellow, every old woman in the place knows that.”

“I suppose they do. But I have been thinking of the accouchement. I have a feeling that someone outside the firm should attend her. A case like this is rather too intimate.”

Burgoyne stood with his glass half raised, staring.

“An outsider?”

“Well, yes. I thought of asking Roper. He is a very sound man.”

Burgoyne finished his brandy, turned, placed the glass on the mantelpiece, and stuffed his hands into his breeches pockets.

“I don’t call this a very friendly gesture, Richmond. Damn it, man——”

“I’m sorry.”

“I presumed, and may I say very naturally so, that I should attend your wife. Damn it, man, what’s the assumption? I suppose you are not suggesting ——?”

Richmond was pale but determined.

“My feeling is, sir, that it would be better that neither you nor I—— What I mean is, in so very personal a matter——”

He saw that Burgoyne was deeply offended.

“I don’t see it in that way at all, Richmond.”

“I’m sorry. What if I get Davidson to come back? He might.”

“No. Have Roper in by all means. I certainly don’t wish to interfere. No, sir, but—— Well, well, there’s a bath waiting for me.”

And Burgoyne walked out of the room with the casual and flushed dignity of a man who considered himself slighted, but he was far too stately a person to lose his seat in the saddle.

Burgoyne never quite forgave him. It was one of those affronts that a vain man nurses in secret, for Burgoyne knew his Southfleet better than Richmond did. The fact that Dr. Roper had been brought in to attend Mrs. Richmond in her first confinement would be commented on by all the ladies, and unflattering conclusions drawn. Yet, had both partners been able to foresee the future, they would have known that a certain incident would have rendered Burgoyne’s presence beside Mrs. Richmond’s bed impossible, and that the slurs upon dear Teddy might never have been cast.

That was a very busy winter, so busy that though two men might sometimes grow a little short with each other, active disagreement was impracticable. Richmond was kept out at all hours, and had his nose so close to the grindstone that moods of subtle self-analysis were not encouraged. Moreover, he had successes to his credit. He set an eminent squire’s broken leg, much to that gentleman’s comfort and satisfaction. He operated

successfully on a strangulated hernia, tracheotomised two diphtheritic children and saved them both, and rescued a cottager's wife when a procrastinating village doctor was allowing her to die in labour. Lady Feygate's words were with him during that winter. Moreover, he was thinking of Lucy as he had never expected to think of any living creature.

Neither of them attended the Burgoyne Christmas party at The Royal George, for Richmond was too busy, and his wife cherishing her figure. Miss Shallowbrass and Mrs. Borrowdale confronted each other as Lemon and Orange, and once again Miss Shallowbrass was worsted. Two children were dreadfully sick after the party, and Richmond was called on to comfort their little tummies, for both mothers were shy of summoning Dr. Burgoyne when it was his party and its ices that had produced such disaster.

Lucy was expecting her child early in March. Dr. Roper drove into Southfleet every fortnight to visit her, for Dr. Roper believed in knowing a patient, and letting a patient know him. There was more in healing than in peddling pills over a counter, and Dr. Roper and Lucy became firm friends. He was a silent, thickset man with a short brown beard, and eyes that were the eyes of a countryman, steadfast in seeing and peculiarly kind. His strength was phenomenal, and his courage as great as his strength. He had been known to get under a wagon that had bogged itself in a muddy lane, with the carter's leg trapped under one of the wheels, and lift it with his broad back. Like many very strong men he was gentle. He wrote poetry, and was boyishly naïve about it. The privileged few were allowed to read his verses. He brought Lucy an Ode to a Snowdrop, and left it deprecatingly on the drawing-room table.

"Like you to read it, Mrs. Richmond."

Lucy read it when he had gone, and was touched and surprised by its simplicity and rightness. Dr. Roper could write without floweriness about a flower. His snowdrop was just a snowdrop, not a Burgoyne tuber-rose.

"Nothing to worry about, my dear. You are a very healthy young woman."

He thought her much more than that, and sometimes he wondered whether John Richmond realized how blessed a trick life had played upon him in giving him such a mate. There was no question about John Richmond's cleverness, but cleverness can be the devil unless you ride it like a mettlesome horse. There is all the difference in the world between being ambitious for yourself and being ambitious for your work. Probably, his patients never suspected that Dr. Roper had passed through a period in his life when a fierce restlessness had raged in him, and almost he had gone berserker like one of his northern forebears. He had fought himself and the seething, rebellious adventure-spirit,

mastered it, tamed it and put it to other uses. He had learnt that a man need not run all over the world with a gun in order to find wild beasts to be killed and strange women to be played with. Why spill your urge like a fool in his cups, when the thing can be turned like water into a conduit and put to other uses, the quenching of thirst, the cleansing of humanity's wounds?

Lucy would lie on the sofa in the window, and watch other people's children bowling their hoops round Tenterden Square. The smack of the sticks on the iron rungs irritated Miss Shallowbrass, but to Lucy it was music. She bore life in her, and she was happy in looking at life and in dreaming about it. That which was in her sustained her, and gave to her as it gives to many women a sense of rightness and fulfilment and serenity and that in spite of physical discomfort.

Did she want a boy? Yes, she did, and Dr. Roper could tell her that in his experience nearly all women asked for their first-born to be male. He himself had a placid, pretty wife, and five children, and in Hayleigh the Roper boys were known as bold and mischievous young buccaneers. Their father whacked them regularly and solemnly and would laugh behind their backs, and since they adored him, they took these whackings with pride. They even boasted about it—"Dad could lay it on!" The Roper children would have thought a father thin beer had he been a poor, preachy person who gave you sentimental toffee to suck. Young Bob Roper, who knew that he could lick any boy of his age in the village, was sure that his father could lick any man in the whole county.

Lucy would sometimes wish that Burgoyne could be translated into Roper.

Life would be easier for John. She was beginning to realize that her husband was being overworked. He would come in at the end of a heavy morning, and almost she could feel him putting off that tense, professional mask for the face of the good comrade. It was like pulling up a blind with a click, and sometimes the blind stuck half-way up. He would bend down and kiss her, and she would show him a bright face and happy eyes. A tired man should not be served with trouble when he came home to be refreshed.

She did say to him one evening before the fire: "I wish Dr. Roper were with you instead of Burgoyne."

"Oh, Burgoyne might be worse."

"You get far too much of the work, John."

"At my age one is expected to. It is better than being a deadhead."

She reached for his hand.

“Yes, but won’t it be more and more so? If people want you, they go on wanting you more and more.”

“I suppose that’s success.”

“You’ll always have that, John, but what I feel is that it isn’t fair. I’m not thinking of the money, but of better things.”

“What things?”

“Oh, some time to yourself, play, books, holidays.”

He looked at her dim face lit by the firelight.

“And you? Is it a little hard on you, Lucy?”

“My dear, I wasn’t thinking so much of that. You have made me very happy.”

He bent down and kissed her.

“I suppose some men get more than they deserve.”

Busy though the practice was, Burgoyne had to have his hunting. Richmond saw him ride off on that February morning in his pink coat and white breeches, top-boots and shining hat. It was one of those days when a doctor looks at his visiting list, and wondering how he will get to the end of it, prays that no emergency will intervene, yet Richmond had just completed his third visit, and was climbing into the dog-cart beside old Howell, when the surgery boy came running round the corner of Ashburnham Road. He was a fat boy, with pink cheeks and bulging blue eyes, and he was breathless.

The dog-cart was moving off, and the boy gave tongue.

“Hi, hi, Doctor, there’s bin a h’ accident.”

His aspirates were here, there and everywhere, and Richmond looked back as the groom stopped the horse.

“What’s the matter, Hopkins?”

“Dr. Burgoyne, sir. Fell off ’is ’orse.”

“Where?”

“Dunno, sir. They’ve brought him back in Chigwell’s ’and-cart. They think ’e’s broke his leg.”

“Prospect House?”

“Yessir.”

Richmond told Howell to turn the horse and to drive back to Prospect House. Here was a nice complication, a broken bone to set, if nothing worse, and Burgoyne out of action for six weeks! The boy hung on to the back of the dog-cart, perched on the step and thoroughly enjoying the adventure. The dog-cart swung into the High Street, and as it neared The Royal George, Richmond saw a small crowd grouped on the pavement. Also, he became aware of an unusual sound, a kind of bellowing as of some strong and frightened animal in pain. Surely, it could not be Burgoyne? But Burgoyne it was, shouting and swearing, and with such bravura that his cries could be heard through the closed window, and half-way up the street.

Richmond was out of the dog-cart and across the pavement in three strides. That unseemly hubbub, and the half-amused, half-shocked faces of the people outside the house whipped him to sudden anger. This was a pleasant example of fortitude, the town’s senior practitioner howling like a spoilt child who had had a tumble and blooded a knee. Richmond passed two scared servants on the stairs. He had no need to be directed. Teddy’s shouts and groans reverberated through the house, and Richmond, opening the front-bedroom door, saw Burgoyne spread upon the bed, with his wife trying to dab his forehead with eau-de-Cologne.

Burgoyne pushed her away.

“Don’t touch me! By God, I——! Oh, there you are, my dear fellah. Ow—ow—oi! Oh, the pain! Believe my back’s broken. Ow—ooch! God damn the——! Get me a dose, Richmond. The pain! Awful! I can’t be touched till I’ve had something to soothe it.”

Richmond took a quick look at him. Burgoyne’s left leg was lying at a strange angle, and there was blood on the white breeches.

“Had a spill?”

“Don’t ask questions, man. Ow—oo, do something.”

Poor Mrs. Burgoyne had burst into tears, and Richmond led her to the door. He dashed downstairs and made for the surgery, and calling to Charlie Byng, collected scissors, bandages, wool.

“Shall want you, Charlie. Mix up a good strong draught of Haust Opii. Follow me up. Any splints padded? No. Well, we will do it upstairs. Looks like a broken leg. Yes, you’ll have to do some holding, I think. God, I wish he wouldn’t shout like that. He’ll have half the town in the street.”

The setting of Burgoyne's leg was a dreadful business. When Richmond had cut away the boots and breeches, he found no more than a simple fracture of both bones, and one or two abrasions that had ceased to bleed. Burgoyne had gulped down his opiate, and lay watching Richmond and Byng padding splints. He was quiet for the moment. There was some displacement of the bones, and Richmond was leaving the further undressing of Burgoyne until this fracture was set and splinted.

"Now, then. I'm afraid it is going to hurt a little."

Burgoyne closed his eyes, and Charlie Byng, sitting sideways on the bed, steadied the knee and thigh, while Richmond grasped ankle and foot, and proceeded to pull on the injured leg. The tension had brought the bones into line, and Richmond was ready for the back-splint when Burgoyne set up a sudden howling, and with his free leg lashed out at the dispenser.

"Let go. I can't stand it. Give me chloroform."

"Be quiet, man."

"Let go, damn you!"

Richmond gave Byng a meaning look.

"Slip the splint under. Sit on that other leg. For God's sake be quiet, Burgoyne. I've got the bones in place. You'll only make things worse."

"I can't."

"All right, howl, but keep still."

Richmond got the leg strapped to the padded back-splint, while Byng controlled that other unruly member, and Burgoyne groaned and shouted. But he ceased from struggling. Byng supported the back-splint, while Richmond strapped the side-splints in place.

"That's better. Worst over."

Burgoyne lay and moaned.

"Thank God, my dear fellah. Get me a drop of brandy, Charles. I feel so faint."

It took them another half-hour to get the rest of Burgoyne's clothes off him, and to slip on a night-shirt, pack the splinted leg, and improvise a cage to take the weight of the bedclothes. Mrs. Burgoyne was re-admitted to fuss over and comfort her wounded hero. Richmond, who had used the Burgoyne basin for the washing, went to the window while drying his hands. The room was unbearably stuffy, and Richmond was about to open the window when he saw

a little crowd of children on the pavement outside The Royal George. They were irreverent and impudent urchins, but Richmond opened the window at the top. He was seen and all those little faces were lifted towards him. One boy in knickers and a ragged blue jersey was carrying a large and battered biscuit tin. He held an iron hoop-stick in his right hand, and inserting the stick into the tin he rattled out a metallic tattoo.

Richmond heard a shout from the bed.

“Who’s making that damned noise?”

“A small boy.”

“Damn it, that’s the little scoundrel who made my horse shy. Boy in a blue jersey?”

“Yes.”

“Go and collar him, my dear fellah. Hand him over to the police. I’ll have the little brute birched.”

Richmond smiled and went downstairs, but when he appeared at the door of Prospect House the little crowd of mischief fled, the boy with the tin hammering it as he ran. Richmond let them go. He had no intention of adding a final act to this most unseemly stage-play by chasing those children up Southfleet High Street. Moreover, he had a whole day’s work before him, with one precious hour already surrendered to fate.

But that was not the end of the business. Two hours later Howell was driving Dr. Richmond up the Pier Hill when he saw that a small crowd had collected again outside Prospect House. He could hear the voice of Burgoyne once more uplifted like the voice of a dog baying the moon. Charlie Byng was standing at the door of Prospect House, and when he saw the dog-cart, he came forward to meet it. There was disgust on Byng’s face. His drooping moustache was both apologetic and contemptuous.

“Pulled all the splints off.”

“What!”

“And sent his groom for Dr. Roper.”

Richmond, very conscious of the ironic faces of the idlers on the pavement, left the dog-cart and disappeared into Prospect House. What an exhibition! Would any soul in Southfleet retain any respect for the firm’s senior partner after this display of flabbiness and hysteria? Richmond was angry. Burgoyne had pulled off the splints and sent for Roper, had he! And how much childish

spite had inspired this silly act? Burgoyne had been deprived of the privilege of attending at Mrs. Richmond's accouchement, and perhaps this was his retort.

He opened Burgoyne's door and entered. Burgoyne was alone, for his wife had fled. The clothes were half off the bed. The back-splint lay by the fire-place, one side splint by the window, the other half under a chest of drawers. It was obvious to Richmond that Burgoyne had torn them off in a childish rage and flung them right and left.

"You damned fool," said Richmond.

Burgoyne blazed at him.

"You're the damned fool. Don't know how to set a fracture."

"Is that so?"

"Strapped me up too tight. Had to tear the damned things off."

"So I see."

"I've sent for Roper. He knows how to——"

Richmond went and closed the window.

"Better have that shut. The town is rather too interested in your squeals, Burgoyne."

"Squeals! What the devil do you mean by that?"

Richmond, having slipped the window-catch, walked back towards the door. He paused there, looking grimly down at his partner's turgid face.

"I have known a child take its medicine better. If you will excuse me, Burgoyne, I have most of the day's work still waiting for me. I'll leave you to Roper."

So, as Richmond had suspected, Burgoyne's ordeal had to be repeated, for in shedding his splints he had unset the fracture, and the displaced bones had to be pulled into line. Roper, who had met Richmond on the road, and consulted with him out of earshot of their respective grooms, was less gentle with Burgoyne than Richmond had been. When Teddy threatened to make an uproar, Roper tossed him a towel.

"Stuff that in your mouth, man. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Incontestably, it was not Burgoyne's Homeric day.

XVIII

Lucy was in pain. It was to her a new pain, and infinitely significant. She had sent Sarah to warn Nurse Garner, but when her husband returned to No. 9 Tenterden Terrace, half an hour late for lunch, and wearing his east-wind face, she rose from the sofa and said never a word to him of her pain.

Richmond rang the bell, almost like a man ringing it to ease his temper, but when Sarah came in with the tray, her mistress made a sign to her behind Dr. Richmond's back. Sarah understood the sign, but she was not ready to agree that when a man was responsible for one of nature's crises he should be spared all worry and suspense.

Richmond sat down at the head of the table.

"Better carve for us, Sarah."

"Yessir."

"I have to be out again at two."

There was silence while Sarah carved for them and presented them with the vegetable dishes, but when she had closed the door, Mrs. Richmond, who had no great appetite for the food before her, made some show of eating.

"One of Burgoyne's hunting days, John?"

Richmond was eating to save time, and was so absorbed in his own affairs that he scarcely looked at his wife.

"Burgoyne won't hunt again this season."

"Oh?"

"By the way, Roper's coming in to see you after tea. He is looking after Teddy."

Richmond pushed his chair back, and went to help himself to more meat and vegetables.

"Have some more?"

"No thank you, John."

"Must feed up, you know."

He did not glance at her plate, and she let half a minute go by before she asked the obvious question.

“Is Burgoyne ill?”

“Broken his leg.”

“Oh, John, that means you——”

“Yes, solus for six weeks.”

“But why is Dr. Roper——?”

He got up to ring the bell.

“Burgoyne’s been behaving like a thrice-spoilt child. Tell you in a minute.”

He half-filled a pipe while Sarah was changing the plates and introducing the pudding. He might be able to snatch five minutes solace from that pipe. He needed it. And when Sarah had gone, he gave her an account of the morning’s sensation, and of Burgoyne’s deplorable exhibition on the field of battle. She too was in pain, but she listened. Well, Dr. Roper was coming to see her, so there was no need for her to tell her husband. Poor John! She was moved to compassion whenever he came home to her with that east-wind face. And poor Teddy! To fail so atrociously under the eyes of other men, and to behave like a squawling urchin! Being in pain, she could be a little sorry for poor Edward Burgoyne. Perhaps he had never been hurt before, and being a dramatic person could not help staging a scene, even in his bed.

“Perhaps it hurt rather terribly, dear.”

“Hurt! Of course it hurt! But if a man can’t stand some pain! When I saw those splints thrown about the room I called him a damned fool.”

She winced, but he did not notice it. He was up and lighting his pipe.

“Yes, silly spiteful ass. Howling for Roper. Byng told me that Roper made him howl.”

“Yes, dear.”

He glanced at her plate.

“You haven’t eaten your pudding.”

“Not very hungry, John.”

“Afraid I must be off again in three minutes. I have a few prescriptions to write.”

At two o’clock old Howell and the dog-cart reappeared like fate in a top-hat and silver buttoned blue overcoat. Lucy was coming to have a profound respect for this old soldier, who, laconic, imperturbable, and clean tempered,

faced long hours and exposure, and was late never. She heard her husband, in the hall. He said good-bye to her and put on his coat at the same moment, and he did both in the doorway. Time had to be saved. He was too busy to kiss her or to look at her with eyes that should have seen that she was both a patient and a wife.

“May get tea out. Just depends. Expect me when you see me.”

She smiled across the room at him.

“Yes, John.”

She watched him drive away, and suddenly she was conscious of that pain, an urgent, prophetic spasm. Sarah was in the doorway, and looking at her, and Sarah saw what Richmond had not seen.

“You come to bed, dearie.”

“Yes, Sarah, I will.”

“Nurse will be here any moment. I suppose the doctor knows?”

“Dr. Roper is coming later.”

“I don’t mean ’im,” said Sarah.

“No, Dr. Richmond doesn’t know.”

“You mean you didn’t tell him?”

“No, Sarah. He has so much to worry him.”

Sarah was in a mood for candour.

“You’ll spoil that man,” and she put her arm round her mistress and helped her up the stairs.

The dog-cart lamps were alight when Howell drove back down Southfleet High Street after a long country round. Richmond was tired and tense. He found a dozen or so club-patients waiting for him, and a Charlie Byng who kept throwing little cautious glances at the doctor as he stood at the high desk and wrote up the day-book. Yes, Dr. Richmond was a cool customer, attending grimly to business while his wife was in the throes of her first labour.

“Dr. Roper’s round there, sir. He left word that——”

“Where?”

“At your house.”

“What?”

Richmond, who had been bending over the desk, straightened and turned upon Charles Byng as though the dispenser had lapsed into some impertinent familiarity.

“Mrs. Richmond is——”

Richmond seemed to be about to say something. Byng saw his face go all funny, and though he turned again to the desk, he made no further entries in the day-book. He just stared at it as though he were looking through it into other profundities.

“You might deal with the crowd out there, Charles. You can, you know. I’ll be back.”

“I can manage, sir. Repeats, most of them.”

Richmond picked up his hat from the broad window-sill and went out into the night, and Byng stroked his drooping moustache, nodded in a significant and friendly sort of way at a large stock-bottle, and supposed that these affairs were rather sudden, and sometimes very strangely so.

Dr. Roper was sitting in front of Richmond’s fire, reading the paper, and taking his ease, for he too had had a heavy day. He had driven and ridden in twice from Hayleigh, and dealt with his own practice as well as with Burgoyne. But Roper, both in temperament and physique was a very singular person, and brother to any grizzled shepherd in the lambing season, calm, devoted, tireless. So, when the young husband came hurrying in and Roper had looked at his face, this shepherd of the sick was wise as to the way youth was feeling. He rustled the paper at John.

“Read the first leader, Richmond, on General Gordon?”

No, Richmond had not. He had shut the door, and was standing beside Roper’s chair, and staring at the fire.

“Things are going very nicely.”

“When did the pains begin?”

“Some time this morning, so Sarah tells me. Nurse is with her.”

“Can I go and see her?”

“Better not. Some women prefer——”

Richmond was silent with the silence of man deeply concerned in self-questionings, and Roper, placidly turning the paper and making a very exact business of keeping it folded in its proper creases, left Richmond to finish the sentence and draw his own inference therefrom.

“Roper.”

“Yes, my lad.”

“She did not tell me.”

Dr. Roper appeared to have discovered a paragraph of peculiar interest at the top of the right-hand page.

“Didn’t she? Oh well, she’s not one of the whimperers.”

“But I didn’t——”

He did not complete that sentence, and Dr. Roper, who was something of a specialist in unfinished sentences, went on reading his paper.

“No need to worry. Everything is normal.”

“Good. I’m glad you are here. I’ll be getting back. Club-patients.”

“Seen Burgoyne?”

“No.”

“I shouldn’t. Bad case of sulks. He’ll be tra-laing again in a week or so.”

Richmond had moved round the back of Roper’s chair to his wife’s bureau that stood in a corner. It was open, and he knelt at it, and taking a sheet of note-paper, wrote three words on it—“I love you.” Folding the paper, he slipped it into an envelope, and carried it to Roper.

“Will you give her this. It won’t upset her. You can read it if you want to.”

Roper tucked the envelope into his breast-pocket.

“She shall have it next time I go up.”

“Thanks, Roper. You’ll stay, won’t you? We can manage a bed.”

Roper turned his big brown head and smiled at him.

“I shall be here till the happy conclusion. This chair will do for me, John.”

Richmond walked to the door. His face was as soft as the face of a woman.

“You won’t forget that envelope?”

“No, John, I won’t forget it.”

Richmond crossed Tenterden Square, and the roadway and stretch of turf beyond it, and for fully a minute he stood looking out across the estuary

towards the sea. There were lights out yonder, a big red eye blinking on the pier's head, and the lights of ships that were passing in the night. He was conscious of a sudden strange loneliness, a child's urge to run for comfort to its mother. And who was mother? Remembering the three words that he had written for Lucy, he was glad of those words, while realizing, with passionate self-reproach, that the one creature in the world to whom he would run when in trouble was denied him for the moment. Good God, how much less selfish she was than he! That should not be forgotten, and feeling calmed and strengthened he walked back to Prospect House where some of the old people might still be waiting for him. After all, the greater courage lay in remembering that you owed service to others.

Richmond had not been out of the house five minutes when Dr. Roper put his paper aside, and with that envelope in his hand, climbed the stairs to the landing. A little, quiet moaning came from Lucy's room, and Dr. Roper stood there, patiently waiting until the spasm had passed. He knocked, and into Nurse Garner's hand he thrust the letter.

"Give her that to read."

The door closed, and Roper went softly down the stairs and back to the fire and his paper. What had Richmond written to his wife? Some simple thing that mattered, as only simple and lovely things matter at such a time?

Lucy was holding up the sheet to the light.

"I love you."

Her face had a sudden warmth. There were things that transcended pain, even made pain beautiful. She folded up the sheet, and tucked it under her pillow.

Nurse Garner looked at her.

"Like some scent, my dear?"

"No, nothing, nurse. I'm quite happy."

Richmond passed the night on the sofa, or wandering about the lower part of the house. It was such a silent house, and Lucy's confrontation of pain so different from Burgoyne's that Richmond wondered whether the pangs of child-bearing were not exaggerated by sentiment. He hoped so, now that the paternal culpability was his, and when he remembered those occasional and desperate cases when nature was frustrated. He did not belong to that hearty, selfish sect, which, in glorifying maleness, asserts that all women are

humbugs, and that the bearing of children is as pleasant to them as the visits of the male.

Roper came downstairs about two in the morning.

“Going well, John. Why not go to bed? You have a long day to-morrow.”

But Richmond would not go to bed. He was stubbornly inspired to watch and wait until Lucy was delivered and at peace. To-morrow could look after itself. And something primitive and actual in him was longing to hear those first petulant little squeals.

“All right. Sit up and be hanged to you. I don’t think it will be long now.”

“Is she——?”

“Of course she is. I have never known a woman come through it better, and help herself and everybody.”

“She looks such a fragile thing, Roper.”

“My lad, she’s got God’s good stuff in her. Be thankful.”

Richmond was sitting at the foot of the stairs, listening to a faint, anguished outcry. He felt compelled to listen. His own bowels were moved by spasms of compassion.

No, it must not happen again. He was damned if it should happen again.

Sudden stillness. What was that? Did it mean? He stood up and sat down again. And then he heard a little whimpering sound, and Roper’s deep voice; it was almost a laughing voice. Damn Roper! The door opened, and a shaft of light shot across the landing, and those little whimperings became lusty squawls.

“Dr. Richmond.”

It was Nurse Garner’s voice, and Richmond stood up.

“Yes.”

“It’s a boy.”

“Is everything——?”

“Can’t you hear how right everything is?”

“Give her my love, nurse, and blessings.”

Do savages leap and shout when such things happen? Richmond opened the front door, stood a moment in the cool night air, and then took the garden gate in one leap as an athlete takes a hurdle. He ran three times round Tenterden Square, and not delicately so, but with ecstasy of the sprinter that leaves him blind and breathless at the tape. In fact, he came near to charging into a young police constable who turned a corner just as Richmond reached it.

“ ‘Allo, what’s on?”

The constable made a grab at Richmond. Assuredly, a fellow who pelted round in the dark like this had been up to no good?

“All right, officer, all right.”

“Oh, it’s you, sir! I’m sorry.”

Richmond laughed. The man had been a patient of his.

“Shake hands, Bridger. I’ve got a son.”

“I’m very glad, sir.”

And solemnly they shook hands.

XIX

Why life should persuade a man to remember certain trivial incidents and to forget matters which might have been considered singular, is a problem for the wise. Balaam's ass may confound the prophets, but from his son's christening Richmond was to carry away two seemingly unrelated recollections, the madonna look on his young wife's face, and the fact that Dr. Creavy's surplice needed washing. The child was christened Charles Lovelace, though why Lucy had chosen the Lovelace was beyond Richmond's understanding. A surprisingly large number of people attended the ceremony, and the gathering was also surprising in its individual components. Sir Hector and Lady Neath were present; so was Sir Roger Feygate, faded and very old; Mrs. Creavy, spectacled and symbolic and looking as though she was aware of the fact that her husband had forgotten to send his surplice to the wash. Tenterden Terrace attended, which was unexpected yet suggestive. Charles Byng, and Howell were there. Sarah and Nurse Garner were Lucy's spiritual supporters. Dr. Roper was a godfather, Lady Neath and Mrs. Cade, the child's godmothers. Charles Lovelace set up a healthy squawling when the cold water wetted his small face, and good Dr. Creavy, though accustomed to such ceremonial noises, blinked and looked reproved.

It was a soft, spring day, and when the ceremony was over, quite a number of ladies gathered round Lucy and her first-born outside the porch. They peered and made ingratiating noises, and said nice things about Charles Lovelace which were of no interest to him. He bobbed and blinked in the April sunlight and allowed Lady Neath to kiss him, but when Miss Shallowbrass poked her face close to his and made a kind of clucking noise, he resented the intrusion. He howled, and both baronets laughed, which was unseemly of them. Old Howell, in livery and looking very polished, was holding open the door of the brougham. Richmond, feeling somewhat like an interested supernumerary, watched Sarah take the child while Lucy entered the brougham. His wife held out her hands for him.

Richmond heard someone say "How sweet!"

Was it? He supposed that it was.

Dr. Richmond drove home with his wife and son, and then resumed the day's work. Southfleet had not changed its familiar outlines, the sea was the sea, the pier the pier, and the jumble of old houses in the old town becoming so familiar that almost they had ceased from being individual. Nor did Dr.

Richmond realize that a new entity had arrived in the little town, a creature that was his and yet not his, a small boy who would become Charlie to everybody, and as singular and as significant as Richmond himself. It did not occur to him that he might enter into competition with his small son. Nor did he realize that Charles Lovelace not only dated him, but gave him a more subtle and serious standing in the place. He had become more intimately a member of the community. No longer was he the strange, new young man from London, but a husband and a father, and a familiar figure in the town. Convention had fastened upon him other bonds. More was expected of him; less might be forgiven. Young bachelors may be allowed some whimsies, but Dr. John Richmond was a responsible and a public person.

To begin with he was a little sentimental about his son, and about his son's mother. No. 9 Tenterden Terrace had become a different house. Ethel had arrived, and a pram. Ethel was the child's nurse, a cheerful, blonde, bouncing girl with a voice that could not be concealed. The little spare-room had become the nursery. Moreover, Dr. Richmond did not realize that Southfleet's attitude to his wife had undergone a remarkable transformation. Almost he and Lucy had changed places. Even Tenterden Terrace and its old ladies appeared to have experienced a change of heart. Miss Thackray would stop the Richmond pram and make cooing and seductive noises to Charles Lovelace. Even the Misses Pinhook would allow their young ladies to gather round little Charles's chariot, and exercise maiden sentiment. Charles was a person, oh, very much a person. Bibs and nappies and bottles were the insignia of the new order. Also, Mrs. Richmond had become a person, a figure of sentiment and of sweetness, the pretty and proud young mother. Evidently she was predestined for such a pedestal. She capped the conventions. She could be seen in the garden or in Tenterden Square, a young madonna shining upon her first-born. Severe ladies relented. That small piece of infantile flesh had confounded apple trees and serpents. The Richmond pram became an institution, and Lucy an admirable young mother who was devoted to her child. Her new world revolved about that symbol. Her new world accepted her and was inclined to turn its critical faculties upon the father, and to ask for the assurance that he was as beautifully devoted to his wife.

Unquestionably, Dr. Richmond was being overworked. An uncle had left Mrs. Burgoyne some twenty thousand pounds, and Teddy, who persisted in limping about for months on a perfectly good leg, was not improved by his wife's inheritance. He was less and less inclined to exert himself. He visited certain lady patients, and collected sympathy from the sex, and liked to be

fussed over. "I shall never get on a horse again." Tragic confession! All gentle women could see that dear Dr. Burgoyne was feeling his leg. And there was no one to pull it.

"I think I shall have to retire, my dear fellow."

Richmond exercised patience. He might have retorted: "Damn it, I wish you would. You get three quarters of the money, and do a quarter of the work." But in the event of his retirement Richmond would be faced with the problem of buying Burgoyne's share of the practice, or of finding a new partner. Inevitably as you might hate any person occupying a hotel bedroom immediately above your head, the devil you know may be preferable to the devil you did not know. Burgoyne might stump about in his boots and sing and cause floorboards to creak just when you were concentrating upon sleep, but the new fellow might be worse. Richmond exercised patience.

Moreover, he had a feeling that Teddy had not forgiven him for that scene in the Prospect House bedroom. Does a very vain man ever forget that he has been called a damned fool? And Richmond was suspecting that there were other petulances which Burgoyne could not wear in his buttonhole. Southfleet was accepting the younger man. Prominent patients were displaying a tentative preference.

"Oh, Dr. Burgoyne, you ought to rest that leg. We are quite willing to see Dr. Richmond."

No doubt Dr. Burgoyne was not insensitive to the implications of such examples of self-denial. This young pup was fawning his way in. Damn it, people so soon forgot all that you had done for them! Burgoyne could not wear this rank flower in his buttonhole, or sing tra-la over a junior partner's conquests. He could express his secret feeling of offence by retiring from a little world that did not appreciate him. Perhaps, the dreadful threat would cause Southfleet to reflect and to cry in chorus: "Oh, Dr. Burgoyne, you cannot mean to desert us?" The cry, if it was uttered at all, cannot have been very emphatic. Southfleet was like a deaf old gentleman who had not heard a joke, and Burgoyne kept on repeating the story.

But he had no settled intention of retiring. He became more and more the *dolce far niente* partner, a flowery ornament, a kind of sentimental bravo. For, after all, he was very comfortably situated. He did a quarter of the work and received three quarters of the income. He dawdled and drank, and shot, and took gentle horse exercise, and played croquet with the ladies, and gave dinners, and told smutty stories over the port. Richmond was a strong and strenuous young fellow. Let the young beggar carry the hod. Youth should

serve.

Dr. Richmond might be proud of his small son, but when a man is tired and irritable small things may vex him, and Charles Lovelace's father, coming back from a long round for a hurried dinner, found the meal not ready. He rang the dining-room bell, and no one answered it. He rang it again somewhat truculently, telling himself that there were three women in the house, and that he did little else but eat and sleep in it.

Someone heard the bell, and a door opened upstairs.

"Oh, it's the doctor, m'am."

Ethel's strident voice seemed to possess the house, and Richmond, going to the foot of the stairs, was about to suggest that he was hungry and in a hurry, when Lucy came out on the landing.

"Oh, John, do come up. Baby's been sick."

Richmond smothered his irritation and climbed the stairs, to find all three women hanging over Charles Lovelace's cot.

"He's been sick twice, poor pet."

"Yes, green, sir."

Sarah exhibited a little slimy mess on a towel, and Richmond, having scrutinized it, was not very sympathetic. He was feeling that Sarah should attend to her responsibilities, and serve up his dinner.

"Just a little bile. Has the bottle been scoured?"

He fastened the question on Ethel and Ethel bridled.

"Of course it has."

Charles Lovelace began to bawl, and with such lustiness that his devoted elders should have been reassured.

"Not much the matter, I think. I'll send some powders round. Sarah, I want dinner in five minutes."

"Dinner, sir."

"It is ten minutes past one."

Undoubtedly No. 9 Tenterden Terrace was not what it had been. Instead of

ministering to the needs of a busy man, it appeared to devote itself to the whimsies of a boisterous little egoist. The whole house seemed to smell of baby. Bibs and nappies sometimes adorned the drawing-room fender. Ethel's voice would not be moderated. She sang to Charles Lovelace and sometimes at night Charles Lovelace serenaded his parents. Ethel had no respect for professional dignities. She would come singing down the stairs just when Dr. Richmond was trying to listen to a patient's chest in the little consulting-room. Ethel was solid. She bumped against things, banged doors.

One day after lunch Dr. Richmond's door flew open on her.

"Stop that noise, instantly."

Ethel's eyes bulged. Coo, the doctor did look in a pet about something!

"Yessir."

"Don't let me hear you singing again while I am in the house."

"Nosir."

Dr. Richmond set out on his afternoon round in a very unprofessional temper. He scolded old Howell for being three minutes late, and the groom took the scolding with patient magnanimity. He did not explain that Polly had shed a shoe, and that he had had to take her round to the smith's, and had bolted his own dinner. Howell could suppose that Dr. Richmond had many things to worry him. Howell was a family man, and knew that charity did not always wait for you at home. Dr. Richmond came back to tea in a state of irritation. Two fool patients had been very exasperating, and both had complained that their medicine did not suit them. Richmond had felt tempted to say that nothing but post-mundane sulphur would suit them, and that it need not be given with a long spoon.

To his wife he said: "You must get rid of that girl."

"What, Ethel, John?"

"Yes."

"But she's such a good nurse."

"She's too noisy. A heifer."

"But, John——"

"Oh, very well, do as you please. I do expect a little peace in the house. I am beginning to realize that this box is too small for us."

Lucy looked worried.

“Yes, perhaps it is.”

“I have heard rumours that No. 11 Queen’s Terrace is likely to be vacant. It would suit us better. The nursery could be at the top of the house.”

Lucy said gently: “Yes, John, it could.”

But Dr. Richmond’s wife was not just blindly maternal. She could not have made a decalogue of her instincts and her feelings, nor did she speak of her duties to her husband. She loved him with a love that was different from the love she could give to a child. She was one of those rare souls who feel themselves accused when someone dear to them shows temper. She did not wrap herself in cold rectitude and suffer the little offended ego in her to exclaim: “How could you?” She used to herself that most magical and mysterious of all words—Why? The self in her was a very sensitive product. It turned its large, quick, questioning eyes upon life, and gave her awareness, just as in some solitary place one becomes aware of sounds and essences and lights and shadows and gradations of colour. In her reactions to life Lucy was the natural and intuitive artist.

Was John jealous of their small son?

Possibly.

Well, if that was so it was a phase of life that had not been foreseen. She did not quarrel with it. God himself might be a jealous God, and perhaps reassuringly so. She pondered her problem instead of putting herself on a pedestal, that dreadful pedestal from which smug little domestic statues crash in ruin. So, this man-creature wanted her, and he wanted to be the first in the house. He set the wife before the mother, which might be or might not be according to nature. Her divinations pleased her. She too might have missed that something in her mate had Dr. John Richmond given the greater part of his precious leisure to playing with a small daughter. Lucy turned the pages of her book of life and read them as she went along.

There were other people who realized that Dr. Richmond was overworked.

Roper, meeting him to consult about a cottage case, was kept waiting for twenty minutes, and when Richmond did arrive, it was with the air of a man who had spent the day angrily chasing Father Time.

“Sorry, Roper, a damned fool wasted half an hour for me.”

Roper smiled at him, and said nothing. That life could be exasperating was just life, but that a physician should allow himself to be exasperated was good neither for the healer nor the patient. Roper had not forgotten the fierce days of his own youth when convention had hung like a yoke upon his shoulders. He too had been tempted to scorn his craft, and to mutter to himself in secret of humbug and pill-peddling. That was your problem. Your craft was what you made it, and if the little, savage boy in man became neither sea-captain nor shepherd, your ship was masterless and your sheep unshepherded.

“Part of our job is to suffer fools, John.”

“I’d like to use the knife on folly.”

Roper took him by the arm.

“What a butcher’s shop it would be, my lad, and you bloodied to the eyebrows.”

They went in to see the patient. It was a difficult case, a compassionate case. The woman, a labourer’s wife, lay in a little back room that was carpetless but beautifully clean. The bare boards were spotless, so was the poor, cheap bed-linen. She had one of those serene, calm faces, hair plaited, lips bloodless, hands worn and prematurely old. There was a tinge of yellow in her skin. Her eyes looked large and luminous in a face that was starved.

“Well, Mrs. Painter, here’s Dr. Richmond to have a look at you.”

She smiled at Roper.

“I’m in good hands, Doctor.”

“How’s the pain?”

“Not so bad, Doctor.”

Richmond questioned and then examined her. After all, it was no very unusual case, an affliction to which women who have borne children are subject, but to a working-woman such a disharmony may be disastrous. She needed help, skilled interference, the skill and the care a hospital could give. Richmond’s face lost some of its tenseness as he examined her.

“How long have you been like this?”

“Nearly three years, Doctor.”

“Why didn’t you do something about it?”

“I’ve three children, Doctor, and a man to look after. And my man only gets fifteen shillings a week.”

Richmond nodded. Yes, the same old story, the courage and the patience of these working women who would slave and starve and smother self in the struggle to carry on.

“We must see if something can’t be done about it.”

“I can’t leave, Doctor. You see, we’ve no neighbours to help. This cottage _____”

“Yes, isolated. I know. But haven’t you a sister or somebody?”

“No, Doctor. And my eldest is only seven.”

They left her and went out into the cottage garden to talk over the case, and even this cottage garden was indicative. There were a few flowers in the beds in front of the cottage, and one old hoary apple tree set with fruit, but nine tenths of the Painters’ garden was given over to potatoes. Runner beans and cabbages completed the picture, and Richmond, who was not as wise as Roper was in country ways, remarked upon the obviousness of the crop.

“It looks as though they lived on them.”

“They do, John, or the woman does. With four other mouths to fill, and a man who has to feed up to his work.”

“On fifteen shillings! No wonder she looks starved.”

“What’s your opinion?”

“Elders first.”

“Operate.”

“I’d like to do it. But, isn’t it ridiculous that in a place like Southfleet there should be no hospital.”

“Something one could work for. There’s Richford Infirmary.”

“That septic barrack! I wonder if I could get her into St. Martha’s under Jolland. Do you know, Roper, I have not been near the place since I left.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, reasons. She would have the best chance there. And she wouldn’t have to get up and scrub floors and cook before she was fit for it. Couldn’t you find some old woman to go in and do the work?”

“I think I could. And if St. Martha’s can’t take her?”

“I’ll go up and see Jolland. If they can’t, would you let me risk it here?”

Roper stood a moment, staring at a patch of bare earth where the woman's husband had been forking potatoes.

"What's the alternative?"

"Chronic hæmorrhage and pain, and worse. She will never be a fit woman, without interference."

"I think I would risk it, John. After all, as things are, hundreds of women have to take that risk in the country. And the risks are less now, and with your training."

"Surely, in a civilized community all possible risks should be eliminated. It is only a matter of——"

"Money."

"And thought. If people thought."

"That is often the last thing they wish to do, my lad. Well, try St. Martha's, and if they can't take her, and she and her man agree we will tackle the problem."

"I'm keen to do it. The thing is straightforward. But let her have her better chance."

It was with a sense of adventure that Dr. Richmond walked into Southfleet station where a green engine was shrilling steam from a brass hump on its back. Roper had arranged to work the country round for him, and as Richmond climbed into an empty second-class carriage, and slammed the door, he knew that he wanted to be alone. It was one of those very rare occasions when he could escape from routine, and from that top-hatted, frock-coated respectability that had begun to irk him. He was so rarely alone. His whole day was given to people and their complaints. He was expected to give, and to take never. Even in the dog-cart he had old Howell beside him. As he sat in the empty carriage and watched the dull green landscape unfold a perpetual and undramatic greenness he felt all the old urges big in him. Good God, had five years passed since he had cut himself off from that fuller and more significant life? And why? To Roper he had spoken vaguely of reasons. What were his reasons? Pride. A resentful shrinking from contact with the life that he had desired. A sense of frustration, the secret bitterness of a young man who had been thwarted. Fear, too, a fear that a renewed contact with certain realities might hurt. New faces, strange faces, the feeling that he had ceased to matter in that larger world. It would have forgotten him. It would regard him as one of

those dull fellows up from the country. It might suggest tolerance and patronage. And patronage was a thing that roused in him fierce resentment.

The East End in all its smutty squalor and its ugliness, miles and miles of slated roofs and stumpy chimneys. Little streets, penurious backyards, a slimy creek, the reek of a soap-factory. Yet, all this crowded ugliness thrilled him. When the train drew up in the London terminus he was out and striding along the platform like youth released. He took a cab in the station forecourt. Crowds, bustle, movement, a vibrant vitality. London smells, horse-droppings, the familiar reek of a jam-factory, buses rolling by, shops, the old grey Monument, Cheapside, the dome of St. Paul's like a great grey bubble. He rested his hands on the door of the hansom-cab and looked at life eagerly. Fleet Street, the Strand, Trafalgar Square. Nelson on his column. The cabby took him up the Haymarket into Regent Street, and Nash's great white curving façades were familiar and somehow splendid. He felt his bowels stirred. All this was part of the past, pregnant with it, and the past was like an unborn child.

When he saw the grey face of his old hospital, its iron railings and forecourt, the familiar clock and all those white windows, almost he felt afraid. He was like a lover returning to a place where love had been frustrated. The cab drove into the forecourt. He got out and paid the cabby, and turning to the great grey porch, entered, expecting to see the well-known face of Tombs the porter. But the face and the porter's box was strange to him. He was conscious of feeling shocked. The man looked at him as at a stranger.

Tombs would have remembered him. He would have shaken hands with Tombs, and Tombs would have said to him: "Why, it's Dr. Richmond. Glad to see you, sir. We've often wondered why you haven't been to see us." This new man had cold blue eyes, a flabby face pouched under the eyelids, a waxed moustache, and an air of arrogance.

"Sir Humphrey Jolland in the hospital?"

The porter glanced casually at Richmond. He was sorting letters, and he went on sorting them.

"What's your business?"

Richmond's face went stiff. This bully in uniform needed a lesson.

"I asked you a question, my man. You can leave sorting those letters and remember your manners."

The man's eyes narrowed.

“Sorry, sir.”

“Is Sir Humphrey Jolland in the hospital?”

“I think so, sir.”

“Good. Same wards, I suppose? Or is he operating?”

“Afraid I don’t know, sir.”

“My name is Richmond. Yes, I know my way, thank you.”

He passed through the glass swing-doors into the wide corridor with its familiar cream and cocoa-coloured walls and rows of Georgian windows, and turning aside into the student’s cloak-room, left his hat and gloves on a peg. The porter had given a twist to his moustachios, scowled after Richmond, and supposed that this high and mighty gentleman was someone in the profession. Well, a fellow could not be expected to know every damned doctor in London. He went on sorting his letters, reflecting that he could take it out of somebody else later.

Meanwhile, Richmond had walked along the familiar passages to the operating theatre. The doors of the anæsthetists rooms were open, and he could smell the ether. A nurse passed him as he turned aside to the door of the stairs leading up to the theatre seats. He climbed to the top gangway, and looking down over rows of heads and shoulders, saw that it was old Tomes who was operating. Tomes with his ragged beard and bald head, and finnicking ways was the same, and the patient on the table was just a patient, but the anæsthetist was a new man. All the other faces were strange. Old “Corkscrews,” the theatre-nurse, was not there; her place had been taken by a blonde and self-important young woman with a full bosom and chilly blue eyes. Richmond leaned on the rail for two minutes, watching old Tomes fiddling with an abdomen, and smirking to himself as was his custom. Sir Humphrey Jolland would be going round his wards, and Richmond descended the polished steps and strolled casually back to one of the main staircases. He ascended it slowly, reminiscently, feeling the atmosphere of the place enveloping him. How often had he climbed these stairs? How good it seemed to reascend them.

He arrived outside Albert Ward, and through the glass doors saw the polished floor, the red screens, the ward tables, the rows of beds. A group of students was massed about a bed on the right side of the ward. Sir Humphrey Jolland would be there, poised on a chair, his handsome old head cocked, his keen eyes quizzing some youngster. Sir Humphrey’s surgical-rags had been famous. No man had been more apt at the genial game of persuading some rather bumptious young man to make a fool of himself.

Richmond entered the ward and strolled towards the half circle of students. He saw the ward-sister and a nurse standing beside the bed, but both their faces were strange to him. He was within a couple of yards of the little crowd when he heard a voice out of the past, a voice that was unpleasantly familiar. It was superior; it sneered. It said: "Let me suggest, Jones, that you should not attempt to produce evidence out of your inner consciousness. Observation, and deduction. Now, feel that swelling again, and let your fingers tell you facts." It was the voice of Bernard Steering who was deputizing for the great man, a Steering who was perched with an air of nonchalance at the head of the patient's bed, a gracefully infallible figure, ironic, faintly contemptuous. Richmond had joined the group, and as he looked at his old rival, he was conscious of antagonisms stirring in him. Steering was occupying the place that, but for brother Lawrence's tragedy, might have been his.

The student was examining the patient's abdomen, and Steering was watching him, but Richmond's concentrated stare was like a ray of light reflected from a mirror playing upon the other man's face. Steering's head lifted sharply. His eyes met Richmond's. He smiled, and his smile expressed other things, as well as recognition, but he did not acknowledge Richmond's presence. He addressed the student.

"Well, Jones, any discoveries?"

"There is fluctuation, sir."

So, the student would address Steering as sir!

"Fluctuation? Imagination again, Jones, I think. Carrington, see what you can find."

The demonstration continued, and for the next ten minutes Steering ignored the presence of his old rival, but he was very conscious of it, and willing Richmond to be conscious of other realities. He smiled; he exercised wit, and his audience tittered. He gave them a beautiful exposition of the case, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment. He was exquisitely complacent over it, and when the business was over, and the group shuffled its way to the next bed, Mr. Bernard Steering stood up, and publicly acknowledged the visitor's presence.

"Ah, Richmond, quite a stranger. Up from the country?"

He was patronizing, but graciously so.

"Care to examine the case?"

Richmond smiled at him.

“I accept your verdict. I’m up to see Sir Humphrey.”

“Called out of town, suddenly. Anything that I can do for you, Richmond?”

“I want a patient admitted.”

“I see. I’m afraid we have a long waiting list. Go and see the gentleman in the office. I am afraid you will have to follow the orthodox procedure.”

It was a delicate snub, and Richmond knew it to be such.

“Thank you, Steering.”

“Something I suppose you can’t tackle in Arcadia? Well, if you will excuse me. I have an emergency op. at five.”

He turned with a little, ironic smile to the next bed, and Richmond walked out of Albert Ward, down the stone stairs, along the familiar corridor to the cloak-room. He took his hat and gloves from the peg, and passing the porter in his box, walked out of the hospital. Yes, Steering had stung him. Arcadia, indeed! He would tackle that case himself.

XX

Dr. Roper it was who persuaded Painter and his wife to consent to the operation. The children were to be packed off for a week to an uncle at Danesfleet, for Roper had found an old woman who would go in and look after Mrs. Painter while her man was at work. Roper drove into Southfleet on the Wednesday, and had tea with the Richmonds, and the two doctors arranged for the operation to be performed on the Sunday. Richmond was less rushed on Sundays, and a craftsman asks for leisure when his hands have to be deliberate and skilful.

Southfleet's season, such as it was, had reached its zenith. Excursion trains poured thousands of Cockneys into the place, and the High Street became a conduit conducting the black ooze of the East End to the sea. You could smell the crowd. It perspired, and drank, and became still more odoriferous. The beach was a fly-paper, the pier an ant-walk. Booths sold the crowd mussels, and whelks and cockles soused in vinegar. The old town pubs dispensed oceans of beer, and served shrimp-teas at ninepence ahead. Tired children wept and were sick. The sailing-boats took Whitechapel for a sail, and the fishes were fed. Louts in their shirt-sleeves floundered and windmilled their way about in row-boats. The world paddled and bathed, while Nigger Minstrels twanged banjos. The fun went on till all hours, and people who were merry and dancing in the streets, lost their trains, and dossed down under bathing-machines or on the cliff seats. You might find yourself in an embarrassing position if you strolled along the cliff-paths after dark, for Eros was out, and he was apt to be a foul mouthed god if his pleasures were interfered with. Charles Byng, who lived over the surgery, abominated these August days. Jocular drunks would shout up the surgery speaking-tube, or blow and set the whistle piping beside Mr. Byng's bed. On Bank Holiday nights Charles had been known to rig up a funnel and tube, and to pour a particularly offensive decoction down it when some Whitechapel wag became mischievous. The dispensary window had been broken on such an occasion when some half inebriated roisterer had received an unexpected dose of medicine.

This adventitious population, some of which tarried for a week in cheap lodging-houses, added to the burdens born by the old firm of Davidson, Burgoyne and Richmond. Burgoyne had become too Olympian a figure to be brought to earth for the succouring of the smelly crowd. If fool-women fed infants on cockles and ginger-beer, and the little wretches developed acute enteritis, was that any concern of his? If fat men went bathing after roast-beef,

and jam-roll washed down with much beer, and got cramp and were fished out moribund, should a senior partner shed perspiration in an effort to resuscitate them? Ignorance, my dear sir, ignorance! Let a lusty lad like Richmond pump-handle the fools. That August Sunday was a blazing day following upon an oppressive night. Lucy's small son was feeling the heat, and had kept the house in a state of worry and unrest, and though Richmond had left the active comforting to his wife, he was a little jaded and out of temper for the day's work.

In the surgery he had a slight passage of arms with Burgoyne. He reminded Teddy that he had an operation to perform, and suggested that any emergency call should be Burgoyne's.

"Out of the question, my dear fellah. I am going to play the new game with the Ransfords at Broom Hall."

The new game was lawn-tennis.

"Then, who is to cover any emergency?"

"Let 'em send for old Soames. Besides, Byng can tackle a drunk or a drowning."

Richmond left it at that. He asked Charlie Byng to prepare all the necessary instruments and dressings, and went out on the morning round. He was back at half-past twelve. Howell had his orders to be outside No. 9 Tenterden Terrace at two o'clock, and Richmond went in to lunch. At a quarter to two he was smoking a pipe in the back garden when Sarah hailed him.

"You're wanted, sir. Someone drowned."

That was a frank and final way of putting it, but when Richmond found one of the local boatmen and two sweaty trippers in their shirt-sleeves waiting on his doorstep, the crisis was not easily side-stepped.

"You must send for Dr. Soames, Christmas. I have an operation."

"It's urgent, sir."

One of the trippers became truculent.

"Yer a doctor, ain't yer? You come along, or we'll know the reason why."

Richmond ignored the fellow.

"Where is it, Christmas?"

"Just by the pier, sir. Conky and I fished him out."

"How long had he been in?"

“Don’t know, sir.”

Howell and the dog-cart appeared at this moment, and Richmond, still ignoring the man in shirt-sleeves, turned back into the house for his hat.

“All right, I’ll come. Hang on behind, Christmas.”

The two trippers showed a desire to join the boatman on the back seat, but Richmond warned them off.

“Three’s enough.”

The truculent fellow was hanging on to the tailboard, but Richmond, who was in no very Christian temper, leaned over, put a hand on his chest, and thrust him off.

“I said three. Whip up, Howell,” and they went trundling down towards the pier.

Said the truculent one: “I’ll bash that bloody toff’s face in.”

“Carm on, carm on,” sang his friend. “Cheese it. Keep the bung in. ’E’s doin’ ’is job, ain’t ’e?”

Richmond found a crowd on the beach, a fool crowd that hustled and gaped round the poor dead thing, for dead it was, and beyond any hope of succour. Richmond and Christmas pushed their way through without much ceremony. Something had to be done to placate this East End crowd, and Richmond was wise as to it. He and two of the boatmen turned the body over, emptied it, turned it back again, and Richmond, whipping his hat and coat off and laying it on the shingle, knelt and began to try resuscitation. The crowd wallowed round him. Someone trod on his coat, and Richmond cursed them. “Get back, you people, get back. Give us air.” The crowd was sullen. For ten minutes he pump-handled the corpse, knowing the case to be hopeless. And then, Charles Byng came pushing through the crowd, and Richmond blessed him.

“No hope, Charles, but carry on for another ten minutes. I’ve got that case on my hands.”

Byng took Richmond’s place, and Richmond put on his coat, but the crowd murmured.

“Call ’isself a doctor!”

“Leavin’ a poor fellah like that!”

Richmond was feeling grim. Head up, eyes daring anyone to interfere with him, he pushed through the crowd, ascended the steps to the parade, crossed it,

climbed into the dog-cart, and was driven away. Applying artificial respiration under a hot August sun, with a smelly mass of humanity crowding round you, had been cooling neither to the flesh nor the temper. Old Howell, who had been watching the affair from his high seat, became the philosopher as the dog-cart emerged from the upper end of the High Street.

“Lot of monkeys, sir. What a crowd needs is the butt-end of a rifle.”

“Learn that in India, Howell?”

“Yes. I reckon crowds are the same all the world over. Better cover up, sir. You’ve been sweating.”

When the dog-cart swung into the lane leading to the Painters’ cottage, Richmond saw the husband leaning over the front gate. He had one of those broad, taciturn country faces that seem dumb and changeless, but there was something in his eyes that betrayed what he was feeling. He opened the gate for Richmond, and offered to carry the bag in.

“Thought you’d forgot us, Doctor.”

“Sorry, Painter. I was called to a man who had been pulled out of the sea.”

“Dr. Roper’s waiting for ye.”

Richmond, looking into the man’s anxious eyes, understood and was touched.

“No need to worry, Painter.”

“She’s precious, Doctor.”

“I know.”

How right was that rather unexpected word from those dumb and fumbling lips; Richmond felt suddenly refreshed by it, and challenged by its appeal. He saw Roper come to the cottage door, a brown figure, as fundamental as the soil. His face was calm.

“Everything’s ready, Richmond.”

“Sorry I’m late. Called to a case of drowning.”

“There’s no hurry.”

He found the woman sitting on a chair with a blanket round her. Her eyes were steady in a pale, serene face. She smiled at Richmond, but said never a word. A plain deal table had been prepared in the kitchen, with another small table beside it, and an extra wooden chair for Roper’s paraphernalia. There was an old mattress and a blanket on the table. A kettle was steaming, a basin ready

in the leaded sink.

“Now, Mrs. Painter.”

The woman rose and walked to the table and Roper, picking her up, laid her on it like a child, and tucked a cushion and a towel under her head. She closed her eyes and lay relaxed. She had the courage of surrender. Richmond was aware of Painter coming in and kissing his wife. She opened her eyes at him and smiled.

“Don’t you worry, Bob.”

The man went out quickly, closing the door after him, and walking down the garden path, hung over the gate.

She took the anæsthetic perfectly, like a child going to sleep.

“She’s under, John. Good woman.”

Richmond got to work. He had forgotten all about that dead man and the fool crowd and the heat. He was the craftsman, cool and sure of himself. It was a single-handed job, with Roper leaning forward now and again to help him. The affair was noiseless, with an occasional quiet word, and the man, leaning on the gate and listening, wondered if all was well.

“Got it. She all right?”

“Perfectly.”

“Straightforward, as I thought. Just hold that a moment. Good. She won’t want much more.”

Roper drew a deep breath as he saw what came away in Richmond’s hand.

“Bigger than I thought.”

“Good job she’s rid of it. Perpetual trouble.”

Roper felt the woman’s pulse.

“And she’s taken it better than I thought she would. Good stuff, John. Give me a country woman, every time.”

Five minutes later Richmond was washing his hands, while Roper watched the semi-conscious woman, when he remembered the husband. He crossed the room and opened the cottage door.

“All’s well, Painter.”

The man swung round, and Richmond saw that he had been weeping.

“Thank God, sir. Can I see her?”

“In ten minutes, perhaps. She’s not round yet.”

“Did you get it away, sir?”

“Yes. I think she will be a different woman now.”

Richmond drove home. He had said: “I’ll drive the mare back,” and Howell had understood that a man who has done something well might be in a mood to handle the reins. Howell might have a bearded rock of a face, but he had come to be wise as to the weather-lore of the faces of the men he drove. Had not Dr. Davidson betrayed how a serious case was shaping by the way he had climbed into a trap and folded the rug over his knees? And it was the same with Dr. Richmond. There would be more volume to the voice, a crispness of speech, a smile that was not quite a smile. Howell knew, and believed that there was a rightness in his knowing, for, after all, if the man who sat beside you had no heart, and was not pleased or sad when those whom he sought to heal were doing well or ill, then that man was no healer and not well worth serving.

“Better take her over Elm Bridge and in by the cliff road, sir.”

Richmond smiled.

“Southfleet High Street on a Sunday, Howell! Full of black beetles.”

“You’d think they owned the street, sir.”

“Perhaps they do. Sorry I’ve stolen your Sunday afternoon.”

“All in my day, sir, and yours, when the going’s good.”

“It has been, Howell.”

“I’m glad of that,” for Howell had seen that man hanging upon the gate like some dumb creature trussed up by the dull agony of waiting.

Lucy Richmond, watching Charles Lovelace’s first crawlings over the grass-plot in the No. 9 back garden, heard Miss Shallowbrass addressing her. Miss S’s sandy head just topped the wall. She had put on her pince-nez and was peering at the small thing crawling on the grass.

“Do you think it is safe, Mrs. Richmond? I hope there is no glass there.”

Glass indeed! Miss Shallowbrass was for ever suspecting the presence of sin or the serpent. For a moment Lucy looked alarmed.

“Oh, I don’t think so. How could there be?”

“The people before you were terribly careless.”

Lucy went down on her knees and ran her hands over the turf as though to assure herself that there were no sharp snags or spicules to wound her child, and this was what Richmond saw when he came to the garden door, his wife and small son crawling side by side, and Miss Shallowbrass smirking at them with her head on one side. Damn that old woman! Richmond walked out into the garden, ignoring that Aunt Sally’s head, and Miss Shallowbrass withdrew. Dr. Richmond was not at all a friendly person; he seemed most strangely to resent neighbourly interest.

“Hallo, the wonder-child is crawling!”

Lucy turned over and sat down.

“Oh, John, I did not hear you.”

“Should I make a noise like a traction-engine?”

She looked at his face and saw that the day had become good for him. He bent down, and picking up Charles Lovelace, swung him up and down. The child chuckled and crowed.

“Marvellous infant, what! Mother and son caught crawling.”

Lucy glanced at the wall.

“Miss Shallowbrass said there might be glass about. I——”

“Fudge!” said her husband, “why, she’s a box of tin-tacks herself.”

“Oh, John, do be careful!”

He laughed.

“Listen to the wonder-child. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! That’s good enough for Sunday.”

“Have you had tea?”

“Have I? I quite forget. No, I haven’t. Besides, it must be nearly six o’clock. Aren’t the bells calling the devout?”

He replaced Charles Lovelace on the grass, and joined him there, making absurd, animal noises.

“Meow, meow! Quack-quack! Hee-haw,” and Lucy, watching them both, heard the bells of St. Jude’s begin their triple chant of ding-dong-bom, ding-dong-bom. Her irreverent husband paraphrased them: “Come to church, come

to church. I won't come. I won't come." He rolled over on his back, and held Charles Lovelace sprawling above him.

"John, dear, there are——"

"Windows. Don't I know it!"

"Did the case go well?"

"Like a text-book."

"I'm so glad."

"So am I. Good business. By the way, don't you think we might do better in the way of walls?"

"Walls?"

"Yes, No. 11 Queen's Terrace. I measured the garden walls the other day. Seven feet high. Cats can crawl on them but not look over."

"John!"

"And we should have an arbour, and a stable with a vine growing over it. Good for old Howell, good for Charles, good for everybody."

"I'd love it, John."

Richmond drove over on the Tuesday to see Mrs. Painter. It was, in a sense, a courtesy visit, for though as the surgeon he was responsible, the case was Roper's. He found the woman faintly flushed, but bright and very pleased to see him. Her temperature was half a degree up, but that could be considered normal in her condition. The one thing that seemed to be worrying her was Richmond's fee. He was charging a normal fee of one guinea, but a guinea to a farm-labourer with a wife and three children was no small sum.

"We'll be able to pay you, Doctor, with my man's harvest-money."

Richmond told her not to worry.

"But we be going to pay it, Doctor, though I know it's little enough. Bob and I are very grateful."

"Well, you wait, Mrs. Painter, till I send in a bill. And if I forget, you need not remind me."

"You mustn't do that, sir. We shouldn't be happy if we didn't pay something."

Richmond was care-free about the case, but on the Thursday a note from Roper reached him as he came in from the morning's round. Roper was not happy about Mrs. Painter. Her temperature was up; she was restless, and there was an offensive discharge, and some tenderness of the abdomen. Would Richmond meet him at three o'clock at the Painters' cottage? Richmond was troubled. He had had no reason to fear the disasters that had befallen such cases in the bad old days when hospital wards were full of puerperal fever and septicæmia. He had operated in a cottage that was exceptionally clean; he had taken every precaution that the knowledge of his day could prescribe.

He wore his silent face at the midday meal, and Lucy did not question him. A medical man is not supposed to gossip about his patients, even with his wife, and no man likes to confess that a case that has flattered him, may turn out to be disastrous. And so tragic is failure, when interference, instead of restoring health, brings death to the patient.

Richmond found Roper waiting for him, sitting on a rough bench under the solitary apple-tree. He was looking very grave. He made Richmond sit down beside him.

"I'm afraid there is an infection. Temperature 103, pulse nearly a hundred."

He spoke gently, for Richmond could be accused of no carelessness. It was just one of those cases that somehow went wrong.

"Let's see her, Roper. This touches me."

"No fault of yours, John. We were agreed."

"Yes, but one feels——"

"I know. Let's go in."

When Richmond had seen the woman, he was left with no illusions. This was one of those tragic cases in which an acute infection nullified all your cleverness. The flushed moist face on the pillow seemed to accuse him.

"I'm not going wrong, Doctor, am I?"

Richmond tried to reassure her for, if they were to fight for her life, she would need all the help they could give her.

He went out again into the garden with Roper.

"I'll curette; it's her only chance."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. I have all the things with me. We need not give her too much

anæsthetic.”

But nothing availed to save her, and on the following Sunday Robert Painter’s wife lay dead.

Richmond, sick at heart about it, felt that he had to face the husband. He drove over that morning and found the man leaning on the gate. The labourer’s face looked dumb and expressionless, save for the dull anguish in his eyes.

“I am most desperately sorry about this, Painter.”

The man just stared at him.

“You did your best, Doctor.”

So Painter did not reproach him. He seemed to be without bitterness, and Richmond felt shaken.

“Thank you, Painter. I can only say——”

The man nodded.

“It just happened so, Doctor. But somehow, I can’t feel she’s left me.”

Richmond was mute.

But this woman’s death was to affect him profoundly, and to leave in his consciousness a sore streak that would irk him for many a day. He had failed, and the consciousness of failure was to poison some virtue in him. His young self-confidence had suffered a secret shock at a moment in his life when restless urges were to attack him. It was as though a dead woman’s ghost followed him about and chilled his faith in himself and in his work.

XXI

Dr. Richmond's face was becoming so familiar to Southfleet that it was like the face of a house you passed each day, to be accepted for what it was, a façade with mouth and eyes, and wearing a slate roof or a hat. The Southfleet that went about its business saw the Richmond face somewhat from a distance, driving by in the high dog-cart beside old Howell's rock-like countenance with its beard of dark seaweed. It was a serious face, perhaps too serious, but then, Southfleet could suppose that a man who was responsible for other people's thorns in the flesh would not go through the day simpering and smirking. Patients who saw the doctor's face at close quarters, had a feeling that they were not comforted by it as they might have been. There was a suggestion of hardness in Dr. Richmond's eyes. He observed you, he questioned you, but rather like a judge dealing with a disingenuous witness. He did not appear to feel what your body was feeling, or take any note of those fears and hopes that afflict the soul. There were moments when his manner suggested that secret gusts of impatience were blowing within him.

"How's your cough, Murrell?"

"It do shake me up, sir."

"It's an old man's cough, you know. Some things have to be suffered."

Which might be true, but the ungarnished truth may not be comforting to humanity, especially if the syrup of sympathy be lacking.

Charlie Byng, filling an eight-ounce medicine bottle at the bottle-tap, heard that remark of Richmond's, and frowned over it. Old Murrell might be a perennial patient, with a cough that asserted itself both in summer and winter, but he was a good old boy who had lived hard and cleanly. Nor was it Dr. Richmond's mere cursory dismissal of the cough but the manner of doing it that caused Charles Byng to frown. Let it be granted that the old chronics could be boring to a gentleman to whom the creakings of age might appear inevitable, and yet—— That "Yet" had begun to shape itself very distinctly in the mind of the dispenser. What was the matter with Dr. John Richmond? He was showing a desire to hurry through the surgery routine. He had become abrupt. "Yes, yes, go on with the medicine." He did not smile at people. He did not make those kindly though obvious jokes that help humanity upon its way. Over-worked he might be, but Dr. Davidson had been overworked, and yet had never given the impression of flurry. Byng would have described Dr. Richmond as a man whose rhythm was out of order, and who was irked by it

and secretly angry about it.

Richmond came into the dispensary and stood at the high desk, and Byng, who was wiping his bottle after inserting a cork, gave him the kind of glance that an observant father gives to a boy who is becoming difficult. A serene spirit is so necessary to a physician, nor does such serenity grow like a gourd in the night. Compassion, a supreme patience, understanding. The thing you called character. Yes, Charles Byng could suppose that all men pass through their testing period. Could he not remember a time when he had been mad about girls, yes, occasions when he had banged a bottle down on the counter, and flattened his face against a window because Ethel Somebody was passing by. He could recall those explosive moods. Damn it, was he going to spend his life dribbling drugs into bottles! He would go for a soldier, see life, explore strange countries and strange women. But surely, grave Dr. Richmond was not bothered in that way? He had a charming house in Queen's Terrace, a wife whom all Southfleet had come to adore, a jolly little son, a good practice. No, it could not be petticoats that were worrying Dr. Richmond, but it might be that tormenting thing which is called ambition.

"The same medicine for Murrell?"

"The same."

Richmond completed his entries, and taking his hat from a peg, walked out of the surgery before Charles Byng or anyone else could ask him further questions. Old Murrell was waiting with his bottle, and Byng took it from him, deciding as he did so to add something more soothing to the old man's medicine.

"Keep you awake, does it, Tom?"

Murrell stood in the doorway, looking like a very sad old child with whiskers.

"It do. Makes my ol' woman peevish. And the doctor, 'e was sharp with me. Just an ol' man's cough, 'e said."

"Don't you take any notice of that."

"I be a noosance to 'ee, Mr. Byng, me and my cough, but I don't want to be."

"Nonsense. You try this."

"I'm thinkin' Dr. Richmond be a hard man to us old folk. I know I oughtn't to say it, but he ain't comfortable like Dr. Davidson was."

“Oh, he’s young yet. He’ll mellow.”

“Maybe so. Clever, I guess, but cleverness ain’t everything.”

“No,” said Byng, “it isn’t. You like a bit of sugar on your tongue, don’t you, Tom? Young men don’t always remember the sugar. I was like that.”

“Were yer? I don’t remember it.”

“But I do.”

It was a summer day, a day which the vulgar referred to as a “Sizzler,” and Southfleet High Street was full of its East End crowd. Both spirits and skins were acting well. It was a crowd that did not smell of the sea. It strolled and played concertinas and sang, and cluttered up both the paths and the roadway, and to a man in a hurry this mass of humanity was not lovely. Richmond made his way through it with a face edged with impatience. “Get out of the way, you fools.” Turning by The Royal George along the terrace he was free of the people, for the crowd poured like sheep down Pier Hill towards the pier and the sea. Whitechapel was not interested in the segregated gentility of Regency houses, or in gardens, and old Beckwith in green coat and red waistcoat was guarding the gate. Only residents and subscribers were suffered to enter.

Richmond caught sight of a familiar figure moving towards him down the broad roadway between Caroline Gardens and Queen’s Terrace, Dr. Creavy and his green umbrella lined with primrose silk. It was like a flower that opened and displayed itself in blazing weather, and was as familiar to Southfleet as was Dr. Creavy’s mild, moon face. Dr. Creavy was not unaccompanied. Two young women from Whitechapel, full of the joy and the impudence of youth, had fallen upon Dr. Creavy and had insisted upon walking arm and arm with him down that decorous roadway. They wore large hats with plumes and close-fitting black velvet dresses, and they danced along beside Dr. Creavy under the green umbrella. Dr. Creavy was looking a little hot and embarrassed, but there was a something about him that suggested that he was somehow enjoying the joke. Both the young wenches were jocund and pretty, and provided that Mrs. Creavy did not appear on the scene, well, let youth have its way.

Richmond stared. He stared at Dr. Creavy’s beaming and self-conscious face, and then he stared at the young women. One of them was fair, with speedwell blue eyes, a broad face, a retroussé nose, and a large and most kissable mouth. It was a provocative face, sensual, jocund, good natured, rich with the bloom of sex. And Richmond stared at her. Probably, she worked in a jam-factory. His stare was significant, and the girl returned it. Richmond was man to her woman.

He took off his hat to the three.

“Good morning, sir.”

Almost Dr. Creavy giggled.

“They must have their game, Richmond.”

Richmond and the fair young woman were looking each other in the eyes.

The green umbrella and the three passed on, but Richmond turned about. So did the blonde wench. She winked at him, and the message was mutual. It said: “You may be a toff, but you’re man to me,” and something in Richmond seethed. He wanted that young woman.

The door of No. 11 confronted him, decorous and shining. Two or three heads were hanging over balcony railings, watching Dr. Creavy’s pagan progress. Well, really! What impudence! Two costermonger girls daring to make such an exhibition of the Church! Richmond turned the brass handle of his door, and entered with the look of a man whose hot thoughts were best left out in the sunlight.

Into the narrow hall of No. 11 staggered his small son, now of an age to hunt mischief on his own small feet. Charles Lovelace looked at his father with very blue eyes. He had something in his right fist, and he put one end of that something to his mouth and blew, but no sound came. Richmond’s face, shadowy and tense, seemed to darken towards the child.

“Where did you get that?”

Charles’s face became solemn, as though reflecting his father’s heavy disapproval.

“I founded it.”

Richmond took the thing from the child, and with such high severity that Charlie’s face puckered up.

“Lucy.”

His wife’s voice answered him from the stairs.

“Yes, John.”

“Haven’t I said before that the child must not be allowed in my consulting-room?”

There was a sudden wail from Charlie, and Mrs. Richmond, hurrying down the stairs, saw the small figure weeping before this angry Jehovah of a father.

“What is it, dear?”

Richmond held the thing up as though displaying original sin to the world.

“This. My new stethoscope. It might have been something more fragile.”

Mrs. Richmond had picked up her son, and over his shamed head she looked strangely at her husband.

“He has not broken it, John.”

“No. He has not broken it. But my orders must be obeyed. I suppose some fool left the door open.”

She pressed her cheek to Charles’s head.

“I’m afraid I was that fool.”

No. 11 Queen’s Terrace was a pleasant house, Regency without the Buck, and though it was linked with memories of the Most Royal Blackguard, it had a happy, cream-coloured face, and a charming balcony with a curved green roof. Its windows looked out over Caroline Gardens, hollies, pines and laurestinas, to the sea. In the spring blackbirds and thrushes sang the dawn up in these gardens. The drawing-room, with its french windows opening upon the balcony, now housed Mrs. Lancaster’s French furniture, and even the maiden aunts of Southfleet had become converted by Louis Quinze. No doubt, young Charles was responsible, as well as his mother. He was really a very lovable child, sensitive, droll on occasions, with a babyish dignity of his own. Unmarried ladies competed with each other for the honour of taking Charles Lovelace out for walks. Ethel, grown less strident, and betrothed to a baker’s roundsman, was a little jealous of these ladies, Lucy not at all so. Ethel had developed a genius for telling stories about pirates and savages and desert-islands. It was a serial story, and was retained for the time of day when Charles Lovelace had his bath. Charles would have it that savages were sabiges, and the illusion lingered until the printed word somehow robbed the black fellows of their sabige mystery.

The windows of the dining-room opened upon a minute front garden protected with green iron railings. Here hyacinths and tulips bloomed, wallflowers and stocks, blue lobelia and red geranium. Charles was not allowed within this sacred precinct. The back garden was his preserve with its little lawn, box-edged borders, high walls, and rose-covered lattice screening the stable upon which a vine turned yellow in autumn. There was a queer old summer-house in the garden, smothered with ivy, a dark and mysterious place,

and to Charles it was all sorts of things, a robber's cave, a lion's den, Robinson Crusoe's hut.

John and Lucy Richmond occupied the front bedroom on the second floor, with a little dressing-room opening from it where Dr. Richmond took his cold bath. Charlie's nursery was the room above his parents, and Caroline slept in the little box of a room next to it. Sarah and Jane the housemaid shared the big back room. Behind the dining-room was Dr. Richmond's consulting-room, with a large window of frosted glass, picked out with yellow stars. Then came a big, brick-walled gulf covered by a skylight, and housing the larder and wine-cellar. The kitchen lay beyond this whitewashed fosse, a kind of single-storied annexe projecting into the garden. No. 11 was a house of vast cupboards, one of which, in the wine-cellar, had never been unlocked, probably because the key had been lost, and Dr. Richmond's stock of wine was not up to the Burgoyne standard. All these cupboards, and the cellar, and especially the locked cupboard had a fascination for Charles Lovelace. He would peer through the keyhole of this sealed chamber. He asked questions.

"What's in there?"

Jane, who was a bit of a fool, and short-tempered, tried, on one occasion, to stifle the child's curiosity by telling him that the cupboard contained a skeleton.

Charles carried the question to his mother.

"What is a skelington, Mumma?"

"A skeleton?"

"Yes, Jane says there is one in the cupboard."

Lucy shattered the myth, and Jane was scolded, but gently so.

"You must not put frightening ideas into a child's head."

Yet, No. 11 Queen's Terrace, though it should have been a happy house, and was so in the main, held for Lucy Richmond the shadow of a sadness. She was not quite happy, because it was becoming plain to her that her husband was not quite happy. Nor was his moodiness that of a man who was tired and in need of contrasts. It was more serious than that. Lucy would have said that the soul of her comrade was darkened, that a shadow lay across him, though what this shadow was she could not say. She would watch him, yet without appearing to watch him. She understood that such secret if devoted spying might be exasperating to the male. She had to ask herself those questions which life propounds to all those women who are not fools. She was learning

what it is the lot of every woman to know, sometimes with bitterness, sometimes with infinite patience and compassion. There is so much of the child in man, and she was mother to her children. Did they both ask for new toys, new faces, new adventures? Was John Richmond beginning to find life stale in this little town, and marriage a convention that irked him? Had she herself changed or failed? Was he jealous of Charles Lovelace! Had the virtuous life of a country doctor ceased to satisfy him? Did he dream of the Islands of the Hesperides and apples of gold?

Should one stand before one's love, challenge it and say—"Comrade, whither goest thou?" or was it better to watch and wait? If the path were dark for a moment, should one question the winter of a man's discontent, or tarry for its passing and the coming of the spring?

About this time, Dr. Burgoyne, who could not be considered a very observant person, save in the spotting of pretty faces and in the choosing of ties and waistcoats, was obliged to notice that a particular bottle in the surgery's oak corner-cupboard was either very full or very empty. Dr. Teddy pondered the problem. As a provider of little tonic draughts when a man was tired, a particular bottle might last a couple of months, especially so in the summer, nor had the bottle been labelled for partnership purposes, "Drs. Burgoyne and Richmond." Obviously, the bottle was being emptied and refilled. But by whom? Charles Byng? Sobriety in a dispenser was a most essential virtue.

As the senior partner Dr. Burgoyne had a right to take his responsibilities in the grand manner. His age was forty-eight. In twenty years he had accumulated funds that provided him with a comfortable little private income, and with his wife's money added to his he could dispose of fifteen hundred pounds a year. He had decided to retire at fifty, and to take a country place in the West, and become a squire. Meanwhile, his highly-established position, both financially and socially, justified him in assuming a florid dignity that could be a little exasperating to other men.

"Mr. Byng."

"Yes, sir?"

"May I ask you to come here a minute?"

Charles Byng was rolling pills, a delicate operation that was not benefited by interruption, but he left his pillboard, to find Dr. Burgoyne standing by the corner cupboard. He had opened the door, and stood posed with one nice pink

hand grasping the knob. Teddy was very proud of his hands.

“Have you noticed anything about this cupboard, Mr. Byng?”

Charles stroked his walrus moustache.

“What sort of thing, sir?”

“A particular something.”

Byng was looking uncomfortable.

“I don’t know what you mean, sir.”

Burgoyne eyed him pontifically.

“That bottle, Byng.”

“Which one, sir?”

Burgoyne gave a stately shake of the head.

“I don’t think you are being quite candid with me, my dear fellah. After all these years, Mr. Byng, one does demand a high standard. Will you please glance at that bottle.”

He indicated it with a dramatic forefinger.

“Three days ago it was nearly full. What is its condition now?”

Byng was looking still more uncomfortable, but it was not the discomfort of guilt.

“About three-quarters full, sir.”

“Ex-actly. Now, I think it my duty to inquire——”

“I’m not responsible, sir.”

“You state that, on your honour?”

“I do, sir.”

Burgoyne looked hard at him.

“I accept your statement, Mr. Byng. I have always considered you a valuable and trusted servant. You will observe that I remove this bottle. In the future it will be kept in my sideboard. And may I request you to remain silent.”

“Of course, sir.”

“The responsibility, I think, is mine.”

Charles Byng returned to his pill-rolling. A most embarrassing and

unpleasant business, this. In a way he was responsible, and yet not responsible. He knew, and yet he was not supposed to know. The incident worried him, because it seemed to accentuate the struggle that had developed between his sympathies and his common sense. It was all very well for Dr. Burgoyne to be so supremely moral, when he drank his sherry and his port, and worked for five hours a day while his junior partner was working twelve.

“Dash it,” said Byng to himself, “I wish he hadn’t noticed it. And I wish Richmond wouldn’t go to that cupboard. After all, it’s only once or twice a day. But the habit? Yes, damn it, a habit like that grows.”

Dr. Richmond’s dog-cart dropped him at the surgery about ten minutes to six. He had the usual crowd waiting for him, chronic dyspeptics, a child with ringworm, a boy with a septic finger, two ulcerated legs, and old Murrell with his cough. Dr. Richmond attended to them with a curt efficiency that was not conversational. Charles Byng listened and waited. He heard Dr. Richmond go into that other room, and he could picture him opening the cupboard door and finding the tonic bottle gone.

Byng turned to the counter to make up some medicine when he heard Richmond’s footsteps returning. There was silence, a significant and suggestive silence. Charles Byng made it appear that he was wholly absorbed in taking down bottles from the shelves, and in pouring the required quantities into the measuring-glass. Richmond had walked to the high desk and was writing up the day-book. Had he opened that cupboard door and discovered the disappearance of the tonic bottle? Byng held his measuring-glass up to the light, and avoided looking at the figure by the desk.

“Charles.”

“Yes, sir?”

“Did you take anything out of that cupboard?”

“No.”

“Did anyone?”

“I think Dr. Burgoyne did, sir.”

“I see.”

Again there was silence. A door opened somewhere. Byng knew the sound of that particular door. It was the private door, and it had a squeaking hinge, and it gave access from the surgery consulting-room into Prospect House.

“Mr. Byng?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is Dr. Richmond back yet?”

“He’s here, sir.”

“Ask him to come into the house for a moment.”

The only person who overheard the row between Dr. Burgoyne and Dr. Richmond was Dr. Burgoyne’s wife, who happened to be reading in the next room. The wall was lath and plaster, and though Mrs. Burgoyne could not hear all that was said, the voices were sufficiently angry for her to be shocked by them. At one time her good husband was shouting. There were “Damn it’s” and “Good God, my dear fellah.” Richmond’s voice was much more under control, and all the more deadly for being so. Mrs. Burgoyne did pick up one of Richmond’s remarks, perhaps, because it was uttered with fierce and mordant deliberation. “If you would do your share of the work, Burgoyne, instead of interfering in matters that don’t concern you——” There was an Olympian bellow from her husband. “My dear fellah, I am warning you for your own good. As your senior, I must claim the right——” A sharp and a rather vulgar word from Richmond caused Mrs. Burgoyne to snap her book to, and leave the room. Really, how disgusting! She would not stay and listen to such language, or to so unseemly a squabble. She did hope that the study window was shut, and that no one could hear what was going on in there.

Presently, Charles Byng heard Richmond returning, and Byng, having cast one quick look at his face, became very busy with his medicine bottles. Dr. Richmond resumed his place at the high desk. He did not flush like Burgoyne when he was angry, but went white and haggard.

“The digitalis mixture for Mrs. Holt. Cut the dose down to five minims.”

“Yes, sir.”

Richmond went on making his entries, and afterwards, when Charles Byng examined the day-book he noticed an angry jerkiness about Richmond’s writing. It was not the usual clean, neat script.

Meanwhile, Dr. Burgoyne was walking up and down his wife’s bedroom, and reacting for her benefit the scene that had taken place in his study. Teddy was that sort of man. He had to ruffle and strut like a fighting cock after the event, especially so if the battle had not gone wholly in his favour.

“Yes, gave it him straight from the shoulder. I don’t think he will forget what I told him. Yes, I can flatter myself that I kept my dignity. Didn’t lose my temper. How did he like it? Of course he didn’t like it. Furious. But I think I

gave him a lesson.”

Mrs. Burgoyne was attending to her hair.

“How very unpleasant for you, Edward.”

“Unpleasant? Damn it, one has to do one’s duty. Can’t allow a fellah to let the practice down. Cæsar’s wife, you know, and all that. Such things get about. Loss of dignity, loss of confidence.”

“Yes, Edward. Really, I think I shall be rather glad when you retire.”

“Fact is, my dear, Richmond isn’t quite a gentleman.”

A man may be conscious of having outfaced an opponent and yet feel humiliated by the challenge that has been thrown at him. Richmond walked back to No. 11 Queen’s Terrace in a mood of hot self-justification. Burgoyne’s pompous insolence had stung him. Damned humbug! Exuding a high, moral flavour when he was part parasite, part snob. And Richmond’s anger spread itself to cover the whole little world he lived and worked in. What a place, what a life! Nothing but smugness and gossip, and smeary convention, and thinking the worst of your neighbour if his hat was not set at just the right angle. Richmond was seething. He wanted to wear his hat on the back of his head, and stuff his fists in his pockets, and swagger and stare Southfleet impudently in the face. What this township needed was a little brutality, the rude candour of the medical student, the pungent breath of reality. Was he to be nothing but a professional lay figure walking sedately in a world of spinsters? Had he no guts, no passions, no primordial urges, no right to be man?

He pushed his hat on to the back of his head, and entering No. 11, slammed the door.

He walked through into the back garden, and here, and suddenly, his wife met him. He was aware of her wide eyes, of a silent shocked questioning, of a suggestion of fear. Damn it, was his face so revealing? Was there no privacy of any sort in this confounded place?

She asked him no question, but that silent challenge moved him to words.

“Just had a row with Burgoyne.”

Her eyelids trembled.

“Where’s the boy?”

“There, on the grass, John. I’m——”

“Oh, nothing to worry about. I spiflicated the flowery fool.”

He walked on, and throwing himself down on the grass beside his small son, removed his hat and placed it on Charles Lovelace's head.

“Extinguished, what! Soldier or sailor, even plough-boy, my lad, but never apothecary or priest.”

Charles chuckled. He put up his hands and raised the black hat until he could see his father.

“What's a pothecary, Dada?”

“A humbug, my lad.”

“And what's a humbug?”

“A thing that buzzes and makes messes on the window-pane. Now then, be careful with my hat. A fellow is not a professional gentleman unless he wears a nicely-polished hat.”

XXII

John Richmond might think of himself as an animal that was caged and tamed, and perhaps he failed to realize that in some subtle way he was ceasing to be a healer. His inspiration was sick in him, and his purpose maimed, and he was in danger of becoming that most sinister creature, the bored physician. His mood was to shrug his shoulders at life, and to declare that a man who vexed his spirit in thinking about human destinies was either a prig or a fool. Consider the butchers how they blow, and the bakers how they bloom, and the brewers how they wax fat and flourish. Money was the thing. Money produced power and freedom. It was more profitable and comfortable to be a tradesman, and to remove from your shop window all texts and testaments. Why hobble yourself with sentimental formulae to which the world paid lip service on the Sabbath, and ignored during the rest of the week? Let the women go to church and sing hymns, and dream of blond, bearded Christs. The women must be allowed their illusions.

But Burgoyne was not an illusion. The relations between them remained stiff and frozen after that high and mighty altercation. Richmond was not in a mood to forgive or forget. And here was this flowery fool imposing upon him a sort of slavery that was profitable only to the senior partner. Burgoyne stood in his way. Burgoyne was the fat master-butcher who pocketed the profits, while his junior cut up the joints. Obviously, if doctoring was to be regarded as a means of earning a living and of becoming a man of property, Burgoyne needed eliminating. Let him retire. Richmond would buy him out, engage a capable assistant at three pounds a week, and begin to make money. With money behind you anything might be possible. He still dreamed at times of returning to the great city and of transcending the Bernard Steerings of this world.

Did Richmond suspect that fate and the Burgoyne inefficiency would deliver him into his hands? The two doctors did not discuss each other's cases. Richmond had nothing to discuss with Dr. Burgoyne, and the Burgoyne dignity was high on its horse. As for the tonic bottle, it lived in a different place, and being under the eyes of Charles Byng, it was appealed to less often.

Glancing down the entries in the day-book which recorded Burgoyne's visits, Richmond was able to keep in touch with his partner's activities. Mrs. Borrowdale was a frequent victim. One name began to appear daily, the name of Miss Alice Ransford, Alan Ransford's only daughter. Burgoyne was paying daily visits to the Ransford house at Richford, and later these visits were

doubled.

Richmond was curious.

“Any idea what is the matter over there?”

“Where, sir?”

“The Ransfords.”

Byng, having gauged the growing hostility between the two partners, clung to discretion.

“It’s a Haust. Bismuthi case.”

“I see. That’s the title.”

“I don’t know any more.”

But Byng had more than a feeling that Dr. Burgoyne was worried about this particular case, for Byng had not studied his Burgoyne for twenty years without becoming wise as to wind and weather. Burgoyne was God’s own blusterer. He could assume an air of Olympian assurance, and peel out platitudes, and rub his nice pink hands together. He was the sort of man who said: “What the patient needs is perfect rest, my dear sir, perfect rest, and a little soothing medicine.” Burgoyne’s vanity was his affliction, the dangerous vanity of a weak man who could not bring himself to say that he did not know. He would persist in such a pose until the chasm yawned before him, and then he would shrink from it in panic, and lie, and rush off to find some other man to underwrite his lies for him. Burgoyne had been singularly fortunate in the way his blunders had been buried. Davidson had saved him on many occasions, but Davidson was not Richmond.

Alice Ransford was a very pretty girl of eighteen, and when, for ten days or more she had been in bed with a raised temperature and vague abdominal pains, her parents became restless. Burgoyne had diagnosed a mild enteritis, and had blamed the hot weather, but at the end of a fortnight it became obvious even to the uninitiated that the girl was seriously ill. Alan Ransford was a lovable man, but he had a red head and a hot temper, and Burgoyne’s flowery phrases exasperated him. He tackled the doctor.

“Look here, Burgoyne, her mother and I are worried. Are you sure you have got to the bottom of the trouble?”

Burgoyne stood on his dignity. Possibly, he had begun to realize that the case was beyond him, but he had bluffed so often and so successfully that he had faith in his star.

“My dear fellah, if you haven’t proper confidence in me——”

Ransford flushed up.

“Isn’t it more serious than that, Burgoyne? Personal feelings apart, are you sure you know?”

Burgoyne had erected a second line of defence.

“My dear fellah, I admit I have had something else in mind. I did not want to worry you. I have been watching the child most carefully.”

“Don’t beat about the bush, man. Tell me.”

“I have begun to suspect something more serious.”

“What?”

“Typhoid. It can be a most insidious and baffling disease.”

“I see. What about a second opinion?”

“My dear fellah, I should welcome it. If she is no better to-morrow, we will have Sylvester Soames in.”

But Ransford was not swallowing Dr. Sylvester Soames.

“Why Soames? I’d prefer your own partner.”

“Richmond?”

“Yes.”

“Dr. Richmond has not the experience of——”

“Look here, Burgoyne, I have a right to some say in the matter. I should like Richmond to see her.”

Burgoyne swallowed the medicine with what dignity he could.

“Very well. Richmond shall see her.”

Charles Byng was shaving himself next morning when both night-bell and day-bell rung, and Byng, who lived over the dispensary, went to the window, and leaning out, saw a groom on the pavement, holding a horse by the bridle.

“Hallo, what’s the trouble?”

“Letter from Mr. Ransford. Doctor wanted at once.”

Byng left half his face unrazored, and went down and opened the door, and seeing that the note was addressed to Burgoyne he told the groom to take it round the corner to Prospect House. The man demurred. Had not Mr. Byng

better do it himself? Young Miss Alice was very ill. He had had orders from his master to see that the doctors came at once; in fact, he was to ride back with them. Byng forgot his funny face, and going round to Prospect House, and finding a maid stoning the doorstep, he sent her up with the letter to Dr. Burgoyne, with a message that the matter was very urgent.

Burgoyne was taking his cold bath, and the letter was pushed under his door.

“It’s urgent, sir.”

“Who from?”

“Mr. Ransford.”

Burgoyne rubbed himself down, slipped into a shirt, and went to collect the letter. It had been written in haste, and it was both peremptory and agitated. Burgoyne was frightened. He hurried into socks and trousers, and going to the head of the stairs, shouted to the maid.

“Edith.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Go and tell Mr. Byng I want him at once.”

When Byng arrived on the landing, he found Burgoyne in the doorway, fastening on a collar with fingers that fumbled.

“Oh, Byng, go round to Dr. Richmond and tell him we are wanted at Richford. Yes, it’s very urgent. And order my dog-cart. Tell Dr. Richmond I’ll drive him over.”

Some hot coffee with a tot of brandy in it, and two hard-boiled eggs had re-stimulated the Burgoyne courage, and he was flushed and talkative, when he took Richmond up into his dog-cart. Ransford’s groom trotted behind them, and that annoyed Burgoyne. Damn it, were they under escort? He turned round and waved the fellow on with his whip. “Get on. Tell your master we are coming.” The groom touched his cap and rode on. Burgoyne puffed out his pink cheeks. “No pleasing some people. A lot of gratitude one gets.” Richmond was watching his man and remaining very silent, and his silence bothered Burgoyne.

“I had better explain the case to you. It looked like a mild enteritis. Didn’t clear up. Of course, I had my suspicions, but I did not want to frighten the good fools. Ransford’s apt to be fussy. Well, what would you suspect?”

Richmond was not helpful. He stared at the green horizon.

“What did you?”

Burgoyne shot an angry and suspicious look at him.

“Why, typhoid, of course. When you have had my experience of queer temperatures and vague tummies——”

“Yes, probably. Any other signs or symptoms?”

“No. One of these dashed vague cases. No spots, no pea-soup stools, no headache.”

“What do you think has happened?”

“Possible perforation, my dear fellah. Didn’t they teach you that?”

Richmond smiled.

“Yes, I think so.”

They found Ransford waiting for them in the garden. He had been prowling up and down like a fierce animal in a cage.

“Ah, here you are. Glad to see you, Richmond. Yes, it was the nurse who made me send off that letter. She’s scared, and so are we all. Yes, go up at once.”

When Richmond saw the girl lying in the bed he was conscious of a sudden shock. Her face was pinched and anguished; it had lost all its youthfulness; to Richmond it was a typical face. He had seen a dozen such tortured masks, and he had never forgotten them. The diagnosis leaped to the eyes of the man who knew. Acute abdomen! He was aware of Burgoyne fussing up to the bed, and of the nurse’s set and somehow unforgiving face. God, what sort of mess had Burgoyne made here?

“A little pain, my dear?”

A little pain indeed! What a question to ask! The girl moved her head to and fro on the pillow, and made a little moaning. The nurse looked grimly at Burgoyne.

“She has been in great pain for hours. It came on suddenly.”

She glanced at Richmond as though appealing to this other man, and Richmond, moving round the bed, drew the clothes back gently and uncovered the girl’s body.

“She can’t bear to be touched, Doctor.”

Richmond nodded.

“Yes, I know.”

For some seconds he watched the girl’s breathing and the rigid stillness of her body below the ribs. He was quick to see and to draw his conclusions from something more, a slight swelling on the right side, below and to the right of the navel. He bent down, and spoke to Alice Ransford.

“I want to touch you. Try and bear it. I won’t hurt you more than I can help.”

Gentle though his touch was, the girl flinched, and her hands clutched his.

“Oh, please don’t.”

“Just a moment. That’s a good girl.”

He had forgotten Burgoyne, but the senior partner stood there cherishing his dignity with the air of a man magnanimously suffering his junior to hold the stage.

“Rather what I suggested, Richmond, I presume.”

Richmond did not look at him. He was very gently percussing the girl’s stomach, and his face was infinitely grave. Then he turned the clothes back with the same gentleness, and stood feeling the girl’s pulse.

Suddenly he looked at Burgoyne across the bed, and there was a ruthlessness in the look.

“We had better discuss.”

He turned and walked out of the room, and Burgoyne followed him. A door stood open, the door of someone’s bedroom. Richmond went in, waited for Burgoyne to enter, and then closed the door. In the garden below he caught sight of Alan Ransford and his wife walking up and down. He saw Ransford glance up at his daughter’s window. How long would those doctors be?

“There’s just one chance left us.”

He turned and looked Burgoyne in the eyes.

“What?”

“Operate.”

Burgoyne blinked at him.

“My dear fellah, one doesn’t operate on a typhoid.”

“It isn’t typhoid.”

Burgoyne's eyelids ceased from blinking. He stared at Richmond.

"My dear fellah, I——"

"It is peritonitis. The caecum and appendix, one of those acute, suppurative cases. Didn't you realize?"

Burgoyne's face grew turgid, his eyes angry, but there was fear mixed with the anger.

"Fudge. I say it's a perforating typhoid."

Richmond gave him a look of scorn.

"Think so? Well, I am going down to put it to Ransford, and ask him to choose. It's the child's only chance, and a poor one. Why the devil didn't you have another opinion?"

Burgoyne stood speechless. This, this was unpardonable. Had Richmond never heard of professional etiquette, of loyalty to your fellows? And suddenly he began to bluster.

"The trouble with you is, Richmond, that you're not——"

"A gentleman? No, I'm not, in a case like this. I'm a surgeon. I am going down to see Ransford."

"You're not."

"I am."

He moved towards the door, and Burgoyne put out a hand.

"Stop. You can't do that. It's——"

"Well, you can tell him."

"I'm damned if I will. My opinion is as good——"

Richmond gave him one look, walked out of the room and down the stairs. He did not see Burgoyne sit down upon the bed, and take out his handkerchief and dab his forehead. What did that bungler matter? Was it your sworn duty to save the faces of fools, and to suffer them to persist in further folly? What infernal humbug! Bunglers like Burgoyne should never be let loose upon a world that wanted to trust them. Also, let it be confessed that his anger over this tragedy was not wholly selfless. There were other angers to be remembered, stupid impertinences to be paid for.

"Do you mind if I speak to you alone, Ransford?"

Mrs. Ransford was a woman of courage.

“I’ll go to Alice, Alan.”

Ransford, head up, shoulders squared, looked Richmond in the face.

“All right. Let’s have the worst.”

“I’m afraid it is very bad. There is just a chance.”

“As bad as that?”

“I’m afraid so. But before we go any further I want to tell you, as man to man, that Burgoyne and I don’t agree.”

Ransford looked hard at him. The pupils showed big in his tawny eyes.

“I’ll take your word, Richmond. What is the——”

“Acute peritonitis following on what used to be called perityphlitis, but never mind words. An operation is the only chance. She’s doomed without it.”

Ransford seemed to steady himself on his heels.

“Any chance then?”

“I’m sorry, only a small one. You see, she ought——”

Ransford nodded.

“Where is Burgoyne?”

“Upstairs, I think. If you would like to hear his opinion——”

“I think I’d rather have his blood, Richmond. You know, I rather dreaded this. I respect you for having told me. Well, for God’s sake do something.”

“You consent?”

“Of course.”

Then, Burgoyne came into the garden, flushed and rather wild-eyed, and somehow determined to retrieve his authority. He cleared his throat, looked at those two other men, and meeting Ransford’s eyes was, for a moment, mute.

“Dr. Burgoyne, Richmond is going to operate.”

Burgoyne raised a sudden, forlorn bluster.

“My dear fellah, if you prefer my junior partner’s opinion.”

“I do.”

“Then, I renounce all responsibility. I——”

Ransford turned away from him.

“I think it is better that you should. How can I help, Richmond?”

“Send your groom on a horse for Roper. The man must find him. He’ll give the anæsthetic. And if you could let me have a trap. I have things to collect.”

“I’ll drive you myself.”

“Then, I’ll tell the nurse to get things as ready as she can.”

Burgoyne had disappeared. He was in his dog-cart and driving off, and the waiting groom saw him whip up his horse savagely, but this outraged soul did not drive so fast or furiously as did Alan Ransford. They passed Burgoyne about half a mile out of Southfleet, and went by him without a look or a word.

Perhaps the gods had pity on Alice Ransford’s youth, or Richmond and Roper worked with fortunate hands, but the girl’s life-flame flickered through the operation, though strong-man Roper had a worried face.

“Pulse almost gone. She won’t stand it.”

“I’ve finished. Good God, what a mess! If Burgoyne wants evidence, you can give it.”

“I should say so. I’m going to give her strychnine.”

“Poor kid, she looks like going. Yes, I’ve got to leave this tube in.”

But Alice Ransford did not die. For three days the life-flame blew this way and that, and then grew steady. Twice a day Richmond tiptoed into the room with eyes that doubted, but on the third day she smiled at him. The temperature was down, all pain gone, the pulse stronger, the wound discharging cleanly.

“Well, young woman, a nice fright you have given us.”

“But I am going to get well, Doctor.”

“Of course you are.”

When Richmond gave Ransford the news, there was not much said between them.

“If there is anything at any time you should want from me, Richmond, it will be yours.”

“Thanks, Ransford. I think I am pleased enough, as it is.”

But towards Burgoyne Ransford was implacable. He would not forgive, nor was he a man who forgot what this other man’s vanity had caused him and

his wife to suffer. He said frankly and publicly what he thought about Burgoyne's incompetence, and let it be known that Burgoyne could take any action that he pleased. He even wrote a letter to the senior partner, a letter which Burgoyne showed to no one. He burnt it. He took no action of any kind in reply to Ransford's challenge.

Yet, this incident was to have its repercussions. Dr. Edward Burgoyne's self-love had been too publicly wounded, and it solaced itself with self-pity. He was a much-wronged man. Just because you had made one mistake, your little world forgot all the years of labour you have given to it. What damned ingratitude! And was any man infallible? Moreover, Dr. Burgoyne was very bitter against Richmond. His partner had behaved infamously, ignored all considerations of loyalty, broken the faith that should unite members of the profession. Richmond had acted like a clever cad. Burgoyne said so to himself and to his wife, who, poor woman, became the homely pot into which her husband poured this perpetual grievance. "That cad, Richmond. I can't go on working with such a fella." Mrs. Burgoyne, wearying of the reiteration, proposed to her husband the very thing he wished to have suggested.

"Why don't you retire, Edward?"

"Dash it, I think I will. Shake off the dust. After all, a fella has to preserve his dignity."

"They haven't appreciated all your work."

"Yes, it's the gross ingratitude of the thing. Siding with a cad like Richmond! I have a good mind to sell out and go."

"We can afford it, dear."

"And if I go, that cad will have to fork out two thousand pounds. Yes, damn it, I'll read the place a lesson. They'll lose the one man who is a gentleman. I haven't forgiven Roper either. He ought to have snubbed Richmond. Yes, dash it, we will go."

He announced his decision to Richmond with the air of a betrayed king who was abdicating, hinting very plainly that the relationship between them had become so ungentlemanly that it could not be stomached. If Richmond wished to take over the whole practice, it would be on a cash down basis. Burgoyne had no intention of accommodating a cad by leaving a part of the principal on loan.

"It is rather a big order for you, Richmond."

"Oh, I can manage."

“Think so?”

“I know someone who will put up half the purchase price for me.”

Burgoyne looked peeved.

“Is that so? I suppose you will take a partner?”

“Possibly.”

“Well, let me give you a word of advice. Bring in a gentleman, a university man. This practice has always had——”

Richmond laughed.

“Thanks, Burgoyne, I’ll keep that in mind. Someone who can add colour and flavour to the concern. I suppose you won’t practice again?”

Puppy! Burgoyne put on his hat and walked out of the surgery. Well, after all, he rather thought that he had snubbed the cad with impressiveness and dignity.

XXIII

So Dr. Edward Burgoyne departed, to wear a red coat and flutter the dovescotes of Devon, and Richmond, after interviewing half a dozen applicants, engaged as an assistant with a view to future partnership, one Dr. Arthur Emmerson. Arthur Emmerson was a very gentlemanly fellow, tall, dark and thin, a Master of Arts and a Bachelor of Medicine of Cambridge. He was a Trinity man, with private means of his own, and engaged to be married. The name of Arthur suited him, for he was quite a stately and gentle young person, with a quiet manner, and a culture that was not wholly medical. The assistantship was to be for a year, but Emmerson, who liked to swim and sail a boat, found Southfleet so much to his liking, that he was ready to gamble on Richmond's good-will, and to take over Prospect House from Burgoyne. Over large it might be for a man proposing to be a junior partner, but Emmerson had eight hundred a year of his own, and a fair young betrothed who was destined to be the mother of many children.

It was Ransford who loaned Richmond a thousand pounds to enable him to pay off Burgoyne. He refused to accept any interest on the loan, and stipulated that the principal should be paid off at Richmond's pleasure. He said: "Your security is good enough, and I don't take blood-money from the man who saved my daughter," which was melodrama, but good melodrama at that.

The passing of Burgoyne coincided with other changes in the town of Southfleet. For thirty years or more it had contained a static community, catering, if it catered at all, for the East End crowds in summer. It had begun as Regency and Early Victorian but about this time two enterprising tradesmen put their heads and their purses together, and began to buy land and build yellow brick villas. They spread along the West Cliff, and beyond the station, and north of Jessamy Lane, and along the Wicking road. Martyr's Grange became involved in them, and æsthetically that was a martyrdom. Moreover, this adventure in bricks and mortar prospered. The speculative gentlemen sold and let their houses to new gentlemen and ladies who preferred to settle in a new place where their very newness would not be remarkable and could be kept in countenance by these hideous, genteel houses. These retired gentlemen were sociable, and they wished to be sporting. The Southfleet Yachting Club was inaugurated, and a little club-house built on the cliff beyond Caroline Gardens. Gentlemen in yachting caps and white trousers and blue reefer jackets gathered here, and played cards and drank and told smutty stories. Their yachting was not a very serious business, for too much sea gave many of

the members queezy stomachs.

Saturday night was a somewhat festive night, and Richmond was asked by one of his new patients, a retired something from the City, why he did not become a member of the club.

“Run down and meet the boys, Doc, one Saturday night, the burgee boys. We’re a cheery crowd.”

Mostly, the “Boys” were elderly, and not of the order of St. Jude, respectable citizens who liked to go unbuttoned now and again and escape from the yellow brick refinement of their households. Richmond could not picture Lucy becoming intimate with these new wives, for though Lucy was utterly untainted by snobbery, she was by her very nature Martyr’s Grange and the Neath world. Lucy and Lady Neath had become fast friends, and in this changing Southfleet, this new middle-class inflorescence that was so very red and white and blue, Willowell was like a landscape in an old Italian picture, hazed with sunlight and dim distances and mystery. Charles Lovelace was taken to the Priory, and being a sensitive child and more Lucy than John he fell into fairyland. He would stand on his strong little legs and watch the fish in the great stew-pond. Then there was The Dell, that place of green mystery, a hollow of shadows and tall trees. Charles Lovelace crawled about in it, and was thrilled, and was conscious sometimes of delicious fear. Sir Hector ran a home-farm. There were pigs and poultry and soft-eyed Jersey cows, and Bob the dog, and geese that gaggled at you. Charles would climb into Lady Ursula’s lap, and gaze into her serene face, and ask strange questions.

Yet, if Lucy and her small son were lifted into that other world, Richmond in this restless and more primitive period of his life, was drawn towards more sensual things. A man may lose his illusions, almost without realizing that they have left him. They may become no more than toys in a nursery, forgotten or despised in youth’s lout stage. Even as sex seems responsible for that spotty and unlovely period when the young beast becomes rough and arrogant, so your grown man may suffer from recrudescences of sex. He may call himself a realist, and choose to gather with blunt souls who suffer from that other illusion that beef and beer and a woman’s legs are the pure realities. Richmond had become cynical, without being conscious of himself as a cynic. He was in a mood to apply the Yankee word Bunkum to all fairy-tales, ethical or otherwise. Such things were for women and children. His appreciation of life coarsened as his estimate of it became more material. Actually this new coarseness, he would have called it naturalness or even sincerity, was part of his anger with convention, and his urge to escape from all the respectabilities that had begun to bore him. The lout had reappeared in Richmond, and was

calling itself man, man the thinker, man the rebel, man the unmiraculous, the educated ape. He was ready to put out a tongue at artifice, the artifice of bustles and skirts and trousers, the priggery of prayer-books, and all the sanctimonious swindles that kept man tame. He called himself a Darwinian, though that gentle and modest old sage would have found no kindred spirit in him. Had he been compelled to read his bible, he would have preferred the Old Testament to the New. Jehovah was natural man writ large, Christ a sentimental improvisation. David and Bathsheba, Elisha cursing the impudent children, Samson slaughtering Philistines, that was life as it was and according to nature. Southfleet was a Shallowbrass world. It did not occur to him at this time that the world, his world, might be Lucy.

So, Richmond went to the club, and went again. In his St. Martha's days he would have found its members uninteresting, good smutty souls who liked a well spiced story, and who were interested in little but commerce and politics. It had a Music-Hall mind, though it was good English, and sufficiently kind. It could be too kind to itself and to others, as Richmond had reason to know, one or two of the more hard-drinking members being his patients. There was old Bowyer, to whom Richmond said: "I would cut a little of the brandy," and Bowyer had winked at him.

"It's a wise child, Doc, that knows its liquor."

Richmond had caught himself hesitating. Ought he to tell Mr. Bowyer that he would be dead in two years if he continued to drink as he was drinking? Was that part of a physician's duty? The Dr. Richmond of five years ago would have found it so, but the new casuist shrugged his shoulders. After all, it was old Bowyer's funeral, and if he chose to shorten his life and be merry, was it a doctor's duty to play parson or prig? And Richmond left it at that.

The club liked heartiness. It asked you to drink, and expected you to do so. It smoked and was noisy over its cards. It damned Mr. Gladstone, and toasted the suave Jew, Dizzy. It chuckled over obscene stories, and laid its bets, and strove to be nautical, and Jingo in its foreign relationships. Not a single member had crossed the English Channel. It read nothing but the daily papers, and was curious about nothing, save the state of securities and the morals of other people's wives and daughters. It liked its maidservants to be pretty. Had anyone quoted poetry to it, it would have looked uncomfortable, and muttered that it could not see anything in that sort of stuff.

"I am going round to the club to-night."

Lucy was ready to agree that a man should amuse himself and mix with other men, but having met some of these gentlemen and their wives when she

had paid courtesy calls on the new villas, Lucy could not help wondering what virtue John found in them. Was it good for the practice? Lucy found herself mute and ill at ease in these new houses, though her muteness did not matter, for her new acquaintances were prepared to do all the talking. They talked about their children and their servants and their husbands. They had good, common minds, and an appreciation of life that was heartily vulgar, and all the more so because it wore satin. If the men were like the women, it puzzled Lucy to know what John had to say to them. You could not talk to them about books or pictures, or beauty in any of its manifestations, or the progress of science, or foreign travel, for they were ignorant of all such things. Rarely did their conversation escape from the quagmire of local gossip, and the trivial curiosity that elevates some domestic mole-hill into a mountain.

In her wisdom she preferred to let words come to her, rather than to beat the hedgerows for them, but she did ask John one question.

“Why not buy a small sailing-boat?”

He seemed less quick to catch her meaning than he would have been in the Tenterden Terrace days.

“A boat? What should I do with a boat?”

“If you are a member of the Yacht Club——”

He laughed.

“Oh, not at all necessary. I go there for a game of cards and some chatter.”

“Who else goes? Any of the old people?”

“Well, no. Feygate is a vice president, but we don’t see him. Old Cade comes along sometimes, and Callow.”

The Rev. Harold Callow was Dr. Creavy’s new curate, a hard-bitten, horse-faced man whose surname was a misfit. He was by no means callow. His large red nose, and long yellow teeth, and his equine laugh were all protests against that surname. Mr. Callow was always present at the club on a Saturday night, playing cards and smoking a foul pipe, and drinking brandies and sodas. He told the most unclerical and unseemly stories until close on midnight, and yawned himself out of bed next morning to administer the Eucharist at St. Jude’s church. Richmond did not describe Mr. Callow’s peculiarities to his wife. She was one of those worshippers who accepted the bread and wine from him, and such crude inconsistencies would have shocked her.

Lucy asked no more questions about the club, but she was questioning life more and more now that her husband was ceasing from being a child of divine

curiosity. Almost, he seemed to have delegated that virtue to his son. He was becoming, without realizing it, an acceptor of material things, a man whose reactions were more and more those of an animal. He was coarser, slower; both lethargic and irritable. He could not be bothered with transcendental problems. The words Why and How were being blotted from his dictionary. Insensibly, he was growing stereotyped in his work, a priest of routine, a stock-bottle physician. His medical journals remained unread, and this was a symptom that did not escape his wife's eyes. He was not interested in new matter, the latest discoveries, the pioneer work of other men.

That, both frightened and saddened her.

To little Charlie Richmond the world was a wonderful place, and his mother the most wonderful person in it.

He was a lovable child, and a healthy one, with a little brown egg of a face, and two serious blue eyes that looked at people and things with peculiar steadfastness. He wore a straw hat with the word "Invincible" stamped in gold upon it, a sailor's jacket and collar, knickers and white socks. The dwellers in Queen's Terrace were accustomed to seeing Charlie Richmond's brown calves racing along by the railings and disappearing into the green gate. He was a somewhat solitary child, and like many solitary and sensitive children, his own playmate, and such good friends with himself that he was seldom peevish or out of temper.

Life to Charles Lovelace was a great adventure. He paddled in the sea, and made daisy-chains in Tenterden Square, and sometimes rode in the dog-cart with his father. He and old Howell were great cronies. He liked to watch the old man grooming the horses, and was so without fear that he had to be watched lest he should get himself kicked or trodden on. He was a child who had never been hurt, and who had implicit faith in humanity. He loved Christmas and Santa Claus and stockings, and going to church when the holly was up, and chanting beside his mother the good old hymns. He stood and sang While Shepherds watched Their Flocks. He learnt to kiss Ethel under the mistletoe. He liked the snow when it lay thick and your feet made sockets in it, and the ice on the Priory fish-pond. His mother put him in a chair and skimmed round with him. He tried sliding and fell and bumped his head, and was consoled by that beautiful creature, Lady Neath. Caroline Gardens formed his favourite playground. There were two funny old twisted oaks here with a seat and forked branches into which you could climb and scan the sea for "Sabiges." Charlie called it The Sabige Tree.

Charlie Richmond was very sensitive to faces. They were like windows, or portraits hanging on a wall, changing their expressions as the light varied. Puzzling things faces, especially those of the grown-ups round you. His mother's face was to him the happiest of them all, in that he never feared it, but even his mother's face changed. Sometimes there seemed to be little lines and shadows upon it, and the eyes became silent eyes, in that they did not smile. Old Sarah, though she loved him dearly, had to be treated with respect, for Sarah had her grim days. She suffered from rheumatism, and the moods of a domestic partisan. Ethel's face could be sulky, for emotional reasons or unreasons that were hidden from the child. Jane had a face like a good loaf of bread that was freshly baked daily and was incapable of sourness.

It was his father's face that caused Charles Lovelace the most puzzlement, for it had become so much more like a window with the blind down. Charlie remembered those days when he had been able to run to his father and clutch his legs, and be tossed up in the air. Now, things were different. Sometimes his father looked at him differently, or did not appear to see him. His father might wear a strange face, and pass him by with a pat on the head, and a "Hallo, young man, run along and play in the garden." His father was becoming a person who inspired awe, unpleasant awe. He disliked noise, and anybody fidgeting near him.

There was the incident of the balcony window one Sunday afternoon. Charlie was playing a game of coming in and going out, banging the drawing-room door, and also the french window, and suddenly he was smitten by a gust of parental anger.

"Are you coming in or going out?"

"I don't know, Daddy."

"Well, go out and stay out."

Charles stared in astonishment at that angry face, and then fled, boo-hooing up the stairs. He heard the rustle of his mother's skirts on the balcony, and her voice, almost a strange voice.

"John, don't speak to the child like that."

"Good God, do I deserve any consideration? You spoil the child."

"No. Children don't understand."

"Well, teach him to understand that I like some peace."

Lucy caught Charlie on the stairs, and sitting down, took him into her lap. She spoke to him gently.

“You must not disturb father when he is reading, dear.”

Charles choked and sobbed.

“No, Mamma.”

“You must be quiet when he is reading.”

“Yes, Mamma.”

“Do you understand?”

“Yes, I do. I didn’t just fink. Are you angry with me too, Mamma?”

“No, dear. But remember.”

So, Charles discovered that fathers could be strange, awesome creatures who exploded suddenly, and made you feel frightened and ashamed. His father had not always been like that. Charles, the little sensitive, became more wondering and watchful. He watched the faces of both his parents, and young though he was, it seemed to him that his mother also watched that other face. Sometimes his father would come in late to meals, and sit down in silence, and look cross. Charles would catch his mother giving that other face a queer, questioning look. There was a muteness about these meals. And if Charles dawdled or muddled a mouthful or kicked the table leg, his father might look at him severely. And the child felt troubled.

Also, there were other voices in the house, the voices of Sarah and Jane and Ethel. Charlie Richmond heard things that he did not understand, and sometimes, when these women became aware of him, their voices would die away. There was an occasion when both his mother and father were out, and Charlie was playing in the back garden. The kitchen window opened on the back garden, and Charles, hearing the voices of Sarah and Ethel and Jane, toddled up with a child’s curiosity and stood listening. His head was below the level of the sill, so the three women did not suspect his presence.

Said Ethel’s thick, tonsillar voice: “Well, I think it’s disgustin’. I don’t hold with a doctor and a gentleman behavin’ like that.”

“Behaving like what?” countered Sarah.

“Well, you know as well as I do. Comin’ ’ome like that on a Saturday night. There were six of ’em, singin’ along the terrace. Bill told me.”

“Bill seems to know a good deal too much.”

“Well, ’e’s the steward, isn’t ’e? The amount o’ drink that’s got through on a Saturday night.”

Sarah's voice became severe.

"Look here, my girl, you mind your own business, and keep your mouth shut."

"I've got a right to an opinion, 'aven't I? I say all that booze——"

"Booze, indeed!"

"Well, I 'eard 'im come in, and it was Sunday morning."

There was sudden silence, and the three women round the kitchen table sat and stared at the child who had appeared in the garden doorway.

"Sarah, what's booze?"

Sarah jumped up with a very red face, and a furious glance at Ethel.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

She went across and picked up Charles and kissed him, and carrying him out into the garden, deposited him on the lawn.

"Let's play pigs, duckie."

She got on her hands and knees and made porcine noises, and Charles Lovelace, putting himself in the same position, grunted at her.

"But what *is* booze, Sarah?"

"Booze, my dear? Why, it's just something I use in the kitchen."

Charles Lovelace had to be satisfied with this explanation, but after posing on all fours in front of Sarah, and staring at her with his very blue eyes, he asked her yet another disconcerting question.

"Why has Effel two voices?"

"Two voices, dearie?" What did the child mean?

"Yes, the kitchen voice, and the voice she gives muvver and dada and me?"

Sarah frowned. Was that so? Yes, she supposed that it was so, and that she herself was more dulcet in the drawing-room. Children did find you out!

"Oh, that's just Ethel, my dear. It does not signify anything. You're too quick, that's what you are."

And she kissed him.

Sarah admonished both herself and Ethel, and preached a short sermon

upon the virtues of discretion and self-restraint when you had a child like Master Charles about the place. The dear innocent must not have ideas put into his head, and when Ethel rather sulkily suggested that days would come when Master Charles would become man, Sarah snubbed her and declared that going to meet trouble was the surest way of making it. She agreed that trouble did come when boy became man, the world's worst trouble, perhaps for man could be a quarrelsome, lazy, lascivious beast, yes, even the best of them. As for Adam putting all the blame on Eve, well, that was man's way, and a rather mean way, if you asked Sarah. Meanwhile, she was not going to have her sweet innocent tarnished before his time.

Mrs. Richmond could have echoed Sarah's warning that going to meet trouble might be the surest way of making it, but when life unfolded to Lucy those undivined markings upon the scroll, she shut her inward eyes for the moment, not because she wished to remain blind, but because the meaning of these happenings bit too deep. How unexpected life was, so like an English day in spring! You began it in the sunshine, feeling that God was in the heavens, and that all was good with the world, and before evening the sky might be overcast, and a little plaintive, restless wind blowing. Surely, she might be considered happy and fortunate among women? She had a husband who had married her for love and whom she loved, a small son, a house and possessions that were dear to her. She had security, friends, good will, and yet she had never felt less secure in the inner sanctuary of her secret self. How strange that you should come to fear those whom you loved! Love and fear seemed to be so close together. That which was very dear to you could wound as nothing else could wound you.

She discovered that it was possible to fear her child's eyes and his questions. He came to her knees as she sat in the drawing-room, sewing, and solemnly asked her a question.

"What is booze, Mamma?"

Sometimes he called her mother, sometimes mamma or mumsie. She had reproved him gently for using that vulgar abbreviation—mum.

"Booze, dear?"

Horrible word! Where had he heard it, and how had it been used? She was conscious of fear, vague nausea.

"Yes, Sarah says—"

"Did Sarah use it?"

"No, Mamma, I heard Effel."

If Lucy could feel bitter against anybody she felt bitter against that garrulous girl.

“You must not pay any attention to what Ethel says, Charlie.”

“Sarah said it was something she uses in the kitchen.”

“Perhaps she does, dear, sometimes.”

“But what is it, Mamma?”

Lucy tried to keep her face from betraying her.

“What we drink, dear. It may be water or lemonade, or tea.”

The child nodded and was silent, but Lucy felt that his child’s mind was groping for new meanings in his own small world. Had that wretched girl been gossiping? How loathesome was such chatter! Common fingers pawing at the secret and intimate things that you tried to cover up and forget. Should she speak to Ethel? But how could she speak to Ethel? If words were inevitable she would have to gather the supreme courage and speak gently to someone else.

She did so speak, inwardly trembling, but outwardly calm. Richmond had his pipe alight and the daily paper spread, and his slippers on a hassock.

“John.”

“Yes.”

She was sewing, and her eyes were on her work. How was she to begin? Blurt out what she knew, or dress up her words in muslin and lace?

“I think I shall have to get rid of Ethel.”

He answered her over the top of the paper: “I think I suggested that some time ago. Well, it is your affair.”

She understood that he wanted to be left in peace to read his paper and not to be bothered with domestic problems, but Ethel was her property-horse and had to be driven on the stage.

“She has been using words in the child’s hearing.”

“Well, get rid of her.”

“One feels so very responsible, John. I think a child ought to be protected.”

There was an impatient rustling of the paper.

“I don’t believe in too much cotton wool.”

“Nor I, but when a girl like Ethel gossips and uses words that might

suggest things to a child.”

He dropped the paper, and his face was irritable.

“Love and young men and all that, I suppose? Well, the girl’s human.”

“No, it wasn’t that.”

“Well, what? Let’s hear the horrible word.”

Her eyes were on the work in her lap.

“Booze.”

Richmond opened his mouth as though to laugh, but almost instantly the impulse seemed to die away. His mouth became a hard line. He stared at his wife, and then raised the paper, so that it hid his face.

“Outrageous, of course.”

He was not reading, and his eyes were set in a stare. Was his wife trying to hint to him that he was kitchen gossip. Oh, damn all these women!

“Well, anything else?”

“No, John. I thought you ought to know.”

He lowered the paper for a second, and looked at her, frowning. Then, the paper went up again.

“So you listen to what such wenches say?”

“Yes, dear, sometimes I do.”

XXIV

At the age of five Charlie Richmond was always falling in love or developing passionate hero-worship for all sorts of people. For a month or more Dr. Arthur Emmerson was Charlie's hero, he going out to sail with him and being dreadfully sick on the first occasion, but Richmond, who became suddenly and strangely jealous of the Emmersonian cult, rather pompously put an end to it.

"I would rather you did not take the boy out. His mother thinks it too dangerous."

Lucy had expressed no such opinion, but Dr. Emmerson accepted it as valid. He was finding it necessary to cultivate tact in his professional relations with Dr. Richmond who, sometimes for no reason at all, would stand decisively upon the prerogatives of the senior partner. Dr. Emmerson had a very sweet temper, and Dr. Richmond's temper blew hot and cold like a wind in some unhappy land where dust-storms arise and too little rain falls.

Charlie Richmond's devotions were varied and non-catholic. He became attached to old Beckwith of Caroline Gardens, and Mr. Kemp an income-tax official who fished from the pier as well as for other and official fish. One of the Miss Pinhook's girls, a chocolate-box blonde, was his beloved for quite six months. He hung about the school gate in Tenterden Terrace and gazed with solemn and adoring eyes at the schoolroom window, causing such giggles that the elder Miss Pinhook wrote a polite yet protesting letter to his mother. He fell asleep in church during one of Dr. Creavy's sermons, and Lucy became aware of a smacking of lips, dream lips. She roused Charles from his slumbers.

"What are you doing, dear?"

She whispered the words, and his response was whispered back.

"I was only kissing Maudie, Mother."

A bearded and saturnine house-painter who was at work on No. 11 cast a strange spell upon Charles. Charles was learning about the great Duke of Wellington, and it would seem that the house-painter became associated in his mind with the Duke. One spring morning Charles collected a bunch of wallflowers in the back garden and presented them to his hero.

The man refused them, and with peculiar surliness.

"Better give 'em to one of the girls."

Charles toddled into the house, humiliated and abashed. He took the flowers to his mother.

“The Duke wouldn’t take my flowers, Mother.”

“Who, darling?”

“The Duke who paints the house.”

He was a very troubled child, and she comforted him.

“Perhaps he did not think he ought to, dear. You see they are father’s flowers.”

“Does father want them to give to ladies?”

“Perhaps he does, darling.”

“Shall I ask him?”

“No, I don’t think I should, if I were you.”

So much likeness was there between father and son, and yet in the nature of things they were so different. They were in agreement even upon the charms of Dr. Emmerson’s new young wife, a brunette with a lovely forehead and coal-black hair, a cherry mouth and hazel eyes. Ruth Emmerson became Charlie’s particular passion. She was a merry, jocund, laughing creature, who took Charles out for walks, and was amused and touched by his devotion. She told him fairy stories and the names of flowers, and let him sit on her lap and gaze at her. She, in her turn, became a devotee of Lucy’s, for they were complementary to each other in colour and in temperament. Lucy was not jealous of this gay and affectionate creature who was too happy and spontaneous to be the bearer of guile.

Ruth Emmerson had a quick tongue and sparkled with mischief, and she dared to tease even that difficult person Dr. Richmond. Charles’s father, at this very pagan period in his life, had a way of regarding gentlewomen with self-conscious suspicion. That he was moved to look at Mrs. Emmerson in a way that was not professional might have been too loutish, and Richmond was not the lout in his wife’s drawing-room. He just stared; and was monosyllabic. Strawberries and cream were too sophisticated and not upon his menu. His appetite could cope with coarser food, jam-roll, and crumpets and good roast-beef.

Mrs. Emmerson dared to flirt with him, perhaps because she and Arthur were agreed that Dr. Richmond was an unknown quantity. Mrs. Emmerson would say that there is no quicker way of exploring a man’s secret self than by

flirting with him. If he is a fool dressed up in strong silences and suggestions of profound sagacity, the secret will soon betray itself. Any male enigma is a challenge to a clever woman's natural wit, but a difficult person like John Richmond had to be hunted with nice cunning and understanding.

Said her husband: "I can't make Richmond out. I like the man, and yet _____"

"A twist, somewhere?"

"A very considerable twist. He's clever enough, but there's something lacking. Like a good watch with the mainspring gone."

"Would you like me to diagnose him, Arthur?"

"You!"

"Don't be so pompous. I'm rather quick at human diagnosis."

"Are you, indeed? So, you summed me up?"

"Well, I married you. That ought to be sufficient."

It was not mere vanity, but a superabundance of vitality that provoked her to playfulness. Her intentions might be quick, but she had yet to learn that some men cannot be played with. They take the game too seriously, and with a sudden primitive explosiveness that is not gentle golden-rain, but a squib or rocket. Moreover, Ruth Emerson was a creature of ardent loyalties, and it did not take her long to discover where her affections lay, and the loyalties that were linked with them. You might find your airy-fairy mischief becoming an embarrassment when a man was dangerous, and in a mood to misread your baby-tricks.

John Richmond's reactions to her playfulness were not those of his son. This man was either a fool, or dangerous. She quickly divined in him a kind of fierce hunger for something, a roughness in playing such a game, a strength that would pull flimsy sentimental curtains aside, and demand the reality.

She was sobered, shocked, a little frightened. Lucy was her friend, and she desired Lucy's friendship. And what if Lucy had noticed that a particular person——? Ruth Emerson became the demure young matron, taking out young Charles, but avoiding the father, but not so completely as to leave him with any illusions. He might find her sitting on a footstool at his wife's feet, and so obviously her devotee that she could look and speak dispassionately to the husband. She made herself appear girlishly at ease with him, devastatingly at ease, and Richmond was secretly angered. There seemed to be so many things that angered him. Coquetting! The pretty little chit had been playing

with him.

Yet, how could he know that Ruth Emerson's baby eyes saw more deeply into dark waters than he did? Yes, and that in some subtle way she felt pity for him, divining in his inflammability the smart of secret disharmony. Poor Dr. Richmond, so much a man, and yet so much a fool! Instinctively, she was drawn nearer to Lucy, understanding that if she, the younger woman, had uncovered that dark storm-centre in a man's soul, Lucy who loved him, must be so much nearer to it. Could a man be such a fool and so hungry for sensation that he did not see that which was so precarious and so precious? Poor Dr. Richmond, poor Lucy!

She did not wish to speak about this incident, even to her husband. It was one of those experiences that can shock the fastidious child in woman, and there are more women of such temper in the world than mere carnal man wots of. Nor is it always prudery, nor the vanity that tempts a man to play with fire, and then snubs him with sanctimonious virtue. There are other profundities, loyalties, compassions, and Ruth Emerson understood them.

Yet, when Arthur teased her about the challenge they had exchanged, she had an answer ready.

"Don't joke about it, Arthur. It's rather sad."

"Sad?"

"Someone is a rather unhappy man."

"Did he tell you the old old story?"

"Don't, my dear. It isn't at all funny."

Arthur Emerson looked at his wife consideringly. Then he bent down and kissed her forehead.

"Sorry. Yes, I understand. There is something wrong there. An attack of youth."

"Yes, one could call it that. I shall not like it in you, Arthur, if ever it happens."

"No. Doesn't it ever happen to women?"

"Perhaps. I don't think it will happen to me, if——"

"If?"

"You always want me."

Southfleet continued to spread itself along the cliffs and over the fields towards Willowell. A new nomenclature was born, and in place of the old Prospect Place and Paradise Rows and Royal Terraces, the new world labelled itself Oaklands, or Minorca Lodge, or The Grampians. The bald, yellow brick Western Terrace had its Balmoral, its Sandringham and its Hughenden. The great Queen's petticoats still prevailed. A Coffee Tavern was opened in Station Road. Good young men wore the blue ribbon in their buttonholes. Earnest gentlemen in black still came and spoke from platforms for the benefit of the heathen. Miss Shallowbrass continued to lead the local choral society in Elijah and the Messiah. Yet, in spite of the increased population the pews of St. Jude's church remained adequate in accommodating the devout and the conventional. Dr. Creavy and his wife sedulously shepherded the new parishioners, but the response was not what Dr. Creavy expected. The new worldliness, or the new paganism was on the way, while, in the villages, farmers, ruined by the American wheat, were going bankrupt. Men were leaving the land.

Dr. Richmond had become much less observant and quick in his responses than his small son. He preferred to drive his own dog-cart with Howell beside him when he was covering a country round, and as a charioteer he was all profile to those people whom he passed. It was as though he did not wish to see them, or be seen by them, or to be bothered with professional courtesies, and in this he had fallen lower than Burgoyne. Burgoyne had always driven through the town with an eye for everybody, and an impressive lift of the hat for all those who mattered. Moreover, Richmond's driving could be on occasions impatient and angry. If silly people stepped off the pavement without care his look of scorn primed his opinion of them on their faces. Sometimes he said what he thought. "Do you want to be knocked down, you idiot?" On one occasion old Howell saved him from driving over two fuddled trippers, by grabbing the reins.

"Look out, sir."

"The damned fools!"

Old Howell's face was set like a rock. What was the matter with his master? And did Dr. Richmond realize that many people in Southfleet were asking the same question?

When the first of The Squatters settled in Southfleet, it was Charlie Richmond who discovered the invasion. Charlie had been playing with other children in Tenterden Square, and seeing some yellow, metallic object glittering at him from the railings of Tenterden Terrace, he had toddled across to investigate. What was the funny thing on the gate of their old home, No. 9?

Charlie was learning his letters, and he was able to spell out the text on the very new brass plate.

“Dr. Percy Squibb, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.”

Charlie was so intrigued that he darted back to tell the news to Ethel.

“Look, Ettie, look at the thing on our old gate.”

Ethel went across to investigate, holding Charlie’s hand.

“Coo!” said she, “a new doctor. Well, I do call that cheek. In No. 9, too!”

Nothing would satisfy Charles but a sudden return to No. 11 Queen’s Terrace and his mother. He dashed upstairs, for he had seen his mother sitting on the balcony.

“What do you fink, Mamma?”

Lucy smiled at him.

“Am I to guess?”

“A new doctor is living in our old house.”

“No. 9?”

“Yes. I read his name, Mamma, Dr. Percy Squibb.”

“How clever of you, darling.”

“But what is he doing there? Ethel said ‘coo, what cheek,’ when I showed it her.”

“Did she? Well, darling, I expect Mr. Squibb is a doctor like father.”

“But people don’t want another doctor, do they, with father and Dr. Arthur?”

“Dr. Squibb hopes so, I expect.”

“Well, I call that silly. And isn’t it a silly name. Squibb. I wonder if he goes bang?”

Lucy laughed. Of course it was possible that Dr. Squibb might prove a damp firework.

Dr. Arthur Emmerson, driving by that morning, spotted the new brass plate, and was amused by it. Dr. Percy Squibb, genus Squatter! Well, Dr. Squibb had arrived somewhat surreptitiously, and not like a Chinese cracker, but with Southfleet spreading itself there was room for new men. Emmerson was not a competitive person. He and Richmond had more than enough to do,

and a well established practice such as Davidson, Burgoyne, Richmond and Emmerson need not cut capers when a squib exploded.

At the end of the morning round, when they met in the surgery, Emmerson broke the news to Richmond, and Richmond, instead of laughing at the joke his partner made of the new doctor's surname, showed anger. He was the man in possession, resenting the appearance of a possible rival, and especially a fellow who came as a pirate, and had not paid a penny piece for the claim he was staking.

“Squibb. Look him up in the directory. Have you seen the fellow?”

“No.”

Emmerson was surprised at Richmond's annoyance. He turned up Dr. Squibb in the big red book, and read out the entry. Richmond, who was writing up his morning round, fastened upon one particular word.

“Durham! That's diagnostic.”

Emmerson, in spite of his Cambridge flavour, was less prejudiced than Richmond.

“Surely good things can come out of Durham?”

“Possible, but not probable.”

Dr. Emmerson closed the book, with a whimsical glance at his partner that said: “Oh, come now! We can stand a little competition, and a man must live.”

Doubtless, that was Dr. Squibb's point of view. For eight years he had toiled as an assistant in a semi-slum practice, and saved money for the great adventure, and being on a holiday in Southfleet, he and Mrs. Squibb, for there was a Mrs. Squibb, had been impressed by the professional possibilities of Southfleet. Dr. Squibb had spied out Canaan. Here was a growing and a prosperous community with but three medical men to serve it, and Dr. Percy Squibb had decided to put up his plate and dare fortune. He was a neat, cocky little man with a black moustache and a shrewd eye, a man whose hat was too large and polished, and his trousers too precisely pressed. His manners were like his hat, too jaunty and curled as to the brim. Dr. Percy Squibb was a bounder, but a good bounder if you gave him a friendly smile and some brotherliness, but quite capable of being a sly and snarling terrier if he was shown your boot.

Professional etiquette demanded that he, as a new man, should leave cards on his brother physicians and surgeons. He did so. Dr. Sylvester Soames and Dr. Emmerson returned the call, but Richmond was less complacent, and

ignored the social significance of Dr. Percy Squibb. He explained the omission to himself by forgetting it, and reminding himself now and again that he supposed that he would have to call on the fellow. Meanwhile, there was no hurry. He, as Southfleet's leading practitioner, could be allowed a certain leisureliness in his acceptance of the squatter.

Dr. Squibb did not see it in that way, but with the eyes of a new man who was risking his precious savings in a gamble with fate. Drs. Soames and Emmerson had recognized him, Dr. Richmond had not. Percy Squibb, knowing too well how precarious his position might be, yet being a pugnacious little person with a considerable opinion of himself, resented Dr. Richmond's snub. He said to his wife: "I shall tackle the fellow if I get a chance," and his wife, who was a yellow-headed little matron with hard blue eyes, applauded his spirit.

Dr. Squibb did get his chance. A horse ran away down the Pier Hill, and pitched the occupant of the trap into the wooden fence of Caroline Gardens. Neither Richmond nor Emmerson nor Dr. Sylvester Soames could be found to deal with the accident, and Dr. Squibb was called to the case. The injured man, who happened to be the lessee of The Crown Inn, had been carried home on a shutter, and Dr. Squibb dealt with a scalp wound and a fractured leg, and most capably so. Bailly of The Crown Inn was a Richmond patient, and Dr. Squibb had washed his hands and was preparing to put on his coat when Richmond himself arrived.

To begin with they were exceedingly if coldly polite to each other.

"Dr. Richmond, I believe? Since you could not be found, they called me in."

"So I see. It is Dr.——?"

"Squibb."

"Yes, I was at the other end of the town, and my partner was over at Richford. I am much obliged to you. Yes, I'll take over."

"I have done everything that was necessary, Dr. Richmond. Scalp wound, and simple fracture of the right tibia and fibula."

Richmond was not tactful. He said that he preferred to be responsible for his own patient, and that he would himself examine Mr. Bailly. His manner gave Dr. Squibb to understand that he, Richmond, had no intention of accepting Dr. Squibb's *ipse dixit*, and that Dr. Squibb could go upon his way. Dr. Squibb's sharp little face became like the face of an angry terrier. He said nothing at the moment. He put on his hat and picked up his bag, and walked

downstairs, but he waited for Richmond in the Crown Inn's front garden. It contained no flowers, nothing but some starved grass, a flagstaff, and two wooden seats painted white. Dr. Squibb sat down on one of the seats, and placed his bag beside him.

When Richmond came out, Dr. Squibb jumped up, and clutching his bag firmly, put himself in Richmond's way.

"You'll excuse me, but I should like a word with you, Dr. Richmond."

Richmond paused.

"Certainly."

"May I remind you that I also am a member of the profession, and that as such, I resent what I might describe as your deliberate rudeness."

Dr. Squibb was very angry, Richmond not at all so, and the advantage lay with Richmond.

"What rudeness?"

Dr. Squibb's tongue and his temper began to run away with him.

"My dear sir, I'm not a fool. I take the trouble to leave my card on you and you have not the decency——"

"I'm a busy man."

"Too busy to remember your manners, I suppose. No, don't interrupt me, I have not finished yet. Do you think I did not understand the cavalier way you treated me upstairs five minutes ago? Let me tell you, Richmond——"

And suddenly Richmond smiled at him, but it was not a smile that assuaged anger. He was finding the little man rather funny, fizzing with indignation, and suggesting that all this fury would end in a fiery pop.

"I'm rather afraid you have lost your temper."

Dr. Squibb became mute. He swallowed. His eloquence died away. He drew himself up and raised his hat to Richmond.

"Good morning. I think I have said all that needed saying. Yes, good morning, Dr. Richmond."

He walked out of the gate like a game-cock, lifting his heels, and clutching his bag very hard. Damned supercilious cad! And Richmond, still amused, followed him out, and climbing into the waiting dog-cart, was driven away and past that little prancing figure that footed it along the footpath, eyes front. Poor little pipsqueak! Richmond did not realize that he had made an enemy, and a

very bitter enemy. Little men can bear malice, for little men are often very vain.

Richmond did not mention the incident to his wife. He was talking less and less to Lucy about all the intimate things in life that should have concerned them both, perhaps because he was conscious of the truth that he was living in a new world, and its realities would have shocked her. That most saddening of all silences was spreading between them like a sheet of dark and steely water. Both of them were conscious of it, and neither of them questioned it, Lucy, because she felt and knew that a comradeship that is clutched at ceases to be valid. Richmond was growing shy of his wife. He had things, urges, discontents, temptations, to conceal, and so he showed to her a conventional surface, talked about trivial things, as though so perfunctory a barrier could mask his intentions. Moreover, there was a part of him that still played censor, sending out a little, frail voice, from the world of yesterday, accusing, reasoning, reproaching. He had not behaved very well to little Dr. Squibb. He had trodden on the foot of another man's pride, and then smiled at his indignation. Oh, well, these little flurries would pass. He might send Dr. Squibb a patient or two, shed some of the superfluities of a flourishing practice in favour of the squatter.

Dr. Percy Squibb did speak of the matter to his wife, and with anger and bitterness. That supercilious swine, Richmond! Yes, if he, Percy Squibb, ever were granted the chance to remove that superior smile from Dr. Richmond's face, most certainly he would seize that chance. And his wife agreed with him, but with a shrewdness that looked out at life from her hard blue eyes. Mrs. Squibb was ambitious, she had one of those predatory noses, with prominent and clearly cut nostrils. It was like a beak fashioned to seize and shred the flesh from the bones of opportunity.

"Don't do anything rash, Percy. Who was that fellow in the bible, Agag, wasn't it?"

"He came to a bad end, Flo."

"Did he? Well, you know what I mean."

"I do. Softlee walkee catchee monkey. If I can catch Richmond tripping. Meanwhile, I've got to squat here and look pleasant. The idea is that whenever new people arrive in the place, you ought to call on them."

"Just in a friendly way, and show my ivories!"

"Ex-actly. Did you say there was sausages and mash for supper?"

The Squibb culture was somewhat superficial, but quite adequate in

matching the colour scheme of much of the new Southfleet.

XXV

Sir Roger Feygate was dying and with great contentment that it should be so, slipping gradually and placidly down the estuary towards the mysterious sea. He had heard it said that no man, however wise or however senile, wishes to die, but in his own case Sir Roger could contradict that statement. She whom he had loved most dearly had left him very much alone. Even the old house had to gaze with stately windows at all that new blatant brickwork rising about it. Towering elms were falling. The new railway line from Southfleet to Eastness traversed the meadows at the bottom of the garden and displayed to Martyr's Grange a great embankment of raw earth. Sir Roger could and did say that he had outlived his own particular world, and that he was ripe to be plucked from the tree.

“Not change and decay, my dear fellow, but change and progress. Progress bewilders me. My heart is tired, and there is no oil in my old joints.”

Richmond visited him daily, not because it was necessary, but because Sir Roger wished it. “You need not look at my tongue or feel my pulse, Richmond. I pay my half guinea for a human presence. You are one of those who knew her.”

It was a Tennysonian passing, with Excalibur thrown into the ghostly mere, but this King Arthur of a little Britain was not a dying man merely dreaming a dream. The spirit of him was still alive to the subtler shades of colour in the garden, to the shadows and the puckered sunlight, to bird notes, and even to music. Sometimes Lucy came and played to him on the piano that had been “Hers.” Lucy was the same, a creature of that more mystical world, a Burne-Jones figure, half angel, half woman, but Richmond was different. What was the matter with the fellow? He too lacked oil, not in his joints, but in his lamp. There was a perfunctoriness about him, a suggestion of pomposity. His voice had changed. Almost, it had a parsonic flavour. He did not talk like a man, but like a professional person. He had ceased to catch your subtler shades of meaning; he was gravel, not grass or foliage. There were days when Sir Roger thought his doctor a dull organic fellow, a ruminating animal.

Was it that the suppleness and the fire of youth had been lost to John Richmond? Youth's urge was to climb, to wave a flag, to spifflicate the cunning and miserly old men. Youth's disillusionment came when it discovered that the height became a plateau not a peak, and that the plateau had to be ploughed, and servile sweat expended. Life was the conquest of plateaux not of peaks.

The cunning old men were here too, the merchants and the money-changers. Then it was that man cast away his flag, and became the cynical cultivator of material routine. Or, he reverted to the lout phase beneath the veneer of a tame social suavity.

Sir Roger missed Dr. Davidson. Richmond was not Davidson, and might never be Davidson. He lacked the gentle humility, the compassion that lights up the path of the healer, that sense of service without which man is no better than an ape. Richmond had lost his way in the Dark House, and his candle had gone out. So had poor Davidson's candle, but he had carried it to the last. Dr. Davidson, with his dry little smile, had understood life and its relativities; Richmond did not.

Sir Roger found Richmond disturbing, medicine that was not comforting. The fellow seemed to be in conflict with things and with himself. He was both stale and irritable, an unpleasant combination. Sir Roger, asking how the new man was shaping, and expressing a desire to meet him, had Arthur Emmerson sent to him on trial.

"Go and talk to the old boy. Visiting there makes me feel a humbug. Nothing to be done."

That was Richmond's trouble. He had lost his candle, and without it he was groping angrily, colliding with seemingly inanimate objects. He was feeling a humbug, which is a craftsman's confession of failure. While his craft lives and burns ever so dimly, man still strives, and is not tempted to belittle himself.

Dr. Emmerson introduced himself to Martyr's Grange and Sir Roger Feygate, and found himself disagreeing with his senior partner. Pulses and tongues might not matter, but Arthur Emmerson divined in this old gentleman the spirit of a child that was lonely. Even while the ship slipped out to the unknown sea, Sir Roger liked to feel that there was someone at the wheel, someone who was young, and not professionalism in trousers. Sir Roger did not need a physician; he was past physicians; he needed a friend, someone who was sensitively alive and who looked upon life as something better than a sardonic farce. Arthur Emmerson could talk music, pictures, gardens. He had a gentle, whimsical way with him, and a happy nature. He was not for ever quarrelling with himself and the self-discipline that may be both practical and mystical. Here was a nice child who had grown up. Sir Roger felt that this younger man smoothed things out.

"Come again, my dear fellow. Tell Richmond we talk roses."

Arthur looked troubled.

“It is rather—— I mean I should love to.”

“The senior partner, eh? Prestige? Very necessary, but not at my age. By the way, Dr. Emmerson, old men are allowed candour. I find Richmond rather difficult these days. My fault, perhaps. Richmond is a realist.”

“He is very able, sir.”

“When he likes. But I’m just an old hulk. Physicians should be patient with old hulks.”

“I don’t think you are anything of the kind, sir. If one’s spirit is seaworthy _____”

“Yes, I still have some stars to sail by.”

Dr. Emmerson had tact, and when Richmond asked him how he and Sir Roger Feygate had got on together, Emmerson spoke of Sir Roger, not as a patient, but as a delightful old gentleman who could talk about immaterial things. Southfleet could not talk about such things, and Arthur Emmerson missed the playfulness of the other world’s beautiful nonsense. Southfleet was so sane, so occupied in making money and saving it, and being respectable and appearing a little more successful than its neighbours, that it was no child to play with. Southfleet’s God wore a top-hat. He was no mythical Phœbus, or Christ, but a shopman whose morality stopped at sanding the sugar.

“What things?”

Richmond asked that question, and Arthur Emmerson smiled like a woman.

“Oh, transcendental stuff. And pictures, and philosophy.”

Why should Richmond be peeved because these two grown-up children were able to play the poetic game together? But peeved he was. He was a jealous beast these days. He said, with an air of satirical flippancy, that Arthur Emmerson had better take on the old gentleman *in toto*. If Sir Roger liked that sort of medicine, let him have it.

Emmerson flushed up.

“You ought to know, Richmond, that he is beyond our medicine.”

“Well, I think I do know that. I’m not much good at the sentimental stuff.”

“It isn’t quite that, you know.”

“Oh, well, I’ll leave it to you.”

“Just as you please, Richmond. Don’t ask me to define a mystery. One

can't."

"Quite so."

Yet, to Lucy's son life was growing more and more mysterious. The winter wind in the chimney was a voice, and the spirit of Christmas more than toys and pudding. Charles was becoming a dreamy child, and very much the son of his mother, for she, missing that child's spirit in the grown man, poured herself more and more into Charles Lovelace. She gave him Hans Andersen and Grimm, and all the Bible stories, believing, as born mothers do believe, that if a man is to be somehow more than man, his childhood should be imaginative and happy. There was sorrow in Lucy, a sadness as she watched the darkening of her comrade's spirit. She would have said that he had lost his child's eyes, his feeling for the unknown and the unknowable, and that he walked, gazing on the ground, like a dog smelling out truffles. He had become the potential cynic, buckrammed with hard complacency, a man who saw a handle ready to his hand, and nothing more. Lucy was sad. Yet, when she asked herself what could be done about it, being wise in waiting, she had no answer. You could not worm your way into a man's secret self. Wisdom comes of itself, or not at all. A man may have to be wounded, almost to the death, in order to become wise.

When, on a spring morning, her son called to her: "Mother, Mother, listen to the bird," she heard a thrush singing in Caroline Gardens.

"Yes, dear, that's a thrush."

"He's calling Charlie, Charlie."

"Perhaps. I hear something else."

"Lucy, Lucy."

She laughed, with a tang of sadness. What naïve egoists were mother and child!

"No, dear, I hear him singing something else."

"What, Mumma?"

"Glory, glory."

"To what?"

"To God, darling, and the sun, and all beautiful things."

The child's face lit up.

“Does God hear?”

“Yes.”

So Charles, meeting Dr. Creavy on the terrace, stood before that good old man, and propounded a question.

“Do you know what the bird says?”

“What bird, Master Charlie?”

“The thrush.”

“And what does he say?”

“Glory, glory, glory!”

“And to whom?”

“God; mother says so.”

Dr. Creavy bent down, and solemnly kissed Charles Lovelace.

“Your mother is right, my dear. Always listen to your mother.”

Dr. John Richmond did not so listen. He was troubled by dreams of strange women, by sensationalism that had eluded him, by thwarted vanities, unaccomplished drama, a self that felt robbed of the ambitious things that might have been. Charles Byng discovered Dr. Richmond engaged in an exercise that Dr. Davidson had never undertaken, the pricing of visits in the firm’s ledger. In the Davidson-Burgoyne days there had been three scales of charges for private patients, A, B and C, each group segregated according to their financial status. A brewer and a baronet might both be in Group A. Also, a list, D, included patients who could afford to pay only a reduced fee or no fee at all. The making up of the accounts had been one of Charles Byng’s duties, for the status of a new patient was noted by a member of the firm, and the fees charged became automatic, with a double fee for a night visit. Richmond was working through the ledger, making notes against certain names, and pencilling in figures.

“Byng.”

“Sir.”

“I am raising some of our fees.”

“Are you, sir?”

“When you extract the figures you will work on my notes. For instance,

there is a woman like Mrs. Borrowdale. She gives us unlimited trouble at five shillings a time. I have raised hers to seven and sixpence.”

Byng’s drooping moustache did not appear to approve of the change.

“I don’t think she is too well off, sir.”

“She carries plenty of money on her back.”

“That may be, but she has a fixed income.”

“How much? You seem to know a good deal, Byng.”

“She’s a better sort than you think, sir. If she’s generous to her own back she’s——”

“You are as sentimental as Burgoyne was, Charles.”

“You have no right to say that, sir.”

“Well, we won’t quarrel; but remember, Mrs. B. is seven and sixpence.”

“Very good, sir.”

“I see we have a number of bad debts. What did Davidson do about them in his day?”

“Not much.”

“I see, let them go. Well, I think it is bad practice. Some of these people pay their butcher. Why not us? Get out these unsettled accounts.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Then I’ll consider them and perhaps press some of them. A lawyer’s letter works like a charm with people who think a doctor isn’t a gentleman if he insists on payment. Then there is our free list. I think there are one or two patients on it who exploit pity. We will charge them small fees, for the sake of their self respect.”

The dispenser was shaking up a bottle, with a finger plugging the bottle’s mouth.

“You want a list of them too, Dr. Richmond?”

“I do.”

“Do you mind if I give you an opinion?”

“Not a bit, Charles. Go ahead.”

“I don’t think it will be good for the practice. You see, sir, in Dr.

Davidson's day, there was—well how shall I put it?"

"All for the love of the thing and not for money, Charles?"

"Yes, sir, in a sense."

"I know. What the dear old professional pundits pin up in classrooms and over hospital doorways. Humbug, Charles. You know it, and I know it."

"If you'll excuse me, Dr. Richmond, I don't know it. Believe me, sir, a man like——"

"Davidson did pretty well out of the practice, didn't he, Charles?"

"Yes, but——"

"He always threw in a little sugared water! Well, I don't believe in too much sugar, or in having my services taken for granted."

Richmond was becoming not only the autocrat of the breakfast-table and the surgery, but the autocrat of the sick-room. If Charlie Richmond could ask his mother: "Mumma, why is father often so cross with me?" patients could raise the same question. Those who are sick like to have confidence in their doctor, and their doctor to have confidence in himself, but when a man's complacency becomes abrupt and dictatorial, the relationship is apt to be uneasy. That was the curious thing about Richmond; the more bored he became with routine, the more casual was his self-confidence. He did not like troublesome patients. His Dark House should be brightly lit by gas, and not by a glimmering and mysterious candle. Autocracy saves time and tissue. The results are more immediate, if results are forthcoming. Richmond had reached that phase when a man is intolerant of opposition. Both temper and impatience exclaimed "Shoot the beasts," or "Hang the brute." Pestilent problems could be solved by violence. He was abrupt, dogmatic, apt to be irritated by argument. Patients should not argue. They should accept, like docile children, all that the wise physician said and did. He had become more and more curt and caustic with the club-patients, so much so that they welcomed the occasions when Arthur Emmerson attended to them. It began to be said in working Southfleet that Dr. Richmond was a hard man. He seemed to forget that you were human.

"My rheumatics do bother me, Doctor."

"What do you expect, Myall, at your time of life?"

There might be a rude suavity about such verdicts, but Richmond's judgments lacked sympathy. Aches and pains may be man's lot, and woman's,

but served without sauce they may turn sour in the stomach.

Dr. Richmond had seen other men make mistakes and had helped or attempted to repair the damage, but as yet no chasm had opened under his rather careless feet. He did not realize that he was becoming careless. His sense of prestige and a kind of cynical self-confidence went hand in hand. He had despised Teddy Burgoyne. He was not that sort of florid fool. But when a man takes himself for granted, and approaches the mysteries of life with something of the complacency of a high-priest who conceives himself infallible, then the morass may be very near.

It was a December day when Richmond was called in to see Mr. Joshua Craddock's son. Craddock was a barge-owner and haulier, and something of a curmudgeon, a Puritan of the Cromwellian order. He too was an autocrat, and an awkward one. He was credited with possessing the loudest voice in Southfleet, and he used it on his carters and his barge-hands. A grim-lipped man with stale eyes and a straggling beard, he collected property, and wore a shabby hat. Mr. Craddock and Richmond were not sympathetic to one another, both of them being suppressors of inward turbulence, and secretly scourged by the importunities of the flesh. But Craddock was a prominent Wesleyan and a power in the chapel, and Jehovah and Venus led a cat and dog's life in contending for his truculent and suffering soul.

Richmond had a long day before him, and a north-east wind was blowing. He came in to examine Johnnie Craddock. The child was in bed, and was complaining of his right knee. He said that he had twisted it sliding on some ice. Richmond, both being and feeling in a hurry, laid a rather perfunctory hand on the boy's knee, said "Yes, yes," to himself; "a sprain and a slight synovitis." He met Mr. Craddock in the passage, and Mr. Craddock was in a bad temper; one of his carters had allowed a horse to go lame. Maybe Richmond was casual with Mr. Craddock. He said that there was nothing much the matter with the boy, and that a day or two in bed and a soothing lotion would soon put him right. Richmond had been upstairs exactly three minutes. Mr. Craddock had timed him, and the brevity of the visit and the curtness of his manner provoked the curmudgeon in Mr. Craddock.

"Well, you didn't take long, Doctor."

"All the time that was necessary."

"A cheap five bobsworth, if you ask me. When I pay, I like to have proper consideration."

"If you are not satisfied——"

“Well, let me tell you I’m not satisfied with your manners, Doctor. I’m a plain man. High and mightiness don’t——”

Richmond walked past him.

“Very well. There is nothing much the matter upstairs. I have told you, and I know. If you care to call in——”

“I don’t need your permission for that, do I? Fact is you’ve got a bit above yourself, Richmond. I know it, and half the town knows it. I’d like a change.”

“By all means. I can assure you the feeling is mutual.”

“Is it, indeed! Then you needn’t ring my bell again. Good morning.”

Apart from being angered by the Craddock insolence, for Richmond was coming to regard all criticism as insolent, he gave no further thought to the case and most certainly he was not worried by it. Master Johnnie Craddock was an unwholesome child, rather like a white slug with enlarged tonsils, and weak eyes that were apt to be red about the lids in the morning. He took after his mother, and not after his biblical, buccaneer of a father. As patients the Craddocks were not lavender, but nonconformity *in excelsis*, and vulgar and bumptious about it. The aggressive smugness of such people was incredible. Richmond did mention the incident to Arthur Emmerson. He said that he and old Craddock had had a difference of opinion, and that in future Arthur might deal with the Craddocks.

Dr. Emmerson demurred.

“He may have called in Soames. Hadn’t we better wait for an indication? You say there is nothing much the matter?”

“A slight sprain, and perhaps a little fluid in the joint. All right. Wait for a day or two. I expect Soames will want to tell us, if the Craddocks are to be his in the future.”

But Mr. Craddock did not call in Dr. Sylvester Soames. He had no liking for Old Soapy. He would employ a new man, someone who was keen and fresh, and who would appreciate the value of the Craddock family as patients. Joshua Craddock called in Dr. Percy Squibb.

Dr. Squibb knew his work. He was not called in until the second day after Richmond’s visit. The Craddocks had become alarmed, for the boy appeared to be very seriously ill, and in great pain. He kept crying out: “Oh, my leg, my leg!” Percy Squibb had not been in the room five minutes before he had gauged the nature of the case and its deadly significance. Johnnie Craddock was suffering from an acute infection that attacks the bone and the marrow-

cavity in sickly children. Both Craddock and his wife were in the room, and Dr. Squibb, inwardly exulting, called Joshua Craddock out on to the landing.

“I’m sorry to say the boy is desperately ill. Unless something is done quickly he will die.”

Old Craddock went the colour of ashes.

“Richmond saw him only two days ago.”

“What did he think?”

“Said it was only a sprain.”

Dr. Squibb gave a little shrug of the shoulders.

“Your boy has what we call acute osteo-myelitis of the shin-bone. An operation may save him.”

Mr. Craddock broke out:

“Damn Richmond! I told him he hadn’t done the job. Just three minutes. If my boy dies——”

“He may have to lose his leg.”

“What! By the Lord God I have a case against Richmond. What do you suggest, Doctor?”

“I would have one of the best men down from London, at once, that is to say, if——”

“Money don’t matter. Who’s your man?”

“Hartley Cripps. This is one of his specialities. I happen to know Cripps.”

“Get hold of him at once, Doctor. Send a telegram.”

“I suggest that I take the next train up to town, see Cripps, explain and bring him straight back with me.”

“That’s the music. My trap’s in the yard. I’ll drive you up to the station. You’re the man for me, sir.”

As Mr. Craddock drove Dr. Squibb up the Pier Hill they met the Richmond dog-cart descending. Richmond and Dr. Percy Squibb exchanged hostile stares, but old Craddock, beside himself, flourished his whip and shouted at Richmond.

“Nice mess you’ve made of my boy’s case. Yes, you’ll hear more from me, Dr. Richmond.”

Richmond, sitting straight and stiff beside old Howell, ignored that bawling, angry voice, but the challenge had gone home. Old Howell, glancing at his master, saw on his face a bleached, pinched look. Had he——? He who was so sure of himself, had he missed something? Impossible! That little cad Squibb had wormed his way in, and was suggesting a difference of opinion. He would teach Mr. Squibb a lesson. But there was a crack in Richmond's cold self-confidence. Surely Squibb would not have dared to question the case, unless——? Had he indeed, missed something? Was this new man doing to him what he had done to Burgoyne? Richmond, the egoist, felt that cold emptiness within him, that contraction of fear that grips a man's stomach. Perhaps, for the first time in his life he was afraid.

He did not speak of the matter to Lucy. Later in the day, when passing that tall, jejune house of the Craddocks with its neatly-pointed brickwork and white window frames, he saw a fly waiting outside. The house's eyes seemed as grey and implacable as old Craddock's. What was happening in there? And suddenly he was conscious of shame. He was not thinking of the child but of himself, his self-love, his reputation, his possessions, and his heart misgave him.

But if Richmond did not speak of the case to his wife, Dr. Percy Squibb let his tongue go that evening to his. He had brought back Mr. Hartley Cripps, and Mr. Cripps having seen and felt, had acted. He had amputated the boy's leg at the knee, and Dr. Squibb had given the anæsthetic.

"It's touch and go, Flo. The kid may pull through. We shall know in a day or two. But old Craddock is raving against Richmond."

"I should say so."

"The supercilious swine. I've got him smitten hip and thigh. Old Craddock's telling the whole town. He talks of suing Richmond."

"And will he?"

"Well, he's got a dashed good case, and he's so mad that I don't think he'd worry about win or lose. He just wants to get Richmond pilloried."

"Would you have to give evidence, Perce?"

"Of course."

"A good advertisement for you, my lad."

"I should say so. Besides, old woman, Craddock's a sort of local Elijah; he has a big pull with the goody-goodies. It means we might get in with them. If I were you I'd call on some of the chapel people."

“It’s an idea, Perce.”

“You might even go to chapel.”

His wife grimaced at the suggestion.

“That might mean we should be out with the church crowd. Doesn’t do to be in too much of a hurry in getting down on your eggs. I don’t see myself as chapel.”

“You don’t look it,” said her husband. “Perhaps you’re right.”

XXVI

Mr. Craddock's son recovered. The child had lost a leg, but not his life, and for many a day Johnnie Craddock on crutches was a proof to the world of the fallibility of man. The case did not come into court. When Mr. Joshua Craddock took legal advice upon suing Richmond for malpraxis, claiming damages for the boy's lost leg, it was pointed out to him by the expert who gave an opinion on the case that Dr. Richmond had seen the boy only once, and that he, Mr. Craddock, had admitted discharging his doctor. Squibb had been called in when the disease had developed, and the diagnosis was much more patent. Moreover, Richmond could argue that he had not been treated fairly, and that had he been allowed to continue in charge of the case he, like Dr. Squibb, would have recognized its seriousness. It would not be easy to prove malpraxis when you had denied to a professional man an adequate opportunity to diagnose and treat the disease. Medical evidence could be called to prove that these cases were deceptive and insidious, and that a diagnosis might not be possible until the patient had been under observation for several days.

So, the Craddock-Richmond quarrel did not become legal argument, but Joshua Craddock adopted other methods. He went about stating that his boy's lost leg was due to Richmond's carelessness, and that he did not mind who knew it, and that if Richmond cared to sue him for telling the truth, well, that was Richmond's funeral. Southfleet was divided over the issue and argued it and almost quarrelled over it, but was agreed in being sorry for Lucy. Her husband had been put in the pillory, and when Richmond did not take up the Craddock challenge Southfleet continued to debate the correctness of his attitude.

In fact, a man's pride may take a toss, and pick itself up, and get back in the saddle and ride the high horse with every appearance of dignity. Richmond adopted that attitude. He was haughty, aloof, a man who had persuaded himself that he had been the victim of a shabby trick. He would not discuss the affair with Arthur Emmerson.

"Such things are better ignored."

But driving round Tenterden Square one morning, he saw Dr. Squibb at the gate of No. 9, and he spoke curtly to Howell.

"Pull up, I want a word with that gentleman."

Dr. Percy Squibb was ready for the encounter. His wife was at the window of No. 9, and heads appeared at other windows. It was astonishing how quickly Southfleet reacted to a sensation. Dr. Squibb walked gently towards the Richmond dog-cart. Richmond's raised hand had been a challenge.

It was not a very seemly wrangle. Old Howell sat through it with a face of stone, his eyes staring over the top of the horse's head. Richmond had not yet attained to that serenity of soul which enables a man to gently and tolerantly put a cad where he should be.

"I suppose," said Richmond, "that it did not occur to you that ordinary professional decency should have prompted you to——"

Dr. Squibb would not let him get into his stride. He was feeling cocky and pleased with life, for already the Craddock affair had brought in half a dozen private patients.

"Feeling a little sore, Dr. Richmond?"

"Hardly that. When a man does not know how to behave, one may feel it one's duty——"

Dr. Squibb smirked at him.

"Duty? What about duty to the patient? I shouldn't adopt that tone, if I were you."

"I am merely trying to tell you——"

"That I ought to have saved your face?"

Richmond was very white.

"Well, I suppose it is no use trying to teach a cad."

"You'll apologize for that word."

"I think not."

"I may take an opinion on that. Let me tell you, Richmond, that a man who has made a mess of a case——"

"It never became my case."

"I said that a man who——"

Old Howell, glancing at his master's face, suddenly became the heavy-handed autocrat. Two gentlemen should not be allowed to make a scene in public. Moreover, Dr. Richmond was looking dangerous, and Howell, the old soldier, knew that look. He took the whip from the socket, gave the mare a

flick, and tore the argument in two.

Richmond turned on him.

“Pull up, you——”

Howell’s jaw was set.

“I wouldn’t trouble with that little tyke, sir. Some dogs are best left snarling.”

Before the day was out Richmond had acknowledged the groom’s wisdom, but he did not say so to him, which was a pity.

Indeed, could Richmond have changed places with his son, and have humbled his small self and knelt like a child at someone’s knees, the issue for him might have been so different. His personal pride was as implacable and bellicose as a misplaced patriotism, strutting and throwing out its chest and marching to martial music. Let the whole world come against him and he would shock it. His dignity sat up aloft in its high dog-cart and would not deign to flicker an eyelash or a smile. If he wanted sympathy he found it among his cronies at the club, who, over hot gin and water exhaled a friendliness that was not so friendly as it seemed. Squibb was not a member, and could remain an outsider, but though Richmond was too absorbed in his own dignity to divine it, even these other men were not displeased that he had taken a knock. He was so much the intellectual superior of these ex-tradesmen and business men that he had accepted this sense of superiority and worn it like a public decoration, without troubling to realize that he was earning the reputation of being a prig.

To the one person who loved him and who could have saved him from a defensive egoism he did not speak of these matters. To Lucy he was obstinately and almost menacingly mute. Probably he had come to regard himself as so much the domestic demi-god and hero that any insults or injuries he might receive were not to be mentioned in the house. A wife should side with her man, and Richmond assumed her partisanship. He was not going to explain or to apologize for anything to Lucy. He was as vain about it as a small boy who has been caned at school, and who has blubbed over it, and then boasts of his hardihood to his sisters.

Lucy waited. She knew all that was to be known. Good friends and bad friends had told her, but she did not allow John to know that she knew anything. Unless he told her, without promptings, she knew that the shadow of failure would lie very near to their love. She supposed that he did still love her, and for a while she wondered whether this stark silence of his was wilful; that

it was not vanity but tenderness that kept him silent. Was it that he did not want her to be worried or wounded? She hoped so; she hoped so profoundly. She had loved a man who had seemed so big, and she feared to find him grown little.

She would lie awake at night and think how strange was this silence between two people who, physically, were so near to each other. In their early days they had been so close in feeling and in thinking. She could remember her lover saying to her, with his arm across her shoulders: "No more loneliness, no more unrest." Yet now they had become like strangers, in spite of the intimacies of the flesh. That too was different, a mere appetite to be satisfied, without that other essential tenderness. A man could be like an animal who ate his fill and then fell asleep. She would lie straight and still, listening to his breathing, and wondering how their comradeship would end. She had become a kind of conventional symbol in his life, like a familiar picture on a wall that had become so familiar that scarcely was it looked at. How very sad, and how very stupid! For, she could have said to him: "Oh, my dear, there is nothing about loving that I do not know. I can give you so much more than any other soul on earth can give. Is it that I have ceased to matter in your life? If so, has the fault been mine?"

Often, in the morning he would blunder out of bed without a word, like a man absorbed in the day's purpose. She would hear the splash of water in the dressing-room, and then the sound of his footsteps going to and fro as he dressed. Minutes of silence would mean that he was shaving. He hated being spoken to when he was shaving. Meanwhile she dressed, feeling that she was putting on a stale old self that was growing shabby. She would hear him go downstairs. They met, the three of them, at the breakfast-table.

She could not help but contrast those two faces, the bright face of the child, and the remote, hard face of the reserved and silent man. A child must chatter, but there were mornings when even the child was mute. He would look at his father with a curious, blue-eyed, upward appraisal. Why did his father look so cross?

"Finish your breakfast, dear."

His mother's voice was like a hand gently pushing him out of that wondering stare. She could feel that her husband was conscious of the boy's scrutiny, and that it irritated him. That, too, was evidential. Happy faces do not flinch from friendly glances. John Richmond's face was that of a man who was not happy with himself.

"Run along, dear."

“Can I get my soldiers out?”

“Yes. Just for a little while. Then, lessons.”

Charles slipped out of the room with a backward glance at his father. Richmond had propped the morning paper against the toast-rack. Lucy was stirring the sugar in her second cup of tea, eyelids lowered, her hand going gently round and round.

Suddenly she looked at her husband as though she had come to some decision.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that, John.”

His eyes met hers.

“Oh, what?”

“Read.”

“Well, I haven’t much time during the rest of the day.”

She smiled at him.

“Is it so important? There are other things.”

He went on reading.

“What things?”

“Charles, for instance. I think what a child says may be more interesting than political speeches.”

“I don’t read speeches.”

She raised her cup and drank, watching him over the brim of it. He went on reading, and her mind was made up.

“Do you mind if I go away for a fortnight?”

He looked at her sharply, and with surprise.

“Go away? What for?”

“Oh, just a change. I would like to take the child.”

His eyes were back on his paper.

“Of course, if you want to. Feeling out of sorts?”

“No. Just a change. Penzance, or Ventnor. The spring comes earlier there. One seems to have to wait so long for it in England.”

He said, rather sullenly, without raising his eyes: “Go, by all means. It can

be pretty deadly here, I suppose. A man does not notice it so much.”

“No.”

“Work to do.”

She smiled at him poignantly.

“Yes, women just sit and wait, John.”

But he did not appear to catch her meaning.

Many women have introduced some such interlude into their lives, and when, in April, Lucy and Charles Lovelace set out for the West Country, winter still loitered at Southfleet, like some grey and malicious hag. Howell drove their trunks to the station, and Charles, who was in a state of high excitement, watched the porter unload the luggage and trundle it in to be labelled. The train left at 10.25, and Richmond, who was visiting one or two nearby patients, had promised to see them off. He appeared to have accepted Lucy’s step without attaching any particular significance to it, for during these days his wife’s spirit was a sealed book to him. Had he opened it, and turned its pages, and read some of its secrets, the soul of him might have been shocked and humbled.

“Daddy’s coming, Mother?”

“Yes, dear.”

They were alone in a second-class carriage, and from the open window Charlie’s sailor hat projected like a halo. He was watching for his father. But a flag waved and a whistle blew, the engine coughed, and the wheels revolved, and Dr. Richmond did not come.

Charles, peering out, turned a wondering face to his mother.

“Daddy hasn’t forgotten?”

His mother’s face puzzled the child.

“No, dear, I expect someone kept him.”

Charlie’s head popped out again, but he did not see his father.

“Come in, dear, your hat may blow off.”

Charlie obeyed her. He glanced at his mother, and saw something that shocked him, and climbing into her lap, he put his arms round her neck.

“Horrid people, keeping daddy away.”

Richmond walked into the station ten seconds too late, and in time to see the tail of the train disappearing under a bridge. He pulled out his watch, and comparing it with the station clock, found that there was a difference of three minutes. Well, it could not be helped. He would write to poor old Lucy and say that he was sorry and for a moment he did feel a little sorry. Howell was waiting for him with the dog-cart, and Richmond, with the air of a man who had more important affairs waiting for him, climbed in and drew the rug over his knees.

“Alexandra Terrace.”

Howell said never a word. He too knew that his master had been too late.

“My watch and the station clock disagree.”

There was not a word from the groom. Howell was wearing his east-wind face. What was the matter with Dr. Richmond? Had he, Howell, promised to say good-bye to a lady like Lucy and a child like Charles, nothing would have kept him from being in time. Such casual carelessness did not make sense.

Richmond worked through his morning round, cut Dr. Squibb in the High Street, and returning at one o'clock to Queen's Terrace, was not conscious of any glumness in the house's atmosphere. Silent it might be, but such a silence was in sympathy with his farouche self-absorbed aloofness. There were no faces that had to be talked to and propitiated. No child would ask questions. He could put the paper on the table and read as he pleased, and ignore the woman who pushed vegetable dishes at him. In fact, he should be completely selfish, smoke his pipe when he pleased, put his feet up on a chair, and play the uncensored male.

Richmond's resolution to write to his wife that evening was postponed by the materialization of a maternity case to which he was called at eight o'clock, and which kept him occupied most of the night. It was an important case, and it proved to be an unfortunate one. Richmond had, in the end, to apply forceps, and the child was born dead. Afterwards, the nurse, who was no friend of his, asserted that Richmond had been rough in his methods, and that the child's head had been crushed. The following day found him tired and out of temper, and in a mood to exclaim: “It's a damned silly and ungrateful world. When you think you have done a clever thing, people think you have been a fool. And when you know you have been a fool, the idiots fancy you've been clever.” In this particular case he believed that he had saved the mother's life at the expense of the child's, and the family was dissatisfied because he had not saved both.

He forgot his letter to Lucy. He did not write it for two days, and when it

was written it was a tired and perfunctory letter, and somewhat bitter in its implications.

Lucy had waited for that letter, and when she had read it, she sat with it lying in her lap, while her eyes looked out over Mount's Bay at St. Michael's, shining in a sea of southern blueness. So, that was all he could say to her. He had become so blind and commonplace and self-absorbed that—— She felt stricken, but when Charles Lovelace came running to her where she sat in a sheltered corner of the garden, she was able to smile, and match his childishness.

“Oh, Mummie, there are donkeys down the street.”

“Donkeys, dear?”

“Yes, can I have a donkey ride?”

Of course he could.

So much more may be allowed to the child than to the man, and perhaps even more to a favourite dog. The moralists may say that more is expected of man, and good women, like the moralists, make the mistake of forgetting or not realizing, that man may be a savage whose conversion to domestic discipline and trousers is so historically recent that it is the nature of the creature to revert. Lucy Richmond was so much more merciful to her son than to her husband. Being the daughter of her mother she should have known that man is by nature polygamous and pursuer of strange women, but in those good, black-coated days such matters were not mentioned. Honesty may have been preserved by the common people who loved and lusted and laughed and were forgiven. A woman may be either too prudishly exacting or too sweet, and not only does too much sweetness cloy a man who is desperate for blood and adventure, but it may exasperate him by holding up before his eyes a picture of perfection that perpetually reproves his horrid impulses. Nail man to the cross of a great endeavour, and he may endure there, forgetting in the finer anguish the lesser qualms of the flesh. For life is anguish, the anguish of striving and desiring and renouncing, and in somehow loving the day that is a little less bitter than yesterday. But when the passionate purpose has gone out of a man's life, no devotion can fill the void. Love can only watch and wait and hope for that purpose to return.

So, at Penzance Lucy and Charles played by the sea, and wandered into the country and picked wild flowers, primroses and bluebells. The country round Southfleet was not a bluebell world, and Charlie Richmond was entranced by

these pools of blueness in the woods. Also, this fairy world moved him to wonder and a sense of mystery.

“Don’t they smell sweet, Mother. May I pick them?”

He was not a greedy child, and he was careful not to tread on the flowers. That would have been brutal, and Lucy, watching him, wondered whether men could recover the spirit of such a childishness, and refrain from trampling on life’s loveliness.

“Mustn’t pick too many, dear. They wither.”

“What’s wither?”

“They get tired and die, dear.”

Charles, treading ever so carefully, looked at the blue bunch in his hand.

“Sorry. Shall I say I’m sorry to the flowers?”

“Yes, dear.”

“I can’t put them back again?”

“A flower that is picked is picked.”

Would he learn some day the secret significance of that? And was she being a prig?

“I won’t pick any more, Mother.”

“No, I shouldn’t, dear.”

It was during this spring and Lucy’s absence that the southern flower floated into Richmond’s life.

It was dusky and full and richly flavoured, and to a man who was kicking against the pricks of respectability, and loathing the tameness of a perfunctory routine, this coarse, rich, perfumed thing, was like a flame licking at his bonds. Richmond was in the mood of a man thrust ashore in some southern port, after six months of celibacy and ship’s biscuit, with money to spend and fierce urges to be exercised. That this dull and decorous little town should have shown this flower abloom just when he was thirsty for southern nights, was one of life’s whimsies. When a man is feeling angry and bitter and turbulent, strong wine and rich scents go to the head. The decalogue becomes a series of flimsy barriers to be stormed and scorned. “I am man, not God’s tame monkey.”

Traced to its source, the coming of Mr. Morelli to Southfleet could be explained by Mr. Morelli's visiting the town one hot August day, and by an attack of chilliness suffered by the local justices when reviewing and renewing the local licences. Some moral person had declared that there were too many public houses in Southfleet's old town, and too much intoxication, and the Bench, moved by the spirit of interference, had refused to renew the licence of the Lord Nelson. A most unpatriotic gesture this! The Lord Nelson was a little old white house with bow-windows, and an apron of grass spread in front of it, and decently curtailed by white posts and chains. Mr. Morelli, a large and swarthy man with operatic eyes and voice, came to Southfleet for some sea air. He suffered from kidney disease and a fatty heart, and after twenty years in the East End, was sentimentally moved to end his life in less crapulous surroundings. Mr. Morelli came, saw, and was inspired. Also, he was perspiring, and this little white building suggested ice, ices, iced cake, iced lemonade. Mr. Morelli was a man of means. He took a lease of the old Lord Nelson, and with the landlord's permission readjusted the house's white front. He had all the woodwork painted Mediterranean blue, the garden tables yellow. He opened a tea and confectionery shop. He sold ices, sweets, fancy cakes, lemonade. Mr. Tony Morelli had prospered. In the season people clustered like flies about his establishment.

Mr. Morelli had a wife, thirty years younger than himself, a dark, black-eyed, jocund creature, with a wide face and a broad nose, and a smile that was sudden and vivid. When Mrs. Morelli smiled her white teeth flashed, and her nose crinkled up, and her lips were like the everted petals of a rich red flower, and her black eyes filled with burrs of light. They could be brown-black velvet too, these eyes, soft and seductive and tender. When Tony Morelli had married his Lucia he had been a big, bouncing lusty barrel of a man, quite adequate as a male, but, as it sometimes happens in such cases, the vigorous creature of fifty had, at sixty become a large, fat, flabby bag, a sick man who was sorry for himself, and needing a mother and a nurse rather than a fine, strong handsome wench of a wife. His belly had overflowed. His face was large and white and waxy. He panted when he walked or had to climb the stairs.

Mr. Morelli had called in Dr. Richmond, and Richmond had found him propped up in bed, with a poor pulse, and swollen feet and ankles. It was an obvious case, and there was nothing much to be done for it. Mr. Morelli's large body had worn itself out.

"I'm a verree unhappee mana, Doctor."

He was, poor thing, and Richmond was sorry for him in a dispassionate

sort of way.

“I canna attenda to beesness.”

And then Mrs. Morelli had come into the room, bringing with her perfume and southern breezes, and a suggestion of purple grapes and dusky nights and music on the Grand Canal. Richmond had stared at her, and she had stared back at him. And suddenly, the atmosphere of the room had altered for him. This poor, breathless bag of fat, and this young, sensuous, flashing Jocunda!

Could not Mrs. Morelli attend to Antonio’s business for him?

She could. She said so. She was doing so. It was not that Lucia was unkind. She was a big, strong, comely animal with fine appetites, and a taste for colour in her clothes. She was wearing black that morning, and it suited her. She had given Antonio Morelli ten years of her youth, and now that his lamp had burned itself dry, she felt that she had done her duty, and that other dues were hers. The business was prospering. It would be hers. It pleased her. She bloomed upon it. She liked the cake and the sweets and the ices, and the great caraffes full of lemon coloured lemonade. She liked the proceeds, and the power it gave her. She was a person, oh, very much a person, and in her young maturity, a strong, capable woman who liked life to be richly scented. She liked men, and men liked her.

“Mr. Morelli worries too much.”

She had a deep, rich voice with a resonant tang to it. She spoke English that was not Italianate. She looked boldly and appraisingly at Richmond, and was more than ready to be looked at in the same way.

“Pulla down the blind a leetle, Lucia.”

Richmond was startled. Lucia! But how different a Lucy! He sat down again beside the bed, and again felt Mr. Morelli’s pulse. He was sorry for the man, but he was more sorry for the woman. The provocation of her prejudiced the male in him. Sex is so ingenious in manipulating ingenuous sentiment.

Five minutes later he found himself downstairs in the Morelli parlour. Lucia Morelli had swept him into it.

“I wish to speak to you of my husband, Doctor.”

She was a woman who carried a man into a corner, and held him there, standing so close to him that her full bosom was like a bouquet almost touching him, while her big black eyes looked him full in the face.

“My husband is a very sick man, Doctor? Tell me.”

“I’m afraid he is.”

“Will he ever be better?”

“No. I am afraid not.”

She dropped her eyes for a moment, and sighed. She breathed out a “Poor Tony, he was always so strong,” and Richmond was more touched than he should have been. This handsome creature was so overwhelmingly woman, so suggestive of rich, primitive things, fierce tendernesses, not sweet anguish.

“It is hard for you, Mrs. Morelli. He cannot attend to business.”

Her eyes stared into his.

“No. But I can manage. You will come and see him, Doctor?”

“If you wish it. Please understand that I cannot cure him. I may be able to make things easier.”

“You are very kind, Doctor. Yes, please come.”

Richmond turned for a moment to the window. It showed him the old Lord Nelson’s garden surrounded with gay little arbours of blue and white trellis in which teas were served. A big apple-tree was in blossom, and its flowery splendour seemed part of the picture.

“May I ask you a question, Mrs. Morelli?”

“Please, Doctor, yes.”

“I mean, about money. I dare say all this is very serious for you. If necessary I shall not charge you the ordinary fees.”

He glanced at her and his glance was held. Her eyes had become velvet, douce and caressing.

“It is very kind of you, but I can manage. I wish you to be our friend, Doctor.”

Her voice, too, was caressing, and before many days had passed Richmond was calling her Lucia.

XXVII

Southfleet was continuing to spread, and about this time a second "Squatter" sput up his plate, a Dr. Algernon Tallent. He took a house in Alexandra Terrace and christened it "The Trossachs," and though Drs. Squibb and Tallent should have been hostile to each other, they found themselves in combination as professional pirates. Dr. Tallent had some money, and Dr. Squibb some patients, and in a very short time they were partners, and conducting a joint attack upon vested interests. Even professional gentlemen may have to play a predatory game, wearing kid gloves and bowling the ball with proper discretion. Dr. Algernon Tallent was an exceedingly good-looking man, in the early thirties, and if Dr. Squibb supplied the ginger, Dr. Tallent added the syrup. Dr. Sylvester Soames was a tired old man, and many of his patients were tired of Dr. Soames. The Squibb-Tallent combination had considerable success in capturing the Soames practice. It had less success against Drs. Richmond and Emmerson, but as Percy said to Algernon: "Keep pushing, my lad. I have a feeling that Richmond is nearer the edge of the cliff than he thinks." Dr. Tallent stroked his nice black moustache; he was rather dudeish and throaty. "Oh, how? Not?" And Dr. Squibb winked at him. "I've heard a thing or two. If he gets put on the carpet by the G.M.C. Emmerson wouldn't hold the practice together. He hasn't the stuff in him."

Quite a considerable part of the new population became Squibb and Tallent, and Richmond, though he was a man bemused by his own discontents and restless urges, was not wholly blind to the new menace. Here were two brisk and hungry men who were ready to snap up possible plunder. There was no friendliness between the two firms, but if the hostility was veiled, it was none the less actual. Even Emmerson referred to Squibb as a clever little cad, and the combination of cleverness and caddishness was not to be taken lightly.

Lucy and Charles spent a month at Penzance, and once a week Lucy received a letter from her husband. When a woman goes on so particular a pilgrimage it may be not only for the sake of her health, but that her presence may be missed, and that the comrade who has been left behind may rediscover the needs of such a comradeship. Let a wife be taken for granted, like the furniture, and she may become no more than the keeper of a comfortable lodging-house, and even the carpets and the chairs may have their essential charm. Though, when a woman is taken for granted, she may deserve it, and regarded dispassionately most women have no claim to be anything else. But

Lucy was no ordinary woman. She did not scold at a situation. She did not assert herself by exercising interference. She waited, trusting to the ultimate wisdom of her mate, and a spirit that might prove all other relationships to be shallow and stale.

Did she hope for some tremors of tenderness in John's letters? She did. This was the first time that he had been alone since their marriage, and her secret wish was that he should feel the lack of something, but in none of the four letters that he wrote to her did he say: "I miss you. I want you back." Nor, when reading between the lines, could she divine any unexpressed or vaguely realized sense of loneliness. These letters lacked any intimate or tender touch. They were coldly cheerful, practical, perfunctory in their material details. He told her that somebody had had a baby, and that the wind was still in the north-east, and that Sarah had been complaining about the kitchen range, and that he was going to have the dog-cart repainted. There was no touch of the hand, no sudden light in the eyes anywhere in his letters.

Lucy kept them, and pondered over them. That they possessed some suggestive significance was a conviction that perplexed her, just because her estimate of their actual significance seemed to fail. Did this gossiping casualness mean that she had felt nothing, and that she had become a kind of lay-figure in his life? Men can be so incorrigibly mute and tongue-tied. Or was there something else, an alien interest that had slipped between them, and made him insensitive towards her? She wondered. She was feeling like a woman who, looking in her mirror, realized that her face had faded and that her mystery had gone. Life wore a shabby frock. She was failing to hold that which had been hers.

She did not feel bitter, but very sad. That subtle thing which is so dear to women, prestige, had drooped in her. She had heard herself called: "The most wonderful thing in the world," and though she may not have been fooled by it, she liked to think that he still thought of her in that way. Did married love grow stale? She would have said that it did or should, grow with a difference. It should become profound, more compassionate, less selfish, more rooted in the spirit than in the flesh. It had grown so with her. Why had it failed, if it had failed, to possess the man in Richmond?

Would she forget that home-coming? A hired cab was sent to meet them at the station. The maids were in the hall, and the luggage was being carried in when the Richmond dog-cart appeared, rounding The Royal George corner. Lucy had just kissed Sarah, and Charles had hold of Ethel's apron.

"I've been riding a donkey, Ethel."

“Gracious, you *have* grown up.”

Charles heard the horse’s trotting hoofs, and the dog-cart’s wheels, and dashed out to meet his father.

“Hallo, Daddy.”

Richmond sprang down. He had an air of clear-cut cheerfulness, the easy fatherliness of a man whose blood was running well.

“Hallo, young man.”

He picked up Charles and kissed him. Lucy, looking with strange poignancy at those two, had gone quickly into the dining-room. She was standing alone by the window when father and son entered hand in hand.

“Hallo, my dear. Feeling better for the change?”

She was conscious of inward desolation, a sense of chilly emptiness, shame, yearning. He kissed her easily and capably on the cheek. There was no sudden, passionate inevitableness about that kiss. It had kindness, an almost casual kindness.

“You look better. As for Charles——”

“I’ve been riding a donkey, Daddy.”

“Have you, by Jove! And did you learn to bump?”

“There was a lot of bumping, Daddy.”

Richmond laughed, but to Lucy there was something wounding in his laughter.

She was back at home as though nothing had happened. The same house, the same furniture, the same faces, and yet she was conscious of a difference. She had a feeling that some sinister thing had hidden itself in the house. Her maids seemed more kind and eager to please her. Why? Were they on her side against this secret, sinister thing? Her joy had gone from the house. She could not love its furniture and its carpets, and its curtains as she had loved them in the old days. Or, was it that she loved them more, and shrank from their dearness? Why had she gone away? What had happened? Had anything happened?

She would have said that the holiday had done her husband more good than it had done her. He seemed less reserved, more consciously kind and conversational. Almost, he came in and sat down as though he felt it his duty

to entertain her. She might have been a new and perhaps plain-faced housekeeper whom he was putting at her ease. Instinctively she would have preferred the old silences, the old reserve. He was too efficiently kind. And that made her afraid. He was looking well, like an animal sleeked out by the spring and the sunlight. He had more animation. Sometimes she heard him humming a tune. He played with the boy almost as in the old days.

A woman of coarser fibre might have been deceived, or she might have understood what had happened to her husband. Lucy neither knew nor did not know. There are certain faithlessnesses that cannot appear credible to one who loves very deeply and unselfishly. The good friend does not easily become the smiling, sedulous stranger. She was conscious of a feeling of bitter helplessness, of wonder, of inward desolation. This easy, debonair, almost too gentlemanly mate frightened her. She would have been less afraid had he been rough and short-tempered and difficult, broken water, not a sleek and sheening surface that concealed in its deeps some other world and its delights.

Tony Morelli was a dying man and, poor soul, very afraid of dying. He was a modern Italian, an anti-clerical and an agnostic, and now that the blank wall rose before him he was like a terrified child. He could not leave his bed, and at night he had to be propped against pillows in order to sleep. His wife, who was kind to him, had had him moved to a back room where there was less noise at night, while she occupied the front room that had served them both. Richmond visited Mr. Morelli every day, and he also was kind to him, perhaps because he was conscious of having stolen from this dying patient.

The strangest of strange things about a man who is sex-mad is that in his blindness he assumes the rest of the world to be equally blind. His recklessness, exulting in itself and in a supposed astuteness, may imagine that because other people do not appear to see or hear, nothing is seen or heard. Richmond was far more reckless than was the woman, in that the disaster he was tempting might be so much greater. His self-justification was equally simple in its buoyant recklessness. After all, he was man and this was life. The fruit was on the tree and asking to be plucked. What was morality but a convention? Provided that your world did not find you out, no social sin was committed. Besides, this was a natural and an inevitable urge. It flew over all the cant and the old men's commandments like Phœbus in his chariot. It was splendid, and wild and free; it was the sap and the sinew of life, and the inspiration of the poets. Had Will Shakespeare toddled about in black gloves and a top-hat? What of Kit Marlow? And even dear Keats and Shelley, those aery spirits, had suffered the splendid shame of loving where they shouldn't.

What right had a prudish professionalism to put on a surplice and order its members to be spunkless anæmic saints? Was a doctor any less skilful for being normal man?

Richmond might despise this decorous, smug little town, but when he assumed that he was above suspicion he forgot the legend of Balaam and his Ass. Did he believe that no one had seen him use his private key on one of the gates of Caroline Gardens? These gardens were closed at dusk, and Eros was not admitted. Also, did it not occur to Richmond that mischievous louts could climb railings, and crawl through bushes and play listening Toms, and snigger and nudge each other? Also, no less a person than Miss Shallowbrass happened to see a certain shadowy figure glide out of this gate, and Miss Shallowbrass thought that she recognized the lady. She used scent, and it was wafted on the night air. Miss Shallowbrass had flattened herself against the railings under the hood of an old holly tree, and presently she had seen another figure emerge. Miss Shallowbrass was in black, and sufficiently shrewd to cover her face with black-gloved hands. How very shocking! She saw the man's figure cross the road, and pass along the Queen's Terrace Gardens.

It entered No. 11. How very shocking! She had been deliciously sure that the surreptitious male had been Dr. Richmond.

Also, dying men may be fey. Antonio Morelli, though bound to his bed, became conscious of a something in the house, even as Lucy Richmond was conscious of it in No. 11 Queen's Terrace. Tony Morelli might be a worn-out hulk, but there were primitive passions still alive in him that gave him the intuitive cunning of the animal. He watched and he listened. Surely, Lucia was being kind to him, almost too kind. She had a rich, jocund yet enigmatic look like that of a woman who carries life in her body, and secretly exults over it. She would come and stand beside and slightly behind the bed during Richmond's visits. But she seemed to have forgotten one thing, a mirror on the opposite wall, and Tony Morelli's eyes were still alive.

"I think our patient is a little better to-day, Mrs. Morelli."

Richmond turned his head to look up at the wife, and in the mirror Tony saw his Lucia return that look, but so differently. Her lips were parted, teeth and eyes shone; her broad face had a handsome, hot radiance. Tony Morelli closed his eyes, sighed and lay still.

"You tinka I am betta, Doctor?"

Richmond's voice had that slightly patronizing smoothness when he

answered.

“Pulse stronger to-day.”

It was, but the doctor did not suspect that some other stimulus was causing the heart to beat more strongly.

They went out together, and Morelli lay and listened. His eyes were open now, large, ominous eyes. Had the stairs creaked? No. Surely his wife and Richmond had gone into that other room, her room? The Italian struggled up in bed, and then sank back again with his teeth showing in a bitter, helpless snarl. No, he would wait. He would try to get a little stronger. And then——!

Miss Shallowbrass wrote a letter. She considered it to be her duty to write that letter, and she enjoyed the writing of it excessively. As a matter of fact, it was not written but hand-printed, for Miss Shallowbrass considered discretion to be the better part of virtue. She signed it “A Friend,” and posted it after dark in a convenient letter-box.

Mrs. Richmond opened the letter at the breakfast-table. She had read a couple of lines before she realized the poisonous significance of the thing, and with a little gentle movement of the hand she slipped the letter under her plate. Meanwhile her curious small son had put out a hand and picked up the envelope.

“What a funny letter, Mother.”

She made no movement to take it from him.

“Yes, isn’t it, dear.”

“It’s all printed.”

Richmond was eating bacon and eggs, with the morning paper propped against the entrée dish. He glanced irritably at Charles.

“Not so much noise, my lad.”

“But look at the funny letter, Daddy.”

Richmond glanced at it, frowned, and looked sharply at his wife. She was spreading butter on a piece of toast.

“What’s that? A disguise?”

She looked across at him, and her eyebrows and eyes had a level steadiness.

“Someone has sent me a tract, I think. Put the envelope down, dear, and go on with your breakfast.”

Richmond’s eyes stared at her for a second, and then fell. With a frown on his face he resumed his reading of the paper.

“Do old women still dish out that rubbish?”

“It seems so, John.”

She waited for her opportunity, and when her husband had his paper up, and Charles had dashed to the window to discover whether two quarrelling cats were using No. 11’s front garden for their squawlings and scratchings, Lucy slipped the letter from under her plate, into her lap, and thence into her pocket. The cats were in the No. 11 garden, pursuing a private feud regardless of the geraniums that had been planted out for the summer, and Charles rushed out into the hall, seized a walking-stick, and opening the front door, put the cats to flight. Charles had left the dining-room door open, and since a window was open behind his father’s back, a considerable draught made itself felt. Richmond got up, and with emphasis, closed the door.

“Can’t you keep that child quiet sometimes?”

“Boys will be boys.”

Richmond walked across to an arm-chair, and sat down in it. How boring were these domestic platitudes! And men will be men.

Not till her husband had left the house for the day’s work, and Charles had been taken out by Ethel, did Lucy attempt to read her letter. She took it up to the drawing-room, and sitting down by an open french window, read the unctuous message.

Mrs. Richmond should be on her guard. There is a snake in the grass. It is with deep regret that the writer of this communication feels it her duty to warn Mrs. Richmond that her husband should be watched. No married man should indulge in an intrigue with another woman, and when the husband is a professional man, the results may be deplorable.

A Friend.

Lucy sat for a long while with that letter in her lap. So, that which she had feared had happened, for this revealing and malignant message touched more than a suspicion. Who had written it? And did it matter? What was to be done with it, or about it? Nothing? She sat there, watching the distant ships go by,

sailing-ships, steamships, coming and going. It was a very peaceful world on this May morning. If she asked herself a question, "Why was man moved to these storms and adventures," she may have answered it by saying, "Perhaps it is the nature of man." And perhaps half the town knew it. Humiliated she might be, but she was not angry. This was beyond anger. She found herself filled with sudden strange pity for the man who had wounded her. Where a more primitive and selfish woman would have raged and accused and scolded, Lucy was mute and suddenly wise in her compassion. Poor John! She seemed to see her husband as he was, a discontented turbulent child, a masterful creature who had found his little world too dull and formal. Poor John! Perhaps his secret ambitions had been vexing him all these years, the passion to perform more dramatically upon the world's stage, to be singular, splendid. The strutting child in man! And had she been his incubus, and her love a net holding him back from greater things? How ironical! He had ceased to be satisfied with the work he did. No longer was he a craftsman or artist, but a poor, bored, bitter creature lost in the lust for crude sensation.

But why? What did he lack? Why could he not find good in his work-a-day world, like Dr. Davidson or Dr. Roper? Was it vanity, thwarted pride? Men were strange creatures, ignoble, silly, and sometimes splendid. What could this other woman give him which she could not? Who was she——? But she shrank from that crude challenge. She remembered her mother's words. "This man may wound you." Yes, pain. Was woman born to pain, in the bearing of children, and in her bearing with man? Would the revolt of an outraged self-love help her? Did self-love ever help?

She stood up. The period of spring-cleaning had passed, and the drawing-room fire-place was decorously concealed for the summer by a wool-work screen. She took the screen away, and looking for something to burn, found some tattered old music of her mother's. It would serve, it was, in a sense, sacrificial. She crumpled up the sheets, packed them in the grate, and placed Miss Shallowbrass's letter on the top of the pyre, lit it, and watched the thing burn. Ashes and silence. That was all that seemed left to her.

It is possible to argue, as Sir Hector Neath argued in his naughty moods, that civilization is all artifice, man's House of Cards, and that if he chooses to blow the thing to pieces the destruction of such an artifice may be as rational as the constructing of it. Man just shed his clothes and went back to nature, and who was to prove that the African savage was a less blessed and happy person than your Noble Fellow in his Sabbath hat?

Sir Hector liked these mischievous moments, playing the toreador in this intellectual arena, and watching his wife react to the pricks of a scientific realism. Lady Neath was so much a Britannia when he played the pirate. Her colour rose, her eyes flashed. She was such a lovable and handsome creature, and when she sailed her stately ship, and gave him broadside for broadside, Sir Hector chuckled to himself and swore that she was the finest woman in Christendom.

“Don’t be naughty, Hector. Man isn’t just a superior ape.”

“I do wish you would prove it to me, my dear.”

“I know, just because there is some other knowledge in me.”

“O you sweet mystics, you transcendental souls!”

“I did not marry a gentlemanly ape, my dear.”

“You ladies always end in personalities, and create God out of your own dear heads.”

“Not head, Hector.”

“Heart, then, that mere muscular pump.”

“Could you make such a pump?”

“There, of course, you have me!”

Lucy Richmond held her tongue, but in her loneliness she did feel the need of some friend to whom she could confess in secret and thereby gain succour and assuagement. She wrote to Lady Neath. Might she and Charles come to tea? and Lady Neath replied that she would send the carriage for them on the Thursday. Lady Neath had a flair as to the significance of this visit. “I think Lucy wishes to tell me something, Hector. You might take charge of the boy.” So, Charlie was taken off to see the pigs, and two broods of newly-hatched chicks, and a ten-day old calf, while Lady Neath and Lucy sat in the Dell under the shade of a cedar. It was a veritable Sybil’s cave, and Lucy’s tongue was loosened.

Where and how had she failed?

The sunlight painted little blurs of light on Lady Neath’s hair and bosom. She had listened to Lucy with eyes as well as ears. If she was angry with Richmond she did not show it, for anger would not help. The poor, crass fool!

“How have I failed?”

“My dear, have you? I think not. So many men pass through this most

uncomfortable phase. With some, it is just a phase, but in your husband's case _____”

“It may mean ruin for him.”

“Are you thinking only of him?”

“Of the boy, too.”

“And not yourself?”

“Oh, not so much.”

Lady Neath, rose, and bending, kissed her.

“Well, let us be frank. Your husband is a fool, and some day he will realize, if he is worth anything——”

“Please!”

“Loyalty? Yes. About the greatest virtue that there is.”

“But what can I do?”

“What would you do?”

“Nothing. If he is to come back to me, it can't be in anger or through anger.”

“Who taught you that?”

“I don't know.”

“Well, to me it is the supreme wisdom. If a man is to come back in the way that matters, it can only be like a hurt and sorry child. Otherwise, let him go.”

“Finally?”

“Yes, finally. That is the test. I think that unless a man can open his own eyes, he is best left blind. You will always have the boy.”

Lucy sat very still.

“But I love my husband.”

“My dear, he may need that love.”

There were no secrets between Sir Hector and his wife, and when Lady Ursula told her other self Lucy's story, Sir Hector boiled over.

“The wretched fellow! He'll get himself unfrocked.”

“Could you do anything, Hector? Of course, Lucy must never know.”

“What, kick the wretched fellow?”

“Paternally.”

“My dear, I don’t like that sort of interference. But, why the devil can’t a man be satisfied? He has so much, a unique wife, a jolly youngster, a home, a good job, the kind of job that ought to fill a man’s life.”

“Your House of Cards, Hector!”

“Yes, damn it! One can’t be flippant about that kind of edifice. Oh yes, you are always right. When the house is built of Hearts, you can’t smash it with impunity.”

“Ought not that incorrigible, selfish idiot to be warned?”

“I’ll think it over, Ursy; I’ll think it over.”

XXVIII

No man is either the complete egoist, or the sensual and besotted fool, especially a man of Richmond's capacity and temper, and though he might be drugged with sex, he could be shocked into sanity. Triumphant he might be, but when that which he had desired was his, he felt far from being a splendid fellow. Sir Hector was wise in his generation. It might be better that some coincidence should kick a man rather than that you should apply the chastisement, however impartially and Olympically it might be administered. A man was nearer salvation and sweet sanity when he was moved to kick himself, and not to forget the angry and shame-faced reflection in the mirror. Reformers are of all people the most dangerous and destructive. Their sincerity may be so over-sincere that, like many platform virtues, it becomes humbug.

It happened this way to Richmond. Charlie had been presented with a tricycle-horse which he pedalled up and down the broad and quiet roadway of Queen's Terrace. The High Street was forbidden ground to him, and so was the Pier Hill, but the gentle slope where Queen's Terrace joined the hill was a temptation to a child mounted upon wheels. It occurred to John Richmond many times afterwards that if a God did watch and prompt the human stage, then on that day God was intervening in the affairs of mortals.

Old Howell was walking the mare and dog-cart up Pier Hill when the thing happened. Another horse and trap were trotting down past The Royal George, and as the trap appeared at the corner, Charles Lovelace came pedalling along by the garden fence, head down, sailor hat full mooned. He was absorbed, as children will be, in the adventure of the moment.

"Stop, dear, no further."

His mother was three or four yards behind him, but Charles was on the slope, and gathering speed that would take him across the forbidden glacia in front of the trotting horse. Richmond, sitting beside old Howell, saw it all happen. The child, realizing his danger, tried to swerve, and spilled himself into the roadway. The man in the trap was shouting, and half standing in the trap, and pulling hard on the reins. Lucy Richmond made a rush for the child. She gathered him, and might have come off scathless, had not the driver pulled his horse in the same direction that she took in trying to avoid the danger. The shaft caught her cheek, and threw her down and to one side, but the wheels of the trap missed both woman and child.

Richmond was out of the dog-cart, and running up the hill. In those few

seconds something had been torn from him, a false film covering his consciousness, leaving behind it a raw and wounded tenderness. She had been thrown down, hurt in trying to save the child. She, who—— And as Richmond ran, a poignant fear shuddered through him. Good God, was she badly hurt? Lucy, Lucy the girl, Lucy of the frightened eyes, that very gentle, lovable creature. In those few seconds the profound significance of Lucy was revealed to him. This was the woman whom he loved, the one creature in the world who mattered. What kind of beastly blindness had made him mad and cruel?

She was lying on the ground half stunned, with blood on her cheek, and the boy, with a small face of terror, was bending over her.

“Mummie, Mummie.”

Other people were running, a waiter from The Royal George, a postman who had dropped his bag outside Lovell’s library, but Richmond was the first to reach her.

“Lucy.”

The end of the shaft had gashed her cheek, and to Richmond that red stain seemed to bleed in his heart.

“Lucy, my dear.”

He was unaware of those other people. He gathered her up, and carried her along the terrace. It was significant that he carried her home, and not to Prospect House surgery. Charles Lovelace weeping, followed his father. The waiter had picked up the tricycle-horse, and passed it up to old Howell, who had brought the dog-cart to the brow of the hill. The driver of the trap was appealing to the world at large, and asking it to understand that it was no fault of his.

“The boy’s machine ran away with him. I did what I could. I wouldn’t have hurt that lady for worlds.”

Old Howell smiled at him, with a face that was strangely like a rock splashed with sunlight.

“You couldn’t help it, Mr. Griggs. The doctor’s got her. That’s as it should be.”

Lucy’s eyes were closed, but full consciousness had returned to her. She knew where she was and whose arms held her. This coming back to life was both bitter and exquisite. Richmond had reached the doorway of No. 11, and Charlie, suddenly wise, ran round his father, and put both hands to the brass handle.

“Shall I tell Sarah, Daddy?”

“Yes, my son. Send Sarah up to me.”

Lucy opened her eyes, and met those other eyes.

“John, I’m so sorry.”

“My dear!”

He carried her in, and pausing in the hall, kissed her. She gave him back that kiss, suddenly exulting, wounded and happy.

“Oh, John.”

“My darling.”

He kissed her again, and his eyes had a sudden dimness. He carried her up the stairs, and she felt that his strength was once more hers. He laid her gently on their bed, and bending over her, looked at her cheek, and touched it.

“Thank God it caught you there. Might have been your eye or temple.”

There was a shudder behind the words, and she smiled at him.

“Is poor Charlie——?”

“Never mind Charlie.”

His right hand was under her head, and his fingers exploring under her hair. No damage there, thank God! And suddenly it came to him that his fingers mattered, with their cunning and their skill, and that their significance had come to life again. He looked down at her, steadfastly.

“My God, you gave me a fright.”

“John, I’m so sorry.”

“Sorry? I’m the person to be sorry.”

Sarah arrived, bustling and breathless, but when she saw those two, something happened to her face. She stood mute in the doorway, blinking.

“Sarah, hot water, clean towels.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell one of the girls to bring up my surgical bag. It is in the cupboard in the consulting-room bookcase.”

His voice was crisp and gentle. Sarah stared at him for a moment as though Balaam’s Ass had indeed spoken words of human and infinite meaning. Then,

she trotted downstairs, holding her bosom as if its sudden plenitude needed support.

Charlie Richmond sat on the stairs. Through the landing window he could see the garden and its red-brick walls, and the stable greened over with the leaves of the Sweet Water Vine. Sweet William and Canterbury Bells were abloom in the garden, and a few red flowers were aflame on the standard roses. Charlie Richmond held a rose in his right hand. He had run upstairs to offer it to his mother, only to find the bedroom door locked.

“Can I come in, Daddy?”

“No, not yet, my son.”

Charlie had listened at the door. He had heard his father say to his mother: “I’m afraid I shall have to put in two stitches, my darling. Can you bear it?” and his mother had answered: “From you, John, yes.” Charlie had wondered why his mother’s voice had sounded so happy. It had not sounded like that for a long time. He had sat down on the stairs with the red rose in his hand. He had not felt rebuffed. Daddy was making mother well, and to Charles his father was a wonderful person. There was not anything that his father could not do. Would daddy scold him for causing that terrifying thing to happen to his mother? Yes, it had been his fault, and as he sat there and looked at the garden, he said to his small self: “Yes, I ought to be hurt for getting mummie hurt. I’ll ask daddy to whip me.”

Presently, the boy heard the key turned in the door. The door opened and his father called him.

“Charlie.”

Charles ran to his father, and Richmond, picking him up, carried him into the room. Charles saw his mother sitting up in bed, her head in bandages. Her face was pale, but her eyes shone. Charles held out his flower, and then suddenly burst into tears.

“Come here, darling.”

Richmond gave the child to his mother, and Lucy held him close.

“Oh, Mummie, I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t cry, dear. Daddy’s made mother well.”

“That silly old horse! I’ll never do it again.”

Richmond stood and looked at them both, a curious, inward smile on his face. The words of the child woke echoes in him, but Richmond was man and not child. Profoundly moved he might be, not only by remorse but by the consciousness of fear. He had been on the brink of—what? And disaster was still not far from him.

Charles had ceased to weep. He kissed his mother, and with sudden solemnity slipped off the bed, his little legs dangling for a moment. He stood before his father, looking up.

“Daddy, may I speak to you?”

“Yes, my son.”

“Outside, Daddy.”

The child put out a hand, and Richmond took it, and Lucy, holding the rose her son had left with her, watched them go out together.

“Shut the door, please, Daddy.”

Richmond closed it. Charles had withdrawn his hand, and Richmond, turning from the door, saw the small creature fumbling with the attachments of his nether garments. Had emotion caused Charles Lovelace sudden and distressing bowel-qualms?

“Want to go?”

Charles looked up at him solemnly.

“No, Daddy. I want to be whipped for making mother hurt.”

Richmond stared at the child. Assuredly, out of the mouths of babes——! He picked the boy up and kissed him. Good God, was he a fit person to administer such chastisement?

“No need, my son, for that. You didn’t think.”

“No, Daddy.”

“Neither did I, Charlie. If I were to whip you for not thinking——”

And suddenly he laughed, such funny laughter, or so it sounded to Charlie.

“Most of us would need more than whipping. Like to come out with me in the dog-cart?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“You shall. Let’s go and tell mother.”

For an hour or more Howell had been sitting stolidly in the dog-cart waiting for his master to resume his morning round. The sun was in strength, and its warmth was reflected from the walls of the houses on to the little gardens and the roadway. The mare dozed; so did the groom, who, accustomed to wait long hours like a soldier at his post, could somehow doze and yet remain as stiff as a ramrod. A tradesman's lad with a basket, passing along the terrace, was moved to mischief by the sleeping mare and the shut-eyed, rigid sentry on the box. He gave the mare a flick with his cap, and she came to life with a start and a shudder. Not so old Howell. He just opened his eyes, saw nothing and everything, and reaching deftly for the whip, flicked it neatly across the lad's cheek.

“'Ere, I say! What are you playin' at?”

The whip cord had stung him, and he crowed like a cockerel.

“Tops and bottoms,” said the groom. “Thought I was nodding, did you?”

“So you were.”

“You run along and leave your parcels, or do you want another tickle with my fishing-rod?”

“You try it, old cock. I'll tell my——”

“Imshi,” said old Howell, who had served in Egypt, “and put your cap on proper. That spit-curl'll lose its polish.”

The lad departed, hot and offended, and half a minute later the door of No. 11 opened, and Richmond and Charles came out. The father was holding the son's hand, and when Howell's shrewd old eyes had taken a look at them, the groom was wise as to the set of the weather.

“The boy is coming with us, Howell.”

Obviously so! The groom's seat was six inches higher than his master's, but there was room between the two men for Charles. Richmond lifted him up.

“Mrs. Richmond is not dangerously hurt, Howell.”

“Glad to hear it, sir. I put Master Charles's horse in the kitchen.”

Richmond climbed up, sat down, and spread the rug over his own and Charlie's knees.

“What's the time, Howell?”

“About half-past eleven, sir.”

“We're pretty late. Better take Willowell. The Rectory.”

Off went the mare as though refreshed and stimulated by the rude interruption of her slumber. Charles, sandwiched between the groom and his father, found his sailor hat in rather narrow quarters.

“Could I take it off, Daddy?”

“Turn the brim down. How’s that?”

“Better, Daddy. The ’lastic’s rather tight.”

“You’ve got it too much under your chin. That’s better.”

Sundry people in the High Street saw Dr. Richmond helping to adjust his son’s sailor hat, and doing it as a father should. There had been rumours of an accident to Mrs. Richmond. Well, well, it could not have been very serious, for here was the doctor out with his boy, and looking as though the sun was shining, which it was. Miss Shallowbrass, stepping out of Mr. Brighthouse’s shop doorway after purchasing precisely one yard of black ribbon, stared, and gave Richmond a forbidding little nod. Richmond missed it, but Charlie did not.

“There’s old Miss Sallowbrass.”

Richmond laughed. The name was a good one.

“I did not see her.”

“She was staring and staring at you, Daddy.”

“Was she, indeed? How rude of me not to notice.”

Charlie looked back.

“She’s still staring. Why’s she so ugly?”

“Heaven knows, my son. You mustn’t ask me such questions. Ask Howell.”

Charles, with a tilt of the straw hat, peered from under it at the groom.

“Does Howell know?”

The groom’s impassive face betrayed a stony twinkle.

“Mustn’t look a lady or a gift horse in the mouth, Master Charles.”

“Why mustn’t I?”

“Not good manners, sir.”

Charles sat silent, reflecting. Then he said: “I don’t think I should like to look into Miss Sallowbrass’s mouth. She’s got such long yellow teeth.”

Howell grunted, which was the sublimation of a guffaw, and flicking the mare gently with the whip, told her to “Gee-up,” which was superfluous.

The new, ochrish villas were advancing along the road to Willowell, but beyond these blobs of progress the country spread in placid greenness like water about the tower and spire of Willowell church. The great elms were laced against white clouds and blue sky. A field of beans was in flower, and Charles Lovelace sniffed it. “What’s the nice smell, Daddy?” “Beans, my son. That field over there.” Willowell was a comely village, and the lilacs were still out, with the laburnum and red thorn joining in. Richmond sat with his arm round his son, and looking upon this English world, and finding it good and lovely, was moved to wonder whether he or the world had changed. What a question! He could think of himself as a man who had escaped from a stuffy, overheated room into the clean air and sunlight. He was free. But was he free? He was conscious of a doubt that gripped him, a mordant uncertainty. He had been so near the edge, and blundering along it like a drunken man. His eyes might be open, his mind clear, but that disastrous precipice was very near his feet. What if it was too late? Oh, but that was just panic, the tormentings of a guilty conscience. He would not go near that house again. He would turn the case over to Emmerson. He might have to lie and say: “I’m finding a certain person rather embarrassing. Be warned.” But was not that cowardly? Poor Morelli was a dying man. Surely, he had the courage and the strength to handle the situation, to tell Lucia frankly and finally that certain things could not be? How did you tell a woman that? Did you say “My dear, you and all this are too dangerous. Forgive me, but I must wish you good day”? And how would a woman like Lucia respond? Well, the crisis had to be faced.

Above the red-brick wall of the Rectory garden the later flowering apple trees were still in blossom. Canon Grey of Willowell was an apostolic figure, big, bearded, and benign, but orchard and garden were the apple of the rector’s eye, and yearly, when the fruit hung on the trees, he administered personal chastisement, if necessary, to marauding boys. Canon Grey did not subscribe to the Slop School. He could hit a huge ball at cricket, and run like a colt, and Willowell respected him and his views upon Thine and Mine. Orchard raiding might be a jolly game, and Canon Grey was quite ready to play it, but if the raiders were caught, their posteriors paid forfeit. Willowell did not love its rector any the less for this. He was a wise, kind, wholesome creature, and if he sometimes caught and whacked a boy, well, Willowell belonged to the wholesome, old English school that was not spinsterish on the subject of social chastisement. Boys will be boys. Yes, but a boy was none the worse for a tanning.

“Good morning, Doctor.”

The Canon’s mountain-voice hailed them over the wall, and Richmond came out of the dog-cart and his mood of self-arraignment.

“Good morning, sir.”

“Patient’s ready for you. Hallo, Master Charles. Come and see my garden.”

“Yes, please.”

“Pass him over the wall, Richmond.”

Charlie was handed over by his father, and mounted on the big man’s shoulder.

“You can hold on to anything, Charles, except my beard.”

On the homeward drive Richmond’s dog-cart passed a smart new equipage, that of Dr. Squibb, who now that he had patients to visit had decided that some further outlay of capital was justified. Moreover, Mrs. Squibb had insisted upon the purchase of a horse and dog-cart. “It will be good for the practice, Percy. You mustn’t foot it when the others are driving. One’s got to look good in this world. If you ask me, it’s more important than being good.” Mrs. Squibb knew what she was talking about, and that the ladies in the new villas preferred their medical man to arrive in a chariot, and not to sneak in on foot like some insurance-tout or the postman. If you could afford a doctor, you liked to afford him in style. Dr. Squibb held the reins, and beside him sat a boy in livery, blue with silver buttons, and wearing a jaunty little top-hat. Richmond, who, on this symbolical morning, was feeling a new friendliness to all the world, smiled and nodded at Dr. Percy Squibb.

“Good morning.”

Dr. Squibb, who had been prepared for the cut-direct, smirked abruptly at his rival.

“Good morning, Richmond.”

Charlie, holding a bunch of lilac that Canon Grey had given him, and which he proposed presenting to his mother, looked up at his father.

“Do you like Dr. Squibb, Daddy?”

Richmond, who had divined the hostility behind Dr. Squibb’s smirk, was guarded both in his thoughts and his answer.

“I don’t know Dr. Squibb well enough to be sure.”

Dr. Squibb had more reason to smile than had his rival. At least, Dr. Squibb thought so. Why this sudden affability? The little man with the black moustache had an explanation of his own to offer. Dr. Richmond was on slippery ground, and knew it. Dr. Richmond might be realizing the need for conciliating criticism, professional and public. When a fellow had fallen into the honey-pot, and his wings were sticky, dignity might be up for sale.

Dr. Squibb took off his hat with a flourish to a lady patient who was passing.

“What ho!” thought he, “if that supercilious swine thinks I am going to give him a leg out, he’s pretty much mistaken. I hope he’s well soused in that sex-scandal. I’m not a vindictive man, but one has to think of the shekels.”

Dr. Richmond and his son were driven down the High Street to the surgery, and there Richmond dismissed old Howell until the afternoon round. Meeting Dr. Squibb had given an edge to John Richmond’s anxiety, for he had seen in Dr. Squibb the little hungry dog waiting to snap up any opportunity. Men like Squibb and Tallent would not show him any mercy, or join in a brotherly crusade to save him from professional tarnish. They would join with the good and the righteous in hounding him out of the town. In fact, Richmond could see Dr. Squibb secretly betraying the scandal to that august body which guarded the morals of the profession.

Charles Byng was up on the high steps, checking the quantities in the stock bottles. He had his back to Dr. Richmond, and Richmond was to be glad of the fact.

“Letter for you, sir. On the desk.”

“Hallo, Mr. Byng.”

“Hallo, Master Charles.”

“Can I have an acid-drop?”

“You know where the bottle is? Oh, yes.”

Richmond had picked up the letter. It had been left by hand, and he did not know the writing.

“Who is this from, Mr. Byng?”

“Morelli’s boy brought it.”

Richmond went hot. Leaning over the high desk he opened the letter and read it. It said that Mr. Morelli was worse, and was asking urgently for the doctor. It said more than this, and with such recklessness that Richmond felt

cold and shocked, though his forehead was sweating. He slipped the sheet back into its envelope and put it away in his breast pocket. Good God, did the woman realize that nothing but a film of paper had protected him from shame and disaster? Would she have cared if their secret had been discovered? Supposing Charles Byng had opened that letter? Richmond felt weak in the stomach. He was appalled at the crude nakedness of the crisis. What a thrice-damned fool he had been! But this business must end, ruthlessly and finally so. He would make it plain to Lucia.

But what if Lucia refused to be reasonable?

He found his son pulling at his coat.

“It’s dinner time, Daddy.”

“Yes, Charles.”

“And I’ve got these flowers for mother.”

Richmond took his son by the hand and walked with him homewards to No. 11 Queen’s Terrace. How pleasant and peaceful were these houses and gardens! And Charles had a bunch of lilac for his mother. Good God, if only he could go in to Lucy with the innocence of that child!

XXIX

Dr. Richmond was glad that Charlie preceded him up the stairs, running up them happily with his bunch of lilac in his hand. Richmond climbed them slowly, as though counting each step. He wanted to be with Lucy, and perhaps for the first time in his life he was afraid of her, like a child who has committed some flagrant sin and cannot confess it. But he was man, not child, and his treachery had been so much more carnal than the sin any child can commit. Treachery, yes, that was the supreme sin, not the mere physical act, but the spiritual deceit that was associated with it. You could not look your real love in the eyes, and even if you compelled yourself to do so, you were conscious of shame, and of the bitter things that you blurted to yourself. Damned hypocrite! Well, Lucy should never know. He would slay the faithless thing, and bury it.

Richmond had reached the landing when the thought struck him and brought him to a sudden pause, almost as though he had run his head against the lintel of a door. What if she did know? What if a woman like Lucy could divine the thing he had sought to hide? Could such obsessions be hidden? His wife's door was open, and he heard Charlie's chatter.

"Smell them, Mother. Isn't it a nice smell?"

"Lovely, dear. Where did you get them."

"Mr. Grey gave them to me."

Richmond forced himself across the landing. How strange that the thing you now most wanted in the world should cause you to shrink and be afraid! He saw Charles on the bed, and Lucy holding the bunch of lilac. Her face had the delicate, waxy texture of the flowers. He entered, closed the door, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"How is it with you, Lucy?"

She looked at him with a kind of suddenness, and put out her hand. He had spoken to her almost like the unsure lover.

"Just a little headache."

"Like the blind lower?"

"No, dear."

"I'll send you round some of our special bromide mixture."

She smiled, and the quality of her smile made him wonder. She looked so

serene, like a nun in a wimple, and yet there was a mystery about her, a strange and secret radiance. He found it difficult to meet her eyes, and he turned to the boy who sat there watching them.

“Now, young man, mustn’t tire mother. Run down and tell Sarah we are in.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

Charles slipped solemnly off the bed, and walked to the door.

“Wait a moment, Charles. What do you fancy, darling? Has Sarah——?”

“Yes, Sarah has something light for me.”

“Good. All right. Run along, Charles.”

When the boy had gone, Richmond sat and looked at his wife. He did not know why, but he had ceased to fear her.

“Any pain now, Lucy?”

“No, only a little ache.”

“Try and get some sleep this afternoon. I’ll see you are not disturbed. You know you are rather precious.”

She looked at him with a wide-eyed, serene steadfastness, and Richmond knew that for him there were no other eyes in the world that mattered. Here were trust, loyalty, honour. What a blind fool he had been! He bent forward and kissed her forehead.

“You gave me a shock to-day. Forgive me.”

They did not look at each other now. Richmond’s eyes were on the hand he was holding, hers on the bunch of lilac.

“Have I anything to forgive, John?”

“Oh yes; I’ve been an awkward, glum brute. Something must have been the matter with me. I needed this shock.”

He felt the pressure of her fingers.

“I think I could forgive you anything, John.”

“My dear!”

“Aren’t the flowers lovely? Put them in water. Yes, the jug will do. I’ll ask Sarah for a vase.”

Richmond gathered the bunch of lilac, smelt it, and smiled.

“Do you remember the lilac bush in your mother’s garden?”

“Yes.”

“How things come back. They are always there, really. Must be. Only fools think——”

He rose and going to the washhand-stand, put the bunch of lilac in the jug.

“Can you see them there?”

“Yes.”

“Good. I’ll go down and see about your lunch.”

A pleasure-yacht was putting out to sea when Dr. Richmond was driven down the Pier Hill. He had a country round before him, but he was proposing to visit Mr. Morelli before driving to Richford and Wickering. With his attitude to life readjusted, he was persuaded that this visit should possess a severely professional flavour. You could spread your sails and put to sea as easily as did that yacht. A little dignity, a kind but firm reserve, a serious word or two, a pat on the shoulder. “My dear, this has become a little too serious. Forgive me, but remember, from now onwards, I am a doctor.”

The dog-cart drew up outside the Lord Nelson, and Richmond, climbing out, gave Howell his orders. “You can turn the mare round. I shall not be ten minutes.” He walked up the gravel path between the tea-tables, a very professional figure, deliberately pulling off his gloves. He rang the bell, and a rather slatternly little maid whose face was refreshingly new to Richmond, answered the bell.

“Be you the doctor?”

“I am.”

“The missus is upstairs with the master.”

Slowly, Richmond climbed those familiar stairs. The wall-paper imitated yellow, blue veined marble; the carpet was a gawdy mixture of reds and yellows. How different a house was this from the house where Lucy lived and had her being! So, Lucia was with her husband. That was as it should be.

He came to the turn of the stairs, and looking up, saw the bedroom door opening. She came out on to the landing, closing the door behind her. She stood at the head of the stairs, and her face was not the face of a woman who wore a faded garland.

Richmond paused for a second, like a man suddenly realizing that the assault was not to be a mere parade-ground exercise.

“I’m sorry. Is he worse?”

She nodded at him. Her very dark eyes assumed all the intimate things that he now wished to ignore. Her lips were parted over her strong teeth. She made no show of moving. They were to meet as they always met.

Richmond made himself smile at her. He came slowly up the last steps, but the conscience in him quailed.

“I must see what I can do, Lucia.”

He was willing her to move, and move she did, but not as he wished it. She came one step down to meet him. Her warm strong arms went round his neck, and her body pressed against him. She did not speak, but her whole jocund, handsome self was asking to be ravaged.

Richmond went rigid. He felt like a man clutched in the sea by a woman who was reckless and desperate. He gripped her arms, and gently thrust her off.

“Not now, Lucia. I come as the doctor.”

She stared him in the face, and laughed, soundlessly. Then, she shook her head at him, and gently smacked his face. She understood, or thought that she understood this solemn, decorous jest. She raised her voice, and her eyes were wanton and merry.

“Yes, Doctor, I am very sorry. It is his heart again. Please come in.”

Morelli was not lying propped against the pillows as Lucia had left him. He had pushed back the clothes, and had one swollen leg out of bed. His hair had gone a shabby grey since his illness, and hair and skin were much the same colour. He panted. His eyes were Southern eyes, ominous and menacing, the eyes of a man who could use a knife and stab. He sat there listening. Then, suddenly, he swung that monstrous leg back into the bed, pulled up the clothes, and lay back against the pillows. When the door opened, he was panting, his face the face of one in the extremity of distress.

Richmond, looking at that dusky, anguished face, was moved to compassion. He was the physician, and this man was dying. Tony Morelli and his wife had changed places.

“Feeling bad, Tony?”

He sat down beside the bed, and felt the Italian’s pulse. It was a terrible

pulse, irregular and galloping. Lucia was leaning over the rail at the foot of the bed, her great round eyes like the eyes of a cow.

“I canna breatha, Doctor.”

“Poor old fellow.”

Richmond’s voice was kind. Morelli lay looking at the ceiling, and trying not to shake with the jealousy that tore him. What a vile hypocrite was this doctor, assuming sympathy, and uttering lies!

“Any pain?”

Morelli groaned.

“Yes, here,” and he put a hand to his heart.

Richmond gently moved the hand; it was cold and clammy, and laid his own hand over the Italian’s heart. Yes, it could not be long before that heart gave up the struggle.

“I’ll make you up something to ease it.”

He glanced at the wife.

“If you’ll send your lad up to the surgery, I’ll have the medicine ready.”

She nodded.

“I will send him.”

Morelli had closed his eyes. He was saying to himself: “This man would give me poison.”

Richmond spoke a few more kind words to Morelli, whose head rolled to and fro on the pillow, for the Italian was suffering other pangs. Lucia followed Richmond out of the room, closing the door behind her, and with a quick movement put herself between Richmond and the stairs.

“I wish to speak about my husband. Can nothing more be done, Doctor?”

Richmond, cut off from the stairs, understood what was in her mind. Those words were meant for her husband. Well, if the crisis was upon him, let it be gone through with. She was pointing to the door of the other room. Her lips were parted over her strong white teeth.

“I am afraid, Mrs. Morelli——”

He passed through into her room, and she followed. She closed the door, and came and stood close to him.

“It will not be long now.”

Richmond stiffened himself.

“Lucia, it is time I told you——”

“Yes, like this——”

Maybe she knew how to overwhelm a man, but when she flung herself at Richmond with all the seductive recklessness of a wanton, he struggled with her.

“Lucia, this must stop.”

He was facing the door, and she had her back to it, and it was he who saw the door open, and Morelli standing there, both tragic and grotesque, a panting, swollen figure in a white night-shirt, its œdematous legs like billets of wood. The Italian’s mouth was open, his eyes ablaze. He began to scream at them.

“You thinka I did not know. You maka of my wife a whore. You, a doctor. Nica beesness. I tella everybody. I ruin you what! I——”

Lucia had turned with a face of fury.

“What are you doing here, you——”

The Italian’s hands were open. He made a lunging step forward as though to take his wife by the throat. Then, his face went all flaccid and blind. He swayed, crumpled up, collapsed on the floor.

Richmond, almost as white as the fainting man, stood shocked and irresolute. This, indeed, was the end of things. Morelli had fainted, but when consciousness returned to that fat and furious creature the truth would be shouted to the world at large. What poor fools were both of them, equally exploited by this handsome jade!

But, Lucia was down on her knees beside her husband. Most amazing thing of all, she was weeping.

“Tony, Tony.”

She took his great grey head in her lap, and fondled it.

“Tony, wake up.”

Richmond stood and stared at them. God, what an incalculable creature was woman! He was aware of Morelli’s thick lips blubbering in and out, and of the froth on them.

Her head jerked back. She snarled at him.

“Do something, you, a doctor. Don’t stand there and gape.”

Richmond winced, as though his rational self had come to life with pain and travail.

“Better get him back to bed. Help me.”

She was a strong creature, and their united strength was needed to lift that stertorous hulk and carry it into the next room. They laid him on the bed, and covered him up, and stood on either side of the bed, silently staring.

Said the woman: “Poor Tony. He was good to me. I was good to him too before you came.”

Richmond glanced at her, almost furtively.

“I am sorry, Lucia. We——”

She went on her knees beside the bed.

“Oh, get out of my sight. I am a bad woman, but you, you are worse.”

Richmond found himself sitting in the dog-cart beside the groom, and being driven up Pier Hill. The same sun was shining; the yacht was tacking out towards Eastness, her white sails and black hull standing out against the blue of the sea. On the plateau above, the houses of Queen’s Terrace towered with a tranquil straightness above the greens and golds of the trees in Caroline Gardens. A squat, stone-pine spread a canopy against the painted fronts of the houses, marking for Richmond the windows and doorways of his home.

This new world seemed to him both vivid and unreal, as though some gauzy fabric had been torn aside, leaving familiar objects brilliantly crude, yet somehow strange. He was conscious of anguish, an emptiness of the stomach. An inward voice kept repeating the same words. “Finished, finished. Oh you thrice-besotted fool!” He looked at that dark green tree, and the house behind it. Lucy was lying there, perhaps asleep, and unsuspecting. He would have to tell her. How could he tell her? Yet, to-morrow, the truth might have spread over the town.

Howell glanced at his master.

“Richford, sir?”

“Yes, Richford.”

How he got through that afternoon round, and what his patients thought of him Richmond never knew. He was a man drugged with dread and doubt and

pain. A part of him moved and spoke and functioned like some mechanism, while his secret self writhed and complained. There was a moment when he was filled with savage anger against himself. It happened while he was washing his hands after examining a case, and a mild little woman was asking him a question.

“Can he have boiled beef and dumplings, Doctor?”

Boiled beef and dumplings? What a question!

“Yes, anything he fancies.”

“He’s so fond of boiled beef and dumplings.”

On the homeward drive he found himself dreading the Southfleet streets. The hedges and the trees of the country lanes did not stare and point and whisper. Perched up in the high dog-cart he was like a man in a pillory, a lewd and scandalous fellow to be jeered at and pelted. Well, he had deserved it. He had been guilty of that disloyalty which professional honour will not stomach. A doctor should be the celibate in any house that he enters as the friend and the physician. Recklessness had passed with the collapse of desire. It was not that Richmond was a coward. Not only would the community accuse him of breaking faith, but he was accusing himself of the same treachery. He had been no better than a lecherous lout, he, who had so much in life that was infinitely worth while.

Driving down Southfleet High Street he sat straight and stiff beside the groom, feeling that he was being stared at. The Neath carriage passed him and he did not see it, nor the figure that smiled and bowed. He did not want to see people. He sat there feeling chilled and dumb and sick at heart, a man most miserable because this misery was of his own creating. Yes, and because of those others who would suffer because he had played the lustful fool.

“Stop at the surgery, Howell.”

“Yes, sir.”

When the dog-cart pulled up, Richmond sprang down and dashed across the pavement, like an animal seeking cover. A voice did say to him: “Pull yourself together. Why not brazen it out?” but his own savage conscience was up in arms against him. He turned into the dispensary where Byng was writing labels and applying them to medicine bottles. The dispenser glanced at him sharply, and stood to one side.

“Letter for you.”

“Oh?”

“From Morelli’s. Left by hand.”

The letter lay upon the open ledger. Richmond stared at it, picked it up, opened it, read.

Tony is dead. He died ten minutes after you left us.

Lucia.

If ever a man was conscious of relief, that man was Richmond, but as he stood with the crumpled letter in his hand, staring down at the ledger, he was conscious of a stab of shame. What brutal selfishness was this that could exult over another man’s death, because that death and its timely silence might signify salvation! He might plead that he was thinking of those others, but the plea could not absolve him from the charge of a double treachery. No sense of humour could rescue him, no flippant self-justification would avail that tried to laugh the business off. A man might be man, and yet no better than a beast, for if man had created certain loyalties, those loyalties were valid.

Richmond, leaning against that familiar desk, was in the pillory of self-accusation, a challenge that no man can answer save through the courage and the compassion of a finer revelation. That revelation did come to him, and with it the courage that clutches the truth, even though it may scorch and wound. He would tell the truth. And suddenly he was conscious of assuagement, a strange calm. He took a pen, and wrote up the entries in the ledger. He spoke to Charles Byng.

“Make a mental note, Charles, I want Garrand to have Unguentum Hydrarg at double strength.”

“Double strength. Right, sir.”

Richmond took his hat and his gloves, and walked out of the surgery, and down the Pier Hill to the house where Antonio Morelli lay dead. Fear had gone from him, and he marvelled.

XXX

The Lord Nelson's blinds were down, and the shop shutters up when Richmond walked up the gravel path to the bright blue door. A small boy trundling a hoop, stopped to stare at the covered windows and the closed shop. Someone had presented him with twopence, and he had proposed spending it upon a penny ice and two halfpenny rockcakes, but both the shop and Antonio were dead. Richmond rang the bell, and the same snuffling, untidy little maid opened the door to him.

"Will you tell Mrs. Morelli that Dr. Richmond is here."

"She ain't seein' nobody."

"Go and take her the message. I will wait."

He stood in the passage while the girl climbed the stairs, her black stockings in wrinkles round her skinny legs. Richmond heard voices, and the clumsy patter of the girl's flat feet returning.

"She'll see you. Step into the parlour. She's comin' down."

Richmond was shown into that too familiar room. It looked out on the back garden that was gaudy with its blue chairs and tables, and red geranium and lobelia. It was part office, part sitting-room. It contained the dead man's desk, and a shabby green safe that Morelli had purchased second-hand. Richmond stood by the window, thinking that death might be merciful not only to the dead but to the living.

Lucia swept in, and closed the door after her. She was voluminous and in black. She had been crying, and her eyes were swollen, and her large face seemed to have coarsened. She sat down in a chair, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes watchful yet sullen.

Richmond, standing with his back to the light, was moved to wonder at the transient nature of desire, for that which had burned so fiercely in him was like ashes on the morning after. He saw a large, coarse creature with swollen eyes, and a face that was puffy and turgid. And strangely enough his compassion went out to her as it would not have done in the days of desire.

"I am sorry, Lucia. I shall never forgive myself for some things."

She gazed at him steadfastly, with a kind of stolid shrewdness.

"Sorry for what?"

“Everything, my dear.”

Her face remained sullen.

“Ah, you are thinking of other things, I suppose.”

He understood her. Man is never more stupid than when sex-obsessed, and with the passing of that illusion Richmond had regained that intuitive intelligence which many philosophers lack, but which all physicians should possess.

“Yes, my dear. I am not here to ask for anything, to justify anything. But I am thinking of other things, other people.”

“So, poor Tony’s death was lucky, for you.”

He smiled at her.

“Maybe, it was merciful to us all. I know now that I behaved to him like a blackguard.”

“Am I included?”

“No, Lucia, I think the chief blame was mine. I who was in a position of trust, I who failed in that trust.”

She, too, smiled, but with sullen irony.

“Men always want to be let off.”

“Have I asked to be let off? But I do ask that those others, who are dear to me——”

“You did not think of them before, did you?”

“No, that’s true. Another piece of treachery.”

She looked at him steadily with those great round black eyes, and being woman, she realized that somehow her power over him had gone. He was not pretending. No longer could she set him alight.

“You want me to let you off, hold my tongue?”

“Wouldn’t that be generous of you?”

“Why should I be?”

“I can give you no reason, save that I am going to tell a certain person the truth.”

“Who?”

“My wife.”

She was startled. She stared at him, round-eyed. Then, she flared at him almost fiercely.

“Don’t be such a fool.”

“Is it folly?”

“To tell a woman that! Why let her know? She’ll never trust you again.”

Richmond stood silent a moment.

“It seems childish to you, Lucia? Well, I’m wondering if the wisdom of children isn’t greater than the wisdom of men. If one has told the truth, might one not be deserving of more trust?”

“You’ll be a fool to tell her.”

“Well, I’ll be that fool.”

“What if she wants to divorce you? What about me? You men always want it all ways. You’re to be forgiven, I suppose, and I’m to be the wicked woman? If your wife——”

He interrupted her.

“Listen, Lucia, you don’t know my wife. She is rather different.”

“From me?”

“From most of us. Oh, I’m not defending myself or accusing you. A certain thing seemed good and we took it. But I see things more clearly now. I am going to tell her, and I am pretty sure that you will not suffer.”

She rose and walked heavily past him to the window.

“Supposing I quarrel with that? Supposing I say that you belong to me.”

“I don’t, Lucia.”

“No? You just wanted——”

“Yes, I wanted you.”

“And that’s all over?”

“Yes. Whatever happens, that is finished.”

She stood staring out into the garden.

“Yes, I understand. I understand that my poor Tony wanted me differently. He—— Yes, we were bad people to him, both of us. Well, go and tell your

wife.”

He looked at her intently, consideringly, and then he laid a hand upon her shoulder.

“Thank you, Lucia. You are better than I am. I have someone to go to. You, my dear——”

And suddenly she burst into tears.

“Yes, you’ve had me, and you have her, and I’ve nothing. All men are like that. No, leave me alone; I don’t want pity. Yes, I’ll keep your secret for you, and for her. What’s it matter?”

“It matters profoundly, my dear. Thank you. If you do this for me, I shall be ashamed for the rest of my life, and that helps.”

She turned and looked at him, wet-eyed.

“Ashamed of me?”

“No, rather proud of you. Coals of fire, Lucia. Oh, yes, bitterness doesn’t help.”

So might the old and the new Adam have argued with each other, the one, the primitive, cunning creature cringing before God, the other, the dear simple prig discovering both ethical and emotional reasons for doing that which would please both God and himself. Lucia Morelli, the Italian, suddenly sweeping her tears away with the back of her hand, looked at him and laughed. How quickly the good English could change the satyr-skin for the surplice! This man was no desperate pirate of a lover, but a good animal who had jumped a field-gate and now was eager to be back in the paddock. Yes, fat grass grew there.

“You make me laugh, Rich Man. Yes, yes, go to your good lady. I thought you a fine devil, and you’re what do they call it, a nice little choir-boy who has been stealing apples.”

She made a face at him.

“I do not sing grand opera. Run away, my dear, and be the good doctor, and go to the church on Sunday.”

She poked a finger at him.

“You English men are so funnee. Why, my poor Tony had hot stuff in him. He knifed a man once for me. But you English, you use solemn words, not knives. You humbug yourselves when it suits you.”

Richmond looked troubled.

“Are we like that, Lucia? I hope not. Sometimes, a sense of duty——”

Again she laughed, and prodded his Adam’s ribs.

“You and your sense of duty! Go along with you. I will go and sit with my Tony. Poor Tony. But I have the shop, you know. I shall be quite a handsome widow, and perhaps I shall find an Italian. Go back to your sweet saint, Dr. Richmond, and have your hair buttered. Christ, how I should scratch you if you came to me with that sort of story.”

Richmond shook his head at her.

“No, you wouldn’t. You’d——”

She smacked his face, then kissed him, and pushed him towards the door.

“Run home to the sweet lady. She’s much too good for you. Women are.”

“You’re right, Lucia. They are.”

Sea, sunlight, sky, a sense of exaltation. Richmond walked up the Pier Hill like a man who has been sick and unhappy, and is well. What strange creatures were women! Would Lucia keep her word? Well, she had laughed at him, and laughter should be without malice. What a reprieve! And should he tell Lucy? Or, should he accept the other woman’s warning? Kiss, but do not tell. Yes, but it had been more than kisses, oh, so much more, nor did he know what Lucia Morelli knew, that she had been left with a child that the dead Tony would claim as posthumous. A last flash in the pan.

Richmond, the good Englishman, felt that God was back in the heavens. His naïve virtue was buttoned up and happy. Should he make that confession? What if Lucy did not know? But, of course, she did not know. Almost, in his relief, he believed that no one knew. Man is so simple a creature when he has stolen and eaten the apples, and has scrambled back over the orchard wall, sure, since no one has challenged him, that he and the escapade have passed unseen. Why should anybody know? And yet, nearly all Southfleet knew, and was waiting with the birch ready for this bad boy’s back. It might apply that birch, and it might not. That might depend, not so much upon how the boy behaved, but upon the particular behaviour of a particular woman.

Charlie had taken to cricket. The game was played in the back garden, with a board for a wicket, and a soft rubber ball for bowling, for though Lucy might

be the most patient of mothers, she considered her flower-beds and the heads of her flowers. Ethel would bowl underhand to Charlie, and sometimes his father had found time to trundle him a few balls, but on this day Ethel was not available. It was her afternoon off. Someone had given Charlie a set of skittles, and since this was a game that could be played solus, Charlie set up his skittles in the passage leading to the back garden. It made a very passable skittle-alley, with the chasm that housed the cellar steps as a pit to catch spent balls and safeguard the stained glass of the consulting-room window.

Charles had knocked down eight of the skittles, but one bold fellow refused to be laid low. It stood there, mocking him. "I'll get you," said Charles, making a truculent face at it. The skittle ball was an oval disc of heavy wood, and Charles bowled it at the very moment that the front door opened, and his father passed into the consulting-room. It was a vicious ball. It said: "I'll knock you down so that daddy can see," but the ball, striking the neck of one of the fallen skittles, bounced in the air, leapt the chasm, and crashed against the big glass window.

Charles stood horrified. He saw a round hole, and a star-shaped scar on the grey ground-glass with its yellow pattern. That sacred window! Dreadful disaster! What would daddy say? More important still, what would daddy do?

Charles stood staring, his right hand prophetically feeling the seat of his knickers. Oh, horrors!

Richmond appeared in the passage.

"Hallo, what are you up to?"

Charles trembled and stood contrite.

"I'm so sorry, Daddy. The ball jumped."

He looked at his father, and his lower lip trembled. The paternal wrath would descend. How he hated that small cane, not so much because of the pain it inflicted, but because of a secret shame.

"A nice mess you have made of the window."

"Yes, Daddy."

Amazing reaction, but his father was laughing. Yes, laughing! He came into the passage, and picked Charlie up, and pretended to smack him.

"Oh, Daddy!"

"Well, that's enough. Hallo, was that the fellow who wouldn't be knocked over?"

“Yes, Daddy.”

Richmond put the boy down.

“Go and get the ball, and let me have a shot.”

Charlie bolted for it down the steps, and returning, gave it to his father.

“You try, Daddy.”

“Here goes.”

Richmond bowled the thing with vigour and, amazing fact, the ball repeated its star performance, jumped in the air, crossed the chasm, and inflicted a far more serious wound upon that sacred window.

Charles stood aghast.

“Oh, Daddy, you have done it!”

And suddenly his emotion changed to glee. He danced up and down, and Richmond, catching the boy’s hands, pranced round with him.

“What will mother say?”

“Yes, what will mother say?”

“Two bad boys went bowling.”

Richmond picked Charles up, and putting him on his back, carried him upstairs.

“Broken windows don’t matter, Charles. They can be mended.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

“But we mustn’t do it again. Oh, no, we mustn’t do it again.”

Outside Lucy’s door father and son whispered together. Mother might be asleep, and if so it would be churlish to disturb her, especially so if the sound of breaking glass had not echoed in her ears. Charles, still on his father’s shoulders, and with his head close to the door, listened, finger on lip. But Lucy was awake and had heard them, as she had heard the crash of the consulting-room window.

“Charlie.”

“Hallo, Mumma. Can we come in?”

“Yes, dear.”

Richmond turned the handle, and father and son entered in the part of the

double-beast. And how was mother? Both mouths asked the question. Was her headache better?

Lucy was sitting up. She looked at the two faces, and somehow knew that both of them had been in mischief.

“What have you two been doing?”

“We’ve broken the study window, Mumma.”

“Both of you?”

“Yes, both of us,” said Richmond; “and mine was the more heinous crime of the two. I don’t ask to be forgiven.”

He deposited Charlie on the bed.

“Skittles, Lucy. Not a proper game for a grown man. I’ll refrain in future.”

He, too, sat down on the bed, and looked at her, and Lucy was conscious of being looked at with eyes of profound affection. How was it with her? Was she in pain? If so, her pain was somebody else’s pain, and not to be borne alone.

“Who is going to pay, John?”

“I think Charlie’s savings-box ought to be rifled.”

“Oh, Daddy, I’ve got only ninepence in it.”

“Does a wise child know how much is in the money-box?”

“I’m saving up for mother’s birthday.”

“Well, daddy will have to pay for the damage. Now, run along, old man, and tell Jane we’ll have tea in a quarter of an hour. Also, someone will have to clear up that glass. I expect a patient at five.”

Charles slipped off the bed.

“Can I have raspberry jam for tea, Mumma?”

“Yes, dear, I think so.”

When the boy had gone, Richmond walked to the window, raised the blind, and looked at the familiar scene, trees, sea, ships, the old wooden pier, the dim green hills across the estuary. In August those hills would become the colour of old gold, for wheat grew there. Then, he pulled down the blind, and turning to the foot of the bed, leaned upon the rail, and looked at his wife.

“Am I forgiven, Lucy?”

“For breaking windows?”

“No, for other and worse follies. I am going to tell you. I feel that I have to tell you, even though I can never seem the same to you. One doesn’t ask to be forgiven. A second chance.”

She looked at him for a moment, and then let her head lie back upon the pillow, eyes half-closed, dark lashes lying on her cheeks.

“Need you tell me, John?”

“I must, just to try and prove that——”

“You see, I knew.”

“You knew?”

“Yes, John.”

“My dear, and you let me——! I mean, you bore this and did not——”

“Women have ways of knowing. If I had been angry and bitter, would that have helped?”

“Weren’t you angry and bitter?”

“No, only humiliated.”

His hands were gripping the rail. He seemed to thrust himself off from it with one strong gesture. He came round, and kneeling down, put his face against the bed.

“Oh, my dear, that goes to the quick. There is nothing that I can say.”

“No, dear. It may happen to any man.”

“It should not have happened to me.”

“Are you so different, John?”

“No, God forgive me. But you are not any woman. That is the difference. Sometimes, there may be justification. I had none.”

There was silence for a moment. Then he said: “What would you have me do, Lucy?”

She put out a hand and let it rest upon his head.

“Can’t you stay with me?”

“Good God, it’s what I ask for. But what right have I?”

“Can’t you go back, or come back, to things as they used to be?”

“Would you let me?”

“My dear, I love you.”

He took her hand, and still keeping his head bowed, put her hand between his lips and the bed.

“Oh, what a fool I have been! Something went wrong with me. A sort of blindness. I’ll not excuse it. We men can be so like spoilt, greedy urchins. Fingers and face in the jam pot. Then, bitter medicine. But you haven’t given me bitter medicine, Lucy.”

“My dear, I love you. I can’t help it. I could be so happy with everything, if you could be happy.”

He lifted his head, and looked at her.

“What is happiness? Letting yourself do just what you damn well please? That is fool-man’s idea of freedom. But it doesn’t work, Lucy; that is to say it doesn’t mix with your work, if the work you have to do is worth while.”

“Isn’t a doctor’s work worth while?”

“Exactly, my dear. If that isn’t, what is? One is apt to laugh at pious prigs. I may be talking rather like one, but I suppose—— Oh, well, will you try and trust me again?”

“Yes, John.”

XXXI

Lucy was up and well, with a little red scar on her cheek, and other wounds that were healing. She sat at the open window and watched the rain come down, sweet summer rain that seemed to make the world more green, and turn the sea to soft grey silk. Charlie was playing on the balcony, parading his soldiers, and among them a new box of lancers in red, white and blue. The clock of St. Jude's struck the third quarter. It was a quarter to one.

"Put the soldiers away, dear."

"Yes, Mumma."

"Tidily."

For Charles liked to bundle his army back into its boxes with a higgledy-piggledy haste that was not professional.

"Yes, Mamma."

Charles collected the boxes, and preceded to put the army to sleep in neat rows.

"Would you like to come out with me this afternoon, dear?"

"Where, Mamma?"

"In the brougham to see a lady."

The adventure did not sound very exciting, but driving in the brougham always suggested mystery.

"Will it be far, Mumma?"

"No, dear. I want you to be nice to the lady. She has been in trouble."

Charles jumped up and hung on the rail of the balcony. He had heard the sound of hoofs.

"Daddy's coming."

The dog-cart had swung round the corner by The Royal George, old Howell in his great white rubber coat, Richmond holding up an umbrella to preserve the gloss and the virtue of a new silk hat. Charles dashed out through the window, and down the stairs to meet his father, and Lucy smiled and let him go. No longer were father and son shy of each other.

At lunch she said to her husband: "Can I have Howell and the brougham

for an hour, John? If you are busy I will order Tibb's fly."

"Of course you can have it. I did the country this morning. Going far?"

"No, only a local call, and a little shopping."

"What time shall I tell Howell?"

"Three o'clock. Then I shall be back for tea."

A number of Southfleet's citizens saw the Richmond brougham stop outside the Morelli house and Mrs. Richmond and her son emerge from it. Lucy and Charles walked up the path, hand in hand. The news was to spread through the town. Miss Shallowbrass heard it, and was nonplussed. Mrs. Richmond had called on the Morelli woman. Now, what was the meaning of that? Had she gone to tell that dreadful person what she thought of her? But surely, if Mrs. Richmond had gone there to speak bitter words, she would not have taken the child with her.

Lucy rang the bell, and the skinny little maid came to answer it.

"Is Mrs. Morelli in?"

"Yes, m'am."

"I am Mrs. Richmond. Would you tell her that I should be so pleased if she will see me."

Lucia was in the shop, serving two customers who were buying cakes. She had not seen her two visitors arrive, and when the girl brought her the message, she was in the act of swinging a paper bag over and over to twist up its corners.

"What!"

"Mrs. Richmond to see you. She's got a child with her."

Lucia's mouth fell open, and her eyes stared, but she passed the bag of cakes to the customer, and remembered to smile.

"That will be one and twopence, please. Yes, show the lady into the parlour, Jane."

This was the first occasion upon which the two Lucias had met. Mrs. Richmond was sitting in an arm-chair, and Charlie was looking out of the window at the blue and white arbours and the gay tables and chairs. Mrs. Richmond rose with a smile, an easy, serene smile, and put out her hand.

"Mrs. Morelli. I felt that I must come and see you."

Charles had turned about and was looking up into the Italian woman's face. To the boy it appeared large and heavy and unfriendly, a great dough face with two black plums for eyes. The woman was looking at his mother, and suddenly her expression changed. The face lit up, the eyes seemed to warm it like two lamps.

"Thank you. Won't you sit down, Mrs. Richmond?"

Lucy sat down again.

"This is Charlie. Yes, Charlie."

Charles glanced at his mother and remembered that he had to be kind to the lady. But was she a lady? He held out a hand.

"How do you do?"

He smiled, and Mrs. Morelli plumped down and kissed him.

"How do you do, my dear."

It was a warm and impulsive kiss, and Charles returned it.

"I am very well, thank you."

Mrs. Morelli's white teeth shone. This was a lovely child, and was she not an Italian? She sat down opposite Lucy, with her large hands lying in her lap.

"He is like you, madam."

"I'm so glad you think so. I felt I must come and tell you how sorry I was to hear—— But, perhaps, you do not wish to speak of it."

Lucia looked consideringly at Lucy, her head slightly on one side, as though listening to a musical note, and gauging its rightness.

"Mr. Morelli was a good husband, madam. He has left me well provided for."

She smiled suddenly at Charles.

"Would you like an ice, my dear? A strawberry ice?"

Charlie smiled at her, and glanced at his mother.

"May I, Mumma?"

"Of course, dear."

Lucia rose.

"Come, Master Charles. I myself will give you the ice."

They were absent for three minutes, and Lucy sat with a serene still face, and when they returned Charles had a very large glass full to the brim with pink ice-cream. He also had a spoon.

“Do not be afraid, Mrs. Richmond. It is good ice-cream.”

“Charles is a lucky boy.”

Charles sat on a stool and spooned away at the pink stuff.

“Would madam like some tea?”

“Thank you so much, but I have to be home for tea.”

“A little lemonade?”

“Yes, I would like a glass of lemonade.”

Mrs. Morelli looked pleased. She rose and left the room again, and Charles, spooning away at his ice, smiled at his mother.

“It’s a lovely ice, Mumma.”

“Is it, dear?”

“Wasn’t it kind of her?”

“Yes, dear, very.”

Mrs. Morelli reappeared, carrying two glasses of lemonade on a lacquer tray. Lucy took her glass.

“Children are a great comfort, madam.”

Lucy smiled.

“Sometimes. When they are good. I think a house must be rather lonely _____”

Lucia nodded.

“Yes. But Mr. Morelli left me something.”

She laid a hand upon her body below her waist, and nodded her head again at Lucy. Did Mrs. Richmond understand? She did.

“I’m so glad. That will make such a difference to you.”

“It is like a lamp burning in a house.”

“Yes. I am so very glad.”

Charlie had finished his ice and was holding the empty glass, with the spoon standing in it.

“Would you like another ice, my dear?”

Charles glanced at his mother.

“No, I am sure that was enough. Such a big one.”

“Yes,” said Charles; “it was a lovely ice. And thank you.”

Mrs. Morelli’s eyes shone.

“You come to me whenever you like, dear, and you shall have an ice, strawberry, raspberry, or vanilla.”

Charles nodded at her.

“I’ll be sure to come.”

Mrs. Richmond sipped her lemonade, and remembering that her hostess was an Italian, began to speak of Italy. Had Mrs. Morelli left that lovely country long ago? Lucia became voluble. Yes, she came from the Levante coast. Did Mrs. Richmond know it, the Shelley, Lord Byron coast? Yes, Mrs. Richmond had spent a winter there as a child, and could speak of Italian towns with round and golden names, and the olives and vines, and the pinewoods and rocks, and that romantic sea. No, it was not at all like Southfleet! The Italian woman’s white teeth flashed. Perhaps Mrs. Richmond could speak Italian? Only a few words, now. “*Bella, bella. Buon giorno. Quanto costa. Arrivederci.*” They laughed together, and Charles, solemnly listening, and watching their faces, decided that Mrs. Morelli was a very likeable person. Meanwhile, his mother had finished her lemonade, Mrs. Morelli rose to take the empty glass. Mrs. Richmond also rose, with deliberation, as though reluctant to leave.

“I really must go. I have shopping to do, and the carriage is waiting. I am sure Charles has enjoyed himself, and so have I.”

The two women stood and smiled at each other. They had exchanged the simplest of phrases, and yet they had reached an understanding of the essential woman in each other. Charles put his hand in his mother’s, and looked up at Lucia Morelli.

“Thank you for the lovely ice.”

She bent and kissed him.

“Don’t forget, my dear, that there will always be an ice.”

Charles nodded gravely.

“I won’t forget. I think I’d like a raspberry one next time.”

Mrs. Morelli walked with them to the door, and down the path to the waiting brougham. In fact, she opened the door for Mrs. Richmond, and the two women shook hands, and smiled into each other's faces. Charles climbed in after his mother, and Lucia closed the door, and waved to him.

“Arrivederci, piccolo mio.”

The brougham moved off, and Charles looked up at his mother.

“What did she say, Mumma?”

“Till we meet again, my little one.”

At tea Charles blurted out the truth.

“We've been to see Mrs. Morelli, Daddy. She gave me a strawberry ice.”

Richmond glanced quickly at his wife, but Lucy's face remained serene, and seemingly unconscious of the question that his eyes asked. She was smiling at Charles.

“It was a very big ice, dear.”

“Yes, Mother. And Daddy, she says I can always have an ice.”

“Without paying for it?”

Charlie looked round-eyed and reproachfully at his father.

“Why, yes, Daddy.”

Dr. Richmond emptied his cup, and passing it across the table to be refilled, met his wife's eyes.

“Thank you, Lucy. Children may not have to pay. But if a man runs into debt——”

The cup and saucer remained poised for a moment like a link between their two hands, while that long and steadfast glance held.

“Debts can be paid, John, or written off.”

“I'll try to pay, even though a generous soul has written them off.”

He released the saucer, and she placed cup and saucer on the table, while Charles, a little puzzled by this conversation, looked from one to the other.

“What is a debt, Daddy?”

“What I may owe, my lad, and may never repay.”

“Just how?”

“Well, if Mrs. Morelli gives you twelve twopenny ices, and you don’t pay for the ices, that is a debt.”

“Ought I to pay, Daddy? I’ve only ninepence in my money-box.”

“The price of four and a half ices! No, I should never offer Mrs. Morelli any money. It wouldn’t be kind.”

“Why, Daddy? Because she’s wanting to be kind?”

“Just that, Charles, precisely.”

Human nature being what it is, there were a number of people in Southfleet who were disappointed when Mrs. Richmond was seen driving, and walking arm-in-arm with her husband, and confronting the world with the happy air of a woman who is queen of her own kingdom. There is so much more spice in sin than in saintliness, and if we can think the worst of our own neighbours, we can feel in the best humour with ourselves. As for dispassionate criticism, it is as rare as pure self-negation, for your critic is not a modest person, and he too takes his pleasures jealously. Belittle the great and greatly praise the little. Then shall a nice mediocrity offend no self-appointed judge.

Some people said of Lucy Richmond that she was a fool.

Others allowed that she was a sweet creature.

The scornful supposed that she would continue to be fooled, and that she would shut her eyes to the fooling.

No one said that she was clever.

Miss Shallowbrass, observing Dr. and Mrs. Richmond walking up the aisle together, to kneel side by side just like two innocents kneeling newly married before the altar, was grievously piqued. This, in God’s house too! Could God be mocked? Miss Shallowbrass was one of those who doubted whether Mrs. Richmond had discovered ultimate truth. The poor, sweet, silly idiot must have suffered herself to be deceived. All men were deceivers. But Miss Shallowbrass really knew very little about men, for no man had ever attempted to deceive her.

Dr. Percy Squibb, having waited for the rocket to go up and burst into blue and sulphur-coloured stars, began to feel that virtue had defrauded him.

“Something funny, Flo, damned funny about this business. I wonder

whether——”

His wife, who was more hard-boiled than her Percy, smiled as that sort of person smiles over cracked china.

“What do you know, really? I’d be pretty careful if I were you, Perce. A man who goes blurting about the place——”

“I don’t blurt.”

“Oh, no!”

“Well, that fellow died rather suddenly.”

“And Richmond poisoned him!”

“Damn it, don’t be so facetious. Supposing his dying like that kept the cat in the bag?”

“What cat?”

“Oh, you know what I mean.”

Dr. Richmond’s eyes were open. He was ready to admit, that so far as Southfleet was concerned, he still was poised very perilously on the edge of a precipice, and that the members of the community in which he lived and worked and had his being might yet be deciding to push him over the edge. He had broken faith as a friend and a physician. He had admitted it to himself and was ready to take his medicine. But there was one signal fact that both he and the community could not ignore during those days of appraisal and probation, his wife stood there beside him, somehow serene and happy and looking the whole world in the face. Her challenge was obvious. “If my husband falls, I fall with him.”

Often, during those summer days, old Howell was left behind on the country round, and Lucy and Charles drove out in the dog-cart with Dr. Richmond. Lucy had hands, and sometimes she took the reins. Miss Shallowbrass and a few good women like her, may have sneered at this pretty domestic picture, but the working men and women beheld it and called it good. For beautiful behaviour does count in a world that may be secretly conscious of its own imperfections, and Mrs. Richmond was one of those rare creatures whom even a rude child cannot flout.

As for Southfleet’s “Society,” Queen’s Terrace was its Mall, Willowell Priory its Sacred Mount. Lady Neath’s yearly garden-party was a pleasant function to which all those who hoped to matter, were eager to be asked. But

that garden feast was not yet. Lucy, taking Charles with her, was driven over to the Priory, after an exchange of letters between herself and Lady Neath.

“How is it with you, my dear?”

Those were the words upon Lady Ursula’s lips when, standing at the library window, she saw the Richmond brougham winding its way across the park. Her husband, who had a map spread on the library table and was studying it, was warned of the approach.

“She is coming, Hector.”

“Go out and meet her.”

“I am going to.”

“Advice to the great is always superfluous.”

“I shall know when I see her.”

“My dear, is there anything you neither see nor know?”

Lady Neath went out and stood in the porch. The near window of the brougham was down, and the first face she saw was Charlie’s. If faces could be wreathed in smiles, Charlie’s bubbled with them. She saw him tweak the black elastic from under his chin, and remove his hat like a little gentleman.

“Hallo, Charles, my dear.”

Behind the boy’s face she saw the mother’s, and the words that had hung on her lips became superfluous. “How is it with you, Lucy?” Lucy’s face had the sheen of a face that is happy, without the strain of self-complacency. Lucy had not been consciously clever in the thing she had done. She had penetrated her problem intuitively, and so had warmed and illuminated it. The self-consciously clever people may be able to set out an emotional problem elaborately on paper, but when it comes to living that problem they may be the most pathetic of bunglers.

“You do look well, my dear.”

Lady Neath was that sort of woman, not like Miss Shallowbrass, who would pin you against the railings, and poke an acid sympathy at you, and squeak: “You do look ill” or thin, or fat, or just what you were not feeling.

Lucy kissed Lady Neath.

“How lovely everything is here.”

“Am I included?”

“Oh yes.”

“And Hector. Hector, come here, and Lucy will include you in a universal loveliness.”

Charles, who was out of the picture for the moment, jumped about like a little dog eager to be noticed. Almost he put his paws on Lady Neath’s dress.

“I want to see the chickens and the pigs. May I?”

“Hector, take Charles on a tour of inspection.”

Sir Hector gave his wife a whimsical look, and took Charles by the hand.

“We have been dismissed, my son. We will revert to nature.”

Lady Neath and Lucy went into the house, and into one of those comfortable and cushioned corners which women love, and Sir Hector and Charles strolled off to see the livestock. But Charles was puzzled and a little disappointed. The yellow, fluffy chicks had grown into awkward, scraggy, long legged creatures.

“But those aren’t my chickens.”

“Oh yes they are, Charles. Don’t you like them like that?”

“No.”

“That’s what we call growing up. Uncomfortable business. A lot of leg and not much sock. I think the pigs do it better.”

“Let’s go and see the pigs.”

And Charles agreed that in the business of growing up the pigs did it better.

The Richmonds were giving a party, and it was advertised to the world by flowered window-boxes on the balcony, and by a little marquee that had been erected on the lawn in the back garden. Queen’s Terrace could observe the marquee from its back windows. People passing along the broad roadway between the Terrace and Caroline Gardens were presented with a parade of carriages, and heading them the Neath victoria with its pair of greys and its green-coated coachman. Charles was wearing his best tailor suit, with white lanyard and whistle, and new white socks. His mother was in cream and black, and looking, Charles thought, so very bootiful. Other people thought so too. Alan Ransford and his wife and daughter were guests; so were the Moneys, and Lady Dudeney of Lockley. The Richmond balcony was like a royal box, displaying its flowers and its fashion to the world.

Richmond, standing talking to Lady Neath, looked past her at his wife, and Lady Neath, provoked by that errant glance, turned her head to discover what Dr. Richmond was admiring. His own wife! Well, well, that was very proper and sensible. The wretched fellow had come back to earth, and found heaven there. Lady Neath felt roguish.

“And who is the lovely lady?”

Richmond gave her a little, shimmering glance, an almost boyish glance tinged with self-irony.

“Lucy. I wonder why some women always look right in their clothes?”

Lady Neath slanted her head consideringly.

“Perhaps because some husbands notice.”

“And take nothing for granted?”

“That would be perfection in a husband! I have always understood that the dodo is extinct!”

Other people, passing along the path by the Queen’s Garden railings, were not so well pleased. Dr. Squibb and his wife, on their way to attend a concert on the pier, saw all those carriages, and particularly the Neath carriage, and the blossom and beauty on the Richmond balcony. Dr. Squibb’s little face let fall a sneer.

“Dashed snobbery, what!”

His wife was looking up at Lucy, and finding nothing upon which to fasten bent pins.

“Well, if that isn’t advertising!”

Said Dr. Squibb, taking off his hat and giving it a polish with his sleeve: “One might drop a Chinese cracker into that show. Dashed lot of snobs. I’ll have a word with Tallent about it.”

Dr. Squibb did have a word with Dr. Tallent, and like two good Englishmen of the commercial classes, they managed to dress up their private passions and prejudices in good ethical style. Dr. Tallent had been employing a hired sneak to conduct a dispassionate investigation. The fellow had been walking out with Mrs. Morelli’s skinny little maid, and his blandishments had produced revelations. He was able to report that there had been a devil of a row in the Morelli household on the day of Morelli’s death. Also, the maid had confessed with a giggle, that she had sneaked up the stairs and listened.

Said Dr. Tallent, in his throaty voice: “My dear fellah, there’s no doubt

about it. If the case were raised Master Richmond would be in the soup.” He pronounced it “Sooop,” and with a little sizzle, like a man spooning hard at a dishful of hot broth. He went on to talk about one’s “Dooty” to the profession and the community. Algernon Tallent could scent himself with a high moral flavour.

“What do you suggest, ol’ man?”

“A letter to the Council.”

“Damned dangerous, unless——”

“My dear fellah, anonymous, of course, and purporting to come from a private citizen. It will put Master Richmond on the platform and demand an investigation.”

Dr. Squibb sniffed exultantly.

“It might work. Know anybody on the Council?”

“Yes, old Prettyman. Reg’lar scorcher on morals and etiquette. Used to give pi-jaws to the nurses and the lads. I’d send it to old Prettyman. He’d put it up to the Council.”

“Have to be jolly careful about handwriting.”

“It would be hand-printed, my dear fellah.”

“Of course.”

So Drs. Squibb and Tallent concocted their duty letter, and hand-printed it on rather common paper that could be purchased at any stationers, and Dr. Tallent posted it late one night in the box of Southfleet’s General Post Office.

“That ought to put old Pretty on the war-path,” and Dr. Tallent was so pleased that he went home and drank a bottle of stout, and passed an amorous night with Mrs. Tallent, so much so that another little Tallent was conceived.

XXXII

Each generation chooses its public words. John Richmond's generation talked about "Duty," and revered General Gordon. Charlie's generation might become a little irreverent about the Great Queen, and say that a thing was sporting or decent. And as indecencies become less indecent to a more tolerant and less smug world, rational behaviour finds itself more rational and decent. Not that the good English would ever subscribe to the testaments of freedom claimed by their Continental cousins. Paris was considered to be a very wicked city where respectable British business men could enjoy hectic adventures, and return, sniggering and smiling to Surbiton or Balham. No wonder the French were witty at our expense, and could have put Pasteur on a pedestal as a challenge to any Sir Pious Prettyman. Imagine a Frenchman arguing the matter with the Great Queen. "In England, madam, your savant must be a savant and not man. Let him confer infinite benefits upon humanity, and yet lose his top-hat in one gust of romance, and you hustle him into social exile, and forget the signal benefits he may have conferred upon you. You waste him. You refuse to let him function in the cause of humanity. You are willing to sacrifice genius to the shade of the Good Albert. Just how good was Albert?" No doubt the Great Queen would not have been amused.

Dr. Richmond, finding life and his work suddenly and surprisingly satisfying, was perhaps less of the penitent than he should have been. He had been sick and was restored to health, social health, and a man with work to do may quickly forget the headache or heartache of yesterday. He did agree that Lucia had behaved most magnanimously, and that Lucy had been angelic. Whether his penitence would have been more pronounced had Lucy lost her temper and put him through tragic discomforts, is a problem for gods and devils. Most women would have declared that Lucy Richmond had been impossibly generous and forgiving, a sweet fool who would always be fooled by such a husband. Each particular problem may adjust itself to the person who solves it.

How ever much the cynics may have smiled over Dr. Richmond's case, Richmond himself was not feeling cynical. His heart had recovered its normal rhythm, and he had rediscovered his head and his hands. The door of Dr. Davidson's Dark House once more stood open. The urge and the mystery of undiscovered things would again reveal themselves to this country doctor. "What have I here? What can I do?" When such questions pique a man passionately, other passions may fade.

Not that Dr. Richmond had yet attained to that fine humility, and that profound compassion without which no man is a master of the craft of healing, but he was once again the doctor who had driven past dangerous cross-roads. He had rediscovered his head and his hands. If he had yet more to discover, that lay in the future.

Mr. Byng, who had been reading *A Christmas Carol*, was moved to wonder whether Marley's ghost had visited Dr. Richmond. Not that you could class Dr. Richmond with old Scrooge, either in his make-up or his reactions. The transfiguration was neither so sudden nor so crude, no pudding-and-turkey humanism. Charles Byng might have said that Dr. Richmond's liver had recovered its sprightliness; the moderns would have talked of glandular secretions. Emotion, as a stimulant, is out of favour, and yet it was emotion that had caused the man in Dr. Richmond to function with renewed and wholesome vigour. He had seen, not the face of a shrew, but the face of the woman who loved him.

Worn-out working-men, who had but little left to them in life but a seat in the sun and their rheumatics, had begun to find Dr. Emmerson more sympathetic than Dr. Richmond, which was a pity, for there was no question but that Richmond was more man than Emmerson. But again the scene had changed. Dr. Richmond, who had been inclined to pass over the club-patients to his junior, showed a very real and renewed interest in their aches and pains. It was Dr. Davidson *redivivus*. Old Beckwith, who had contracted lumbago, standing at the gate of Caroline Gardens in a north-east wind, found Dr. Emmerson a very kind young man, but his treatment lacked vigour.

"Well, Beckwith, how's the back?"

"I can't well say as it's better, sir."

It was Richmond who asked the question. Obviously, old Beckwith was in much pain.

"What are you doing for it?"

"Liniment, sir, and medicine."

Richmond examined the old man's back, and gave him a very gentle smack on his posterior.

"You go back to bed. I'll come and see you later in the morning."

"But the trustees, sir, don't pay me when I be laid up."

“Is that so?”

“It is, sir.”

“Well, you leave the trustees to me, Beckwith, and I’ll come along and do something to you.”

Richmond decided to perform an old and rather ruthless but effective minor operation on Beckwith.

“It’s going to hurt you, man, but you’ll be better for it.”

“You do what you think best, Doctor. I can stand a bit of pain.”

Old Beckwith gave a jump, and a little snarl, and then set his teeth and endured.

“Lord love a duck, sir, you caught me proper.”

“Hurt much?”

“I’ll say it did.”

Beckwith lost his lumbago. “Fair scared it out o’ me, he did.” Moreover, Richmond ordered the old man a liniment that the dispensary knew to be the prerogative of paying patients. Charles Byng nibbled his moustache over that prescription, as he did over other prescriptions. Dr. Richmond was ordering his club-patients tinctures, and Charles Byng knew just how much tinctures cost. The yearly drug bill would be doubled if Dr. Richmond continued to prescribe in this way. Not that Charles Byng disapproved. If opportunities for education were not equal, at least the anodynes of life should offer some equality.

Mrs. Borrowdale, whose head was more golden than ever, and who was much less of a fool than some people thought her, did represent middle-class Southfleet in a shrewd, working estimate of life and of humanity. Miss Shallowbrass always referred to Mrs. Borrowdale as “That Barmaid,” and supposed that since the passing of Dr. Burgoyne, Mrs. B. had seduced one of the other partners. For a good woman Miss Shallowbrass had a particularly nasty mind. Mrs. Borrowdale had not been well, and she had said to herself: “Well, I suppose I shall have to have Richmond. He’s a hard devil, but he is worth two of sweet Dr. Emmerson.” Mrs. Borrowdale sent for Richmond, and suffered a surprise immediately he entered her bedroom.

This man had what Mrs. Borrowdale described as a new face. Yet, it was the old face somehow done up and refreshed. It had bright, keen eyes, and it was kind, kind without being sloppy. Richmond listened sympathetically to

Mrs. Borrowdale's symptoms, examined her, and made his diagnosis.

"I think I can soon put you right."

"I hope you can, Doctor."

"We must get rid of that pain. I'll send you round something at once for it."

When Dr. Richmond had gone, Mrs. Borrowdale lay and reflected upon the change in her physician. He had recognized pain; he understood pain and the fact that the first thing a patient asked for was to be relieved of pain. Mrs. Borrowdale, of course, had heard of the Morelli scandal, but being very much woman she was not moved to condemn a man for being too much man. Now, what was the position? Had Dr. Richmond become Agag? Was he trying to walk delicately and to re-establish himself in the good opinion of Southfleet? Mrs. Borrowdale did not accept that explanation. Her feeling about it was that Dr. Richmond had passed through one of life's uncomfortable and turgid phases, and had emerged from it, the beloved physician who found pleasure and blessedness in the business of healing.

Dr. Richmond's treatment of Mrs. Borrowdale proved very successful, not only medically but emotionally, and Mrs. Borrowdale was not a woman who believed in being a tepid friend. Richmond had become to her "The dear Doctor," with no suggestion of intrigue attached to the dear. Mrs. Borrowdale's romantic moments were over as actual experience, she had become motherly and was beloved by two dogs. Dr. Richmond having ordered her gentle exercise, Mrs. Borrowdale went to walk in Caroline Gardens, and here she fell in with Miss Shallowbrass who had been tucking tracts into the hedges and shrubs, and Miss Shallowbrass accosted Mrs. Borrowdale.

"I'm so glad to see you about again."

"Lying old cat," thought the other lady.

"You don't look at all well, rather pinched."

Mrs. Borrowdale smiled sweetly. That was the old cat's way of scratching your face.

"Ginger," said Mrs. Borrowdale.

Miss Shallowbrass looked puzzled.

"Yes, a tonic, I suppose."

"Ginger and bitters. And how are tracts this morning?"

Miss Shallowbrass pushed one at her, but Mrs. Borrowdale refused it.

“My doctor says that I must read only light literature.”

“Ah, I thought Dr. Emmerson’s taste——”

“You mean Dr. Richmond.”

Miss Shallowbrass quirked her head and compressed her lips. Her stare said: “Surely you don’t patronize that disgusting man?” And Mrs. Borrowdale took up the challenge.

“Dr. Richmond is such a very clever doctor, and so kind.”

“Too kind, sometimes I gather.”

Mrs. Borrowdale laughed.

“Has that been your experience?”

“I beg your pardon!” snapped Miss Shallowbrass.

“Oh, I suppose you have been listening to that ridiculous gossip?”

“I think it is more than gossip.”

“Do you, indeed! How very Christian. I take people as I find them. Of course, if you go through life squeaking like a slate pencil——”

Miss Shallowbrass’s head gave a jerk.

“Are you referring to me?”

And again Mrs. Borrowdale laughed.

“Don’t you admire Mrs. Richmond? What looks, what a nature! Now, a woman like that is what I call comfortable. I don’t wonder the men—— Oh, no, I don’t mean what you think I mean. What I do mean is that Dr. Richmond and his wife are such a——”

But Miss Shallowbrass put her nose in the air and passed on. She did not wish to listen to this panegyric. Also, she had a feeling that Mrs. Borrowdale had had the best of the encounter. That barmaid! What fools such women were about men!

Justice is depicted in statuary as a female figure, with bandaged eyes, and holding the scales, but when a man and his works are to be judged, no shrewder and more comprehensive critic can be found than the plain man of mature years who uses his hands. It takes a craftsman to appreciate craft, and the character that is instinct in craftsmanship, and Richmond, now that he had recovered his head and his hands and his heart, was judged anew by the workers whom he doctored. If they can say of you: “He does his best for the

likes of us,” that is profound praise. Dr. Richmond, taking turns with Emmerson in attending the surgery patients, could look back on yesterday and wonder why these old people had bored him. In the main they were so patient and so courageous, and they asked for so little. Kindness was sometimes more than medicine. The world held them of little account, and perhaps some of them were bitter about it, but all that bitterness vanished when a busy man took the trouble to listen. These working men, getting together on seats and gossiping in the sun, could be very frank when the gentry were out of hearing. Of a lady like Mrs. Richmond they had little to say, perhaps because they were agreed that there was no other person in the place quite like her. Dr. Emmerson was a nice young gentleman. Dr. Squibb was not popular with the workers. Unerringly they had scented out the foxy little cad in him. They said coarse things about Miss Shallowbrass and her ilk. The Neaths were the gentry, good people, with a mysterious greatness that was accepted. As to Dr. Richmond, the carpenters and bricklayers, gardeners and painters, labourers and carters, cobblers and smiths, had held their hands behind their backs, and observed him as a shrewd, English, working crowd observes a man exhibiting himself on a platform. In the earlier days he had been to them “The Doctor,” a title of faith and of affection. Then, he had fallen to “Richmond.” Now, he was again being spoken of as The Doctor. His audience had ceased to be suspicious. The good things he had done were remembered. The good things he did were spoken of. Moreover, he had a different face and a different voice. Hats were touched to him. He was one of those people whom it was good to see going about their business.

“He’s got over it,” said one old fellow.

“Got over what, Jim?”

“What most of us get, one time or another; the itch for the women.”

The younger gossip laughed.

“It takes a devil of a lot of getting over, if you ask me.”

“That’s so,” said the elder. “It’s just a question o’ common sense. You can’t always be round the corner. Besides, if you’re married your wife’s either your best pal, or a dose o’ nasty medicine you ’ave to swaller daily. If your pal’s a good ’un you don’t want to let ’er down.”

“And t’other sort?”

“Ah, well, the scolds and the skinnies, I’m sorry for ’em, and I don’t blame a chap. But what I was meanin’ was that the doctor’s got a good ’un, and if a man don’t find that out, ’e’s past prayin’ for.”

“I get you,” said the younger.

“A man’s either wise or a bloody fool at forty.”

Dr. Richmond, driving out on his country rounds, somehow found those more spacious fields and hours linked arm-in-arm and smiling at him. He or old Howell could let the mare have her head, for Kitty was a spirited beast and liked to go spanking along the country roads under the green elms. Let her see a horse and trap in front of her and she must pass it, a spirit of emulation that amused Benjamin Howell.

“Showing off, my lass, what? Vanity, vanity, the vanity of women.”

Richmond laughed.

“We all suffer from it, Howell. What’s yours?”

“I really don’t know, sir.”

“I think I do.”

For Howell’s pride was in turning out his horse and his trap and his harness to look better than the equipages of Drs. Emmerson or Squibb or Tallent. Howell and his master were once more very sound friends, and the summer sun was shining, and the fields were looking good. So thought Richmond as he gazed across the waving wheat and barley, and watched it change colour day by day, from green to greenish blue, until a tinge of gold tempered it for the harvest. It was pleasant to watch the wind and the sun and the cloud shadows playing over these cornfields as you drove along between the hedgerows. Pleasanter still was it to realize that faces welcomed you, the faces of simple folk who had faith in your power to help them.

“I be glad that you’ve come, Doctor. I’ve been that worried about the boy.”

Help. However mysterious the Dark House might be, you had your candle, but if that candle went out, Heaven help you! You became a mere mocker, a creature slimed over with cleverness, a humbug, a shrugger of shoulders. You sneered at your own ignorance, yet concealed it behind pretentious words. Lacking sincerity, no man dares to say: “I do not know.” Knowledge of these simple verities seemed to fall out of heaven upon John Richmond as he drove along between the cornfields and watched them ripening for the harvest moon. So should man’s wisdom ripen. A new tenderness was born in him. He felt himself one with these simple folk, the shepherds and ploughmen and carters, men who used their hands, and were wise in the ways of nature. The shepherd had to live for his sheep, the ploughman for his plough and his horses. Proud

men, these, and proud of their craft. Dr. Richmond saluted them. He too had his craft, and was once more proud of it. If you gave of your best, if your urge was to help and to succour, then life could be good. How simple were the old verities. They lived on among the craftsmen and the workers. Only, the little, clever people lost them, and in losing them became a pathetic smirk on the face of a fatuous cynicism.

Richmond was to remember a particular case and to count it of prophetic, personal significance. A very malevolent and obscure form of Enteric Fever persisted in this corner of the country. It was a variant of the disease that deceived the most cunning physician, if he was without experience of it, but Dr. Davidson had long ago recognized this ambulatory type and had passed on his clinical notes to Richmond.

Stranger still, the case was a Squibb case, and it occurred in a Willowell cottage. Dr. Squibb, cocky and confident, was quite sure that he knew what was the matter, but when grave and surprising symptoms suddenly supervened, he, Dr. Squibb, was nonplussed yet would not confess it.

The parents of the child, prompted by their farmer-employer, asked for Dr. Richmond.

Dr. Squibb objected, and when his objection was countered, put on his hat, and said that he would wash his hands of the case. If his skill was not trusted he would prefer to withdraw. Yes, most certainly. His professional prestige had been offended.

The parents were stubborn people, and anxiety made them more so. The boy was an only child, and more precious to them than Dr. Squibb's vanity.

“Very well, send for Dr. Richmond.”

Dr. Squibb's gesture was that of a man washing his hands of all responsibility. Damn Richmond! If that letter had not miscarried, and Dr. Squibb had no reason to believe that it had, Richmond would soon be in Queer Street.

The mother of the boy asked him an awkward question.

“Won't you see Dr. Richmond?”

“See him?”

“Yes, here, Doctor. What they call a consultation, sir.”

“If you wish Dr. Richmond to take over the case I, of course, surrender it.”

The country woman looked hard at him. She was sorry that she had called in this cock-sparrow of a man.

“Hoity-toity, is it? You don’t care whether the boy——”

Dr. Squibb was greatly offended.

“That is a most insulting remark, my good woman. No, I do not ask for an apology. I will wish you good-morning.”

He drove off, seething and consoling himself with the thought that in a month or two these fools would have no Richmond to send for. He did not notify his rival of the nature of the case, or of the wishes of the parents. His professional dignity perched on its twig and chirped indignantly. Farmer Jones, when the crisis was explained to him, got out his gig and drove into Southfleet. He was fortunate in catching Richmond on his rounds and in appealing for help.

“But it is Squibb’s case, Mr. Jones.”

“He’s walked out on it, Doctor.”

“Why?”

“Well, if you ask me, it’s just spite. The boy’s parents weren’t satisfied and wanted your opinion.”

“I have heard nothing from Dr. Squibb.”

“Mean little tyke. You’ll come, Doctor.”

“Of course. If Dr. Squibb has abandoned the case, I’ll take it over.”

“Good. I’ll drive back and tell ’em.”

When Richmond had examined the child he realized that he was dealing with one of those obscure cases of Enteric, and that the insidious onset and the absence of normal symptoms had deceived Dr. Squibb. Richmond was in no doubt about the diagnosis, and as he sat by the bed, and watched the child’s breathing and felt his pulse, he knew that the case was a desperate one, and that Dr. Percy Squibb had bungled it. If he so wished he could behave to Dr. Squibb as Squibb had behaved to him in the matter of that other child, but the new man in Richmond was not tempted by retaliation. Assuredly two men whose business was to heal should not seize a desperately sick child as a sort of sacrificial victim to be offered up in the cause of professional spite? Richmond’s mood was one of compassion. One day he might attain to that bigness, that almost tender tolerance that submerges self in the passion for selfless craftsmanship.

“No solid food, Mrs. Mason.”

“No, sir.”

“Milk and water, a little at a time. And the boy must not be moved. Absolute stillness, flat in bed.”

“What shall I do about his——?”

“I’ll see the village nurse and send her in. A draw-sheet would be best.”

“What d’you think, Doctor? Is he going to——?”

Richmond was guarded. He took the mother out of the room, and spoke to her kindly and gently. Yes, the child was very seriously ill, but if all precautions were taken, it would be possible to save him. The mother’s face grew suddenly puckered and pitiful.

“You’ll do your best, Doctor?”

Richmond patted her shoulder.

“I’ll come in again this afternoon, and I’ll get hold of the nurse at once. It is a matter of nursing.”

The woman shed tears, and there was anger in them.

“I knew he was wrong. If anything happens to my boy that there Dr. Squibb——”

“It is a very difficult case, Mrs. Mason. Don’t be too hard on Dr. Squibb. I’ll write to him about it, and he may like to see the child with me.”

“I won’t have him in my house, Doctor. He was that rude to me when—— Called it just summer diarrhœa.”

“Mrs. Mason, forgive me, but don’t let us quarrel just now about that.”

“You’re standing up for him, Doctor.”

“No. I am telling you that this is a very tricky case. We get them in this part of the world. Dr. Davidson was the first man to understand them. He taught me. Now, our business is to pull the boy through. It is going to be a fight, and I want you to try and keep smiling.”

“Yes, Doctor, I will.”

“That’s the spirit. I shall be back here again this afternoon.”

Richmond wrote his letter to Dr. Squibb, but the receipt of it was not acknowledged. Dr. Percy chattered over it contemptuously. Enteric, indeed!

Bosh! Richmond was exaggerating the case in order to get a rise out of him. Dr. Squibb showed the letter to Dr. Tallent, and Dr. Tallent, having considered it, and the professional petard that they had applied surrepticiously to Richmond's reputation, agreed with Dr. Squibb that the letter might be ignored. Should any unpleasantness arise Dr. Squibb could plead that he had been discharged from the case, and that his diagnosis had been a tentative one.

"Of course, my dear fellah, if it is an Enteric, you can always swear you had Enteric in mind."

"But I'm damned if it is Enteric!"

"I wouldn't plunge on that, if I were you. Keep it up your sleeve. We ought to be hearing something soon about that other affair."

"We shan't hear anything."

"No, my dear fellah, but if the Council puts Richmond on the carpet, and holds an inquiry and he is chucked out, this little matter won't be of much consequence. But I'd hedge about the diagnosis."

Dr. Squibb twirled his fierce little moustache.

"I'm damned if it's Enteric. Still, perhaps you are right."

Enteric it was, and on the second day of Richmond's attendance the child had a hæmorrhage. All the village knew that Dr. Richmond had displaced Dr. Squibb, and that the mother was saying that if her boy died Dr. Squibb would be responsible. Grief-distraught mothers have an unpleasant way of disregarding etiquette. The village, being dependent upon its own domestic matters for sensation, the halfpenny press having not yet arrived as a universal provider of murder, rape and thuggery, took a very personal interest in the fate of Mrs. Mason's boy. And, on the whole, the gossip was kindly and human, save in its reflections upon Dr. Squibb.

"Richmond's been there three times to-day."

"Poor little Arthur's had another bleeding."

The village wanted to know the cause of the trouble. Was it due to the water in the village wells? If so, what could be done about it? Somebody asserted that the disease could be spread by eating oysters. Oysters! Well, Arty Mason had not been eating oysters! The village nurse happened to be a splendid woman, with hands and a head, and a tongue that was under control, and Richmond could say to her: "Well, if the boy pulls through, the credit will

be yours, nurse.”

For two days he did not think that they could save the boy. Two bouts of hæmorrhage had brought him to the last flicker. A third bleeding, or perforation would be fatal.

Lucy heard about the case and, looking at her own son, was moved to pity. Richmond never discussed his cases with his wife, but this one was exceptional. Somehow, it seemed to touch them both, and to unite them in an intimate sympathy that was part of their deepening sense of comradeship. Lucy prayed that the child might live.

On the evening of the third day Richmond drove home with a smile in his eyes. Lucy was on the balcony, watching the sunset over the estuary. Charles Lovelace had been put to bed. Howell drove the dog-cart round to the mews, and Richmond went up to his wife.

“I think we’ve won.”

Her face lit up, a mother’s face.

“Oh, John, I’m so glad. If anybody could——”

He smiled, bent down and kissed her.

“Some things are worth while. But I didn’t do it. God, nature, and the women! Nurse Hays has been splendid.”

Lucy Richmond closed her eyes momentarily.

“It might have been Charles. Her boy lives, my boy lives. Of course, you did it, John.”

“My dear, I didn’t.”

“You did. If you had not understood what was the matter——”

“Perhaps. I came, I saw, but I did not conquer.”

XXXIII

During the last two or three years Richmond had renewed his association with Sir Humphrey Jolland, for, being the senior partner it was his privilege to decide who should be the firm's consultants. He had sent Sir Humphrey several patients, and had called him in to operate on a surgical case that had required a specialist's skill. Sir Humphrey was still very much the maestro, and though younger men may have said in secret that the old gentleman should retire and make room for ambitious rivals, his handsome white head continued to carry its patriarchal dignity through the wards of St. Martha's. Mr. Bernard Steering, still a junior surgeon, was particularly scathing in his references to an old gentleman whom he described as Father Noah. Yet Sir Humphrey retained his dominance. He was very much a power as a member of the august body which guarded the profession's morals and its honour. Incidentally, he represented that portion of the council which was opposed both humanly and philosophically to the Sir Pious Prettyman clique. Sir Humphrey, being a man of the world and a humanist, hated that very complacent and acidulated saint who regarded the miracle of Cana and the pardoning of the woman taken in adultery as lapses in Divine good taste.

When Sir Pious Prettyman produced the Squibb-Tallent letter to the Council, Sir Humphrey was present. The letter was read by Prettyman, and Sir Humphrey asked for the document to be passed to him, and while he was reading it, Sir Pious made a little speech in which he gave it as his emphatic opinion that the matter needed investigating. Dr. Richmond should be asked for an explanation, and if that explanation proved unsatisfactory, an inquiry should be held.

Sir Humphrey threw the letter on the table.

"Pah, a dirty document. You don't mean to say, Prettyman, that you attach any serious importance——?"

"Most certainly I do."

"What! To a cowardly, scurrilous, anonymous thing like this? I happen to know Richmond. He was the best house-surgeon I ever had. He is the senior partner in an old and established practice."

Sir Pious Prettyman nibbled at Sir Humphrey.

"All the more reason for an impartial inquiry."

“Bosh!”

“Gentlemen, I must protest. Here is a very serious charge, the most serious charge that can be made against a member of the profession. I deem it my duty _____”

“Forgive me, Prettyman, I disagree. Are we to lower ourselves to the level of this dirty, anonymous sneak? The thing reeks of malice.”

Sir Humphrey’s letter arrived on the Richmond breakfast-table. It was marked private and confidential, and Richmond, recognizing the handwriting, opened it with the vague feeling that, somehow, it contained bad news. Charles, who was watching his father’s face, saw it go set and hard.

Sir Humphrey wrote as a friend to warn Richmond that an accusation against him had been laid before the Council. Sir Humphrey stated what the accusation was, and added that he did not believe it. He gave his opinion of such attempts to poison a man’s reputation. It was a cowardly business. Sir Humphrey added that the Council had considered the letter; there had been a serious difference of opinion, and the final decision had been postponed until the next meeting.

“I think you ought to know, Richmond, that though I hope to squash the matter, it is exceedingly serious. Presumably, you have enemies. I ask no questions. I refuse to ask a man questions in a case such as this. I am taking a strong line that no Council such as ours should take cognizance of an accusation that is anonymous and obviously malicious. I hope to be able to let you know the Council’s decision in a very short time. Please regard this letter as confidential.”

Richmond folded up the letter and put it away in his pocket. His breakfast had to be finished, and though he had no great stomach for it, bacon and eggs could not be left on a plate to advertise dyspepsia, spiritual or otherwise. He had received a shock that was all the more poignant for the very reason that he had hoped to hear no more of that incident in his life, and had dared to regard it as dead and buried. Who had done this thing? Who was the secret enemy? Some good and spiteful woman? Lucia? No, he could not believe that Lucia — Some professional enemy? Little Squibb? Well, probably he would never know.

He glanced at Lucy. Lucy was looking at him as though his face had betrayed worry and distress.

“More coffee, John?”

Yes, more coffee! He managed to smile at her, and in compelling himself

to smile he was moved to vow that Lucy should not be made to suffer without need. He had caused her sufficient pain. He would not tell her of this danger to their lives unless the verdict went against him.

He found Charles leaning against his knee.

“Can I come with you this morning, Daddy?”

Richmond put his arm across the boy’s shoulders.

“Yes, my son.”

He was both hurt and helped by the thought of having the child near him.

Howell drove them down the Pier Hill, and Charles, tucked between the two men, looked up at his father.

“Could I have an ice, Daddy?”

It was an inspiration, and Richmond told Howell to pull up outside Mrs. Morelli’s. He climbed out and lifted the boy down, and they walked up the path, hand in hand. Lucia, who was in the shop, saw them, and came out jocund and smiling.

“Good morning, Mrs. Morelli,” said Richmond, raising his hat.

“Good morning, Mrs. Morelli,” said Charles, tilting the brim of his.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” and she gave them something like a curtsy. “Would Mr. Charles like an ice?”

Here Charles’s face showed that she had guessed aright, but the man’s face flashed her another message. Could he speak to her for a moment? She stared at him questioningly, and nodded. So, while Charles had his ice in the garden, Richmond and Lucia stood facing each other in the parlour, two people who saw the past in each other, and to whom the future was becoming precious.

“I am going to trust you with this, Lucia.”

He passed her Sir Humphrey’s letter and watched her face while she read it. It was not a face that concealed the things that she felt. The full flavour of her frown and the flash of her eyes were southern.

“Who has done this to us?”

“I do not know, Lucia. Probably, we shall never know. Tell nobody.”

“Does she know?”

“God forbid!”

“You are right, my friend. She should not be hurt. I, a woman, understand that.”

“Lucia, you have been very generous to me. Nothing may happen. If anything should happen, I will take the blame, and try to keep your name out of it.”

She gave the letter back to him.

“I would like to put my foot on the head of that snake. I will say nothing. For her sake, I would lie.”

“Thank you, Lucia. Let’s go and see how Charles likes his ice.”

The afternoon round took Dr. Richmond to Willowell and Hayleigh. He had replied to Sir Humphrey Jolland’s letter, giving the great man profound thanks, yet conscious of a secret shame when he had attempted to express indignation. He could not and did not confess to Sir Humphrey, for his feeling about it was that, as an advocate, Sir Humphrey would prefer to have his case unclouded. Yes, it was a very sorry sort of letter for any man to have to write, a lame letter, and he wondered whether Sir Humphrey would recognize its lameness. Sir Humphrey Jolland did divine the absence of an angry sincerity in Richmond’s letter, and was challenged and embarrassed by it. So, there may have been fire behind the smoke! Luckily for Richmond Sir Humphrey Jolland was not Pious Prettyman, a professional Pharisee to whom condemnation was a burnt offering and a sweet sacrifice, for Sir Humphrey, having been tempted in his more adventurous years, felt fatherly and tolerant towards frail humanity. Moreover, that sort of social assassination was to him particularly damnable when it was smeared with the poison of smuggerly.

At Willowell Richmond saw Arthur Mason eating his first slice of paper-thin bread and butter, and happening to glance at the wall above Arthur’s bed he saw an illuminated text pinned to the wall. “Be Sure Thy Sin Will Find Thee Out.” Richmond stared at it, and was challenged by its crude self-righteousness. How the godly did love to rub salt into a wound! He glanced round at the mother who was standing and shining at her son.

“Not a cheerful text for Arthur, Mrs. Mason.”

The woman looked at the screed and smiled.

“Oh, that’s been up there years, sir. I’ll take it down if you don’t approve.”

“I don’t think Arthur is a great sinner.”

“Bless him, no, doctor. You just lie and think of jam and plum pudding, don’t you, duckie?”

“Yes,” said Arthur, glancing regretfully at the empty plate.

Richmond laughed, though things were hurting in him.

“It is a bad business, Arthur, to be found out.”

As Howell drove him through the summer fields and woods to Hayleigh, Richmond found himself feeling so much a part of the little world in which he laboured that it did not seem possible to him that in a few months he might be an exile from it, a shabby person from whom the gods had withdrawn the right to fill his particular field. It was not a pleasant prospect, and its ugliness frightened him. A defrocked doctor, forbidden to do the work that he desired to do! How excellent for Lucy and the boy! How would he meet the disaster, and set about earning a living? Turn bottle-washer to some other man, farm, emigrate? Yes, it was a bad business being found out, especially so when you had learnt to transcend your folly. But that you should find yourself out, that might be so very necessary, and the beginning of all wisdom. A conventional complacency might be the supreme sin.

So much alone did he feel that afternoon beside the familiar figure of the groom, that he was moved, profoundly so, to seek some friend to whom he could unburden himself. He wanted to confess, to be judged and to be shrived. The little formal vanities of life fell away from him. It might not be easy to say “I have been a shameful fool, and a traitor to the traditions,” but in so stripping oneself there might be assuagement, peace. To whom could he go? Roper? Assuredly, Roper was the man, that fierce, tender-hearted incorruptible creature who might smite you on the cheek, and then seal the stigma with the kiss of Christ.

So, to Roper’s he drove, a long, old, white house set back from the Green, with a smother of great elms and chestnuts behind it. At such an hour Dr. Roper might be found in his garden or his greenhouse, for, in summer, when the work was light and the days long, the village doctor could give hours to his garden. Mrs. Roper had gone to play croquet at the Rectory, and the Roper children were bathing in the brook, and Richmond found his friend pottering about among his chrysanthemums. Mums he called them, and mum they were, but of such a beauty and splendour in autumn that Roper took prizes wherever he cared to exhibit.

“Hallo, John, trespassing on my shoot?”

“No. I have come to be thrashed.”

Roper crinkled up those keen, kind eyes of his.

“Tongue or stick?”

“Both, if you think fit.”

“What’s the trouble?”

“Read that.”

He gave his friend Humphrey Jolland’s letter, and Roper sat down on a wooden stool, and put on his spectacles and read. The big brown hands that held the sheet were very steady. The sunlight played upon the solid, grizzled head.

“Pretty damnable, my lad. But why worry?”

“Because it’s true.”

Roper jerked a sudden look at him. Then, he folded up the letter, laid it on his knee, put his spectacles away in their case, and slipped the case into his pocket.

“True still, John?”

“No. That’s the irony of it. I suppose it is possible to be a damned fool once in one’s lifetime.”

“Does she know?”

“Lucy?”

“Yes.”

“Of the thing, yes; of this letter, no. I haven’t told her. I haven’t the heart to tell her. You see, she forgave me.”

“I would not tell her, John.”

“No. I’ll take my chance. One does learn, Roper, that there may be one creature in the world whom it is death to hurt.”

There was silence between them for a moment, and then, Richmond, looking down at his friend’s face, said: “It seems so strange to think that this may be the end of the things, the things I have learnt to love, and to love doing. It may be justice, and yet——”

“No, not justice, John.”

“Why don’t you curse me?”

“God forbid! Who am I to judge? It happened to me once.”

“To you?”

“Yes, a young man is not a slippered saint, John. It’s just humbug to pretend he is. One may have one’s mad year. Something flames up and the smoke gets in one’s eyes. Values become blurred, one’s sense of the things that matter, of the things that are steadfast and good.”

Richmond sat down on the edge of the greenhouse staging.

“Yes, the things that are steadfast and good. I suppose one doesn’t get one’s values until one has weighed up life, and been weighed up by it. But, Roper, I——”

“You took me for a dull sort of fellow, one of the sober hum-drums?”

“No, not that. But——”

“When I got sex out of my eyes, John, I seemed to see life as one sees it on a clear, clean day, when rain is coming. I wanted the rain. Good God, this silly sex business. Aren’t there other things in the world, lovely things, fascinating things? One’s job. And ours is a good job, John.”

“I know.”

“After all, we are trying to help. It’s one of God’s jobs. Yes, I believe in God. And when you realize that you know that there is something sacred in your job. It’s a trust. We are trusted.”

“Yes.”

“A trust that is given to few men. It may be a hair shirt, but, by all that’s holy, we have to wear it. That’s why we can’t let go, why honour does matter. We have to play the game by the people who trust us.”

Roper had picked up one of his pots and, holding it between his knees, pinched off several superfluous shoots.

“Almost like that, John, so that the flowers that open may be the finer. Shedding superfluous tissue. Well, would you say that I am an unhappy man?”

“I should not. I always think of you as about the happiest man I know.”

Roper put the pot back on the staging, and smiled up at him.

“Much happier than I deserve to be. And so will you be.”

“If——”

“Take that letter back and burn it. Is God anything to you, John?”

“No. He might be.”

“He is to me. I feel Him. That’s about all one can say. And if you feel, pray. It does us all good to get down on our knees. There’s something in kneeling. It chastens the proud flesh.”

Richmond took the letter from his friend’s hand.

“I think I know what you mean.”

Richmond did not tell his wife of the disaster that threatened them. She had suffered too much at his hands, and if he prayed, as Dr. Roper had bade him pray, it was that this peril might pass like some dark ship in the night. As for getting down on his knees Dr. Richmond was most strangely shy about it, like some awkward boy consumed with self-consciousness. It might be easy to humble yourself in the spirit, but to kneel down beside his wife was a thing he could not bring himself to do. It might cause her to wonder, and to divine the shadow that lay over their lives. It would be too sudden, too much like humbug, too propitiatory a pose. But Richmond did go down on his knees, for there were some moments when the anguish of doubt was bitter in him. He did not pray like a suppliant. He knelt like a man exploring some mystery, in the midst of darkness, letting his inward self grope and question that which seemed unrevealable. Was there a God? Could one feel any Presence, the immanence of some other being who was transcendently wise and compassionate? Roper felt God, or said so. Was Roper’s evidence adequate? Well, he could believe in that other man’s belief. It might be founded on an illusion, but the faith was there.

Poor, doubting, self-distracted Thomas! Richmond was as shy as a boy about this prayer business, a boy who wanted to kneel beside his bed in life’s dormitory, and was afraid of his own jeers. He locked himself into his study.

He knelt down between his writing-desk and his professional chair, his face covered, and his hands resting their backs against the oak. He did this each morning when he came downstairs, and again at night before climbing the stairs. His mortal eyes were closed, and the eyes of his spirit seemed to gaze into an equal darkness. Would he ever feel anything? Would some sense of otherness come to him? What did he expect? He could not say. Not a face. Or a voice? Perhaps. Or would it be a feeling of something in himself, peace, assuagement, sudden strange exultation, the conviction that something had happened in his Dark House?

One morning he forgot to lock the door.

That was not strange perhaps, but that which was strange was the sudden feeling that came to him when his knees touched the floor. No jolt of emotion, no sense of striving, but a kind of infinite calmness. It seemed to penetrate him suddenly, to spread through his whole being, to fill him with strange courage. Fear had gone.

He knelt wondering, and suffering this consciousness of otherness to soak into his being. Was this the revelation? Was this how Dr. Roper felt, how thousands upon thousands of men and women had seen God?

He did not hear the door open, or realize that his small son was standing there.

Charles stared at the kneeling figure, nor did the child see any strangeness in the fact that his father should be praying. Did not his mother kneel down every night with him beside his bed, and share his "Our Father which art in Heaven"? But his father should not be disturbed or spied upon when he was talking to God. Charles was about to slip out and close the door when his father opened his eyes and saw him.

Richmond did not say anything. He smiled, and Charles could not remember seeing his father smile in that way before. He remained on his knees, his elbows resting on the desk.

"I'm sorry, Daddy."

"Come here, my son."

Richmond stretched out a hand across the table, palm upwards, and Charles came and put his hand in his father's.

"I've said my prayers, Daddy."

"Shut the door, Charles, and come and say them again."

"Yes, Daddy."

The child closed the door, and returning, knelt down beside his father.

"Will you pray, Daddy, or shall I?"

"You pray, Charles."

The boy put his hands together and closed his eyes.

"Out loud, Daddy?"

"Just as you feel."

There was a short silence, and then Richmond heard his son's voice

speaking to God. Richmond's eyes were open. He looked down at that solemn little face, and thought of the old saying concerning the things that were revealed to babes and sucklings.

“O God, make mother and daddy happy. O God, don't let it rain on my birthday. O God, make me a good boy, and keep me from the biccy-box, if you can.”

Charles's eyes opened, and he looked up into the face of his father.

“You didn't know that, Daddy, did you?”

“What, my son?”

“About the biccy-box, and the ones with the sugar on them.”

Richmond put his arm round his son. There was laughter in him, such laughter as God may love to hear.

“No, Charles. But we all have biccy-boxes. Come on. I'll bowl you a few balls before breakfast.”

Dr. Richmond was not conscious of surprise when he found that particular letter lying beside his plate. He recognized Sir Humphrey Jolland's handwriting. Nor was he afraid of the contents of the letter, and if he was challenged by his own calmness in the face of the unknown, he had reason for that calmness. Not that it was a reasoned calmness. Something in him seemed to know that Sir Humphrey sent him good news, even as Dr. Roper knew that God was not an illusion.

Half-way through the meal Richmond picked up the letter and opened it. He smiled as he read it. Yes, God could be merciful to sinners.

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 *The Dark House* by Warwick Deeping]