Adrian Savage

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“YOU HAVE MADE ME ONCE MORE IN LOVE WITH THE GOODNESS OF GOD, IN LOVE WITH LIFE”

Adrian Savage

A Novel

BY LUCAS MALET

AUTHOR OF
"SIR RICHARD CALMADY"

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TO

GABRIELLE FRANCESCA LILIAN MARY

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED. UPON
HER BIRTHDAY. AS A LOVE-TOKEN

BY
LUCAS MALET

THE ORCHARD,
EVERSLEY

AUGUST 28, 1911

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THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

PREFATORY NOTE

I will ask my readers kindly to understand that this book is altogether a work of fiction. The characters it portrays, their circumstances and the episodes in which they play a part, are my own invention.

Every sincere and scientific student of human nature and the social scene must, of necessity, depend upon direct observation of life for his general types—the said types being the composite photographs with which study and observation have supplied him. But, for the shaping of individual characters out of the said types, he should, in my opinion, rely exclusively upon his imagination and his sense of dramatic coherence. Exactly in proportion as he does this can he claim to be a true artist. Since the novel, to be a work of art, must be impersonal, neither autobiographical nor biographical.—I am not, of course, speaking of the historical novel, whether the history involved be ancient or contemporary, nor am I speaking of an admitted satire.

I wish further to assure my readers that the names of my characters have been selected at random; and belong, certainly in sequence of Christian and surname, to no persons with whom I am, or ever have been, acquainted. I may also add that although I have often visited *Stourmouth* and its neighborhood—of which I am very fond—my knowledge of the social life of the district is of the smallest, while my knowledge of its municipal and commercial life is *nil*.

Finally, the lamented disappearance of *La Gioconda*, from the *Salon Carré* of the Louvre, took place when the whole of my manuscript was already in the hands of the printers. May I express a pious hope that this most seductive of women will be safely restored to her former dwelling-place before any copies of my novel are in the hands of the public?

LUCAS MALET.

August 28, 1911

I
CONCERNING THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE READER IS INVITED TO MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE HERO OF THIS BOOK

Adrian Savage—a noticeably distinct, well-groomed, and well-set-up figure, showing dark in the harsh light of the winter afternoon against the pallor of the asphalt—walked rapidly across the Pont des Arts, and, about half-way along the *Quai Malaquais*, turned in under the archway of a cavernous *porte-cochère*. The bare, spindly planes and poplars, in the center of the courtyard to which this gave access, shivered visibly. Doubtless the lightly clad, lichen-stained nymph to whom they acted as body-guard would have shivered likewise had her stony substance permitted, for icicles fringed the lip of her tilted pitcher and caked the edge of the shell-shaped basin into which, under normal conditions, its waters dripped with a not unmusical tinkle. Yet the atmosphere of the courtyard struck the young man as almost mild compared with that of the quay outside, along which the northeasterly wind scourged bitingly. Upon the farther bank of the turgid, gray-green river the buildings of the Louvre stood out pale and stark against a sullen backing of snow-cloud. For the past week Paris had cowered, sunless, in the grip of a black frost. If those leaden heavens would only elect to unload themselves of their burden the weather might take up! To Adrian Savage, in excellent health and prosperous circumstances, the cold in itself mattered nothing—would, indeed, rather have acted as a stimulus to his chronic appreciation of the joy of living but for the fact that he had to-day been suddenly and unexpectedly called upon to leave Paris and bid farewell to one of its inhabitants eminently and even perplexingly dear to him. Having, for all his young masculine optimism, the artist's exaggerated sensibility to the aspects of outward things, and equally exaggerated capacity for conceiving—highly improbable—disaster, it troubled him to make his adieux under such forbidding meteorologic conditions. His regrets and alarms would, he felt, have been decidedly lessened had kindly sunshine set a golden frame about his parting impressions.

Nevertheless, as—raising his hat gallantly to the concierge, seated in her glass-fronted lodge, swathed mummy-like in shawls and mufflers—he turned shortly to the left along the backs of the tall, gray houses, a high expectation, at once delightful and disturbing, took possession of him to the exclusion of all other sensations. For the past eighteen months—ever since, indeed, the distressingly sudden death of his old friend, the popular painter Horace St. Leger—he had made this selfsame little pilgrimage as frequently as respectful discretion permitted. And invariably, at the selfsame spot—it was where, as he noted amusedly, between the third and fourth of the heavily barred ground-floor windows a square leaden water-pipe, running the height of the house wall from the parapet of the steep slated roof, reached the grating in the pavement—this quickening of his whole being came upon him, however occupied his thoughts might previously have been with his literary work, or with the conduct of the bi-monthly review of which he was at once assistant editor and part proprietor. This quickening remained with him, moreover, as he entered a doorway set in the near corner of the courtyard and ran up the flights of waxed wooden stairs to the third story. In no country of the civilized world, it may be confidently asserted, do affairs of the heart, even when virtuous, command more indulgent sympathy than in France. It followed that Adrian entertained his own emotions with the same eager and friendly amenity which he would have extended to those of another man in like case. He was not in the least contemptuous or suspicious of them. He permitted cynicism no smallest word in the matter. On the contrary, he hailed the present

ebullience of his affections as among those captivating surprises of earthly existence upon which one should warmly congratulate oneself, having liveliest cause for rejoicing.

To-day, as usual, there was a brief pause before the door of the vestibule opened. A space of delicious anxiety—carrying him back to the poignant hopes and despairs of childhood, when the fate of some anticipated treat hangs in the balance—while he inquired of the trim waiting-maid whether her mistress was or was not receiving. Followed by that other moment, childlike, too, in its deliciously troubled emotion and vision, when, passing from the corridor into the warm, vaguely fragrant atmosphere of the long, pale, rose-red and canvas-colored drawing-room, he once again beheld the lady of his desires and of his heart.

From the foregoing it may be deduced, and rightly, that Adrian Savage was of a romantic temperament, and that he was very much in love. Let it be immediately added, however, that he was a young gentleman whose head, to employ a vulgarism, was most emphatically screwed on the right way. Only child of an eminent English physician of good family, long resident in Paris, and of a French mother—a woman of great personal charm and some distinction as a poetess—he had inherited, along with a comfortable little income of about eighteen hundred pounds a year, a certain sagacity and decision in dealing with men and with affairs, as well as quick sensibility in relation to beauty and to drama. Artist and practical man of the world went, for the most part, very happily hand and hand in him. At moments, however, they quarreled, to the production of complications.

The death of both his parents occurred during his tenth year, leaving him to the guardianship of a devoted French grandmother. Under the terms of Doctor Savage's will one-third of his income was to be applied to the boy's maintenance and education until his majority, the remaining two-thirds being set aside to accumulate until his twenty-third birthday. "At that age," so the document in question stated, "I apprehend that my son will have discovered in what direction his talents and aptitudes lie. I do not wish to fetter his choice of a profession; still I do most earnestly request him not to squander the considerable sum of money into possession of which he will then come, but to spend it judiciously, in the service of those talents and aptitudes, with the purpose of securing for himself an honorable and distinguished career." This idea that something definite, something notable even in the matter of achievement was demanded from him, clung to the boy through school and college, acting—since he was healthy, high-spirited, and confident—as a wholesome incentive to effort. Even before fulfilling his term of military service, Adrian had decided what his career should be. Letters called him with no uncertain voice. He would be a writer—dramatist, novelist, an artist in psychology, in touch at all points with the inexhaustible riches of the human scene. His father's science, his mother's poetic gift, should combine, so he believed, to produce in him a very special vocation. His ambitions at this period were colossal. The raw material of his selected art appeared to him nothing less than the fee-simple of creation. He planned literary undertakings beside which the numerically formidable volumes of Balzac or Zola shriveled to positive next-to-nothingness. Fortunately fuller knowledge begot a juster sense of proportion, while his native shrewdness lent a hand to knocking extravagant conceptions on the head. By the time he came into possession of the comfortable sum of money that had accumulated during his minority and he was free to follow his bent, Adrian found himself contented with quite modest first steps in authorship. For a couple of years he traveled, resolved to broaden his acquaintance with men and things, to get some clear first-hand impressions both of the ancient, deep-rooted civilizations of the East and the amazing mushroom growths of America. On his return to Paris, it so happened that a leading bi-

monthly review, which had shown hospitality to his maiden literary productions, stood badly in need of financial support. Adrian bought a preponderating interest in it; and by the time in question—namely, the winter of 190- and the dawn of his thirtieth year—had contrived to make it not only a powerful factor in contemporary criticism and literary output, but a solid commercial success.

To be nine-and-twenty, the owner of a well-favored person, of admitted talent and business capacity, and to be honestly in love, is surely to be as happily circumstanced as mortal man can reasonably ask to be. That the course of true love should not run quite smooth, that the beloved one should prove elusive, difficult of access, that obstacles should encumber the path of achievement, that mists of doubt and uncertainty should drift across the face of the situation, obscuring its issues, only served in Adrian's case to heighten interest and whet appetite. The last thing he asked was that the affair should move on fashionable, conventional lines, a matter for newspaper paragraphs and social gossip. The justifying charm of it, to his thinking, resided in precisely those elements of uncertainty and difficulty. If, in the twentieth century, a man is to subscribe to the constraints of marriage at all, let it at least be in some sort marriage by capture! And, as he told himself, what man worth the name, let alone what artist, what poet—vowed by his calling to confession of the transcendental, the eternally mystic and sacred in this apparently most primitive, even savage, of human relations—would choose to capture his exquisite prey amid the blatant materialism, the vulgar noise and chaffer of the modern social highway; rather than pursue it through the shifting lights and shadows of mysterious woodland places, the dread of its final escape always upon him, till his feet were weary with running, and his hands with dividing the thick, leafy branches, his ears, all the while, tormented by the baffling, piercing sweetness of the half-heard Pipes of Pan?

Not infrequently Adrian would draw himself up short in the midst of such rhapsodizings, humorously conscious that the artistic side of his nature had got the bit, so to speak, very much between its teeth and was running away altogether too violently with its soberer, more practical, stable companion. For, as he frankly admitted, to the ordinary observer it must seem a rather ludicrously far cry from Madame St. Leger's pleasant, well-found flat, in the center of cosmopolitan twentieth-century Paris, to the arcana of pagan myth and legend! Yet, speaking quite soberly and truthfully, it was of such ancient, secret, and symbolic things he instinctively thought when looking into Gabrielle St. Leger's golden-brown eyes and noting the ironic loveliness of her smiling lips. That was just the delight, just the provocation, just what differentiated her from all other women of his acquaintance, from any other woman who, so far, had touched his heart or stirred his senses. Her recondite beauty—to quote the phrase of this analytical lover—challenged his imagination with the excitement of something hidden; though whether hidden by intentional and delicate malice, or merely by lack of opportunity for self-declaration, he was at a loss to determine. Daughter, wife, mother, widow—young though she still was, she had sounded the gamut of woman's most vital experiences. Yet, it seemed to him, although she had fulfilled, and was fulfilling, the obligations incident to each of these several conditions in so gracious and irreproachable a manner, her soul had never been effectively snared in the meshes of any net. Good Catholic, good housewife, sympathetic hostess, intelligent and discriminating critic, still—he might be a fool for his pains, but what artist doesn't know better than to under-rate the fine uses of folly?—he believed her to be, either by fate or by choice, essentially a *Belle au Bois Dormant*; and further believed himself, thanks to the workings of constitutional masculine vanity, to be the princely adventurer designed by providence for the far from disagreeable duty of waking her up. Only just now

providence, to put it roughly, appeared to have quite other fish for him to fry. And it was under compulsion of such prospective fish-frying that he sought her apartment overlooking the *Quai Malaquais*, this afternoon, reluctantly to bid her farewell.

CHAPTER II

WHEREIN A VERY MODERN YOUNG MAN TELLS A TIME-HONORED TALE WITH BUT SMALL ENCOURAGEMENT

Disappointment awaited him. Madame St. Leger was receiving; but, to his chagrin, another visitor had forestalled his advent—witness a woman's fur-lined wrap lying across the lid of the painted Venetian chest in the corridor. Adrian bestowed a glance of veritable hatred upon the garment. Then, recognizing it, felt a little better. For it belonged to Anastasia Beauchamp, an old friend, not unsympathetic, as he believed, to his suit.

Sympathy, however, was hardly the note struck on his entrance. Miss Beauchamp and Madame St. Leger stood in the vacant rose-red carpeted space at the far end of the long room, in front of the open fire. Both were silent; yet Adrian was aware somehow they had only that moment ceased speaking, and that their conversation had been momentous in character. The high tension of it held them to the point of their permitting him to walk the whole length of the room before turning to acknowledge his presence. This was damping for Adrian, who, like most agreeable young men, thought himself entitled to and well worth a welcome. But not a bit of it! The elder woman—high-shouldered, short-waisted, an admittedly liberal sixty, her arms disproportionate in their length and thinness to her low stature—continued to hold her hostess's right hand in both hers and look at her intently, as though enforcing some request or admonition.

Miss Beauchamp, it may be noted in passing, affected a certain juvenility of apparel. To-day she wore a short purple serge walking-suit. A velvet toque of the same color, trimmed with sable and blush-roses, perched itself on her elaborately dressed hair, which, in obedience to the then prevailing fashion, showed not gray but a full coppery red. Her eyebrows and eyelids were darkly penciled, and powder essayed to mask wrinkles and sallowness of complexion. Yet the very frankness of these artifices tended to rob them of offense; or, in any serious degree—the first surprise of them over—to mar the genial promise of her quick blue-gray eyes and her thin, witty, strongly marked, rather masculine countenance. Adrian usually accepted her superficial bedizenments without criticism, as just part of her excellent, if somewhat bizarre, personality. But to-day—his temper being slightly ruffled—under the cold, diffused light of the range of tall windows, they started, to his seeing, into quite unpardonable prominence—a prominence punctuated by the grace and the proudly youthful aspect of the woman beside her.

Madame St. Leger was clothed in unrelieved black, from the frill, high about her long throat, to the hem of her trailing cling skirts. Over her head she had thrown a black gauze scarf, soberly framing her heart-shaped face in fine semi-transparent folds, and obscuring the burnished lights in her brown hair, which stood away in soft, dense ridges on either side the parting and was gathered into a loose knot at the back of her head. Her white skin was very clear, a faint scarlet tinge showing through it in the round of either cheek. But just now she was pale. And this, along with the framing black gauze scarf, developed the subtle likeness which—as Adrian held—she bore, in the proportions of her face and molding of it, to Leonardo's world-famous "Mona Lisa" in Salon Carré of the Louvre. The strange recondite quality of her beauty, and the challenge it offered, were peculiarly in evidence; thereby making, as he reflected, cruel, though unconscious, havoc of the juvenile pretensions of poor Anastasia. And this was painful to him. So that in wishing—as he incontestably did—the said

Anastasia absent, his wish may have been dictated almost as much by chivalry as by selfishness.

All of which conflicting perceptions and emotions tended to rob him of his habitual and happy self-assurance. His voice took on quite plaintive tones, and his gay brown eyes a quite pathetic and orphaned expression, as he exclaimed:

"Ah! I see that I disturb you. I am in the way. My visit is inconvenient to you!"

The faint tinge of scarlet leaped into Madame St. Leger's cheeks, and an engaging dimple indicated itself at the left corner of her closed and smiling mouth. Meanwhile Anastasia Beauchamp broke forth impetuously:

"No, no! On the contrary, it is I who am in the way, though our dear, exquisite friend is too amiable to tell me so. I have victimized her far too long already. I have bored her distractingly."

"Indeed, it is impossible you should ever bore me," the younger woman put in quietly.

"Then I have done worse. I have just a little bit angered you," Miss Beauchamp declared. "Oh! I know I have been richly irritating, preaching antiquated doctrines of moderation in thought and conduct. But '*les vérités bêtes*' remain '*les vérités vraies*,' now as ever. With that I go. *Ma toute chère et belle*, I leave you. And," she added, turning to Adrian, "I leave you, you lucky young man, in possession. Retrieve my failures! Be as amusing as I have been intolerable.—But see, one moment, since the opportunity offers. Tell me, you are going to accept those articles on the Stage in the Eighteenth Century, by my poor little protégé, Lewis Byewater, for publication in the Review?"

"Am I not always ready to attempt the impossible for your sake, dear Mademoiselle?" Adrian inquired gallantly.

"Hum—hum—is it as bad as that, then? Are his articles so impossible? Byewater has soaked himself in his subject. He has been tremendously conscientious. He has taken immense trouble over them."

"He has taken immensely too much; that is just the worry. His conscience protrudes at every sentence. It prods, it positively impales you!" The speaker raised his neat black eyebrows and broad shoulders in delicate apology. "Alas! he is pompous, pedantic, I grieve to report; he is heavy, very heavy, your little Byewater. The eighteenth-century stage was many things which it had, no doubt, much better not have been, but was it heavy? Assuredly not."

"Ah! poor child, he is young. He is nervous. He has not command of his style yet. You should be lenient. Give him opportunity and encouragement, and he will find himself, will rise to the possibilities of his own talent. After all," she added, "every writer must begin some time and somewhere!"

"But not necessarily in the pages of my Review," Adrian protested. "With every desire to be philanthropic, I dare not convert it into a *crèche*, a foundling hospital, for the maintenance of ponderous literary infants. My subscribers might, not unreasonably, object."

"You floated René Dax."

"But he is a genius," Madame St. Leger remarked quietly.

"Yes," Adrian asserted, "there could be no doubt about his value from the first. He is extraordinary."

"He is extraordinarily perverted," cried Miss Beauchamp.

"I am much attached to M. René Dax." Madame St. Leger spoke deliberately; and a little silence followed, as when people listen, almost anxiously, to the sound of a pebble dropped

into a well, trying to hear it touch bottom. Miss Beauchamp was the first to break it. She did so laughing.

"In that case, *ma toute belle*, you also are perverse, though I trust not yet perverted. It amounts to this, then," she continued, pulling her long gloves up her thin arms: "I am to dispose of poor Byewater, shatter his hopes, crush his ambitions, tell him, in short, that he won't do. Just Heaven, you who have arrived, how soon you become cruel!" She looked from the handsome black-bearded young man to the beautiful enigmatic young woman, and her witty, accentuated face bore a singular expression. "Good-by, charming Gabrielle," she said. "Forgive me if I have been tedious, for truly I am devotedly fond of you. And good-by to you, Mr. Savage. Yes! I go to dispose of the ill-fated Byewater. But ah! ah! if you only knew all I have done this afternoon, or tried to do, to serve you!"

Whereupon Adrian, smitten by sudden apprehension of deep and possibly dangerous issues, followed her to the door, crying eagerly:

"Wait, I implore you, dear Mademoiselle. Do not be too precipitate in disposing of Byewater. I may have underrated the worth of his articles. I will re-read, I will reconsider. Nothing presses. I have to leave Paris for a week or two. Let the matter rest till my return. I may find it possible, after all, to accept them."

Then, the door closed, he came back and stood on the vacant space of rose-red carpet in the pleasant glow of the fire.

"She is a clever woman," he said, reflectively. "She has cornered me, and that is not quite fair—on the Review. For they constitute a veritable atrocity of dullness, those articles by her miserable little Byewater."

"It is part of her code of friendship—it holds true all round. If she helps others—"

Madame St. Leger left her sentence unfinished and, glancing with a hint of veiled mockery at her guest, sat down in a carven, high-backed, rose-cushioned chair at right angles to the fireplace, and picked up a bundle of white needlework from the little table beside it.

"You mean that Miss Beauchamp does her best for me, too?" Adrian inquired, tentatively.

But the lady was too busy unfolding her work, finding needle and thimble to make answer.

"I foresee that I shall be compelled to print the wretched little Byewater in the end," he murmured, still tentatively.

"Did you not tell Miss Beauchamp you were going away?" Gabrielle asked. She had no desire to continue the conversation on this particular note.

"Yes, I leave Paris to-night. That is my excuse for asking to see you this afternoon. But I feel that my visit is ill-timed. I observed directly I came in that you looked a little fatigued. I fear you are suffering. Ought you to undertake the exertion of receiving visitors? I doubt it. Yet I should have been desolated had you refused me. For I leave, as I say, to-night in response to a sudden call to England upon business—that of certain members of my father's family. I am barely acquainted with them. But they claim my assistance, and I cannot refuse it. I could not do otherwise than tell you of this unexpected journey, could I? It distresses me to find you suffering."

Gabrielle had looked at him smiling, her lips closed, the little dimple again showing in her left cheek. His eagerness and volubility were diverting to her. They enabled her to think of him as still very young; and she quite earnestly wished thus to think of him. To do so made for security. At this period Madame St. Leger put a very high value upon security.

"But, indeed," she said, "I am quite well. The corridor is chilly, and I have been going to and fro preparing a little *fête* for Bette. She has her friends, our neighbor Madame Bernard's

two little girls, from the floor below, to spend the afternoon with her. My mother is now kindly guarding the small flock. But I could not burden her with preliminaries.—I am quite well, and, for the moment, I am quite at leisure. Bring a chair. Sit down. It is for me to condole with you rather than for you to condole with me," she went on, in her quiet voice, "for this is far from the moment one would select for a cross-Channel journey! But then you are more English than French in all that. Hereditary instincts assert themselves in you. You have the islander's inborn sense of being cramped by the modest proportions of his island, and craving to step off the edge of it into space."

The young man placed his hat on the floor, opened the fronts of his overcoat, and drew a chair up to the near side of the low work-table whence he commanded an uninterrupted view of his hostess's charming person.

"That is right," she said. "Now tell me about this sudden journey. Is it for long? When may we expect you back?"

"What do I know?" he replied, spreading out his hands quickly. "It may be a matter of days. It may be a matter of weeks. I am ignorant of the amount of business entailed. The whole thing has come upon me as so complete a surprise. What induced my venerable cousin to select me as his executor remains inexplicable. I remember seeing him when, as a child, I visited England with my parents. I remember, also, that he filled me with alarm and melancholy. He lived in a big, solemn house on the outskirts of a great, noisy, dirty, manufacturing town in Yorkshire. It was impressed upon me that I must behave in his presence with eminent circumspection, since he was very religious, very intellectual. I fear I was an impertinent little boy. He appeared to me to worship a most odious deity, who permitted no amusements, no holidays, no laughter; while his conversation—my cousin's, I mean, not that of the Almighty—struck me as quite the dullest I had ever listened to. I cried, very loud and very often, to the consternation of the whole establishment, and demanded to be taken home to Paris at once. I never saw him again until three years ago, when he spent a few days here, on a return journey from Carlsbad. As in duty bound, I did what I could to render their stay agreeable to him and his companions." Adrian's expression became at once apologetic and merry. "My efforts were not, as I supposed, crowned with at all flattering success. My venerable cousin still filled me with melancholy and alarm. In face of his immense seriousness I appeared to myself as some capering harlequin. Therefore it is, as you will readily understand, with unqualified amazement that I learn he has intrusted the administration of his very considerable estate to my care. Really, his faith in me constitutes a vastly embarrassing compliment. I wish to heaven he had formed a less exalted estimate of my probity and business acumen and looked elsewhere for an executor!"

"He had no children, poor man?" Madame St. Leger inquired, sympathetically.

"On the contrary, he leaves twin daughters. And it is in conjunction with the—briefly—elder of these two ladies that I am required to act."

Gabrielle moved slightly in her chair. Her eyelids were half-closed. She looked at the young man sideways without turning her head. Her resemblance to the Mona Lisa was startling just then; but it was Mona Lisa in a most mischievous humor.

"In many ways you cannot fail to find that interesting," she said. "You are a professional psychologist, a student of character. And then, too, it is your nature to be untiring in kindness and helpfulness to women."

"To women of flesh and blood, yes, possibly, if they are amiable enough to accept my services," Adrian returned, somewhat warmly, a lover's resentment of any ascription of

benevolence toward the sex, merely as such, all agog in him. “But are these ladies really of flesh and blood? They affected me, when I last saw them, rather as shadowy and harassed abstractions. I gazed at them in wonder. They are not old. But have they ever been young? I doubt it, with so aggressively ethical and educative a father. I was at a loss how to approach them; they were so silent, so restrained, so apparently bankrupt in the small change of social intercourse. If they did not add sensibly to my alarm they most unquestionably contributed to my melancholy—the humiliating, disintegrating melancholy of harlequin, capering in conscious fatuity before an audience morally and physically incapable of laughter. All this was bad enough when our connection was but superficial and transitory. It will be ten thousand times worse when we are forced into a position of unnatural intimacy.”

During this tirade, Gabrielle had shaken out the thin folds of her needlework and begun setting quick stitches methodically. Her hands were strong, square in the palm and the finger-tips, finely modeled, finely capable—more fitted, as it might seem, to hold maul-stick and palate, or even wield mallet and chisel, than to put rows of small, even, snippety stitches in a child’s lawn frock. If the fifteenth century and the voluptuous humanism of the Italian Renaissance found subtle reflection in her face, the twentieth century and its awakening militant feminism found expression in her firm hands and their promise of fearless and ready strength.

“I believe you do both yourself and those two ladies an injustice,” she said, her head bent over her stitching. “It will not be the very least in the character of harlequin that they receive you, but rather in that of a savior, a liberator. For you will be delightful to them—ah! I see it all quite clearly—tactful, considerate, reassuring. That is your *rôle*, and you will play it to perfection. How can you do otherwise, since not only your sense of dramatic necessity but your goodness of heart will be engaged? And, take it from me, the enjoyment will not be exclusively on their side. For you will find it increasingly inspiring to act providence to those two shadowy old-young ladies as you see age vanish and youth return. I envy you. Think what an admirable mission you are about to fulfil!”

She glanced up suddenly, her eyes and the turn of her mouth conveying to unhappy Adrian a distracting combination of friendliness—detestable sentiment, since it went no further!—and of raillery. Then, her face positively brilliant with mischief, she gave him a final dig.

“What a thousand pities, though, that there are two of these abstractions whom it is your office to materialize! Had there been but one, how far simpler the problem of your position!”

The young man literally bounded on to his feet, his expression eloquent of the liveliest repudiation and reproach. But Madame St. Leger’s head was bent over her needlework again. She stitched, stitched, in the calmest manner imaginable, talking, meanwhile, in a quiet, even voice.

“Did I not tell you we are *en fête*? Bette has her friends, the little Bernards, to spend the afternoon with her. It is an excuse for keeping her indoors. The modern craze for sending children out in all weathers does not appeal to me. I do not believe in a system of hardening.”

“Indeed?” Adrian commented, with meaning.

“For little girls?” she inquired. “Oh no, decidedly not. For grown-up people, especially for men when they are young and in good health, it may, of course, have excellent results.”

“Ah!” he said, resentfully.

“They—the children, I mean—are busy in the dining-room making rather terrible culinary experiments with a new doll’s cooking stove. Shall we go and see how they are getting on? I ought, perhaps, to just take a look at them and assure myself they are not tiring my mother too

much. And then they will be distressed, my mother and Bette, if they do not have an opportunity to bid you good-by before your journey."

For once Adrian was guilty of ignoring his hostess's suggestions. He stood leaning one elbow upon the chimneypiece, and—above the powder-blue Chinese jars and ivory godlings adorning it—scrutinizing his own image in the looking-glass. He had just suffered a sharp and, to his thinking, most uncalled-for rebuff. He smarted under it, unable for the moment to recover his equanimity. But, contemplating the image held by the mirror, his soul received a sensible measure of comfort. The smooth, opaque, colorless complexion; the pointed black beard, so close cut as in no degree to hide the forcible line of the jaw or distort the excellent proportions of the mask; the thick, well-trimmed mustache, standing upward from the lip and leaving the curved mouth free; the straight square-tipped nose, with its suggestion of pugnacity; let alone the last word of contemporary fashion in collar and tie and heavy box-cloth overcoat, the cut of which lent itself to the values of a tall, well-set-up figure—all these went to form a far from discouraging picture. Yes! surely he was a good-looking fellow enough! One, moreover, with the promise of plenty of fight in him; daring, constitutionally obstinate, not in the least likely tamely to take "No" for an answer once his mind was made up.

Then, in thought, he made a rapid survey of the mental, social, moral, and financial qualifications of those who had formed the circle of poor Horace St. Leger's friends, and who, during the years of his marriage, had been permitted the *entrée* of his house. A varied and remarkable company when one came to review it—savants, artists, politicians, men of letters, musicians, journalists, from octogenarian M. de Cubières, Member of the Senate, Member of the Academy, and Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, to that most disconcerting sport of wayward genius, vitriolic caricaturist and elegant minor poet, René Dax, whose immense domed head and neat little toy of a body had won him at school the nickname of *le tetard*—the tadpole—an appellation as descriptive as it was unflattering, and which—rather cruelly—had stuck to him ever since. Adrian marshaled all these, examined their possible claims, and pronounced each, in turn, ineligible. Some, thank Heaven! were securely married already. Others, though untrammeled by the bonds of holy matrimony, were trammeled by bonds in no wise holy, yet scarcely less prohibitive. Some were too old, others too young or too poor. Some, as, for example, René Dax, were altogether too eccentric. True, Madame St. Leger had just now declared herself warmly attached to him. But wasn't that the best proof of the absence of danger? A woman doesn't openly affirm her regard for a man unless that regard is of purely platonic and innocuous character. And then, after all—excellent thought!—was it not he, Adrian Savage, who had been admitted even during the tragic hours of poor Horace's agony; who had watched by the corpse through a stifling summer night, a night too hot for sleep, restless with the continual sound of footsteps and voices, the smell of the asphalt and of the river? And, since then, was it not to him Gabrielle and her mother, Madame Vernois, had repeatedly turned for advice in matters of business?

Fortified by which reflections, stimulated, though stung, by her teasing, defiant of all other possible and impossible lovers, the young man wheeled round and stood directly in front of Gabrielle St. Leger.

"Listen, *très chère Madame et amie*, listen one little minute," he said, "I implore you. It is true that I go to-night, and for how long a time I am ignorant, to arrange the worldly affairs of my alarming old relative, Montagu Smyrthwaite, and, incidentally, to adjust those of his two dessicated daughters. But it is equally true—for I vehemently refuse such a solution of the

problem of my relation to either of those ladies as your words seem to prefigure—I repeat, it is equally true that I shall return at the very earliest opportunity. And return in precisely the same attitude of mind as I go—namely, wholly convinced, wholly faithful, incapable of any attachment, indifferent to any sentiment save one."

The corners of his mouth quivered and his gay brown eyes were misty with tears.

"I do not permit myself to enlarge upon the nature of that sentiment to-day. To do so might seem intrusive, even wanting in delicacy. But I do permit myself—your own words have procured me the opportunity—both to declare its existence and to assert my profound assurance of its permanence. You may not smile upon it, dear Madame. You may even regard it as an impertinence, a nuisance. Yet it is there—there." Adrian drummed with his closed fist upon the region of his heart. "It has been there for a longer period than I care to mention. And it declines to be eradicated. While life remains, it remains, unalterable. It is idle, absolutely idle, believe me, to invite it to lessen or to depart."

Madame St. Leger had risen, too, laying her work down on the little table. Her face was grave to the point of displeasure. The tinge of scarlet had died out in the round of her cheeks. She was about to speak, but the young man spread out his hands with an almost violent gesture.

"No—no," he cried. "Do not say anything. Do not, I entreat, attempt to answer me. When I came here this afternoon I had no thought of making this avowal. It has been forced from me, and may well appear to you premature. Therefore I entreat you for the moment ignore it. Let everything between us remain as before. That is so easy, you see, since I am going away. Only," he added, more lightly, "I think, if you will excuse me, I will not join that interesting conference of amateur chefs in the dining-room. My mind, I confess, at this moment is slightly preoccupied, and I might prove a but clumsy and distracted assistant. May I ask you, therefore, kindly to express to your mother, Madame Vernois, and to the ravishing Mademoiselle Bette my regret at being unable to make my farewells in person?"

He picked up his hat, buttoned his overcoat, and, without attempting to take his hostess's hand, backed away from her.

"With your permission I shall write at intervals during my unwilling exile," he said. "But merely to recount my adventures—nothing beyond my adventures, rest assured. These are likely to possess a certain piquancy, I imagine, and may serve to amuse you."

Something of his habitual happy self-confidence had returned to him. His air was high-spirited, courteous, instinct with the splendid optimism of his vigorous young manhood, as he paused, hat in hand, for a last word in the doorway.

"*Au revoir, très chère Madame*," he cried. "I go to a land of penetrating fogs and a household of pensive abstractions, but I shall come back unaffected by either, since I carry a certain memory, a certain aspiration in my heart. *Au revoir*. God keep you. Ah! very surely, and with what a quite infinite gladness I shall come back!"

CHAPTER III

TELLING HOW RENÉ DAX COOKED A SAVORY OMELETTE, AND WHY GABRIELLE ST. LEGER LOOKED OUT OF AN OPEN WINDOW AT PAST MIDNIGHT

Wrapped in a wadded silk dressing-gown, with frilled muslin cape and under-sleeves to it, Gabrielle St. Leger had made her nightly round. Had seen that lights were switched off, fires safe, shutters bolted, and the maids duly retired to their bedchamber. Had embraced her mother, and looked into details of night-light and spirit-lamp, lest the excessive cold should render some hot beverage advisable for the elder lady in the course of the night. Had visited Bette in the little room adjoining her own, and found the child snuggled down in her cot profoundly and deliciously asleep. Then, being at last free of further obligation to house or household, she turned the key in the lock of her bedroom door and sat down to think.

Until the day's work, its courtesies as well as its duties, was fully done she had agreed with herself not to think. For even startling events and agitating experiences should, in her opinion, be dealt with methodically in their proper season and order, without fear and without haste. Only so could you be both just and clear-sighted in respect of them. All of which—had she known it—went to prove a theory of Adrian's—namely, that in her case, as in that of so many modern women between the ages of eighteen and, say, eight and twenty, the reasoning, the intellectual, rather than the sensuous and emotional elements are in the ascendant.

And, indeed, Gabrielle honestly regretted that which had to-day happened by the conversion of a valued friend into a declared lover. It was tiresome, really tiresome to a degree! Nor was her vexation lessened by the fact that she could not excuse herself of blame. The catastrophe had been precipitated by her fatal habit of teasing. How constantly she resolved to be staid and serious in the presence of mankind! And then, all uninvited, a sprickety, mischievous humor would take her, making it irresistible delicately to poke fun at those large, self-confident, masculine creatures, to plague and trick them, placing them at a disadvantage; and, by so doing, to lower, for a moment at least, the crest of their over-weening self-complacency. Only this afternoon, as she ruefully admitted, she had gone unwisely far, letting malice tread hard on the heels of mere mischief. This was what vexed her most. For why should malice find entrance in this particular connection? Gabrielle would gladly have shirked the question. But it stood out in capital letters right in front of her, with a portly note of interrogation at the end of the sentence, asking, almost audibly, "Why? Why? Why?"

With a movement of her hands, at once impatient and deprecatory, the young woman lay back in her long chair. In part it was Anastasia Beauchamp's fault. Anastasia had come rather close, venturing to criticize and to warn. Anastasia was anti-feministe, distrustful of modern tendencies, of independence, of woman's life and outlook in and for itself. This genial unbeliever preached orthodoxy; this unmarried woman—with a legend, for there were those who reported events in the far past—preached matrimony. "In the end," she said, "in the end independence proved a mistake." And not improbably she was right in as far as her own generation was concerned. But now the world had moved forward a big piece. The conditions were different. And in this, Gabrielle's generation, how, save by experiment, could you possibly prove that independence mightn't very much pay? Whereupon her thought began to march down alluring avenues of speculation guarded by vague, masterful theories of feminine supremacy.

The crimson shades of the electric lights above her dressing-table, the crimson silk coverlet of her bed, gave an effect of warmth and comfort to the otherwise cool-colored room,

its carved, white furniture and blue-green carpet, curtains, and walls. Formerly this had been a guest-chamber. But, since her husband's death, Gabrielle had taken it for her own. Her former room was too peopled with experiences and memories for solitude. And, like all strong and self-realized natures, Gabrielle demanded solitude at times—a place not only for rest, but for those intimate unwitnessed battles which necessarily beset the strong.

Just now, however, the desired solitude was almost too complete. Presently her attention began to be occupied by it to the exclusion of all other things. In the stillness of the sleeping house she heard the wind crying along the steep house-roofs and hissing against the windows. There was a note of homelessness, even of desolation, in the sound. Involuntarily her thought returned upon Adrian Savage. She saw the mail steamer thrashing out from Calais harbor into the black welter of blizzard and winter sea. Saw, too, the young man's momentarily tremulous lips and tearful eyes as he declared his love. And the subsequent fine recovery of his natural gladness of aspect, as, standing hat in hand in the doorway, a notably gallant and handsome figure, he had asserted his speedy return rather than bade her good-by.

For quite an appreciable space of time she gazed at this visualized recollection of him. Then, shutting her eyes, she turned her back on it, and lay sideways in the long chair. She determined to be rid of it. Almost fiercely she told it to go. For it was useless to deny that it both charmed and moved her. And she didn't want that and all which it involved and stood for. Earnestly, honestly, she didn't want it!—Ah! what misguided temerity to have teased! For she wanted—yes she did, Anastasia Beauchamp's middle-aged wisdom notwithstanding—to retain her but lately acquired freedom; not only the repose, but the stimulating clarity of mind and obligation, the conscious development of personality and broadening of thought which went along with that freedom. She had passed straight from the obedience of young girlhood to the obedience of young wifehood. Now she wanted to belong wholly and exclusively to herself, not to be the property of any man, however devoted, talented, charming—not ever—not certainly for a long while yet.

This craving for the conservation of her freedom took its rise neither in the fact that the memory of her husband was hateful to her, nor that it was so dear as to render the thought of a second marriage a desecration, shocking to the heart. She remembered Horace St. Leger with affection, in many respects with gratitude. He had been considerate, watchfully protective of her beauty and her youth. As the mother of his child he had yielded her a worship touched by an immense tenderness. He had been irreproachably loyal and indulgent. All this she admitted and valued. Wasn't it, indeed, very much?—The circumstances of her marriage, moreover, had not been without their romantic aspect. Madame Vernois, after the death of her husband, who held a professorship at the Collège de France, both from motives of economy and the wish to be near her own family, had retired to her native Chambéry, in the *Haute Savoie*. It was in this strangely picturesque town, rich in remarkable buildings and in traditions both literary and historic, guarded by fantastic mountains and traversed by unruly torrents, that Gabrielle Vernois passed her childhood—mixing in a society both refined and devout though somewhat prejudiced and circumscribed of outlook, the members of it being more distinguished for the magnitude of their united ages and the multitude of their quarterings, than for the length of their purses or their acquaintance with the world as it now actually is.

And it was here, too—she being barely nineteen, he little short of fifty—that Horace St. Leger had met her; had been captivated by her singular type of beauty and the delicious combination of her innocence and ready wit. He was something of a connoisseur in women.

Now he surely discovered a unique specimen! Naturally he wished to acquire that specimen for himself. The years of his apprenticeship were over. He had made a name; had, within the limits of his capacity, evolved his style and mastered the exacting technique of his art. He was young for his age, too; well-preserved, in the plentitude of his popularity. He had made money and he had spent money, but he had never, to all appearance, been more secure of continuing to make. He could well afford to indulge his tastes, even when they took the expensive form of a serious establishment and a seductive wife. He hastened back to Paris, put a final and satisfactory termination to a connection which had long lost its pristine ardors and begun to pall upon him, and then returned to Chambéry, officially to offer this enchanting child of nineteen the sum total of his life's achievement in respect of fame, fortune, social opportunity, along with that suavity of temper and outlook which result from the successful cultivation of a facile talent untroubled by the torments and dislocations of genius.

The young girl's dowry was of the slenderest. The marriage offered not only a secure and agreeable future for herself; but—and this influenced her decision at least equally—relief to her mother from straitened means and their attendant deprivations and anxieties. The subtle unrest, the haunting ambitions and curiosities of her awakening womanhood stirred in her, while the disparity of age between herself and her suitor seemed, to her inexperience, a matter of indifference. The marriage took place in due course, and ostensibly all went well. Yet, looking back upon it now, sitting here alone in her bedchamber while the wind cried along the house-roofs and Paris cowered in the grip of the bitter frost, Gabrielle St. Leger knew that she had learned life, the actualities both of human nature and civilized society, in a hard enough school.

For indisputably the thirty years' difference in age between herself and her husband, which, before marriage, had seemed so negligible a quantity, entailed consequences that intruded themselves at every turn. St. Leger's character and opinions were fixed, crystallized, insusceptible of change, while her own were still, if not in the actually fluid, yet in the distinctly malleable stage. This rendered any equality of intercourse impossible. Her husband treated her as a child, whose ignorance one finds exquisitely entertaining, and enlightens with high, if indulgent, amusement—his attitude toward her quasi-paternal in its serene assumption of omniscience. Yet, being quick-witted and observant, she soon perceived that assumption did not receive, by any means, universal indorsement. Among the younger generation of the artistic and literary brotherhood it became evident to her that, though the man was held in affection, the painter was regarded as a bit of a charlatan, destitute of illumination and sincerity of method—as one who had never possessed the courage or the capacity to attempt any lifting the veil of Isis and penetration of the mysteries it conceals. Nor was she slow to learn, hearing the witty talk and covert allusions of the dinner-table and studio—although her guests made honest and honorable effort to restrain their tongues in her presence—that the rule of faith and morals which had been so earnestly enjoined upon her in her childhood was very much of a dead letter to the average man and woman of the world. The general scheme of existence was a far more complicated affair than she had been taught to suppose. The dividing line between the sheep and the goats was by no means always easy of recognition. Delightful people did very shady, not to say very outrageous and abominable, things. She suffered moments of cruel perspicacity and consequent disgust, during which she was tempted to accuse even her dearly loved mother of having purposely misled and lied to her. For was it not idle to suppose that her husband differed from other men? Or that his passion for her was unique, without predecessors? Was it not very much more reasonable to see, in the perfection

of tactful delicacy with which he treated her, proof positive of a large and varied emotional experience?

Then followed a further discovery. In this marriage she had looked confidently for a brilliant future. But, in plain truth, what future remained? St. Leger had reached the zenith of his career. He was well on in middle life. The only possible future for him lay in the direction of decline and decay. She recognized that her mission, therefore, was not to share a brightening glory, but to maintain a fondly cherished illusion, to soften the asperities of his declension and mask the approach of age and lessening powers by the stimulus of her own radiant youth.

One by one these revelations came upon her with the shock of detected and abiding deceptions. Her pride suffered. Her jealous respect for her own intelligence and personality was rudely shaken. But she kept her own counsel, making neither complaint nor outcry. Silently, after a struggle which left its impress in the irony of her smiling eyes and lips, she faced each discovery in turn and reckoned with it. Then she ranged herself, dismissing once and for all, as she believed, high-flown heroic conceptions of love between man and woman, accepting human nature and human relations as they actually are and forgiving—though it shrewdly taxed her longanimity—all those pious frauds which, from time immemorial, civilized parents and teachers have supposed it their duty to practise upon the children whom they at once adore and betray.

It remained to her credit, however, that, even in the most searching hours of disillusionment, Gabrielle did not lose her sense of justice or fail to discriminate, to the best of her ability, between that for which the society in which he moved and that for which her husband, personally, should be held responsible. So doing she admitted, and gladly, that any legitimate cause of quarrel with him was of the smallest. Taking all the circumstances of the case into account, he had behaved well, even admirably, by her. The way of the world, its habits and standards, the constitution of human nature, rather than Horace St. Leger, was in fault. And it was precisely on that finding, as she told herself now, having reasoned it out sitting here alone in her bedchamber, that she deprecated any change of estate, the contraction of any fresh and intimate relation. If she had not known it might have been different—and there she paused a little wistfully, sorrowfully. But she did know, and therefore she could not consent to part with her freedom, with the repose of mind and the large liberty of thought and action her freedom permitted her. Her body was her own. Her soul, her emotions were her own. Almost fiercely she protested they should remain so. Hence it was useless, useless, that Anastasia should warn, or that the image of Adrian Savage should solicit her, standing there handsome, devoted, and how maddeningly self-confident! She could not listen. She would not listen. No, no, simply she would not.

Having thus analyzed the position, summed up and delivered judgment upon it, clearly it was the part of common-sense to go to bed and to sleep. Gabrielle stretched out her hand for the crystal and silver rosary lying, along with her missal and certain books of devotion, on a whatnot beside her chair. She fingered it, making an effort to concentrate and compose her thoughts. But they refused to be composed, darting hither and thither like a flight of startled birds. Restlessness still possessed her, making recitation of the hallowed invocations which mark each separate bead trench perilously on profanity. She let the rosary drop and pressed her hands over her eyes. Certain words, over and above the disturbing ones spoken by Adrian Savage, haunted her. For the agitations of the afternoon had not ended with his declaration and

exit. A subsequent episode had contributed, in no small degree, to produce her existing state of perturbation.

It had happened thus. A few minutes after Adrian left her, going out on to the gallery, which runs the length of the flat from the vestibule and studio at one end to the dining-room and offices at the other, she had been struck by the strangely cold, haggard light filling it. The ceiling stared, while details of pictures and china upon the walls, the graceful statuette of a slim, unclad boy carrying a hooded hawk on his wrist, and, farther on, a portrait bust of Horace St. Leger—each set on an antique porphyry column—started into peculiar and shadowless prominence. The windows of the gallery gave on to the courtyard. Gabrielle held aside one of the vitrine curtains and looked out.

Snow was falling. Countless thin, fine flakes circled and eddied, drifted earthward, and swept up again caught in some local draught. Through the lace work of black, quivering branches the backs of the houses across the courtyard showed pallid and gaunt. Far below, on the frost-bitten grass-plat, the lichen-stained nymph tilted her ice-bound pitcher above the frozen basin. The familiar scene in its present aspect was indescribably dreary, provocative of doubting, distrustful thoughts. With a movement of impatience, her expression hard, her charming lips compressed, the young woman turned away, conscious of being foolishly, unreasonably out of conceit with most things. Doing so, the bust of her husband confronted her, seeming to watch her from out the blank cavities in the eyeballs which so uncomfortably travesty sight. An expression of amused, slightly cynical inquiry rested upon the sculptured face. This, in her present somewhat irritable and over-sensitized condition, she resented, finding it singularly unpleasant. She moved rapidly away along the gallery. Then stopped dead.

From the dining-room came a joyful racket. But, to her astonishment, cutting through the rippling staccato of children's talk and laughter, came the grave tones of a man's voice. Hearing which, steady of nerve and strong though she was, Gabrielle turned faint. The blood left her heart. She made for the nearest window-seat and sank down on it.—Horace was there, in the dining-room, playing with Bette and her little friends as he so dearly loved to play. The fact of her widowhood, the past eighteen months of freedom, became as though they were not. In attitude and sentiment she found herself relegated to an earlier period, against which her whole nature rose in rebellion. She realized how quite horribly little she wanted to see Horace again, or renew his and her former relation. Realized her jealousy of him in respect of her child. Realized, indeed, that, notwithstanding his many attractive qualities and invariable kindness, his resurrection must represent to her something trenching upon despair.

Yet it was cruel, she knew, heartless, to feel thus. She glanced in positive mental torment at the marble bust. It still watched her, through the haggard clarity of the snow-glare, with the same effect of cynically questioning criticism and amusement, almost, so she thought, as one should say: "My dear, be consoled. Even had I the will, I am powerless to return and to claim you. Follow your own fancy. Make yourself perfectly easy. Have no fear but that I am very effectually wiped out of your life."

The blood rushed back to her heart. Her face flamed. She felt humiliated, as though detected in a secret villainy, in an act of detestable meanness. It is an ugly thing to pillage the dead. But she was also very angry, for she understood what had happened. Not Horace—poor, undesired Horace—but Adrian Savage was there in the dining-room. He had changed his mind after all; and, in the hope of somehow working upon her, had stayed to bid grandmother and grandchild good-by. This was a plot, a plant, and she was furious, her sense of justice

suffering violent eclipse. For was it not abominable of him to have placed her in so unworthy and mortifying a position in respect of her dead husband, and, incidentally, to have given her such a dreadful fright? Regardless of reason she piled his offenses mountain-high. However, this simplified matters in a way, disposing of a certain question forever. Marry him? She'd as soon marry a ragpicker, a scavenger! She hoped devoutly he would have an atrocious crossing when he did at last seek foreign shores.

Thereupon she rose and swept onward, in the stateliest manner imaginable, with trailing, somber skirts, over the polished, shining floor.

As she threw open the dining-room door a slender, white-frocked, black-silk-legged figure rushed upon her and clasped her about the hips with ecstatic cries.

"Ah! mamma," it piped. "At last you have come! I am so excited. We have waited and listened. But it was a secret. He forbade us to tell you he was here. It was to be a great surprise. Now you may look, but you must promise not to interrupt with conversation. That is very important, you understand, because the next few moments are critical. M. Dax is cooking an omelette in my tiny, weeny frying-pan for our dolls and Teddy-bears."

And so, once again upon this day of self-revelations, Madame St. Leger had to revise her position and own herself in the wrong. Yet the relief of finding neither resuscitated husband nor importunate lover, but simply M. René Dax, in possession was so great that she greeted that eccentric and gifted young man with warm cordiality—wholly ignoring his affectations and the rumors current regarding his moral aberrations, remembering only the irreproachable correctness of his dress and manners, and the quaintly pathetic effect of his small, tired face, great domed head and bulging forehead—like those of a hydrocephalic baby—and the ingeniously fascinating qualities he displayed as self-elected playfellow of Bette and her little friends.

Yes, she told herself, she really had a great regard for René Dax. He touched her. And now she, undoubtedly, passed a wholly delightful three-quarters of an hour in his and the little girls' company, Madame Vernois looking on, meanwhile, sympathetic yet slightly perplexed. For Gabrielle, in her reaction of feeling, forgetful of her black dress and twenty-seven years, and the rather tedious restraints and dignities of her matronhood, was taken with the sprightliest humor. She remembered that three-quarters of an hour now with a degree of regret. If only it could have stopped at that! But, unfortunately, things went further.

For, at parting, she had lingered in the gallery, where the haggard whiteness of the snow-glare struggled with the deepening twilight, thanking René Dax for his kindness to the children and for the happy afternoon he had given them. The sense of holiday, of playtime, was still upon her and she spoke with unaccustomed gaiety and intimacy of tone.

The young man looked up at her attentively, queerly—the top of his head barely level with her shoulder—and answered, a certain harshness observable in his carefully modulated voice:

"Do not spoil it all by accusing me of a good action. In accusing me of that you do my intelligence a gross injustice. My conduct has been dictated, as always, by calculated selfishness."

And, when she smilingly protested, he went on:

"I have many faults, no doubt. But I am guiltless of the weakness of altruism—contemptible word, under which the modern mind tries to conceal its cowardice and absence of all sound philosophy. I am an egoist, dear Madame, believe me, an egoist pure and simple."

He paused, looking down with an effect of the utmost gravity at his very small and exquisitely shod feet.

"It happened, for reasons with which it is superfluous to trouble you, that to-day I required a change of atmosphere. I needed to bathe myself in innocence. I cast about for the easiest method of performing such ablutions, and my thought traveled to Mademoiselle Bette. The weather being odious, it was probable I should find her in the house. My plan succeeded to admiration. Have no delusions under that head. It is invariably the altruist, not the egoist, whose plans miscarry or are foiled!"

He took a long breath, stretching his puny person.

"I am better. I am cleansed," he said. "For the moment at least I am restored, renewed. And for this restoration the reason is at once simple and profound. You must understand," he went on, in a soft conversational manner, as one stating the most obvious common-place, "my soul when it first entered my body was already old, immeasurably old. It had traversed countless cycles of human history. It had heard things no man may repeat and live. It had fed on gilded and splendid corruptions. It had embraced the forbidden and hugged nameless abominations to its heart. It had gazed on the naked face of the Ultimate Self-Existent Terror whose breath drives the ever-turning Wheel of Being. It had galloped back, appalled, through the blank, shouting nothingness, and clothed itself in the flesh of an unborn, unquickened infant, thus for a brief space obtaining unconsciousness and repose."

René Dax looked up at her again, his little, tired face very solemn, his eyes glowing as though a red lamp burned behind them.

"Has it ever occurred to you why we worship our mothers?" he asked. "It is not because they bring us into life, but because for nine sacred months they procure us blessed illusion of non-living. How can we ever thank them sufficiently for this? And that," he added, "is why at times, as to-day, I am driven to seek the society of young children. It rests and refreshes me to be near them, because they have still gone but a few steps along the horrible, perpetually retrodden pathway. They have not begun to recognize the landmarks. They have not yet begun to remember. They fancy they are here for the first time. Past and future are alike unrealized by them. The aroma of the enchanted narcotic of non-living, which still exhales from their speech and laughter, renders their neighborhood infinitely soothing to a soul like mine, staggering beneath the paralyzing burden of a knowledge of accumulated lives."

Whether the young man had spoken sincerely, giving voice to a creed he actually, however mistakenly, held, or whether his utterances were merely a pose, the outcome of a perverse and morbid effort at singularity, Madame St. Leger was uncertain. Still it was undeniable that those utterances—whether honest or not—and the somber visions evoked by them remained, distressing and perplexing her with a dreary horror of non-progression, of perpetual and futile spinning in a vicious circle, of perpetual and futile actual sameness throughout perpetual apparent change.

So far all the essentials of the Faith in which she had been born and educated remained to her. Yet, too often now, as she sorrowfully admitted, her declaration of that Faith found expression in the disciple's cry, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief." For unbelief, reasoned not merely scoffing, had, during these years of intercourse with the literary and artistic world of Paris, become by no means inconceivable to her. More than half the people she met smiled at, if they might not openly repudiate, Christianity. It followed that she no longer figured the Faith to herself as a "fair land and large" wherein she could dwell in happy security, but rather as a fortress set on an island of somewhat friable rock, against which winds and waves beat remorselessly. And truly, at moments—cruel moments, which she dreaded—the onslaught of modern ideas, of the modern attitude in its contempt of tradition and defiance

of authority—flinging back questions long since judged and conclusions long established into the seething pot of individual speculation—seemed to threaten final undermining of that rock and consequent toppling of the fortress of Faith surmounting it into the waters of a laughing, envious, all-swallowing sea. This troubled her the more because certain modern ideas—notably that of emancipated and self-sustained womanhood—appealed to and attracted her. Was there no middle way? Was no marriage between the old Faith and the new science, the new democracy, possible? If you accepted the latter, did negations and denials logically follow, compelling you to let the former go?

And so it came about that to-night, she alone waking in the sleeping house, the gloomy pictures called up by René Dax's strange talk held her painfully. They stood between her and sleep, between her and prayer, heightening her restlessness and suggesting thoughts very subversive of Christian theology and Christian ethics.

Gabrielle rose from her chair and moved to and fro, her hands clasped behind her. She never remembered to have felt like this before. The room seemed too narrow, too neat, its appointments too finicking and orderly, to contain her erratic and overflowing mental activity. The abiding mystery which not only surrounds each individual life, but permeates each individual nature, the impassable gulf which divides even the nearest and most unselfishly loved—even she herself and her own darling little Bette—from one another, presented itself oppressive and distressing as a nightmare. Just now it appeared to her inconceivable that to-morrow she would rise just as usual, satisfied to accept conventions, subscribe to compromises, take things in general at their face value, while contentedly expending her energies of brain and body upon trivialities of clothes, housekeeping, gossip, the thousand and one ephemeral interests and occupations of a sheltered, highly civilized woman's daily existence. The inadequacy, the amazing futility of it all!

Then, half afraid of the great stillness, she stood perfectly quiet, listening to the desolate cry of the wind along the house-roofs and its hissing against the window-panes.

" 'My soul has gazed on the Ultimate Self-Existent Terror whose breath drives the ever-turning Wheel of Being,' " she murmured as she listened. " 'It galloped back, appalled, through the blank, shouting nothingness' "—

Yes, that was dreadful conception of human fate! But what if it were true? Millions believed it, or something very closely akin to it, away in the East, in those frightening lands of yellow sunrise and yellow, expressionless peoples of whom it always alarmed her to think! Swiftly her mind made a return upon the three men, living and dead, who to-day had so deeply affected her, breaking up her practised calm and self-restraint. She ranged them side by side, and, in her present state of exaltation, they severally and equally—though for very different reasons—appeared to her as enemies against whom she was called upon to fight. Seemed to her as tyrants, either of whom to sustain his own insolent, masculine supremacy schemed to enslave her, to rob her of her intellectual and physical freedom, of her so jealously cherished ownership of herself.

" 'It galloped back through the blank, shouting nothingness,' " she repeated. But there came the sharpest sting of the situation. For to what covert? Where could her soul take sanctuary since friendship and marriage proved so full of pitfalls, and her fortress of Faith was just now, as she feared, shaken to the base?

Then, the homeless cry of the wind finding echo in her homelessness of spirit, a sort of anger upon her, blind anger against things as they are, she moved over to the window, drew back the curtains and opened the locked casements. The cold clutched her by the throat,

making her gasp for breath, making her flesh sting and ache. Yet the apprehension of a Presence, steadying and fortifying in its great simplicity of strength, compelled her to remain. She knelt upon the window-seat and leaned out between the inward opening casements, planting her elbows on the window-ledge and covering her mouth with her hands to protect her lips from the blistering chill.

Outside was the wonder of an unknown Paris, a vacant, frozen, voiceless Paris, wrapped in a winding-sheet of newly fallen snow. Under the lamps, along the quay immediately below, that winding-sheet glittered in myriad diamond points, a uniform surface as yet unbroken by wheel tracks or footprints—misery, pleasure, business, alike in hiding from the bitter frost. Elsewhere it spread in a heavy, muffling bleachedness, from the bosom of which walls, buildings, bridges reared themselves strangely unsubstantial, every ledge and projection enameled in white. Beneath the *Pont des Arts* on the right and the *Pont des Saints Pères* on the left—each very distinct with glistening roadway and double row of lamps—the river ran black as ink. The trees bordering the quays were black, a spidery black, in their agitated, wind-tormented bareness. And the sky was black, too, impenetrable, starless, low and flat, engulfing the many domes, monuments, and towers of Paris, engulfing even the roofs and pavilions of the Louvre along the opposite bank of the Seine, inclosing and curiously isolating the scene. This effect of an earth so much paler and, for the most part, so much less solid than the sky above it, this effect of buildings rising from that pallor to lose themselves in duskiness, was unnatural and disquieting in a high degree. The sentiment of this desert, voiceless Paris was more disquieting still. For Gabrielle retained something of the provincial's persistent distrust of the siren personality of *la ville lumière*. The wonderful and brilliant city had enthralled her imagination, but had never quite conquered her affections. Now, leaning out of the high-set window, she gazed as far as sight carried, east, west, and north, while a vague, deep-seated excitement possessed her. It was as though she touched the verge of some extraordinary revelation, some tremendous crisis of the cosmic drama. Had universal paralysis seized the heart of things, she asked herself, of which this desert, voiceless Paris was the symbol? Had the ever-turning Wheel of Being ceased to turn, struck into immobility, as the world-famous city appeared to be, by some miracle of incalculable frost?

The cry of the wind answered. So the wind, at least, was alive and awake yet, as were the black seaward-flowing waters of the river.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, along with that homeless cry of the wind hailing from she knew not what immense desolation of polar spaces, came a small, plaintive, human cry close at hand.

Hearing which last the young woman sprang down from her kneeling place, locked the gaping casements together, and ran lightly and swiftly into the adjoining room. There in the warm dimness, her hands outstretched grasping the rail of her cot on either side, slim little Bette sat woefully straight up on end.

"Mamma, mamma," she wailed, "come and hold me tight, very tight! I have had a bad dream. I am frightened. M. René Dax touched all my toys, all my darling, tiny saucepans and kettles, all my dolls and Teddy-bears with his little walking-cane. And it was terrifying. They all came alive and chased me. Hold me tight. I am so frightened. They rushed along. They chased me and chased me. They panted. Their mouths were open. I could see their red tongues. And they yelped as the little pet dogs do in the public gardens when they try to catch the sparrows. I called and called to you, but you were not there. You did not come. I tried very hard to run away, but my feet stuck to the floor. They were so very heavy I could not lift them.

It is not true? Tell me it is not true. He cannot touch all my toys with his little cane and make them come alive? I think I shall be afraid ever to play with them any more. They were so dreadfully unkind. Tell me it is not true!"

"No, no, my angel," Gabrielle declared, soothingly. "It is not true, not in the very least true. It is only a silly dream. All the poor toys are quite good. You will find them obedient and loving, asking ever so prettily to be played with again to-morrow morning."

She took the slender, soft, warm body up in her arms—it was sweet with the flower-like sweetness of perfect cleanliness and health—and held it close against her. And for the moment perplexities, far-reaching speculations and questionings were obliterated in a passion of tenderness for this innocent life, this innocent body, which was the fruit of her own life and her own body. All else fell away from her, leaving her motherhood triumphant and supreme.

The child, making good the opportunity, began to wheedle and coax.

"I think it is really very cold in my bed," she said. "I am sure it would be far warmer in yours. And I may dream M. Dax came back and touched my toys with his little walking-cane and made them naughty if I remain here by myself. Do not you think it would be rather dangerous to leave me here alone? I might wake grandmamma if I were to be terrified again and to scream. I like your big bed so very much best."

The consequence of all of which was that Gabrielle St. Leger said her rosary that night fingering the beads with one hand while the other clasped the sleeping child, whose pretty head lay on her bosom. Her mind grew calm. The fortress of Faith stood firm again, as she thankfully believed, upon its foundation of rock. She recovered her justness of attitude toward departed husband and absent lover. But she determined to reduce her intercourse with M. René Dax to a minimum, since the tricks he played with his little walking-cane seemed liable to be of so revolutionary and disintegrating a character.

CHAPTER IV

CLIMBING THE LADDER

The snow had been cleared away from the drive and carriage sweep, but still lay in thick billowy masses upon the branches of the fir and pine trees and upon the banks of laurel and rhododendron below. At sunset the sky had cleared somewhat, and a scarlet glow touched the under side of the vast perspective of pale, folded cloud, and blazed on the upper south westward-facing windows of the Tower House as with a dazzle of fierce flame. Joseph Challoner, however, was unaware of these rather superb impressionist effects as, with his heavy, lunging step, he came out of the house on to the drive. The drawing-room had been hot, and he had gone through a somewhat emotional interview. A man at once hard and sentimental, just now sentiment was, so to speak, on the top. His upright face and head were decidedly flushed. He felt warm. He also felt excited, perceiving perspectives quite other than those presented by the folded clouds and the afterglow.

Usually Joseph Challoner affected a country-gentleman style of dress—tweeds of British manufacture, noted for their wear and wet-resisting qualities, symbolic of those sturdy, manly, no-nonsense sort of virtues, of which he reckoned himself so conspicuous an exponent, and which have, as we all know, gone to make England what she is. But to-day out of respect for his late client, Montagu Smyrthwaite, he had put on garments of ceremony, black braid-edged coat and waistcoat, pepper-and-salt-mixture overcoat with black-velvet collar, striped dove-gray and black trousers—which had served at a recent local wedding—and top hat. This costume tended to make an awkwardness of gait and action which belonged to him the more observable. Over six feet in height, he was commonly described by his admirers—mostly women—as “a splendid-looking man.” Others, doubtless envious of his success with the fair sex and of his inches, compared him, with his straight, thick, up-and-down figure, as broad across the loins as at the shoulders, his large paw-like hands and feet and flattened, slightly Mongolian caste of countenance, to a colossal infant. His opinion of his own appearance, concerning which he was in a chronic state of anxiety, fluctuated between these two extremes, with hopeful leanings toward the former. At the present moment, for private reasons, he hoped fervently that he was “a splendid-looking man.”

That he was a moist and hot one was undeniable. He took off his hat and passed his hand over his straight, shiny, reddish hair—carefully brushed across impending calvities—and sucked the ends of his rather ragged mustache nervously into the corners of his mouth.

He was touched, very much touched. He had not felt so upset for years. He admired his own sensibility. Yes, most distinctly he trusted that he was “a splendid-looking man”—and that she so regarded him. Then, coming along the drive toward him, between the snow-patched banks of evergreen, he caught sight of the short, well-bred, well-dressed, busy, not to say fussy, little figure of that cherished institution of the best Stourmouth society, Colonel Rentoul Haig. This diverted his thoughts into another channel, or, to be perfectly accurate, set a second stream running alongside the first. Both, it may be added, tended in the direction of personal self-aggrandizement.

“Good-day to you, Challoner. Glad to meet you,” Colonel Haig said, a hint of patronage in his tone. “I heard the sad news from Woodward at the club at luncheon-time, and I took the tram up as far as the County Gates as soon as I could get away. We had a committee meeting at two-thirty. I felt it would be only proper to come and inquire.”

"Yes," the other answered, in a suitably black-edged manner, "our poor friend passed away early this morning. I was sent for immediately."

Having a keen sense of the value of phrases, Colonel Haig pricked up his ears, so to speak. His attitude of mind was far from democratic, and "our poor friend" from a local solicitor struck him as a trifle familiar. He looked up sharply at the speaker. He felt very much tempted to teach the man his place. But there was such a lot he wanted to hear which only this man could tell him. And so, the inquisitive nose and puckered, gossipy mouth getting the better of the commanding military eye, he decided to postpone the snubbing of Challoner to a more convenient season.

"I came round this afternoon chiefly to see Miss Margaret," the latter continued. "She was terribly distressed and felt unequal to seeing me this morning. She is very sensitive, very sensitive and feminine. Her father's death came as a great shock to her. And then owing to some mistake or neglect she was not present at the last. As she told me, she feels that very much indeed." The speaker's voice took a severe tone. He shifted his weight from one massive foot to the other, rather after the manner of a dancing bear. "Her grief was painful to witness. And I think you'll agree with me, Colonel, it was just one of the neglects which ought not to have occurred."

"A pity, a pity!" the other admitted. "But on such occasions people will lose their heads. It's unavoidable. Look here, Challoner, I must go on and leave cards. But I sha'n't be more than five minutes. I shall not ask to see either of the ladies to-day. So if you'll wait I'll walk as far as the County Gates with you, supposing you're going in my direction."

The Mongolian caste of countenance is conveniently non-committal, lending itself to no compromising play of expression. Challoner was more than willing to wait. He had certain things to say, a favor, indeed, to ask. And it always looked well, moreover—conferred a sort of patent of social solvency upon you—to be seen in public with Colonel Haig. He wished the weather had been less inclement so that more people might be about! But he betrayed no eagerness. Took out his watch, even, and noted the hour before answering.

"Yes, I think I may allow myself the pleasure," he said. "I have been too much engaged here to get down to my office to-day, and there will be a mass of business waiting for me at home—no taking it easy in my profession if you're to do your duty by your clients—but, yes, I shall be happy to wait for you."

Then, left alone in the still, clear cold, he became absorbed in thought again.

When Joseph Challoner, the elder, settled at Stourmouth in the early sixties of the last century, that famous health-resort had consisted of a single street of small shops, stationed along a level space about half a mile up the fir and pine clad valley from the sea, plus some dozen unattractive lodging-houses perched on the top of the West Cliff. The beginnings of business had been meager. Now Stourmouth and the outlying residential districts to which it acts as center—among them the great stretch of pine-land known as the Baughurst Park Estate—covers the whole thirteen miles, in an almost unbroken series of shops, boarding-houses, hotels, villas, and places of amusement, from the ancient abbey-town of Marychurch at the junction of the rivers Wilmer and Arn, on the east, to Barryport, the old sea-faring town, formerly of somewhat sinister reputation, set beside a wide, shallow, island-dotted, land-locked harbor to the west. Along with the development of Stourmouth the elder Challoner's fortunes developed. So that when, as an old man, he died in the last of the eighties, his son, the younger Joseph, succeeded to a by no means contemptible patrimony.

As business increased other members came into the firm, which now figured as that of Challoner, Greatrex & Pewsey. But, and that not in virtue of his senior partnership alone, Joseph Challoner's interest remained the largely predominant one. He was indefatigable, quick to spot a good thing, and, so some said, more clever than scrupulous in his pursuit of it. He came to possess the reputation of a man who it is safer to have for your friend than your enemy. So much for the hard side of his character.

As to the sentimental side. When a youth of twenty he had fallen head over ears in love with the daughter of a local retail chemist, a pretty, delicate girl, with the marks of phthisis already upon her. She brought him a few hundred pounds. They married. And he was quite a good husband to her—as English husbands go. Still this marriage had been, he came to see, a mistake. The money, after all, was but a modest sum, while her ill-health proved decidedly costly. And then he had grown to know more of the world, grown harder and stronger, grown to perceive among other things that connection with a shop is a handicap. The smell of it sticks. There's no ridding yourself of it. Joseph Challoner may be acquitted of being more addicted to peerage or money worship, to being a greater snob, in short, than the average self-respecting Anglo-Saxon; yet it would be idle to deny that when an all-wise and merciful providence permitted his poor, pretty young wife—after several unsuccessful attempts at the production of infant Challoners—to die of consumption, her husband felt there were compensations. He recognized her death as a call, socially speaking, to come up higher. He set himself to obey that call, but he did not hurry. For close upon thirteen years now, though of an amorous and domestic disposition, he had remained a widower. And this of set purpose, for he proposed that the last whiff of the shop should have time to evaporate. By the period immediately in question he had reason to believe it really had done so. Privately he expended a considerable sum in procuring his father-in-law a promising business near London. Stourmouth knew that retail chemist no more. And so it followed that the dead wife's compromising origin was, practically, forgotten; only admiration of the constancy of the bereaved husband remained. To complete the divorce between past and present, Challoner, some few years previously, had let the "upper part" over the firm's offices, at the corner where the Old Marychurch Road opens upon the public gardens and The Square in the center of Stourmouth, to his junior partner, Mr. Pewsey, and removed to Heatherleigh, a fair-sized villa on the Baughurst Park Estate, which he bought at bargain price owing to the insolvency of its owner. Here, with a married couple at the head of his household, as butler and cook-housekeeper, he lived in solid British comfort—so-called—giving tea and tennis parties at intervals during the summer months, and somewhat heavy dinners during the winter ones, followed by bridge and billiards.

Granted the man and his natural tendencies, it was impossible that the thirteen years which had elapsed since the death of his wife should have been altogether free from sentimental complications. These had, in point of fact, been numerous. Upon several of them he could not look back with self-congratulation. Still the main thing was that he had escaped, always managing to sheer off in time to avoid being "had," being run down and legally appropriated. The retreat may not have been graceful, might not, to a scrupulous conscience, even figure as strictly honorable, but it had been accomplished. And for that—standing here, now, to-day, on the snow-powdered carriage sweep of the Tower House—with a movement of unsuspected cynicism and profanity he gave thanks, sober, heartfelt, deliberate thanks to God his Maker. For his chance had come, the chance of a lifetime! He turned fiercely, grimly angry at the bare

notion that any turn of events might have rendered him not free to embrace it. And his anger, as anger will, fixed itself vindictively upon a concrete object, upon a particular person.

But, at this point, his meditations were broken in upon by the sound of Colonel Haig's slightly patronizing speech and the ring of his brisk returning footsteps over the hard gravel.

"Very obliging of you to wait for me, Challoner," he said. "There are several things which I should be glad to hear, in confidence, about all this matter. Since their father's death I feel a certain responsibility toward the Miss Smyrthwaites. They have only acquaintances here in the south of England—no old friends, no relatives. I really stand nearest to them, though we are but distantly connected."

"I was not aware of even a distant connection," Challoner returned.

"Probably not. I suppose hardly any one here is aware of it. In a watering-place like Stourmouth, a place that has come up like a mushroom in a night, as you may say, only a very small and exclusive circle do know who is who. That is one of the things one has to put up with, though I confess I find it annoying at times. Well, you see, my grandmother and poor Smyrthwaite's mother were first cousins once removed—both Savages, the Yorkshire, not the Irish, branch of the family. I have reason to believe there was a good deal of opposition to Mrs. Smyrthwaite's marriage. She was not a Roman Catholic, like most of her people. But they all were—and all are, I am thankful to say—people of very solid standing, landed gentry, soldiers, and so on. Naturally they objected to a marriage with a manufacturer and a Non-conformist. I am quite prepared to admit Unitarians have more breeding than most dissenters, but still it isn't pleasant, it isn't quite the thing, you know. Prejudice? Perhaps. But gentle-people are naturally prejudiced in favor of their own class. And, upon my word, I am inclined to believe it is very happy for the community at large they should be so."

The two men reached the gate opening from the grounds of the Tower House on to the public road—a broad, straight avenue, the foot-paths on either side divided from the carriage-way by a double line of Scotch firs rising from an undergrowth of rhododendron and laurel. At intervals the roofs, gables, and turrets of other jealously secluded villas—in widely differing styles and no-styles of architecture—were visible. But these struck the eye as accidental. The somber, far-stretching fir and pine woods were that which held the attention. They, and the great quiet of them; in which the cracking of a branch over-weighted with snow, the distant barking of a dog, or the twittering of a company of blue-tits foraging from tree-stem to tree-stem where the red scaling bark gave promise of insect provender, amounted to an arresting event.

After a moment of just perceptible hesitation Joseph Challoner pushed open the heavy gate for the elder man and let him pass out first. Several points in Colonel Haig's discourse pleased him exceedingly little, but, in dealing with men as with affairs, he never permitted minor issues to obscure his judgment regarding major ones. If the old lad chose to be a bit impertinent and showy, never mind. Let him amuse himself that way if he wanted to. Challoner had a use for him just now, and could be patient till he had used him—used him right up, in fine, and no longer had any use left for him. It followed that as, side by side, the two turned northeastward up The Avenue he answered in a noticeably conciliatory tone:

"I really am indebted to you, Colonel, for telling me this. I own my position looked awkward in some respects. I foresaw I might want to consult some one, unofficially, you understand, about the Miss Smyrthwaites' affairs; and, as you truly say, they've nothing beyond acquaintances here. I recognized there really wasn't a soul to whom I should feel at

liberty to speak. But now that I know of your connection with and the interest you take in the family, I feel I have some one to turn to if I should need advice. It is a great relief."

Colonel Haig's self-importance was agreeably tickled.

"I am very happy to have the opportunity of being of service to you, Challoner," he said, graciously, "particularly in connection with my cousin's affairs." Then he became eminently businesslike. "The disposition of the property is intricate?" he asked.

"No, not exactly. The provisions of the will—I drew it—are simple enough—in a way. But there is such a large amount of property to deal with."

"Yes, yes, Smyrthwaite was very close, of course, very reticent. Still I have always supposed there was a good deal of money. Now, what about is the amount, approximately, I mean—if you are free to tell me?"

"Under the circumstances I see no reason why I should not tell you—in strict confidence, of course."

"That is understood, my dear Challoner. Whatever you may feel it advisable, in the interests of these ladies, to say to me goes no farther, absolutely no farther."

This from one whose face was irradiated with the joy of prospective gossipings struck his hearer as a trifle simple-minded. Never mind. The said hearer had the game well in hand.

"I take that for granted, Colonel," he answered. "Professional instinct made me allude to it. One gets so much into the habit of insisting on silence regarding confidential communications that one insists when, as in the present case, there's not the slightest necessity for doing so. A form of words—nothing more. With you I know I'm safe. Well, the estate stands at about two hundred thousand, rather more than less, with a considerable yearly income from the mills at Leeds in addition."

Haig stopped short. He went very red in the face.

"Yes, it makes a very tidy heiress of each of the ladies," Challoner said, parenthetically.

"It all goes to them?"

"Practically all of it."

"I doubt if women should be left so much money," Colonel Haig exclaimed, explosively. Remembrance of his own eight or nine hundred a year disgusted him. What a miserable pittance! He moved forward again, still red from mingled surprise and disgust, his neat, frizzly, gray mustache positively bristling. "Yes, I doubt, I very much doubt," he repeated, "whether it is doing any woman a kindness, an unmarried woman, in particular, to leave her so much money. It opens the door to all sorts of risks. Women have no idea of money. It's not in them. The position of an heiress is a most unfortunate one, in my opinion. It places her at the mercy of every description of rascally, unscrupulous fortune hunter."

"You're perfectly right, Colonel—I agree," Challoner said. "It does."

His face was unmoved, but his voice shook, gurgling in his throat like that of a man on the edge of a boisterous horse-laugh. For a few steps the two walked in silence, then he added: "And that is why I am so relieved at having you to turn to, Colonel. Unscrupulous fortune hunters are just the sort of dirty gentry we shall have to protect the two ladies against."

"You may be sure of me, Challoner," Colonel Haig said, with much seriousness. "We must work together."

"Yes, we must work together, Colonel—in a good cause—that's it." And again his voice shook.

"Are you executor?" the other inquired, after a pause.

"No, and, between ourselves, I am glad of it. I shall be able to safeguard the Miss Smyrthwaites' interests better since I am not dealing directly with the property. Miss Joanna and a distant relative are the executors. I think the second appointment a bad one, and ventured to say as much to Mr. Smyrthwaite when I drew this new will for him about two years ago."

"A new will?"

"Yes; a name occurred in the earlier one which he wished to have cut out."

The speaker paused, and the other man rose, metaphorically speaking, as a fish at a neatly cast fly.

"Ah! his son's, I suppose. Poor Bibby's—William, I mean, William Smyrthwaite. Everybody knew him as Bibby."

"Yes," Challoner said, "his son, William Smyrthwaite. Of course I am aware something went wrong there, but, to tell you the truth, Colonel, I have never got fairly at the story."

"Well you may take it from me the story is a disgraceful one. I am a man of the world, Challoner, and not squeamish. I can make excuses, but, you may take it from me, young Smyrthwaite was a hopelessly bad lot. A low, vicious, ill-conditioned young fellow—degenerate, that is the only word, I am sorry to say. He was several years younger than his sisters. I heard all about it at the time through friends. There were nasty rumors about him at Rugby, and he was expelled—quite properly. His father put him into the business. Then things happened at Leeds—gambling, chorus girls, drink. I need not go into particulars. There was some question, too, of embezzlement, and young Smyrthwaite had to disappear. It was a terrible blow to his father. He decided to leave Leeds. He came south, bought the Tower House and settled here. I think he was quite right. The position was a very humiliating one, especially for his wife and daughters."

Joseph Challoner listened carefully.

"And what became of the boy?"

"Oh, dead—fortunately for everybody concerned, dead."

"Dead? Very fortunate. But a proven case of death or only an accepted one?"

"Oh, proven, I take it. Yes, unquestionably proven. I never heard there was the slightest doubt about that."

"What a chattering fool the old bird is!" Challoner said to himself irreverently, adding, aloud: "Apparently, then, we may leave Master Bibby out of our count. That's a good thing, anyhow. I am extremely obliged to you for giving me such a clear account of the whole matter, Colonel. It explains a great deal. Really I can't be sufficiently glad that I happened to run across you this afternoon. I may call it providential. But now to go back to another young gentleman, Miss Joanna's coexecutor, who is not in the very least dead."

"Yes?" Haig inquired, with avidity. "Speak without reserve, Challoner. Ask me anything you are in any difficulty about."

"I don't want to abuse your good nature. And I don't forget you have seen a lot more of the world than I have. Your point of view may be different. I shall be only too glad if you can reassure me. For I tell you, Colonel, it makes me uneasy. England's good enough for me, England and Englishmen. I may be narrow-minded and insular, but I can do without the foreigner."

"Yes, and I'm not sure you are not right in that," the other said, rising at another clever cast. "Yes?"

"I am glad you agree. Well, this coexecutor whom we have to look after is, to all intents and purposes, a foreigner, that is to say, born abroad—a Parisian and a journalist. Ah, exactly! I am not sorry to see it strikes you as it did me, Colonel, when poor Mr. Smyrthwaite first broached the subject. Doesn't sound very substantial, does it? And when you remember the amount of money that will pass through his hands! Still you may be able to reassure me. By the way, I suppose he must be a relative of yours. His name is Adrian Savage."

"Never heard of him in my life," Haig exclaimed, irritably. Then, afraid he had altogether too roundly given away his ignorance, he went on:

"But wait a moment, wait! Yes, now I come to think, I do recollect that one of the Savages, a younger son, went into the medical profession. I never saw anything of him. There was a strong feeling in the family about it. Like marriage with a dissenter, they felt doctoring wasn't exactly the thing for a Savage. So he was advised, if he must follow the medical profession, to follow it at a distance. I remember I heard he settled in Paris and married there. This journalist fellow may be a son of his." The speaker cleared his throat. He was put about, uncertain what line it would be best to take. "At one time I used to be over there often. As a young man I knew my Paris well enough—"

"I'll be bound you did, Colonel," Challoner put in, with a flattering suggestiveness. "Silly old goat!" he said to himself.

"Yes, I do not deny I have amused myself there a little in the past," the other acknowledged. "But somehow I never looked Doctor Savage up. It was unfriendly, perhaps, but—well—in point of fact I never did."

"Had neater and sweeter things to look up, eh, Colonel?" Challoner put in again. "I believe you. Wish I'd ever had your luck."

Here resisted laughter got the better of him, jarring the quiet of the woods with a coarseness of quality startling even to his own ears. Nothing betrays lack of breeding more than a laugh. He knew this, and it galled him. He felt angry, and hastened in so far as he might to recover himself.

"Seriously, though, joking apart, I very much wish, as things turn out, you had kept in touch with the doctor," he said. "Then you would have been in a position to give me your views on this son of his. Mr. Smyrthwaite seems to have taken an awful fancy to him. But I don't attach much importance to that. He was ill and crotchety, just in the state of health to take unreasoning likes and dislikes. And I can't help being anxious, I tell you, Colonel. It does not affect my pocket in any way—I'm not thinking of myself. And I am no sentimentalist. My line of business leaves neither time nor room for that. Still I tell you candidly it goes tremendously against the grain with me to think of some irresponsible, long-haired, foreign, Bohemian chap being mixed up with the affairs of two refined English gentlewomen like the Miss Smyrthwaites. Of course he may turn out a less shadowy individual than I anticipate. Nothing would please me better than that he should. But, in any case, I mean to keep my eye upon him. He's not going to play hanky-panky with the ladies' money if Joseph Challoner can prevent it. I hold myself responsible to you, as well as to them and to my own conscience, Colonel, to keep things straight."

"I am confident you will do your best," the other replied, graciously. "And I trust you to consult me whenever you think fit. Don't hesitate to make use of me."

"I won't, Colonel. Make yourself easy on that point. I am greatly indebted to you. I won't."

The end of the long avenue had come into sight, where, between high stone gate-posts—surmounted by just-lighted gas-lamps—it opens upon the main road and tram-line running from Stourmouth to Barryport. After the silence and solitude of the woods the street appeared full of movement. A row of shop-fronts, across the roadway, threw a yellow glare over the pavement and on to the snow-heaps piled in the gutter. The overhead wires hummed in the frosty air. A gang of boys snowballed one another in the middle of the street, scattering before some passing cart, and rushed back, shouting, to renew the fight. Groups of home-going workmen tramped along the pavement, their breath and the smoke of their pipes making a mist about their heads in the cold winter dusk.

Challoner held out a paw-like hand.

"You'll excuse me if I leave you, Colonel?" he said. "I have outstayed my time already. I am afraid I must be getting home—a lot of work waiting for me. Good-night."

He turned away. Then, just inside the gates, a sudden thought apparently striking him, he hesitated and came back.

"By the way," he said, "I had been meaning to write a line to you to-day, but this sad business at the Tower House put it clean out of my head. I may just as well ask you by word of mouth. It'll save you the bother of a note. Woodford has nominated me for election at the club. Your name, as one of the oldest and most influential members, of course, carries much weight. If you second me you'll do me a great kindness."

Here the towering, well-lighted tram from Barryport sailed majestically up, with a long-drawn growl, ending in a heavy clang and thin shriek as the powerful brakes gripped, bringing it to a stop.

"All right. I may take it for settled, then. I have your promise. Really I am awfully obliged to you. Don't let me make you miss your tram, though. Hi! conductor, steady a minute. Colonel Haig's going with you.—Thanks, Colonel, good-night," Challoner cried, all in a breath, without giving the hustled, harried, almost apoplectic ex-warrior time to utter a syllable good or bad.

"Had him neatly," he said to himself, as he turned once more into the stillness and twilight of the woods. "He can't back out—daren't back out. Their swagger, aristocratic, d—— your impudence Stourmouth Club taken by assault!"

And again he laughed, but this time the coarse quality of the sound failed to jar him. On the contrary, he rather relished its stridency. He was winning all along the line, so he could afford—for a little while here alone under the snow-laden fir-trees in the deepening dusk—to be himself.

In the hall at Heatherleigh his man-servant—a thin, yellowish, gentle, anxious-looking person, who played the part of shuttlecock to the battledores of his strong master and of a commanding wife, ten years his senior—met him.

"Mr. Pewsey is waiting for you in the smoke-room, sir," he said, while helping Challoner off with the pepper-and-salt-mixture overcoat. "And Mrs. Spencer, sir, called to leave this note. She said there was no answer, but I was to be sure and give it to you directly you came in."

Challoner took the note, and stopped for a minute under the hanging, colored-glass gas-lantern to read it. It was written in a large, showy, yet tentative hand, on highly scented mauve paper with a white border to it, and ran thus:

"B. gone to Mary church to dine and sleep. Alone. Come round if you can after dinner. Want you. Quite safe. Love. GWYNNIE."

Challoner rolled the small scented sheet into a ball and tossed it viciously on to the fire, watching till the flame licked it up.

"No, there's no answer. Quite true, Mrs. Gwynnie—even less answer than you suppose or will in the least bit like," he said, between his teeth.

Then he opened the door and passed into the smoking-room to join his junior partner, with a quite expressionless face.

CHAPTER V

PASSAGES FROM JOANNA SMYRTHWAITE'S LOCKED BOOK

"You won't go sitting up writing to-night, Miss Joanna? You should get right into bed, for you are properly worn out."

"It would be useless for me to attempt to sleep yet, Isherwood, but I shall not sit up late."

This, between two women standing on the gallery of the spacious, heavily carpeted stair-head. Save for the feeble light of their glass-shaded candles the place was in darkness. The atmosphere, oppressive from the heat given off by radiators in the hall below and upon the landing itself, was permeated by the clinging odor of some disinfectant. They spoke in subdued voices, covered and whispering as those of reverent-minded persons unwillingly compelled to hold conversation in church. The northeasterly wind—which, at this same hour, cried homeless along the steep house-roofs of the *Quai Malaquais* to the disturbance of Gabrielle St. Leger's meditations upon the deceptions of modern marriage—raked the thick-set fir and pine trees bordering the carriage-drive outside, and shattered against the elaborately leaded panes of the high staircase windows, making the thick velvet curtains which covered them sway and quiver in the draught.

"You had better let me wait and brush your hair as usual, Miss Joanna. It might soothe your nerves," the elder of the two women said. She was a comely, vigilant-eyed person, a touch of mustache on her long upper lip and a ruddiness upon her high cheek-bones as of sun-ripened fruit. Though well on in the sixties, her carriage was upright, and her hair, looped window-curtain fashion over her ears and plaited in a round at the back of her head, still showed as black as her close-fitted black silk dress. First nurse in the Smyrthwaite family, now for many years lady's maid and housekeeper, capable, prejudiced, caustic of speech, untiring in faithful devotion to those—the very few—whom she loved, Mrs. Isherwood, virgin and spinster, represented a domestic type becoming all too rapidly extinct.

The younger woman made no immediate answer. Her bearing and attitude bespoke a great lassitude as she stood resting her right hand on the ball of the newel-post. The light of the candle she carried was thrown upward, showing a face making but small claim to beauty. A thick, pasty complexion, straight, heavy, yellowish auburn hair turned back over a pad from the high, square forehead. No sufficient softening of the pale, anxious, blue-gray eyes by eyelash or eyebrow. An acquiline nose with upcut winged nostrils, and a mouth, which, but for the compression of the lips, might have argued a certain coarseness of nature. A face, in fine, almost painful in its effect of studied self-repression, patient as it was unsatisfied, an arrested, consciously resisted violence of feeling perceptible in every line of it.

"I could hardly bear having my hair brushed to-night, I am afraid, Isherwood," she said, presently. "I am really only fit to be alone. You say Margaret is quite composed now? You think she will sleep?"

"Oh! dear me, yes, Miss Joanna, Miss Margaret will sleep. She drank a full tumbler of hot milk and fairly settled off before I left her. I wish I was half as easy about your night's rest as I am about hers."

"My good Isherwood," Miss Smyrthwaite said, softly, as she moved away across the landing. Suddenly she paused and came hurriedly back.

"Isherwood, Isherwood," she called under her breath, "the smell of that disinfectant seems so very strong. You're sure the door of—of papa's room is shut and locked?"

"Dear me, yes, Miss Joanna. I have the key here in my pocket. Mr. Smallbridge and I went in the last thing before I came up, and I locked the door myself. You've got the smell of that nasty stuff in your nose. Anybody would, the amount those nurses used of it! Now you promise you'll ring, Miss Joanna, if you should feel nervous or poorly in the night? You know it never troubles me the least to get up."

"My good Isherwood!" the younger woman said again.

From the age of fourteen Joanna Smyrthwaite had been encouraged to keep a diary. For the diary was an acknowledged part of the system of feminine education—"forming the character," it used euphemistically to be called—that obtained so largely among serious-minded persons of leisure during the earlier half of the Victorian Era. Thoughtfulness, reserve, methodical habits, the saving of time, hands never unemployed, the conforming of one's own conduct to and testing of the conduct of others by certain wholly arbitrary and conventional standards—these nominal rather than real virtues were perpetually pressed home upon the minds and consciences of the "well-brought-up" female child. Inevitable reaction carried the majority of *fin-de-siècle* female children notably far in the quite opposite direction. But in some instances the older system survived its appointed span—that of the Smyrthwaite family may be cited as a case in point. The consequences were of doubtful benefit; since conditions have changed, and adaptability to environment is a necessity of mental as well as of physical health.

Joanna Smyrthwaite was now in her twenty-ninth year. She still kept a diary. Written in a very small, neat, scholarly hand, it filled many octavo volumes, bound in dark-purple leather, each with a clasp and lock to it, her initials and the date stamped in gold lettering on the back. She was a diarist absolutely innocent of any thought or wish of eventual print. A fierce modesty, indeed, overlay the whole matter of her diary. That it should be secret, unseen by any eyes save her own, gave it its value. She regarded it with a singular jealousy of possession. As nothing else belonging to her, her diaries were exclusively, inviolably her own. It may almost be asserted that she took refuge in them, as weaker women, under stress of unsatisfied passion, will take refuge in a drug.

And so to-night, without waiting to make any change in her dress, feverishly, as one at last set free from unwelcome observation, she pushed back the cylinder of the handsome satinwood bureau in her bedroom, set lighted candles upon the flat desk of it, took the current volume of the diary out of one of the pigeon-holes, and sat down, her thin hands trembling with mingled fatigue and excitement, to write.

"*Wednesday, Jan. 12, 190-*

"It has been impossible to put down anything for some days. The strain of nursing and the demands upon my time have been incessant and too great. I do not know that I am justified in writing to-night. Isherwood begged me not to do so, but it is a relief. It will quiet me, and bring me into a more normal relation to myself and to my own thought. For days I have been a mere beast of burden, bearing the anxieties of the sick-room and of the household upon my back. My intellectual life has been at a standstill. I have read nothing, not even the newspapers—The Times or last week's Spectator. There has been perpetual friction between the servants and the nurses which I have had to adjust. Margaret could not be looked to for help in this. She is too easily influenced, being disposed always to take sides with the person who last spoke to her. Mr. Savage cannot arrive before to-morrow afternoon. I am

glad of this breathing space, for the thought of his coming is oppressive to me. He appeared so lively and so much a man of society, when we met him in Paris, that I felt shy and awkward in talking to him. But it is useless to dwell upon this. He is coming. I must accept the fact. My head aches. I keep on fancying there are strange sounds in the house. But, as Isherwood says, I am overtired. I meant to state quite simply what has occurred since I last wrote; but I find it difficult to concentrate my attention.

"Papa died just before five o'clock this morning. It was snowing and the wind was high. Isherwood and I were in the room, with the night-nurse. Margaret had gone to lie down and I did not call her. She has reproached me for this since and will probably continue to do so. Perhaps I acted wrongly in not calling her, but I was dazed. Everything appeared unreal, and I did not grasp what was occurring until they told me. We had watched so long that I had grown dull and unresponsive. I was sitting upon the ottoman—in which mamma's evening gowns used to be kept—at the foot of the bed, when Isherwood came close to me and said, 'Miss Joanna, Mr. Smyrthwaite's going.' I said, 'Where?' not understanding what she meant. 'You had better be quick,' the night-nurse said. Her manner has never been respectful. I got up and went to the side of the bed. Papa's eyes were open. They seemed to stare at something which made him angry. He used to look thus at poor Bibby. I felt a spirit of opposition arise in me. This I now regret, for it was not a proper state of mind. Presently the night-nurse felt his pulse and held a hand-mirror to his mouth. I saw that the surface of it remained unblurred. She looked across at Isherwood and nodded familiarly. 'I thought so,' she said. Then I understood that papa was dead; and I felt sorry for him, both because I knew how much he disliked the idea of dying, and also because I should never be afraid of him any more.

"The night-nurse said, quite out loud—her offhand way of speaking has struck me, all along, as objectionable—'There is no reason Miss Smyrthwaite should stop any longer. I always prefer to do the laying-out by myself. I get through with it so much quicker.'

" 'Isherwood will remain,' I said. I felt it right to assert my authority, and I so dread the upper servants being annoyed. It makes everything so difficult to manage.

" 'That is quite unnecessary,' she answered. 'If I require assistance for lifting I can call Nurse Bagot. She will be coming on duty anyhow in another hour, and as the case is over I should not mind disturbing her. She can finish her rest later.'

"But I wish Mrs. Isherwood to remain,' I repeated.

" 'Of course I shall stay, Miss Joanna,' Isherwood said. 'It is my place to do so. It is not suitable or likely I should leave the laying-out to strangers. Besides, I do not take orders from anybody in this house but you or Miss Margaret.'

"To have a wrangle just then was painful; but I think both Isherwood and I spoke under great provocation.

"Afterward I went to Margaret. It was still dark, and I heard the wind and snow driving against the passage windows. I found Margaret difficult to awaken. When I told her, she became hysterical and said I ought to have spoken less suddenly. But Margaret cries readily. I believe it is a relief to her and enables her to get over trouble more easily. I have had no disposition to cry so far, yet I have been much more of a companion to papa than Margaret ever has. Latterly, in particular, she

avoided being with him on the plea that was too exhausting for her. Sometimes I have thought her selfish. When I asked her to sit with him she was so ready with excuses. Still he cared for her more than for me. She is pretty and I am not—less than ever now, my eyes look so tired and have red rims to them—and then Margaret never opposed him. She has a way of slipping out of things without expressing a direct opinion. I did oppose him during the terrible troubles about poor Bibby, and when he spoke harshly or sarcastically before mamma. And I kept him at Carlsbad, away from mamma, during the last days of her illness, by telegraphing false reports to him. That is nearly eight years ago. He never actually knew that I had deceived him, unless Margaret has hinted at it, and I hardly think she would dare do so—she is not very courageous—but he suspected something, and he never forgave me, although he gradually grew more and more dependent upon me. I have examined my conscience strictly, and it is clear in relation to him. Yet he looked angry this morning when he was dead. I suppose I shall always think of him as looking angry. But I think I do not care. How extraordinary it is to feel that—to feel that I have ceased to mind, to be afraid.

"I sent round quite early to Heatherleigh for Mr. Challoner. He came at once. He strongly expressed the wish to do all he can to help me, and inquired more than once for Margaret. He said that, directly he heard of papa's death, he thought of Margaret, as he feared she would be prostrated by the shock. He said she impressed him as so fragile and so sensitive. The words struck me because it had never occurred to me that Margaret was fragile. She has better health than I have. She is more excitable than I am, and easily gets into a fuss, but I do not think her particularly sensitive. Probably it was just Mr. Challoner's way of expressing himself, but I cannot think the terms are particularly applicable. I am afraid Mr. Challoner is vexed at papa having appointed Mr. Savage my coexecutor. He intimated that Margaret had been slighted by the arrangement. I may do him an injustice, but I fancy he is disappointed at not being executor himself. In this I am not to blame. As I told him, I should have preferred to act with him rather than with Mr. Savage, as he knows so much about the property. I told him I urged papa, in as far as I could, to give up the idea of appointing Mr. Savage. I think this pleased him. He kindly sent off the telegram to Mr. Savage for me and the obituary notices for the newspapers himself. He said he would call later in the day to inquire for Margaret, and to see if there was anything further he could do for us. I told Margaret this. She became more composed when she knew he was coming, and ceased reproaching me for not having called her when papa was dying. She said she should be glad to see Mr. Challoner. She has always liked him better than I have. He is clever, but uncultivated. But Margaret has never really cared about culture. I know mamma feared she might become frivolous and worldly if she was not under intellectual influences. If mamma had only lived till now!—I dare not develop all I mean in saying that. I foresee difficulties with Margaret. I earnestly hope she will not take up the idea she has been slighted. I do not want to put myself forward, yet it is my duty not only to carry out papa's instructions, but, in as far as I know them, mamma's wishes also.

"I tried to word the obituary notices as papa would have liked. Perhaps I should have inserted the words *Liberal* and *Unitarian*, so as to define his political and

religious position. Yet he differed from the main body of Unitarians on so many points and condemned so many modern Liberal tendencies and measures that I did not feel justified in employing those terms. They are generic, and, as it appeared to me, committed him to views he had long ceased actually to hold. I should have consulted Margaret, but she was very fretful just then; and it was useless to ask Mr. Challoner, as he would not appreciate fine distinctions, I fancy. So I simply put 'At his residence, the Tower House, Baughurst Park Estate, Stourmouth, Hants, Montagu Priestly Smyrthwaite, formerly of the Priestly Mills and of Highdene, Leeds, aged seventy-six. No flowers, by special request.' I suppose Andrew Merriman and others from the mills will attend the funeral. I dread seeing Andrew Merriman again. It will bring back all the terrible trouble about poor Bibby. And I cannot think how Mr. Savage will get on with the people from the mills. It would have been simpler to have Mr. Challoner act officially in the capacity of host. I dare not think much about the funeral.

"After luncheon I filled in their papers and dismissed the nurses. I think they expected some present, but I did not feel it necessary to give them any. They had only done what they were well paid to do; and I liked neither of them, though Nurse Bagot was the least patronizing and interfering. Their refusing to take their meals in the housekeeper's room and the upper servants' objection to waiting upon them made arrangements very trying. I sympathized with the servants, but I had to consider the nurses, lest they should be quarrelsome and make everybody even more uncomfortable. I am thankful we had no professional nurses when mamma was ill, and that Isherwood and I nursed her. But this case was different. We could not have done without professional help even had we wished to do so.

"I went to papa's room this afternoon, when the undertakers had finished taking measurements for the coffin. I thought it my duty to go. I supposed Margaret would have accompanied me, but she refused, saying it would only upset her again just as she was expecting Mr. Challoner. I told her I feared the servants might think it unnatural and unfeeling if she did not go into the room at all. She said if she felt better to-morrow she would make an effort to go then. I hope she will. I should not like her to expose herself to criticism, even though unspoken, on the part of the servants. One of our first duties, now we are alone, is to set an example to the household. I think she is wrong in putting off going. It will not be any less painful to-morrow than to-day. And if I can bear it, she should be able to bear it. We are different, but I do not pretend to be Margaret's superior in any way.

"The room was very cold. I suppose I remarked this particularly because of the high temperature which has been kept up in it for so many weeks. The upper sashes of all the windows were open behind the drawn blinds, which the air alternately inflated and sucked outward. This made an unpleasant dragging sound. I was foolish to mind it, but I am tired. There was a sheet over the bed, which was quite proper; but there were sheets over the toilet-glass, the cheval-glass, and the mirror above the chimneypiece also. This must have been Isherwood's doing. It placed me in a difficulty. I did not want to hurt her feelings, but I know papa would have disapproved. He was so intolerant of all superstition, that the ignorant notion any one might see the dead person's face reflected in a looking-glass in the death-chamber, and that it would bring misfortune, would have made him extremely

angry. He was contemptuous of uneducated people and of their ideas. I had begun taking the sheet off the cheval-glass when I saw that Margaret's gray Persian cat was in the room. I suppose it must have slipped in beside me without my noticing it. The light was very dim and I was thinking only of my own feelings. I called it, in a whisper, but it ran away from me mewing. It went twice right round the bed, squeezing in between the head of it and the wall. It stood upon its hind-legs, and then crouched, preparing to spring up over the footboard. I drove it away, but it kept on mewing. It hid under the bed and I could not dislodge it. I was afraid to go across and ring the bell lest it should attempt to spring up again. The room grew dark. It was weak of me, but I felt helpless and nervous. I seemed to see a movement upon the bed, as though some one was trying to crawl from underneath the sheet and had not sufficient strength to do so. No doubt this was the result of my brain being so exhausted by sleeplessness and anxiety, but I could not reason with myself just then. It seemed quite real and it terrified me. I was afraid I should scream. At last Isherwood came. She had missed me and came to look for me. I could not explain at first, but when she understood, she called Sarah, the second housemaid, of whom the cat is fond. Sarah was frightened at entering the room, and Isherwood had to speak sharply to her. It was all very dreadful. At last Sarah coaxed the cat from under the bed. Isherwood knelt down and pushed it behind with a broom. When Sarah had taken it away, I lost my self-control and was quite overcome. I felt and spoke bitterly about the maids' and Margaret's carelessness. During the whole of papa's illness the cat has been kept out of the south wing, and it would have been so easy to exercise care a little longer. I said it appeared things were intentionally neglected now that papa's authority is withdrawn, and that those who formerly cringed to him now took pleasure in defying his orders and wishes. This was an exaggerated statement; but the incident brought home to me how little any person, even the most important and autocratic, matters as soon as he or she is dead. Death does more than level, it obliterates.

"Moreover, I could not rid my mind of the thought of those feeble, ineffectual movements beneath the sheet. This added to my distress and nervousness. I asked Isherwood to uncover the bed so that I might assure myself the body remained in the same position. I looked closely at it, though it was extremely painful to me to do so. The eyes were now closed, but the face was still severe, expressive of disapproval. Why, and for what? Obviously it is useless to disapprove of whatever may follow death—if, indeed, anything does, sensibly, follow it. Papa's belief in the survival of consciousness and individuality was of the slightest. So is mine. The so-called 'future life' is, I fear, but a 'fond thing vainly imagined.' The extinction of myriads of intelligent, highly organized and highly gifted beings after a few years—few, as against the vast stretch of astral or geologic periods—of earthly struggle, suffering, and attainment appears incredibly wasteful. But that constitutes no valid argument against extinction—at least, in my opinion, it would be weakly optimistic to accept it as a valid one. A very superficial study of biology convinces one of the supreme indifference of Nature to waste. As far as sentient living creatures, other than man, are concerned, Nature is certainly no economist. She destroys as lavishly as she creates. Therefore it is safer to eliminate all hope of restitution or reward from one's

outlook, and accustom oneself to the thought of extinction. I have long tried to school myself to this, but I find it difficult. I must try harder.

"Recalling the scene of this afternoon, I feel grateful to Isherwood. I was childishly unreasonable and passionate, and she was very patient with me. She is always kind to me; but I must not permit myself to lean too much upon her. She is an uneducated woman, and has the prejudices and superstitions of her class. To lean upon her might prove enfeebling to my character and judgment.

"I have not yet spoken to Margaret about the cat; for, when I was sufficiently composed to go down-stairs, Mr. Challoner had just left and she began talking about his visit, which seemed to have pleased and excited her. She praised his thoughtfulness and sympathy. No doubt he has valuable qualities, but I own something in his manner and way of expressing himself jars upon me. He is not quite gentleman-like in mind or appearance. Margaret called me proud and fastidious, and added that I took pleasure in depreciating those who showed her attention. That is neither true nor just, but I will be more careful what I say about people before her. It is unwise to be betrayed into discussions since she so often misunderstands me and so easily takes offense. Later on she spoke about our mourning. I had not given the subject a thought, I admit, since there has been so very much else to occupy me. I took for granted Madame Pell would make it for us, in Stourmouth, as she has done all our dressmaking lately. But Margaret said Madame Pell's things were always rather old-fashioned and that she wished to have our mourning from Grays'. I pointed out that it would be inconvenient and unsuitable for either of us to go up to London, for a day, just now. She replied that Grays' would send some one down with a selection for us to choose from. I mentioned expense. Margaret said that need not be considered, adding:

" 'Mr. Challoner tells me we shall both be rich. For years papa Has lived very much below his income and has saved a great deal of money. All the property is left to you and me. We shall each have a large fortune.'

"I was annoyed by her tone, which struck me as both exultant and unfeeling. I cannot forget that the greater proportion of papa's property would have been Bibby's, and it is dreadful to me that Margaret and I should profit by our brother's disgrace and death.—If he is dead! To the last mamma believed he was still alive, in hiding somewhere. I still believe it, and hope he may come back—poor, darling Bibby! Margaret, I am convinced, neither wishes nor hopes this. She has said more than once, lately, that if people do wrong it is better to put them out of one's life altogether, and I know she was thinking of Bibby. I could never put him out of my life, even if I wished to do so. I had the greatest difficulty to-day in not speaking of him when she talked about our large fortunes, but I controlled myself. I was still shaken by the scene with her cat, and feared I might exhibit temper. I did reason with her about having our mourning from Grays', as it seems to me ostentatious. But she became fretful and inclined to cry again, accusing me of always wanting my own way and of trying to deny her every little interest and amusement, so I thought it best to give in to her.

"I promised Isherwood I would not sit up, so I must stop writing. The smell of the disinfectant pursues and disgusts me, and I go on fancying that I hear strange noises in the house. I wish I could feel sorrow for papa's death. It would be more

natural. But I feel none. I only feel resentment against mamma's suffering and Bibby's disgrace. How cruel and purposeless the past seems! And I feel alarm in thinking of the future. I cannot picture Margaret's and my life alone together. Will it be cruel and purposeless, too? I shall not sleep, but I must not break my word to Isherwood. I will stop writing and go to bed."

Two o'clock had struck before Joanna Smyrthwaite closed and locked her diary and replaced it in the pigeon-hole of the satin wood bureau. At the same hour, away in Paris, Gabrielle St. Leger, answering little Bette's cry, gathered the child's soft, warm body in her arms and found the solution of many perplexities in the God-ordered discipline of mother-love. The less fortunate Englishwoman also received comfort—of a kind. Her hands were stiff with cold. The small, neat writing on the last page of the diary showed cramped and almost illegible. She was faint from the long vigil. Yet the fever of her spirit was somewhat appeased. For, in thus visualizing and recording her emotions, in thus setting the picture of her life outside her, she had, in a measure, lightened the strain of it. The drug from which she had sought relief acted, so to speak, allaying the ache of her loveless, unsatisfied heart.

CHAPTER VI

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF PUTTING NEW WINE INTO OLD BOTTLES

The next entry in Joanna Smyrthwaite's diary dates several days later. The handwriting, though quite clear, is less neat and studied than usual.

"I have a sense of crowding and confusion, of incapacity to realize and deal with that which is happening around me and in my own thought. Hence I have delayed writing. I hoped to attain composure and lucidity; but, since these seem as far off as ever, it is useless to wait any longer. Possibly the act of writing may help me.

"Mr. Savage arrived on Thursday, immediately after luncheon. We had not expected him until the evening, and I felt unprepared. I am afraid my reception of him was awkward and ungracious, but his quick speech and brilliant manner made me nervous. He spoke at once of his respect for papa, and expressed sympathy for us in our bereavement, adding that he 'placed himself entirely at our disposition.' I found it difficult to make a suitable reply. I do not know whether he noticed this—probably he put it down to my grief—and I am not grieved. I am hard and cold, and, I am afraid, resentful. All of which is wrong. I do not attempt to justify my state of mind, but it would be dishonest to pretend, even to myself, about it.

"To return to Mr. Savage. He speaks English fluently, but employs words and frames his sentences in a peculiar manner. This helps to give vivacity and point to all which he says, but it might also give rise to misunderstandings. I trust it will not do so when he and Mr. Challoner and Andrew Merriman discuss business. Smallbridge valets him, not Edwin. I was uncertain whether Smallbridge would like to do so, but he said he preferred it. I think Mr. Savage has made a good impression upon the servants. I am glad of this. He is certainly very courteous to them. After Margaret and I came up-stairs, the first evening he was here, she remarked that he was very handsome. She has repeated this frequently since. I suppose it is true. Margaret is always very much occupied about personal appearance. Mr. Savage is, undoubtedly, very kind, and seems most anxious to save us trouble and take care of us. Margaret evidently likes this. I am unaccustomed to being taken care of. I find it embarrassing. It adds to my nervousness.

"I feel dissatisfied with myself, and anxious lest I should not behave with the dignity which my position, as head of the household, demands; but I am tired and so many new duties and new ideas crowd in on me. I seem to have lost my identity. Ever since I can remember, papa has occupied the central place in my thoughts and plans. His will and wishes supplied the pivot on which all our lives turned, and I cannot accustom myself to the absence of his authority. I am pursued by a fear that I am forgetting some order of his, or neglecting some duty toward him, for which omission I shall presently be called to account. He represented Fate, Nemesis to me. As I see now, I had never questioned but that his power, or right to use that power, was absolute. Even through all the trouble about poor Bibby, though I protested against his action, I never doubted his right to act as he saw fit. Now I cannot help reasoning about our relation to him, and asking myself whether—in the general scheme of things—it can be intended that one human being should exercise such complete and arbitrary control over the minds and consciences of others. I know that I was greatly his inferior in ability and knowledge, let alone that I am a woman and that, as his daughter, I owed him obedience. Still I cannot help feeling that I may have been rendered unnecessarily stupid and diffident through

subjection to him. Something which Mr. Savage said to-day at luncheon about Individualism —though I do not think he meant it to apply to papa—suggested to me that there are other forms of cannibalism besides that practised by the degraded savages who cook and eat the dead bodies of their captives. In civilized communities a more subtle, but more cruel, kind of cannibalism is neither impossible nor infrequent—a feeding upon the intelligence, the energies and personality of those about you, which, though it does not actually kill, leaves its victims sterile and helpless. I suppose this idea would be called morbid, and should not be encouraged. But my will is weak just now, and I cannot put it away from me. I am haunted by remembrance of the classic legend of Saturn devouring his own children. It is monstrous and shocking, yet it does haunt me. If papa had been less stern and exacting with Bibby, the latter might not have fallen into bad habits, or, at all events, might have had strength to recover from them. But papa's dominating personality made him hopeless and helpless, depriving him of self-respect and initiative. With me it has been the same, though in a lesser degree; and I am aware of this, especially when talking to Mr. Savage. Then I feel how dull I am, like some blighted, half-dead thing incapable of self-expression and spontaneity. And I cannot help knowing that he perceives this and pities me—not merely on account of our present trouble, but for something inalienably wanting in myself. This fills me with resentment toward the past, as though, by my education and home circumstances, I had been wronged and deprived of a power of happiness which was my natural right. Our lives were devoured—mamma's, Bibby's, mine—by papa's love of power and pursuit of self-exaltation. Only Margaret, in virtue of her slighter nature, escaped. It was so. I see it clearly. But I must not dwell on this. I have said it once now. I must let that suffice. To enlarge upon it is useless and would further embitter me.

"To go back to every-day matters. I asked Mr. Challoner to dine the night before last, so that he and Mr. Savage might make further acquaintance. I am afraid Mr. Savage found it a tedious dinner, after the brilliant society he has been accustomed to in Paris. I know I have little conversation, and Margaret, though she looked unusually animated, never really has very much to say. Mr. Challoner did not show to advantage. He is not at his ease with Mr. Savage. He is heavy and crude in speech and in appearance beside him. I thought he showed bad taste in his remarks about foreigners and his insistence on the superiority of everything English. I do not think Margaret remarked this, but it made me hot and nervous. Mr. Savage behaved with great courtesy, for which I was grateful to him. I am afraid I was a poor hostess, but we have entertained so little since we left Highdene, and then papa always led the conversation. We were merely listeners. The cooking was satisfactory with the exception of the cheese *soufflé*, the top of which was slightly burnt. I spoke to Rossiter about it this morning and begged her to be more careful in future.

"A young woman came from Grays' yesterday, bringing a profusion of dresses and millinery. Margaret seemed amused and interested, trying everything on, asking the young woman's advice and talking freely with her. I tried to be interested, too, but I did not find it easy. The styles seemed to me exaggerated and showy, and the prices exorbitant. I should prefer what is simpler for such deep mourning, but Margaret did not agree with me. It would not do for us to be differently dressed, and when I suggested modifications the young woman, supported by Margaret, overruled me. Margaret is fond of elaborate styles, and the young woman said that a good deal of fullness and trimming was necessary for me as I have so little figure. It was foolish to attach importance to the remarks of a person in her position, yet what she said hurt me. She admired Margaret's figure, or affected to do so, and paid her a number

of compliments. I looked at myself in the long glass in my room last night, after Margaret left me, and I see that I am very thin. My cheeks have fallen in and there are lines across my forehead and at the corners of my mouth. My face can give no pleasure to those who see it—the features are not good, and the expression is anxious. I look several years older than Margaret. I do not know why I should mind this. Long ago I accepted the fact that I was not pretty. But last night I was depressed by the realization of it. For the first time since papa's death I felt inclined to cry. When Isherwood came to undress me I made an excuse and sent her away. I did not want her to see me cry. I feared she might ask questions; and I had no reason for crying—at least no fresh reason, none certainly that I could explain to Isherwood. I am ashamed, remembering my state of mind last night. I could not write, neither could I sleep. I sat for a long while in front of the glass, looking at myself and crying. I seemed rarely to have seen a less pleasing woman. I have always valued intellect and talent more highly than beauty, but last night I doubted. My strongest convictions seemed to be slipping away from me. I suppose this is partly the result of physical strain. I must try not to give way thus to useless emotion.

"Mrs. Paull and the Woodfords called yesterday to inquire. So did Mrs. Spencer and Marion Chase. I was surprised at Mrs. Spencer calling. We have met her at garden-parties and at-homes, but we have never exchanged visits. No doubt her intention in calling was kind, but I should not care to be intimate with her. Neither she nor her sister appear to me very ladylike. I hope Margaret will not want to make friends with her now. She strikes me as a frivolous person, whose influence might be the reverse of desirable. Margaret saw Marion, saying she wished to consult her about some details of our mourning. I did not see her. She and Margaret spent more than an hour together in the blue sitting-room. The Pottingers and Mrs. Norbiton sent around cards of inquiry by a servant to-day. I think every one wishes to be kind. Papa was very much respected, though perhaps he was not liked. He was more highly educated and more intellectual than any one here, and that helped to make him unpopular. His conversation and manner tended to make others aware of their mental inferiority, which they resented. This was only natural, yet it increased our isolation.

"Colonel Rentoul Haig called on the day of papa's death. He has written since, very civilly, asking if he can be of any help to us. He appears anxious to make Mr. Savage's acquaintance, but I do not want to ask any one here until after the funeral. Colonel Haig assumes the tone of a near relation. This pleased Margaret, and she is annoyed at my unwillingness to invite him until after the funeral. I think she is flattered by his expression of interest in our affairs.

"I am worried about Margaret. Mr. Challoner is here constantly, and I cannot help observing how much attention he pays her. He refers to her on every occasion and insists upon asking her opinion. It is almost as though he placed her and himself in opposition to Mr. Savage and me; this causes delays in business, and unnecessary discussions which are very tiresome. His tone in speaking of or to Margaret is protective, as though he thought she was not being well treated. Perhaps I am unjust toward him, but he and Margaret are so frequently together. He asks for her and goes up to the blue sitting-room to see her. I am sure Mr. Savage observes this. I feel very anxious lest any wrong impression should gain ground among the servants or others. I dread anything approaching gossip just now. Since we left Highdene we have always kept ourselves free of that. Ever since we came here people have known little or nothing of our doings and affairs, and it would humiliate me that they should be canvassed now. I wish Margaret would be more careful of appearances. Then, too, although I do not like

her, it is our duty to consider Mrs. Spencer. Her name has been so freely associated with that of Mr. Challoner. Every one has taken it for granted they will eventually marry. I ought to remind Margaret of this, since she seems to ignore it, and I have not the moral courage to do so. I am afraid of her tears and reproaches. When the funeral is over, Mr. Challoner will have less excuse for coming so often. I think I will wait. Things may arrange themselves, and I may be spared the unpleasantness of speaking.

"Something happened this evening which threw me into a strange excitement. I hardly know whether to set it down or not. I thought the impression would pass away, but I have been writing for more than an hour and it is still strongly upon me. My state of mind is exaggerated. Perhaps if I set it down I shall become more composed. When I bade Mr. Savage good-night in the hall—Margaret had gone on and was half-way up-stairs, she was not in a good temper—he spoke kindly about the responsibilities which have fallen upon me, and the amount I have had to do lately. He said he admired my business capacity and my high sense of duty. He addressed me as 'my dear cousin,' and kissed my right hand. This surprised and affected me. No one ever kissed my hand before. The tones of his voice are very varied. They caused me unexpected emotion. All was said and done very lightly and gracefully, almost playfully, but I cannot forget it. When I came up-stairs I locked the door of my room, and walked up and down in the firelight, looking at my hand, for a long while before I recovered sufficient self-control to light the candles and sit down and write. I have a strange feeling toward my own hand. It seems to have gained an intrinsic beauty and value, as of something quite apart from myself. I look at it with a sense of admiration. I enjoy touching it with my other hand. And yet I am doubtful whether to write this down. Only these sensations are so new to me that, when they are past, I shall be glad, I think, to have some record of them. I wrote about other things first, to-night, to test whether the impression was fugitive or not. It is still with me, though I am quite composed now. I am composed, but I still look at my hand with emotion. I will not write any more. I think I shall sleep to-night."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH ADRIAN HELPS TO THROW EARTH INTO AN OPEN GRAVE

Adrian Savage, meanwhile, his native buoyancy of spirit notwithstanding, became increasingly sensible of the depressing moral atmosphere surrounding him. He was impatient of it. For did they not really take things rather ridiculously hard, these excellent English people? Had they no sense of proportion? Had they no power of averaging, no little consolations of good-tempered philosophy? He went so far, in moments of levity, as to accuse *le bon Dieu* of reprehensible squandering by thus bestowing the eminently good gift of life upon persons so deplorably incapable of profiting by it. To him they appeared thankless, cowardly, and quite unpardonably clumsy in their handling of opportunity. Moreover, while curiously clannish, ready on the slightest provocation to stand back to back against the world, they waged internecine war, being permanently suspicious of, and unamiable toward, one another. If this represented a fair sample of the much-vaunted English home and the English character—well, for his part, Adrian was of opinion they did these things quite as well, if not a great deal better, in France!

He shrugged his shoulders, elevated his black eyebrows, stroked his neat beard, trying at once to overcome his sense of depression and stifle his sense of humor. The atmosphere would, he told himself, no doubt become more exhilarating when poor Montagu Smyrthwaite's body had been removed from that rather terrible best bedroom—apparently "turned up," as the maids have it, for spring cleaning—and finally consigned to the tomb. Never had he seen a dead fellow-creature treated with such meager tribute, either in language or symbol, of human pity or eternal hope! It shocked his sensibility that the corpse should lie there, locked away by itself in a cold, dismal twilight of drawn blinds, without any orderly setting-out of the death-chamber, without watchers, or prayer offered, or lighted candles, or flowers, or other suggestion either of tenderness or of religious obligation. Observances of this sort, he was given to understand by Joseph Challoner, were discredited in highly intellectual circles, such as that in which the Smyrthwaites moved, as savoring of antiquated and unscientific superstitions. The result, to Adrian's thinking, presented an effect at once so abjectly domestic, and so miserably deficient in any appreciation of the eternal mystery of human fate, that the crudest death-rites of the most degraded aborigines would have been preferable.

And then, by a singular inversion of sentiment, it was held necessary as a testimony of respect to keep the poor, disagreeable old gentleman's body waiting such a quite inordinately long time for interment! During a, to Adrian, positively endless week did it remain there, amid a doleful array of dusting-sheets and disinfectants! So that, what with the dark, snow-patched fir woods without, and the dark, neutral-tinted house within; what with conventionally hushed footsteps and lowered voices, plus an all-pervasive odor of iodiform tainting the close, heated air, the young man found the present among quite the most trying and distasteful of all his personal experiences.

Yet, as the interminable days went by—while Joseph Challoner, jealous alike of his own position and of the newcomer's breeding and ability, alternately bluffed, snarled and flattered, and pompous, little Colonel Haig fell headlong from attempted patronage to a certain fulsomeness of conciliation—against this dismal background the figure of Joanna Smyrthwaite came to stand out, to Adrian's seeing, with an intensity of moral effort and sustained determination of duty both impressive and admirable. Beneath the bloodless surface,

behind the anxious, unlovely countenance and coldly nervous manner, he began to divine a remarkable character. He had been mistaken in calling her a shadow. She was a distinct entity, but she was also, to him, quite arrestingly unattractive. And, just on that account, the chivalry both of the man and the artist grew alert to be very gentle to her, to omit no smallest offering of friendliness or courtesy. The very reason and purpose of woman's existence being charm and beauty—his thought turned with a great yearning to remembrance of a certain enigmatic fair lady, the windows of whose rose-red and canvas-colored drawing-room overlooked the heart of Paris from above the *Quai Malaquais*—it was pitiful in the extreme to see any woman thus disfranchised.

The inherent tragedy of that disfranchisement was brought home to him, with peculiar force, on the evening following Montagu Smyrthwaite's funeral. For eventually, almost to Adrian's surprise, the poor lonely corpse really did get itself buried! Then, at the Tower House, the blinds were drawn up, and the mourners, local and official, returning thither, discarding the appointed countenance assumed as due to the mournful character of the rites lately accomplished and resuming that common to them under ordinary conditions, prepared almost jovially to do justice to an excellent luncheon. The Miss Smyrthwaites excused themselves from attendance, no other ladies being there, so it fell to Adrian's lot to preside at the banquet. He was amused to note the fact that they had left all which was mortal of the late owner of the house in the new West Stourmouth cemetery—which, with its pale monuments, roads and pathways, showed as a gigantic scar upon the face of the dusky moorland—in no perceptible degree impaired the healthy appetite of any member of the company. To eat offers agreeably convincing testimony that one is as yet well within the pale of the living; and none of the eighteen or twenty gentlemen present, whatever their diversities of profession or of social standing, entertained the faintest desire to follow Montagu Smyrthwaite—their neighbor, kinsman, patron, or employer—to the grave in any sense save a strictly complimentary one. That final civility being now duly paid in respect of him, it was in the spirit of those who receive well-earned reward for well-performed labor that they sat down to feed.

In Adrian, both the Latin and the Catholic were still somewhat in revolt against this scant tenderness shown toward death. The whole matter from start to finish had been, as he reflected, notably of the earth-to-earth order. The alacrity, displayed by the assistants, in the direction of food and drink, was of the earth earthy, too. It, however, had at least the merit of being very human. Therefore, to him, it came as a rather humorous relief. Since his childhood his visits to England had been infrequent. With London and London society he was fairly well acquainted, but of provincial life and its social conditions he knew next to nothing. It followed that, in their racial and psychological aspects, the members of the present company were interesting to him. He tried to forget the poor, unloved corpse lying beneath the rattling snow-sodden gravel of the moorland and absorb himself in observation of the men seated on either side the dinner-table; to where, at the opposite end of it, the hard-featured, taciturn, sagacious, Yorkshire manufacturer, Andrew Merriman, manager and part proprietor of the Priestly woolen mills, faced him. This man had not taken off the appointed countenance, for the very good reason that he had never put it on, his nature being of a type which disdains conventional manifestations, either of joy or woe. Throughout the day, in this as in other particulars, Merriman's personality had struck Adrian as distinct, standing away from the rest of the company, silently declaring itself as possessed of unusual vigor and independence. He tried to enter into conversation, but invariably Joseph Challoner contrived to intervene; and it was not

till evening, shortly before Merriman and the rest of the Yorkshire contingent were due to depart to Stourmouth on their return journey by the night mail to Leeds, that he succeeded in getting private speech of him.

Then, after some brief mention of certain business details, Merriman said to him, gruffly, and as though grudgingly:

"I own I am more satisfied now I have met you, Mr. Savage. I did not much care about your appointment as executor. But I might have trusted Mr. Smyrthwaite's judgment. I have seldom known him wrong in his estimate of a man."

"You wish me to understand that you believe me to be quite fairly honest and competent?" Adrian returned, in mingled annoyance and pleasure. The intention was complimentary, but the address so singularly blunt! "I venture to agree with you, my dear sir. Without vanity, I have reason to believe I really am both."

"So much the better," Merriman answered, sardonically. "I have no wish to offend you. But an uncommon amount of property, in which I am interested, is changing hands; and honest, trustworthy persons are pretty scarce." He glanced from under penthouse eyebrows across the room to where Challoner, shifting his weight uneasily from one foot to the other, dancing-bear fashion, stood talking to Colonel Haig. "At least in my experience they are, Mr. Savage. When a family is dying out you generally find the males are debilitated specimens and the females the strongest. In this family, if Miss Smyrthwaite had been born a boy it would have been better for the name and for the business. Only, then, you and I shouldn't have met here to-day, because Mr. Smyrthwaite would never have left Highdene, and I should never have been manager at the mills."

"Which would have been a misfortune—for me, in any case," Adrian returned, suavely.

"Maybe," the other said. "But I can tell you Joanna Smyrthwaite's all right. She has sound commercial instincts if she's allowed to use them. It is an all-fired pity she's a woman."

An idea occurred to Adrian.

"She should have married," he said. This bluntness of statement became lamentably infectious! "Every woman should marry. Then her abilities find their natural expression and development."

"Quite right, sir. And it is on the cards, I am thinking, Joanna would have married if a man had not been too much afraid of her father to ask her. Mind," he added, "I have no quarrel with our late head. My father was a national schoolmaster. My grandfather was a mill-hand. I should not be where I am but for Mr. Smyrthwaite. He fancied my looks when I was quite a little nipper, picked me out and gave me my start. And I'm not boasting, any more than you were just now, if I say I know he never had reason to regret doing that."

The speaker straightened up his heavy figure, looking Adrian steadily in the eyes.

"I told you he was a sure judge of men. But women, except to bring him children, and mind his house, and put up with his tempers, and fetch and carry for him, didn't enter into his calculations at all. He was a bit of a Grand Turk was Mr. Smyrthwaite. And Joanna, from quite a little mite, made herself useful as his amanuensis and reader and so on. He looked upon her as his private property, and kept her busy, I promise you; so that the man who wanted to take her away from him didn't have a fighting chance."

"But now the Grand Turk is finally removed," Adrian declared. "Haven't we just concluded all that?"

"And now a man is afraid of her money, I'm thinking," the big Yorkshireman returned, slowly, a grim smile pulling at the corners of his mouth. "Joanna was always the plain one of

the two girls. And she has aged lately. You can't seem to picture her with a healthy baby on her lap. And so, nobody would believe—the man, though he wished it ever so, would hardly believe himself—it was the woman he wanted, the woman he was after, and not just her wealth."

He stood silent a moment, his jaw set, and then held out a large, hard, but not unkindly hand to Adrian.

"I reckon our time's about up," he said. "Write or wire me to come if I am needed, Mr. Savage. And, when you leave, I should be obliged if you'll remind Joanna I'm always at her service. I shall look after the girls' interest at the mills right enough, but I can get away down here for twenty-four hours almost any time at a push. Good-day to you, sir. I am glad we've met. Now I must round up my lads and take 'em back home to work."

This conversation, in its crude sincerity of language and statement, remained by Adrian, and was still present to his mind next morning when he rose. Early in his stay at the Tower House he had petitioned Smallbridge to bring him rolls and coffee when calling him, since a solid breakfast at nine, followed by a solid luncheon at one-thirty, proved too serious an undertaking for the comfort of the Latin stomach. By the above arrangement he secured two or three hours to himself either for writing or for exercise. This morning he went out soon after eight and walked down the wide avenue, past large, jealously secluded villas, each standing in its acre or half acre of thickly planted grounds, to where the mouth of the long, dark wooded valley opens between striated gray and orange sand-cliffs, as through a giant gateway, upon the sea. Thin, primrose-yellow sunlight glinted on the backs of the steel-blue waves. A great flight of gulls, driven inshore by stress of weather, swept, and dropped, and lifted again, with wild, yelping laughter, above the flowing tide. Fringing the cliff edge the purple boles, red trunks, and black, ragged heads of a line of wind-tormented Scotch firs, detached themselves, from foot to crown, against the colorless winter sky.

The thirty or forty yards of level sand, stretching from the turn of the road in the valley bottom to the dark windrows of sea-wrack marking the tide-line, were pocketed by footsteps. But, at this hour, the place was wholly deserted, it being too early in the day, and too early in the season, for invasion by any advance guard of the mighty army of tourists and trippers which infests the coast from Marychurch and Stourmouth, westward to Barryport, during the summer and autumn months. Adrian found himself solitary, in a silent wilderness, save for the murmur of the pines, the plunge and hush of the waves, and harsh laughter of the strong-winged gulls. From where he stood, looking inland, the surface of the vast, somber amphitheater of blue-black fir forest, variegated here and there by the purple-brown of a grove of bare, deciduous trees, or the pallor of a snow-dusted space of tussock-grass and heather, was unbroken by house-roof or other sign of human habitation. Looking seaward no shipping was visible. To Adrian the scene appeared arrestingly northern in character, the spirit of it questioning, introspective, coldly complex, yet primitive and elfin, reminding him of Grieg's Occasional Music to the haunting parable-poem of Peer Gynt. Then, as he paced the harder sand to the seaward side of the tide-mark, the chill breeze pushing against him and the keen smell of the brine in his nostrils, his thought carried back vividly to his conversation of last night with Andrew Merriman.

For, now that he came to think of it, might not Joanna, the main subject of that conversation, in all her feminine leanness and overstrained mentality, have stepped straight out of one of those plays of Ibsen's which, heretofore, had so perplexed him by their distance from any moral and racial conditions with which he was familiar? Northern, joyless, uncertain

in faith, burdened by scruples, prey to a misplaced intellectualism, yet clear-headed and able in practical matters, could not her prototype be found again and again in the Norwegian playwright's penetrating and disheartening pages? And, if it came to that, in the relentless common-sense of the big Yorkshireman's cruelly sagacious estimate of his own attitude toward her was there not an Ibsenish element, too? For that Andrew Merriman was, himself, "the man" of whom he had spoken, Adrian entertained no doubt.

So he paced the sand, absorbed in analysis and in apprehension, while ripples of spent waves slipped, in foam-outlined curves, near and nearer to his feet. It seemed to him he touched something new here in human tendencies and human development; something which, in the coming social order, might very widely obtain, especially among Protestant English-speaking peoples.—A democratic, scientific, unsparing self-knowledge, physical and mental, on the one hand, and a narrow, sectarian, self-sufficiency, on the other; a morbidly cold-blooded acknowledgment of fact and application of means to ends, in which neither poetry nor religion had any determining part. The artist in him protested hotly. For really a world so ordered did not look enticing in the very least!

Then, his thought fixing itself again exclusively on Joanna, played around the everlastingly baffling problem of woman's mind, woman's outlook, in itself, divorced from her relation to man. It was not the first time his imagination had been held up by this problem, nor was he conceited enough to suppose it would be the last. Woman in her relation to man was a stale enough, obvious enough, story. But in her relation to her fellow-woman, in her relation to herself—had not this tripped even the cleverest novelists and dramatists of his own sex? Wasn't it, after all, easier for a woman rightly to imagine the life a man lives among men, than for a man to conceive woman's life with his own great self left out of it? He feared so, though the admission was far from flattering to masculine perspicacity. He resented his own inability to negotiate those moral and emotional lines of cleavage which do, so very actually, divide the sexes. To think, for example, that Joanna Smyrthwaite and Gabrielle St. Leger—their radical differences of circumstances, endowment, and experience notwithstanding—were still essentially nearer to each other, more capable of mutual sympathy and understanding in the deep places of their nature, than he, with all his acute sensibility and dramatic insight, could ever be to either of them!

But there the young man stopped and fairly laughed outright. For to class Gabrielle St. Leger, the devoutly worshiped and desired, and poor Joanna Smyrthwaite together, even in passing, was a little too outrageously far-fetched. Here, indeed, the study of psychology ran frankly and, in a sense, almost profanely mad.

He looked away, through the shifting cloud of screaming gulls, over the steel-blue levels of the Channel toward far-distant France, and a strong nostalgia took him for the delightful, quick-witted land of his birth. It seemed a thousand years since he left Paris. What were they all doing over there, the dear people whose friendship spelled for him more than half the joy of living? Save for one brief note, in the response to the announcement of his arrival, Madame St. Leger had given no sign. And he, in face of his last interview with her, wanted to know—wanted so very badly to know. He wanted to look at her. He wanted to hear her voice.—Whereupon he turned positively vindictive. Oh! most consoling doctrine of purgatory!—Might Montagu Smyrthwaite very thoroughly suffer the depleting pains of it as punishment for this fiendishly tiresome legacy of an executorship! Why couldn't he have left Adrian free to pursue his delicious love campaign, and appointed somebody else—the unpleasant, heavy-weight Challoner, say, or the worldly, feather-weight Haig? Either of them would have reveled

in the brief authority it conferred, while to him it constituted an intolerable waste of time. He was sick to death, interesting racial and psychological researches notwithstanding, sick to death of the whole *corvée*.

And then he skipped aside with quite undignified haste, for an incoming wave threatened his long-toed French boots with total immersion.

CHAPTER VIII

A MODERN ANTIGONE

His retina still holding that northern elfin landscape and seascape, his ears the voices of the forest and of the wildly yelping gulls, his mind still working on the thought of that new moral and social order now coming into being, his heart and his manhood crying out for the woman he loved, Adrian—the keen freshness of the winter morning pouring in through the open door along with him—entered the hall of the Tower House. And down the broad staircase, over the thick, sound-muffling carpet, the wan light streaming in through the blurred, leaded glass of the great staircase windows falling upon her meager, flat-bosomed, crape-clad figure, yellowish-auburn hair and strained, anxious countenance, came the other woman, the Ibsen woman, concerning whose nature and attributes he had just indulged in so much analytic speculation.

Joanna held up the front of her crape dress. Her feet showed as she stepped down the shallow treads. And Adrian, standing below, looking up at her, hat in hand, saw—though he didn't in the least want to see—that she wore black velvet slippers with square toes and no heels to them, and that both her feet and hands, though comparatively small, were lacking in individuality and in that sharpness of outline which is the mark of fineness of breeding. They might have been just anybody's hands and feet; and so—he felt amusedly ashamed of himself for admitting it—they were exactly the hands and feet one would expect Joanna Smyrthwaite to possess.

Taking himself to task for this involuntary cruelty of observation, his manner the more persuasive and gallant because he felt himself to blame, the young man advanced through the dull reds and browns of the spacious hall to the foot of the staircase.

"Ah! you are here! Good-morning, *chère cousine*," he said. "I rose early and have already been out walking in your great woods and down on the shore. It is all a poem of the first days of creation, before man intruded his perplexing presence upon the earth. I felt quite rampantly decadent in this overcivilized twentieth-century costume, under obligation to offer the humblest apologies to the hairy mammoths and pterodactyls, which, at every turn of the road, I instinctively braced my courage to meet. But really it is rather wonderful how 'the desert and the sown' jostle one another here in England. The contrasts are so unexpected, so violent, so complete!"

Adrian talked on rather at random, smiling, his head thrown back, the expression of his handsome face gay yet subtlely apologetic; the general effect of him pleasantly healthy, self-secure, finished, and on excellently good terms both with fortune and with himself. And Joanna, looking down at him, faltered, stopped in her descent, let slip the folds of her crape skirt, while she laid one hand hurriedly upon the baluster-rail and pressed the other nervously against her left side over her heart.

"I am afraid," she said, "you get up and go out so early on our account—I mean so that you may devote all the rest of the day to us."

"Oh no," Adrian returned, still smiling. "It is an old habit, one of my very few good habits, that of early rising. You see, I am quite a busy man in my own small way, what with my Review, my friends, my literary work—"

"I realize that, and so I am very much distressed at the demands which we are making upon your valuable time. I cannot justify or excuse it to myself. I do not think it was proper

that papa should have appointed you as my coexecutor without consulting you and asking your permission first."

She spoke with a suppressed violence of feeling which caused Adrian to gulp down his complete agreement in these sentiments, and reply in soothing tones:

"But, dear cousin, surely at this time of day it is superfluous to vex yourself about that! Believe me, you are too scrupulous, too considerate. I assure you, as I have so often assured you before, that I am touched by the confidence your father showed me in thus temporarily intrusting not only his affairs, but yourself and your sister, to my care. My sole desire is worthily to fulfil that trust. To do so constitutes, in as far as my time is concerned, an all-sufficient reward. And then, after all," he added, gaily, "ten days, a fortnight even, should I have to go north to Leeds for a brief visit, will see all imperative business through and so put a term to our joint labors."

There he paused, looking discreetly aside as he unbuttoned his overcoat, since he was aware that the gladness of coming freedom might declare itself with unflattering distinctness. For in imagination he sprinted once again, three steps at a time, up the three flights of stairs to the top story of the tall, gray house overlooking the *Quai Malaquais*, while high expectation, at once delicious and disturbing, circulated through every fiber of his being. How adorable it would be—how richly, poignantly enchanting! But just then, though by no means easily open to hypnotic or mesmeric influences, he became conscious that Joanna Smyrthwaite's eyes—those tenacious, prominent, faded-blue eyes, with red-rimmed lids to them, which, to his seeing, so perpetually gave away the inward tempest of feeling to which the compressed lips refused utterance—were fixed upon him with an extraordinary intensity of questioning scrutiny. For a moment the young man felt frankly embarrassed, uncertain how to comport himself. For he had no answer whatever to give to that questioning scrutiny. He suddenly grew wary, fearing demand might create supply—of a fraudulent sort—courtesy betraying him into return glances dishonestly sympathetic in character. But, to his relief, the sound of an opening door, followed by that of two chattering feminine voices—high-pitched, unmusical in tone, one indeed peevish and complaining—coming from the gallery above created a diversion. He felt, rather than saw, Joanna Smyrthwaite start and look impatiently upward. Thus the awkward minute passed, resolving itself; and the situation—if the little episode deserved so high-sounding a title—was saved. Adrian backed away and slipped off his overcoat, doubling it together across his arm.

Joanna, her expression and manner agitated, descending the remaining treads of the staircase hastily, followed and stood close by him.

"That is Margaret," she said, in a hurried undertone. "Marion Chase is with her as usual. And Mr. Challoner comes here at half-past eleven. It was his own proposition. I had a note from him early this morning. I should have been glad to put aside legal business just for to-day, but Margaret expressed unwillingness that I should refuse to receive him. There is something I feel I must explain to you, Cousin Adrian, before I see him. But I cannot speak of it before Margaret, still less before Marion Chase. Would it trouble you too much to come into the library with me? We should be alone. Margaret would hardly attempt to bring Marion in there, I should think."

The young man assented readily, though the invitation was not very much to his taste. Of all the rooms in this finely proportioned yet gloomy house, that distinctly masculine apartment, the library aforesaid, was, to his thinking, the most depressing. Facing north and east, its windows were darkened by the rough corrugated trunks and scraggy lower branches

of a grove of Weymouth pines, spared when the rest of the site had been cleared for building. These, at close quarters and when old, are doleful trees, lifeless and unchanging in aspect, telling of sour soil and barren, unprofitable spaces. Two sides of the room were lined, to within a couple of feet of the ceiling, with mahogany bookcases, the contents of which, in Adrian's opinion, only too thoroughly harmonized in spirit with the doleful grove outside. They consisted of ranges of well-bound volumes upon such juiceless subjects as commercial and municipal law, ethics of citizenship and political economy, together with an extensive collection of pamphlets embodying the controversies of the last fifty years—social, political, ecclesiastical, and religious—neatly indexed and bound. Not only did the complete works of Adam Smith, David Hume, Dugald Stewart, and the two Mills—elder and younger—decorate the shelves; but portrait prints of these authors, along with those of certain liberal statesmen and Nonconformist divines, solidly framed and glazed, decorated the remaining wall spaces. The carpet and curtains were of a dull brown, patterned in dusky blues and greens. A writing-table of huge dimensions, fitted with many drawers; dark leather-covered chairs, various mechanical devices in the form of reading-desks and leg-rests, and an elaborate adjustable invalid couch constituted the other appointments of the room.

Following Joanna's crape-clad figure into this severely educational sanctuary, Adrian could not but think of the long joyless hours she must have spent there reading to or writing for that imperious old gentleman, the late lamented Montagu. And this thought softened his attitude toward her, reawakening sentiments of chivalrous pity. For, though rich, highly educated, and clever, had not she, poor girl, every bit as much as her cautious, halting lover, been denied the very barest fighting chance?

"You are tired, *chère cousine*," he said, consolingly. "Is it any wonder after the painful fatigues of yesterday? See, I place this chair comfortably near the fire for you. Sit down, and, while resting, tell me at your leisure what it is that you wish to explain."

And Joanna not only sat down obediently, but, rather to his consternation, bowed her lean person together and pressed a fine, black-bordered pocket-handkerchief—insisted upon by the stylish young person from Grays' as a necessary part of her mourning equipment—against her faded eyes and wept. Ah! poor thing! poor thing! she was a pitiful spectacle, a pitiful creature, inciting all the young man's goodness of heart, sense of personal success, delight in living, physical soundness and well-being, to claim sympathy and forbearance toward her!

"Yes, yes," he declared, almost tenderly. "I comprehend and associate myself with your grief. The trial has been so prolonged. You cannot expect to throw off painful impressions and adjust yourself to new conditions immediately. But that adjustment will come, dear cousin, believe me. It is merely a question of time, for you are young, and in youth our recuperative power is immense. So do not fight against your tears. If they relieve you, shed them freely."

For a while Joanna remained bowed together, then she threw herself back in her chair almost convulsively.

"You must not be too kind to me," she cried. "I enjoy it, but it encourages my want of self-control."

"Don't you good English people set an exaggerated value upon self-control, perhaps?" Adrian asked, gently, argumentatively. "Why waste so much energy in the effort to maintain an appearance of Red Indian stoicism and impassivity? Why fear to be human? Sensibility is a grace rather than a fault, especially in a woman—"

He moved away and stood by one of the eastern windows looking out into the pine grove. A draught of air, round the corner of the house, shook the stiff branches. He felt sorry for her,

quite horribly sorry. But, just Heaven, how plain she was, with that tear-blotched face and those quivering lips and nostrils! Andrew Merriman's appraisement of her appearance and the consequences entailed by it in respect of a possible suitor were not overstated. Adrian waited, giving not only her, but himself, time to recover, and, approaching her again, did so smiling.

"Ah! that is well, dear cousin," he said. "Already you feel better, you regain your serenity. Well then, let us talk quietly about this matter which you wish to explain to me."

"It was about our wills—Margaret's and mine, I mean; about the disposition of our property." As she spoke she clenched her right hand, working it against the palm of her left, like a ball working in a socket. "Mr. Challoner has mentioned this subject to Margaret, impressing upon her that we ought to attend to it without delay."

"Our good Challoner is a little disposed to magnify his office," Adrian put in, lightly.

"So I have thought—sometimes," Joanna agreed, a trace of eagerness in her flat, colorless voice, produced—as always—from the top of an empty lung. "But he has great influence over Margaret. I do not want to be unjust, but I think the ideas he suggests to her are not always suitable. They tend to create difficulties between us. From what Margaret tells me I gather that he has discussed this subject very freely with her. She refers to it and quotes him continually when we are alone. I gather that he thinks I ought to make a will exclusively in Margaret's favor, so that in the event of my death the estate may pass to papa's direct descendants. He tells Margaret, as I gather, that papa wished this although he left no written instructions regarding it. And he—he—Mr. Challoner, I mean—appears to take for granted that while Margaret will almost certainly marry now, it is improbable I shall ever marry."

"But," Adrian cried, indignantly, though against his convictions and his better judgment, "in even hinting at such a thing Challoner is guilty of a very great impertinence! He takes for granted that which is no concern of his, and takes it for granted altogether prematurely, thereby laying himself open to a well-deserved and very extensive snubbing."

Joanna's breath caught in her throat. Again the young man felt her eyes fix on him with an extraordinary intensity of gaze.

"Cousin Adrian," she said, hurriedly, "has any one ever told you—do you know—I think you ought to know—about our brother William—about Bibby?"

This time Adrian met her gaze steadily. He felt it imperative to do so. To his relief, after a momentary fluttering, the red-rimmed eyelids were lowered.

"I have heard a little about him, poor boy," he answered, gently and respectfully. "I have heard that he caused those who loved him anxiety and trouble."

"And humiliation and disgrace," Joanna whispered.

"But what would you have, dear cousin? It must be so at times. Life is a tremendous, a dangerous, though, in my opinion, a very splendid experiment. We all start as amateurs, in ignorance of the laws which govern it. Is it not, therefore, inevitable that some should get off the true lines, and make mistakes injurious to themselves and lamentable to others?"

"But papa did not permit mistakes. He never forgave them."

"Pardon me, but in not forgiving them did he not himself, perhaps, commit the very gravest of all mistakes?" Adrian could not resist asking, though he feared the question trenched on levity.

"I wish I could believe that." She spoke bitterly. "It would simplify so much for me. I should be so thankful to believe it. It would help to excuse Bibby. I know he was weak in character; but he was so nervous and delicate as a child. Papa alarmed him. He demanded too much of him, and was stern and sarcastic because Bibby could not meet that demand. My

brother did not go to a preparatory school, but at thirteen he was sent to Rugby. It was papa's old school, and he believed the traditions and atmosphere of it were calculated to induce the serious sense of moral and intellectual responsibility in which he thought Bibby deficient."

"Poor child!" Adrian murmured.

"Yes," she said; "I am thankful you understand and pity him. I know papa's purpose was Bibby's good, the improvement and development of his character; but the treatment was too severe. It did not brace him, but only broke his spirit. He was unaccustomed to associate with other boys. They frightened and bullied him. He was so miserable that at the beginning of his second term he ran away."

She waited a moment, struggling against rising emotion, her hands working again ball-and-socket fashion.

"It was all very dreadful. For nearly a week he was lost. We knew he could have very little money, for his allowance was small. Papa held economy to be a duty for the young. I think, next to mamma, I suffered most, for I always loved Bibby best—better than I did Margaret. I shall never forget that week. I suppose papa suffered, too, in his own way. He was very silent, and looked angry. Andrew Merriman traced Bibby to London and brought him home. Mamma pleaded to keep him for a time, but he was sent straight back to school. About six months later papa received a request to remove him. He was accused of taking money from another boy's locker. Nothing was actually proved, but suspicion clung to him, and as his general conduct was reported unsatisfactory, the authorities thought it better he should leave. Papa sent him abroad to a private school at Lausanne. He remained there three years, until he was seventeen. Papa refused to let him spend the holidays at home, so during the whole of that time we only saw him twice, when we were traveling."

The monotonous, colorless voice, the monotonous story of well-meaning, cold-blooded tyranny it narrated, got upon the listener's nerves. With difficulty he restrained explosive comment reflecting far from politely upon the so recently buried dead. He really could not sit still under the indignation it provoked in him. He got up, moved away and stood leaning his shoulder against the dark, polished woodwork of the eastern window, his back to the light. He thought it well the narrator should not see his expression too clearly.

"It is almost inconceivable," he said.

"I am not exaggerating, Cousin Adrian," Joanna returned, straining her eyes in the effort to fix them upon his face. "All these events in their consecutive order are stamped indelibly upon my memory."

"I am convinced you are not exaggerating, my dear cousin, and just on that very account it is the more inconceivable," Adrian declared.

"But in your present relation to us—to me—I feel you ought to know all about poor Bibby, all about our—my—family history. My duty is to place the facts before you. I should be guilty of great self-indulgence if I concealed anything from you in that connection," Joanna protested, with growing agitation. "I should do very wrong if, to spare myself pain, I deceived you."

And again that sensation of embarrassment, of uncertainty how to comport himself, returned upon Adrian.

"But, dear cousin," he said, in a mildly argumentative manner, "don't you emphasize the obligation of truth-telling unnecessarily? I am here to be of help to you, to shield you, in so far as possible, from that which is distressing. In thus reviving painful memories do you not defeat the very object of my presence?"

"Oh no, no," Joanna cried. "Surely you realize how bitterly I might have cause to upbraid myself—later—if I now left anything untold which it was right you should have heard? It is incumbent upon me, a matter of—of honor, to be perfectly explicit."

Adrian raised his eyebrows the least bit. How providential he stood with his back to the light! He passed his left hand down over his neat black beard, and his lips parted silently. Poor, dear young woman, what in the name of wonder did—And then he came near laughing. The idea was too preposterous, and, worse still—shame filled him at even momentary entertainment of it—too fatuous! He gave it unqualified dismissal.

"No," she repeated, with a veiled and somber violence, "I should do very wrong by permitting you to remain in ignorance. I should deserve any after suffering which might come to me. For I have a duty to fulfil to Bibby as well—that is what I wanted to explain to you before giving instructions to Mr. Challoner about drafting my will. Some day my duty to Bibby may appear to clash with another duty; and therefore it is necessary you should know clearly beforehand."

Joanna flung herself back in her chair.

"Whatever it may cost me now or—or—in the future, I must tell you the rest, Adrian."

More mystified than ever, startled by the use of his Christian name without any qualifying prefix, at once affected and repelled by her excitement, the young man moved from his station at the window and stood near her, leaning his hands upon the head of the ungainly adjustable, couch.

"Pray tell me any and everything which may help to procure you relief," he said, kindly.

And Joanna, lying back, looked up at him, an immense appeal, a something desperate and unsatiable in her faded blue eyes, which made him consciously shrink. The Ibsen woman—the Ibsen woman in another manifestation!—It was not pleasant. He didn't like it in the very least. —Then, as if at the touch of a spring, she sat bolt upright, looking past him out of the window at the dark, wind-shaken branches of the pines.

"When my brother returned from Lausanne," she began again in that colorless, monotonous voice, "he was put into Andrew Merriman's office at the mills. Mamma and I were glad at first. We trusted Andrew Merriman. He had always been tactful and kind about Bibby. But papa decided he—my brother—should live at home so that he might exert a direct personal authority over him. And the two had nothing, nothing in common. You can judge from the contents of this library what papa's tastes and pursuits were. My brother did not care anything about politics, or social reform, or that class of subject. He was pleasure-loving, and I do not think his long stay abroad improved him in that respect. Papa supposed the discipline at M. Leonard's school to be rigid. Among the elder boys I have reason to fear it was decidedly lax."

Adrian made a slight movement of comprehension. He could picture the *régime*, and could well imagine the nice little games these exiled young gentlemen had been at!

"Papa was stern; Bibby inattentive, sullen, and nervous. At dinner we—mamma and I—used constantly to be in dread of collisions. We were in perpetual anxiety as to what Bibby might inadvertently say, or not say, which might provoke papa's sarcasm. Then mamma's health began to give way. We went to Torquay for the winter, taking the servants, and Highdene was shut up. Bibby went into lodgings near to Andrew Merriman, in the suburb of Leeds, in which the mills are situated. Papa wishing to train him in habits of economy, only allowed him the salary of a junior clerk. But every one there knew we were rich, so the tradespeople were only too ready to give Bibby credit, while unscrupulous persons borrowed

of him. He was naturally generous, and easily imposed upon, and he enjoyed the society of those who flattered and made much of him. It was said he frequented low company, that he gambled at cards and got intoxicated. I do not know how far this was true, but he did get deeply into debt. More than once Andrew Merriman helped him, but he could not afford to be responsible for Bibby's continued extravagance. And then—then—my brother manipulated certain accounts and embezzled a large sum of money. Andrew Merriman discovered this. He tried to shield him, and interceded with papa for him—"

The speaker broke off, pausing for breath, bending down as though crushed by the weight of her recollections.

"It was very, very dreadful," she said. "Papa paid my brother's debts, but he forbade him all intercourse with us. He cut Bibby out of our family life, as a surgeon might cut out some malignant growth. He regarded him thus, I think—indeed, he said so once—as a diseased part the excision of which was imperative if the moral health of the family was to be preserved. He gave Andrew Merriman a capital sum, which was to be remitted to Bibby in small quarterly instalments. When that sum was exhausted he was to receive nothing further. We never saw him again. Papa bought this house, and we moved here. He would not remain at Highdene. The scandal had been too great. He could not forgive, nor could he endure pity. He made the business into a company, and retired. Mamma had become a complete invalid. The doctors thought this climate might benefit her; and then this place is far away from our former friends and associations. We knew no one here."

Joanna raised herself, looking, not at Adrian Savage, but past him, out at the dusky pines. She wiped her lips with her black-bordered handkerchief.

"That is all, Cousin Adrian," she said.

But, when the young man would have spoken she held up one hand restrainingly, and he saw that she shivered.

"Except—except this," she went on. "Papa ordered that Bibby should be considered as dead. Later Andrew ceased to hear from him, and rumors came that he was actually dead—that he had died at Buenos Ayres, where he had gone as a member of some theatrical troupe. But mamma and I never credited those rumors. Nor did Andrew Merriman. He does not credit them now."

She turned her head, looking full at Adrian with that same desperation of appeal.

"I asked him yesterday," she said. "It was dreadful to speak to him on the subject, but I felt it my duty to do so. I felt I ought to know where I stood in regard to my fortune, because—because of the future. Andrew believes my brother is still alive. And that is why I must refuse to make a will in Margaret's favor. If, as you say, papa made the gravest of all mistakes in never pardoning mistakes, clearly my duty to his memory is to redress the mistake he made in the case of my brother in as far as it is possible for me to do so. Margaret will have ample means of her own. I cannot be ruled by Mr. Challoner's opinion."

Joanna rose and walked over to the window, standing exactly where Adrian had stood some ten minutes before. There seemed a definite purpose in her selection of the exact spot, both in the placing of her feet and the leaning of her shoulder against the window-frame. Her back was to the light. Adrian could not see the expression of her face distinctly. He was glad of this. He did not want to see it, for again he was conscious of shrinking from her.

"After all, Mr. Challoner may be wrong—as you yourself just now said, Cousin Adrian—in taking for granted I shall never marry. I may marry. But, whatever happens, I shall not leave any part of my fortune to Margaret. I shall leave two-thirds of it to Bibby, and the rest—"

Smallbridge threw open the library door.

“Mr. Challoner, ma’am,” he said; and the Stourmouth solicitor, his Mongolian countenance quite strikingly devoid of all expression, ponderously entered the room.

II
THE DRAWINGS UPON THE WALL

CHAPTER I

A WASTER

It was still cold, but the skies were clear. The snow had been carted away and Paris was herself again; the note of her exhilarating, seductive, vibrant—a note at once curiously fiercer and more feminine than that of London.

René Dax, crossing the *Place du Carrousel*, stood for a moment listening to that vibrant note, sensible of its charm and challenge; looking westward, meanwhile, across the Tuileries Gardens and *Place de la Concorde* to the ascending perspective of the *Champs-Élysées*. The superb *ensemble* and detail of the scene, softened by lavender mist at the ground levels, was crowned by the blood-red and gold of a wide-flung frosty sunset—a city of fire, as the young man told himself, built on foundations of dreams!

He had just come away from the press view of a one-man show of his own drawings. The rooms were crowded to suffocation. The success of the exhibition was already assured, promising to be prodigious, to amount to a veritable sensation. He was aware of this, yet his mood remained an unhappy one. As usual the critics showed themselves a herd of imbeciles. They praised the wrong things, or, more exasperating still, praising the right ones praised them wrongly, extolling their weak points rather than their fine ones, misinterpreting their message and inner meaning. Had Adrian Savage been there—unluckily he was still in England—some sense might have been spoken. Adrian was an austere critic, but always an intelligent and discriminating one. As for the rest of the confraternity—René gazed mournfully at the flaming sunset splendor—they got upon his nerves, they nauseated him.

And it all went deeper than that. For those many square yards of wall, plastered with his mordant verdict upon the human species, got upon his nerves, too, and nauseated him. He recoiled, as he had often recoiled before—taking it thus wholesale—from his own merciless exposure of the follies, vulgarities, the mental and physical deformities and distortions of his fellow-creatures; recoiled from the reek of his own Rabelaisian humor, of his own extravagant ribaldry and ingenious grossness. It was his vocation, as that of other and more famous satirists, to wreak a vindictive vengeance thus upon humanity. Only, in his care, reaction invariably followed. The devil of unsanctified laughter for the time satiated and cast out of him, he wandered—as this evening—a very sad and plaintive little being, firmly resolving—as how often before!—once and for all to throw away his rather horrible pencil, and betake himself exclusively to the construction of those delicate lyrics and rondels from which, whatever minor perversions of sentiment they might exhibit, the witty bestiality common to his caricatures was conspicuously absent.

He wanted to forget the hot, close rooms, packed with admirers, male, and, though happily in a minority, female also. By René Dax that minority was held in particularly small respect. The woman who relished, or affected to relish, his art ought to be ashamed of herself—such at least was his opinion. His art was meant for men, not for women; and the women who couldn't arrive at that conclusion by instinct, unaided, were women for whom, especially in his existing mood, he had no use whatever, didn't want in the very least. That which he did want, under the head of things feminine, was something conspicuously different—a far-removed, stately, inaccessible type of womanhood. And, still more, he wanted the child who should grow into such womanhood—a tender, elusive, sprite-like, spotlessly innocent and unsoiled creature, to whom moral and physical ugliness were equally unknown and equally, saving the paradox, abhorrent.

Well, were not the tall, old-fashioned houses of the *Quai Malaquais* across the river there just opposite, and was it not still early enough to pay a visit? But then, as he rather fretfully remembered, Madame St. Leger had been pertinaciously invisible of late. He had called several times, only to be told she was not receiving or that she was out. He had never succeeded in seeing her and little Bette; never, now that he came to think of it, since the day of the great snow, the day when Adrian, whose absence he had just been deploring, left for England.

The bringing of these two facts into any relation of cause and effect had not previously occurred to him. It did not do so seriously even now. Yet unquestionably the names of Madame St. Leger and Adrian Savage took up a position side by side in his mind, thereby subtly coloring his reflections. He had no friend upon whom he depended and who, in his capricious exacting fashion, he loved as he did Adrian. The friendship had remained practically unbroken since the time when Adrian, the healthier, happier-natured boy, protected him, the queer little Tadpole, from tormentors at school. This friendship had been among the wholesomest influences of his life, and, amid many aberrations and perversities of thought and conduct, he clung to it. But it followed on his self-absorption and selfishness, natural and assumed, that his friend's interests and concerns, save in so far as they bore direct relation to his own, were a matter of indifference to him. He had never troubled himself as to the possible state or direction of Adrian's affections, and perhaps consequently, this sudden juxtaposition of names came to him as a surprise, and an irritating one.

Slipping in and out between private cars, taxis, and humbler, horse-drawn vehicles, he crossed the roadway to the *Pont des Saints Pères*. The sunset glories faded, while avenues of living white and glow-worm green lights sprang into being. Still, here and there, red splashes, as of blood, stained the livid, swirling surface of the Seine, which, in half flood, fed by the melted snow, hissed and gurgled under the arches and against the masonry of the bridge.

As it happened, just then, a lull occurred in the cross-river traffic, a break in the quick-moving throng of foot-passengers, so that in front of René Dax the pale arc of the right-hand pavement showed empty in the whole of its length, save for a single tall, slouching, shabby figure, clothed in a blue-serge suit unmistakably English in cut and in pattern. As René advanced, his mind still working around those two names set in such irritating juxtaposition, he saw the man in the English-made suit first glance sharply to right and left, then bend down, grasping the outer edge of the parapet, while slowly and, as it seemed, furtively, drawing one knee up on to the flat of the coping.

—Was it possible that Madame St. Leger's repeated refusals to receive him were other than accidental? Was it possible they had some connection with Adrian's absence? Was it conceivable his friend had turned traitor, had interfered, saying or hinting at that which might, socially, justify such denial of admission? Suspicion, resentment, self-pity, a lively sense of personal injury invaded him.—

The shabby, slouching loafer's right knee was fairly upon the coping now. He threw up both arms, threw back his head, his mouth opened wide as one letting loose a great cry. René Dax saw his extended arms, his bare head, his profile with that wide-open mouth, dark against a pale background of buildings and cold, translucent sky. The effect was of the strangest, the more so that no sound came from the apparently loud-crying mouth. Suddenly his chin dropped on his breast. His hands were lowered, clutching at the edge of the parapet again, and he remained thus for a few seconds, immobile, crouched together, his left foot, in a well-cut but bulging hole-riddled boot, still resting upon the pavement.

Then in a flash, awakening from contemplation of his own lately discovered woes, René realized what was about to occur. His height and reach were insufficient, encumbered as he was, moreover, by a thick fur-lined overcoat, for him to get his arms round the crouching figure. So he just clutched whatever came handiest, the back of the fellow's jacket, the slack of the seat of his trousers. Exerting all his strength, René hauled and jerked at these well-worn garments. The attack, though neither very forcible nor very scientific, was completely unexpected. The man's grip relaxed. His knee slipped and he fell back, an amorphous indigo and sandy-red heap, upon the pallid asphalt.

René pulled a scented pocket-handkerchief out of the breast-pocket of his coat and proceeded delicately to wipe the fingers and palms of his gray *suède* gloves. He was unaccustomed to such exertion. His heart thumped against his ribs. His sight was blurred. He felt slightly faint and light-headed and was grateful for the cold back-draught of air off the rapidly flowing river. It was his pride, part of his pose, in fact, never to display emotion; and he now found himself excited and shaken, by no means fully self-possessed. He needed a space of quiet in which to regain his accustomed affectations of bearing and manner. He was aware, too, that those shabby garments were decidedly unpleasant to touch. Therefore he stood still, breathing rather hard through his nostrils, and daintily wiping the neat, little gray suede gloves incasing his quick, clever little fingers.

"I must express regret for my violence," he said, with the utmost civility, to the heap on the pavement, as soon as he judged his voice sufficiently steady for speech. "I must apologize to you for such absence of ceremony, but really, my dear sir, it appeared to me no time should be lost. You had, unconsciously of course, placed yourself in a highly ridiculous position from which it was clearly incumbent upon me, as an amiable and sympathetic person, immediately to remove you. At times one is compelled to act with decision rather than politeness. This was a case in point. Doubtless you are at present annoyed with me. But a few moments' reflection will, I feel sure, commend my action to you. You will recognize how right, even to the point of an apparent sacrifice of personal dignity, I was."

The man by now had got upon all fours, looking like some unsightly, shambling animal. Limply he rose to his feet and, supporting himself against the balustrade, turned upon his savior a dissipated boyish countenance, down which tears dribbled miserably.

"Why the devil couldn't you leave me alone?" he asked, petulantly, in English. "What earthly concern is it of yours? Aren't I my own master?"

His voice rose to a wail.

"I've been trying to—to do it all day, but there have been too many people about. They stared at me. They suspected and followed me. I could not dodge them. Now I thought the opportunity had come. I was rid of them at last. I never saw you, curse you, you're so short. After all, one doesn't think of looking on the ground, except for vermin. And I'd just pulled myself together. I mayn't have the nerve to try again. I've lost my chance," he wailed, childishly, his weak, loose-lipped mouth twisted by the wretchedness of crying. "I've lost my chance through you, you beast. And you've torn my coat, too. It's the only one I have left; and I did want to look decent, when they found me, when I was dead."

He flung away passionately, pressing his face down on his folded arms upon the parapet, while his angular shoulders heaved and his body shuddered under the ragged blue-serge jacket.

"I shall not have the pluck again. I know myself, and I sha'n't have it. By now I should have been out of the whole accursed tangle. The whole show would have been over—over—I

should know nothing more. I should be quit of my misery. I should be dead—ah! my God, dead—dead—"

But René Dax continued to wipe his neat, little gray *suède* gloves. For his mood had changed. The taunt regarding his smallness of stature had turned him wicked, so that the exquisite minor poet, yearning for the companionship of things pure, lovely, and of good report, fled away. The injured friend fled away likewise. And the satirist, the caricaturist, impure and unsimple, greedy of human ugliness and degradation, malignant, mercilessly scoffing, reigned in their stead. And here, in this loose-limbed, blue-eyed, tawny-headed foreign youth—whose voice and speech, coarseness of expression notwithstanding, witnessed to education and gentle blood—vainly essaying to drown himself under the dying sunset skies of the city of fire built on foundations of dreams, was a subject, surely made to the satirist's hand, a subject of great price! The despotism of his art came upon René Dax, that necessity for vengeance upon humanity; and this time, for him, the edge of vengeance was sharpened by personal insult. For this was no common vagabond wastrel, thrown up from the foul underlying dregs of the population, but a person of condition, once his social equal, whose insolence therefore touched his honor as that of a man of the people could not.

"You are offensive, my young friend," he said, in careful, slightly over-pronounced, but fluent English. "You are also remarkably unattractive and wanting in intelligence. But I, being happily none of these things—offensive, I would say, unattractive or wanting in intelligence—can afford to be magnanimous. Learn, then, that had I not intervened—at much inconvenience to myself—to prevent your projecting your unsavory carcass into the river, but permitted you to carry out your thrice-idiotic purpose, it would not, as you say, have been all over by now and you quit of your misery, not one bit of it! Were you less crude in idea, less bestially ignorant, you would be aware that the principle of life is indestructible. Choking and struggling in the black water there you would have suffered abominable discomfort. But, even when the process of asphyxiation was complete, you yourself would have been still alive, still conscious, and would have discovered, to your infinite chagrin, that you had merely exchanged one state of being for an other and more odious one."

René rested his elbows upon the top of the balustrade, and, putting his little, tired baby face close, spoke with incisive clearness of enunciation into the young man's ear.

"Be under no delusion," he said. "Once alive, always alive. There is no breaking out of that prison. It is too cleverly constructed. You cannot get away. Your sentence is for life; and there is no term to living—none, absolutely none, forever and forever. You might have killed your present very unpleasing body, I grant, but this would not have advanced matters. For your essential self, the Me, the ego, would have remained and would have been compelled by incalculable and indomitable natural forces to surround itself with another body, in which to endure the shame of birth, the agonizing sorrows of childhood, and all that which, from childhood, has rendered existence intolerable to you, over again. Or you might, very probably, have come to rebirth lower down in the scale of creation—as a beetle to be crushed under foot, a dog to be pinned out on the vivisector's table, a lamb to be flayed at the abattoir, a worm to writhe on the fisherman's hook, a formless grub to bloat itself with carrion."

Here the wretched youth raised his head and stared at his self-constituted mentor. Tearful wretchedness had given place to an expression of moral terror, almost trenching on insanity—terror of immeasurable possibilities, of conceptions monstrous and unnatural.

"Who are you, what are you," he cried, "you mincing little devil? Isn't it all horrible enough already without you trying to scare me? I hate you. And you haven't been dead. How

can you know?"

"Ah! you begin to take notice, to listen. And although you continue offensive, that you should listen is satisfactory, as it assures me my amiable attentions and instructive conversation are not altogether wasted. Learn then, my cherished pupil," René added, in a soft, easy, small-talk tone, "that you are still in error, since I—I who so patiently reason with you—have unquestionably been dead scores, hundreds, probably thousands of times. I have sampled many different incarnations, just as you, doubtless, under less indigent circumstances, have sampled dinners at many different restaurants; with this distinction, however, that whereas, in Paris at all events, you must have eaten a number of quite passable dinners, I have never yet experienced an incarnation which was not in the main detestable, a flagrant outrage on sensibility and good taste. Hence, you see, I do not speak at random, but from a wide basis of fact. I know all about it. And, therefore, I just emphasize this point once more. Engrave it upon the tablets of your memory. It is well worth remembering, particularly in reckless and exaggerated moments. Life is indestructible. To end it is merely to begin it under slightly altered material conditions, with a prelude of acute mental and physical discomfort thrown in; hideous disappointment, moreover, waiting to transfix you when your higher faculties are—like mine—sufficiently developed for you to have acquired the power of looking backward and visualizing the premutations of your past."

The speaker turned sideways, leaning on one elbow. He took his handkerchief neatly from his breast-pocket again and held it to his nose.

"Really, you do need washing rather badly, my young friend!" he said. "But not down there, not in the but dubiously cleanly waters of our beloved Seine. A Turkish bath, and a vigorous shampoo afterward, and, subsequently, a change of linen.—However, that, for the moment, must wait. To return to our little lesson in practical philosophy.—I have rescued you from the disaster of premature reincarnation. I have also striven to improve your mind, to enlighten you, and that at considerable discomfort to myself, for I find it very cold standing and instructing you in the fundamental principles of being, here on this remarkably draughty bridge. I risk double pneumonia in your service. Be grateful, then, and make suitable acknowledgment of the immense charity I have shown you."

"You are a devil, and I hate you. Why can't you go away?" the young man answered in a terrified sulkiness.

"Truly you are mistaken," René returned, imperturbably. "My charity is too great to permit me to go away until you, my pupil, are provided for. You have so much which it would be to your advantage to learn! I am not a devil. No—but I admit that I am, to-day, one of the most-talked-about persons in Paris. I must therefore entreat you to adopt a more respectful tone and less accentuated manner. We have ceased to be alone. Many people are crossing the bridge. Among them must be those to whom my appearance is familiar; and, if I am remarked pleading thus with a debauched, would-be suicide, I shall certainly read in the morning papers that M. René Dax has discovered a new method of self-advertisement, a catchy puff for his picture-show. This would be disagreeable to me. My work is big enough to stand on its own merits. Self-advertisement, in my case, is as superfluous as it is vulgar. Compose yourself. Cease to be ridiculous. And above all do not call me rude names in the hearing of the public. Ah! excellent!—There is an empty cab."

He hailed a passing taxi, and, as the chauffeur drew up to the curb, put his arm within that of his companion, persuasively, even affectionately.

“Come, then, my child,” he said. “See, my charity is really inexhaustible! I will take you home with me, though I confess you are a far from fragrant fellow-traveler, pending that so desirable Turkish bath. And, listen—I will take you home, I will also feed you. And I will draw little pictures of you, several little pictures, because I find in you a singularly edifying example of a singularly degraded type. After I have drawn as many little pictures as pleases me, I will have you washed, I will give you clothes, I will give you money, and then I will send you away without asking any questions, without so much as inquiring your name.”

He moved toward the waiting car, the door of which the chauffeur held open. But the young man showed a disposition to struggle and hang back.

“Get in, dirty animal, or I call the police,” René Dax ordered, sharply, “and recount to them your recent exploit. They will not give you money or clothes, nor will they abstain from asking inconvenient questions. Ah! you decide to accompany me? That is well.”

And, with a roughly helping hand from the chauffeur, he projected the limp, wretched figure into the cab.

“A good tip, my son, and drive smartly,” he added, after giving an address in the *Boulevard du Mont Parnasse*.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

"Yes, I have returned. I am here, veritably here, *chère Madame et amie*. At last I have effected my escape from the Land of Egypt and the House of Bondage—and such a bondage! Ah! it is an incredibly happy thing to be back!"

Adrian permitted himself to hold his hostess's hand some seconds longer than is demanded by strict etiquette. His face was as glad as a spring morning. Tender gallantry lurked in his eyes. His voice had a ring of joy irrepressible. His aspect was at once that of suppliant and of conqueror. And this whole brilliant effect was infectious, finding readier and more sympathetic reflection in Madame St. Leger's expression and humor than she at all intended or bargained for. For the moment, indeed, the charm and the rush of it came near sweeping her off her feet. She ceased to subscribe to theory, ceased to reason, yielded to spontaneous feeling, practice claiming her—the secular and delightful practice of he being man, she woman, and of both being fearless, high-spirited, beautifully human, and beautifully young.

"In any case the House of Bondage has not disagreed with you," she said, gaily. "For I have never seen you looking more admirably well."

"Ah! you must not put that down to the credit of the House of Bondage, but to the fact of my entrancing escape from it, to the fact that once more I am here—here—with you." As he spoke Adrian glanced round the dear rose-red-and-canvas-colored room. He wished to make sure that, in every detail, he found it precisely as he had left it, every article of furniture, every picture, every ornament in its accustomed position. He felt jealous of the minutest change of object or of place. "No, nothing is altered, nothing," he said, answering his own thought aloud in the greatness of his content.

Gabrielle abstained from comment. She owned herself moved, excited, uplifted, by the joyful atmosphere which his presence exhaled. Indeed, that presence affected her far more deeply than she had anticipated, catching her imagination and emotions as in the dazzling meshes of a golden net. Some men are gross, some absurd, some unspeakably tedious when in love. Adrian was very certainly neither of these objectionable things. He struck, indeed, an almost perfect note. And that was just where the danger came in, just why she dared not let this interview continue at the enthusiastic level. She might suffer the charm of it too comprehensively, and—for already she began to reason again—that would entail regret, and, only too likely, worse than regret.

So, steeling herself against the insidious charm which so worked on and quickened her, she moved away from the vacant place before the fire, where she had been standing with Adrian Savage, sat down in her high-backed, rose-cushioned chair and picked up the bundle of white lawn and lace lying on the little table beside it. She needed protection—whether from him or from herself she did not quite care to inquire—and reckoned it wiser to put a barrier of actual space and barrier of sobering employment between herself and this inconveniently moving returned guest and lover. She refused to be taken by storm.

But Adrian's buoyancy of spirit was not so easily to be crushed.

"Ah! only that was needed," he declared, "to complete my satisfaction—that you should place yourself thus and shake out your pretty needlework. It procures me the welcome belief that no time has really been lost or wasted; it almost convinces me that I have not been away

at all. You cannot conceive what pleasure, what happiness it gives me, to be here, to see you again. But now that I am able to observe you calmly, *chère Madame*—"

"Yes, calmly, calmly," she put in, without raising her eyes from her stitching. "How I value, how I appreciate calm!"

"Do you not appear a little tired, a little pale?"

"Very possibly," she answered. "I have been troubled about my mother recently. The extreme cold affected her circulation. For some days we were in grave anxiety. Her vitality is low. Indeed, I have passed through some trying hours."

"And I was ignorant of her illness, ignorant of your anxiety! Why did you not write and tell me?"

"Does not the difficulty of answering letters one has never received occur to you?" Gabrielle inquired, mildly. "And it was not I, you know, who volunteered to write."

The young man had drawn a chair up to the near side of the little table. Now he leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, both hands extended, as one who offers a petition.

"Do not reproach me with my silence or I shall be broken-hearted," he said. "My inclination was to write reams to you, volumes. I did, in fact, begin many letters. But I restrained myself. I destroyed them. To have sent them would have been selfish and indiscreet. I was bound, by my promise to you at parting, not to allude to the subject which most vitally touches my happiness. And I found over there so much which was perplexing and sad. I asked myself what right I had to inflict upon you a recital of melancholy impressions and events. I came to the conclusion that I really had none."

Madame St. Leger looked at him sideways from between half-closed eyelids. The dimple showed in her cheek, but her smile was distinctly ironic.

"Why not admit that I was right in foretelling that you would find those shadowy ladies, and your mission to them, of absorbing interest? It occupied your time and thoughts to the exclusion of all else—now, was it not so? Was I not right?"

"Yes and no, *chère Madame*," he answered, presently, slowly and with so perceptible a change of tone that his hearer was startled to the point of finding it difficult to go on with her needlework.

Adrian sat silently watching her. The singular character of her beauty, both in its subtlety and suggestion of a reserve of moral force, had never been more evident to him. More than ever, in each gesture, in the long, suave lines of her body and limbs shrouded in clinging black, in the gleam of her furrowed hair as she turned or bent her charming head, in the abiding provocation and mystery of her eyes and lips, did she appear to him unique and infinitely desirable. Watching her, he inclined to become lyrical and cry aloud his worship in heroic fashion, careless of twentieth-century decorum and restraint. But if her room, the material frame and setting of that beauty, to his immense content remained unchanged in every particular, her attitude of mind, to his immense discontent, evidently remained unchanged likewise. In the first surprise of his arrival she had yielded somewhat, catching alight from his flame. But with a determined hand she shut down those sympathetic fires, becoming obdurate as before. He could feel her will sensibly stiffening against his own; and this at once hurt him shrewdly and whipped up passion, preaching a reckless war of conquest, bidding him disregard promises, bidding him speak and thunder down opposition by sheer law of the strongest. In every man worth the name temptation must arise, at moments, to beat the defiant beloved object into an obedient and docile jelly—the defiant beloved object, it may confidently be added, would regard any man as unworthy of serious consideration did it not.

But, in Adrian's case, sitting watching her now, though such temptation did very really arise, its duration was brief. Less primitive counsels prevailed. She was far from kind and he was hotly in love; but he was also the child of his age, and a fine gentleman at that, to whom, given time for reflection, berserker methods must inevitably present themselves as both unworthy and ludicrous. So, if she condemned him to play a waiting game, he would bow to her ruling and play it. He had considerable capital of self-confidence to draw upon. In as far as the ultimate issues were concerned he wasn't a bit afraid—as yet. He could afford, so he believed, to wait. Only, since tormenting was about, all the fun of that amiable pastime shouldn't be on her side. And to this end now he would make her speak first.

He remained silent, therefore, still observing her, until the color deepened in the round of her cheeks, and the stitches were set less regularly in the white work, while uneasiness gained on her causing her presently to look up.

"Yes and no?" she said, "yes and no? That is nothing of an answer. I am all attention. I am curious to hear your explanation. And then—yes and no—what next?"

"This," he replied, "that on nearer acquaintance the two ladies proved anything but shadowy. They proved, in some respects, even a little tremendous. Far from being absorbed in them, I came alarmingly near being absorbed by them—which is a very different matter."

"Ah, that is interesting. You did not like them?"

"I really cannot say. They both—but particularly the elder sister, my cousin Joanna—were new to my experience. I do not feel that I have even yet placed them in my mind. The members of all nations above a certain social level can meet on common ground. It is below that level national tendencies and eccentricities actually declare themselves. I went over, strong in the conceit of ignorance. I supposed I knew all about it and should find myself quite at home. I was colossally mistaken. The manners and mental attitude of the provincial middle-class English were a revelation to me of the blighting effects of a sea frontier and a Puritan descent. The men have but three subjects of conversation—politics, games, and their own importance. The women"—Adrian paused, looking full at Madame St. Leger—"I am very, very sorry for the women. Ah! dear Madame," he added, "let us return devout thanks that we were born on this side, the humane, the amiable, the artistic side of the Channel, you and I. For they are really a very uncomfortable people those middle-class Anglo-Saxons. Until I spent this age-long three weeks among them I had no conception what a convinced Catholic—in sentiment, if not, to my shame, altogether in practice—and thorough-paced Latin I was!"

During the above harangue Gabrielle's hands remained idle. He was really very good, meeting her thus half-way in the suppression of the personal and amatory note. She was obliged to him, of course; yet, in honest truth, was she so very much pleased by his readiness to take the hint? She could not but ask herself that—and then hurry away, so to speak, from the answer, her fingers in her pretty ears. His cue was an intelligent exchange of ideas then? An excellent one!—She stopped her ears more resolutely.—She, too, would be intelligent.

"Increased faith and increased patriotism as the result of your journey! How admirable! Clearly it is highly beneficial to one's morale to cross the Channel. Were it rather later in the year, and were the weather less inclement, I should be disposed to take the little cure, without delay, myself."

"It would not suit you in the least," Adrian asserted. "You would dislike it all quite enormously."

Gabrielle St. Leger at the Tower House! The idea produced in him a violent unreasoning repulsion, as though she ran some actual physical danger. Heaven forbid!

"I should not go with any purpose of enjoyment, but rather as a penance, hoping the dislike of what I found over there might heighten my appreciation of all my blessings here at home."

Whereupon Adrian, careless of diplomacy, clutched at his chance.

"Then you are not so entirely satisfied, *chère Madame et amie*," he cried, laughing a little in his eagerness, "not so utterly happy and content!"

"Is one ever as devout, ever as patriotic, as one ought to be?" she asked, gravely.

"Or as sincere?" he returned, with corresponding gravity.

The hot color deepened in the young woman's face, and she picked up her needlework again quickly.

"I—insincere?" she asked. "Is not that precisely why you find me slightly vexatious, my dear Mr. Savage, that I am only too sincere, a veritable model of sincerity?"

And she rose, gracious, smiling, to receive another guest.

"Ah! *ma toute belle*, how are you, and how is the poor, darling mother? Better? Thank God for that! But still in her room? Dear! dear! Yet, after all, what can one expect? In such weather convalescence must necessarily be protracted. I am forced to come and ask for news in person since you refuse to have a telephone. Just consider the many annoying intrusions, such as the present, which that useful instrument would spare you!"

Anastasia Beauchamp, overdressed and genial as ever, interspersed these remarks with the unwinding of voluminous fox furs, all heads and tails and feebly dangling paws, the kissing of her hostess on either cheek, and finally a hand-shake to Adrian.

"So you are restored to us, my dear Savage," she continued. "I am more than delighted to see you, though at this moment I am well aware that delight is not reciprocated.—There, there, it is superfluous to perjure yourself by a denial.—And you are back just in time to write a scathing criticism of your *protégé* M. Dax's exhibition, in the Review. Here is matter for sincere congratulation, for, believe me, very plain speaking is demanded. The newspapers are afraid of him. They cringe. Their pusillanimity is disgusting. Really this time he has broken his own record! It is just these things which create a wrong impression and bring France into bad odor with other nations. He is a traitor to the best traditions of the art of this country. I deplore it from that point of view. His exhibition is a scandal. The correctional police should step in."

"You have yourself visited the exhibition, dear Anastasia?" Madame St. Leger inquired, demurely.

"Naturally, I have been to see it. Don't I see everything which is going? Isn't that my acknowledged little hobby, my dear? Then, too, where does the benefit of increasing age come in unless you claim the privileges of indiscretion conferred by it? Still, even in senile indiscretion, one should observe a decent limit. I went alone, absolutely alone, to inspect those abominable productions. I wore a thick veil, too, and—I blushed behind it. Needless to relate, I now and then quivered with laughter. One is but human after all, and to be human is also to be diverted by impropriety. But I could have whipped myself for laughing, even though quite alone and behind the veil. Go and judge for yourself whether I am not justified in my disgust, my dear Savage. And as for you, *ma toute belle*, do not, I implore you, go at all—unless you have had the misfortune to do so already—even though going would effectually cure you of any kindness you may entertain toward the artist—an end, in my poor opinion, greatly to be desired."

“I have not seen M. Dax’s exhibition, nor have I seen M. Dax himself for some length of time,” Gabrielle remarked, quietly.

“You have dropped him? I rejoice to hear it. A man of so villainous an imagination is unfit to approach you.”

“I will not say that I have dropped him.” As she spoke she was aware that Adrian looked keenly, inquiringly at her. And this displeased her, as an intrusion upon her liberty of action. “M. Dax has a charming devotion to my little Bette,” she continued. “No one whom I know is so perfect a playfellow to children. His sympathy with them is extraordinary. He understands their tastes and pleasures, and is unwearied in his kindness to them. Only, perhaps, his games are a little overstimulating, overexciting. After his last visit my poor Bette suffered from agitating dreams and awoke in the night frightened and crying. I had difficulty in soothing her.”

“Praiseworthy babe, how profoundly right are her instincts!” Miss Beauchamp declared, fervently. “But, Heaven help us, what’s this!” she added, under her breath. “Perfidious infant, how these praiseworthy babies can fool one!”

She nodded and beckoned to Adrian, still speaking under her breath.

“As you value my friendship, don’t go, on no account go, my dear Savage. Come and sit here by me and tell me about your time in England. Like the chivalrous young man you are, stick to me. Supply me with a valid excuse for remaining. For, manners or no manners, I am resolved not to leave her alone with that depraved little horror. I am resolved to outstay him.”

CHAPTER III

A STRAINING OF FRIENDSHIP

Bette, light-footed, sprightly, in beaver cap, pelisse, and muff, brown cloth gaiters and boots to match, her face pink from air and exercise, her eyes wide and bright with consciousness of temerity, spricketed toward her mother, leading René Dax by the hand.

"I found him outside in the courtyard as I returned from my walk with my little friends," she piped, the words tumbling over one another in her pretty haste. "He told me that he wished so much to see us, but that he never found us at home now. And he looked unhappy. You have always instructed me that it is our duty to console the unhappy. So I informed him that I knew you were at home to-day, because you would not leave my grandmother, and I assured him that, speaking in your name, it would give us much pleasure to receive him. And then I invited him to come up-stairs with me. And that was all quite proper, wasn't it, mamma, because we do not like him to be unhappy, and it does give us pleasure to receive M. Dax, does it not?"

"Assuredly it gives us pleasure to receive M. Dax," Gabrielle said, her head carried high and a just perceptible ring of defiance in her voice.

She smiled graciously upon the young man, and for an instant the three stood hand in hand —René Dax, the Tadpole, offering the very strangest of connecting links between the beautiful mother and delicious little girl.

Miss Beauchamp uttered a sharp exclamation, which she vainly attempted to mask by a cough. Adrian Savage looked, saw, and turned his back. He stared blindly out of window at Paris beneath, sparkling in the keen-edged February sunshine. The sweat broke out on his forehead. He had received an agonizing, a hateful impression, amounting, sound and self-confident though he was, to acute physical pain. "No, not that, not that," he cried to himself. "Of all conceivable combinations, not that one. It is hideous, unbearable, out of nature!"

Miss Beauchamp touched him on the arm. Her face spoke volumes.

"Talk to me, my dear Savage," she said, urgently. "I can imagine what you feel. But talk. Create some, any excuse for staying, and take *It*, that depraved little horror, away with you when you go. Rally your resources, my dear friend. Play up, I entreat you, play up."

Then louder.

"You had a deplorable crossing—fog, coming into Calais? Yes, February is among the most odious months of the year. But I go over so seldom now, you know, since my poor brother's death. Nearly all my friends are on this side; and, after all, one only has to wait. Everybody who is anybody must pass through Paris sooner or later.—Talk, my dear Savage, talk. Support me.—Ah yes, in London you observed many changes? I hear a mania has taken the authorities lately for improvements. You did not stay in town? Ah no, of course not. Stourmouth?—Yes, I remember the place vaguely. Interminable black fir-trees and interminable, perambulating pink-and-white consumptives—I like neither. Yes, talk—talk—my own remarks are abysmal in their fatuity. But no matter. It's all in a good cause. Let us keep on."

René, meanwhile, successfully affected ignorance of any human presences save those of his hostess and his little guide.

"Why have you refused me? Why have you never let me see you?" he asked, gazing mournfully at Madame St. Leger.

"I have not been receiving," she replied. "My mother has been ailing, and my time has been devoted to her."

"But to see me, even to be aware that I was near her, would have done her good," he returned. "She has a great regard for me; and, in the case of a sensitive organization, the proximity of a person to whom one is attached acts as a restorative. It was on that account I have needed to come here. I, too, have been ailing. My exhibition is a howling success. Being a person of refinement, this naturally has disagreed with me, inducing repeated fits of the spleen, flooring me with a dumb rage of melancholy. As a corrective I required the soothing society of Madame, your mother, and of Mademoiselle Bette. I required also to be with you, Madame, to look at you. This I believed would prove beneficial to my nerves, lacerated by frenzied public admiration. By excluding me, you have not only wounded my susceptibilities, but prolonged my ill health. As I have already proved to you, Madame Vernois's regrettable illness is no sufficient reason for that exclusion. There must have been some further reason."

"There was a further reason," Gabrielle replied, quietly.

René gazed up at her, a point of flame in his somber eyes. All of a sudden, with an amazingly quick, very vulgar, street-boy gesture and a wicked grimace, tipping his thumb over his shoulder, he indicated the other two guests holding uneasy converse at the other side of the room. The thing was done in a twinkling, and he regained his accustomed plaintive solemnity of aspect.

"What further reason, that he, the janitor, otherwise Adrian the Magnificent, was away?"

"You are impertinent," Madame St. Leger said, sternly. At first her anger concentrated itself upon René Dax. Then, quite arbitrarily and unjustly, it took a wider sweep. She called Bette to her; and, kneeling down, the train of her dress trailing out across the rosy carpet, her head bowed, began undoing the frogs of the child's fur pelisse.

"Pray understand," she said, still sternly, "Mr. Savage's presence or absence is a matter which in no degree affects my actions."

While in the pause which followed Adrian's voice, harsh from his effort to make it sound quite disengaged and natural, asserted itself forcibly.

"Yes," he was saying, "Colonel Rentoul Haig.—You cannot surely have been so heartless as to have forgotten his existence, dear Miss Beauchamp, when he retains such enthusiastic memories of you and of the brilliancy of your conversation?"

"Rentoul Haig? Rentoul Haig? Ah! to be sure! I have it at last. Yes, certainly, in the early eighties, at my cousin Delamere Beauchamp's place in Midlandshire. Of course, of course—a neat, little, tea-party subaltern, out in camp with some militia regiment, in general request for answering questions and running messages, and so on; qualifying, even then, as a walking hand-book of the English landed and titled gentry."

"He has continued in that line until his genealogical learning has reached truly monumental proportions," Adrian returned, in the same harsh voice. "It possesses and obsesses him, keeping him in a perpetual ferment of apprehension lest he should be called upon to associate with persons of no family in particular. In this connection my arrival, I fear, caused him cruel searchings of heart. His mother and my father were hundredth cousins. Hence, alarms. Should I prove presentable to the funny old gentlemen at the local club, or should I compromise him? He has hardly marched with the times, and pictured me—this I learned from his own ingenuous lips—as some long-haired, threadbare, starveling Bohemian, straight out of the pages of Henri Mürger or Eugène Sue. My personal appearance did, I rejoice to say, reassure him to a certain extent. But your name, and recollections both of your

cousin's fine place and of your own conversational powers, did much more toward allaying the torment of his social sense. He ended, indeed, by conveying to me that, my beloved mother's alien nationality and my beloved father's profession notwithstanding, I was really quite a credit to the united houses of Savage and Haig."

"Are you going again to exclude me, are you going to shut the door on me, because I have been that which you qualify by the word 'impertinent'?" René Dax asked, softly and sadly, as Madame St. Leger—the little girl's coat removed and her frilled white skirts straightened out—rose proudly to her feet.

"You richly deserve that I should do so," she replied.

"Ah! *pardon*—but just consider. For to be cross with me, to repudiate me, is so conspicuously useless. It only serves to accentuate my faults—always supposing I really have any. I am controlled, I am led, by kindness, and I possess most engaging qualities. In the interests of all concerned you should encourage the display of those qualities."

"Pray do not be severe with M. Dax any more," little Bette put in, prettily and busily. "You have, perhaps, dear mamma, been so on my account, therefore it is for me to plead with you."

Madame St. Leger's expression softened. The Tadpole, his big overdeveloped brain and puny body, touched the springs of maternal compassion in her, somehow. She glanced at him. Surely she had exaggerated the disturbing influences which could be exercised by so quaint and relatively insignificant a creature? Then, stooping down, she took little Bette up in her arms, smiling, her figure finely poised, both in lifting and bearing the weight of that graceful burden. In an ecstasy of affection the child snuggled against her, cheek to cheek.

"I am no longer afraid of his little walking-cane," Bette murmured, in a confidential whisper. "That was a silly dream. I assure you I shall not allow it to trouble me, should it repeat itself. So I entreat you, mamma, tell M. Dax he may come here again and play with me and my little friends as he used to do."

Gabrielle's smile sweetened to a tender merriment. With her child pressed close against her, thus, she felt so satisfied, so secure in the strong, pure joys of her motherhood, that she gave caution the slip. So safeguarded, what, she asked herself, could disquiet her soul or harm her? René Dax was right, moreover, in saying he possessed engaging qualities—though it mightn't be the best taste in the world that he, himself, should announce the fact. What a good work, then, to nurture those qualities, and, by keeping them in play, strengthen and redeem all that was best in the young man's complex and wayward nature! A quite missionary spirit, toward the singular Tadpole, arose in her. And something further—though this she did not willingly acknowledge—namely, a hot desire to assert the completeness of her personal liberty before witnesses just now present. She would conserve her freedom, and demonstrate unequivocally to present company that she intended so doing.

"Good, most precious one," she said, returning the child's fluttering kisses. Then: "Since my little daughter wishes it, the door shall remain open, M. Dax."

But here Adrian Savage, partially overhearing the conversation, partially divining that purpose of demonstration, smitten, moreover, by Madame St. Leger's resolved and exalted aspect, was overcome by alarm and distress altogether too acute for further concealment. Miss Beauchamp might wave her long, thin arms, and pour forth cascades of transparently artificial conversation in the effort to delay his departure, but he could bear the position no longer. She, after all, was actuated by motives of social expediency and of friendship only, was merely an onlooker at this drama, while he was a principal actor in it, all his dearest hopes, all his future happiness at stake. He had reached the limits of moral and emotional endurance. His

handsome face was drawn and blanched to an unnatural pallor as against his black, pointed beard, black eyebrows, and dark, close-cropped hair. A few moments more and he felt he might be guilty of some irretrievable breach of good manners, might make a scene, commit some unpardonable folly of speech and action, or that just simply he might collapse, might faint. So, then and there, he bounded tiger-like, so to speak, into the open space before the fire where his hostess still stood, addressing her rapidly, imperatively, wholly ignoring her companion, René Dax.

"Pardon me, Madame, that I interrupt you, but I have already, as I fear, greatly outstayed your patience and will delay no further to bid you good-by. My excuse, both for coming to-day and for remaining so long, must be that I am here, in Paris, probably for but a few days on the business of the Review. I may be recalled to England at any moment, and it is conceivable in the press of work which demands my attention that I may not have another opportunity of presenting myself to you before I go."

"Behold Vesuvius in full eruption," René murmured, gazing pensively at his hostess.

The latter had stood little Bette down on the seat of the rose-cushioned chair. She still held the child close, one arm round her waist. The unaccustomed tones of Adrian's voice, his vehemence, and air of unmistakable suffering, agitated her. Was it the price of her independence to hurt a faithful friend so sorely as all this?

"I was unaware you were likely to leave Paris again so soon," she said. "I supposed you had returned for good; and there is so much that I wished to hear, so much that I had promised myself the entertainment of having you recount to me."

"Unfortunately the claims of my venerable cousin's affairs are inexorable," Adrian replied, with a not very successful attempt at lightness, looking her in the eyes while his lips perceptibly shook. "In death, as in life, he has proved himself an unscrupulously devouring old tyrant. Indeed, I am quite unable to forecast, as yet, when I shall escape out of the house of bondage for good."

"Mamma, dearest," little Bette whispered, politely, "I like it of course, but you will excuse me if I mention that you are squeezing me so very tight?"

And thereupon, somehow, Gabrielle's gentler mood evaporated. She ceased to be touched by the young man's troubled aspect, or to regret her share in the production of that trouble. She felt angry, though not very certainly with innocent Bette. Mockery supplanted concern in the expression of her beautiful face as she gave her hand to her unhappy lover.

"In time the arrangement of even the richest succession must be terminated. When that termination is reached we shall hope to welcome you back, Mr. Savage—unless, of course, you have any thought of forming ties which will necessitate your settling permanently in England?"

And, before Adrian had either time or heart to parry this cruel thrust, René intervened, patting him delicately on the back.

"So you are going, *mon vieux*? See, I will accompany you. No, no—indeed, I gladly go with you, leaving Mademoiselle Beauchamp—who detests me—as she so earnestly desires, in possession of the field of battle. Why should I not go, my dear fellow? You do not hurry my departure in the least. I have accomplished the object of my visit. I am restored, soothed comforted. I have got all—all that, for the moment, I want."

As the door closed behind the two young men Anastasia advanced. She re-adjusted her frisky hat, pulled her long gloves up at the elbow, cast the heads and tails and feebly dangling paws of her fox furs about her neck and shoulders.

"*Ma toute belle*, at the risk of your being angry and requesting me to mind my own business, I am constrained to tell you that I fear you are committing a very grave folly," she said.

But Madame St. Leger was engaged in caressing little Bette.

"My poor angel, did I hurt you?" she asked. "Forgive me. I am ten thousand times sorry.—A grave folly, dear Anastasia? Ah no, believe me, you are altogether

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH ADRIAN SETS FORTH IN PURSUIT OF THE FURTHER REASON

Coming from under the *porte-cochère* into the street, Adrian, pleading a business appointment as excuse, shook off his companion somewhat unceremoniously, and hailing the first empty motor-cab, sped away to the office, his Review, in the *rue Druoi*. The rush across the center of Paris, through the thick of the afternoon traffic, with its lively chances of smashing or being smashed, served to steady him. Yet he was still under the empire of considerable emotion when he entered his private room at the office, and Emile Konski, his secretary, a roundabout, pink-cheeked, gray-headed, alert little man of fifty, arose bowing and beaming to relieve him of hat, coat, and umbrella.

"Thanks, thanks, my good Konski," he said. "And now just arrange the copy I have to revise, will you kindly, and take your own work into the outer office. I am rather hurried. I will call through to you should I want you."

"Perfectly, sir," the good Konski returned, obediently; but he beamed no more. His employer was also the god of his ingenuous idolatry, and to leave the private room for the outer office was to leave the Sanctuary for the Court of the Gentiles. Opportunities of devotion had been limited lately, hence banishment became the more grievous.

Once alone, Adrian sat down before his writing-table. The fortnightly *chronique* of home and foreign politics awaited his revision, so did literary and art notices. Among the latter a *critique* of René Dax's picture-show remained to be written, Adrian having expressed an intention of dealing with it himself. He meant to have passed an hour in the galleries after calling upon Madame St. Leger this afternoon, but had relinquished his purpose. For he desired rightly to divide the word of truth regarding René's eccentric performances; and just now, for reasons quite independent of their inherent merits or demerits, he feared they might stink in his nostrils to a degree subversive of any just exercise of the critical faculty.

He made an honest effort to settle to work and absorb himself in the affairs of Morocco, the last new books, the last debates in the Chamber. But the neatly typed words and sentences proved singularly lacking in interest or meaning. He read them over and over again, only to find them crumble into purposeless units, like so much dry sand, incapable of cohesion. For what mattered—so, in a crisis, is even the cleverest of us dominated by personal feeling—what mattered the future of Morocco, for instance, though involving possibilities of war to all Europe, as against the future of himself, Adrian Savage?

And that future did, unquestionably, present itself just now as lamentably parlous. That he might fail, that Madame St. Leger might eventually and finally refuse to marry him, had never really seriously entered his head before. That he might have to diplomatize, to lay long and patient siege to the enchanting and enchanted beleaguered city before it fell he had long ago accepted; but that, in the end, it would most assuredly fall and he rapturously claim it by right of conquest, in his triumphant masculine optimism he had never, till this afternoon, doubted. Now the doubt did very really present itself and proved a staggering one. Nor was this all. For, save during those first few delicious moments of greeting he had been sensible of a sinister element battling against him, painfully affecting him, yet which he failed to define or to grasp.

Adrian stared at the copy outspread on his blotting-pad, and its blank, unmeaning sentences. Never before had he realized what a terrible, imprisoning, stultifying thing it may be to love! Morocco? Morocco? What, in the name of all which makes a man's life worth living, did he care about the fate of that forbidding North African coast? Let it stew in its own

barbarous juice! All the same, his inability to concentrate his attention upon the subject of that disagreeable country served to increase his perturbation and distress. Thanks to admirable physical health, he was accustomed to have his faculties thoroughly and immediately at command, and this refusal of his brain to work to order fairly infuriated him.

There was the *critique* of René Dax's picture-show to be written, too!

Adrian rose from the table and walked restlessly, almost distractedly, about the room. For where exactly, in respect of the resistance of that beloved beleaguered city, did René come in? Oh! that Tadpole of perverted genius, that perniciously clever Tadpole, who from childhood he had protected and befriended, whose fortunes he had so assiduously pushed! And again now, as when staring forth blindly from the high-set windows of *la belle* Gabrielle's thrice-sacred drawing-room at Paris, glittering in the sharp-edged sunshine, Adrian's whole being cried aloud against the blasphemy of a certain conceivable, yet inconceivable, combination in a passionate, agonized "God forbid!"

But verbal protest against that combination, however loud-voiced and vehement, ranging ineffectually within the narrow confines of his office, was a transparently inadequate mode of self-expression. His native impetuosity rendered uncertainty and suspense intolerable to him. He must act, must make a reconnaissance, must discover some means of ascertaining whether anything had occurred during his absence which served to explain the apparently existing situation. But, here, the intrinsic delicacy of the said situation asserted itself; since precisely those questions to which an answer is most urgently needed are the questions which a person of fine feeling cannot ask. Good breeding, sensibility, a chivalrous regard for the feelings of others are, as he reflected, at times a quite abominable handicap.

He sat down once again at the writing-table. What should he do? At his elbow stood the ebonized upright of the telephone, the long, green, silk-covered wire of it trailing away across the parquet floor to the plug in the wainscot. From a man he could not ask advice or information. But from a woman—surely it was different, permissible? Adrian left off pulling the ends of his upturned mustache and meditated. Distraction slightly lifted and lessened. He looked up an address in the directory; and, after an at first polite then slightly acrimonious parley with the operator at the exchange, got into communication with the person wanted. Would she be at home to-night after dinner, say about eight forty-five? Might he call? And, with multiplied apologies, might he depend upon finding her alone? To these questions the replies proved satisfactory, so that, in a degree solaced, his thirst for immediate action in a measure appeased and his scattered wits consequently once more fairly at command, Adrian resolutely turned his attention to the affairs of neglected Morocco.

As to René Dax's exhibition? Well, till to-morrow, at all events, it must wait.

Ever since he could remember, Miss Beauchamp had occupied the same handsome, second-floor flat in a quiet street just off the *Parc Monceau*. Adrian recalled a visit, in company with his mother, made to her there at a period when he still wore white frilled drawers and long-waisted holland tunics. Later, during his early school-days, he vaguely recollected a period during which his grandmother rarely mentioned Anastasia, and then with a suggestive pursing up of the lips and lift of the eyebrows. Afterward he came to know how, for some years, Miss Beauchamp's name had been rather conspicuously associated with that of a certain famous Hungarian composer resident in Paris. But the said composer had long since gone the way of all flesh, and the question as to whether his and Anastasia's friendship was, or was not, strictly platonic in character had long since ceased to interest society. Other stars rose and set in the musical firmament. Other scandals, real or imaginary, offered food for

discussion to those greedy of such fly-blown provender. Miss Beauchamp, meanwhile, had become an institution; was received—as the phrase goes—everywhere. Report declared her rich. Her generosity to young musicians, artists, and *literati* was, unquestionably, large to the verge of prodigality.

The aspect of her domicile, when he entered it this evening, struck Adrian as much the same now as on that long-ago visit with his mother. The suite of living-rooms was lofty, having coved and painted ceilings, captivating to his childish fancy. The rooms opened one from another in a sequence of three. The two first, both somewhat encumbered with furniture, pictures, and bric-à-brac—of very varying value and merit—were dimly lighted and vacant, places of silence and shadows, the atmosphere of them impregnated with a scent of cedar and sandal wood. From the third, the doorway of which was masked by thick curtains of Oriental embroidery, came the sound of a grand piano, played, and in masterly fashion, by a man's hands.

Adrian stopped abruptly, turning to the elderly maid.

"Miss Beauchamp informed me she would be alone," he said.

"Mademoiselle is alone," the maid answered. "She gave instructions no one was to be admitted save monsieur."

"Thanks—I will not detain you. I will announce myself," Adrian said.

He crossed the second and larger room, threading his way in and out of a perfect archipelago of furniture; and held one curtain partially aside, while the purpose of his visit and the smart of his own distractions alike were merged in a sensation of curiosity and surprise.

Miss Beauchamp sat at a grand piano, placed in the middle of the bare polished floor at right angles to the doorway. Adrian saw her face and high-shouldered, high-waisted figure in profile. She wore a cinnamon-colored tea-gown, opening over an under-dress of copper sequin-sewn net. A veritable pagoda of fiery curls crowned her head. Yet, though thin and bony, hers were the man's hands which compelled such rich, forcible music from the piano, making it speak, declaim, sing, plead, touch tragedy, triumphantly affirm, in this so very convincing a manner. The method and mind of the player, in their largeness of conception and fearless security of execution, held the young man captive, raising his whole attitude and outlook to a nobler plane. The music, indeed, carried his imagination up to regions heroic. He was in no haste to have it cease. He waited, therefore.

When the final chords were struck Anastasia Beauchamp, raising her hands from the keyboard, rested the tips of her fingers upon the edge of the empty music-desk, and sat motionless, absorbed in thought. Then, as the seconds passed, Adrian's position became, in his opinion, equivocal, courtesy demanding that he should either make his presence known or withdraw. He chose the former alternative and, taking a step forward, let the curtain fall into place behind him. Imperiously, with a lift of the chin, Miss Beauchamp turned her head and looked full at him; and, for a moment, the young man was fairly taken aback. For, setting of flaming pagoda and frisky tea-gown notwithstanding, he beheld a countenance no longer bizarre, that of an accredited jester, but sibylline, that of a woman who, in respect of certain departments of human knowledge, has touched ultimate wisdom, so that, in respect of those departments, life has no further secrets to reveal. Here was something outpacing the province of Adrian's self-confident, young masculine attainment; and it was to his credit that he instantly recognized this, accepting it with quick-witted and intuitive sympathy.

"Forgive me if I have presumed upon your indulgence, dear lady," he said, advancing with a disarming air of admiration and modesty, "by remaining here unannounced. I could not

permit any interruption of your wonderful playing. It would have amounted to profanity. Your art is sublime, is so altogether impressively great. But oh! why," he added, as the sibylline countenance softened somewhat, "have you elected to let me, to let your many friends, remain in ignorance? Why have you deprived us all of the joy of your superb musical gift?"

"Because that gift served its turn very fully many years ago, when you, my dear Savage, were little more than a baby," she answered. "Since then I have felt at liberty to regard my playing as a trifle of private property which I might keep to and for myself."

As she spoke Miss Beauchamp rose from her seat at the piano, and began replacing a multiplicity of bracelets and rings, laid aside during the performance.

"As we grow older we, most of us, are disposed to practise such reservations, I suppose, whether openly acknowledged or not," she continued. "They may take their rise in inclinations of a sentimental, avaricious, or penitential nature; but, however divergent their cause, their object is identical—namely, to keep intact one's individuality, menaced by the disintegrating wear and tear of outward things. The tendency of the modern world is to render one invertebrate, to pound one's character and opinions into a pulp. In self-defense one is forced to reserve and to cultivate some hidden garden, wherein one's poor, battered individual me may walk in assuaging solitude and recollection. Especially"—she looked bravely at Adrian through the shaded light, while her long-armed, ungainly, rusty-gold figure, and strangely wise face surmounted by that flaming top-knot, appeared to him more than ever impressive—"especially, perhaps, is this the case if that garden once represented—as my music possibly once did—a Garden of Paradise in which one did not walk altogether solitary. But, come. You want to speak to me. Let us go into the drawing-room and have our talk there."

"Let us talk, by all means," Adrian put in, quickly, "but let it be here, please. This room is sympathetic—full of splendid echoes good for the soul."

Anastasia's expression softened yet more.

"That is charmingly said. We will stay here, since you wish it. The sofa? Yes, this is my corner—thanks. And now, to be quite frank with you, understand that I had lost count of time and you were inordinately punctual, or you wouldn't have caught me making music. And understand, further, that had I not been unusually moved, by something which occurred this afternoon, I should not have made music at all. I rarely walk in the hidden garden now. As one grows older one has to economize one's emotions. They are too tiring, liable to endanger one's sleep afterward. But this evening circumstances, associations, were too strong for me. The garden called to me and—I walked."

CHAPTER V

WITH DEBORAH, UNDER AN OAK IN THE PARC MONCEAU

Miss Beauchamp leaned back against the piled-up sofa cushions shading her eyes with her left hand; and that hand must have been a little unsteady, since Adrian heard the bracelets upon her wrist rattle and clink.

"Shall I tell you what the something was which so moved me?" she asked. "Unless I am greatly mistaken it is the main cause of our present interview, so that to speak of it may help to make that interview easier for us both."

"Pray tell me." Adrian felt curious as to what should follow; but his curiosity was tempered by deepening respect.

"It comes to this, then, my dear young man, I think," she said. "For those who have once been acquainted with true love—I am not speaking of mere sexual passion, still less of silly flirtations or wanton amorettes—those who have once known that uniquely beautiful and illuminating condition can neither forget nor mistake it. They carry an infallible touchstone in their own eyes, and ears, and hearts. It is my privilege to carry such a touchstone; and this afternoon—there, there, don't wince; quite, quite reverently and gently I put my finger on the fact—I beheld true love again; but true love tormented and far from happy. Wasn't it so?"

"Yes," Adrian replied, with a touch of bitterness, "it was."

"And that brought certain events and experiences—your dear mother's sympathy and friendship among them—so vividly before me that I could only come home here, to this practically deserted room, and make music, as long ago, when another man, another true lover, sat where you now sit. Do you follow me?"

Adrian's heart was somewhat full. He bowed his head in silent assent.

"The ice is satisfactorily broken then? I am an old woman now. Many people, I don't doubt, describe me as a flighty, prankish old spinster, who apes departed youth in a highly ridiculous manner."

She no longer shaded her eyes with her hand, but looked full at Adrian, through the quiet light, smiling—half sibyl, half jester, but, as he felt, wholly wise, wholly kind.

"Such criticisms matter to me rather less than nothing," she continued, "since the hidden garden knows the why and wherefore of all that, and more besides. And now, my dear boy, I have said enough, I think, to show you that you can unburden yourself without reserve or hesitation. You will not speak to me of an undiscovered country."

But just then Adrian felt it difficult to speak. Coming to this woman, he had found so much more than he had asked for or expected—namely, a finding of high romance, of almost reckless generosity, which made him feel humble, feel indeed quite quaintly ignorant and inexperienced. It followed that, when he did speak, he did so in child-like fashion, protesting his innocence as though needing to disarm censure.

"Believe me, I have not acted unworthily," he said. "From the first I was charmed, I was enthralled, but I made every effort to restrain myself. Even in thought I was loyal to poor St. Leger. I did my best to conceal my admiration—I kept away, as much as I could without discourtesy. You see, her very perfection is, in a sense, her safeguard, for how inconceivably vile to endanger the peace of mind of so adorable a creature by any hint, any suggestion! It is only since St. Leger's death that I—"

"Yes, yes, I take all that for granted," Anastasia broke in. "Doesn't it stand to reason, since we are talking of true love?"

And Adrian could not forbear to smile, notwithstanding his humbled condition; the touch was so deliciously feminine in its assumption and non-logic. Unless, by chance, she was laughing at him out of her larger wisdom? Possibly she was. Well, she could do nothing but right, anyhow—so he didn't care! Whereupon he proceeded to pour forth the history of his affection in all its phases, from its first inception to the existing moment, with dramatic fervor, spreading abroad his hands descriptively, while the sentences galloped with increasing velocity and the mellow, baritone voice rose and fell.

"Ah! and can you not conceive it? After that dismal time in England, burying the dead, contending with all manner of tiresomenesses, with narrow-minded, over-strenuous, over-educated women and men—ye gods, such men!—to come back, to see her, was like coming from some underground cavern into the sunshine. She received me exquisitely. I tasted ecstasy. I was transported by hope. Then, abruptly, her manner changed; and that change did not appear to me spontaneous, but calculated—as though, in obedience to some alien influence, she unwillingly put a constraint upon herself. Since then I have reconstituted the scene repeatedly—"

"My poor dear boy!" Anastasia murmured.

"Yes, repeatedly, repeatedly. I try to convince myself that her change of manner was unwilling, not the result of caprice."

"Madame St. Leger is not capricious."

"I am sure of it. Her nature, at bottom, is serious. She reasons and obeys reason. But in this case what reason? Not dislike of me? No, no, my mind refuses such an explanation of her conduct. It would be too horrible, too desolating."

"Isn't there another rather obvious explanation of Madame St. Leger's attitude—the fear of liking you a little too much?"

"But why should she fear to like me?" poor Adrian cried. "I am no devouring monster! I have some talent, sufficient means, and no concealed vices."

And there the thought of René Dax invaded him, scorching him with positively rampant jealousy and repulsion. For could this, which he had just asserted regarding himself, be asserted with equal truth regarding the Tadpole of genius? He knew very well it could not. Still, even so, he shrank from the *rôle* of treacherous friend or detractor.

"She can be gracious enough to others," he contented himself by saying, gazing at his hostess meanwhile, his expression altogether orphaned and pathetic.

"Dangerously gracious. And that is why I did all in my power to delay your departure this afternoon, although I knew perfectly well you were on the rack."

"But, dear God in heaven!" he broke out, incoherently, burying his face in both hands, "you cannot imply, you cannot intend to convey to me your belief—"

"That Gabrielle St. Leger contemplates marrying that libelous little horror, M. Dax? Never in life!"

Adrian got up and walked unsteadily—for indeed the floor seemed to shift and lurch beneath his feet—across the room. Without the faintest conception of what he was looking at, he minutely examined a landscape hanging upon the opposite wall. He also blew his nose and wiped his eyes. While Anastasia Beauchamp, her jaw set, leaning back against the sofa cushions, very actually and poignantly walked in that hidden garden of hers—once a Garden of Eden, and not an Adamless one—wrapped about by remembrance.

After a time the young man came back and sat down beside her. His face was white and his eyes were luminous.

“Most dear and kind friend, forgive me,” he said, very gently. “I have climbed giddy pinnacles of rapture, and tumbled off them—plop—into blackest morasses of despair to-day, and my nerves have suffered.”

“Ah! it has got you!” she returned. “I’m not a bit sorry for you. On the contrary, I congratulate you. For you are very handsomely and hopelessly in love.”

Adrian nodded assent, pushing up the ends of his mustache with a twist of his fingers and smiling.

“Yes, yes, indeed I know,” he said. “It is a thing for which to be immeasurably thankful. Yet, all the same, it has its little hours of inconvenience, as I have to-day discovered. It can hold the field to the exclusion of all else; and that with a quite demoralizing intensity, making one feel murderous toward one’s oldest friends and, in respect of one’s work, no better than a driveling idiot.”

“Such are inevitable symptoms of the blessed state. I still congratulate you.”

“But you admit, at least, that they are practically extremely impeding? And so, dear Mademoiselle, you whom my mother loved and who loved my mother, you who have done so much to help and comfort me in the last half-hour—will you do something more?”

“I suppose I shall,” Anastasia answered, with a laugh which was against herself rather than against him. “I seem to be pretty thoroughly committed to this business for—well, for two people’s sakes, perhaps.”

“Yes, for her sake also—for hers as well as mine,” Adrian cried, impetuously. “Those few words are beautifully full of encouragement. For see here,” he went on, “in some ways I am just simply an obstinate, pig-headed Englishman. You permit me to speak quite freely? Loosing her, I cannot console myself elsewhere. It is not merely a wife that I want; having reached the age when a man should range himself a well-bred, healthy, and generally unexceptionable mother for his children! Don’t imagine that I would not like to make my subscription to humanity in the form of charming babies. Of course I should. Still those small people, however beguiling, are not to the point in this connection. I am not in pursuit of a suitable marriage, but of—”

“*La belle Gabrielle*—only and solely *la belle Gabrielle*—that must be conspicuously evident to the meanest intelligence,” Anastasia put in, merrily. “But there, unfortunately, we run up against the crux of the whole situation. For, it is only fair to tell you, our exquisite young woman is even less in pursuit of a suitable marriage than you yourself are. We have had some intimate conversations, she and I. Don’t imagine for an instant your name, or any other name, has been hinted at, much less mentioned. But she has been good enough to bestow her confidence upon me, in as far as she bestows it upon any one. Fundamentally she is a mysterious creature, and that’s exactly why, I suppose, one finds her so endlessly interesting. And, from those conversations, I gather her mind is set on things quite other than marriage.”

“Ah! just Heaven—and what things, then?” poor Adrian exclaimed, distraction again threatening him.

“She would, I think, have very great difficulty in telling you.”

Here distraction did more than threaten. It jumped on him, so that in his agitation he positively bounced, ball-like, upon the seat of the sofa.

“I knew it,” he cried. “I was sure of it. Almost immediately I detected an alien and inimical influence intrude itself between us, as I have already told you, and battle against me. And this was the more detestable to me because I felt powerless to combat it, being ignorant whence it came and what its nature actually was.”

Miss Beauchamp looked at him indulgently. And he, distraction notwithstanding, perceived that her countenance once more had grown sibylline. This served sensibly to quiet and steady him.

"I fancy that influence comes from very deep and very far," she said. "A woman of so much temperament and so much intelligence as Gabrielle St. Leger must, of necessity, be the child of the age in which she lives, in touch with the spirit of it. Her eyes are turned toward the future, and the strange unrestful wind, the wind of Modernity, which blows from out the future, is upon her face. This is the influence you have to battle against, my dear young man, I am afraid, nothing less than the Spirit of the Age, the spirit of Modernity. You have your work cut out for you! To combat it successfully will be—to put it vulgarly—a mighty tough job."

"Like King David of old, I'd rather fall into the hands of God than into those of man," Adrian returned, with rather rueful humor.

"Is one so very sure they are the hands of the Almighty? Too often one has reason to suspect they belong to exactly the opposite person—the inspirer—namely, of so many of your friend M. René Dax's unpardonable caricatures. But there," she added, "I don't want to give place to prejudice; though whether Modernity is veritably the highroad to the state of human earthly felicity its exponents so confidently—and truculently—predict, or not rather to some appalling and final catastrophe, some Armageddon, and Twilight of the Gods, appears to me, in the existing stage of its evolution, open to the liveliest question. Fortunately, at my time of life one is free to stand aside and look on, passively awaiting the event without taking part in the production of it. But with Madame St. Leger, as with yourself, it is different. You are on the active list. Whether you like or not, you are bound to participate in the production of the event—and she, at least, is by no means unwilling to do so."

"But how, *chère Mademoiselle*, but how?" Adrian questioned.

"After a fashion you can hardly be expected to indorse enthusiastically."

Miss Beauchamp shaded her eyes with her left hand again, while the many bracelets slipping up her thin wrist clinked and rattled.

"See here, my dear Savage," she said, "among all the destructions and reconstructions, the changes—many of them nominal rather than real, and, consequently, superfluous—of which Modernity is made up, one change is very real and has, I sincerely believe, come to stay. I mean the widespread change in thought and attitude of my sex toward yours."

"Feminism, in short."

"In short, Feminism."

A little silence followed. Then: "You take the dose very nicely," Anastasia said.

"Perhaps I take it so nicely because I am convinced it is innocuous. On the other hand, perhaps I don't take it at all. Really, I am not certain which."

He shifted his position, planting his elbows on his knees and his chin in the hollow of his hands.

"The deuce, the deuce!" he said, softly, tapping one long-toed boot meditatively upon the floor.

Miss Beauchamp watched him, amused, observant, making no comment.

"I am sorry," he went on, presently. "It's all moonshine, of course. Nature's too strong for them. In the end they must come into line."

"Moonshine has often proved a very dangerous, because so very intangible an enemy. And the end promises to be far off."

"Yes, I am sorry," Adrian repeated, "very sorry, we were over in England I could understand. Women there have an excuse for revolt. All Englishmen are pedants, even in their games, even in their sport. They have been called a nation of shopkeepers. They might with equal truth be called a nation of schoolmasters; not because they desire to impart knowledge, but because they crave to exercise power and prove, to themselves, their innate superiority by the chastisement of others. Ah! I have witnessed plenty of that in the last month! Truly, they are very disagreeable sons, husbands, and fathers, those middle-class Britons, the schoolmaster, so to speak, permanently on top. And there are not even enough of them to go round! Numerically they are inferior; and this helps to feed their arrogance and inflame their conceit. But even if there were enough, they wouldn't—if I may so express myself—go round. On the contrary, they would go in the opposite direction, to their own selfish pleasures, their clubs, their playing-fields, their interminable football, and cricket, and golf."

"Hum—hum! What about the British flag you waved so vigorously five minutes ago?"

"Did I? Forget it, then. It was a passing aberration. I repent and wrap myself once more in the folds of the tricolor. Most distinctly that is the flag under which a lover of your adorable sex should fight!"

"With the Gallic cock set symbolic at the top of the flag-staff?"

"And why not? Why not? Who can do otherwise than behold with approval that smart, well-groomed, abundantly amatory, I grant you, but also abundantly chivalrous fowl? His absence is, in a sense, precisely that with which I quarrel on the other side of the Channel. It goes to make the revolt of the Englishwoman comprehensible. Her countrymen's relation to her is so inartistic, so utilitarian, so without delicate humor. We hear of her freedom from annoyance, her personal security. But in what do these take their rise? Simply in her countrymen's indifference to her—to her emotions, her mentality, her thousand and one delicate needs, elusive and charming necessities. If he thinks about her at all, it is with the schoolmaster's odious design of correcting her faults, of improving her. The blatant conceit of the animal! As if she could be improved, as if she were not perfect already! But stay. There I pause to correct myself. The Englishwoman is susceptible of improvement. And how? By being snubbed, depressed, depreciated, grumbled at, scolded, made to think meanly of herself? Never a bit.—She has suffered generations of that treatment already. By being admired, reverenced, playfully delighted in, appreciated, encouraged."

Adrian spread abroad his hands with the most amiably persuasive expression and gesture.

"Ah! believe me, dear friend," he cried, "when Luther, the burly renegade German monk; Calvin, the parchment-dry, middle-class Picard lawyer, and English 'King Hal,' of grossest memory, conspired to depose Our Blessed Lady from her rightful throne in heaven, they, incidentally, went far to depose woman from her rightful throne here upon earth. So that, small wonder, having no eternal, universal Mother, whose aid and patronage she can invoke in hours of perplexity and distress, the modern, non-Catholic woman is constrained to rush around in prison-vans, or any other unlovely public vehicle which may come handy, invoking the aid of parliamentary suffrage and kindred dreary mechanical forms of protection against the tedious tyrannies of arrogant, sullen, selfish, slow-witted, birch-rod-wielding, pedagogic man. Yes, truly, as over there, I understand, I sympathize. But here, where, though we may have tolerated, even invented, Revolution, we have at least withstood that most time-serving and inartistic compromise, Reformation—with an impudent capital letter—here, in the patrimony of Chantecler, enveloped in the folds of the gallant tricolor, surely such revolt is unreasonable, is out of place! For here are we not all Feminists, every man-jack of us? *Chère*

Mademoiselle, you know that we are. What more, then, have the members of your adored sex to ask?"

And, for the moment, Anastasia Beauchamp's usually ready tongue played her false. The whirl of words had been somewhat overpowering, while, through the whirl, his good faith was so transparently apparent, his argument suggested rather than aggressively pressed home, so evidently to himself conclusive, that a cogent answer was far from easy to frame.

"What more have they to ask?" she said, presently, smiling at him. "Well, just those alluring, because new, untried and intangible satisfactions which the Spirit of the Age promises so largely, and which you, my dear Savage, if you'll pardon my saying, don't and can't promise at all."

"The Spirit of the Age now, as so often in history, will prove a false prophet, a charlatan and juggler, making large promises which he will fail to redeem," Adrian declared. "See, do not art, nature, the cumulative result of human experience, combine to discredit his methods and condemn his objects?"

"Convince Gabrielle St. Leger of that, and my thanks and applause will not be wanting."

"I will convince her," Adrian cried, with growing exaltation. "I will convince her. I devote my life to that purpose, to that end."

And thereupon a certain solemnity seemed to descend upon and diffuse itself through the quiet, lofty room, affecting both speaker and listener, causing them to sit silent, as though in hushed suspense, awaiting the sensible ratification of some serious engagement entered into, some binding oath taken. In the stillness faint, fugitive echoes reached them of the palpitating life and movement of the city outside. The effect was arresting. To Adrian it seemed as though he stood on the extreme edge, the crumbling, treacherous verge, of some momentous episode in which he was foredoomed to play a part, but a part alien to his desires and defiant of his control. While—and this touched him with intimate, though half-ashamed, shrinking and repudiation—not Gabrielle St. Leger, but Joanna Smyrthwaite appeared to stand beside him imploring rescue and safety upon that treacherously crumbling verge. His sense of her presence was so acute, so overmastering in its intensity, that he felt in an instant more he should hear her flat, colorless voice and be compelled—how unwillingly!—to meet the fixed scrutiny of her pale, insatiable eyes.

Then, startling in its suddenness as the ping of a rifle-bullet, came a very different sound to that of Joanna's toneless voice close at hand. For, with a wrenching twang and thin, piercing, long-drawn vibration which shuddered through the air, shuddered through every object in the room, strangely setting in motion that pervasive scent of cedar and sandalwood, a string of the piano broke.

Miss Beauchamp uttered an angry, yet smothered, cry, as one who receives and resents an unexpected hurt. And Adrian, alarmed, agitated, hardly understanding what had actually occurred, turning to her, perceived that her countenance again had changed. Now it was that neither of sibyl nor of jester, but vivid, keen with fight. Yet, even as he looked, it grew gray, grief-smitten, immeasurably, frighteningly old.

Natural pity, and some inherited instinct of healing, made the young man lean toward her and take her hand in his, holding and chafing it, while his finger-tips sought and found the little space between the sinews of the wrist where the tides of life ebb and flow. Her pulse was barely perceptible, intermittent, weak as a thread.

Adrian took the other passive hand, and, chafing both, used this contact as a conduit along which to transmit some of his own fine vitality. His act of willing this transmission was

conscious, determined, his concentration of purpose great; so that presently, while he watched her, the grayness lifted, her lips regained their normal color, her pulse steadied and strengthened, and her face filled out, resuming its natural contours. Then as she moved sat upright, smiling, an unusual softness in her expression.

"Don't attempt to speak yet," he said, still busy with and somewhat excited by his work of restoration. "Rest a little. I have been a shameless egoist this evening. I have talked too much, have made too heavy a demand upon your sympathies, and so have exhausted you."

"Whatever you may have taken, you have more than paid back," she answered. She was touched—a nostalgia being upon her for things no longer possible, for youth and all the glory and sweetness of youth. "It is not for nothing that you are the son of a famous physician and of a woman of remarkable imaginative gifts," she went on. "You have *la main heureuse*, life-giving both to body and spirit. This is a power and a great one. But now that, thanks to you, my weakness is passed we will not remain in this room. You said it was full of splendid echoes, good for the soul. It is rather too full of them, since one's soul is still weighted with a body. I find them oppressive in their suggestion and demand. Frankly, I dare not expose myself to their influence any longer."

Helped by Adrian, she rose and, taking his arm, moved slowly toward the doorway.

"Sometimes, unexpectedly, the merciful dimness which holds our eyes is broken up, giving place to momentary clear-seeing of all which lies beyond and around the commonplace and conventional medium in which we live. Unless one is rather abnormally constituted that clear-seeing is liable to blind rather than to illuminate. Flesh and blood aren't quite equal to it. And so with the snapping of the piano string. Doubtless the causes were simple enough—some peculiar atmospheric conditions, along with the fact that the instrument has been unused for many months. Still in me it produced one of those fateful instants of clairvoyance. I knew it for the signing of a death-warrant. Not my own. Thanks to the kindly ministrations of *la main heureuse* the signature of that particular warrant is postponed for a while yet. Nor yours either, of that I am convinced. I cannot say whose. The clear-seeing was too rapidly obscured by failing bodily strength. I am not talking nonsense. This has happened twice before. The second time a string broke my brother's death followed within the year."

"And the first time?" Adrian felt impelled to ask. His recent expenditure of will-power had left his nerves in a state of slightly unstable equilibrium which rendered him highly impressionable.

"The first time?" Miss Beauchamp repeated, lifting her hand from his arm. "The death of that other true lover, who listened here to my playing, of the friend who walked with me in the hidden garden, followed the breaking of the first string."

Adrian stepped forward and held aside the embroidered curtain, letting her pass into the drawing-room. Here the air was lighter, the moral and emotional atmosphere, as it seemed to him, lighter likewise. He was aware of a relaxation of mental tension and a deadening of sensation which he at once welcomed and regretted. He waited a few seconds until he was sure that in his own case, too, any disquieting tendency to clairvoyance was over and the conventional and commonplace had fairly come back.

Miss Beauchamp passed on into the first room of the suite. Here the lights were turned on and he found her seated at a little supper-table, vivacious, accentuated in aspect and manner, flaming pagoda of curls and frisky cinnamon-colored, sequin-sewn tea-gown once again very much in evidence. But these things no longer jarred on him. He could view them in their true

perspective, as the masquerade make-up with which a proud woman elected—in self-defense—to disguise too deep a knowledge, too sensitive a nature, and too passionate a heart.

"Yes, sit down, my dear Savage," she cried, "sit down. Eat and drink. For really it is about time we both indulged in what are vulgarly called 'light refreshments.' We have been surprisingly clever, you and I, and have rubbed our wits together to the emission of many sparks! I am not a bit above restoring wasted tissue in this practical manner—nor, I trust, are you. Moreover, our lengthy discourse notwithstanding, I have still five words to say to you. For, see, very soon Madame St. Leger's period of mourning will be over. She will begin to go into society again."

"Alas! yes." Adrian sighed.

"You don't like it? Probably not. You would prefer keeping her, like blessed St. Barbara, shut up on the top of her tower, I dare say. But doesn't it occur to you that there are as insidious dangers on the tower top as in the world below—visits from the little horror, M. René Dax, for example? Anyhow, she will shortly very certainly descend from the tower. For we are neither of us, I suppose, under the delusion she has buried all her joy of living in poor Horace St. Leger's grave."

"I have no violent objection to her not having done so," Adrian said, with becoming gravity.

"That first descent after her long seclusion will be critical. She will need protection and advice."

"Her mother, Madame Vernois, is at hand," Adrian remarked, perhaps rather tentatively.

"Yes, a sweet person and a devoted mother; but a little conspicuously with the outlook and moral standards of a past generation. She is at once too charitable and too humble-minded to be a judge of character—one born to follow rather than to lead—and, though a woman of breeding and position, always a provincial. She followed Professor Vernois as long as he was here to follow. Then she followed her noble and needy relations away in Chambéry. Now she follows her beautiful daughter. And the daughter, in the near future, is going to be a mark for the archers—male and female. Already I have reason to believe that archery practice has begun. The sweet, timid mother, though perplexed and anxious, hasn't a notion how to turn those arrows aside."

Miss Beauchamp gazed into the shallow depths of her wine-glass.

"It's an unsavory subject," she continued, "and, I agree with you, Feminism has next to no legitimate excuse for existence here. That is just why, I imagine, it has allied itself with ideas and practices not precisely legitimate. It makes its appeal to by no means the most exalted elements of our very mixed human nature."

"Ah! but," Adrian broke out in a white heat of anger, "it is not possible! Such persons would never presume—"

"They have already presumed. Zélie de Gand, helped by I don't quite know who, though I have my suspicions, has approached Madame St. Leger. She is crazy to recover lost ground, to get herself and her clique reinstated. Madame St. Leger's beauty, brains, and her reputation—so absolutely unsullied and above suspicion—represent an immense asset to any cause she may embrace."

"But need she embrace any cause?"

"My dear young man," Miss Beauchamp returned, smiling rather broadly, "you had better take it for said, once and for all, that a beautiful young woman of seven and twenty, who is

beginning the world afresh after being relieved of a not entirely satisfactory marriage, is perfectly certain to embrace—well—well—Something, if she doesn't embrace Somebody."

Presently, after a silence, Anastasia spoke again, gently and seriously.

"I am altogether on your side," she said. "But I cannot pretend it is plain sailing for you. There is a reserve of enthusiasm in her nature, an heroic strain pushing her toward great enterprises. It may be she will suffer before she arrives, will be led astray, will follow delusions. Her mind is critical rather than creative. She is disposed to distrust her instincts and to reason where she had ten thousand times better only feel. And, as I tell you, she looks toward the future; the restless wind of it is upon her face, alluring, exciting her. No—no—it is not plain sailing for you, my dear young man. But, for Heaven's sake, don't let true love be your undoing, seducing you from work, from personal achievement in your own admirable world of letters. For remember, the greater your own success the more you have to offer. And the modern woman asks that. She requires not merely Somebody to whom to give herself, but Something which shall so satisfy her brain and her ambitions as to make that supreme act of giving worth while."

Anastasia smiled wistfully, sadly.

"Yes, indeed, times have changed and the fashion of them! Man's supremacy is very quaintly threatened. For the first time in the history of the human race he finds sex at a discount.—But now good-night, my dear Savage. Whenever you think I can help you, come. You will always be welcome. And—this last word at parting—do your possible to keep that little horror away from her. In him Modernity finds a most malign embodiment. Farewell."

CHAPTER VI

RECORDING THE VIGIL OF A SCARLET HOMUNCULUS AND ARISTIDES THE JUST

The gray lemur sat before the fire in a baby's scarlet-painted cane chair. He kept his knees well apart, so that the comfortable warmth, given off by the burning logs and bed of glowing ashes, might reach his furry concave stomach and the inside of his furry thighs. His long, ringed tail, slipped neatly under the arm of the little scarlet chair, lay, like a thick gray note of interrogation, upon the surface of the black Aubusson carpet. Now and again he leaned his slender, small-waisted body forward, grasping the chair-arms with his two hands—which resembled a baby's leather gloves with fur backs to them—and advanced a sensitive, inquisitive, pointed muzzle toward the blaze, his nose being cold. His movements were attractive in their composure and restraint. For this quadrumanous exile from sub-tropic Madagascan forests was a dignified little personage, not in the least addicted, as the vulgar phrase has it, to giving himself away.

At first sight the lemur, sitting thus before the fire, appeared to be the sole inhabitant of the bare white-walled studio. Then, as the eye became accustomed to the dusky light, shed by hanging electric lamps with dark smoked-glass shades to them, other queer living creatures disclosed their presence.

At the end of the great room farthest from the door, where it narrowed in two oblique angles under high, shelving skylights, in a glass tank—some five feet by three and about two feet deep—set on a square of mosaic pavement, goldfish swam lazily to and fro. In the center of the tank, about the rockwork built up around the jet of a little tinkling fountain, small, dull-hued tortoises with skinny necks and slimy carapaces and black-blotched, orange-bellied, crested tritons crawled. While all round the room, forming a sort of dado to the height of above five feet, ran an arabesque of scenes and figures, some life-size, some even colossal, some minute and exquisitely finished, some blurred and half obliterated, in places superimposed, sketched one over the other to the production of madly nightmarish effects of heads, limbs, trunks, and features attached, divided, flung broadcast, heaped together in horrible promiscuosity. All were drawn boldly, showing an astonishing vivacity of line and mastery of attitude and expression, in charcoal or red and black chalk, or were washed in with the brush in Indian ink and light red. In the dusky lamplight and scintillating firelight this amazing decoration seemed endowed with life and movement, so that shamelessly, in unholy mirth, hideousness, and depravity it stalked and pranced, beckoned, squirmed, and flaunted upon those austerely snow-white walls.

For the rest, chairs, tables, easels, even the model's movable platform, were, like the carpet, dead black. Two low, wide divans upholstered in black brocade stood on either side of the deep outstanding chimney-breast; and upon the farther one, masked by a red-lacquer folding screen, amid a huddle of soft, black pillows, flat on its back, a human form reposed—but whether of living man or of cleverly disposed lay figure remained debatable, since it was shrouded from head to heel in a black silk *resai*, even the face being covered, and its immobility complete.

On taking leave of Anastasia Beauchamp, Adrian Savage had found himself in no humor either for work or for sleep. His search for the further reason had led him a longer journey than he anticipated. And in some of its stages that journey offered disquieting episodes. He admitted he was still puzzled, still anxious; more than ever determined as to the final result, yet hardly more clear as to how the result in question might be obtained. There were points

which needed thinking out, but to think them out profitably he must regain his normal attitude of mind and self-possession. So, reckoning it useless to go home to his well-found bachelor apartments in the *rue de l'Université*, he decided to walk till such time as physical exercise had regulated both his bodily and mental circulation.

It happened to be the moment of the turn-out of theaters and other places of entertainment, and, as the young man made his way down toward the *Place de l'Opéra*, the aspect of the town struck him as conspicuously animated and brilliant. His eyes, still focused to the quiet English atmosphere and landscape, were quick to note the contrast to these presented by his existing surroundings. He invited impressions, looking at the scene sympathetically, yet idly, as at the pages of a picture-book. Strong effects of light and color held the ground plan, above which the tall, many-windowed houses rose as some pale striated cliff-face toward the strip of infinitely remote, star-pierced sky. It was sharply cold, and through the exciting tumult of the streets he could detect a shrill singing of wind in telegraph and telephone wires and amid the branches of the leafless trees. In like manner, passing from the material to the moral plane, through the accentuated vivacity of the amusement-seeking crowd, he seemed to detect, as so often in Paris—is not that, indeed, half the secret of her magic and her charm?—a certain instability and menace, a shrill singing of possible social upheaval, of Revolution always there close at hand awaiting her surely recurrent hour of opportunity.

To Adrian, after precedent-ridden, firmly planted, middle-class England and the English, that effect of instability, that shrill singing of social upheaval, proved stimulating. He breathed it in with conscious enjoyment while negotiating thickly peopled pavements or madly tram- and motor-rushed crossings. For these dear Parisians, as he told himself, alike in mind and in appearance, are both individual and individualists with a positive vengeance, possessing not only the courage of their physical types—and making, for beauty or the reverse, the very most of them—and the courage of their convictions; but the courage of their emotions likewise. And how refreshingly many are those emotions, how variegated, how incalculable, how explosive! How articulate, too, ready at a moment's notice to justify their existence by the discharge of salvos of impassioned rhetoric! If the English might fairly be called a nation of pedants, these might, with at least equal fairness, be called a nation of comedians; not in the sense of pretending, of intentionally playing a part—to that affectation the English were far more addicted—but in the sense of regarding themselves and life from a permanently dramatic standpoint. Wasn't it worth while to have been away for a time, since absence had so heightened his appreciation of racial contrasts and power of recognizing them?

And there he paused in his pæan. For on second thoughts, were these psychologic determinations so well worth the practical cost of them? Is gain of the abstract ever worth loss in the concrete? His thought turned with impatience to Stourmouth, to the Tower House and its inhabitants, and to the loss of precious time which devotion to their affairs had, in point of fact, caused him. Resultant appreciation of psychologic phenomena seemed but a meager recompense for such expenditure. For this absence had made him lose ground in relation to Madame St. Leger. Miss Beauchamp intimated as much; intimated, too, that while he lost ground others had gained it, had done their best to jump his claim, so to speak, and had, in a measure at least, succeeded—take Mademoiselle Zélie de Gand, for example.

Whereupon Adrian ceased to take any interest, philosophic or otherwise, in the wonderful midnight streets and midnight people; becoming himself actively, even aggressively, individualist, as he brushed his way through the throng, his expression the reverse of urbane and his pace almost headlong.

For who, in the devil's name, had dared give that much-discussed, plausible, very astute and clever, also very much discredited arrivist and novelist—Zélie de Gand—an introduction to Madame St. Leger? Miss Beauchamp owned to a suspicion. And then, yes, of course he remembered last year meeting the great Zélie at René Dax's studio! Remembered, too, how René had pressed a short story of hers upon him for publication in the Review; and had sulked for a week afterward when—not without laughter—he had pronounced the said story quite clearly unprintable. Did René, after all, represent the further reason, not as aspirant to *la belle Gabrielle's* thrice-sacred hand indeed; but as her mental director, inciting her to throw in her lot with agitators and extremists, Feminists, Futurists, and such-like pestilent persons—enemies of marriage and of the family, of moral and spiritual authority, of all sane canons of art, music and literature, reckless anarchists in thought and purpose if not, through defective courage, in actual deed? Was this what Anastasia Beauchamp hinted at? Was it against risk of such abominable stabling of swine in his own particular Holy of Holies—for the young man's anger and alarm, now thoroughly aroused, tended to express themselves in no measured language—she did her best to warn him?

Again, as earlier that day, a necessity for immediate and practical action laid hold on him. Delay became not only intolerable, but unpardonable. He must know, and he must also prevent this campaign of defilement and outrage going further. Wherefore he bolted into the first empty cab, had himself whirled to the *Boulevard du Montparnasse*, and projected himself, bomb-like, bursting with protest and indignation, into René Dax's great, dusky, white-walled studio; to find, in the stillness, nothing more pertinent to the matter in hand than the gentle, gray lemur sitting in its scarlet-painted baby's chair before the fire, the orange-and-black blotched newts and small ancient tortoises crawling upon the rock-work of the little fountain, while in the glass tank the gleaming fishes swam lazily to and fro. Of the owner of this quaint menagerie no signs were visible.

But neither René's absence nor the presence of his queer associates held Adrian's attention more than a few seconds; for, upon an easel facing him as he entered, placed where the light of the hanging lamps fell strongest, was a drawing in red chalk, which at once fed his anger by its subject and commanded his unqualified admiration by its consummate beauty and art.

Nearly half life-size, the figure poised, the head slightly inclined, proudly yet lovingly, toward the delicious child she carried on her arm, Gabrielle St. Leger stepped toward him, as on air, from off the tall panel of ivory-tinted cartridge paper. The attitude was precisely that in which he had seen her this afternoon, when she told René Dax the "door should remain open since little Bette wished it." The two figures were rendered with a suavity, yet precision, of treatment, a noble assurance of line and faithfulness of detail, little short of miraculous considering the time in which the drawing must have been executed.—Yes, it was *la belle Gabrielle* to the life; and alive—how wonderfully alive! The tears came into the young man's eyes, so deeply did this counterfeit presentment of her move him, and so very deeply did he love her. He noted, in growing amazement, little details, even little blemishes, dear to his heart as a lover, since these differentiated her beauty from that of other beautiful women, giving the original, the intimate and finely personal note.

And then anger shook him more sharply than ever, for how dare any man, save himself, note these infinitely precious, because exclusively personal, touches? How dare René observe, still more how dare he record them? His offense was rank; since to do so constituted an unpardonable liberty, a gross intrusion upon her individuality. René knew too much, quite too

much, and, for the moment, Adrian was assailed by a very simple and comprehensive desire to kill him.

But now a wave of humiliation, salt and bitter, submerged this unhappy lover. For not only was that little devil of a Tadpole's drawing a masterpiece in its realization of the outward aspect of Gabrielle St. Leger, but of insight into the present workings of her mind and heart. Had not he apprehended and set forth here, with the clarity and force of undeniable genius, just all that which Anastasia Beauchamp had tried to tell him—Adrian Savage—about her? What he, Adrian, notwithstanding the greatness of his devotion, fumbled over and misinterpreted, René grasped unaided, and thus superbly chronicled! For, here indeed, to quote Anastasia, Gabrielle's eyes were turned toward the future and the strange unrestful wind —the wind of Modernity—which blows from out the future, was upon her face; with the result that her expression and bearing were exalted, a noble going forth to meet fate in them, she herself as one consecrated, at once the embodiment and exponent of some compelling idea, the leader of some momentous movement, the elect spokeswoman of a new and tremendous age.

Beholding all which, poor Adrian's spirits descended with most disintegrating velocity into his boots, and miserably camped at that abject level. For though he might declare, and very honestly believe, the idea in question, the movement in question, to be so much moonshine, and the Spirit of the Age a rank impostor, how did he propose to convince Madame St. Leger of that? The inquiry brought him up as against a brick wall. Yes, Miss Beauchamp had been rather cruelly right when she told him his work was cut out for him and would prove a mighty tough job. For what, calmly considered, had he, after all, to offer as against those alluring and immense perspectives?—Really, when he came to ask himself, it made him blush.—Only an agreeable, fairly talented and well-conditioned young man—that was all; and marriage—marriage, an old story to Gabrielle, a commonplace affair about which she already knew everything that there is to know. Of course she didn't know everything about it, he went on, plucking up a little spirit again. Hers had been a marriage of convenience; a marriage of reason. Poor Horace was by a whole generation her senior. Whereas, in the present case, it all would be so different—a great and exclusive passion, et cetera, et cetera. He would have liked to wax eloquent, descanting upon that difference and its resultant illuminating values. But his eloquence stuck in his throat somehow. Himself as a husband—humor compelled him to own, with a pretty sharp stab of mortification, this a rather stale and meager programme as alternative to cloudy splendors of self-consecration to the mighty purposes of Modernity and the Spirit of the Age.

"She is very beautiful, is she not, my Madonna of the Future?"

René Dax asked the question in soft, confidential accents. He stood at Adrian's elbow, clothed in a scarlet Japanese silk smoking-suit. Upon his neat bare feet he wore a pair of black Afghan sandals. Uttering little loving, crooning cries, the gray lemur balanced itself upon his shoulders, clasping his great domed head with thin furry arms and furry-backed, black-palmed hands, the finger-tips of which just met upon the center of his forehead.

"I have been watching, from behind the screen, the effect she produced on you. I have given up going to bed, you see. I wrap myself in blankets and quilts and sleep here—when I do sleep—upon one of the divans. It is more artistic. It is simpler. The bed, when you come to consider it, is, like the umbrella, the mark of the bourgeois, of the bourgeoise and of all their infected progeny. It represents, as you may say, the battle-cry of middle-class civilization. The domestic hearth? No, no. The domestic bed. How far more scientific and philosophic a

definition! Therefore I abjure it.—So I was lying there on the divan in meditation. I am preparing illustrations for an *édition de luxe of Les Contes Drolatiques*. It is not designed for family reading. It will probably be printed in Belgium and sold at Port Said. I lie on my back. I cover my face, thus isolating myself from contemplation of surrounding objects, so that my imagination may play freely around those agreeable tales. In the midst of my meditation I heard you burst in. At first I felt annoyed. Then I arose silently and watched the effect this portrait produced on you. I was rewarded; for it knocked the bluster pretty effectually out of you, eh, *mon vieux*? I saw you droop, grow dejected, pull your beard, wipe your eyes, eh? And you deserved all that, for your manner was offensive this afternoon. You treated me disrespectfully. Have you now come to apologize? It would be only decent you should do so. But I do not press the point. I can afford to be magnanimous, since, in any case, I am even with you. My Madonna is my revenge."

"I did not come to apologize, but to demand explanation," Adrian began, hotly. Then his tone changed. Truly he was very unhappy, very heavy of heart. "You are right," he added. "This drawing is your revenge."

"You do not like my drawing."

"On the contrary, I find it glorious, wonderful."

"And it hurts you?"

"Yes, it hurts me," he answered hoarsely, backing away. "I hate it."

"I am so glad," René said, sweetly. He put his hand behind his scarlet back, and tweaked the tip of the lemur's long furry tail affectionately.

"You hear, you rejoice with me, oh, venerable Aristides!" he murmured.

To which the little creature replied by clasping his head more tightly and making strange, coaxing noises.

"But there,—for the moment my Madonna has done precisely what I asked of her, so now let us talk about something else, *mon vieux*, something less controversial. Why not? For here, after all, she is fixed, my Madonna. She can't run away, happily. We can always return and, though she is mine, I will permit you to take another look at her. So—well—do you remark how I have changed my decorative scheme since you last visited me? Is it original, startling, eh? That is what I intended. Again I felt the need to simplify. I called for plasterers, painters, upholsterers. When they will be paid I haven't a conception; but that is a contemptible detail. I rushed them. I harried them. I drove them before me like a flock of geese, a troop of asses. 'Work,' I screamed, 'work. Delay is suffocation to my imagination. This transformation must be effected instantly.' For suddenly color sickened me. I comprehended what a fraud, what a subterfuge and inanity it is. Form alone matters, alone is permanent and essential. Color bears to form the same relation which emotion bears to reason, which sensation bears to intellect. It represents an attitude rather than an entity. I recognized it as adventitious, accidental, unscientific, hysterical. So I had them all washed out, ripped off, obliterated, my tender, tearful blues and greens, my caressing pinks, my luscious mauves and purples, my rapturously bilious, sugar-sweet yellows, all my adorably morbid florescence of putrifaction in neutral-tinted semi-tones, and limited my scheme to this harshly symbolic triad. See everywhere, everywhere, black, white, red—these three always and only—beating upon my brain, feeding my eyes with thoughts of darkness, night, death, the bottomless pit, despair, iniquity; of light, day, snow, the colorless ether, virtue, the child's blank soul, immaculate sterility. And then red—red, the horrid whipper-in and huntsman of us all, meaning life, fire, lust, pain, carnage, sex,

revolution and war, scarlet-lipped scorn and mockery—the raw, gaping, ever-bleeding, ever-breeding wound, in short, upon the body of the Cosmos which we call Humanity."

The young man's affectation of imperturbability for once deserted him. He was shaken by the force of his own speech. His voice rose, vibrating with passion, taking on, indeed, an almost maniacal quality, highly distressing to Adrian and altogether terrifying to the lemur, which moaned audibly and shivered as it clutched at his forehead.

"Get down, Aristides," he cried with sudden childish petulance. "Unclasp your hands. You scratch. You hurt me. Go back to your little chair. I am tired. I have worked too hard. The back of my head stabs with pain. I suffer, I suffer so badly."

He came close to Adrian, who, his nerves too very much on edge, still stood before the noble drawing of Gabrielle St. Leger.

"I am not well," he said, plaintively. "Certainly I have overworked, and it is all your fault. Yet listen, *mon vieux*. Your affection is necessary to me. Therefore do not let us quarrel. I own you enraged me this afternoon. I did not want you just then."

"Nor I you," Adrian returned, with some asperity.

"And your manner was at once insufferably brusque and insufferably possessive. I could not let it pass. I felt it incumbent upon me to administer correction. But I would not descend to anything commonplace in the way of chastisement. I would lay an ingenious trap for you. I came straight home. I seated myself here. I set up this panel, and I drew, and drew, and drew, without pause, without food, in a tense frenzy of concentration, of recollection, till I had completed this portrait. I was possessed, inspired. Never have I worked with such fury, such torment and ecstasy. For I had, at once, to assure myself of your sentiments toward the subject of that picture, and to read you a lesson. I had to prove to you that I, too, amount to something which has to be reckoned with; that I, too, have power."

"You have commanding power," Adrian answered, bitterly. "The power of genius."

"Then, then," René Dax cried, "since you acknowledge my power, will you consent to leave my Madonna alone? Will you consent not to make any further attempt to interfere between her and me, to pay court to and marry her?"

The attack in its directness proved, for the moment, staggering. Adrian stood, his eyes staring, his mouth half open, actually recovering his breath, which seemed fairly knocked out of him by the amazing impudence of this proposition. Yet wasn't it perfectly in the part? Wasn't it just exactly the egregious Tadpole all over? His mind swung back instinctively to scenes of years ago in play-ground, class-room, dormitory, when—while though himself exasperated—he had intervened to protect René, a boy brilliant as he was infuriating, from the consequences of some colossal impertinence in word or deed. And that swing back to recollection of their school-days produced in Adrian a salutary lessening of nervous excitement, restoring his self-confidence, focusing his outlook, both on events and persons to a normal perspective.

"So that I may leave the stage conveniently clear for you, *mon petit*?" he inquired, quite good-temperedly. "No, I am sorry, but I'm afraid I cannot consent to do anything of the kind."

And then he moved away across the studio, leaving the egregious Tadpole to digest his refusal. For he did not want to quarrel, either. Far from it. That instinctive throw-back into their school-boy friendship brought home to him how very much attached to this wayward being he actually was. So that, of all things, he wanted to avoid a quarrel, if such avoidance were consonant with restraint of René's influence in a certain dear direction and development of his own.

"Nothing will turn me from my purpose, *mon petit*," he said, gently, even gaily, over his shoulder. "Nothing—make sure of that—nothing, nobody, past, present, or to come."

He proceeded, with slightly ostentatious composure, to study the dado of pictured figures rioting along the surface of the white distempered walls. He had delivered his ultimatum. Very soon he meant to depart, for it was no use attempting to hold further intercourse with René to-night. Once you brought him up short, like this, for a greater or lesser period he was certain to sulk. It was wisest to let him have his sulk out. And—his eyes growing accustomed to the dusky light—good heavens, how superbly clever, how grossly humorous those pictured figures were! Was there any draftsman living who could compare with René Dax? No, decidedly he didn't want to quarrel with the creature. He only wanted to prevent his confusing certain issues and doing harm. Yet, as he passed from group to group, from one outrageous witticism to another, the difficulty of maintaining an equable attitude increased upon him. For it was hateful to remember that the same hand and brain which had projected that heroic portrait of Madame St. Leger was responsible for these indecencies as well. Looking at some of these, thinking of that, he could have found it in his heart, he feared, to take Master René by the throat and put an end to his drawing for ever, so atrocious a profanity did such coexistence, such, in a sense, correlation appear.

And then, moving on again, he started and drew back in absolute consternation. For there, right in front of him, covering the wall for a space of two yards or more, he came on a series of sketches—some dashed in in charcoal, some carefully finished in red and black chalk—of Joanna Smyrthwaite.—Joanna, arrayed in man's clothing, a slovenly, ragged jacket suit, sagging from her thin limbs and angular shoulders; she bareheaded, moreover, her hair cropped, her face telling of drink and dissipation, loose-lipped, repulsive to the point of disgust in its weakness and profligate misery, her attitudes degraded, almost bestial as she cringed on all fours or lay heaped together like so much shot rubbish.

Adrian put his hands over his eyes. Looked again. Turned indignantly to demand an answer to this hideous riddle. But his host had disappeared. Only the gray lemur sat in its scarlet-painted baby's chair before the fire; and from off the tall white panel Gabrielle St. Leger, carrying her child on her arm, stepped forth to meet the Future, while the unrestful wind which blows from out the Future—the fateful wind of Modernity—played upon her beloved face.

III
THE OTHER SIDE

CHAPTER I

RECORDING A BRAVE MAN'S EFFORT TO CULTIVATE HIS PRIVATE GARDEN

Joseph Challoner telephoned up to Heatherleigh from his office in Stourmouth that, being detained by business, he should dine in town to-night. This seemed to him the safest way to manage it, since you never could be quite sure how far your servants didn't shadow you.

He had put off dealing with the matter in question from day to day, and week to week, because, in plain English, he funked it. True, this was not his first experience of the kind; but, looking back upon other—never mind about the exact number of them—other experiences of like nature, this struck him as very much the most unpleasant of the lot. His own moral and social standpoint had changed; there perhaps—he hoped so—was the reason. In more senses than one he had "come up higher," so that anything even distantly approaching scandal was actively alarming to him, giving him—as he expressed it—"the goose-skin all over." Yet, funk or no funk, the thing had to be seen to. Further shilly-shallying was not permissible. The by-election for the Baughurst Park Ward, vacant through the impending retirement of Mr. Pottinger, was imminent. Challoner had offered himself as a candidate. The seat was well worth gaining, since the Baughurst Park Ward was the richest and, in many respects, most influential in the borough. To represent it was, with a little adroit manipulation, to control a very large amount of capital available for public purposes. Moreover, in a year or so it must inevitably lead to the mayoralty; and Joseph Challoner fully intended one of these days to be Mayor of Stourmouth. Not only did the mayoralty, in itself, confer much authority and local distinction, but it offered collateral opportunities of self-advancement. Upon these Challoner had long fixed his thoughts, so that already he had fully considered what course of action, in the present, promised the most profitable line of investment in view of that coveted future.

Should he push the construction of the new under-cliff drive, for instance? But, as he argued, at most you could invite a Duke or Field-Marshal to perform the opening ceremony—the latter for choice, since it gives legitimate excuse for the military display, always productive of enthusiasm in a conspicuously non-combatant population such as that of Stourmouth. Unfortunately Dukes and Field-Marshals, though very useful when, socially speaking, you could not get anything better, were not altogether up to Challoner's requirements. He aspired, he in fact languished, to entertain Royalty. But under-cliff drives were no use in that connection, only justifying a little patriotic beating of drums to the tune of coast defense, and incidental trotting-out of the hard-worked German invasion bogey. The first came too near party politics, the second too near family relationships, to be acceptable to the highest in the land. No, as he very well saw, you must sail on some other tack, cloaking your designs with the much-covering mantle of charity if you proposed successfully to exploit princes.

And, after all, what simpler? Was not Stourmouth renowned as a health resort, and are not hospitals the accredited highroad to royal favor? A hospital, evidently; and, since it is always safest to specialize—that enables you to make play with scare-inducing statistics and impressive scientific formulæ, flavoring them here and there with the sentimental anecdotal note—clearly a hospital for the cure of tuberculosis—nothing just now more fashionable, nothing more popular! Really, it suited him to a tee, for had not his own poor little wife fallen a victim to the fell disease in question? And had not he—here Challoner just managed not to put his tongue in his cheek—had not he remained, through all these long, long years, affectingly faithful to her memory? Therefore, not only upon the platform, but during the

private pocket-pickings he projected among the wealthy residents of the Baughurst Park Ward, he could give a personal turn to his appeal by alluding feelingly to the cutting short of his own early married happiness, to the pathetic wreck of "love's young dream" all through the operation of that terrible scourge, consumption. Yes, quite undoubtedly, tuberculosis was, as he put it, "the ticket."

He remembered, with a movement of active gratitude toward his Maker—or was it perhaps toward that quite other deity, the God of Chance, so ardently worshiped by all arrivists?—the big stretch of common, Wytch Heath, just beyond the new West Stourmouth Cemetery, recently thrown on the market and certain to go at a low figure. Lying so high and dry, the air up there must be remarkably bracing—fit to cut you in two, indeed, when the wind was northerly. Clearly it was a crying shame to waste so much salubrity upon the dead! True, Stourmouth already bristled with sanatoria of sorts. But these were, for the most part, defective in construction or obsolete in equipment; whereas his, Challoner's, new Royal Hospital should be absolutely up to date, furnished, regardless of expense, in accordance with the latest costly fad of the latest pathological faddist. No extravagance should be debarred, while, incidentally, handsome measure of commissions and perquisites should be winked at so as to keep the staff, both above and below stairs, in good humor. Salaries must be on the same extensive scale as the rest. Later, when a certain personal end had been gained, it would be plenty time enough to placate protesting subscribers by discovering reprehensible waste, and preaching reform and retrenchment.

Finally, Royalty should be humbly prayed to declare the record-breaking institution open, during his, Challoner's, tenure of office. He licked his lips, not figuratively but literally, thinking of it. "Our public-spirited and philanthropic Mayor, to whose generous expenditure of both time and money, combined with his untiring zeal in the service of his suffering fellow-creatures, we are mainly indebted for the inception and completion of this truly magnificent charity," et cetera, et cetera. Let them pile on the butter, bless them—he could put up with any amount of that kind of basting—until Royalty, impressed alike by the magnitude of his altruistic labors and touched by the tragedy of his early sorrow—for the sentimental personal chord should here be struck again softly—would feel constrained to bestow honors on so deeply tried and meritorious a subject. "Sir Joseph Challoner."—He turned the delicious phrase over in his mouth, as a small boy turns a succulent lollipop, to get the full value and sweetness out of it. He amplified the luscious morsel, almost blushingly. "Sir Joseph and Lady Challoner"—not the poor little first wife, well understood, with the fatal stamp of disease and still more fatal stamp of her father's shop upon her, reminiscences of whose premature demise had contributed so tactfully to the realization of his present splendor; but the second, the coming wife, in the serious courting of whom he thirsted to embark immediately, since she offered such conspicuous contrast to the said poor little first one both in solid fortune and social opportunity.

Only, unluckily, before these bright unworldly dreams could even approximately be translated into fact, there was a nasty awkward bit of rooting up and clearing out to be done in, so to speak, Challoner's own private back garden. And it was with a view to effecting such clearance, quietly, unobserved and undisturbed, that he elected to-night to eat a third-rate dinner at an obscure commercial tavern in Stourmouth, where recognition was improbable, rather than a first-rate one in his own comfortable dining-room at Heatherleigh.

After the consummation of that unattractive meal, he took a tram up from The Square to the top of Hill Street, where this joins the Barryport Road about three-quarters of a mile short

of Baughurst Park and the County Gates. Here, alighting, he turned into the maze of roads, bordered by villas and small lodging-houses interspersed with undeveloped plots of building land, which extends from the left of the Barryport Road to the edge of the West Cliff. The late March evening was fine and keen, and Challoner, whose large frame cried out for exercise after a long day of sedentary employment, would have relished the walk in the moist salt air had it not been for that disagreeable bit of back-garden clearing work looming up as the ultimate purpose of it.

In the recesses of his mind, moreover, lurked an uneasy suspicion that he would really be very much less of a cur if he felt a good deal more of one. This made him savage, since it appeared a reflection upon the purity of his motives and the solid worth of his character. He stated the case to himself, as he had stated it any number of times already, and found it a convincingly clear one. Still that irritating suspicion of insufficient self-disgust continued to haunt him. He ran through the well-worn arguments again, pleading the justice of his own cause to his own conscience. For, when all is said and done, how can any man possessing an average allowance of susceptibility resist a pretty, showy woman if she throws herself at his head? And Mrs. Gwynnie had very much thrown herself at his head, pertinaciously coaxed, admired and flattered him. Whatever had taken place was more than half her doing—before God it was. He might have been weak, might have been a confounded fool even; but then, hadn't every man, worth the name, a soft side to him? Take all your famous heroes of history—weren't there funny little tales about every one of them, from the Royal Psalmist downward? If he, Challoner, had been a fool, he could quote plenty of examples of that particular style of folly among the most aristocratic company. And, looking at the actual facts, wasn't the woman most to blame? Hadn't she run after him just all she knew how? Hadn't she subjected him to a veritable persecution?

But now Challoner found himself at the turn into Silver Chine Road, the long, yellow-gray web of which meandered away through the twilight, small detached houses set in little gardens ranged on either side of it shoulder to shoulder, the walls of them shrouded by creepers, and their lower windows—where lights glowed faintly through muslin curtains and drawn blinds—masked by luxuriant growth of arbutus, escallonia, euonymus, myrtle and bay. Now and again a solitary Scotch fir, relic of the former moorland, raised its dense crown, velvet black, against the sulphur-stained crystal of the western sky. Stourmouth is nothing if not well-groomed and neat, so that roads, fences, lawns and houses looked brushed up, polished and dusted as some show-case exhibit. Only a misanthropic imagination could suppose questionable doings or primitive passions sheltering behind those tidy, clean-pinafored, self-respecting gray and red house-fronts, in their setting of trim turf, beds of just-opening snowdrops and crocuses, and fragrant glossy-leaved shrubs.

Joseph Challoner drew up and stood, in large vexation and worry, contemplating the pleasant, well-to-do prospect. The alert calm of an early spring evening held the whole scene. Faintly, in the distance, he could hear a long-drawn murmur of wind in the Baughurst woods and the rhythmic plunge of the sea. And he was aware that—still to employ his own not very graceful vernacular—he funked the business in hand, consciously and very thoroughly funked it. He had all the mind in the world to retrace his steps, board the tram again and get home to Heatherleigh. He took off his hat, hoping the chill, moist air might cool his tall brick-dust-red face and bare head, while he fenced thus grimly with indecision. For it had come to that—he had grown so ignominiously chicken-livered—had he the pluck to go on or should he throw up the game? Let the whole show slide, in short—Baughurst Park Ward, record-breaking

hospital, probable mayoralty, possible knighthood, wealthy second wife, whose standing and ample fortune would lift him to the top of the best society Stourmouth could offer—and all for the very inadequate reason that a flimsy, flirtatious, impecunious little Anglo-Indian widow had elected to throw her bonnet over the windmills for his sake? To Challoner it seemed hard, beastly hard, he should be placed in such a fix. How could he be certain, moreover, that it was for his sake, and not mainly for her own, she had sent that precious bit of millinery flying? What assurance had he that it wasn't a put-up job to entangle and land him, not for love of him himself, of what he was, but for love of what he'd got?

Challoner dragged his handkerchief out of his shirt-cuff and wiped his forehead. Of all his amatory experiences this one did, without question, "take the cake" for all-round inconvenience and exasperation!

Of course, he went on again, picking up the thread of the argument, if he could be convinced, could believe in the sincerity of her affection, be certain it was he, himself, whom she really loved and wanted, not just Heatherleigh and a decent income, that would make just all the difference, put matters on an absolutely different footing and radically alter his feeling toward her.

And then, with a horse-laugh, he spat on the ground, regardless of the Stourmouth Borough Council's by-law prohibiting "expectoration in a public place under penalty of a fine not exceeding twenty shillings." The lie was so transparent, the hypocrisy so glaring, that, although no stickler for truth where the truth told against him, he was obliged to rid himself of this particular violation of it in some open and practical manner. For he knew perfectly well that her love, whether for the man or merely for his possessions, in no appreciable degree affected the question. Not doubt as to the quality or object of Mrs. Gwynnie's affections, but rank personal cowardice in face of the situation, kept him standing here in this contemptible attitude of indecision amid the chill sweetness of the spring dusk.

Yet that coarse outward repudiation of inward deceit, if failing to make him a better man morally, had emotionally, and even physically, a beneficial effect. It braced him somehow, so that he squared his shoulders, while his native bullying pluck, his capacity of cynically measuring himself against fact and taking the risks of the duel, revived in him.

For this shilly-shallying didn't pay. And it wasn't like him. Every man has a soft side to him—granted; but he'd be hung if he was going to let himself turn a softie all over! The smart of his own gibes stimulated him wonderfully, so that in the pride of his recovered strength of mind, and consciousness of his brawny strength of body, he found himself growing almost sentimentally sorry for the fate of his puny adversary. Poor little soul, perhaps she really was in love with him!—Challoner wiped his face again with a flourish. Well, plenty of people did call him "a splendid-looking man"! All the same, she'd got to go under. She must be rooted up and cleared out. He was sorry, for it's always a nasty thing for a woman to be made to understand she is only a side-show in a man's life. Only if he meant to stand for the Baughurst Park Ward—and unquestionably he did now mean to do so—his address to the electors must be printed and distributed and his canvass started within the week. Yes, no doubt very, very sorry for her, still he was bound to make short work with this rooting up and clearing out of poor Mrs. Gwynnie.

Nor did his election supply the only reason against further shilly-shally. Here Challoner cleared his throat, while the brick-dust of his complexion deepened to crimson. It was funny how shy the thought of Margaret Smyrthwaite always turned him! But when once the winding up of old Montagu Smyrthwaite's estate was completed, he would no longer have a legitimate

excuse for dropping in at the Tower House at odd hours, indulging in nice confidential little chats with Margaret in the blue sitting-room or taking a *tête-à-tête* stroll with her around the gardens and through the conservatories. Miss Joanna did not like him, he was sure of that. She certainly wouldn't give him encouragement. So time pressed, for the completion of the winding up of the estate could not be delayed much longer. Montagu Smyrthwaite had left his affairs in quite vexatiously good order, from Challoner's point of view, thereby obliging the latter to expend much ingenuity in the invention of obstacles to the completion of business. His object was to keep Adrian Savage out of England and away from his cousins as long as possible. But the young man—with how much heartiness Challoner consigned him and all his works and ways to regions infernal!—might grow suspicious and run over from Paris just to hasten matters. That would not suit Challoner's little game in the least. He must make certain of his standing with Margaret before that most unwelcome descent of the enemy.

For the whole matter of Adrian Savage had become to him as the proverbial red rag to a bull. By its irritating associations it acted very sensibly upon him now, causing him to charge down the road headlong, with his heavy, lunging tread. Had Adrian proved a bad man of business, ignorant, careless, or bungling, Challoner felt his superiority in other departments might have been more easily stomached. But to find this highly polished man of the world as smart a business man as his somewhat unpolished and provincial self rubbed him very shrewdly on the raw. When, with an eye to a not impossible future, he essayed so to jockey affairs as to secure some advantage to Margaret Smyrthwaite, in the disposition of her father's property, Adrian invariably detected the attempted small swindle and promptly, though politely, checkmated it.

Such encounters had occurred more than once; and both his own failure and Adrian's adroitness in disposing of them rankled so much still that Challoner walked nearly half the length of Silver Chine Road absorbed in disagreeable remembrance. Then the name on a gate-post, which happened to catch his eye, acquainted him with the hardly less disagreeable fact that he neared the end of his journey.

Ferndale—and he went on repeating the names of the houses as he passed them, mostly by rote, occasionally refreshing his memory where the light permitted by a glance at gate or gate-post. Ferndale, then Ambleside, The Hollies, St. Miguel, Killarney, followed by Castlebar, The Moorings, Peshawar, Mon Repos, Clovelly. And next, after crossing the end of St. Cuthbert's Road, Leicester Lodge, Fairlawn, Chatsworth, Ben Nevis, Santander. Less than a year ago these same names had been to him as mile-stones on love's pilgrimage, each one of which brought him a few steps nearer to a hotly coveted goal. Now he waxed sarcastic at the expense of their far-fetched, high-flown titles. Take Chatsworth, for instance—a forty-five-pound-a-year house, rates and taxes included, with, at the outside, an eighth of an acre of garden to it—could snobbish silliness go much farther?

But here was Robin's Rest, capping the climax, in respect of its title, by vulgar folly.

Challoner's large, stiff-jointed hands came down roughly on the top bar of the little white gate. He waited a few seconds, breathing rather stertorously.

"Robin's Rest—why not Joseph's Coat?" he snarled, "a coat of many colors. Convenient, that, when you happen to want to turn it, perhaps! Now, no more squish-squash. Straight ahead—go in and win, and my best wishes to you, Sir Joseph Turncoat."

With that he swung the gate open and tramped up the path to the front door, a certain bullying swagger in the carriage of his big person and tall, upright head.

CHAPTER II

A STRATEGIC MOVEMENT WHICH SECURES VICTORY WHILE SIMULATING RETREAT

Mrs. Spencer, the train of her mauve, cotton-back satin tea-gown thrown negligently over her arm, held aside the strings of the beaded chick, letting her guest pass into the inner hall. As she moved across to the open door of the much be-frilled and be-palmed little drawing-room, they rippled back into place behind her with a rattle of cane and tinkle of glass. The familiar sound gave Challoner, who, heavily deliberate, deposited gloves and hat on the hall table, a catch in his throat. He found the first sight of Mrs. Gwynnie in her flimsy satin, cream lace, and rather tired turquoise-blue ribbons, upsetting. She was a straw-colored, insignificant-featured, fairly tall, fairly plump, fairly graceful, uncomfortably small-waisted woman; looking, at a distance, five-and-twenty, at close quarters, nearer five-and-thirty, cheaply pretty and effective, though slightly washed out. And this latter quality, or absence of quality, in her appearance took hold of Challoner now with an appeal of pathos which he resented and made an effort to ignore. It did not tend to the improvement of his manners or of his temper.

"Since when have you taken to answering the front door yourself?" he inquired, in tones of heavy banter. "Been having the periodic rumpus with the maids again?"

"Oh no; the maids are quite good, thank you," she answered, punctuating her speech with a little meaningless, neighing laugh habitual to her. "I'm on excellent terms with both of them, for a wonder. But it's the cook's evening out, and I gave Esther leave to go with her. I didn't think we should have any particular use for them." Again she laughed. "But didn't you get my note?"

"Yes, I got it right enough," Challoner said. He had followed her into the drawing-room and stood with his hands behind him and his back to the hissing gas-fire, looking down at his seal-brown frieze trousers. The suit was almost new, yet the knees showed signs of bagging already. This vexed him. "That is why I am here. You said you wanted to see me. So I stayed and dined in town to save time, and came on just as I was."

"So I perceive," she put in with meaning.

Challoner continued to contemplate the knees of his trousers. Yet he was well aware that her eyes were fixed on another item of his costume—namely, his waistcoat, crocheted in red and white quarter-inch squares, and finished with a gray cloth border and flat white horn buttons. Mrs. Spencer had worked it for him last year as a Christmas present. He wished to goodness he had not happened to be wearing it to-night!

"Yes," he repeated, without looking up, "I got your note right enough. But, do you know, I begin to think I get rather too many of those notes. You've fallen into the habit of writing too frequently. Between ourselves, it worries me a lot."

"Why?" she asked.

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Why? Because I have some regard for your reputation, I imagine. I don't care a twopenny damn on my own account, of course. My back's broad enough to bear the consequences of my own actions, even if they are disagreeable. But it is quite another matter for you; and I must say you're getting very reckless. That's not fair by me. I've been awfully careful from the first. But where's the use of my taking extensive precautions to shield you if you go and invite gossip like this?"

"Don't be cross and scold me," Mrs. Spencer said, archly.

She had placed herself on the sofa at right angles to the fireplace, drawing the train of her tea-gown aside so as to leave room for a second occupant of this, the most solid seat in the room. The rest of the furniture ran to wicker chairs, colored Madras muslin veiling their original cretonne coverings, and tables, whatnots, cabinets, and flower-pot stands with mottled brown-and-biscuit bamboo frames and plaited straw tops, brackets, and shelves to them.

"I won't write so often if you really think it is dangerous," she added.

"It is dangerous," Challoner asserted, ignoring the invitation to share the sofa. "Think for yourself. At Heatherleigh there are my servants. At the office there are my clerks. Do you suppose they haven't tongues in their mouths or eyes in their heads? If that does not constitute danger, I'll thank you to tell me what does."

"But you forbid me to telephone, so how am I to communicate with you unless I write? You call so seldom. I hardly ever see you now."

"Oh! come," he remonstrated, "I was here Sunday week."

"But that's Beattie's afternoon at home. You know I always give it up to her friends. And a whole crowd of them was here Sunday week—Fred Lawley, and the Busbridge boys, and Marion Chase. I didn't get three words with you."

Challoner glanced at her in sharp anxiety.

"Fred Lawley come up to the scratch yet?" he asked.

"If you mean has he proposed, I am sure I can't tell you. I don't know myself. I suppose if he had, Bee would have told me. He seems tremendously gone on her. But you never can be sure of a man till your engagement has been publicly announced."

It was Challoner who laughed a little this time.

"Not quite invariably even then," he said.

His chin settled into the V of the turned-back corners of his high shirt-collar, while his eyes returned to contemplation of those vexatiously baggy trousers. Mrs. Spencer began to speak, but he hulled down her voice by asking, rather loudly:

"By the way, where is Miss Beattie?"

"Oh, she's gone over to Marychurch to the Quartermains. They asked her to stop the night because the Progressive Whist Club meets at their house. I think those club parties awfully slow, but Bee wouldn't miss one on any account. They don't play for money, only prizes."

"China lucky pigs or a black velvet cat, home-made, with a pink ribbon around its neck—I know the style," Challoner returned. "Fred Lawley's the attraction, I imagine, rather than those high-class works of art."

"I don't think he'll be there. Bee said something about his having gone to Southampton to join his ship. You seem very interested in Fred Lawley. But I told you in my note Bee was away to-night?"

"Very likely you did—I really don't remember," he replied, hastily.

For he detected, or fancied he detected, a suggestion in her tone and words eminently unwelcome and embarrassing. He felt the brick-dust red of his face and neck deepening to crimson; and this both angered and alarmed him. Notwithstanding repudiation of sentiment, was the soft side still uppermost? That would not do. He must buckram himself more resolutely against poor Mrs. Gwynnie's fascinations, and bring matters to a head at once.

"But that reminds me—speaking of Beattie, I mean—what do you want done about the lease of this house? It will be up at the end of the half quarter."

So far Mrs. Spencer had lolled in attitudes of studied ease upon the sofa. Now she sat bolt upright, clasping her small waist with both hands and advancing her bust. The little neighing

laugh preceded, instead of punctuating, her speech. Challoner observed a nervous ring in the quality of it.

"Oh! well that rests more with you than with me, doesn't it? Of course I hadn't forgotten the lease is nearly up. It was partly—partly"—with emphasis—"about the house I wanted to see you to-night, and I think it awfully sweet of you to ask what I want done—"

She paused, while her auditor, in growing uneasiness, again shifted his weight, dancing-bear fashion, from one to the other foot.

"Yes, it's awfully sweet of you to put it that way," she repeated. "And I quite know I ought to make up my mind. I suppose, on the whole, I had better ask you to renew the lease for a year, or six months, unless—unless—"

"Unless what?" Challoner snapped.

He could have bitten his tongue out immediately after, perceiving how woefully he had blundered. For, although he carefully abstained from looking at her, he knew that the light leaped into Mrs. Spencer's eyes and the pink into her cheek, while even her straw-colored hair, through the intricate convolutions of which a wisp of turquoise chiffon was twisted, took on a livelier tint. She blossomed, in short; her faded, crumpled, played-out prettiness of person and manner transformed into the younger, smarter, more convinced, and consequently more convincing, prettiness which had raised an evil spirit of covetousness in him when he first met her, and continued to provoke that covetousness until—well, until something very much more profitable, socially and financially, in the shape of possibly obtainable womanhood had risen above his horizon. The moment was a very nasty one for Joseph Challoner; since it could not but occur to him that, while responsible for much existing damage, he was about to render himself liable for far heavier damages in the near future. This taxed his courage. Again, consciously, he "funked it"; so that for some few seconds Gwynneth Spencer's fate hung in the balance. But only for a few seconds did her fate so hang. Ambition, and a brute obstinacy in face of attempted coercion, a certain animal necessity to prove to himself the fact of his own strength, carried the day. Challoner turned his coat once and for all, in as far as poor light-weight Gwynnie Spencer was concerned, letting the underlying element of cruelty and cunning in his nature have free play.

"Unless what?" she echoed, laughing thinly. "Why, unless you have any other plan to propose, Joe; any arrangement which you'd like better and which I should like better than just sticking on here indefinitely at Robin's Rest."

Challoner had moved away to a rickety little bamboo table, set out with cheap flower-vases and knick-knacks. Absently he picked up a photograph, in dilapidated silver frame, from among these treasures and stood fingering it. The coat of many colors was fairly turned; yet at the sound of his pet name Challoner started, letting the object he held fall to the ground, where, to his relief, silver, leather, glass, cardboard and portrait incontinently parted company.

"I need not put it more plainly, need I?" she quavered, an upward break in her voice. "But, of course, if you have any other plan to propose there would be no occasion to bother about the renewal of the lease."

Challoner knelt on one knee, his large hands groping over the carpet as he gathered up the *débris*.

"Bless me!" he said, "the wretched thing's smashed. What a nuisance! I hope you haven't any special affection for it. I am awfully sorry. Can't imagine how I came to drop it! Stupid of me, wasn't it? I must get you a new one. I saw some uncommonly tasty silver frames in a shop in the Marychurch Road to-day. I'll go in and buy you one the first time I pass. Tell your girl

to be careful when she sweeps in the morning, though, for the glass has splintered all over the place."

He rose ponderously to his feet, and for the first time since his arrival looked full at her.

"Peuh!" he went on, blowing out his breath and laying one hand across the small of his back. "It strikes me I'm growing confoundedly stiff. Old age comes on apace, eh, Mrs. Gwynnie? Not in your case, I don't mean. You are one of the sort that wears well. I haven't seen you in better looks for months. Some other plan to propose, did you say? Yes, I have, otherwise I mightn't have been quite so ready to eat a beastly bad dinner down-town, so as to be free to come on here early to see you."

His manner had become almost boisterously jocose. Casting out the last remnant of pity, he cast out the last remnant of fear of her even in her present heightened prettiness. He came round behind the sofa and perched himself on the back of it, sitting sideways, looking down at her flushed, expectant, unimportant little face, and quite jauntily swinging his leg.

"You'll not forget to tell them about the broken glass?" he queried, parenthetically, "or you'll have somebody getting badly cut. As to my alternative plan now, Mrs. Gwynnie, I have been thinking things over too; and I feel, like you, they can't very well continue as they are. This Robin's Rest arrangement, which served its purpose well enough at first, is pretty thoroughly played out. We may regret that, but it is. And, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Gwyn, I have been troubled by some little qualms of conscience lately. Beattie's affairs have been on my mind a lot."

"Beattie, Beattie?" she broke in, shrilly. "What on earth has Bee to do with it?"

"The question is not so much what Beattie has to do with it"—laying stress on the last word—"as what it has to do with Beattie," Challoner returned, in a benevolent, heavy-father tone. "In my opinion she has been a mighty good little sister to you, and she must be mortally tired of keeping her eyes shut and playing gooseberry by this time. I see no reason why her prospects should be sacrificed. She's a perfect right to a look in of her own, poor girl."

The answer to the above might appear obvious. But Challoner gauged the mental caliber of the person he dealt with. Mrs. Spencer's shallow, trivial, fair-weather nature was ill-adapted to meet any great crisis. Her small brain worked slowly, and with a permanent inclination toward the irrelevant and indirect. He counted upon these defects of perception and logic, and he was not disappointed.

"But—but, when I marry," she said, essaying not very successfully to practise her little laugh, "I always meant to make it a condition that Bee should share my home."

"Very nice and thoughtful. Quite right of you," Challoner replied, still benevolently jocose. "Only I was talking about Beattie's matrimonial projects just now, not about yours, you see. And you are to blame, Mrs. Gwyn. You have been careless. I don't want to pile on the agony, but you have been most awfully careless. There is ever so much gossip going round. I am afraid people are beginning to look just a little askance. And what reflects on you reflects on your sister. I have taken the trouble to make inquiries, and, from all I hear, Fred Lawley is a very decent young fellow and will come into some money when his grandfather dies. He is second officer now, and stands well for promotion. The pay is above the average, too, on that Cape line. His people are in a good position; quite gentlefolk, a solid old clerical family—one of his uncles a canon of some cathedral or other, I forget which. It would be a first-class marriage for Beattie. But you cannot expect people like that to be best pleased at his taking up with a girl out of such a queer stable as—well, as this one, Mrs. Gwyn. Therefore I

do not think I should be acting in your sister's interests if I renewed the lease of this house for you."

"I see that," she said, her aspect brightening. "I see what you are coming round to. How you have thought it all out! I see—of course—go on."

"I shall not renew the lease of this house," he repeated, slowly, "but I propose you and Miss Beattie shall move, bag and baggage, to Marychurch, where—"

"Marychurch? Why? I thought you meant Heatherleigh! Why? Do you want to get rid of us? Oh!" she gasped, "oh!"

"Yes," Challoner said, jocosity waning somewhat. "Exactly, Mrs. Gwynnie. How quick you are! I do want to get rid of you, for your own good, and my good, and Beattie's good as well—principally for hers. This gossip must be stopped. I cannot have it. It is unpleasant for me, but for you it is disastrous. At Marychurch Beattie has the Quartermains and plenty of other friends. It will be handy for her young man, too, when his vessel is at Southampton. You would see ever so much more society there than you do here. And I can give you an uncommonly nice house, very superior in every respect to this one—Sunnyside, the white house with a veranda, opposite the new Borough Recreation Ground in Wilmer Road. Nominally it belongs to old Manby, but actually it belongs to me. It has been standing empty since Christmas, and Manby will think himself only too lucky to let it to any client of mine at a low rent—which I pay, of course. No one need know anything about that."

Challoner talked on, swinging his leg jauntily, though every nerve in his big body was strained with the effort to apprehend and follow the workings of his hearer's mind. So far, save for that passing outbreak, she had received his admonitions and propositions more reasonably than he had anticipated. So he must exercise patience, must not rush her; but give the idea time to sink in.

"Manby's property is mortgaged up to the hilt," he went on, "and he is more than half a year behind with the interest. If he doesn't come into my terms I shall threaten to foreclose. He knows I have got him between my finger and thumb, poor old chap, and he goes in terror of the time I may begin to squeeze. I admit it does seem rather rough on him, for he is in this hole through no fault of his own. His family has owned the property for three generations. But his business has dwindled to nothing, and that compelled him to raise money. The co-operative stores at Stourmouth and Southampton are crushing him and old-fashioned, jog-along, retail tradesmen like him out of existence. The same thing is happening all over the country. Men of his type have neither enterprise nor capital to compete with those large company concerns."

She sat so still, listening with such apparent docility, that Challoner judged it safe to quit generalities.

"Sunnyside shall be properly done up and the sanitation inspected," he said. "I am willing to spend from seventy to a hundred on the place. It is bound to be my own sooner or later, so any money I lay out on it will come back to me in the end. Too, I want to do the thing handsomely for you, Mrs. Gwyn. You and Beattie could go out by tram to-morrow, or next day, and have a look at the place. I'll advise Manby by telephone to-morrow, first thing, I have found him a very desirable tenant, so that he may open the house. Better make a list of any little odds and ends you may think need doing. If you like, you can choose the wall-papers yourself."

"That's awfully sweet of you. But supposing I don't like the house when I see it? I know I am rather fanciful and particular," she put in, with her little neighing laugh.

"I'll guarantee you'll like it," he returned. "It's just the sort of house to appeal to your taste. Really high class, nothing cheap or tawdry about it, built somewhere in the early seventies, tip-top style in its own line, quite a gentlewoman's house."

Mrs. Spencer fingered the lace and ribbons of her tea-gown negligently, advanced her left foot, studied the pointed toe of her beaded slipper, then looked up archly in Challoner's face.

"But supposing," she said, "I really don't want a house at Marychurch at all—what then? Supposing I really prefer to remain at Stourmouth? Supposing I am really determined to stay on here at our dear old Robin's Rest?"

Challoner's expression darkened. He descended from his graceful perch and stood behind the sofa, towering above her.

"Very sorry, Mrs. Gwyn," he replied, "but I regret to say it can't be done. It doesn't suit me to have you stay on at Robin's Rest."

"But why?" she insisted.

Challoner hesitated for an instant, decided to make exact truth subservient to expediency, and spoke.

"Why? Well, if you press the point, not only for the very good reasons which I have already given you at some length, but because I want the house for another tenant. Pewsey, my junior partner, has asked for it for his mother. I am anxious to oblige Pewsey. I have promised him possession some time in the June quarter."

"You have let Robin's Rest, let our house, Joe, our own dear little house, without ever telling me? Let it over my head?"

Looking at her upturned face, pretty, scared, brainless, Challoner's memory played a queer trick on him, harking back to scenes of long ago, at which, as a schoolboy, he had more than once—to his shame—assisted, on the Fairmead at Marychurch, the great, flat, fifty-acre grass meadow which lies on the outskirts of the little town between the River Wilmer and the Castle Moat. He saw, with startling vividness of detail, the agonized leaping rush of the shrill-squealing rabbits, wire-netting barrier in front of them and red-jawed, hot-breathing dogs behind. Even then he had turned somewhat sick at the hellish pastime, although excitement, and a natural disposition to bully all creatures weaker than himself, made him yell and curse and urge on the dogs with the roughest of the crowd. He sickened now, watching this hapless, foolish, bewildered woman double and turn in desperate effort to elude pursuing, self-created Fate, only to find herself brought up short against the irrefragable logic of the situation as demonstrated by his own relentless common-sense. Yet, even while he sickened, excitement gained on him, and his bullying instinct began to find satisfaction in the inhuman sport.

"Yes, Mrs. Gwynnie," he said, "I own I have done just that—let Robin's Rest over your head. I saw it was the kindest thing, both by you and by your sister, though it might strike you as a bit arbitrary at first. My duty is to stop this infernal gossip at all costs. If you won't take proper care of your own reputation I must take care of it for you—isn't that as clear as mud?"

"But I don't want to go away," she cried, again missing the point. "I refuse to be sent away. You have no right to interfere. It isn't your place. You can't order me about and push me aside like that. I am a lady, and I refuse to put up with such treatment. It is very rude of you and quite unsuitable. Everybody would feel that. I shall appeal to my friends. I shall tell every one I know about it."

"Oh! as you please, of course. But just what will you tell them?" Challoner asked.

"Why, the whole story—the whole truth."

"As you please," he repeated. "Only I'm afraid it's not a story likely, when told, to enlarge your local visiting-list."

Challoner perched on the back of the sofa again, domineering, masterful, leaning down and looking her straight in the eyes.

"See here, Gwynnie," he said. "You're in a tight place. Listen to reason. Don't be a fool and throw away your last chance in a pet."

"I mean to expose you. I will tell everybody, everybody," she cried.

"No," Challoner said, "you won't. I give you credit for more worldly wisdom, more self-respect, more good feeling, than that. The injury you might do me, by publishing this little love-passage of ours, would not be a patch upon the injury you would do yourself. You don't want to commit social suicide, do you, and find every door shut in your face? Tell any of these friends of yours, the Woodfords, Mrs. Paull, Marion Chase, and they'd avoid you as they would a leper, drop you like a hot potato, cut you dead, whether they believed your charming little tale or not. You are fond of company, Mrs. Gwynnie—a gregarious being. You would not the least enjoy being left out in the cold all by yourself. And there is another point. I am perfectly willing to pay for my pleasure honestly, as a man should, but it is not wise to tax my good nature too far. Doing your best to blast my reputation is not exactly the way to make me feel kindly or act generously toward you. There would be no more nice houses, rent free, Mrs. Gwyn, rates and taxes paid; no more quarterly allowance, I am afraid. I should cut off supplies, my dear. Your widow's pension is paid in rupees, remember, not in sterling; and the value of the rupee is hardly likely to go up. So you had better look at the question all round before you take the neighborhood into your confidence. Listen here, I will give you a hundred a year and the Marychurch house—"

"But if I tell everybody how you have treated me, public opinion will force you to marry me," she cried, with an air of announcing an annihilating truth.

Challoner swung his big body from side to side contemptuously.

"Faugh!" he said. "Public opinion will do nothing of the sort. You forget it is a case of my word against yours, and that, considering our relative positions, my word will count a jolly sight most."

"But you dare not deny—"

"Oh, indeed yes, I dare," Challoner broke out. "I can deny and shall deny—or rather should, for it won't ever come to the test—that your accusations have any foundation whatsoever in fact. If a woman is mad enough to incriminate herself she must do so. But a man always denies, at least every man of honor and proper feeling does. No, no; be sensible. Think of Beattie. Think of yourself. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You are a taking woman still, Mrs. Gwyn. Give yourself another chance. For remember, you haven't a shred of evidence to offer in support of your attack. You have bombarded me with notes, but, except as lawyer to client, I have never written you two lines in my life." He paused. "No, thank goodness! even at my hottest I kept my head screwed on sufficiently the right way to avoid the old letter-writing trap."

"Then from the first, the very first," she gasped, "did you never mean to marry me?"

Challoner had the grace to hesitate, look down at the floor, and lower his voice as he answered.

"No, my dear girl, never—from the day I found I could get what I wanted at the cheaper rate."

Gwynneth Spencer stared blankly in front of her. Then, as her small, slow-working brain began to take in the measure of her own disgrace, while the poor house of cards in which she trusted toppled and tumbled flat, her silly, little, neighing laugh rose to a shriek. Beating the air with both hands, she flung herself at full length on the sofa, her body convulsed from head to foot and her throat torn by hysterical cries and sobs. Challoner turned his back, put his hands over his ears. The squealing of the mangled rabbits, on the Fairmead, had been a lullaby compared with this! But he found it useless to try and shut out the sounds. Piercing, discordant, rasping, they echoed through the room. They must be heard next door. Heard out in the road. Heard, so it seemed to Challoner, through the length and breadth of Stourmouth. Must resound, startling the high respectabilities of the Baughurst Park Ward. Must break in upon the dignified seclusion of the Tower House itself, searing his name with infamy.

He turned round, leaned down over the back of the sofa. He felt the greatest reluctance to touch the shrieking, struggling woman, but the noise was unendurable. He caught both her wrists, in one hand, and pinned them down among the ribbons and laces at her waist. The other hand he laid upon her open and distorted mouth.

"Hush," he said. "Be quiet. Hush, you fool! Gwynnie, be a good girl. Hush, Gwyn. For God's sake, don't go on like this! Hush—pull yourself together. Try to control yourself. My dear little woman—curse you, leave off your caterwauling, you damned hell-cat. Do you hear, hold your infernal row! Gwynnie love, darling, chummy little sweetheart! Leave off, will you, or you'll make me smother you. Leave off.—Ah! my God! that's better.—Oh! Oh!—ouf!"

The next thing Challoner knew clearly was that he stood in the little dining-room. Upon the dinner-table, under the dim light of the turned-down-gas-jets, a square spirit decanter, a syphon of soda, and a couple of glasses were set out on a round red-lacquer tray. He remembered often to have seen them set out thus. But, for the moment, he could not recall why he was there or what he came for. He felt very tired. His hands shook, the veins stood out on his forehead, and great drops of perspiration ran down his face. He would be uncommonly glad of some brandy. Then he started with a sudden movement of disgust. He might be brutal, cynical, callous, but there were depths to which he could not descend. Never again could he eat or drink in this house.

He remembered what he came for. A sound away in the offices arrested his attention. The maids had come in, he supposed. He was glad of that. He poured some brandy into a glass, and, crossing the hall, went back into the drawing-room, shutting the door softly behind him. Mrs. Spencer lay quite still, the fit of hysteric violence spent. Her face was clay-colored. Her lips blue. Her eyes closed. Her body limp and inert. She cried a little weakly and quietly.

Challoner knelt down beside the sofa, slipped one hand under the back of her head, with its elaborately dressed hair and wisp of turquoise chiffon, and held the glass to her lips.

"Drink this," he said, in a thick whisper. "It will help to bring you round. It will do you good."

Then, as she sipped it, drawing away now and then and spluttering a little as the raw spirit burned her tongue and throat, he went on:

"You are going to be sensible and not throw away your chance?"

"No—I mean yes," she said.

"You will take Beattie over to Marychurch to look at the house?"

"Yes—oh! yes."

"I'll give you a hundred and fifty a year—fifty more than I promised. You can do quite nicely on that?"

“Yes—thank you—yes.”

“And as long as you keep your part of the bargain I’ll keep mine. If you play me false and talk—”

“I sha’n’t talk,” she said, feebly and fretfully. “Why should I talk now it’s no use?”

“Ah,” Challoner returned, “I am very glad you have come to your senses, Mrs. Gwyn. I believed, give it a little thought, you’d see it all in a reasonable light. That’s right.”

He rose and went out into the hall again, carrying the glass; put it down, took up his gloves and hat, crossed to the door leading to the offices, opened it and called.

A young woman, in a trim black serge coat and skirt and pink sailor hat, appeared in the kitchen doorway with a knowing and slightly disconcerting smirk.

“Look here, Esther,” Challoner said, “Mrs. Spencer has been extremely unwell. It was most fortunate I happened to call in to-night. If I hadn’t, I don’t quite know what would have become of her. She ought not to be left alone in the house. Next time Miss Beattie is away, mind both of you do not go out. It is not safe.”

He felt among the loose coins in his trousers pocket; laid hold of a sovereign, considered that it was too much—might have the flavor of a bribe about it. Found a couple of half-crowns, drew them out and put them into the young woman’s hand.

“You understand what I say? Never let your mistress be alone in the house.”

Once outside in the road, Challoner took off his hat, walking slowly. He was grateful for the freshness and the soothing half-dark. He had gone about fifty yards when the blond road seemed to lurch. That horrible shrieking laughter was in his ears—or was it only the squealing of the tortured rabbits? He turned giddy, laid hold of the top of some garden palings for support. A spasm contracted his throat. He retched, vomited. And then passed onward, homeward, through the chill, moist fragrance of the spring night.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH EUTERPE IS CALLED UPON TO PLAY THE PART OF INTERPRETER

The concert was over. Coming out of the Rotunda—a domed and pinnacled building of glass and iron, half conservatory, half theater, set on the hillside against a crown of evergreen-trees—the audience poured in a dark stream down the steep garden walks to where, flanked by red and yellow wooden kiosks, the turnstiles and entrance gates open on to the public road.

Joanna Smyrthwaite was among the last to leave the auditorium. She did so in a dazed and almost sleep-walking condition, exhausted and enervated by the tumult of her own sensations. But that enervation was singularly pleasant to her, since, by reducing the claims of her overdeveloped intellectual and moral nature, it left the emotional element in undisputed ascendancy. She was, indeed, jealous of any interruption or curtailment of this condition. Therefore she lingered, unwilling to leave the place where so much inward felicity had been procured her, and fearing to meet any of her acquaintance. Dr. and Mrs. Norbiton and Mrs. Paull had, she believed, occupied stalls a couple of rows behind her. She wished to avoid conversation with them, and still more to avoid offering—her carriage was waiting at the entrance gates—to drive them to their respective homes. Their comments upon the performance, however intelligent and appreciative, must, she knew, jar upon her in her present frame of mind. Felicity would be extinguished in irritation, and for such deplorable downfall she should, she knew, hold her good neighbors responsible. It was wiser to avoid occasion of offense since she so wanted, so really needed, to be alone.

Her sister Margaret's musical requirements went no further than the modern English ballad. For preference of the description in which roses, personal pronouns, cheap erotic sentiment, endearing diminutives, and tags of melody appropriated—without acknowledgment—from the works of early masters go to make up so remarkably meritricious a whole. Of this Joanna, while duly deploring Margaret's artistic limitations, was really very glad. It enabled her to attend the weekly Wednesday and Friday classical concerts, at the Rotunda, by herself. She had always wished to attend these concerts, but only since her father's demise had she felt free to gratify her wishes in respect of them. Since that event, they had become first a permitted pleasure, then an indulgence crying aloud for gratification, and finally a duty of a semi-religious character on no account to be omitted. To-day the religious sentiment was conspicuously present, as the programme consisted of excerpts from Wagner's operas. Reared in a creed which sublimates the deity to an inoperative abstraction, Joanna's thought reacted just now toward an exaggerated anthropomorphism. In her mind, as in those of many persons deficient in the finer and more catholic musical instinct, the titanic quality of so much of the great composer's work excited feelings of astonishment and awe which resulted in an attitude closely akin to worship. The elevation of primitive human passions—desire, remorse, anger, revenge, blood-hunger—to regions of portent and prodigy, so that they stalk, altogether phantasmal and gigantic clothed in rent garments of amazing and tormented harmonies across the world stage, their heads threatening the integrity of the constellations while their feet are made of, and squarely planted upon, very common clay, is, undoubtedly, a spectacle calculated at once to flatter human pride and provoke a species of idolatry. For some reason, moreover, lust is less readily conceivable in the neighborhood of the pole than in that of the equator; so that the bleak Northern atmosphere, in which the Wagnerian dramas move, procures for them an effect of austerity, not to say of chastity, almost amusingly misleading.

Humor, however, is indispensable to the recognition of the above little truths, and Joanna's composition was innocent of the smallest admixture of that merrily nose-pulling ingredient. She took her emotions quite seriously; not only nursing them when present, but finding in them later assurance of the reality of certain fond dreams, vehement hopes and longings, which possessed her. Therefore, standing under the glazed marquise of the Rotunda she watched, with strained face and pale, anxious eyes, until the little company of her acquaintance—she could distinguish Dr. Norbiton by his height and the green felt hat, cleft in the crown, which he wore—reached the turnstiles and passed out toward the animated open space of The Square.

This last, like the flat of the valley, lay in shadow; faint pearl-gray mist veiling the modest stream whence Stourmouth derives its name, and the lawns and borders—now gay with spring flowers—of the well-kept ornamental grounds through which it flows. But, across the valley, the fir plantation upon the opposite slope, and the houses and big hotels—the streaming flags of which supplied a welcome note of crude color in the landscape—rising behind the dark bar of it, along with the upward curve of shops and offices in Marychurch Road, and the three tall church spires—two of buff-gray stone, the third red-tiled and elegantly slender—were flooded with steady sunshine. Thrushes sang loud in the grove at the back of the Rotunda. Perched on the outstanding ironwork of the dome, starlings creaked and whistled. A grind of tram wheels, hooting of motor horns, barking of dogs, and sound of voices, borne on the easterly breeze, arose from The Square. The bell of an Anglican church called to evensong. From the bandstand, situated at the far end of the public gardens, came the strains of a popular march; while with these, in a soft undertone, mingled the murmur of the many trees and hush of the sea.

Seeing and hearing all of which, in her present highly sensitized condition, realization of the inherent beauty of things, the inherent wonder and delight of Being, pierced Joanna Smyrthwaite's understanding and heart. Her whole nature was fused by the fires of a limitless tenderness and sympathy. And, being thus delivered from the tyranny of words and empty phrases, from the false standards of thought and conduct engendered by her upbringing, and from ever-present consciousness of her own circumscribed and discordant personality, for the first time in her experience she tasted the strong wine of life, pure and undiluted. During a few splendid moments she knew the joy of genius' sixth sense—becoming one with the soul and purpose of all that which she looked upon. Hot tears rose to her eyes. She was broken by a mute ecstasy of thanksgiving.

But it was impossible this happy state should continue. The malady of introspection was too deeply ingrained in her. Tormenting fears and scruples again arose. Innate pessimism laid its paralyzing influence upon her. She felt as one in whose hands a gift of great value has been placed; but whose muscles being too weak to grasp it, the precious lovely thing falls to the ground and is shattered. Whereat tears of enraptured sensibility turned to tears of bitter humiliation. Drawing a black-bordered handkerchief from the silver-mounted bag hanging at her waist, she pressed it against her wet, yet burning, face and hurried down the hill.

At the gates the well-appointed barouche and pair of fine brown horses awaited her—Johnson, the coachman, rotund and respectful, in his black livery, upon the box; Edwin the footman, elongated and respectful, her rugs and wraps over his arm, at the carriage door. The spring evenings still grew chill toward sundown; and Joanna's circulation was never of the best. She stood silent and abstracted while Edwin put her cloak—a costly garment of Persian lamb lined with ermine—about her thin shoulders; nor, until she was seated in the carriage,

the fur rug warmly tucked round her, had her agitation subsided sufficiently for her to speak. She would not go the short way home by Barryport Road. She disliked the traffic. The trams made her nervous. She would go by the new drive along the West Cliff, and across Tantivy Common.

Obediently the carriage turned to the left through the shadow, up the steep hill behind the Rotunda. The horses climbed, straining at the collar. Then, the top of the ascent being reached, they bowled along the broad, even road, snorting in the sparkle of the upland air and recovered sunshine. Joanna sat stiffly upright, shivering a little and blinking in the strong light. She still held her handkerchief in her hand, and it was through a blur of again up-welling tears that she saw the uninviting red and gray terraces and large, straggling boarding-houses, set in a sparse fringe of fir-trees, on either side the road. This quarter of Stourmouth, declining from fashion, is given over to cheap *pensions*, nursing-homes, and schools. The footwalks were infested by hospital nurses and bath-chairs, while long files of girls, marching two and two, meandered home and seaward. Some of these maidens stared enviously at the young lady, wrapped in furs, driving along in her smart carriage, and sighed for the glorious days when mistresses and lessons would have no more dominion over them. But Joanna remained unconscious of the interest she excited. Her thoughts had returned upon a subject which now constantly and all too exclusively occupied them—a subject to which even the admirable playing of the Rotunda orchestra and noble singing of the young dramatic soprano—though she had listened to both in a fervor of reverential emotion—supplied, after all, little more than a humble accompaniment.

In the silver-mounted velvet bag hanging at her waist, neatly filed and dated, encircled by elastic bands to keep them perfectly flat and prevent their edges from crumpling, were all the letters she had received from Adrian Savage. Even the thin French envelopes, cross-hatched with blue inside to secure opacity, had been carefully preserved. Even the telegram she had received from Adrian, in response to the announcement of her father's death, found a place there. The letters in question were discreet, even ceremonious epistles, dealing with business and plans, expressing regret at the delays in his return to England caused by "our good Challoner's" slowness in preparing documents and accounts, and making civil inquiries as to Joanna and her sister's health and well-being. Quaint turns of phrase and vivacity of diction gave these letters a flavor of originality; but, taken as a whole, less intimate or more uncompromising effusions it would be difficult to conceive. By this fact, however, Joanna was in no wise daunted. As all his many friends agreed, Adrian Savage was a dear, delightful, and very clever fellow, who would assuredly make a name for himself. But Joanna went far beyond that, endowing him with enough virtues, graces, and talents to people this naughty old earth with sages and stock all heaven with saints. Consequently in the graceful lightness and polite restraint of his letters, alike, she found food for admiration and security of hope—namely, consideration for the difficulties of her unprotected position, delicacy in face of her recent bereavement, a high-minded determination in no way to hurry her to a decision.

At night Joanna placed the slender packet in a Russia-leather wallet beneath her pillow. By day she carried it in the bag at her waist. Often, when alone, she drew it forth from its hiding-place and fondled it tremulously. She had done so this afternoon during the concert more than once. It was unnecessary for her to re-read the letters. She knew their contents by heart. Adrian had touched them. He thought of her when writing them, when folding the thin sheets of paper, when stamping and addressing the envelopes. Thus they constituted a direct material, as well as mental, link between herself and him. Perpetually she dwelt on this fact, finding in

it a pleasure almost painful in its intensity. Only for a few minutes at a time, indeed, could she dare to hold or look at the packet. Then, replacing it in the wallet or bag, she struggled to regain her composure, merely to take it out at the first favorable opportunity, and repeat the whole process again.

In the same way, although longing for the young man's return, to the point of passion, she hailed each obstacle which postponed that return. To see him, to hear his voice and footsteps, meet his gallant and kindly eyes, to watch him come and go about the house, to listen to his clever and sympathetic talk, would constitute rapture, but a rapture from which she shrank in terror. She felt that she could hardly endure his presence. It would drain her of vitality.

Now, sitting upright in the carriage, while the horses carried her forward at a spanking pace through the sea and moorland freshness and the delights of the spring sunshine, a new form of these fears tortured her. Adrian's love, constant association with him, participation in the varied interests and activities of his daily life and in that of the brilliant society in which he moved—this, and nothing less than this, in sum and in detail, constituted the lovely precious gift placed in her, till now, so sad and empty hands by a strange turn of Fortune's wheel. Were those poor hungry hands strong enough to close upon and hold it? Or would they, weakly faltering and failing, let it fall to the ground and be shattered? The shame of such prospective failure agonized her. To renounce a crown may be heroic, but to have it incontinently tumble off, when you are straining every nerve, exerting every faculty, to keep it safely balanced on your head, is feeble, as she felt, to the point of ignominy.

At last the schools, *pensions*, nursing-homes, and lodging-houses were left behind. The carriage reached the open common. Tracts of gorse, thick-set with apricot-yellow blossom, broke up the silvery brown expanse of heather. In sharply green, grass-grown hollows ancient hawthorns, their tops clipped by the sea wind into quaint shapes, compact and ruddy, were dusted over by opening leaf-buds. High in air screaming gulls circled. The shadows were long, for the sun drew down toward its setting. Then, as once before to-day, the happy appeal of outward things—in which, as in glass, man may, if he will, catch some faint reflection of God's glory—made its voice heard, awakening Joanna Smyrthwaite from the fever-dreams of her almost maniacal egoism.

Obeying a sudden impulse, she stopped the carriage, alighted, and walked out on to the little promontory the neck of which the road crosses. Here the sand cliffs, dyed all shades from deepest rusty orange to palest lemon-yellow and glistening white, descend, almost perpendicularly in narrow water-worn shelves and ledges to the beach nearly a hundred feet below. Looking eastward, up the wind, the sea horizon, Stourmouth, its many buildings and its pier, and all the curving coastline away to Stonehorse Head—the dark mass of which guards the entrance to Marychurch Haven—showed through a film of fine gray mist. Westward, the colors of both land and sea, though opaque, were warmer. Across the golden gorse of the common in the immediate foreground Joanna saw the great amphitheater of the Baughurst Park Woods extending far inland, the rich blue-purple of the pines and firs pierced here and there by the living sunlight of a larch plantation. Beyond Barryport Harbor, only the farthest coves and inlets of whose gleaming waters were visible, the quiet, rounded outlines of the Slepe Hills pushed seaward in blunt-nosed headland after headland, softening from heliotrope to ethereal lavender in the extreme distance, under a sky resembling the tint and texture of a pink pearl.

Joanna, her fur cloak gathered closely about her, stood a lonely black figure amid the splendor of the scented gorse. There is an exciting quality in the east wind. The harsh tang of

it galvanized her into an unusual physical well-being, making her chest expand and her blood circulate more rapidly.

A new thought came to her. To doubt her power of meeting the demands of Adrian's affection and of rising to his level was really to doubt the vivifying power of that affection, to doubt his ability to raise her to his own level. Her doubt of her own worthiness was, in point of fact, an accusation against his intelligence and his judgment.

Joanna slipped one hand inside the velvet bag under her cloak and clasped the thin packet of letters. With the other she momentarily covered her eyes, as though in apology and penitence.

"Ah! how miserably faithless I am," she murmured in her flat, toneless voice. "How wickedly ungrateful it is not to trust him. As though he were not capable of supplying all that is wanting in me—as though he did not know so far, far best!"

CHAPTER IV

SOME PASSAGES FROM JOANNA SYMRTHWAITE'S LOCKED BOOK

That evening Joanna went to her room early. She permitted Mrs. Isherwood to help her off with her evening dress and on with a purple lamb's-wool kimono, the color and cut of which were singularly ill-suited to her pasty complexion and narrow-chested figure. She then rather summarily dismissed the good woman, who retired accompanied by black silk rustlings indicative of respectful displeasure and protest. These Joanna refused to let affect her. The experiences of the day had aroused an inherited, though until now latent, arrogance. She regarded herself as sealed to that altogether-otherwise-engaged young gentleman, Adrian Savage, and set apart. Yet ingrained habits of obedience and self-repression still stirred within her, making her timid in the presence of any sort of established authority, even in that of her old nurse. She needed solitude to enable her to enjoy the luxury of such "sealing" to the full. Therefore, when the door shut upon those remonstrant rustlings, she followed almost stealthily and locked it, stood for a moment listening to make sure of Isherwood's final departure, then extended both arms with a voiceless cry of satisfaction, crossed to her satinwood bureau, opened it and took the current volume of her diary from a pigeon-hole, fetched lighted candles and the silver-mounted bag containing Adrian's letters from off her dressing-table, and sat down to write.

"*April 20, 190-*

> "I have neglected my diary for many weeks. But I have feared I might set down that which I should afterward regret. Indeed, all my accustomed occupations and employments have been neglected. They have appeared to me tedious and trivial. My mind has been strangely disordered. But to-night I feel this state is passed. I see my duty clearly, and shall not allow anything to interfere with it or deflect me from the pursuit of it. I owe this to the person who has so wonderfully chosen me."

At this point the small, neat, scholarly writing became irregular and almost illegible. Joanna rose and paced the room, pressing her hands against her high forehead. Presently she returned and sat down again.

> "It is unwise to dwell too much on this. As yet I am unequal to any adequate expression of my feelings. When rearranging the books in library last week I happened to open a volume of Mrs. Browning's poems containing her 'Sonnets from the Portuguese.' They appeared to me singularly appropriate to my own case. I have, indeed, been weakly jealous that any other woman should have felt, and so exactly expressed, my own thoughts and emotions. Yet I read and re-read the sonnets daily. They speak for me not only more eloquently, but more truthfully, than I can speak for myself. But, unhappily, I have less, terribly less, to offer in return than the poetess had. This has racked me with distress, annihilating my peace of mind, and in great measure dimming my gratitude, until to-day. I see how very wrong this has been. It has its root in pride. For, as I now understand, distrust of myself is nothing less than distrust of him. I am resolved to exterminate my pride and submit to be nothing, so that he may give everything. Already I feel relief and a growing repose of mind from this resolve. Already I feel my pride yielding. Soon, I

believe, I shall almost rejoice in my own absence of gifts and attractions, since it enlarges his opportunity for generosity."

The chatter of young women upon the gallery, accompanied by smothered laughter, not to say giggling. Joanna ceased writing, blotted the page, and returned the diary to its pigeonhole. She moved into the center of the room and stood anxiously listening. But to her relief no knock came at the door. The two voices grew faint along the corridor, and ceased. Joanna could not, however, immediately settle to her diary again. The giggling had brought her down, from high poetic regions to common earth, with a bump. Pride, cast out in one direction, pranced in another unrestrained—as is pride's wont. When Joanna resumed her writing subject and treatment alike were changed.

"Marion Chase is staying here, as usual," she wrote. "In some ways I am glad of this. It relieves me of any obligation to be constantly with Margaret. To be constantly with her would be very irksome to me. I no longer pretend that she and I have much in common. Since papa's authority has been removed the radical divergence between Margaret's character and mine becomes more and more evident. Marion Chase has no intellectual life. Her pleasures are active and practical. These Margaret appears increasingly to enjoy sharing. To-day she and Marion have been to Southampton and back in a new motor-car Margaret has on trial. Mr. Challoner selected it for her in London. It came down yesterday. Margaret is very much excited about it. She is, of course, at liberty to buy a motor-car if she pleases, though I think it would have been better taste to wait until the business connected with our inheritance was finally settled before making any such costly purchase. I prefer Johnson and the horses. Motoring would, I feel sure, cause me nervousness. Mr. Challoner, I heard this evening, met them in Stourmouth, and, under plea of seeing how the car worked before advising Margaret to keep it, accompanied them to Southampton and back. This appears to me quite unnecessary. I could not make out from Marion whether his going was by previous arrangement or merely the result of a sudden thought and invitation. In either case I cannot but disapprove of his joining the party. He is still here very frequently, and Margaret quotes his opinions on every occasion. Those opinions are prejudiced and insular, as one might expect from a man who has enjoyed few social and educational advantages. Papa used to say the worst enemies of patriotism were patriots. This is certainly true in the case of Mr. Challoner in as far as the effect of his conversation upon me is concerned. He knows nothing of foreign countries and foreign politics, and yet speaks contemptuously of whatever and whoever is not English. Margaret has taken to echoing him until I grow weary and irritable. Surely it might occur to her that reiterated depreciation of everything foreign must be displeasing to me. But Margaret has no perception. Argument is lost upon her, so I am constrained to remain silent. Yet I cannot disguise from myself that her constant association with Mr. Challoner and the influence he undoubtedly has obtained over her may lead to great difficulties in the future—particularly in the event of my own marriage."

Here, once again, the neat writing became erratic. Emotion gained upon Joanna, compelling her to lay down her pen, rise, and pace the room.

“My own marriage—my own marriage,” she repeated, her head thrown back, her eyes shut, her arms hanging straight at her sides, while her hands worked, opening and closing in nervous, purposeless clutchings.

Presently she walked back to the bureau and took Adrian’s letters out of the velvet bag. Resting her left hand, her fingers outstretched, upon the flat slab of the bureau for support, she held the letters in her right. Their contact made her wince and shrink, as though she held white-hot metal instead of innocent bluey-white note-paper. Only by degrees could she muster sufficient composure to look at the slim little packet upon which encircling elastic bands conferred a distinctly prosaic and even bill-like appearance.

“ ‘And yet because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart—’ ”

Her voice failed, dying in her throat, leaving the quotation incomplete. Hastily she pushed the packet of letters back into the bag, snapped to the silver catch, and, again pressing her hands to her forehead, paced the room till such time as her agitation had sufficiently subsided for her to resume her writing.

“I must resist the temptation to dwell upon a certain subject, save in silence. To refer to it in words moves me too deeply. That subject is the life of my life. Of this I am so utterly sure, so utterly convinced, that I can surely afford to keep silence. Just in proportion as I know that my heart is beating, it becomes unnecessary to count the heart-beats. I had better write of practical things. To do so has lessened the worry they too often caused me in the past. I trust it may do so again. I mean this specially in connection with the anxiety Margaret’s association with Mr. Challoner occasions me. I fear Margaret is disingenuous. Mamma used to deplore a tendency to deceit in her, deceit in little things, even when she was a child. Margaret enjoys concealment. It amuses her and gives her an idea of her own astuteness and superiority. I do not wish to be unjust, but I cannot help fearing this tendency to slyness is increased by her intercourse with Mr. Challoner and with Marion.

“In addition to the fact of Mr. Challoner’s drive with them to Southampton something else came out at dinner, to-night, which disturbed me. On my way home to-day, after crossing Tantivy Common, Johnson turned along Silver Chine Road. A pantechnicon van stood before one of the small houses which I recognized as that which Margaret once pointed out to me as belonging to Mrs. Spencer. As the carriage passed, I saw Mrs. Spencer herself and her young sister, Miss Beatrice Stacey, directing the men who were carrying out the furniture. I thought they both looked hard at me, but I did not bow. I sent cards to Mrs. Spencer, as to every one else who called here to inquire after papa’s death, but I do not desire her acquaintance. On the few occasions when I have met her she appeared to me a frivolous, dressy person, whose influence upon Margaret would not be for good. I do not wish to be uncharitable, but her manners struck me as unladylike. At dinner I mentioned the circumstances under which I saw her this afternoon. Marion glanced at Margaret with a singular expression of face.

" 'I heard Mrs. Spencer and Bee were leaving soon,' she said. 'I believe they have taken a house at Marychurch.'

"I observed Margaret flushed, but she did not speak.

" 'Of course I don't believe there is any real harm in her,' Marion added, again looking at Margaret, 'or I should not have gone there so often. But I do think whatever talk there has been is entirely her own fault.'

"Then Margaret began to speak of the car, and Mr. Challoner's advice to her about buying it, in a rather loud tone. She hardly spoke to me during the rest of the evening. I certainly had no intention of annoying her by mentioning Mrs. Spencer, but she was evidently very angry with me. I cannot help being anxious—yet I know my own great happiness should make me patient and tolerant, even when vulgar and trivial matters are pressed upon my attention. I am very weak. I ought to rise above all such things and rest calmly in the one wonderful thought that I am no longer alone, that I no longer belong to myself."

Joanna put her hand over her eyes.

" 'Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling thy purple round me,' " she again quoted half aloud. Then once more she wrote.

"I am glad that I am rich. I have never felt glad of this till to-day. We have always been rich, and, though papa inculcated economy as a duty, I have taken riches for granted as a natural part of my own position. Now I recognize their value. I have at least that to give—I mean, a not despicable amount of wealth, and the dignified ease which wealth obtains. In this respect at least I can make some slight return. Since there has been time to look into affairs, we find papa's estate considerably larger than we supposed. Margaret and I shall each have between seven and eight thousand a year. Yes, I am very, very glad. At least I do not go to him an empty-handed beggar in material things."

She sat awhile looking up, both hands resting on the edge of the slab. Her mouth was half open, her eyes fixed, her face irradiated by an expression of ecstasy painful in its strained intensity. A little more and ecstasy might decline to idiocy. Joanna doted; and always—though particularly under such circumstances as Joanna's—it is a mistake to dote.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH ADRIAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF SOME INHABITANTS OF THE TOWER HOUSE IS SENSIBLY INCREASED

A week of the burning mid-May weather, such as often comes in the fir and heather country. The Baughurst woods and all the coast-line from Marychurch to Barryport basked in the strong, still heat. Over open spaces the heat became visible, dancing and swirling like the vapors off a lime-kiln as it baked all residue of moisture out of the light surface soil. Aromatic scents given off by the lush foliage and lately risen sap filled the air. The furze-pods crackled and snapped. Fir-cones fell, softly thudding, on to the deep, dry beds of fir-needles, and films of bark scaling off the red upper branches made small, ticking noises in the sun-scorch. All day long in the heart of the woodland turtle doves repeated their cozy, crooning lament. Wandering cuckoos called. In the gardens blackbirds and thrushes, though silent at mid-day, sang early and late. Great blue and green dragonflies hawked over the lawns, darting back and forth from the warm dappled shade of the fir plantations, where their enameled bodies and transparent wings glinted across long slanting shafts of sunlight. In the shrubberies rhododendrons, azaleas, pink thorns, and crab-trees were in flower. Lilac and syringa blossom was about to break. The sky, high and unclouded, showed a deep, hot blue above the dark-plumed pines and fir-trees and against the red-tiled roofs and sextagonal red-brick tower—surmounted by a gilt weather-vane—of the Tower House from sunrise to sunset.

Adrian Savage lay back in a long cane chair set upon the veranda, around the fluted terra-cotta pillars of which trumpet-flowered honeysuckle, jasmine, and climbing roses flourished. He found the English heat heavy and somewhat enervating, clear though the atmosphere was. It made him lazy, inclined to dream and disinclined to act or think. He laid The Times down on the wicker table beside him, put his Panama hat on the top of it, returned a small illustrated French newspaper, of questionable modesty, to the breast-pocket of his jacket, stretched, stifled a yawn, and lighted his third cigarette. Then, reclining in the chair again, he contemplated the perspective of his own person—clad in a suit of white flannel with a faint four-thread black stripe—to where the said perspective ended in a pair of tan boots. He had bought the boots in London. He knew they represented the last word of the right thing. So he ought to like them.—He crossed and re-crossed his feet.—But he wasn't sure he did like them. On the whole he thought not. Therefore he sighed meditatively, pulled the tip of his close-cut black beard and pushed up the rather fly-away ends of his mustache. Stared sadly at the tan boots, raised his eyebrows and shoulders just perceptibly, and mournfully shook his close-cropped black head. Sighed again, and then looked away, across the gravel terrace and flower-beds immediately below it crowded with pink, mauve, and pale-yellow tulips, to where, on the sunk court at the far end of the long, wide lawn, four agile, ruddy-faced, white-clothed young people very vigorously played tennis.

In the last three months Adrian had lost weight. *La belle Gabrielle* had not been kind; not at all kind. More than ever did she appear elusive and baffling. More than ever was the mysterious element of her complex and enchanting personality in evidence. She frequented drawing-room meetings at which Feminists, male as well as female, held forth. She received Zélie de Gand and other such vermin—the term is Adrian's—at her thrice-sacred flat. Finally, her attitude was altogether too maternal and beneficent toward M. René Dax. These things caused Adrian rage and unhappiness. He lost flesh. In his eyes was a permanently pathetic and orphaned look. Happily, his nose retained its native pugnacity of outline, testifying to the fact

that, although he might voluminously sigh as a lover, as a high-spirited and perfectly healthy young gentleman he could still very handsomely spoil for a fight.

But no legitimate fight presented itself—that was exactly where, from Adrian's point of view, the worry came in. He might haunt *la belle Gabrielle's* staircase, spend hours in consultation with wise and witty Anastasia Beauchamp, exert all his ingenuity to achieve persuasion or excision of René Dax, but without practicable result. About as useful to try to bottle a shadow, play leap-frog with an echo, tie up the wind in a sack! Really he felt quite glad to go away to England for a time, out of the vexatiously profitless wear and tear of it all.

The sun, sloping westward, slanted in under the round-headed terra-cotta arches supporting the roof of the veranda. Adrian drew his feet back out of the scorch, and in so doing sat more upright, thereby gaining a fuller view of the tennis players.

Marion Chase happened to be serving. She interested him as a type produced by current English methods of mental and physical culture practically unknown in France. She stood—so she informed him with the utmost frankness—five feet ten in her stockings, took eight and a half in shoes, measured forty inches round the chest and twenty-nine and three-quarters round the waist. To these communicated details he could add from personal observation that she had the complexion of a Channel pilot, owned a sensible, good-tempered, very managing face, and spoke in a full barytone voice. He accredited her with being very fairly honorable, irreproachably virtuous, and conspicuously devoid of either the religious or artistic sense—though she frequented concerts, picture galleries, and church services with praiseworthy regularity and persistence. He liked her rather, and wondered at her much—being unaccustomed to the society of such large-boned, athletic, and sexless persons, petticoated, yet conspicuously deficient in haunches and busts.

Miss Chase, he further remarked, was permanently in waiting upon Margaret Smyrthwaite, while a tail of youths and maidens was almost as permanently in waiting upon Miss Chase. Their relation to her was gregarious rather than sentimental, a mere herding of children who follow a leader at play. The said tail to-day consisted of the Busbridge boys and Amy Woodford—the former two lanky, sandy-headed, quite innocuous young fellows in immaculate flannels, their nether garments sustained by green and orange silk handkerchiefs knotted—Adrian trusted securely—about their waists; the latter a rather stout, dark-haired young lady, arrayed in white linen, who would have been very passably pretty had not her mouth been too small, her nose too long, and her bright, boot-button-black eyes set insufficiently far apart.

Idly he watched the quartette as the members of it ran, leaped, backed, called, stood breathing after a long rally, with, apparently, as little soul or mind in their active young bodies as a mob of colts and fillies. Then his eyes traveled to Margaret Smyrthwaite sitting outside the larch-built, heather-thatched tennis pavilion beyond the court in the shade of a grove of tall fir and beech trees.

If Marion Chase caused him wonder, Margaret caused him very much more, though from a different angle. Her development in the last three months struck him as phenomenal—a startling example of the adaptability to environment inherent in the feminine nature. From a rather negative and invertebrate being, with little to say and a manner alternately peevish and silly, she had grown into a self-possessed young woman, capable of making her presence, pleasure, and displeasure, definitely felt. The likeness and the unlikeness she bore to Joanna had from the first appeared to Adrian both pathetic and singular. Now, on seeing the twin sisters again, this likeness and unlikeness passed the bounds of pathos and became, to his

eyes, quite actively cruel. For they bore to each other—it was thus he put it—the same relation that the *édition de luxe* of a book bears to its original rough copy—Joanna, naturally, representing the rough copy. All the ungracious and ungrateful aspects of Joanna's appearance were nicely corrected in her sister, fined down or filled out—heavy, yellowish auburn hair, improved to crisp copper; a pasty complexion giving place to a fair though freckled skin and bright color; blue eyes no longer prominent or anxious, but clear, self-content, and possibly a trifle sly.

At forty Adrian could imagine her fat and a little coarse-looking, but now her figure was graceful, and she dressed well, though with perhaps too great elaboration for impeccable taste. Adrian trembled as to the flights of decorative fancy which might present themselves when her period of mourning was passed! To-day she wore a black muslin dress and a wide-brimmed, black chip hat, trimmed with four enormous black silk and gauze roses, the whole of rather studied candor of effect. Yes, she was quite an agreeable object to look upon; but Joanna, oh! poor, poor Joanna!

Adrian lit a fourth cigarette, stretched himself in his chair again, crossing his legs and gazing up at the roof rafters. Joanna afforded him an uncomfortable subject of thought, and one which he tried to avoid in so far as possible. He respected her. More than ever he felt a chivalrous pity toward her. But he did not like her, somehow. Ridiculous though it might sound, he was a wee bit afraid of her, conscious of self-protective instincts, of an inclination to erect small barricades and throw up small earthworks behind which to shelter when alone with her. He was ashamed of his own sensations, but—and more particularly since he had seen those degraded drawings upon the wall of René's studio which so dreadfully resembled her—she, to use a childish expression, gave him the creeps.

Then, suddenly penetrated by a conviction that her pale eyes were at that very moment fixed upon him, Adrian whipped out of his chair and wheeled round, very alert and upright in his tan boots and light flannel suit.

"Ah! my dear cousin, it is you! I thought so," he said, quickly. "At last you come out to enjoy this ideal afternoon. That is well. Is it not ravishing?"

For quite a perceptible space of time Joanna made no reply. She stood on the stone step of one of the large French windows opening on to the veranda. Her lips were parted and upon her face was a singular expression, midway—so it struck Adrian—between driveling folly and rapture. This recalled to him with such vividness those evil drawings upon the studio wall that had the likeness been completed by her sporting masculine attire it would hardly have surprised him. She, in point of fact, however, wore nothing more peculiar than a modest, slightly limp, black alpaca coat and skirt. Adrian was aware of developing an unreasoning detestation of that innocent and very serviceable material.

"I am so sorry," she said, at last, in a sort of hurried whisper. "I ought not to have come out unexpectedly thus, by the window. I have disturbed you. It was thoughtless of me and inconsiderate."

"But—no—no—not in the least," he assured her. "I was doing absolutely nothing. The hot weather disposes one to idleness. I tried to read The Times. I found it a monument of dullness. I looked into a little French paper I have here." He patted the breast-pocket of his jacket. "I found it quite too lively."

The corners of his mouth gave slightly; for oh! how very far away from poor Joanna's was the outlook upon things in general of that naughty little print!

"Have no fear," he added. "It shall remain safely stowed away. It is not, I admit, exactly designed for what you call family reading—unsuited, for example, to the ingenuous minds of those excellent young tennis players! Ah, the energy they display! It puts me to shame."

Joanna came forward slowly, touching chairs, flower-stands, tables, in passing, as though blindly feeling her way.

"I have wanted so much to speak to you alone," she said.

"Yes—yes?" Adrian answered inquiringly, with a hasty mental looking around for suitable barricade-building material.

"Ever since you told me you had lately suffered anxiety and trouble," she continued.

"Ah! my dear cousin, you are too sympathetic, too kind. Who among us is free from anxieties and troubles—*des ennuis*? One accepts them as an integral part of one's existence upon this astonishing planet. One even cherishes a certain affection for them, perhaps one's own dear little personal *ennuis*."

Joanna sank into a chair. Her lips worked with emotion.

"I wish I could feel as you do," she said. "But I am weak. I rebel against that which pains me or causes me anxiety. I have no large tolerance of philosophy. But, therefore, all the more do I admire it in you. Now, when I allude to your trouble you try to put the matter aside gracefully out of consideration for me. Indeed, I appreciate that consideration, but while it causes me gratitude, it increases my regret.—You will not think me officious or intrusive? But I cannot tell you how it distresses me that you should endure any mental suffering, that you should have troubles or anxieties. I had never thought of the possibility of anything unhappy in your life or circumstances. Since you told me I think of it continually. Forgive me if I appear presumptuous, but you have done so incalculably much for—for us—Margaret, I mean, and me—especially, I know"—her voice faded to a mere thread—"I know, of course, for me—that I have wondered whether there was not anything in which I could be of some slight use to you, in which I could help you, in return?"

Adrian had subsided into his long chair again. He leaned sideways, his legs crossed, his right arm extended to its full length across the arm of the chair, holding his cigarette between his first and second fingers, as far from his companion as possible lest the smoke of it should be unpleasant to her. His lean, shapely hand and wrist showed brown against the hard white of his shirt-cuff, and the blue smoke from the smoldering cigarette curled delicately upward in the hot, fragrant air. And Joanna watched his every movement; watched with the fixed intentness, the beatified idiocy, of those who dote.

Outwardly the young man remained charmingly debonair. Inwardly he labored at the erection of barricades and the strengthening of earthworks with positive frenzy, distractedly apprehensive of what might be coming next.

"Sympathy so generously given as yours can never be otherwise than helpful, dear cousin," he said. "Believe me, I am deeply touched by the interest you take in me. But the trouble I have on my mind—and which it was foolish and selfish of me ever to allude to—"

"Oh no," Joanna interrupted, breathlessly. "Do not say that. Pray don't. It was entirely my doing. Both Margaret and I observed that you—you looked sad, that you had grown thinner. I questioned you. Perhaps it was intrusive of me to do so. Yet how could I remain silent when all which affects you necessarily concerns me so profoundly?"

Notwithstanding the high temperature, Adrian felt something queerly like a trickle of iced water down the length of his spine. He just managed not to change his position, but remained leaning sideways toward her.

"You are more than kind to me, dear cousin," he said. "Really, more than kind and good. But I am sure your ready sympathy will make you comprehend there is a stage of most *ennuis*, private worries and bothers, when it is only discreet, only, indeed, honorable, to maintain silence. Yet, believe me, I shall never forget your amiable solicitude for my happiness. Some day in the future it may become possible for me to explain—"

"Yes—oh! yes—in the future—thank you—I know—in the future," Joanna whispered, pressing her hands over her eyes.

And Adrian shrank away from her. He couldn't help it. Mercifully, she wasn't looking. He uncrossed his legs, sat upright. Then, leaning forward with bent head, he stared at the red and purple quarries of the pavement, resting his wrists upon his knees. He was about to reply, but Joanna's toneless speech rushed onward.

"Pray, pray do not suppose that I wish to cross-question you or force myself into your confidence. Nothing could be further from my intention than that. I am so sure you know far best what to tell and what to withhold from me. I could never question your judgment for an instant. In this, as in everything—yes, everything—I am ready and contented to wait. Only sometimes there are practical ways of being helpful. I have lived among business people all my life, and I could not help thinking that if there was any scheme—connected with your Review, for instance—forgive me if I am presumptuous—but any business affair in which you were interested and which might require capital, might need financing—"

Adrian raised his head slightly. His face was drawn and very pale. His nostrils quivered. He had sufficient self-control to keep his eyes steadily upon the white, capering forms of the tennis players there on the other side of the sunny lawn. Was it conceivable that she, Joanna—of all created women—was trying to buy him? The degradation, the infinite disgust of it!—But no, that really was too vile a thought. With all the cleanness, all the chivalry of his nature, Adrian thrust it aside, refusing to dishonor her so much. Again he nerved himself to speak, and again her speech rushed onward like—so it seemed to him—some toneless hissing of wind over a barren, treeless, seedless waste.

"Pray, pray do not be displeased with me," she pleaded. "I may be acting unconventionally in touching thus upon matters apparently outside my province. But, as I think you will admit, I am at most only forestalling the right, the privilege rather—for to me no privilege could be greater—which will be mine later on, in the future of which you just now spoke. Please think of it thus. And if my action is premature, a little unbecoming or unusual, you—who understand everything—will most surely forgive. No—Cousin Adrian, do not answer me, I implore you—not just yet. I have longed so earnestly for this opportunity of talking alone with you. Give me time. Let me finish. I know I do not express myself well. But be patient with me. When we are together I am only conscious of your presence. I become miserably deficient in courage and resource. Words fail me. I am so sensible of my own shortcomings. Therefore I cannot consent to lose this opportunity. There is something I so intensely need to tell you, because I cannot help hoping it may lighten the anxieties which have been troubling you—"

During this extraordinary address Adrian held himself rigidly still, his head again bent, while he stared at the red and purple quarries. He could not trust himself to move by so much as an inch lest he should betray the repulsion with which she inspired him. Meanwhile his mind worked like some high-powered engine at full pressure, for, indeed, the situation was extravagant in its unpleasantness. How to say anything conclusive without assuming too much passed human wit. Yet what more fatuous, what more execrably bad taste than to assume just

that too much? He wanted to spare the poor woman, and act toward her with as perfect charity, as perfect good breeding, as he might.

"This is what I have so wanted to tell you, Adrian," Joanna went on. "Lately I have felt quite differently about my unfortunate brother, about poor Bibby, of whose unhappy career I spoke to you when you were here before. I have learned to think differently upon many subjects in the last three months—"

Joanna paused, pressing her hands against her forehead.

"Yes—upon many, many subjects," she said. "That is natural, inevitable, with the wonderful prospect which lies before me."

The young man braced himself, each muscle growing taut, as a man braces himself for a life-and-death fight. But he did not alter his position.

"When we talked of my brother before, I told you—I thought it right to do so—that I proposed to put aside the larger portion of my fortune for his benefit. I believed it my duty to do my utmost to make amends for papa's harshness toward him. But since then I have come to see the matter in a different light. I no longer feel that my brother has the first claim upon me. I no longer believe my first duty is to Bibby. It is to some one else. And I have ceased to believe he is still living. A strange and deepening conviction has grown upon me that he is dead."

Adrian's muscles relaxed. He threw back his head and looked into the sky, into the strong, steady sunlight. For hearing Joanna's last words, he hailed salvation—salvation coming, be it added, from the very queerest and most unexpected quarter.

"Consequently I have decided to alter my will," Joanna continued. "I scrutinized my own motives carefully. I have earnestly tried not to be unduly influenced by my own inclinations, but to do what is just and right. I have not yet spoken to Margaret about it, but I intend to make a redistribution of my property, devoting that portion of it which I held in reserve for my brother to another person—I mean another purpose. Under my altered circumstances I feel not only that I am justified in doing this, but that it has become an imperative obligation. Were my poor brother still living the news of papa's death must have reached him by this time and he would have communicated either with Andrew Merriman or with me. As he has not communicated with either of us, I am free to assume the fact of his death. You agree with me, Adrian? I am at liberty to make this redistribution of my property? You—you assent?"

"Since you are good enough to ask my advice, dear cousin," Adrian said, looking upon the ground and speaking quietly and distinctly, "I am compelled to answer you truthfully. You are not free at the present time, in my opinion, to make any alteration in your will which affects your bequest to your brother."

"But," Joanna protested, with a smoldering violence, "but if I am certain, morally certain, that my unfortunate brother is dead?"

Putting a strong force upon himself, Adrian leaned sideways in his chair, again crossing his legs, turning his face toward Joanna, and looking gravely and kindly at her.

"Dear cousin," he said, "perhaps I should have acted more wisely had I written or spoken to you before now of a certain discovery which I happened, accidentally, to make immediately after my return to France. I hesitated after the exhausting experiences you had recently passed through to subject you to further anxiety and suspense or to raise hopes which might be fated to disappointment. But I possess evidence—to myself conclusive—that your brother was living as lately as three months ago; that in February last he was in Paris. Yes, I know, I sympathize—I readily comprehend," he went on, feelingly, "how greatly this information is

calculated to surprise you. On that account I have withheld it, and I grieve it is not possible to soften the shock of it by giving a happy account of your brother's state of mind or of his circumstances."

Here the speaker stopped, for Joanna raised her hand with an almost menacing gesture.

"Wait, Adrian," she cried, "wait! I cannot bear any more at present. I must accustom myself to this idea. It means so much, so dreadfully much. I must have time to think."

CHAPTER VI

WHICH PLAYS SEESAW BETWEEN A GAME OF LAWN-TENNIS AND A PRODIGAL SON

Coming in by the wicket gate from the carriage-drive, Challoner sauntered with a deliberate and even proprietary tread along the shrubbery path skirting the eastern side of the lawn. He was clothed, with a view to sports and pastimes, in a loosely fitting gray Norfolk jacket, white trousers, and a hard, white straw hat, the low crown of it encircled by a band of purple-and-scarlet-striped ribbon. The said hat, set on the top of his tall, upright head and neck, and straight, solid figure, gave him—in outline—an appearance remarkably suggestive of a large medicine bottle with the cork rammed well in. Over his shoulder he carried a racket, from which dangled a pair of by no means diminutive tennis shoes.

Only recently had Challoner received invitations to the Tower House of this purely social character. They gave him the warmest satisfaction, as marking progress toward the goal of his ambitions. He had been elected to the Baughurst Park Ward; by a narrow majority, it is true, still he had been elected—and that was the main thing, since it supplied a secure basis from which to manoeuver. Before the next election, if all went well—and he would compel all, never fear, to go well—he would be in a position to ride rough-shod over the Baughurst Park Ward, herding its voters to the poll like so many obedient sheep. His wits and professional standing plus Margaret Smyrthwaite's fortune and social standing would make him master not only of the Baughurst Park Ward, but of all Stourmouth. Yes, Sir Joseph and Lady Challoner, sons, perhaps, at Eton, daughters presented at Court and marrying into the peerage! Such beatific visions floated before him, and Challoner felt then, indeed, he would not have lived in vain. The job of uprooting and deporting Mrs. Gwynnie had been a nasty one. It hit him very hard at the time. There were moments of it he didn't care to remember very clearly even now. But, as he sauntered slowly in the still afternoon heat through the aromatic atmosphere of the radiant garden, and glanced up at the imposing mass of the big red house, its gilt weather-vane cutting into the blazing blue, he thanked Almighty God from his heart, piously, that he had had the pluck, and forethought, and resolution to go through with that nasty job of uprooting and deportation. Only weak men let women wreck them; and, thank God, he, Joseph Challoner, wasn't weak. Meanwhile—here piety had the grace to walk out and let honest cynicism walk in, winking—meanwhile Margaret Smyrthwaite grew better-looking and more accessible every day. Yes, unquestionably Providence is on the side of the clear-headed, helping those who help themselves, who know the chance of their lives when it comes along and don't allow sentimental scruples to prevent their fixing right on to it. Only the unfit go under—such, for instance, as that flimsy little baggage, Mrs. Gwynnie. And, if you look at things all round calmly and scientifically, how very much better for everybody concerned, public morals included, that under such very unfit little feminine baggages should very completely and finally go!

Chewing the cud of which philosophic reflections, Challoner pursued his prosperous and contented way. From the tennis court the players waved and called their greetings as he approached them. Margaret Smyrthwaite, leaving her seat in front of the pavilion, came forward to meet him, her smart black figure and enormous hat backed by a bank of crimson and pink rhododendron in full blossom. She moved with the rather studied grace of a girl who expects, and is altogether ready, to be admired. Challoner had no quarrel with this. For his taste she could not be too ornate. He appraised her appearance, her costume, the general effect of her, as he might a fine piece of plate for his table. Well, didn't he propose she should be, in

a sense, just that—his domestic and social centerpiece? The more glory to him, then, the more expensive she looked! And she could afford to look expensive, thank God!—here piety stepped in again momentarily.—And he could afford to let her look so; for once that handsome fortune of hers in his keeping, be d——d if he would not double or treble it.

He raised his hat and stood with it in his hand. His eyes covered her covetously. If she wanted admiration, it was hers to order. He could supply a perfectly genuine article in unlimited quantity. And, though his countenance was not an expressive one, he contrived to convey the above information to her quite clearly. The young lady responded. She talked of the weather, the heat, the game, and such-like inanities; but she displayed her fine plumage and trailed her wings all the while. Challoner began to think of a game of tennis as a wholesome corrective. The temperature became high in more senses than the meteorologic one. Presently she made a gesture calling his attention to her sister and Adrian Savage sitting on the veranda; smiled slyly, looking up at him, and then turned and sauntered a few steps beside him back along the path.

Witnessing all which suggestive pantomime from his distant station, Adrian had much ado to maintain an attitude of circumspection and restraint. For was it conceivable that those two —Margaret and Challoner—in any degree shared, or affected to share, poor Joanna's infatuated delusion? Was ever man landed in so false a position! An atmosphere of intrigue surrounded him. He felt as though walking among treacherous quicksands, where every step spells danger of being sucked under and engulfed. Inwardly he tore and plunged, cursing against the hateful, the dishonoring silence imposed upon him by circumstance. He was tempted to rush out on to the sun-bathed lawn, regardless of all mercy, of all decorum, and shout to the four winds of heaven his unique, inextinguishable devotion to Gabrielle St. Leger, his sole desire and love! Only by some such public loud-tongued demonstration did he feel he could regain safe foothold and cleanse his honor from the detestable and insidious duplicity fathered upon him through no act or lapse of his.

But here Joanna's voice once more claimed his attention. It still hissed and whispered, causing him shrinking and repulsion. Yet he detected a change in the spirit of it. Some finer, more wholesome chord had been struck. She no longer cringed.

"I am ready now, Cousin Adrian," she said, "to hear that which you have to tell me about my brother."

And the young man, finding relief to his pent-up feelings in voluminous and rapid speech, told her how, calling late one night upon an old school-fellow, a widely known draftsman and caricaturist, he had seen certain drawings—here Adrian picked his phrases a little—representing a young man of six or seven and twenty—"Who," he said, "bore such a striking resemblance to you, my dear cousin, and to Margaret, that I was transfixed with veritable amazement. I do not disguise from you that I was also pained, that for the moment I was furious. For these pictures were objectionable in character, in many respects odious. It appeared to me my friend had been guilty of an outrage for which it was my duty to administer sharp chastisement. But I could demand no immediate satisfaction, because he and I had already quarreled that evening, and he concealed himself from me, thereby rendering it impracticable that I should question him. This, perhaps, was as well, since I was heated and it gave me space for reflection. I realized the extreme improbability of his ever having seen either you or your sister—the absolute impossibility of his having done so recently, as you had been at home in England for some years. Then I recalled the pathetic history of your brother which you had confided to me. I grasped the situation. I understood. I called upon my friend

next day. Still he was rancorous. He flew into a passion and refused to admit me. I restrained my resentment. I wrote to him explaining the gravity and urgency of the case. I appealed to his better nature, entreated him to be reasonable and to give me information. Indeed, I conducted myself with praiseworthy reticence, while he remained obstinate to the point of exasperation. Upon more than one count, I fear, I should have derived the very warmest satisfaction from wringing his neck."

Adrian's handsome eyes danced and glittered. His teeth showed white and wicked under his fly-away mustache.

"Yes, I, on my side, also possibly harbored a trifle of rancor," he said. "But I suppressed my legitimate annoyance. I ignored his provocations. I insisted. At last I elicited this much."

"That was very noble of you; still it distresses me that, indirectly, I should have caused you this trouble. Though I am grateful—some day I may find words in which to tell you how grateful," Joanna whispered, leaning forward and working her hands together nervously in her black alpaca lap.

All of which served to bring Adrian, who had grown quite comparatively at ease and happy in his subjective belaborings of The Unspeakable Tadpole, back to the entanglements and distractions of the immediate present, with a bounce.

"Upon my word, my dear Joanna," he replied almost brusquely, "I am afraid it very much remains to be proved whether I deserve your gratitude or not. I labor under the ungracious necessity of communicating much to you that is painful, that is sad. Yet, having gone thus far it becomes imperative, for many reasons, that I should put you in possession of all the facts. Then it will be for you to decide what further steps are to be taken next."

"You will know best—far best," she murmured.

The young man set his teeth. Never before had he come so near being cruel to a woman. Instinctively he crossed himself. *Sancta Maria, Mater Dei*, in mercy preserve him from the guilt of so dastardly a sin! He turned to Joanna and spoke, dealing out his words slowly, so that the full meaning of them might reach her beclouded, love-sick brain.

"My friend, René Dax, found this young man, whose likeness to you and your sister is so indisputable, so intimate, in the act of attempting his life."

"Ah! Bibby, Bibby!" Joanna cried harshly, throwing back her head.

"Yes," Adrian continued, pursuing his advantage, "unnerved by the horror of his friendless and destitute condition, the unhappy boy was about to throw himself from one of the bridges into the Seine. At his age one must have suffered very greatly to take refuge in that! But from the drawings of which I have spoken one can form only too forcible a conception of his desperation. They supply a human document of a deplorably convincing order. René, who, notwithstanding his eccentricity, possesses admirable instincts, struggled with him and succeeded in preventing the accomplishment of his fatal design. Then, forcing him into a passing cab—kidnapping him, in short—carried him off with him home."

"Oh, wait, wait!" Joanna broke in. "This is all so very dreadful. It is so remote from my experience, from all I am accustomed to, from all the habits and purposes of my life. I do not wish to be self-indulgent and shirk my duty. I wish to hear the whole, Cousin Adrian; but I must pause. I must recover and collect myself, if I am to follow your narrative intelligently."

Just then Joseph Challoner, having laid aside hat and jacket and put on tennis shoes, came out of the pavilion and joined the group, gathered around Margaret Smyrthwaite, on the terraced grass bank of the court. Challoner had the reputation of being a formidable player, his height, and reach, and sureness of eye more than counterbalancing any lack of agility. It may

be added that, along with a losing game, he had the reputation of too often mislaying his manners and losing his temper. But this afternoon no question presented itself of losing either game or temper. He had practised regularly lately. He felt in fine form. He felt in high good humor. While both sense and senses called for strong physical exercise as a wholesome outlet to emotion.

Amid discussion and laughter, Marion Chase tossed for partners. The elder of the Busbridge boys fell to her lot, the younger to Challoner's, and the set began. Margaret returned to her chair, and Amy Woodford lolled on the pavilion step, in the shadow close beside her, fanning a very pink face with a large palm-leaf fan. As the game progressed the two girls commented and applauded, with clapping of hands and derisive or encouraging titterings and cries. Against this gaily explosive feminine duet, the rapid thud of balls, and sharp calling of the score, Joanna's voice asserted itself, with—to her hearer—a consuming dreariness of interminable and fruitless moral effort, a grayness of perpetual non-arrival, perpetual frustration, misconception and mistake.

"I am composed now, Adrian," she said. "My will again controls my feelings. Please tell me the rest."

"I am afraid there is disappointingly little more to tell," he replied. "For two days the unfortunate boy remained with my friend as his guest. René clothed him properly, fed and cared for him, and paid him liberally for his services as a model. But on the third morning, under plea of requiring to obtain some particular drug from a neighboring pharmacy, the young man left my friend's studio. He did not return."

"Where did he go?"

"That is what I have asked myself a thousand times, and made every effort to discover. I have friends at the Prefecture of Police. I consulted them. They were generous in their readiness to put their knowledge at my disposal and aid me in my research. Unluckily I could only give them a verbal description of the missing man, for René refused me all assistance, refused to allow any police agent to view the drawings, refused even to allow photographs of them to be taken. To do so, he declared, would constitute an unpardonable act of treachery, a violation of hospitality and crime against his own good faith. The unhappy fellow had trusted him on the understanding that no inquiry would be made regarding his family or his name. Now the episode was closed. René did not want it reopened. He had other things to think about. Rather than have the drawings employed for purposes of identification, he would destroy them, obliterate them with a coat of paint. When it became evident, however, the young man had disappeared for good René's valet, less scrupulous than his master, carefully examined the wretched clothes he had left behind. Between the lining and stuff of the jacket he found a small photograph. It must have worked through from a rent in the breast-pocket. Though creased and defaced, the subject of it was still in a degree distinguishable. I did not wish to agitate you, my dear cousin, by communicating this matter to you until I had made further efforts to discover the truth. I sent the photograph to Mr. Merriman. He tells me it represents the garden front of your old house, Highdene, near Leeds."

Joanna neither moved nor spoke, though her breath sighed and caught. The sounds from the tennis court, meanwhile, increased both in volume and in animation, causing Adrian to look up.

Challoner stood as near to the net as is permissible, volleying or smashing down ball after ball, until his opponents began to lose heart and science and grow harried and spent. And Adrian, watching, found himself, though unwillingly, impressed by and admiring the force,

not only the great brute strength but determination of the man, which bestowed a certain dignity upon the game, raising it from the level of a mere amusement to that of a serious duel. And across the intervening space Challoner became sensible of that unwilling admiration—the admiration of a quasi-enemy, curiously supplementing another admiration of which he was also conscious—namely, that of Margaret Smyrthwaite, of the woman who craves to be justified, by public exhibition of his skill and prowess, of the man to whom she meditates intrusting her person and her fate. This excited Challoner, flattering his pride, stimulating his ambition and belief in himself.—Yes, he would show them all what he was made of, show them all what he could do, what he was worth! So that now he no longer played simply to win a set at tennis from a harmless, lanky Busbridge boy and amazon-like Marion Chase; but to revenge himself for Adrian Savage's past distrust of him, detection and prevention of his shady little business tricks, played to revenge himself for the younger man's superiority in breeding, knowledge of the world, culture, talents, charm of manner and of looks. He gave himself to the paying off of old scores in that game of tennis, all his bullying instinct, his necessity to beat down and trample Opposition under foot, actively militant. Yet since Margaret Smyrthwaite's approval, not to mention her goodly fortune, came into reckoning, the bullying instinct made him deadly cool and cunning rather than headlong or reckless in his play.

Presently Joanna silently motioned Adrian once again to take up his sordid story. And with a feeling of rather hopeless weariness he obeyed, recounting his scouring of Paris, accompanied by a private detective. Told her of clues found, or apparently found, only again to be lost. Told her, incidentally, a little about the haunts of vagabondage and crime and vice, of the seething, foul-smelling, festering under-world which there, as in every great city, lies below the genial surface of things, ready to drag down and absorb the friendless and the weak. So doing—while he still watched Challoner, and divined much of the human drama—finding expression in his masterful manipulation of racket and ball—Adrian's imagination took fire. He forgot his companion, gave reign to his natural eloquence and described certain scenes, certain episodes, with only too telling effect.

"But you must have been exposed to great danger," she broke in breathlessly at last.

"Ah! like that!" he cried, shrugging his shoulders and laughing a little fiercely. "Danger is, after all, an excellent sauce to meat. I had entire confidence in the loyalty and discretion of my companion, and we were armed."

Joanna got up, pushing away her chair, which scrooped upon the quarries.

"And you did all this for me—for my sake, because Bibby is my brother!" she exclaimed. "You risked contracting some illness, receiving some injury! For me, because of Bibby's relation to me, you endangered your life!"

"But in point of fact, I didn't suffer in the least, my dear Joanna," he replied, rising also. "I enlarged my acquaintance with a city of which I am quite incorrigibly fond; which, even at her dirtiest and naughtiest, I very heartily love. And here I am, as you see, in excellent health, perfectly intact, ready to start on my voyage of discovery again to-morrow, if there should seem any reasonable hope of its being crowned with success. Common humanity demands that much of me. One cannot let a fellow-creature, especially one who has the claim of kinship, perish in degradation and misery without making every rational effort to rescue and rehabilitate him."

Joanna hardly appeared to listen. She moved to and fro, her arms hanging straight at her sides, her hands opening and closing in nervous, purposeless clutchings.

"No," she declared violently, "no! When I think of the risks which you have exposed yourself, and the shocking and cruel things which might have happened to you, I cannot control my indignation. When I think that Bibby might have been the cause of your death no vestige of affection for him is left in me. None—none—I cast him out of my heart. Yes, it is dreadful. Looking back, all the anguish of which my brother has been the cause is present to me—the constant anxiety which his conduct gave rise to, the concealments mamma and I had to practise to shield him from papa's anger, the atmosphere of nervousness and unrest which, owing to him, embittered my girlhood. He was the cause of estrangement between my parents; between papa and myself. He was the cause of the break-up of our home at Leeds, of the severing of old friendships and associations, of the sense of disgrace which for so many years lay upon our whole establishment. It destroyed my mother's health. It emphasized the unsympathetic tendencies of my father's character. And now, now, when so much has happened to redress the unhappiness of the past, to glorify and enlarge my life, when my future is so inexpressibly full of hope and promise, it is too much, too much, that my brother should reappear, that he should intervene between us, Adrian, between you and me—endangering your actual existence. And he will come back—I know it, I feel it," she added wildly. "I believed him dead because I wished him dead. I still wish it. But that is useless—useless."

And, as though in ironic applause of Joanna's passionate denunciation, the two young ladies watching the game of tennis broke into enthusiastic hand-clapping.

"Well played—good—good—splendid—played indeed!" they cried, their voices ringing out through the still, hot air.

Marion Chase flung herself down on the terraced grass-bank.

"You're out of sight too strong for us," she gasped, laughingly. "We didn't have the ghost of a chance."

Challoner stood wiping his face and neck with his handkerchief. He was puffed up with pride, almost boisterously exultant. Ah! yes, let the hen-bird display her fine plumage and trail her wings ever so prettily, when it came to a fight the cock-bird had his innings, and could show he wasn't lacking in virility or spunk! He'd given them all a taste of his metal this afternoon, he flattered himself; taught them Joseph Challoner was something more than a common low-caste, office-bred, country attorney, half sharper, half lick-spittle sneak!

"The gray mare isn't the better horse yet awhile, eh, Miss Marion, your friends the suffragettes notwithstanding?" he said, jocosely. "All the same, I congratulate you. You and your partner made a plucky stand."

The elder Busbridge boy lay on his back, panting and tightening the supporting silk handkerchief about his lean young waist.

"My hat! that last rally was a breather though," he grunted. "I got regularly fed up with the way you kept me bargeing from side to side of that back court, Challoner. Double-demon, all-round champion terrifier—that's about the name to suit you, my good chap."

Joanna had come close to Adrian. Her prominent eyes were strained and clouded. Seam-like lines showed in her forehead and cheeks. Her poor mouth looked bruised, the outline of her lips frayed and discolored. Her likeness to the drawings upon the wall was phenomenal just then. It shocked Adrian, and it caused him to think.

"They have finished playing," she said. "They will come in to tea directly. I cannot remain and meet them. I must show some respect for my own dignity. They are all Margaret's friends. I do not care for them. I cannot expose myself to their observation. She must entertain them

herself. I will go to my room. I must be alone until I have had time to regain my composure, until I know my own thought about this cruel, cruel event; until I have recovered in some degree from the shock I have suffered, and begin to see what my duty is."

CHAPTER VII

PISTOLS OR POLITENESS—FOR TWO

"This is the last of the documents, Mr. Challoner?"

"Yes, that is the last of the lot. You noted the contents of Schedule D, covering the period from the end of the December quarter to the date of Mr. Smyrthwaite's death, among the Priestly Mills statement of accounts? The typed one—quite right. Yes, that's the lot."

"We may consider the whole of our business concluded?"

"That is so," Challoner said.

He stood in an easy attitude resting his elbow on the shelf of the red porphyry-mantelpiece of the smoking-room at Heatherleigh—a heavily furnished apartment, the walls hung with chocolate-colored imitation leather, in a raised self-colored pattern of lozenge-shaped medallions, each centered with a Tudor rose. The successes of the afternoon still inflated him. In addition to his triumphs in sports and pastimes, he had managed to say five words to Margaret Smyrthwaite. And, though the crucial question had neither been asked nor answered, he felt sure of her at last. His humor was hilarious and expansive—of the sort which chucks young women under the chin, digs old gentlemen in the ribs or slaps them familiarly upon the back. There was a covert sneer in the tail of Challoner's eye and a braggart tang in his talk. He swaggered, every inch of his big body pleased with living, almost brutally self-congratulatory and content.

"I am really under considerable obligation to you for giving up your evening to me, and letting me finish our business after office-hours thus. It will enable me to catch the night cross-Channel boat from Dover to-morrow. I shall be particularly glad to do so."

As he spoke, Adrian swung round the revolving chair, in which he sat before the large writing-table—loaded with bundles of folded papers, and legal documents engrossed on vellum tied round with pink tape. In turning, the light from the shaded incandescent gas-lamp, hanging directly above the table, brought his black hair and beard and white face into the high relief of some Rembrandt portrait.

"What's up with young Master Highty Tighty?" Challoner asked himself. "Looks off color, somehow, as if he'd had an uncommon nasty blow below the belt."

The windows and glass door stood open on to the garden, and the pungent scents of the great fir woods drawn forth by the day's sunshine mingled with that of Challoner's cigar and Adrian's cigarette.

"Oh! so you're off at once then, are you?" the former said. "That's something new, isn't it? I understood from the ladies you thought of stopping on here a bit. And when may we hope for the pleasure of seeing you again on this side of the silver strip?"

Adrian leaned back in his chair, stretching out his legs and crossing his feet.

"At the present time I really have no idea," he replied.

Challoner could hardly conceal his glee. For an instant he debated. Concluded he would venture on a reconnaissance. Flicked the end off his cigar into the fireplace.

"Miss Joanna will be sorry," he said.

"Both my cousins have been perfect in their amiability, in their hospitality, in their generous appreciation of any small services it has been in my power to render them," Adrian declared, rolling his r's and speaking with the hint of a foreign accent common to him when tired or vexed. "My cousins know that they can command my co-operation at a moment's notice should they require counsel or advice. But my own affairs, as they kindly and readily

comprehend, cannot be too long neglected. My interests and my work are necessarily abroad —in France. It becomes imperative that I should return to my work."

"Not a doubt about it," Challoner said. "Work stands first. Though I own I'm glad my work doesn't oblige me to expatriate myself. I shouldn't relish that. Not a bit. Poor old England's good enough for me."

"Precisely—your interests and your work are here."

Challoner fitted the toe of his boot into the pattern of the hearth-rug, looking down and permitting himself a quiet laugh.

"Oh! Lord, yes," he said, "to be sure. My work and my interests are here right enough—very much here. I'm not ashamed of the word 'local,' or of the word 'provincial' either, Mr. Savage. My father invented Stourmouth, as you may say, and I've patented his invention. Stourmouth owes a good deal to the two Joseph Challoners, father and son; and I propose it should owe a long sight more, one way and another, before I join my poor old daddy 'under the churchyard sod.' "

"It is an act of piety to devote one's talents and energies to the welfare of one's native place," Adrian returned.

And therewith, judging he had made sufficient concession to the exigencies of the position in the matter of general conversation, he rose to depart. But Challoner stopped him.

"Just half a minute, will you please, Mr. Savage," he said. "It occurs to me if we're not likely to meet for some time there's one matter I ought to mention to you. I don't exactly care to take the whole onus of the thing upon my own shoulders. Of course, if you're cognizant of it, there's the beginning and end of the story as far as my responsibility goes. I may have my own opinion as to the wisdom, and—not to mince matters—the honesty of the arrangement. But, if you are aware of it and approve, my mouth, of course, is shut. Has Miss Smyrthwaite told you of the alteration she proposes making in her will?"

"Yes, she spoke of it to-day; and I dissuaded her from making it."

Challoner sucked in his breath with a soft whistle.

"Indeed?" he said. "That's a self-denying ordinance."

Adrian held himself extremely erect. His eyebrows were raised and the tip of his pugnacious nose was very much in the air.

"Pardon me, but I do not quite follow you," he said.

"Miss Smyrthwaite didn't explain the nature of the alterations very fully then, I take it?"

"My cousin informed me that she proposed to revoke certain gifts and bequests she had made to her brother, William Smyrthwaite—supposing him still to be living. Of this I disapproved. I told her so, giving her the reasons for my disapproval."

Challoner looked down and fitted the toe of his boot into the hearth-rug pattern once more.

"You hold the property should remain in the family—go to the direct heirs, the next of kin? A very sound principle; but one, if you'll excuse my saying so, few persons stick to where their personal advantage is involved."

"I repeat, I fail to follow you," Adrian returned, shrugging his shoulders and spreading out his hands with an impatient movement.

"Perhaps Miss Smyrthwaite omitted to explain that this redistribution of her property was exclusively in your favor; all she mulcted her precious specimen of a brother of was to go not to her direct heir—her sister—but to yourself."

Whereupon, it must be conceded, the younger man's bearing became not a little insolent.

“Preposterous, my dear Challoner, utterly preposterous!” he cried. “For once your professional acumen must have quite scandalously deserted you, or you could not have so misunderstood my cousin’s instructions.”

It was not Challoner’s cue to lose his temper. He had too many causes for self-congratulation to-night. And then, whether Adrian was bluffing or not, he believed—though it was annoying to find the young man so unmercenary—this repudiation of the proffered inheritance to be sincere.

“Joanna—Miss Smyrthwaite, I mean, I beg her pardon—is too good a woman of business to trust to verbal instructions. I have got the whole thing on paper, in black and white, there”—he pointed to the table. “I can lay my hand on it in half a minute. Possibly you’d like to look at it yourself, as you appear to doubt my word.”

But for the moment Adrian was incapable of reply. This was what Joanna had meant! It was even worse than he had feared. He felt humiliated, hot with shame. And then, in spirit, he clasped those infamous drawings upon the wall and the subject of them, Bibby, the miserable wastrel Bibby, to his breast.

“Do you wish to look at Miss Smyrthwaite’s instructions as to the transfer of her property, Mr. Savage?” Challoner repeated, a sneer in his voice.

But the young man had recovered his native adroitness.

“Clearly it would be superfluous for me to do so; because, as I have already informed you, Miss Smyrthwaite, recognizing the validity of my arguments, decides to cancel those instructions, to make no alteration in the disposition of her property. Happily I was in a position to convince her that it is premature to assume the fact of her brother’s death. I have comparatively recent news of him.”

Challoner’s jaw dropped.

“The devil you have,” he said, under his breath.

“Yes—‘the devil,’ quite possibly—as you so delicately put it,” Adrian returned, lightly. “I have been tempted, at moments, to put it myself so, my dear Mr. Challoner. At others I have seemed to trace a really providential element in this strange affair. Directly the facts of William Smyrthwaite’s reappearance came to my knowledge I placed Mr. Andrew Merriman in full possession of them.”

“Oh, you did, did you?” Challoner commented.

“Yes. I considered this the correct course to pursue. Mr. Merriman was formerly employed by Mr. Smyrthwaite as the channel of communication between himself and his son.”

“Graceless young hound!” Challoner snarled, caution swamped by anger and chagrin. It made him mad to think Adrian Savage had had this eminently disconcerting piece of information up his sleeve all along! Once more he’d been checkmated.

“Mr. Merriman generously accepts all responsibility in the conduct of this matter,” Adrian went on. “And, I am sure you will feel with me, that his long and intimate connection with my cousins’ family renders him quite the most suitable person to deal with it. Therefore, until further developments declare themselves—I beg your pardon? You express a pious hope further developments never will declare themselves? Possibly that might save trouble; but I fear the saving of trouble is hardly the main point in the present case. Therefore, until they do declare themselves, you will, I feel sure, agree that it is most undesirable this subject should be spoken about. Discussion of it can only cause my cousins agitation and heighten their suspense. This I am naturally most anxious they should be spared. Nothing, meanwhile, will

be neglected. I shall do my part. Mr. Merriman will do his. I will ask you therefore to consider this conversation as strictly confidential."

"Oh! you needn't be afraid I shall blab," Challoner said. "Poor girl," he went on presently, pronouncing that dangerous catch-word as though it rhymed with *curl*—"poor girl, poor Miss Margaret! It'll be an awful blow to her. She is so sensitive. She's given me to understand—indirectly, of course—when we've been talking over business, what an out-and-out rotter this precious brother of hers was. To my mind, you know, Mr. Savage, it's not a nice thing to turn such vermin as young Smyrthwaite loose on two defenseless women. I don't like it. Honestly I don't. So you needn't be afraid of my blabbing. My whole object, out of respect for the ladies and for poor old Smyrthwaite's memory, will be to keep matters dark. At the same time I note what you say about Merriman; which, I take it, is equivalent to telling me to keep my hands off. Very good, Mr. Savage. What I have just said proves I think that I am more than willing to keep my hands very much off this very dirty job. Still, there is one question which, even so, I imagine I am at liberty to ask. Are you sure of your facts?"

To Adrian Savage it appeared only two alternatives were open to him—namely, to treat his host with studied politeness or call him out. And England, perhaps unfortunately, is no longer a dueling country. Adrian's manner became elaborately sweet.

"As far as they go," he said, "I am, dear Mr. Challoner, absolutely sure of my facts."

"As far as they go? Well, there's room for hope they mayn't go very far, then—may be something of the nature of a scare, in short. And, if I may be allowed one question more, has this very edifying piece of family news been communicated to Margaret?"

"To—to whom?" Adrian said, with a civil interrogatory face, raised eyebrows, and a slightly elongated neck.

"Sorry I didn't speak plainly enough," Challoner snarled back. "Communicated to your cousin, Mr. Savage, Miss Margaret Smyrthwaite?"

"Not by me," the other returned, smiling affably. "And now, my dear Mr. Challoner," he went on, "since these labors in which we have been associated are at an end, let me thank you warmly for your able concurrence and for the priceless assistance you have given me in the administration of Mr. Smyrthwaite's estate. Accept, also, my thanks for your courtesy in permitting me to come here to your charming house to-night."

Adrian glanced around the forbidding apartment.

"I carry away with me so many interesting and instructive impressions," he said. "But now I really must trespass upon your time and indulgence no longer. Again thanks—and, since I leave at a comparatively early hour to-morrow, good-by, Mr. Challoner—good-by, good-night."

CHAPTER VIII

"NUIT DE MAI"

Some half-hour later Adrian turned into the garden of the Tower House by the wicket gate opening off the carriage-drive. And so doing, the tranquil beauty of the night made itself felt. During his walk from Heatherleigh his preoccupation had been too great to admit of the bestowal of intelligent attention upon outward things, however poetic their aspect. He possessed the comfortable assurance, it is true, of having worsted the animal Challoner in the only way possible, swords and pistols being forbidden. He also possessed the comfortable assurance of having scrupulously and successfully regulated the *affaire* Smyrthwaite, in as far as business was concerned, and taken his discharge in respect of it. But the events of the afternoon had proved to him, beyond all shadow of doubt and denial, the existence of a second *affaire* Smyrthwaite, compared with which regulation of hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of property was, from his personal standpoint, but the veriest bagatelle! Now the question of how to deal with this second *affaire*, alike scrupulously and successfully, racked his brain, usually so direct in decision, so prompt in honorable instinct and thought. And it was to the young man's credit that, while fully measuring the abominable nature of the hole in which the unhappy Joanna had put him, he remained just and temperate in his judgment of Joanna herself. The more to his credit, because, as a native of a country where certain subjects are treated in a spirit of merry common-sense—which, if it makes in some degree for license, also makes for absence of hypocrisy and much wholesome delight in life—Joanna's attitude offered an obscure problem. Were she a vicious woman his position would be a comparatively simple one. But Joanna and vice were, he felt, far as the poles asunder. Even that ugly matter of "trying to buy him"—as in his first overwhelming disgust he had defined it—proved, on calmer inspection, innocent of any intention of offense. She didn't know, poor, dear woman, she didn't know. In her virtuous ignorance of certain fundamental tendencies of human nature, of the correlative action of body and spirit, she had not a conception of the atrocities she was in process of committing! For she was essentially high-minded, deep-hearted, sincere; a positive slave to the demands of her own overdeveloped moral sense. But, heavens and earth, if only those responsible for her education had taught her a little more about the nature of the *genus homo*—male and female—and the physiology of her own emotions, and a little less about quite supererogatory theoretic ethics! The burning, though veiled, passion from which he recoiled was, he believed, in great measure the result of the narrow intellectualism on which she had been nurtured working upon a naturally ardent temperament. What she must have suffered! What she would suffer in the coming days!

For it was that last which hit Adrian hardest, in all this distracting imbroglio, giving him that "uncommon nasty blow below the belt" the effects of which Joseph Challoner had noted. The more he analyzed, and, analyzing, excused, Joanna's attitude the more odiously distasteful did his own position become. In how far was he to blame? What had he done, by word, act, or look, to provoke or to foster Joanna's most lamentable infatuation? He explored his memory, and, to his rather bitter amusement, found it an absolute blank. He had not flirted with her, even within the most restrained of the limits sanctioned by ordinary social intercourse. For this he did not commend himself. On the contrary, he felt almost penitent; since—there hadn't been any temptation to flirt. Positively not any—though Adrian knew himself to be by no means insensible to feminine influence. He loved Madame St. Leger. She constituted, so to speak, the religion of his heart. But he found dozens of other women

charming, and did not scruple to—as good as—tell them so.—Why not? Are not such tellings the delightful and perfectly legitimate small change of a gallant man's affections? And out of the farthings and half-farthings, the very fractions of half-farthings, indeed—of such small change, Joanna had constructed a great and serious romance terminating in matrimony! The young man could have beat his breast, torn his hair, poured ashes upon his thus forcibly denuded scalp, and rent his up-to-date and particularly well-tailored garments. He, Adrian Savage, the husband of Joanna!—From this his lively Gallic imagination galloped away, blushing in humorous horror, utterly refusing to contemplate the picture. At the same time his pity for her was immense. And how, oh! how, without gross and really sickening cruelty, to dispel her disastrous delusion?

With the above question upon his lips, Adrian turned by the wicket gate into the garden, where the tranquil beauty surrounding him compelled his observation.

High above the dark-feathered crests of the firs, the moon, two days short of the full, rode in the southeastern sky, obliterating all stars in the vicinity of her pathway. She showed to-night not as a flat disk plastered against the solid vault, but as a mammoth, delicately tarnished silver ball, traveling in stateliest fashion the steel-blue fields of space. The roofs and façade of the house, its multiplicity of glinting window-panes, the lawns and shrubberies, and all-encircling woodland, were alike overlaid with the searching whiteness of her light. The air was dry and very mellow, rich with a blending of forest and garden scents. Faintly to northward Adrian's ear could detect the rattle and grind of a belated tram on the Barryport Road, and, southward, the continuous wistful murmur of the mile-distant sea!

Now, as often before, he was sensible of the subtle charm produced by this conjunction of a highly finished, material civilization with gently savage and unsubjugated Nature. England is, in so great measure, a sylvan country even yet; a country of close-coming, abounding, and invading trees. And when, as now, just upon midnight, its transitory human populations—which in silly pride suppose themselves proprietors of the soil and all that grows upon it—are herded safe indoors, abed and asleep, the trees resume their primitive sovereignty, making their presence proudly evident. They had no voice to-night, it is true. They stood becalmed and silent. Yet the genius of them, both in their woodland unity and endless individual diversity of form and growth, declared itself nevertheless. For this last the infiltration of moonlight was partly accountable, since it lent each stem, branch, and twig, each differing species of foliage—the large leaves of laurel and rhododendron, the semi-transparent, fringed and fluted leaves of the beech, the finely spiked tufts of fir-needles—a definiteness and separateness such as hoar-frost might. Each tree and bush stood apart from its fellows in charming completeness and relief, challenging the eye by a certain sprightly independence of mien and aspect. Had they moved from their fixed places, the big trees mingling in some stately procession or dance, while the shrubs and bushes frisked upon the greensward, Adrian would hardly have been surprised. A spirit of phantasy was abroad—here in the Baughurst Park Ward, local municipal government notwithstanding—entrancing to his poetic sense.

Therefore he lingered, walking slowly along the path leading to the garden entrance of the house, here shaded by a broken line of tall Scotch firs, their smooth stems rising like pillars, bare of branches for some twenty or thirty feet. Now and again he stopped, held captive by the tranquil yet disquieting beauty of the scene. It reminded him strangely of Gabrielle St. Leger's beauty, and the something elusive, delicately malicious and ironic, in the character of it. Her smiling, unclosed lips, the dimple in her left cheek; those mysterious oblique glances from beneath her long-shaped, half-closed eyelids, full at once of invitation and reserve; the

untamed, deliciously tricksy spirit he apprehended in her; and a something majestic, too, as of those vast, calm, steel-blue fields of space,—these, all and severally, he, lover-like, found mirrored in the loveliness of this May night.

On his left the lawns, flooded by moonlight, stretched away to the tennis court and the terrace walk in front of the pavilion. On his right, backed by the line of Scotch firs aforesaid, a thick wall of deciduous shrubs—allspice, lilac, syringa, hydrangea, sweetbrier, and laburnum —shut out the carriage-drive. The quaint leathery flowers of the allspice gave off a powerful and luscious sweetness as of sun-ripened fruit. Adrian paused, inhaling it, gazing meanwhile in fond imagination into *la belle Gabrielle's* golden-brown eyes, refreshingly forgetful of the distracting perplexities of the *affaire* Smyrthwaite No. 2.

It was a good moment, at once chaste and voluptuous, wherein the very finest flame of ideal love burned upon his heart's altar. But it was broken up by an arresting apparition. For a white owl swept, phantom-like, out of the plantation behind the pavilion and beat over the moonlit turf in swift and absolutely noiseless flight. A soft thistle-down could hardly have passed more lightly or silently than the great wide-winged bird. Beneath it, its shadow, skimming the close-cut surface of the grass, seemed as much alive and more substantial than itself. Twice, while Adrian watched, moved and a little startled, it quartered the lawn in search of prey; then flung itself up, high in air, vanishing among the tree-tops, with a long-drawn hoo-hoo-hooing of hollow laughter. And in the space of a few seconds, from the recesses of the woodland, its mate answered with a far-off elfin echo of its sinister note. Then Adrian heard a window open. And, on to the far end of the red-balustraded balcony—extending along the first floor of the house, in the recess above the veranda—a woman came.

She was dressed in a white *négligé* of some soft, woolen material, which hung straight in knife-edge pleatings from her shoulders to her feet, covering them—as the young man could see between the wide-spaced balusters—and lying outspread for some inches around her upon the floor. Over this she wore a black cloak, straight-hanging too, made of some fine and supple fur. The fronts of it, which were thrown open, leaving her arms free, appeared to be lined with ermine. Her peculiar garb and the perceptible angularity of her form and action suggested some crabbed medieval figure of church wood-carving or memorial brass.

The woman looked so tall standing there as in a mural pulpit, high against the house-front, that at first sight Adrian, took her to be Marion Chase. But medieval and ecclesiastical associations were a little too glaringly out of place in connection with that remarkably healthy young amazon and athlete. Adrian dismissed them, with a sensible sinking of the heart. Instinctively he moved aside, seeking the deepest of the shadows cast by the fir-trees, pressing himself back among the bushes of sweet-flowered allspice. Of two evils one must choose the least. Concealment was repugnant to him; but, to go forward meant to be recognized and compelled to speak. And, to play the part of hero in some grim travesty of the Garden Scene from "Romeo and Juliet," was of the two vastly the more repugnant.

Becoming aware of a movement in the garden below, the woman leaned forward and gazed fixedly in his direction, showing in the bleaching moonlight Joanna Smyrthwaite's heavy, upturned hair, strained, prominent eyes and almost terrible face, so ravaged was it by emotion.

The night traffics in exaggerations; and Adrian's senses and sensibilities were already somewhat over-stimulated. Perhaps, therefore, it followed that, looking up at Joanna, she appeared to him clothed in hieratic garments as the elect exponent and high-priestess of all lovelorn, unmated, childless womanhood throughout the world. To him, just then, her aspect

gathered up and embodied the fiercely disguised sufferings of all the barren, the ugly, the ungifted, the undesired and unsought; of that disfranchised multitude of women whose ears have never listened to recitation of a certain Song of Songs. Her youth—she was as young as he—her wealth, the ease, leisure, solid luxury which surrounded her, her possession of those material advantages which make for gaiety and security, for pleasant vanities, for participation in all the light-hearted activities of modern life, only deepened the tragedy. Denied by man and—since she was without religion—denying God, she did indeed offer a piteous spectacle. The more so, that he apprehended a toughness of fiber in her, arguing a power of protracted and obstinate resistance. Happier for her, surely, had she been made of weaker stuff, like her wretched brother of the vile drawings upon René Dax's studio wall!

Adrian's own personal share in this second and tragic *affaire* Smyrthwaite came home to him with added poignancy as he stood thus, in hiding, amid the luscious sweetness of the flowering allspice. For one intolerable moment he questioned whether he could, whether he should, sacrifice himself, transmuting Joanna's besotted delusion into fact and truth. But reason, honor, love, the demands of his own rich vitality, his keen value of life and of the delights of living, his poetic and his artistic sense, the splendid call of all the coming years, his shrewdness, his caution, his English humor and his Gallic wit, arose in hot and clamorous rebellion, shouting refusal final and absolute. He couldn't do it. Death itself would be preferable. It came very simply to this—he could not.

Just then he saw Joanna draw her costly cloak about her neck and shoulders, as though struck by sudden and sharp cold. Again the sinister note of the owls in greeting and in answer came from the recesses of the great woodland. And again Joanna, leaning forward, scrutinized the shadows of the garden path with pale, strained eyes. Then raising both hands and pressing them against her forehead as though in physical pain, she turned and went indoors, closing the window behind her.

Both pity and policy kept the young man for another, far from agreeable, five minutes in the shelter of the allspice bushes before venturing into the open. Upon the veranda he waited again, conscious of intense reluctance to enter the house. He knew his decision to be sane and right, the only one possible, in respect of Joanna; yet he felt like a criminal, a betrayer, a profligate trader in women's affections. He called himself hard names, knowing them all the while to be inapplicable and unjust; but his sympathies were excited, his imagination horror-struck by that lately witnessed vision of feminine disfranchisement and distress.

At his request the men-servants had left the door opening from the veranda unlocked. Passing along the corridor into the hall, he became very sensible of the silence and suspended animation of the sleeping house. The curtains of the five-light, twenty-foot staircase window were drawn back. Through the leaded panes of thickened clouded glass moonlight filtered, stamping misty diaper-work upon walls and floor, painting polished edges and surfaces of woodwork with lines and patches of shining white. On a small table at the foot of the stairs decanters and glasses, a cut-glass jug of iced water, a box of cigars, silver candlestick and matchbox had been placed against his return. But the young man was in no humor just now for superfluous drinks or superfluous lights. He felt apprehensive, childishly distrustful of the quiet reigning in the house, as though, behind it, some evil lay in wait to leap upon and capture him He felt nervous. This at once annoyed him and made him keenly observant and alert. He stood a moment listening, then ran up the wide, shallow tread of the stairs lightly, three steps at a time. On the level of the half-flight, under the great window, he paused. The air was hot and heavy. His heart beat. A door opened from the right on to the gallery above.

Some one came forward, with a soft dragging of draperies over the thick carpet, through the dim checkerings of the moonlight.

"Adrian," Joanna called, whisperingly, "Adrian, is that you?"

The young man took a long breath. His nerves grew steady. He came calmly up the remaining half-flight, his head carried high, his face serious, his eyes a little hard and very bright. Childish fears, exaggerations of self-condemnation, left him at the sound of Joanna's voice; but he was sorry, very sorry, both for her and—for himself.

"Yes, Cousin Joanna," he answered, and his speech, to his own hearing, had a somewhat metallic ring in it.

If there must be an interview at this highly indiscreet hour of the night it should at least be open and above-board, conducted in tones which the entire household could, if it chose, hear plainly enough. Both for his own honor and Joanna's this was best.

"I have just come back from Heatherleigh," he continued. "You will be glad to know that Mr. Challoner and I have finished the business connected with your father's property. All outstanding accounts and all duties upon the estate are now paid. All documents are signed, receipted, and in order."

Joanna made an impatient gesture as though thrusting aside some foolish obstruction.

"Yes," she said, "no doubt; but it is not about the property I need to speak to you, Adrian. My mind is quite at ease about that. It is about something else. It is about myself."

"Ah, yes?" the young man inquired, gravely.

"I did not come down to dinner to-night. I felt sure you would understand and excuse me. I could not. I could not have borne to be with Margaret and Marion Chase and to listen to their trivial talk in your presence, after our conversation of this afternoon. I had to be alone that I might think, that I might bring my temper into subjection to my will. Isherwood told me you had gone out after dinner. But I felt I could not rest without seeing you again to-night. I felt I must speak to you, must ask your forgiveness, must try to explain. So I waited up. The owls startled me, and I went on to the balcony. I fancied you were in the garden. But I could not see you. Later I heard your footsteps"—Joanna paused breathlessly—"your footsteps," she repeated, "upon the pavement of the veranda. My courage failed. I felt ashamed to meet you. But it would be so very dreadful to have you think harshly of me—so, so I came."

Owing to the vague quality of the light Adrian failed to see her face distinctly, and for this he was thankful. But he knew that her arms hung straight at her sides, and that, under cover of her costly cloak, her poor hands clutched and clutched against the white knife-pleatings of her dress.

"Dear cousin," he said, "I have no cause to think harshly of you. Indeed, my thought has been occupied with sympathy for the trials that you have already undergone, and with regret that I should be instrumental in recalling distressing events to your mind."

"Ah! I deserve no sympathy," she declared, vehemently, turning aside and moving restlessly to and fro. "I do not deserve that excuses should be made for me. This afternoon I showed my character in a shocking light. Perhaps it was the true light. Perhaps my character is objectionable. I both felt and said what was cruel and intemperate. I was selfish. I only considered my own happiness. I repudiated my duty toward my brother. I wished him dead, because his return, and all the anxiety and thought the probability of that return necessarily occasions, interfered with my own plans, with my own beautiful prospects and hopes."

She came close, standing before the young man, her hands clasped, her body visibly shuddering beneath her hieratic garments.

"Now I have come to myself, Adrian. I realize—indeed I realize—the enormity of my own callousness, my own selfishness. I realize, too, the dreadful impression of my nature which you must have received. If you repudiated me I should have no valid cause for complaint. My reason forces me to acknowledge that I deserve your censure; that if you turn from me—dreadful, dreadful as it would be—I shall have brought that misery upon myself. Dreadful, dreadful," she moaned, "too dreadful to contemplate—yet deserved, invited by the exhibition of my own ungovernable temper—deserved—there is the sting of it."

"But—but, my dear Joanna," Adrian broke forth, carried out of himself by the spectacle of her grief, "you are fighting with shadows. You are torturing yourself with non-existent iniquities. Calm yourself, dear cousin. Look at things quietly and in a reasonable spirit. Your brother is, unfortunately, unsatisfactory and troublesome, a difficult person to deal with. His errors of conduct have caused his family grave inconvenience and sorrow. Let us be honest. Let us freely admit all that. He is not a young man to be proud of. What more natural then than that you should recoil from the idea of his return? That, in the first shock of the idea being presented to you, you should strongly express your alarm, your distaste? It is only human. Who but a hypocrite or pedant would condemn you for that! Calm yourself, dear cousin. Be just to yourself. I could not permit you to revoke your gifts to your brother. My own honor was a little involved there perhaps—"

Adrian smiled at her reassuringly, putting some force upon himself.

"Let us be sensible," he continued. "Let us be moderate. At the present time we have no reliable information as to where your brother is. We may not discover him. He may never come back. Meanwhile, I implore you, dismiss this painful subject from your mind. Be merciful to your own nerves, dear Joanna. Remember Andrew Merriman and I engage to do our best, to exercise all care, all delicacy, in the prosecution of our inquiries. When necessary we will consult with you"—he spread out his hands, his head a little on one side, consolatory, debonair, charming.—"Ah! dear cousin, be advised—do not agitate yourself further. Leave it all at that."

Joanna sighed once or twice. Put up her hands, pressing them against her forehead. Her body swayed slightly as she stood. Her hands dropped at her side again. She looked fixedly, intently, at Adrian Savage. Her mouth was a little open. The ecstatic expression, so nearly touching upon idiocy, had come back.

"Then nothing is changed—nothing is altered between us?" she whispered.

The young man took her hand, and bowing low over it, kissed it. As he raised himself he looked her full in the face.

"No, nothing, my dear cousin," he said.

There were tears in his eyes, and his voice shook. He was filled with apology, with immeasurable concern and regret, with an immeasurable craving for her forgiveness, in that he spoke actual and literal truth. For nothing was changed—no, nothing.—He never had loved, he did not love, he never could love Joanna Smyrthwaite.

He stayed for no further word or look. Practically he ran away. But there is just one thing, on the face of the earth, from which a brave man may run without smallest accusation of cowardice—namely, a woman who loves him and whom he does not love! Once in his room Adrian bolted the door on the inside as well as locking it, and began to pack. He would take the mid-day rather than the night cross-Channel boat to-morrow. Then, with relief, he remembered that it was already to-morrow. In a few hours the servants would be about.

Twice before dawn he fancied he heard footsteps and a soft dragging of draperies over the carpet of the corridor. He opened the windows wide, and let in the singing of birds greeting the morning from the woodland. For the sound of those footsteps and softly dragging draperies cut him to the heart with sorrow for womanhood unfulfilled—womanhood denied by man, and, not having religion, denying God.

IV
THE FOLLY OF THE WISE

CHAPTER I

RE-ENTER A WAYFARING GOSSIP

The last of Miss Beauchamp's receptions for the season drew to a vivacious close. Sunday would witness the running of the *Grand Prix*. Then the world would begin to scatter, leaving Paris to the inquiring foreigner, the staggering sunshine, some few millions of the governing classes—new style—the smells, the sparrows, and the dust.

As a woman consciously looking threescore and ten in the face Anastasia felt very tired. Her throat was husky and her back ached. But, as a hostess, she felt elate, gratified, even touched. For everybody had come. Had worn their smartest new summer clothes. Had been animated, complimentary, appreciative. Had drunk China tea or iced coffee; eaten strawberries and cream, sweetmeats, ices, and wonderful little cakes, and declared "Mademoiselle Beauchamp's ravishing 'five-o'clock' " to be entirely different from and superior to any other "five-o'clock" of the whole of their united and separate experience.

Art and letters were, of course, fully represented; but politics and diplomacy made a fair show as well. Anastasia greeted three members of the Chamber, two of the Senate, a Cabinet Minister, and a contingent from the personnel of both the English and the Italian embassies. The coveted red ribbon was conspicuous by its presence. And all these delightful people had the good sense to arrive in relays; so that the rooms—the furniture of them disposed against the walls—had never throughout the afternoon been too crowded for circulation, had never been too hot.

Delicious Nanny Legrenzi, of the *Opéra Comique*, sang—and looked—like an impudent angel. Ludovico Müller played like a whirlwind, a zephyr, a lost soul, a quite rampantly saved soul—what you will! And every one talked. Heavenly powers, how they had talked!—their voices rising from a gentle adagio, through a tripping capriccioso, to the magnificently sustained fortissimo so welcome, so indescribably satisfying, to the ear of the practised hostess. Yes, all had gone well, excellently well, and now they were in act of departing.

Anastasia, weary, but genial and amused, on capital terms with her fellow-creatures and with herself, stood in the embrasure of one of the windows in the second room of the suite. Behind her red and pink rambler roses and ferns, in pots, formed a living screen against the glass, pleasantly tempering the light. Ludovico Müller had just made his bow and exit, leaving the music-room empty; while in the first and largest room Madame St. Leger, who helped her to receive to-day, bade farewell to the guests as they passed on into the cool, lofty hall.

"I have entertained him the best I know, Miss Beauchamp," Lewis Byewater said. "But he did not appear keen to converse on general topics. Seemed to need to specialize. Wanted to have me tell him just who every one present was."

"His talent always lay in the direction of biographical research—modern biography, well understood. And so, like a dear, kind young man, you told him who everybody was?"

"Within the limits of my own acquaintance, I did so. But, you see, in this crowd quite a number of persons were unknown to me," Byewater—a clean, fair, ingenuous and slightly unfinished-looking youth, with a candid, shining forehead, carefully tooled and gilded teeth, a meager allowance of hair, a permanent pince-nez, and a pronounced transatlantic accent—explained conscientiously. "I did my best, and when I got through with my facts I started out to invent. I believe I thickened up the ranks of the French aristocracy to a perfectly scandalous extent. But the Colonel appeared thirsty on titles."

"A form of thirst entirely unknown to your side of the Atlantic!" Anastasia retorted. "Never mind. If you have done violence to the purity of your republican principles by a promiscuous ennobling of my guests you have sinned in the cause of friendship, my dear Byewater, and I am infinitely obliged to you. But where is Colonel Haig now?"

"In the outer parlor, I believe, watching Madame St. Leger wish the rear-guard good-day. He proposes to remain to the bitter end of this reception, Miss Beauchamp. He confided as much to me. He is sensible of having the time of his life *re* Parisian society people, so he proposes to stick. But you must be pretty well through with any wish for entertaining by this," the kindly fellow went on—"so you just tell me truly if you would prefer to have me go off right now, or have me wait awhile till the Colonel shows signs of getting more satiated and take him along too? I intended proposing to dine him somewhere, anyway, to-night."

"You are the very nicest of all nice young men, and unquestionably I shall meet you in heaven," Anastasia asserted, heartily. "And as I shall arrive there so long before you, you may count on my saying all manner of handsome things to St. Peter about you. Oh yes, stay, my dear boy, and carry the title-thirsty Colonel away with you. By all manner of means, stay."

Byewater flushed up to the top of his shining forehead. He looked at her shyly out of his clear, guileless eyes.

"I do not feel to worry any wearing amount over the Apostle, Miss Beauchamp," he said, slowly. "I believe it is more Mr. Adrian Savage at the present who stands to break up my rest. If you could say some favorable things about me to him, I own it would be a let up. He accepted my articles upon the Eighteenth-Century Stage; but I do not seem any forwarder with getting them positively published. I suppose he is holding them over for the dead season. Well, I presume there is appropriateness in that; for, seeing the time it has lain in his office, the manuscript must be very fairly moth-eaten by this."

"Oh, trust me!" Anastasia cried, genially. "I'll jog his memory directly I see him—which I shall do as soon as he returns from England. Never fear, I'll hustle him to some purpose if you'll stay now and deliver me from this military genealogical incubus. Look—how precious a contrast!—here they come."

Madame St. Leger entered the room, talking, smiling, while Rentoul Haig, short, but valiantly making the most of his inches, his chest well forward, neat as a new pin, his countenance rosy, furiously pleased and furiously busy, with something between a marching and a dancing step, paraded proudly beside her.

La belle Gabrielle had discarded black garments, and blossomed delicately into oyster-gray chiffon and a silk netted tunic to match, finished with self-colored silk embroideries and deep, sweeping knotted fringe. The crown of her wide-brimmed gray hat was massed with soft, drooping ostrich plumes of the same reposeful tint, which lifted a little, waving slightly as she advanced. A scarlet tinge showed in the round of her charming cheeks. Mischief looked out of her eyes and tipped the corners of her smiling mouth. She was, indeed, much diverted by the small and pompous British warrior strutting at her side. He offered example of a type hitherto unknown to her. She relished him greatly. She also relished the afternoon's experiences. They were exhilarating. She felt deliciously mistress of herself and deliciously light-hearted. It is comparatively easy to despise the world when you are out of it. But now, the seclusion of her mourning being over, returning to the world, she could not but admit it a vastly pleasant place. This afternoon it had broadly smiled upon her; and she found herself smiling back without any mental reservation in respect of ideas and causes. At seven and twenty, though you may hesitate to circumscribe your personal liberty by marriage with one

man, the homage of many men—if respectfully offered—is by no manner of means a thing to be sneezed at. Gabrielle St. Leger did not sneeze at it. On the contrary she gathered admiring looks, nicely turned compliments, emulous attentions, veiled ardors of manner and of speech, into a bouquet, so to speak, to tuck gaily into her waistband. The sense of her own beauty, and of the power conferred by that beauty, was joyful to her. Under the stimulus of success her tongue waxed merry, so that she came off with flying colors from more than one battle of wit. And, for some reason, all this went to make her think with unusual kindliness of her absent lover. In this vivacious, mundane atmosphere, Adrian Savage would be so eminently at home and in place! His presence, moreover, would give just that touch of romance, that touch of sentiment, to the sparkling present which—and there Gabrielle thought it safest to stop.

"Ah! it has been so very, very agreeable, your party, most dear friend," she said in her pretty careful English, taking her hostess's hand in both hers. "I find myself quite sorrowful that it should be at an end. I could say 'and please how soon may we begin all over again' like my little Bette when she too is happy."

"Dear child, dear child," Anastasia returned affectionately, almost wistfully, for nostalgia of youth is great in those who, though bravely acquiescent, are no longer young.

Gray hair happened to be the fashion in Paris this season. About a week previously Miss Beauchamp had mysteriously closed her door to all comers. To-day she emerged gray-headed. This transformation at once perplexed and pleased her many friends. If it admitted her age, and by lessening the eccentricity of her appearance made her less conspicuous, it gave her an added dignity, strangely softening and refining the expression of her large-featured, slightly masculine face. Just now, in a highly ornate black lace and white silk gown, and suite of ruby ornaments set in diamonds—whereby hung a tale not unknown to a certain hidden garden—Anastasia Beauchamp, in the younger woman's opinion, showed not only as an impressive but as a noble figure.

"Ah yes, and you should know, Colonel 'Aig," the latter continued, the aspirate going under badly in her eagerness, "since you have not for so long a time seen her, that it is always thus with Mademoiselle Beauchamp at her parties. She produces a mutual sympathy between her guests so that, while in her presence, they adore one another. It is her secret. She makes all of us at our happiest, at our best. We laugh, but we are also gentle-hearted. We desire to do good."

"That is so," Byewater put in nasally. "I indorse your sentiments, Madame St. Leger. When I came over I believed I should find I had left the finest specimens of modern woman behind in America. But I was mistaken. Miss Beauchamp is positively great."

"And—and me, Mr. Byewater?" Gabrielle asked with a naughty mouth.

"Oh! well, you—Madame St. Leger," the poor youth faltered, turning away modestly, his countenance flaming very bright red.

"I require no assurances regarding our hostess's brilliant social gifts," Rentoul Haig declared, mouthing his words so as to make himself intelligible to this foreign, or semi-foreign, audience. "My memory carries me back to—"

"The year one, my dear Colonel, the year one," Anastasia interrupted—"the old days at Beauchamp Sulgrave. Great changes there, alas, since my poor brother's death. Between Death Duties and Land Taxes, my cousin can't afford to keep the place up, or thinks he can't, which amounts to much the same thing. He is trying to sell a lot of the farms at Beauchamp St. Anne's hear.

"England is being ruined by those iniquitous Land Taxes, I give you my word, Miss Beauchamp, simply ruined. Take Beauchamp Sulgrave, for instance. Perfect example of an English country-house, amply large enough yet not too large for comfort, and really lovely grounds. Just the type of place that always has appealed to me. I remember every stick and stone of it. I give you my word, I find it difficult to speak with moderation of these Radical nobodies, whose thieving propensities endanger the preservation of such places on the old hospitable and stately basis. I remember my regiment was in camp at Beauchamp St. Anne's —I am afraid it was in the seventies—and your party from Sulgrave used kindly to drive over to tea, regimental sports, and impromptu gymkhanas. Charming summer! How it all comes back to me, Miss Beauchamp!"

He cleared his throat, pursing up his lips and nodding his head quite sentimentally.

"Really, I cannot say what a resuscitation of pleasant memories it gave me, when our mutual friend Savage mentioned your name one day at my cousin, the Smyrthwaites' house, at Stourmouth, this winter. Directly my doctor ordered me to Aix-les-Bains.—A touch of gout, nothing more serious. My health is, and always has been, excellent, I am thankful to say.—I determined to remain a few days in Paris on my way out, in the hope of renewing our acquaintance. Savage told me—"

Gabrielle had dropped her friend's hand.

"Ah! these climbing roses, are they not ravishing?" she exclaimed, advancing her nose to the pink clusters daintily. "See then, M. Byewater, if you please, can you tell me the name of them? I think I will buy some to decorate my own drawing-room. The colors would sympathize—'armonize—is it that, yes?—so prettily with my carpet.—You recall the tone of my carpet?—And of my curtains. Though whether it is worth while, since I so soon leave Paris!"

"Is that so, Madame St. Leger?" Byewater asked rather blankly.

"Savage is a delightful fellow, a really delightful fellow," Rentoul Haig asserted largely.

"For the summer, oh yes," *la belle Gabrielle* almost gabbled. "I take my mother and my little girl to the—how do you say?—to the sea-bathings. On the Norman coast I have rented a *chalet*. The climate is invigorating. It will benefit my mother, whose health causes me anxieties. And my little girl will enjoy the society of some little friends, whose parents rent for this season a neighboring villa."

"Ah! precisely that is what I want to talk to you about. Come and sit down, Colonel Haig."

Anastasia raised her voice slightly.

"Here—yes—on the settee. And now about Adrian Savage. I confess I begin to look upon this executorship as an imposition. It is not quite fair on him, poor dear fellow. It occupies time and thought which would be expended much more profitably elsewhere. He is as good as gold about it all, but I know he feels it a most inconvenient tie. It interferes with his literary work, which is serious, and with his social life here—with his friendships."

"Yes, I do not usually go to the coast. I accompany my mother to her native province—to Savoy"—Madame St. Leger's voice had also risen. "To Chambéry, where we have relations. You are not acquainted with Chambéry, M. Byewater? Ah! but you make a mistake. You should be. It is quite the old France, very original, quite of the past ages. I love it; but this year —"

"In my opinion it is quite time Savage was set free." Anastasia's tone waxed increasingly emphatic. "You must forgive my saying the Smyrthwaite ladies are very exacting, Colonel Haig. They appear to trade upon his chivalry and forbearance to a remarkable extent. Doesn't

it occur to them that a young man, in his position, has affairs of his own in plenty to attend to?"

"This year the sea-bathing will certainly be more efficacious. No doubt the mountain air in Savoy is also invigorating; but the changes of climate are so rapid, so injurious—"

"Perhaps there are other attractions, of a not strictly business character. One cannot help hearing rumors, you know. And recently I have been a good deal at the Miss Smyrthwaites' myself. As a connection of their mother's, in their rather unprotected condition, I have felt it incumbent upon me to keep my eye on matters."

Rentoul Haig settled himself comfortably upon the settee beside his hostess, inclining sideways, a little toward her. He spoke low, confidentially, as one communicating state secrets, his nose inquisitive, his mouth puckered, his whole dapper person irradiated by a positive rapture of gossip. He simmered, he bubbled, he only just managed not to boil over, in his luxury of enjoyment. Anastasia listened, now fanning herself, now punctuating his discourse with incredulous ejaculations and gestures descriptive of the liveliest dissent.

"Incredible! my dear Colonel," she cried. "You must be misinformed. Savage is regarded as a most desirable *parti* here in Paris. He can marry whom he pleases. Impossible! I know better."

"Then do you tell me it is unhappily quite true that M. René Dax is ill, M. Byewater?" Gabrielle St. Leger inquired in unnecessarily loud, clear accents.

"Well, I would hesitate to make you feel too badly about him, Madame St. Leger," the conscientious youth returned cautiously. "I cannot speak from first-hand knowledge, since I would not presume to give myself out as among M. Dax's intimates. He has been a made man this long time, while I am only now starting out on schemes for arriving at fame myself way off in the far by and by."

"Never in life!" Anastasia cried, in response to further confidential bubblings. "You misread our friend Savage altogether if you suppose his heart could be influenced by the lady's wealth. He is the least mercenary person I know. The modern fortune-hunting madness has not touched him, I am delighted to say. Then, he is really quite comfortably off already. He has every reasonable prospect of being rich eventually. He is very shrewd in money matters; and he has friends whom, I can undertake to say, will not forget him when the final disposition of their worldly goods is in question. He is a man of sensibility, of deep feeling, capable of a profound and lasting attachment."

She paused, glancing at *la belle Gabrielle*.

"I would not like to have you think I underrate Mr. Dax's talent." This from Byewater. "I recognize he is just as clever as anything. But I am from a country where the standards are different, and much of Mr. Dax's art is way over the curve of the world where my sympathy fails to follow. This being so, I have never made any special effort to get into direct personal contact—"

"You may take it from me, my dear Colonel, that profound and lasting attachment is already in existence."

"But I was lunching with Lenty B. Stacpole, our leading black-and-white artist, yesterday. Maybe you are not acquainted with his work, Madame St. Leger? Most of the time he puts it right on the American market, and does not show here. And, Lenty told me Mr. Dax is so badly broken up with neurasthenia that if he does not quit work and exercise more, and cultivate normal habits generally, he risks soon being just as sick a man as any but a coroner's jury can have use for."

"It is a matter of fact, I may almost say of common knowledge"—fatigue and huskiness notwithstanding, Anastasia's voice rang out in a veritable war-cry. "All his friends are aware that for years he has been devoted—honorably and honestly devoted—to a most lovely woman, here, in Paris."

She paused, again looking the bubbling little warrior hard in the eye.

"Here," she repeated.

"But that pains me so much"—Gabrielle also spoke for the benefit of all and any hearers. "Without doubt I did know that M. René Dax was ailing; but that he was so very ill—no—no."

Miss Beauchamp laid her fan lightly upon Colonel Haig's coat-cuff, silently drawing his attention to the somewhat unfinished American youth and the perfectly finished young Frenchwoman, standing together in the embrasure of the window backed by the trellis of red and pink rambler roses. Again she looked him hard in the eye.

"Now does it occur to you why any other affair of the heart, in Mr. Savage's case, is preposterous and unthinkable?" she inquired. He swallowed, nodded: "Upon my word—indeed! Most interesting."

"And most convincing?"

"My dear lady, is it necessary to ask that question, in face of such remarkable charm and beauty? Enviable fellow! Upon my word, is it convincing?"

But here *la belle Gabrielle*, conscious alike of their scrutiny and the purport of their partly heard conversation, advanced from the window. The ostrich plumes upon her hat lifted and waved as she moved. The scarlet tinge in her cheeks had deepened, and her eyes were at once troubled and daring.

Rentoul Haig got upon his feet in a twinkling.

"Enviable fellow!" he repeated feelingly. Then added, "I—I am at liberty to mention this very interesting piece of information, Miss Beauchamp?"

"Cry it aloud from the housetops if you will. I vouch for the truth of it," Anastasia replied, rising also. "All her friends wish him success. I say advisedly friends. In such a case, as you can readily imagine, there are others"—she turned to Madame St. Leger. "Why, *ma toute belle*, is anything wrong? You appear a little disturbed, disquieted."

"M. Byewater has just communicated a very unhappy news to me," she replied.

"Heartless young man! As punishment let us send him packing instantly."

Anastasia smiled at the perplexed youth in the kindest and most encouraging fashion.

"I am ever so mortified to have caused Madame St. Leger to feel badly," he said.

"Oh! She will get over it. In time she will forgive you. Leave her to me! I will reason with her. You must be going, too, Colonel Haig?" Anastasia held out her hand, cheerfully enforcing farewell. "Ah! well, it has been very nice, very nice indeed, to see you and talk over old times and so on. Don't fail to look me up whenever you pass through Paris. I give you a standing invitation. You're sure to find me. I am as much a fixture as the *Bois* or the river."

As the two men passed from the outer room into the hall Anastasia sank down on the settee again.

"Just Heaven!" she said, "but I expire with fatigue, simply expire."

Gabrielle looked at her mutinously. Then, sitting down beside her, she kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"You are malicious," she said; "you are very obstinate. Perhaps I too am obstinate. You will not succeed in driving me into—into marriage."

“Never a bit! I trust your own heart, dearest child, to do the driving.”

“Ah! my heart—have I any left? Save where my mother and Bette are concerned, I sometimes wonder!”

“You don’t give your heart the chance to speak. You are afraid of it, because you know beforehand what it would say, what it is already saying.”

Madame St. Leger rose, shaking her head, big hat, waving plumes and all, with captivating petulance.

“How can I tell, how can I tell?” she exclaimed. “Is not marriage for me ancient history? Did I not read it all years ago, when I was still but an infant?”

“That is exactly the reason why you should read it again, now that you are no longer an infant—conceivably.”

“But I do not care to read again that which I have already read. I have learned all the lessons that particular ancient history has to teach.” Her tone and expression were not without a point of bitterness. “I want to go forward, to learn a new science, rather than to repeat discredited fables.”

Anastasia sighed, raising her shoulders, smiling keenly and sadly.

“Ah! you are still a baby,” she said; “very much a baby, stretching out soft, eager fingers toward any and every untried thing which sparkles, or jiggets, or rattles. Poor enough stuff, my dear, for the most part, when you do contrive to grasp it! Not new at all, either, save for the high-sounding modern names with which it is labeled—only old clothes made over to ape new fashions! Believe me, the love of a clever and handsome young man is a thousand times more satisfying, more entertaining, than any such sartorial reconstructions from the world-old rag-bag of social experiment. Ah! vastly more entertaining,” she added, placing her fan against her lips, and looking at the younger woman over the top of it with meaning.

“M. Byewater informs me that M. René Dax is really, really ill,” Gabrielle remarked rather hastily, her eyes turned upon the roses.

“Umph—and pray what, my dear, has that precious piece of information to do with it?”

“He may perhaps even die.”

“I, for one, should survive his loss with conspicuous resignation and fortitude.”

“But for the past week he has written to me almost daily.”

“An impertinence which makes me the more resigned to his speedy demise.”

“Yes—piteous, eloquent little letters, telling me how he suffers. And I have not answered.”

“I take that for granted, *ma toute belle*.”

“I did not reply because—I am sorry now—I did not quite believe him. His eloquence was affecting. But it was also misleading. I thought it improbable any person would write so very well if he were so very ill. I lament my suspicions. I have added to his sufferings. He implores me, in each letter, since it is impossible he should at present visit me, that I should go, if only for a few moments, to see him.”

“Out of all question—a monstrous and infamous proposal!”

“So I myself thought at first. But if it is true that he may die? Listen, dear friend, tell me __”

With a rapid, sweeping movement Gabrielle again sat down beside her friend. Again kissed her lightly on the cheek, manoeuvering the wide-brimmed hat skilfully, so as to avoid scrapings and collisions.

“Listen,” she repeated coaxingly—“for really I find myself in a dilemma. I cannot consult my mother. She is timid and diffident before questions such as these, of what is and is not

socially permissible. Her charity, dear, sainted being, is limitless. It conflicts with her natural timidity. Between the two she becomes incapable of exercising clear judgment. She does not comprehend modern life."

"Few of us do," Anastasia commented.

"And her health is, alas, still far from being re-established. I desire to spare her all physical as well as all moral exertion. Therefore I cannot propose that she should accompany me to visit M. René Dax. That would render my position comparatively simple; but the excitement and fatigue of such a proceeding are practically prohibitive for her."

"Am I then to understand," Anastasia inquired somewhat grimly, "that you kindly propose I should play duenna, and call on that singularly objectionable young man in company with you?"

"Ah! if it only could be arranged! But I fear he might not improbably refuse to receive you."

"Execrable taste on his part, of course. Yet I thank him, for it disposes of the matter, since you cannot go alone."

"But if he should be dying? Ah, forgive me," she cried, with charming penitence. "I weary, I even annoy you, most dear Anastasia, most cherished, most valued friend. It is unconscionable to do so after you have given me the enjoyment of so charming, so inspiriting, an afternoon. You should rest. I will ask nothing more of you. I will go."

"But not to call on M. René Dax—" she caught *la belle Gabrielle's* two hands in hers. "My darling child, you must surely perceive the impropriety, the scandal, of such a *démarche* on your part—at your age, with your attractions, well known as you are—and, putting prejudice aside, with his reputation, whether deserved or not, for libertinism, for grossness of ideas, for reckless indiscretion—"

Madame St. Leger had risen. The elder woman still held her hands imprisoned. She stood looking down, the brim of her hat forming a gray halo about her abundant burnished hair, and pale, grave, heart-shaped face.

"I perceive all that," she answered quietly. "I have thought carefully of it. I did so while I yet was doubtful of the actuality of his illness. But now that I am no longer doubtful, that I am assured he is practising no deceit upon me, I ask myself whether I—who embrace the nobler and larger conceptions of the office of woman—am not thereby committed to disregard such conventions. Whether it is not of the essence of the reforms, the ideals for which we work that we should, each one of us, have the courage, when occasion arises, to defy tradition. Only to talk, is silly. To make a protest of action gives the true measure of our faith, our sincerity. The making of such a protest against current usages cannot be agreeable. I do not make it light-heartedly, with any satisfaction in my own audacity. To gratify myself, to obtain amusement or frivolous pleasure, I would never risk outraging the accepted code of conduct, the accepted proprieties. But for the sake of one who suffers, of one to whom—without vanity—I believe my friendship to have been helpful—for the sake of one whose attitude toward me has been irreproachable, and who, though so gifted, is in many ways so greatly to be pitied—"

She bent her head and kissed her hostess.

"Farewell," she said gently. "I shall not in any case go to-day. It is now too late. But, beyond that, I make no promises for fear I may perjure myself. Yes, I have been so happy, so happy this afternoon. For this, most dear friend, all my thanks."

Regardless of aching back and aching throat, Anastasia Beauchamp went to the telephone. First she told the operator, at the exchange, to ring up the number of Adrian's bachelor flat in

the *rue de l'Université*. From thence no response was obtainable. Nothing daunted, Anastasia requested to be put into communication with the office in the *rue Druot*. Here with polite alacrity the good Konski's amiable voice answered her.

"Alas, no! To the desolation of his colleagues M. Savage had not yet returned. But in a few days he would without doubt do so. The conduct of the Review compelled it. Without him, the machine refused any longer to work. His presence became imperative. Madame would write? Precisely. Her letter should receive his," the good Konski's, "most eager attention. Let Madame repose entire confidence in his assiduity, resting assured that not an instant's delay should occur in the delivery of her distinguished communication."

CHAPTER II

IN THE TRACK OF THE BRAIN-STORM

"At last you have arrived. Through an interminable progression of hours I have waited, the days and nights mixing themselves into one abominable salad of expectation, disappointment, rage against those whom I pictured as interfering to detain you; and, as dressing and sauce to the whole infernal compound, a yearning for the assuaging repose of your presence which gnawed, like the undying worm, at my entrails."

This address, although delivered in the young man's accustomed unemotional manner, with studied, carefully modulated utterance, was hardly calculated to allay the embarrassment or disquietude aroused by the uncompromising stare of the concierge, and very evident, though more deferential, curiosity of Giovanni, the bright-eyed, velvet-spoken Italian man-servant who admitted her.

Nor were other sources of discomfort lacking. Madame St. Leger, like all persons of temperament, in whom mind and body, the soul and senses, are constantly and actively interpenetrative, instinctively responded to the spiritual influences which reside in places and even in material objects. Now, coming directly into it from the glitter and movement, the thousand and one very articulate activities of the sun-bathed city, the vivid foliage of whose many trees tossed in the crisp freshness of the summer wind, René Dax's studio struck her as the strangest and, perhaps, most repellant human habitation she had ever yet set foot in. Struck her, too, as belonging to a section of that exclusively man's world, in which woman's part is at once fugitive and not a little suspect.

The black hangings and furniture stared at, the bare immaculately white walls bluffed, her. Only a mournful travesty of the splendid daylight, reigning out of doors, filtered down through the gathered black-stuff blinds drawn across the great, sloping skylights, and contended languidly against the harsh clarity of a couple of electric lights—with flat smoked-glass shades to them—hanging, spider-like, at the end of long black cords from the beam supporting the central span of the arched ceiling. Notwithstanding the height of the room and its largeness of area, the atmosphere was stagnant, listless, and dead. This constituted Madame St. Leger's initial impression. This, and a singular persuasion—returning upon her stealthily, persistently, though she strove honestly to cast it out—that the studio, although apparently so bare and empty, was, in point of fact, crowded by forms and conceptions the reverse of wholesome or ennobling, which pushed upon and jostled her, while, by their number and grossness, they further exhausted the already lifeless air.

The sense of suffocation, thus produced, so oppressed her that her heart beat nervously and her pulse fluttered. Though unwilling to discard the modest shelter it afforded and gain closer acquaintance with the details of her surroundings, Gabrielle untwisted the flowing gray veil which she wore over her hat and around her throat, and threw it back from her face. Then, for a while, all else was forgotten in the thought of, the sight of, René Dax. And, although that thought and seeing was in itself painful, it tended to restore both her outward serenity and her inward assurance and strength.

"Ah! my poor friend," she said, soothingly, "had I understood how suffering you were, how greatly in need of sympathy, I would have put aside obstacles and come to you sooner; though—though you will still remember, it is no small concession that I should come at all."

"Only by concessions is life rendered supportable," he answered. "I too have made concessions. If you defy conventional decorum for my sake, I, on the other hand, have

sacrificed to it for your sake very royally. I have destroyed the labor of months, have obliterated priceless records to safeguard your delicacy, to insure you immunity—should you at last visit me—from all offense."

And *la belle Gabrielle*, listening, was moved and touched. But she asked no explanation—shrank from it, indeed, divining the sacrifice in question bore vital relation to that unseen yet jostling, unwholesome and ignoble crowd. She therefore rallied the mothering, ministering spirit within her, resolving to let speech, action and feeling be inspired and controlled by this, and this alone.

For one thing was indisputable—namely, that René Dax, caricaturist and poet, was, as the cleanly young American yesterday told her, just as sick a man as any man need be. His puny person had wasted. He looked all head—all brain, rather, since his tired little face seemed to also have dwindled and to occupy the most restricted space permissible in proportion to the whole. The full, black linen painting-blouse, which he wore in place of a coat, produced, along with his lowness of stature, a queerly youthful and even childish effect. To stand on ceremony with this small, sad human being, still more to go in fear of it, to regard it as possibly dangerous, its poor little neighborhood as in any degree compromising, was to Gabrielle St. Leger altogether absurd and unworthy. Let the overpunctilious or overworldly say what they pleased, she congratulated herself. She was glad to have disregarded opposition, glad to have come. Where custom and humanity conflict—so she told herself—let it be custom which goes to the wall.

Therewith she drew herself up proudly, and, carrying her charming head high, looked bravely around the strange and somewhat sinister place. Noted the wide divans on either side the fireplace and the diminutive scarlet cane chair set on the hearth-rug; the five-fold red lacquer screen; the trophy of arms—swords, rapiers, simitars, daggers, and other such uncomfortably cutting, ripping, and stabbing tools—upon the chimney-breast above the mantelpiece. Noted, not without a shudder of disgust, the glass tank and its slimy swimming and crawling population; the tables loaded with books, materials and implements of the draftsman's craft; the model's platform; the array of portfolios, canvases, drawing-boards—surely the place had been very scrupulously swept and garnished against her coming! It was minutely, even rigidly, clean and neat. This pleased her as a pretty tribute of respect. Finally, her eyes sought the nearly life-size red-chalk drawing set on an easel in the center of the studio immediately beneath the electric light.

René Dax stood beside her. She tall, noticeably elegant in her short-waisted, long-coated, pale-gray, braided walking-dress. He reserved and weary in bearing, but very watchful and very intent.

"You observe my drawing?" he inquired softly. "I have been waiting for that—waiting for you to grasp the fact that there is nothing new, nothing extraordinary in your being here with me—you, and Mademoiselle Bette. For months now you are my companions all day and all night—yes, then very sensibly also. Look, I lie there upon the divan. I fold the red screen back—it is loot from the Imperial Palace at Peking, that screen. Grotesquely sanguinary scenes figure upon it. But I forget them and the entertainment they afford me.—I fold the screen back, I turn upon my side among the cushions and I look at you. I look until, on those nights when my will is active and yours in abeyance, or perhaps a little weak, you step off the paper and cross the room, there—between the platform and the long table—always carrying Mademoiselle Bette on your arm; and, coming close, you bend down over me. You never speak, neither do you touch me. But I cease to suffer. The tension of my nerves is relaxed. The

hideous pain at the base of my skull, where the brain and spinal-cord form their junction, no longer tortures me. I am inexpressibly soothed. I become calm. I sleep."

Gabrielle St. Leger had grown very serious. For this small, sad human being to whom she proposed to minister and to mother had disconcertingly original and even consternating ways with it. Should she resent the said ways, soundly snubbing him? Or, making allowance for his ill-health and acknowledged eccentricity, parley with and humor him? To steer a wise course was difficult.

"I willingly believe your intention in making this drawing was not disloyal," she said, quietly. "Yet I cannot but be displeased. Before making it you should have asked my approval and obtained my consent."

"Which you would have refused?—No, I knew better than that. But dismiss the idea of disloyalty. Rise above paltry considerations of expediency and etiquette. You can do so if you choose. Accept the position in its gravity, in its permanent consequences both to me and to yourself. In making this drawing I thought not merely of the ease and relief I might obtain through it. I thought of you also. For I perceived the perversion which threatened you. I decided to intervene, to rescue you. I decided to co-operate with destiny, to interest myself in the evolution of your highest good. So now it amounts to no less than this—that your future and mine are inextricably conjoined, intermingled, incapable of separation henceforth."

"Gently, gently, my poor friend," Gabrielle said.

"Are you not then sorry for me?" he asked quickly, with very disarming and child-like pathos. "Is it a fraud, a heartless experiment, coming to-day to see me thus? Have you no real desire to console or bring me hope?"

"From my heart I pity and commiserate you," Gabrielle said.

"Then where is your logic, where is your reason? For I—I—René Dax—I, and my recovery, my welfare, constitute your highest good. I am your destiny. Your being here to-day regardless of etiquette, your stepping off the paper there upon the easel, crossing the room and bending over me at night, carrying the little maiden child, the flower of innocence, in your arms, these are at least a tacit admission of the truth of that."

A point of fear came into Madame St. Leger's eyes. Outward serenity, inward assurance, were not easy of maintenance. The more so, that again she was very sensible of the unseen crowd of ignoble forms and conceptions peopling the room, tainting and exhausting the air of it, pressing upon and—as she felt—deriding her.

"You speak foolishly and extravagantly," she said, steadying her voice with effort. "I pardon that because I know that you are suffering and not altogether master of yourself. But I do not enjoy this conversation. I beg you to talk more becomingly, or I shall be unable to remain. I shall feel compelled to leave you."

For an instant René Dax looked up at her with a positively diabolic expression of resentment. Then his face was distorted by a sudden spasm.

"It is only too true that I suffer," he cried bitterly. "My head aches—there at the base of my brain. It is like the grinding of iron knuckles. I become distracted. Very probably I speak extravagantly. My sensations are extravagant, and my talk matches them. But do not leave me. I will not offend you. I will be altogether good, altogether mild and amiable. Only remain. Place yourself here in this chair. Your presence comforts and pacifies me—but only if you are in sympathy with me. Let your sympathy flow out then. Do not restrain it. Let it surround and support me, buoying me up, so that I float upon the surface of it as upon some divine river of peace. Ah, Madame, pity me. I am so tired of pain."

Reluctantly, out of her charity and against her better, her mundane judgment, Gabrielle St. Leger yielded. She sat down in the large, black brocade-covered chair indicated. Her back was toward the drawing upon the easel. She was glad not to see it, glad that the electric light no longer glared in her eyes. She clasped her hands lightly in her lap, trying to subdue all inward agitation, to maintain a perfectly sane and normal outlook, thereby infusing something of her own health and sweetness as a disinfectant into this morbid atmosphere.

The young man sat down, too, upon the edge of the divan just opposite to her. He set his elbows upon his knees, his big head projected forward, his eyes closed, his chin resting in the hollow of his hard, clever little hands. For a time there was silence, save for the dripping of the fountain in the glass tank, and the ticking of a clock. Presently, very softly, he began to speak.

"My art is killing me—killing me—and only you and Mademoiselle Bette can save me," he said. "And I am worth saving; for, not only am I the most accomplished draftsman of the century, but my knowledge of the human animal is unsurpassed. Moreover, that I should die is so inconceivably purposeless. Death is such a stupidity, such an outrage on intelligence and common-sense."

Gabrielle remained passive. To reason with him would, she felt, be useless as yet. She would wait her opportunity.

"Yes, my art is killing me," he went on. "It asks too much. More than once I have tried to sever myself from it; but it is the stronger. It refuses amputation. Long ago, when, as a child—unhappy, devoured by fancies, by curiosity about myself, about other children, about everything which I saw—I found that I possessed this talent, I was both shy and enchanted. It gave me power. Everything that I looked at belonged to me. I could reproduce it in beauty or the reverse. I could cover with ridicule those who annoyed me. By means of my talent I could torment. I played with it as naughty little boys play together, ingenious in provocation, in malice, in dirty monkey tricks. Then as I grew older I enjoyed my talent languorously. I spent long days of dreams, long nights of love with it. That was a period when my heart was still soft. I believed. The trivial vices of the little boy were left behind. The full-blooded vices of manhood were untried as yet. Later ambition took me. I would study. I would know. I would train my eye and my hand to perfect mastery in observation and in execution. My own mechanical skill, my power of memorizing, of visualizing, intoxicated me. I reviewed the work of famous draftsmen. I recognized that I was on the highroad to surpass it, both in effrontery of conception and perfection of technique. I refused my art nothing, shrank from nothing. I had loved my art as a companion in childish mischief; then as a youth loves his first mistress. Now I loved it as a man loves his career, loves that which raises him above his contemporaries. I stood above others, alone. I was filled with an immense scorn of them. I unveiled their deceit, their hypocrisy, their ignorance, their vileness, the degradation of their minds and habits. I whipped them till the blood came. No one could escape. I jeered. I laughed. I made them laugh too. Between the cuts of the lash, even while the blood flowed, they laughed. How could they help doing so? My wit was irresistible. They cursed me, yet shouted to me to lay on to them again."

For a minute or more silence, save for the dripping fountain, the ticking clock, and a bubbling, sucking sound as one of the black-and-orange blotched newts dived from the rockwork down to the sandy, pebbly floor of the glass tank. Madame St. Leger leaned back in her chair. She pressed her handkerchief against her lips. She felt as one who witnesses some

terrible drama upon the stage which holds the attention captive. She could not have gone away and left René Dax until the scene was concluded, even if she would.

"That was the period of my apotheosis, when I appeared to myself as a god,—last year, the year before last, even this winter," he said, presently, "before the pain came and while still I myself was greater than my art. But now, now, to-day, I do not laugh any more, nor can I make others laugh. My art is greater than I. It has grown unruly, arrogant. I am unequal to its demands. It asks of me what I am no longer able to give. It hounds me along. It storms at me —'Go further yet, imagine the unimaginable, pass all known limits. You are too squeamish, too fastidious, too modest, too nice. There yet remain sanctities to be defiled, shames to be depicted, agonies to be stewed in the vitriol juice of sarcasm. Go forward. You are lazy. Exert yourself. Discover fresh subjects. Invent new profanities. Turn the spit on which you have impaled humanity faster and faster. Draw better—you grow lethargic, indolent—draw better and better yet.'—But I cannot, I cannot," René Dax said, the corners of his mouth drooping like those of a tired baby. "We have changed places, my art and I. It is greater than me. It masters me instead of my mastering it. Like some huge brazen Moloch, with burning, brazen arms it presses me against its burning, brazen breast, scorching me to a cinder. It has squeezed me dry—dry—I am no longer able to collect my ideas, to memorize that which I see. My imagination is sterile. My hand refuses to obey my brain. My line, my beloved, my unexampled line, wavers, is broken, uncertain, loses itself. I scrabble unmeaning nonsense upon the paper."

He unbuttoned the wristband of his blouse and stripped up the sleeve of it.

"See," he went on, "how my muscles have deteriorated. My arm resembles some withered, sapless twig. Soon I shall not possess sufficient strength to hold a pencil or a bit of charcoal. Yes, yes, I know what you would say. Others have already said it. Travel, try change of scene, rest, consult doctors. But pah! Butchers, carrion-feeders, what can they tell me which I do not know already? For—for—"

He rose, came nearer to Gabrielle St. Leger, pointing to the inner corner of the great room in a line with the door.

"There," he said, with a singular sly gleefulness, "there—you see, Madame, behind the port folio-wagon? Yes?—It has its lair there, its retreat in which it conceals itself. It always says one thing, and it always tells the truth. It has once been a man; now it has no skin. You can observe all the muscles and sinews in action, which is extremely instructive. But naturally it is red—red all over. And it is highly varnished, otherwise, of course, it would feel the cold too much. It places its red hands on the edges of the portfolios—thus—and it vaults into the room. It is astonishingly agile. I think it may formerly have been, by profession, an acrobat, it runs so very swiftly. Its contortions are infinite. It avoids the pieces of furniture with extraordinary dexterity. Sometimes it leaps over them. The rapidity of its movements excites me. The pain—here at the base of my skull—always increases when I see it. I cannot restrain myself. I pursue it with frenzy. I hurl books, pictures, firewood, anything I can lay hands upon, at it—even my precious daggers and javelins from off the wall. But it sustains no injury. They—these objects which I throw—pass clean through it; yet they leave no aperture, no mark. My servant afterward finds them scattered upon the ground quite clean and free from moisture. And, as it runs, it screams to me, over its red shoulder, in a rasping voice like the cutting of stone with a saw, 'You are going mad, René Dax. You are going mad—mad.' "

Madame St. Leger raised both hands in mute horror, pity, protest. Her lips trembled. The tears ran down her cheeks. The young man watched her for some seconds, the strangest

expression of triumph upon his solemn little face. Then, with a great sigh, he backed away and sat down on the divan once more.

"Ah! Ah!" he said, quite calmly and gently. "It is so adorable to see you weep! Better even than that you should step down off the easel, as you sometimes do at night, and, crossing the room, bend over me and give me sleep. Still the red man speaks truth, Madame, accurate, unassailable truth. It comes just to this. Very soon now the final act of this infernal comedy will be reached. I shall be mad—unless—"

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE STORM BREAKS

"Unless—unless—what?"

Gabrielle St. Leger asked the question not because she wished to ask it, but because outward things forced her.

All disease is actually infecting, if not actively infectious, since contact with it disturbs the emotional and functional equilibrium, maintenance of which constitutes perfect health. Such disturbance is most readily and injuriously produced in persons of fine sensibility. Just now Madame St. Leger's faculties and feelings alike were in disarray. René Dax, his genius and the neurosis from which he suffered, his strange dwelling-place, all that which had happened in and—morally—adhered to it, combined to put compulsion upon her. In a sense, she knew the world. She was not inexperienced. But the amenities of a polished and highly civilized society, whose principal business it is to veil and mitigate the asperities of fact, had stood between her and direct acquaintance with the fundamental brutalities of life. Now she consciously met the shock of those brutalities, and met it single-handed. This exclusively man's world, the gates of which she had forced with wilful self-confidence, produced in her humiliation and helplessness, a sense of having projected herself into regions where accustomed laws are inoperative and direction-posts—for guidance of wandering feminine footsteps—agitatingly non-existent. Under this stress of circumstance her initiative deserted her. The vein of irony—running like a steel ribbon through her mentality—became suddenly and queerly worked out. She could not detach herself from the immediate position, stand aside, review it as a whole, and deal with it. That which made for individuality had gone under. Only her womanhood as womanhood—a womanhood sheltered, petted, moving ever in a gracefully artificial atmosphere—was left. She had come, intending to console, to minister, sagely to advise. It looked quite anxiously much as though, tyrannized by rude, unfamiliar forces, she would remain to yield and to obey. Thus, taking up the tag-end of René Dax's speech, she asked, unwillingly, almost fearfully:

"Unless—unless what?"

"Unless you consent to save me, Madame," he replied, with insinuating gravity and sweetness. "Unless you consecrate yourself to the work of my recovery, you and the delicious Mademoiselle Bette."

"But, my poor friend," she reasoned, "how is it possible for me to do that?"

"In a way very obvious and simple, wholly consonant to the most exalted aspirations of your nature," he returned. "I have planned it all out. No serious difficulties present themselves. Good will, Madame, on your part, some forethought on mine, and all is satisfactorily arranged. As to Mademoiselle Bette, she will find herself in a veritable paradise. You know her affection for me? And, putting aside my own gifts as a comrade, I have most pleasing little animals for her to play with. You have seen those in the aquarium? There is also Aristides. To my anguish I struck him last night with a hearth-brush during my pursuit of the red man, and Giovanni has charge of him in hospital to-day. The affair was purely accidental. I am convinced that he bears me no malice, poor cherished little cabbage; yet it cuts me to the quick to see his empty chair. But to return to your coming, Madame. For it is thus that you will save me—by coming here to remain permanently, by devoting yourself to me unremittingly, exclusively—by coming here—here to live."

The color rushed into Madame St. Leger's face and neck. Then ebbed, leaving her white to the lips, deathly white as against the black brocade of the chair-back. Here was a direction-post, at last, with information written upon it of—as it seemed to her—the very plainest and ugliest sort; the road which it signalized leading to well-known and wholly undesirable places, though trodden, only too frequently, by wandering feminine feet! For the moment she doubted his good faith; doubted whether he was not playing some infamous trick upon her; doubted whether his illness was not, after all, a treacherous fabrication. Her mouth and throat went dry as a lime-kiln. She could barely articulate.

"Monsieur," she said sternly, "I fear it is already too late to save you. In making such a proposition you show only too convincingly that you are already mad."

But the young man's expression lost nothing of its triumph or his manner of its sweetness.

"Madame, that is a very cruel speech," he said.

"You deserve it should be cruel," she answered.

"Indeed," René replied, looking calmly at her. "Indeed, I do not. You rush too hastily to injurious conclusions. It is an error to do so. You cause yourself unnecessary annoyance. You, also, cause me a waste of tissue, which, in my existing condition of health, I can ill afford. It is irrevocably decided that you come here to live. Evidently it has to be. I make no disloyal proposition to you. As I have told you, I earnestly consider your good. It is to rescue you from threatening perversions of office and of instinct, from declension to a lower emotional level, that I invite you, require you, to make your home with me. For I crave your presence not as other men crave for association with so beautiful a person—that is, sensually, for gratification of the beast within them—but spiritually, as an object of faith, an object of worship, as a healing and purifying aura, a divine emanation efficacious to the exorcism of that devouring devil, my art. Mistress—wife—pah!—Madame, my art has been all that to me, and more than that—not to mention those more active amatory excursions, common to generous youth, in which I do not deny participation. But my art has never been to me that thing so far more sacred, more human—a mother."

René Dax leaned toward her, both arms wide extended, his somber eyes glowing as though a red lamp shone behind them, his features contracted by spasms of pain.

"This," he pursued, "is what I ask, what in the depths and heights, in the utmost sincerity of my being, I need and must have.—The Madonna of the Future, the perfect woman, whose experience as woman is at once passionless and complete, human yet spiritual—the everlasting mother. A mother, moreover, such as in the entire course of the uncounted ages no man has ever yet possessed; still young, young as himself, unsoiled, untired, still in the spring-time of her charm, yet mysterious, in a sense awful, so that she is hedged about with inviolable reverence and respect, the intimate wonders of whose beauty never fully disclose themselves, but continue adorably unknown and remote. This is what I need; and this you only can give. It is your unique and commanding destiny. You must, rallying your fortitude and virtue, rise to it."

He stood up, his head thrown back, his arms still extended, as he indicated the extent and appointments of the studio with large, sweeping gestures.

"See," he cried, in increasing excitement, "here is the temple prepared for your worship! I had decorated the walls of it with obscenities which have caused rapture to the most emancipated intellects in Paris. To spare you offense, when I decided that you should come to me, I sent for plasterers, for whitewashes, who, even while they worked, rocked with laughter at the masterpieces of humor they were in process of destroying. The more intelligent of them

mutinied, declaring it vandalism to obliterate such expressions of genius. I seized a brush. I myself worked, hailing invectives upon them. I never rested till my purpose was achieved. Then, when the temple was cleansed, I wrote to you."

He sank down, squatting on the carpet, a queer black lump amid the surrounding blackness, his shoulders resting against the front of the divan, his hands clasped behind and supporting his pale, unwieldy head.

"Ah, ah!" he cried plaintively; "the pain, the pain—again it pierces me! It becomes extravagant. Surely, Madame, I need not explain to you any further? You witness my sufferings. Terminate them. It is in your power to do so. You cannot refuse a request so wholly reasonable and natural! You consent to remain with me?—There need be no delay. Giovanni, my servant, is a good fellow, trustworthy and intelligent. He will take a motor-cab and proceed immediately to the *Quai Malaquais*. After informing Madame, your mother, that you remain here permanently, he will return accompanied by Mademoiselle Bette. Within the course of half an hour the thing is done; it becomes an accomplished fact. Your welfare is assured; and I, Madame, I am rescued from the bottomless pit, from a hell of unspeakable disgust.—The pain ceases. The brazen Moloch no longer presses me to his burning breast. I am recreated. My childhood is given back to me—but a childhood of such peace, such innocent gaiety as no child ever yet experienced. I sleep in exquisite content. I wake, not merely to find and pray for help from your image reflected there upon paper, but to find you yourself my guest and my savior, you here moving to and fro among my possessions, breathing, speaking, smiling, making day and night alike fragrant by your presence, distilling the healing virtue of a deified maternity, of an enshrined and consecrated life."

As he finished speaking the young man rose to his feet. He came near to Gabrielle, and stood looking down at her, solemn, imploring, yet with a strange, flickering impishness in his manner and his face. He clasped his hard little hands, turning the palms of them outward, alternately bowing over her and rising on tiptoe, holding himself stiffly erect.

"Can you hesitate, Madame?" softly and sweetly he asked. "No—assuredly—it is inconceivable that you should hesitate!"

Gabrielle had stripped off her gloves, thrown back the fronts of her coat. Her bosom rose and fell with an abrupt irregular motion under the lace and chiffon of her blouse. More than ever was the air dead, the atmosphere suffocating. More than ever did those depraved forms and conceptions, defying expulsion by plaster and whitewash, crowd in upon and oppress her. Supernatural, moral, and physical terror, joining hands, created a very evil magic circle around her, isolating her, cutting her off from all familiar, amusing, pleasant, tender and gracious every-day matters dear to her social and domestic sense. She no longer entertained any doubt about the young man's mental condition. Shut away with him here, alone, behind closed doors, beneath black-muffled skylights, with only clay-cold fish and reptiles as witnesses, the situation began to appear alarming in the extreme. How to effect her escape? How to temporize until rescue should in some form come to her? Her circumstances were so incredible, so nightmarish in their improbability, their merciless reality, their insane logic, that her brain reeled under the strain. Wordlessly but passionately she prayed for strength, guidance, help.

"It is inconceivable, Madame, that you still hesitate," René repeated, insinuatingly.

Making a supreme effort, Gabrielle rose from her chair. She felt braver, more mistress of herself standing up. With an assumption of ease and indifference she buttoned her coat and began drawing on her long gloves.

“You are right,” she replied, but without looking at him. “I no longer hesitate. You have made your meaning clear. You have also said many affecting and poetic things to me. But, as you will be the first to admit, there are certain filial obligations I am bound to discharge, and to discharge personally. My beloved mother has been my companion and my constant care for so long, that it is imperative I should go with Giovanni; and, in a few words, tell her myself of the decision we have arrived at. To commit the communication of such news to a servant, however excellent, who is also a stranger, would be both cruel and impertinent. You, who reverence motherhood so deeply, will sympathize with this mother from whom you propose to take away those dearest to her.”

The sobs rose in Gabrielle’s throat. But she swallowed them courageously. If she once gave way, once lost her head—well—

“Moreover,” she continued, “unless I myself go, unless I myself claim her, my mother will, and rightly, refuse to part with my little Bette.”

A pause followed, during which the young man appeared immersed in thought. During that pause a faint sound of footsteps seemed to reach Gabrielle’s fear-quickened hearing; but whether from the common stairway, the flat underneath, or here, nearer at hand, she could not determine. She prayed with all the fervor of her spirit, while deftly, daintily smoothing out the wrinkles in the wrists of her long gloves.

“You appreciate the force of that which I say regarding my mother and my little Bette?” she asked, glancing at him.

“I do—most incontestably, I do.”

The answer came so spontaneously and in so perfectly natural a tone that Gabrielle’s glance steadied upon the speaker in swift inquiry and hope. Had the cloud lifted, leaving his mind clear, permitting an interval of lucidity, of reason and normal thought?

“Ah, my poor friend, then all is well?” she cried, a great thankfulness irradiating her face.

“Perhaps, yes,” he returned, in the same quiet and natural manner. “Personally I should have preferred the other plan. To relinquish it disappoints me. All promised so well. But I put it aside, for toward Madame, your mother, I am, believe me, incapable of an unsympathetic or discourteous act.”

Gabrielle continued her little preparations for departure. She began to arrange her veil. Raising both hands, she drew the edge of it forward over the crown of her hat. Later, reaction would set in. Safe in her own home, she would break down, paying in physical and mental exhaustion the price of this very terrible act of charity. But just now she felt strong and elate in her thankfulness for answered prayer and prospect of release. Never had family affection, the love of friends, all the wholesome sentiments of human intercourse, appeared to her so delightful or so good. Delicate color tinged her cheeks. Kindness and pity softened her golden-brown eyes. Standing there, with upraised hands and gently smiling lips, her beauty was very noble, full of soul as well as of victorious health and youth.

For some seconds René Dax gazed at her, as though fascinated, studying every detail of her appearance. Then, once more, a flickering impishness crossed his sad little face. He went down on one knee, laid hold of the hem of her dress, and, bowing his great head to the ground, kissed and again kissed it.

“Accept my worship, my homage, oh! Madonna—Madonna of the Future!” he said.

He sprang upright, clasping his little hands again, the palms turned outward.

“Yes,” he went on reflectively, “honestly, I prefer the other plan. Yet this one, as I increasingly perceive, possesses merits. Let us dwell upon them. They will console us. For,

after all, what I am about to carry out is, also, a masterpiece—daring, voluptuous, merciless, at once lovely and hideous—and conclusive. Yes, amazingly conclusive. Unmitigated—just that. It will set the public imagination on fire. All Paris will seethe with it. All Paris which can gain admittance will rush, fight, trample, to obtain a look at it. It will represent the most scathing of my revenges upon the unfathomable stupidity of mankind. But it will do more than that. It will constitute my supreme revenge upon my art. Thus I sterilize the brazen Moloch, rendering him voiceless, eyeless, handless, denying him all means of self-expression. In myself dying, I make him worse than dead—though he still exists. Art, being eternal, necessarily still exists. Yet what an existence! I, who have so long parted company with laughter, could almost laugh! Yes, veritably I draw his teeth. By depriving him of my assistance as interpreter, by depriving him of the vehicle of my unrivaled technique, I annihilate his power. Blind, deaf, maimed, impotent, yes—yes—is it not beyond all words magnificent? Let us hasten, Madame, to accomplish this."

René had delivered himself of his harangue with growing indications of excitement, his voice rising finally to a scream. Throughout the nerve-shattering jar and rush of it, Madame St. Leger, in deepening terror, listened for any sound of delivering footsteps—listened and prayed. Now his manner changed, became cool, matter-of-fact, rather horribly busy and business-like.

"See, Madame," he said, "the divan on the left will certainly be the most suitable. You will place yourself at the farther end of it. There are plenty of cushions.—When Giovanni has filled the large bronze bowl—you see which I mean—there upon the ebony pedestal?"

He pointed with one hand. With the other he laid hold of Madame St. Leger's wrist, the hard, short fingers closing down like the teeth of a steel trap. To struggle was useless. Might God in his mercy hear and send help!

"When Giovanni, I repeat, has filled the bowl with warm water—warm, not too hot—and set it upon the center of the divan—thus—I will instruct him to draw the screen across, concealing us. You understand, we shall place ourselves on either side of the bowl, plunging our arms as far as the elbow into it. The warmth of the water at once soothes the nerves and accelerates the flow of blood.—Ah, do not draw back from me!" he pleaded. "Do not render my task more difficult. Obey your highest instincts. Be perfect in grace and in beneficence to the close. The pain racks my head. Do not by opposition or reluctance oblige me to concentrate my brain upon further explanation or thought.—Consider only that from which I save you. The degradation of marriage, of the embraces of a lover—of Adrian, my old schoolfellow—the impious assumption of the beast!—of Adrian Savage.—From the shame of old age, too—from the anguish of tears shed beside the bedside of, possibly, your child, your little Bette—of, certainly, Madame, your mother! And, as against all these tragedies, to what does the other amount? I give you my word it will not hurt. You will barely be sensible of that which is occurring.—The merest scratch.—In my student days I obtained bodies from the hospitals. With minute and faithful accuracy I dissected them out. I know precisely where to cut, what portion of the arteries and sinews to sever.—And we shall sit here alone—alone—you and I, behind the red screen, while our veins empty themselves of their red liquor, and slowly, serenely life ebbs, our vision growing dim and yet more—

"Help!" Gabrielle called aloud. "Help!"

For truly the sound of voices and of footsteps came at last. The studio door was thrown open. A man entered. Who he was she did not know; but, with a strength born of despair and of hope, she wrenched herself free from René Dax's grasp, ran across the big room, flung her

arms round the man's neck, her beautiful head crushing down upon his breast, while her breath rushed out in great strangled, panting cries: "Ah!" And again, "Ah! Ah!"

CHAPTER IV
ON THE HEIGHTS

Adrian stood on the edge of the pavement beside his well-appointed, blue-black automobile, the door of which the chauffeur held open. The hinged top of the limousine was folded back, and the sunshine, slanting down over the roofs of the high, white houses on the right, brought the pale, gray-clad figure of its occupant into charming relief as against the oatmeal-colored upholstering of the inside of the car in tones at once blending and standing finely apart. An itinerant flower-seller, bareheaded, short-skirted, trimly shod, her flat, wicker tray heaped up with vivid blossoms, held out a graceful bunch of crimson and yellow roses, with the smiling suggestion that—"Monsieur should assuredly present them to Madame, who could not fail to revel in their ravishing odor." Monsieur, however, showed himself unflatteringly ignorant of her presence, while Martin, the chauffeur, dissembling his natural inclination toward every member of the sex, motioned her away with, so to speak, a front of adamant.

Adrian put one foot on the step of the car, and there paused, hesitating. At last, with a point of eagerness piercing his constraint, he said:

"Instead of going directly to the *Quai Malaquais*, will you permit me to take you for a short, a quiet drive, Madame? The air may refresh you."

"I shall be grateful," Gabrielle replied, briefly and hoarsely.

Adrian delivered himself of rapid, emphatic directions to his chauffeur, swung into the car, and placed himself beside her, arranging the thin dust-rug carefully over the skirt of her dress. Then, his nostrils quivering slightly, his face noticeably drawn and set, he leaned back in his corner of the luxurious vehicle. Martin slipped in behind the steering-wheel; and with a preliminary snarl and rattling vibration, gaining silence and smoothness as it made the pace, the car headed up the glittering perspective of the wide, tree-bordered street.

Somewhere in the back of his consciousness, when he had bought this car a few weeks prior to his last visit to Stourmouth, there floated entrancing visions of circumstances such as the present. At that time his affair of the heart promised lamentably ill, and realization of such visions appeared both highly improbable and most wearifully distant. Now a wholly unexpected turn of events had converted them into actual fact. Through the delight of the brilliant summer afternoon, the caressing wind, and clear, brave sunlight he bore Gabrielle St. Leger away whither he would. Verily he had his desire, but leanness withal in his soul. For, God in heaven! what a question squatted there upon the biscuit-colored seat, interposing its hateful presence between them, poisoning his mind with an anguish of suspense and doubt!

He was still, even physically, under the dominion of the almost incredible scene in which he had recently taken part. He had carried rather than led Madame St. Leger down the five flights of stairs from René Dax's flat, and had just only not required the help of the chauffeur to lift her into the waiting car. His heart still thumped, sledge-hammer fashion, against his ribs. Every muscle was strained and taut. Not his eyes only, but the whole temper and spirit of him, were still hot with desire of vengeance. That loud, hardly human cry of Gabrielle's as, lost to all dignity, lost almost to all modesty, she flung herself upon him still rang in his ears. The primitive savagery of it coming from the lips of so fastidious, elusive, quick-witted a creature, from those of so artistic a product of our complicated modern civilization, at once horrified and filled him with vicarious shame. In that wild moment of impact the dormant violence of the young man's passion had been aroused. Yet a gross and cynical query was

scrawled across his remembrance of it all. For what could, in point of fact, have happened previous to his arrival to produce so amazing a result?

And to Adrian not the least cruel part of this business was the duty, so clearly laid upon him, of rigid self-restraint, of maintaining, for her protection, as sparing and shielding her, his ordinary air of courteous, unaccentuated and friendly intercourse. Good breeding and fine feeling alike condemned him to behave just as usual, not assuming by so much as a hair's breadth that closer intimacy which the events of the last half-hour might very reasonably justify. Unless she herself chose to speak, this whole astounding episode must remain as though it never had been and was not.—And here his lover's and artist's imagination crimped him, projecting torments of unsatisfied conjecture extending throughout the unending cycles of eternity. Yet in uncomplaining endurance of such torment, as he perceived, must the perfection of his attitude toward her declare itself, must the perfection of his loyalty come in.

Meanwhile as the car hummed along the upward-trending avenues toward the southern heights, leaving the more fashionable and populous districts of the city behind, the air grew lighter and the breeze more lively. Adrian, still sitting tight in his corner, trusted himself to look at his companion. Through the fluttering gray veil, as through some tenuous, drifting mist, he saw her proud, delicate profile. Saw also that though she remained apparently passive and strove to hold all outward signs of emotion in check, the tears ran slowly down her cheek, while the rounded corner of her usually enigmatic, smiling mouth trembled nervously and drooped.

Presently, as he still watched, she slipped the chain of her gold and gray vanity-bag off her wrist and essayed to open it. But her fingers fumbled ineffectually with the gilt snap. The beautiful, capable hands he so fondly loved shook, having suddenly grown weak. Tears came into Adrian's eyes also. To him the helplessness of those dear hands stood for so very much. Silently he took the little bag, opened and held it, while she pulled out a lace-bordered handkerchief, and, pushing it beneath the fluttering veil, wiped her wet eyes and wet cheeks. He kept the bag open, waiting for her to put the handkerchief back. But, without speaking, Gabrielle shook her head slightly, in token that further drying operations might not improbably shortly be required. Adrian obediently snapped to the gold catch; yet, since he really shut up such a very big slice of his own heart within it, was it not, after all, but natural and legitimate that he should retain possession of the little bag?

This trifle of service rendered and accepted bore fruit, bringing the two into a more normal relation and lessening the tension of their mutual constraint. After a while Gabrielle spoke, but low and hoarsely, her throat still strained by those hardly human cries. Adrian found himself obliged to draw nearer to her if he would catch her words amid the clatter of the street and humming of the engines of the car.

"There is that, I feel, I should without delay make you know," she said, speaking in English; for it comes easier, sometimes, to clothe the telling of ugly and difficult things with the circumscriptions of a foreign language.

"Yes?" Adrian put in, as she paused.

"You should know that he is insane. Possibly my visiting him contributed to precipitate the crisis. I do not know. But he is now no longer responsible. Therefore truly I commiserate rather than feel anger toward him."

Again the handkerchief went up under the fluttering veil. Again, when it was withdrawn, Adrian saw, as through thin, drifting mist, the proud, delicate profile.

“I should make you know,” she went on, resolutely, “it was my life—yes, my life—but my honor, no—never—which was in jeopardy.”

“Thank God! thank God for that!” the young man almost groaned, bowing himself together, while his grasp tightened upon the pretty little gold and gray bag almost mercilessly.

He sat upright, took a deep breath, staring with unseeing eyes at the bright, variegated prospect of shops, houses, trees, traffic, people scampering past on either side the rushing car. Only now did he begin to gauge the vital character of his recent misery, and the tremendous force of the love which in so happily constituted and circumstanced a man as himself could render such a misery possible. Until to-day, until, indeed, this thrice-blessed minute when he learned from her own lips that no shame sullied her, he had never really gauged the depth of his love for Gabrielle St. Leger, or quite realized how all the many ambitions, interests, satisfactions of his very agreeable existence were as so much dust, froth, garbage, burnt-out cinder in comparison to that love. He had told Anastasia Beauchamp, in the course of a certain memorable conversation, he would devote his life to that love. But, he now discovered, it was quite unnecessary that he should take active steps toward the production or maintenance of it, since his life was already almost alarmingly devoted, leaving room, in truth, as he now perceived, for nothing outside that same love. And thereupon—the balance essaying to right itself, as in sane, healthy natures it instinctively must and will—poor Joanna Smyrthwaite’s face, and its expression of semi-idiot ecstasy, as he had seen it only two nights ago at the Tower House on the gallery in the checkered moonlight, arose before him. Adrian was conscious of pulling himself together sharply.—Love—if you will—and with all the strength, all the vigor of his nature. But to dote? Devil take the notion—no thank you! Never, if he knew it, would he dote.

Wherefore, it followed that his wits were very thoroughly, if very tenderly, about him when next Gabrielle St. Leger spoke.

“I see now,” she said, “the method by which he proposed we—he and myself—should die amounted to an absurdity, since it involved the concurrence of his servant.”

Covered by the noise of the car, Adrian permitted himself the relief of cursing a little quietly under his breath.

“But at the time I could not reason. I found myself too confused and terrified by the extraordinary and horrible things he told me—things in themselves demented, extravagant, yet as he told them so apparently sensible. His poor, disordered brain was so fertile in expedients that from moment to moment I could not foresee what fresh unnatural demand he might make on me, what new scheme he might not devise for my destruction.”

“Alone with a maniac no degree of fear can be excessive,” Adrian asserted, warmly.

For he perceived her pride was touched, so that her self-esteem called for support and encouragement. To his hearing her words conveyed a rather pathetic hint of apology, both to herself and to him, for that moment of wild self-abandonment.

“It doesn’t require much imagination,” he went on, “to understand the danger you ran was appalling—in every way appalling—simply that. And, good heavens! why didn’t I know?” he broke out, slapping his two hands down on his knees in sudden fury. “Why didn’t my instinct warn me, thick-headed fool that I am? Why didn’t I get to that hateful carrion-bird’s roost of a studio an hour, half an hour earlier? Pardon me, dear Madame,” he added, moderating his transports, “if I shock you by my violence. But when I consider what you must have endured, when I picture what might have happened, I confess I am almost beside myself with rage and distress.”

La belle Gabrielle had turned her head. She looked straight at him. The timid ghost of her mysterious, finely malicious smile visited her lips. Yet seen through the mist of her fluttering veil her eyes were singularly soft and lovely, wistful—so, at least, it seemed to Adrian—with the dawning of a sentiment other than that of bare friendship. Whereupon the young man's heart began to thump against his ribs again, while the engines of the car broke into a most marvelous sweet singing.

"I am not sure," she commenced, speaking with engaging hesitation, "whether, perhaps, since I am, thanks to *le bon Dieu*, here in safety and about to return unhurt to my child and my mother, it is not well I should have had this trial. For you did come in time—yes, mercifully in time. I doubt if I could have endured much longer. There were other things," she went on, hurriedly, "besides those which I consciously heard or saw which combined to disgust and terrify me. You, too, believe, do you not, that thoughts may acquire a separate existence—thoughts, purposes, imaginations—and that they may inhabit particular places? I cannot explain, but by such things I believe myself to be surrounded. I felt they might break through whatever restraining medium withheld them, and become visible. A little longer and my reason, too, might have given way—" She paused. "But you came—you came—"

"Yes, I came," Adrian repeated quietly.

"And, that being so—I being mercifully spared the worst, being unhurt, I mean—"

"Yes, precisely—unhurt," he repeated with praiseworthy docility.

"This experience may be of value. It may help to make me revise some mistaken ideas"—she turned away, and, though her head was held high, tears, as Adrian noted, were again somewhat in evidence—"some perhaps foolishly self-willed and—how shall I say?—conceited opinions."

In the last few minutes the car had traversed one of those unkempt and, in a sense, nomadic districts common to the fringe of all great cities. Spaces of waste land, littered with nondescript rubbish and materials for new buildings in course of noisy construction, alternated with rows of low-class houses, off the walls of which the plaster cracked and scaled; with long lines of hoardings displaying liberal assortment of flaming posters; wine-shops at once shabby and showy, crude reds, greens, and yellows adorning their wooden balconies and striped, flapping awnings; gaudy-fronted dancing-booths and shooting-galleries tailing away at the back into neglected weed-grown gardens. All these, with a sparse population, male and female, very much to match; while here and there some solitary shuttered dwelling standing back from the wide avenue in an inclosed plot of ground betrayed a countenance suggestive of disquieting adventures.

As Madame St. Leger finished making her, to Adrian, very touching confession, the automobile, quitting these doubtful purlieus—which, however, thanks to a charm of early summer foliage and generous breadth of sunshine, took on an air of jovial devil-may-care vagabondage, inspiriting rather than objectionable—headed eastward, along the boulevard skirting the grass-grown slopes and mounds of the dismantled fortifications, and drew up opposite the entrance to the *Parc de Montsouris*. Here, Adrian proposed they should alight and stroll in the tree-shaded alleys, as a relief from the dust and noise of the streets.

But once on her feet, Gabrielle discovered how very tired she still was, weak-kneed and tremulous to the point of gladly accepting the support of her companion's arm. This renewed contact, though of a comparatively perfunctory and unofficial character, proved by no means displeasing to Adrian. In truth it gave him such a lively sense of happiness, that to his dying day he will cherish a romantic affection for those remote and unfashionable pleasure-grounds

upon the southern heights. Happiness is really the simplest of God's creatures—easily gratified, large in charity, hospitable to all the minor poetry of life. Whence it came about that this critical, traveled, shrewd, and smart young gentleman had never, surely, beheld trees so green, flower-borders so radiant, walks so smooth and well-swept, statues so noble, cascades so musical, lakes so limpid and so truthfully mirroring the limpid heavens above. Even the rococo and slightly ridiculous reproduction of the Palace of the Bey of Tunis, now used as an observatory, which crowns the highest ground, its domes, cupolas, somberly painted mural surfaces, peacock-blue encaustic tiles, and rows of horseshoe-headed Moorish arches—looking in its modern Western surroundings about as congruous as a camel in a cabbage-patch—presented itself to his happy eyes with all the allurements of some genii-and-gem-built palace from out the immortal pages of the *Arabian Nights*. Gabrielle St. Leger's hand rested upon his arm, her feet kept step with his feet. The folds of her dainty gown swept lightly against him as he walked. Past and future fell out of the reckoning. Nothing obtained save the beatified present, while his heart and his senses were, at once, sharply hungry and exquisitely at peace.

The grounds were practically deserted. Only a few employees from the observatory, blue-habited gardeners, a batch of Cook's tourists—English and American—weary with sight-seeing, and some respectable French fathers of families, imparting, *al fresco*, instruction in local natural science, topography and art, to their progeny, were at hand to greet the passing couple with starings, sympathetic, self-consicous, or envious, as the case might be. Among the first ranked the French fathers of families, who paused in frank admiration and interest.

"For was not the lady arrestingly elegant?—*Sapristi!* if ever a young man had luck! Yet, after all, why not? For he, too, repaid observation. Truly a handsome fellow, and of a type of male beauty eminently Gallic—refined yet virile; perfectly distinguished, moreover, in manner and in dress. She appeared languid. Well, what more easily comprehensible, since—a marriage of inclination, without doubt—"

Whereupon, in the intervals of anxiously retrieving some strayed all too adventurous Mimi or Toto, the fond parental being beheld, in prophetic vision, Adrian the Magnificent also shepherding a delicious little human flock.

"How did you know, or was it by chance that you came?" Gabrielle presently inquired.

And, in reply, Adrian explained that, the affairs of the Smyrthwaite inheritance being completed sooner than he anticipated, he had advanced his return—Ah! shade, accusing shade, of Joanna! But with *la belle Gabrielle's* hand resting confidingly upon his arm, he could hardly be expected to turn aside to appease that unhappy phantom.

"Unfortunately I missed the connection in London, and failed to catch the midday Channel boat. Consequently I only reached Paris early this morning. I had passed two practically sleepless nights"—again accusing shade of Joanna, sound of footsteps, and dragging of draperies upon the corridor outside his bedroom door!—"To my shame," he continued, "I made up for my broken rest to-day. It was already past three o'clock when I went to my office. I had omitted to warn my people there of my return. Picture then, *chère Madame*, my emotion when my secretary handed me a letter from our friend Miss Beauchamp!"

"So it was Anastasia," Madame St. Leger murmured; but whether resentfully or gratefully her hearer failed to determine.

"I flung myself into the automobile—and—*enfin*—you know the rest."

"Yes," she agreed, "I know the rest."

And, thereupon, she gave a little cry of astonishment.

For, turning the eastern side of the would-be Moorish palace and passing on to the terrace in front of it, the whole of Paris was disclosed to view outspread below along the valley of the Seine. In intermingling, finely gradated tones, blond and silver, the immense panorama presented itself; squares, gardens, monuments, world-famous streets and world-famous buildings seen in the splendid clarity of the sun-penetrated atmosphere, purple-stained here and there by the shadows of detached high-sailing clouds. Upon the opposite height, crowning Montmartre, the Church of the *Sacré Coeur* rose ivory-white, its dome and clock-tower seeming strangely adjacent to the vast blue arch of the summer sky; while, in the extreme distance both to right and left, beyond the precincts of the laughing city, a gray, angular grimness of outlying forts struck the vibrant and masculine note of the peril of war.

For quite a sensible period of time Gabrielle St. Leger gazed at the scene in silence. Then she took her hand from Adrian's arm and moved a step away. But he could not quarrel with this, since she put up her veil and looked frankly yet wistfully at him, a great sweetness in her charming face.

"Ah!" she said, stretching out her hand with a gesture of welcome to the noble view, "this is a thing to do one good, to renew one's courage, one's sanity and hope. I am grateful to you. It was both wise and kind of you to bring me here and show me this. By so doing you have washed my mind of dark and sinister impressions. You have made me once more in love with the goodness of God, in love with life. But come," she added, quickly, almost shyly, "I must ask you to take me home to the *Quai Malaquais*. I can meet my mother and child now without betraying emotion—without letting them suspect the grave and terrible trial through which I have passed."

And upon this speech Adrian Savage, being an astute and politic lover, offered no comment. He had gained so much to-day that he could afford to be patient, making no attempt to press his point. Restraining his natural impetuosity, he rested in the happiness of the present and spoke no word of love. Only his eyes, perhaps, gave him away just a little; and, undoubtedly, on the return journey in the merrily singing car he permitted himself to sit a little closer to *la belle Gabrielle* than on the journey out.

At the foot of the shining, waxed, wooden staircase within the doorway at the corner of the courtyard, where, backed by her bodyguard of spindly planes and poplars, the lichen-stained nymph still poured the contents of her tilted pitcher into the shell-shaped basin below, Adrian left Madame St. Leger.

"No, I will not come farther, *chère Madame et amie*," he said, his air at once gallant and tender, standing before her, hat in hand. "It will perhaps be easier, in face of the pious fraud you propose to practise upon Madame, your mother, that you should meet her alone."

He backed away. It was safer. Farewells are treacherous. All had been perfect so far. He would give himself no chance of occasion for regret.

"Mount the stairs slowly, though, dear Madame," he called after her, moved by sudden anxiety. "Remember your recent fatigue—they are steep."

Then, the beloved gray gown and floating gray veil having passed upward out of sight, he turned and went.

"And now for that poor, unhappy little devil of a Tadpole," he said.

CHAPTER V

DE PROFUNDIS

"Just now he is quieter. I have a hope that he sleeps. But, *per Bacco*, Monsieur, what a month, what a six weeks since I had the honor of speaking with you last! My poor master all the while going from bad to worse, becoming more exacting, more eccentric in his habits, showing tendencies toward cruelty quite foreign to his nature. And to-day, what a scene after you left! I had been on the alert all the afternoon, since he displayed signs of febrile excitement. I remained here, in the passage, not far from the door, prepared, notwithstanding his violent prohibition, to enter the studio should any sound of a disturbing character reach me. But his voice appeared calm. I trusted the visit of the Signora—ah, *Dio mio!* what charm, what divine grace!—was producing a beneficial effect, soothing and pacifying my poor master. Upon my honor, I declare to you it was only at the actual moment of my admitting you those heartrending cries for help arose. Then, afterward, pouring forth words which made even my ears tingle, hardened old reprobate—the saints forgive me!—though I am, he rushed upon the drawing of the Signora, which has been a glorious adornment of our studio for so long, tore it from the easel and reduced it to a thousand fragments, which—since I have not yet dared to remove them—Monsieur will still find scattered upon the carpet. This work of destruction had the effect of appeasing his fury. He flung himself among the pillows of the divan, and has remained there ever since in a silence which justifies the hope that he sleeps."

The spare, bright-eyed, velvet-spoken Giovanni folded his hands as in prayer.

"Monsieur will take command, he will intervene to help us? Otherwise a catastrophe may ensue, and the unrivaled genius of my poor master may be lost to the world."

As Adrian crossed the dusky studio in the now fading light René Dax moved among the cushions and raised himself on his elbow.

"*Mon vieux*, is that you?" he asked feebly. "They told me—they—it does not matter who—some one told me you had come back. I am glad, for I need attention. I apprehend some lesion of the brain. My memory plays me false. This causes inconveniences. Something here, at the base of my skull, seems to have given way, to have snapped. I think it would be well that I should leave Paris for a time, and take a cure of some description. It is not pretty"—he looked up at Adrian with a child-like candor wholly disarming—"no, very certainly it is a far from pretty request, but I shall be indebted to you if you will make it your business to discover a private hospital for the insane—a civilized one, mind you—where I can be accommodated with a comfortable suite of rooms. I have money enough. My illustrations to the *Contes Drolatiques* will pay for this agreeable little jaunt. But civilized, I repeat, where no objection will be made to receiving well-conducted domestic animals, since I shall require to take both Giovanni with me and Aristides the Just."

Adrian sat down upon the divan. His speech was somewhat thick and broken as he answered.

"Yes, *mon petit*. Rest content that I will do my very best to find you such a place as you want."

"And you will come often to visit me?"

"Indeed, I will come very constantly to visit you," Adrian said.

René Dax raised himself higher and looked long and searchingly at his friend from head to foot. The red lamp began to glow behind his somber eyes again.

“You do not possess one-tenth of my talent,” he declared; “but you possess ten times my physique. Therefore you will obtain. You will prosper. You will lie soft. From the most fastidious to the vilest all women are the same. The Moslems are right. Women have neither soul nor intellect, only bodies, bodies, bodies. All they want in a man is physique.”

His tone changed to a wheedling one. He crawled over the soft, black silk cushions and put his arm coaxingly about Adrian’s neck.

“See, *mon vieux*, see, be amiable! Do not loiter. Come at once. Let us search together diligently every corner, every nook. To recover it would fill me with rapture; and there is still time before the school-bell rings for class. Come. Help me to find my lost laughter,” he said.

And at that moment, with a startling emotion of hope and of relief, Adrian observed, for the first time, that the infamous drawings upon the walls had been painted out, leaving the whole, from floor to ceiling, white.

V
THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

CHAPTER I

SOME PASSAGES FROM JOANNA SMYRTHWAITE'S LOCKED BOOK

The drought was slow in breaking. Day after day ragged-headed thunder pillars boiled up along the southeastern horizon; and, drifting northward, inland, in portentous procession as the afternoon advanced, massed themselves as a mighty mountain range against the sulky blue of the upper sky. About their flanks, later, sheet lightning streaked and quivered, making the hot night unrestful, as with the winking of malevolent and monstrous eyes.

Owing to the lie of the land and the encircling trees, this aerial drama was not visible from the Tower House. But the atmospheric pressure, and nervous tension produced by it, very sensibly invaded the great woodland. The French window of Joanna Smyrthwaite's bedroom stood wide open on to the balcony. She had drawn an easy-chair close up to it, and, dressed in her white woolen *négligé*, sat there in the half-dark. She left the *négligé* unfastened at the neck, it being an unsuitably warm garment to wear on so hot a night. She was aware it caused her discomfort; despite which she wore it. The pristine freshness of it was passed. It was slightly soiled, and the knife-pleatings, losing their sharpness of edge, sagged irregularly in places, like the bellows of an old concertina. More than once Mrs. Isherwood had declared, "Miss Joanna ought to buy herself a new wrapper, or at any rate let this poor old object go to the cleaners'." But Joanna refused, almost angrily, to part with it even for a week. She gave no reason for her refusal, but locked the insulted garment away in a drawer of her wardrobe, whence she extracted it with jealous tenderness after Isherwood had left her at night. Then she wore it, if but for half an hour; and, wearing it, she brooded, fondling her right hand, which, upon two occasions, Adrian Savage had kissed.

At the opposite end of the lawn, in front of the tennis pavilion, figures sauntered to and fro and voices were raised in desultory talk. Amy Woodford giggled. The elder Busbridge boy whistled "Yip-i-addy," and, losing his breath, coughed. The odor of cigarettes mingled with that of the trumpet-honeysuckle and jasmine encircling the pillars of the veranda below the window. Joanna neither looked at nor listened to the others. Her eyes were fixed upon the circle of fir-trees, where the dense plumed darkness of their topmost branches met the only less dense darkness of the sky. And she brooded. Once she kissed the hand which Adrian Savage had kissed.

But the figures and voices came nearer. Amy Woodford, her Oxford undergraduate brother, and the two Busbridge boys were saying good-night. Their feet tapped and scraped on the quarries of the veranda. Somebody ran into a chair, toppled it over, gave a yelp, and the whole company laughed. These playful goings-on came between Joanna and her brooding. She rose impatiently, crossed the room to her bureau, lighted the candles, and sat down to write.

"*August 21, 190-*

"We are never alone. I try not to be irritable, but this constant entertaining wears me out. It is contrary to all the traditions of our home life. I cannot help thinking how strongly papa would have condemned it. Even mamma would have disapproved. I fear I am wanting in moral courage and firmness in not expressing disapproval more often myself; but Margaret always imputes wrong motives to me and inverts the meaning of that which I say. She cannot be brought to see that I object on principle, and accuses me of a selfish attempt to shirk exertion. She says I

am inhospitable and elusive. She even accuses me of being niggardly and grudging my share in the increased household expenditure. This is unjust, and I cannot help resenting it. Yesterday I remonstrated with her, and our discussion degenerated to a wrangle, which was painful and unbecoming. To-day she has avoided speaking to me unless positively obliged to do so. I feel I have failed in regard to Margaret, and that I ought to have kept up a higher standard since papa died and I became, virtually, the head of the house. Margaret is entirely occupied with amusement and with dress. This must be, in part, my fault, though dear mamma always feared frivolous inclinations in Margaret. It is all very trying. I doubt whether Marion Chase's influence is good for her. I am sure Mr. Challoner's is not. Marion is fairly well educated, but is without cultivated tastes. Mr. Challoner is not even well educated. They both flatter her and defer to her wishes far too much. Other people flatter her too, even serious persons, such as the Norbitons and Mrs. Paull. I do not think I am jealous of Margaret, but I will scrutinize my own feelings more closely upon this point.

"I am afraid the servants observe that she and I are not on happy terms. This worries me. I dread the household taking sides. Isherwood and Johnson, and, I believe, Smallbridge are quite faithful to me. So is Rossiter, though I cannot help attributing that mainly to her dislike of the increased work in the kitchen. But Margaret's new maid and her chauffeur—whose manner I consider much too familiar—create a fresh element in our establishment. They both are showy, and I mistrust the effect of their companionship upon the younger servants. I no longer really feel mistress in my own house. My position is rendered undignified. Sometimes I regret the old days at Highdene, or here, before papa's death. But that is weak of me, even hypocritical, since it is dread of responsibility rather than affection for the past which dictates the wish. I must school myself to indifference, and try more earnestly to rise superior to these worries. I must look forward rather than look back."

Joanna laid down her pen, held up her right hand, kissed the back of it just above the ridge of the knuckles, thrust it within the open neck of her *négligé* and, placing her left hand over it, pressed it against her meager bosom.

"I must look forward," she said half aloud. " 'Nothing is changed between us.' He told me so himself the night before he left. I must rest in that."

She got up and paced the length of the room for a while, repeating—"I must rest in that, must rest in that."

A sound of voices still rose from the garden, now a man's and a woman's in low and evidently intimate talk. Joanna stood still. The note of intimacy excited subconscious, unacknowledged envy within her. She did not distinguish, nor did she attempt to distinguish, the words said. The tones were enough. It got upon her nerves to hear a man and woman speak thus. A little longer and she felt she should be unable to bear it—she must command them to stop.

She went back to her bureau again. Here, at a distance from the window, the voices were less audible. She sat down and forced herself to write.

"This is the second dinner-party we have given, or, rather, which Margaret has given, within a week. I absented myself, pleading neuralgia, and remained up-stairs in the blue sitting-room. With the exception of Marion and Mr. Challoner, it was a boy-and-girl party. I do not feel at my ease in such company. I fail to see the point of their slang expressions and their jokes, and I do not understand the technical terms regarding games which they so constantly employ. No doubt my dining up-stairs will be a cause of offense, but I cannot help it. If Margaret invites her own friends here so often she must at least contrive sometimes to entertain them without my assistance. I will try to dismiss this subject from my mind. To dwell upon it only irritates me.

"I really needed to be alone to-night. I live stupidly, from day to day. I feel that I ought to have a more definite routine of reading and of self-culture. I ought to spend the present interval in educating myself more thoroughly for my future occupations and duties. I will draw up some general scheme of study. And I will keep my diary more regularly. I so seldom write now, yet I know it is good for me. Writing obliges me to be clear in my intentions and in my thought. I am self-indulgent and allow myself to be too indefinite and vague, to let my mind drift. Papa always warned me against that. He used to say no woman was ever a sufficiently close thinker. The inherent inferiority of the feminine intelligence was, he held, proved by this cardinal defect. I know my inclination has always been toward too great introspection, and I regret now that I have not striven more consistently after mental directness and grasp. I have been reading the *Révue de Deux Mondes* lately, feeling it a duty to acquaint myself with modern French literature. The luminous objectivity of the French mind impresses me very strongly—an objectivity which is neither superficial nor unduly materialistic. When listening to Adrian I was often struck by this quality—"

Joanna laid down her pen once more. She sat still, her hands resting upon the flat space of the desk on either side the blotting-pad, her head thrown back and her eyes closed. The voices in the garden had ceased, and the silence, save for the shutting of a door in a distant part of the house and the faint grinding of wheels and bell of a tram-car on the Barryport Road, was complete. For some minutes she remained in the same position, her body inert, her inward activity intense. At last she raised her hands as though in protest, and, bending down, fell to work upon her diary again with a smothered violence.

"I have resisted the temptation to write about it till now. I have been afraid of myself, afraid for myself. But to-night I feel differently. I feel a necessity to refer to it—to set it down in words, and to relieve myself of the burden of the 'thing unspoken.' On former occasions when I have been greatly harassed and troubled I have found alleviation in so doing.

"I want to make it quite clear to myself that I have never doubted consideration for me, a desire to spare me distress and agitation, dictated Adrian's silence regarding his sudden and unexpected departure. He knew how painful it would be to me to part with him, particularly after our conversation regarding Bibby. Seeing how overwrought I had been by that conversation, he wished to put no further strain upon me. I want to make it quite clear to myself that the letter he left for us with Smallbridge was all that good taste and courtesy demanded. Yet it hurt me. It hurts me still. He took pains to thank us for our hospitality and to express his pleasure in having helped us through all the business connected with our succession to papa's property. He said a number of kind and friendly things. Few persons could have written a more graceful or cousinly letter. I know all this. I entertain no doubt of

his sincerity. Still the letter did hurt me. Margaret appropriated it. It was addressed to her as well as to me, so, I suppose, she believed herself to have a right to take possession of it. And I am not sure I wished to keep it. I could not have put it with his other letters, since it only belonged to me in part. Yet I often wonder what Margaret has done with it—thrown it into the waste-paper basket most likely! And it is very dreadful to think any letter of his has been thrown away or burned. Just because it was only half mine I feel so bitterly about it. I am afraid I have allowed this bitterness to affect my attitude toward Margaret; but it is very painful that she should share, in any degree, the correspondence which is of such infinite value to me. I do accept the fact that he acted in good faith, without an idea how deeply so apparently simple a thing would wound me. I excuse him of the most remote wish to wound me. But I was, and am, wounded; and his letters since then—there are five of them—have failed to heal the wound.

"It is dreadful to write all this down; but it is far more dreadful to let it remain on my mind, corroding all my thought of him. Not that it really does so. In my agitation I overstate. 'Nothing is changed between us.' No, nothing, Adrian—believe me, nothing. Yet in those last five letters I do detect a change. They have not the playful frankness of the earlier ones. I detect effort in them. They are very interesting and very kind, I know; still there is something lacking which I can only describe as the personal note. They are written as a duty, they lack spontaneity. He tells me he has been detained in Paris, all the summer, by the illness—nervous breakdown—of a former schoolfellow. He tells me of his continued efforts to trace Bibby. But these are outside things, of which he might write to any acquaintance. I read and re-read these letters in the hope of discovering some word, some message, actual or implied, addressed to me as me, the woman he has so wonderfully chosen. But I do not find it, so the wound remains unhealed.

"Yet how ungrateful I am to complain! To do so shows me my own nature in a dreadful light—grasping, impatient, suspicious. Innumerable duties and occupations may so readily interfere to prevent his writing more frequently or more fully! Why cannot I trust him more? Is it not the very height of ingratitude thus to cavil and to doubt?"

Overcome by emotion, Joanna left the bureau and paced the room once more, her arms hanging straight at her sides, her hands plucking at the pleatings of her *négligé*. The heat seemed to her to have increased to an almost unbearable extent, notwithstanding which she clung to her woolen garment. Crossing to the washing-stand, she dipped a handkerchief in the water and, folding it into a bandage, held it across her forehead. She blew out the candles and, returning to the open window, sank into the easy-chair. The sky remained unclouded, but in the last hour had so thickened with thunder haze that it was difficult to distinguish the tree-tops from it. Joanna gazed fixedly at this hardly determinable line of junction. Presently she began to talk to herself in short, hurried sentences.

"I know I told him I would wait. I believed I had strength sufficient for entire submission. But I am weaker than I supposed. I despise myself for that weakness. But I cannot wait. He is my life. Without him I have no life—none that is coherent and progressive. My loneliness and emptiness, apart from my relation to him, are dreadful. And lately jealousy has grown shockingly upon me. I think of nothing else. I am jealous of every person whom he sees, of every object which he touches, of his literary work because it interests him—jealous of the old schoolfellow whom he is nursing; jealous of Bibby, for whom he searches; jealous of the very air he breathes and ground on which he treads. All these come between him and me, stealing

from me that which should be mine, since they are close to him and engage his attention and thought."

Joanna stopped, breathless, and, closing her eyes, lay back in the chair, while drops oozing from the wet bandage trickled downward and dripped upon her thin neck and breast.

"Now at last I am honest with myself," she whispered. "I have spoken the truth—the hateful truth, since it lays bare to me the inner meanness of my own nature. I no longer palliate my own repulsive qualities or attempt to excuse myself to myself. I admit my many faults. I call them by their real names. Now, possibly, I shall become calmer and more resigned. The completeness of my faith in him will come back. And then, some day in the future, when I tell him how I repent of my suspicions and rebellious doubts, he will forgive me and help me to eradicate my faults and make me more worthy of the wonderful gift of his love."

Then she lay still, exhausted by her paroxysm of self-accusation.

"Here you are at last! You do take an unconscionably long time saying good-night! I nearly gave up and went indoors to bed."

This chaffingly, from the terrace outside the veranda, in Marion Chase's hearty barytone.

"I imagine people in our situation usually have a good deal to say to each other."

Rustlings of silk and creakings followed, occasioned by the descent of a well-cushioned feminine body into a wicker chair.

"And pray, how far did you go with him?" still chaffingly.

"Only to the end of the carriage-drive, and then into the road for a minute to see the lightning. Really, it's too odd—quite creepy. Looking toward the County Gates, the sky seems to open and shut like the lid of a box."

"I shouldn't mind its opening wider and giving us some rain. It's too stuffy for words to-night. And then he proceeded to walk back with you, I suppose?"

"No, he didn't, because I dismissed him. I can be firm when I choose, you know; and I am sure it is wisest to begin as I mean to go on. I intend to be my own mistress—"

"And his master?"

"Doesn't that follow as a matter of course—a 'necessary corollary,' as Joanna would say? Too, I didn't want to run the risk of meeting any of the servants coming in. He is liable to be a little demonstrative when we are alone, don't you know."

"Margaret!"

"Well, why not? I take demonstrations quite calmly so long as they are made in private. It would be silly to do otherwise. They're just, of course, part of the—"

"Whole show?"

"Yes, if you like to be vulgar, Marion, and quote the Busbridge boys—I limit my quotations to Joanna—of the whole show."

After a short pause.

"Maggie, did you settle any dates to-night? I thought he seemed preoccupied, as if he meant business of some sort. You don't mind my asking?"

"Not in the least. He says he is bothered because his position is an equivocal one."

"So it is." This very sensibly from Marion Chase. "People begin to think you are simply mean to keep him dangling."

"Do they? How amusing!"

"Not for him, poor beast." And both young women laughed.

"He is wild to have the announcement made at once."

"In the papers, do you mean?"

"Yes, The Times and Morning Post, of course, and two local ones. He suggests the Stourmouth and Marychurch Chronicle and the Barryport Gazette. I should have thought the Courier ranked higher, but he says it's not nearly so widely read as the Chronicle. Then we ought to put it in a Yorkshire paper as well, I think."

"How awfully thrilling!"

At first to Joanna, at the open window above, still laboring with the aftermath of her gloomy outbreaks of passion, this conversation had been but as a chirping of birds or squeaking of bats. Such slipshod telegraphic chatterings between the two young ladies, obnoxious alike to her taste and scholarship, were her daily portion. Joanna had scornfully trained herself to ignore them. She could not prevent their assailing her ears; but she could, and as a rule did, successfully prevent their reaching her understanding.

To-night, however, strained and on edge as she was, her will proved incapable of prolonged effort, and indifference was unsustainable. Gradually the manner of the speakers and significance of that which they said mastered her unwilling attention. Surprise followed on surprise. She knew how the two friends talked in her presence. Was this how they talked in her absence, disclosing—especially in the case of her sister—an attitude of mind, let alone definite purposes and actions, of which she had been in total ignorance? And—to carry the question a step farther—did this connote corresponding ignorance on her part in other directions? Was she, Joanna, living in worlds very much unrealized, where all manner of things of primary importance remained unknown to or misinterpreted by her?

The thought opened up vistas packed with agitation and alarm. Self-defense admits few scruples; and it appeared to poor Joanna just then that every man's hand was against her. Living in the midst of deceptions, what weapon except deceit—and in this case deceit was tacit only—remained to her? Her sense of honor, and along with it the self-respect in which the roots of honor are set, went overboard. Instead of leaving the window and refusing to hear more, Joanna stayed. A morbid desire to know, to learn all that which was being kept from her, to get at the truth of these lives lived so close to her own, to get at the truth of their opinion of her, seized upon her.

She took the moist handkerchief off her forehead, and, slipping noiselessly out of her chair, knelt upon the rug laid along the inner side of the window-sill, craning her neck forward so that no word of the conversation might escape her.

"Personally, as I told him, I was in no particular hurry."

"Pleasant news for him!" Marion Chase returned.

"But I'm not. There are several good reasons for waiting—our mourning for one thing. And then the question of a house. Heatherleigh's not large enough, or smart enough—all very well for a bachelor establishment, I dare say. What I should like is this house; but I doubt whether Joanna would give it up, though it really is altogether too extensive a place for her alone. I don't mean that she could not afford to keep it up. She could afford to; but it would be ostentatious, ridiculously out of proportion for an unmarried woman."

Joanna's indignation nearly flamed into speech. She moved impatiently, causing the chair behind her to scrape on its casters.

"What was that?" from Marion Chase.

"A fir-cone falling probably. It's hotter than ever.—No, I haven't the smallest intention of not going through with this business; but I'm in no hurry. Things are quite amusing as they are."

"I believe you enjoy taking people in, you wicked old thing."

"If keeping quiet about my own affairs is taking people in, I suppose I do enjoy it. And then, of course, you see I am bound to tell Joanna first. There's no help for that—"

"Magsie, you know her windows are open? You don't think we can be overheard?"

"No; it's all right. I looked when I came back. There's no light. Either she's still in the blue sitting-room or she's gone to bed. Too, I must do her the justice to say Joanna is not the sort of person who listens. She would consider it wrong."

Joanna drew back and was on the point of rising. Again the chair scraped.

"And then she would never condescend to listen to anything I might happen to be saying. There is a compensating freedom in being beneath notice!"

Joanna remained on her knees at the open window.

"I own I most cordially dislike the idea of telling her," Margaret continued. "I know she will be unreasonable and say things which will lead to all sorts of disputes and disagreeables between us."

"Oh! but she must know perfectly well already, only she means to make you speak first," the other returned. "It's too absurd to suppose she hasn't spotted what's been going on. Why, his state of mind has been patent for ages. She can't be off seeing."

"I don't believe for a single moment she does see. She's so frightfully self-absorbed and self-occupied. You know yourself, Marion, how extraordinarily obtuse she can be. She lives in the most hopeless state of dream—"

Joanna swayed a little as she knelt and laid hold of the folds of the striped tabaret window-curtain for support.

"I know she always has been inclined to dream; but recently it has grown upon her. For me to say anything to her about it is worse than useless. She only sits upon me, and then we 'have words,' as Isherwood says. At bottom Joanna is awfully obstinate. In many ways she reminds me very much of papa; only, being a woman, unfortunately one can't get round her as one could round him. People are beginning to notice what an odd, moody state she is in. Mrs. Norbiton said something about it when they dined here on Monday. She said Joanna seemed so absent-minded, and asked whether I thought she wasn't well. And Colonel Haig mentioned it to me the afternoon we had tea with him at the golf club. That really led to his telling me what he had heard in Paris."

"Telling you—oh, I remember! What he had heard about Mr. Savage?" Marion Chase remarked.

Joanna got on to her feet, went out on to the balcony, and hung over the red balustrade into the hot, thick darkness.

"Margaret!" she called. "Margaret, I must speak to you. Please come to my room. It is something urgent. Come at once."

CHAPTER II

RECORDING A SISTERLY EFFORT TO LET IN LIGHT

When Margaret Smyrthwaite entered her sister's bedchamber she brought the atmosphere of a perfumer's shop along with her. Under the elder and sterner reign scent-sprays and scent-caskets were unknown at the Tower House, Montagu Smyrthwaite holding such adjuncts to the feminine toilet in hardly less abhorrence than powder or paint itself. A modest whiff of aromatic vinegar or of eau-de-Cologne touched the high-water mark of permitted indulgence. But in the use of perfumes, as in other matters, Margaret—so Mrs. Isherwood put it—"had broke out sadly since the poor old gentleman went." The intellectual streak common to the Smyrthwaite family had from the first been absent in the young lady's composition; while the morbid streak, also common in the family, was now cauterized, if not actually eliminated, by the sunshine of her seven thousand a year. A North-country grit, a rather foxy astuteness and a toughness of fiber—also inherited—remained, however, very much to the fore in her, with the result that she would travel—was, indeed, already traveling—the grand trunk road of modern life without hesitation, or apology, or any of those anxious questionings of why, wherefrom, and whither which beset persons of nobler spiritual caliber.

In the past few months she had shed the last uncertainties of girlhood. She had filled out and was in act of blossoming into that which gentlemen of the Challoner order, in moments of expansion, not without a cocking of the eye and moistening of the lip, are tempted to describe as a "d—d fine woman." Now the light of the candle she carried showed the rounded smoothness of her handsome neck and arms, through the transparent yoke and sleeves of her black evening blouse, touched the folds and curls of bright auburn hair upon her forehead, and brought the hard bright blue of her eyes into conspicuous evidence. A deficiency of eyelash and eyebrow caused her permanent vexation. This defect she intended to remedy—some day. Not just at present, however, as both Joanna and Isherwood were too loyally wedded to the aromatic vinegar and eau-de-Cologne régime for such facial reconstructions to pass without prejudiced and aggravating comment.

Advancing up the room, all of a piece and somewhat solid in tread, she offered a notable contrast to Joanna, who awaited her palpitating and angular, ravaged by agonies and aspirations, indignantly trembling within the sagged knife-pleatings of her soiled white *négligé*. The rough copy and *édition de luxe*, as Adrian had dubbed them, just then very forcibly presented their likeness and unlikeness; yet, possibly, to a discerning eye, the rough copy, though superficially so conspicuously lacking in charm, might commend itself as the essentially nobler of these two human documents.

"What is the matter, Joanna?" the *édition de luxe* inquired. "Why couldn't you send Isherwood to say you wanted to speak to me? It's fortunate Marion's and my nerves are steady, for your calling out gave us both an awful start."

"I did listen," the other returned, in a breathlessness of strong emotion. "I was sitting at the window in the dark when you began talking. At first I paid no heed; but, as your conversation went on, I found it bore reference to matters which you are keeping from me and with which I ought to be acquainted. I found it concerned me—myself. I offer no apology. I acted in self-protection. I listened deliberately."

Margaret laid the magazines and illustrated fashion papers, she carried under her arm, upon the slab of the open bureau. She set down her flat candlestick beside them, thus creating a triad of lighted candles—unlucky omen!

"Then, Nannie," she said, coolly, "you did something which was not at all nice."

The word stung Joanna by its grotesque inadequacy either to the depth of her sufferings or of her transgression against the laws of honor. To range at the tragic level, in relation to both, would have afforded her consolation and support. Margaret denied such consolation by taking her own stand squarely upon the conventional and commonplace. Joanna's transgression began to show merely vulgar. This compelled her to descend from tragic heights.

"Am I to understand that you really are engaged to Mr. Challoner?" she therefore asked, without further preamble.

"If you listened you must have gathered as much, I imagine," Margaret said.

"I did—I did, but I refused to believe it. I thought I must be mistaken. I was unprepared for such news. It came to me as such a shock, such a distressing surprise."

"Really, it's quite your own fault, Joanna," Margaret returned. "What did you suppose he'd been coming here for constantly?"

"Not for that—"

"Thank you!" Margaret said.

"You know I have always objected to his being here so much. I tried to prevent it. I feared it might lead to gossip. I felt you did not consider that seriously enough. It is so dreadful that what we do or say should be commented upon. Until the business connected with the property was settled I recognized a necessity for Mr. Challoner's frequent visits, but not since then, not for the last three months. I am quite willing to admit his good points. I quite believe he has served us faithfully in business.—Pray do not suppose I underrate his services in that respect. But I never supposed he could presume to propose to you, Margaret."

"I don't see anything presumptuous in his proposing. He admires me very much. Is it such an unheard-of thing that he should wish me to marry him?"

"No—no—but that you should give him encouragement.—For you must have encouraged him—"

"And"—with disconcerting composure from the *édition de luxe*—"why not?"

Joanna began to pace the room restlessly in her trailing draperies.

"Because—because"—she said—"your own instinct must tell you what an unsuitable marriage this would be for you—for our parents' daughter, for my sister. I don't want to be selfish, Margaret, but I have a right to consider my own future to some extent; and Mr. Challoner—I dislike to seem to deprecate him—it is invidious to do so—indeed, it is intensely distasteful to me to point out his peculiarities—but when I think of him as a brother-in-law—his antecedents, his standard of manners and conversation strike me as so different to those to which we have always been accustomed. I cannot avoid seeing this. It is so very palpable. Others must see it too—members of our family, I mean, with whom we are, or may in the future be, intimately associated."

In her excitement clearness of statement failed somewhat. Margaret stood listening, calmly obstinate, her head a little bent, while she straightened the magazines and picture papers lying on the slab of the bureau with her finger-tips.

"I didn't for one moment imagine you would be pleased at my engagement—that's why I have not told you sooner. I was sure you'd be disagreeable about it. And you are disagreeable, Joanna, very disagreeable indeed. Like most people who plume themselves on being very high-minded, you end by being very vulgar-minded and worldly. I quite expected this tone from you; and so I put off telling you as long as possible. Even now, you must remember, you

have surprised my confidence. I have not given it voluntarily. Useless discussions, such as this, bore me."

"Useless?" Joanna interrupted.

"Quite useless, unless I happen to change my mind, which I shall not do. I have considered things all round. I have talked everything over with Marion. You must make what you like of it, Joanna; but I am going to marry Challoner."

The scriptural Christian name annoyed her as suggesting possibilities of humorous retrospect. The "mister" under existing romantic circumstances savored of underbred, middle-class ceremony. So she struck for the surname, pure and simple, thereby conferring, in some sort, the noble conciseness of a title upon her admirer.

"I don't share your very exalted opinions of our position and importance," she continued. "Papa was a successful Yorkshire mill owner. Challoner is the head of a firm of successful South-country solicitors. You talk of his antecedents. His father was a very enterprising man, who built up the business here which he has carried on and developed. Everybody in this part of England knows who Challoner, Greatrex & Pewsey are. The firm's reputation is above suspicion. They opened a branch office four years ago at Southampton, and one last year at Weymouth. Really, I can't see what you have to object to on the score of position, Joanna? Andrew Merriman's grandfather was only a mill-hand."

"You need not have alluded to that," the other cried, sharply. Then, fighting for self-control, she added, "You know quite well it is a marriage you would never have thought of making while papa was living."

"And you know equally well, Nannie, it was utterly hopeless to think of any marriage whatever when papa was alive. We hardly ever saw a man. Papa snubbed every one who came near us. No one dared propose, even if they wished to do so. Remember all the Andrew Merriman business?"

"Pray don't refer to that again," Joanna said.

"I only wanted to give you an instance—Nannie, would you mind sitting down? It makes me so dreadfully hot to watch you roaming about in that way. We could talk ever so much better if you would only keep still.—And there is a great deal which has to be talked over some time. As we have begun to-night, we may as well go on and get through with it. The heat makes me fidgety. I'm not inclined to go to bed."

Thus admonished, Joanna sank into the easy-chair once more. She doubled herself together, working her hands nervously, ball-and-socket fashion, in her lap. The perception that this was a new Margaret, a Margaret wholly unreckoned with, grew upon her. And along with that perception an apprehension of fronting things unknown yet of vital significance, things which, when known, must inevitably color all her future outlook, grew upon her likewise. As yet the screen of ignorance, dense though impalpable as the dense thunder-thickened sky there outside, interposed between her and those fateful things veiling them. But Margaret, the new, composed, practical, highly perfumed Margaret, was in act of drawing that screen aside. Then what would she, Joanna, see? What concourse of cruel verities lurked behind, waiting to jump on her?—Asking herself this, she shivered, notwithstanding the heat of the atmosphere and of her woolen gown, with premonition of coming chill—chill of loneliness, chill of disaster, of which such loneliness was at once the bitter flower and the root.

Her sister had followed her to the window, and stood just within it, nonchalant and comely, fanning herself with a little fan hanging by a ribbon from her waistband. The silver

spangles upon the black gauze sparkled sharply in the candle-light, and the ebony sticks ticked as she waved it to and fro.

"I do so wish you wouldn't make a tragedy of all this, Nannie," she said. "But of course I knew you would, because you always think it your duty to get into a wild state of mind over everything I say or do. It would be so much more comfortable for both of us if you could get it into your head once and for all that you're not responsible for me in any way. We are equals. We're the same age—you always seem to forget that—and I'm quite as competent to manage my affairs as you are to manage yours. You have no authority over me of any description, legal or moral, none whatsoever, you know."

"I am only too well aware that I have failed to influence you, Margaret," Joanna returned, while waves of scented air, set in motion by the black and silver fan, played upon her face. "I had been thinking of that to-night, before I overheard your and Marion's conversation. I had been reproaching myself. I know we are the same age; but our dispositions are different, and I have always occupied an elder sister's position toward you. It is very distressing to me to realize how entirely I have failed to influence you. This contemplated marriage of yours gives the measure of my non-success."

"Oh! dear me! Influence—failure—really, you know, Nannie, you are most awfully provoking!" the other exclaimed. "I don't want to lose my temper and be cross, but I am so frightfully sick of this whole responsibility mania. It's been the bugbear of our lives ever since we were children. Papa and mamma sacrificed themselves and sacrificed us to it, with the result that we've always been in an unnatural attitude, like dogs trying to walk on their hind legs."

"Margaret, Margaret!" Joanna protested, scandalized by the filial profanity of the suggested picture.

"So we have, Nannie. And in what has this everlasting preaching of responsibility ended? Why, simply in making papa believe he was doing right by being rude and arrogant and dreadfully disagreeable over trifles. In making mamma a hopeless invalid. In ruining Bibby, body and soul, making him untruthful and dishonest, and inclined to do all sorts of horrid, ungentlemanly things. Hush? No, I am not going to hush, Joanna. You asked me to come here, and you asked me a question. Now you really must listen till I have said all I have to say in answer. I want to get it over. It's far too unpleasant to go through twice. And this mania about responsibility has been disastrous for you too—you know that perfectly well. It has spoiled your life by keeping you in a perpetual state of fuss and worry, and of dissatisfaction with your own conduct and everybody else's. As for me, it made me hysterical and fretful, and deceitful too. How could one help being deceitful when one was always dodging some silly trumped-up fault-finding or bother? I believe it would have broken up my nerves altogether if it had gone on much longer. And what on earth does it all mean? What were we responsible for? Who were we responsible to?" she went on contemptuously. "I don't know. And I don't believe you know either, Joanna, if you would only use your common-sense and give up worshiping words and phrases. The whole thing is nonsense, and rather lying nonsense—just a pretending to oneself that one is better and cleverer than other people. When you come to think of it, this craze for superiority is so frightfully conceited! For who cares, or ever has cared, whether we Smyrthwaites were intellectual, and high-minded, and cultured, and well-read, and all the rest of it, or not? In my opinion the system on which our parents brought us up, and on which their parents brought them up, is nothing but an excuse for self-adulation and pharisaism. I am sick to death of the whole thing, and I mean to break away from it. And

the simplest way to do so is to marry Challoner. He's about as far away from it all as anybody well can be—just a modern, practical man, who cares for real things, not for advanced thought, and reform, and political economy, and questions of morals, and so on. He isn't a bit intellectual. He only reads the newspapers, or an occasional novel in the train when he's traveling, I am thankful to say. And, I am awfully glad he belongs to the Church of England, for I mean to break with the Unitarian Connection, Joanna. I don't care about doctrine one way or another; but I can see how narrow-minded and exclusive it makes people when they belong to a small sect. Unitarians are always so frightfully pleased with themselves because they believe less than other people. They're always living up to their own cleverness in not believing; and it does make them awfully hind-leggy and boring.—And then, of course, being a Nonconformist cuts one out of a lot. Socially it is no end of a disadvantage to one. It didn't signify so much in the North, but here it has stood horridly in our way. Lots of nice people would have called on us when we first came if we hadn't been dissenters. And, please understand, I mean to know everybody now and be popular. I should enjoy giving away prizes and opening bazaars, and entertaining on a big scale, and taking part in all that goes on here. It would amuse me. I can give large subscriptions, and I mean to give them. As I say, I intend to be popular and to be talked about. I intend to make myself a power in the place. And then, Joanna, there's something more—I dare say you'll think it necessary to be scandalized—but there's this—"

She stopped fanning herself, and looked out into the hot darkness, smiling, a certain luster upon her smooth skin and a fullness about her bosom and her lips. Her voice took on richer tones when she spoke.

"I want to marry, and I mean to marry. I am nine and twenty, and I'm tired of not knowing exactly what marriage is. So I'm not going to wait, and hawk myself and my fortune about on the chance of a smarter match. I have decided to be sensible and make the best of what I have—namely, Challoner. I don't pretend he is perfect. I take him as he stands. After all, he is only just forty and he is in excellent health. I care about that, for I dislike sickly people, especially men. They're always horridly selfish and fanciful. Either they oughtn't to marry at all or ought to marry hospital nurses.—Then Challoner is making a good income. We've talked quite frankly over the money question. And then—then—"

For the first time she showed signs of slight embarrassment, laughing a little, pursing up her lips and fanning herself again lightly.

"Then," she repeated, "he is desperately in love with me, and I enjoy that. I want more of it. It interests and amuses me. It is exciting to find one can twist a great, hard-headed fellow like Challoner round one's little finger; make him go hot and cold, grow nervous and all of a tremor just by a word or a look. He is like so much dough in my hands. I can shape him as I like. There's nothing he wouldn't do to please me. Oh! yes, he is desperately in love with me!"

This drawing back of the interposing screen and exhibition of the Smyrthwaite tradition and system, stripped to the skin, stripped, indeed, to an almost primordial nothingness, had been richly distressing to poor Joanna. For was not she intrinsically the product and exponent of the said tradition and system? Did it not stand for the loom upon which the whole pattern of her character and conduct was woven? In thus stripping the system, she was painfully conscious that Margaret stripped her also to a like miserable nakedness and nothingness. For, admitting the laws which she had been brought up to reverence, and to obey which she had trained herself with such unsparing diligence, were nugatory, what remained to her for guidance or inspiration? Admitting her strenuously acquired mental attitude and habit to be

but senseless posturing, as of dancing dogs, how deplorably she had wasted herself upon that which profiteth not! If the formative processes of her education and culture represented nothing better than laborious subscription to exploded fallacy, must she not make a return, with all possible speed, upon whatever remnant of unalloyed instinct and spontaneous purpose might still be left in her? But how to make such a return? How to reform, to recreate, her attitude and outlook?

These questions assailed Joanna, bewildering alike in their multiplicity and intricacy. The wheels of her over-taxed brain whizzed and whirred. For the curse of the system-ridden, of the pedant, of the doctrinaire, is loss of clear-seeing simplicity, of initiative, of that power of direct and unaided action which is the reward of simplicity. Stripped of encompassing precept and precedent, deprived of sustaining prejudice, Joanna found herself naked and helpless indeed. She ran wildly in search of fresh precept and precedent in which to clothe herself. And found them, after a fashion normal and natural enough had they happened to be grounded in fact instead of in most pitiful illusion.

For as, distressedly watching her sister's rather cynical exposure of the family tradition, she asked herself—in face of the said exposure—what to her, personally, remained, she answered that Adrian Savage remained. And thereupon proceeded with all the intensity and pent-up passion of her morbidly introspective nature to fling herself upon the thought of that delightful young man and his matrimonial intentions. Hounding out doubts, furiously repressing misgivings, she grappled herself to belief in Adrian with hooks of iron, chained herself to it with links of steel, drank from the well of splendid promise which it offered to the verge of inebriety. In him she hailed her savior. Adrian would make good the wasted years. Adrian would teach her where she had been mistaken, and where her intelligence had gone astray. Adrian would instruct and counsel her, would supply her with a rule of living at once just and distinguished. Adrian would be gentle to her errors—had he not shown himself so already on more than one occasion?—would be sympathetic, playful and charming even in merited rebuke. She heard his voice once again. Saw him, in his habit as he lived, gallant, courteous, eager yet debonair; and seeing, her poor heart spilled itself upon the ground like water at his conquering feet.

Joanna could sit still no longer. Her agitation was too vital, too overmastering. She left the chair by the window and began to roam to and fro, her hands plucking at the pleatings of her dress, her pale, prominent eyes staring fixedly, her lips parted, her expression rapt.

" 'Because thou art more noble and like a king,' " she quoted, silently, turning to the sonnets from the Portuguese for adequate expression of her emotion. " 'Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling thy purple round me.' "

The consequence of all of which was that she paid scant attention to the concluding portion of her sister's comprehensive argument in favor of her projected espousal of Joseph Challoner, and only awoke from the state of trance induced by her access of Adrian-worship when the repetition of Margaret's assertion of the violent character of Challoner's affection and the slightly ambiguous laugh following that assertion struck her ear. Then she turned upon the speaker with the righteous wrath of one who hears sacred words put to unworthy uses.

"Desperately in love?" she said harshly. "And do you intend me to understand, Margaret, that you are desperately in love with Mr. Challoner in return?"

"Oh dear, no!" the lady addressed replied calmly enough. "Though if I were, I see no occasion for your scolding me about it, Nannie.—What does make you so restless and cross to-night? However, if you're determined to be uncomfortable, I'm not—so I shall sit down

here in your chair. Did you see the lightning then? No, I'm not the least silly about Challoner; but then I should be very sorry to be silly about any man. I don't think it dignified for a woman to be in a wild state of mind about her *fiancé*. It's not nice. I like Challoner well enough to marry him, and well enough not to mind his making love to me. That's quite sufficient, I think."

Jealous curiosity pricked Joanna. She stopped in her agitated walk and stood stretching out her right hand and gazing abstractedly at it.

"What—what precisely do you mean when you speak of his making love to you, Margaret?" she said, in a thin, urgent whisper.

"Really, for a person who plumes herself upon being particularly refined you do say the most singular things, Joanna!" the other exclaimed, laughing. "You can hardly expect me to go into details. Making love is making love."

"Kissing your hand—do you mean?" Joanna gasped, in awestruck accents, a dry sob rising in her throat.

"One's hand? Why, anybody might kiss one's hand. Challoner's proceedings, I'm afraid, are considerably more unrestrained than that. But I positively can't go into details. How extraordinary you are, Nannie! Doesn't it occur to you there are questions which one doesn't ask?"

Streaks of pain shot across the back of Joanna's right hand, as though it were struck again and again with a rod. Moaning, just audibly, she thrust it within the open bosom of her white *négligé*, and laid her left hand upon it, fondling it as one striving to soothe some sorely wounded creature.

Margaret leaned back in the easy-chair, fingering her little fan, a sleekness, a suggestion of almost animal content in her expression and attitude.

"No, really I can't explain any further," she said, laughing a little. "I'm quite hot enough as it is, and refuse to make myself any hotter. You must wait till somebody makes love to you, I'm afraid, Nannie, if you want to know exactly what the process consists in. An object-lesson would be necessary, and I am hardly equal to supplying that."

Joanna's roamings had taken her as far as the door leading on to the gallery. She waited, leaning against it. The back of Margaret's chair was toward her, so that she was safe from observation. For this she was not sorry, as the pain in her hand was acute, particularly upon the spot where Adrian's lips had once touched it. There it throbbed and smarted, as though a live coal were pressing into the flesh. Her face was drawn with suffering. She dreaded to have her sister ask what ailed her. But that young lady's thoughts were quite otherwise engaged. She spoke presently, over her shoulder. Her voice sounded curiously cozy.

"This evening, when he said good-by to me, Challoner lifted me right off my feet when he was kissing me. He had never done so before. I liked it. It showed how strong he is. I felt a wee bit nervous, but I enjoyed it too. I revel in his strength. My ribs ache still.—There, Nannie, is that little sample of love-making illuminating enough?"

And, leaning against the polished surface of the door, Joanna shivered, nursing and fondling her burning hand.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH JOANNA EMBRACES A PHANTOM BLISS

The obscure psychological relation existing between twins necessarily produces either peculiar sympathy or peculiar opposition of tastes and sentiment. The record of these twin sisters was of the discordant sort. Unspoken rivalry and jealousy had divided them. Unconsciously, yet unremittingly, they had struggled for pre-eminence. At the present moment, in Joanna's case these feelings combined to produce a sensation approaching active hatred. As she leaned shivering against her bedroom door, in the oppressive warmth of the summer night, all her petty griefs and grudges against her more attractive and popular sister complained in chorus. As a child Margaret had been pretty and taking. At school, though lazy and by no means clever, she had been petted and admired. Such affection as Montagu Smyrthwaite was capable of displaying he had displayed toward her. "Margaret was sensitive, Margaret was delicate"—which meant that Margaret knew just when to cry loud enough to excite pity; just when to announce tiredness or a headache, so as to escape unwelcome exertion. She had, in short, reduced the practice of selfishness—so Joanna thought—to a fine art.

And now, finally, to-night, not timidly with disarming apology, but with flaunting assurance, Margaret dared to infringe her—Joanna's—copyright in the wonder-story of a man's love, thereby capping the climax of offense. Her transcript of the said story might be of the grosser sort; yet on that very account it showed the more convincing. No misgivings, no agonized suspense, no tremulously anxious reading between the lines, were demanded. It was printed in large type, and in language coarsely vigorous as Joseph Challoner himself! Morally it repelled Joanna, although inflaming her imagination with vague drivings of desire. Her whole poor being, indeed, was swept by conflicting and but half-comprehended passions, from amid the tempest of which this one thing declared itself in a rising scale of furious insistence—namely, that Margaret should not once again best her; that no marriage Margaret might elect to make should endanger her own marriage with Adrian Savage; that by some means, any means fair or foul, Margaret must be prevented tasting the fullness of man's love—never mind how poor an edition of love this might be, how unpoetic, bow vulgar—as long as she, Joanna, was denied love's fullness. Yet so deeply were tradition and system ingrained in her that, even at this pass, she paid homage to their ruling, since instead of making a direct attack, and owning anger as the cause of it, she tricked herself with a fiction of moral obligation.

"Margaret," she began presently from her station at the door, speaking with such self-command as she could muster, "I dislike alluding to the subject very much. No doubt you will be annoyed and will accuse me of interference; still there is something I feel I ought to say to you. If I do not say it now, there may not be a suitable opportunity later."

"Then pray say it now. As I have told you, I want to get the whole thing thoroughly thrashed out to-night, so that we may avoid odious discussions in the future. What is it, Joanna?"

"I can't help observing that it is only since papa's death Mr. Challoner has paid you so much attention. Before then—"

Margaret rose and faced round upon the speaker. Her manner remained composed, but her blue eyes held the light of battle.

"You mean it is not me, but my fortune, Challoner is in love with? I quite expected you would tell me that, Joanna, sooner or later; but I am bound to say it is not a very elegant compliment either to him or to me."

"I did not intend to bring such an accusation against him," Joanna protested. "It would be very dreadful to suppose any one's affection, any one's choice, could be seriously influenced by the fact we have money."

"I'm afraid my views are less romantic than yours. It seems to me quite natural money should prove an attraction—particularly in cases where other attractions are rather wanting."

For some reason Joanna felt the stroke of a rod across her hand again. The pain excited her. She came forward a step or two.

"You do not give me time to explain myself, Margaret. Before papa's death Mr. Challoner's name was very freely associated with that of Mrs. Spencer. Both you and Marion Chase spoke of an engagement between them as certain. Others spoke of it also. The probability of a marriage was accepted. I cannot forget this."

Margaret laughed.

"Really, it's too funny that you of all people should champion wretched little Mrs. Spencer! Why, Joanna, you invariably intimated she was quite beneath your notice, and have lost no opportunity of snubbing her. I've had to be nice, more than once, simply because I felt so awfully ashamed of your rudeness to her."

"I do not like her. She is unladylike. Still I think Mr. Challoner's change of attitude requires explanation."

"Do you?" Margaret retorted. "Here is the explanation then. Simply that Challoner is too kind-hearted to save himself at the expense of a woman, even when she has treated him badly. He told me all about her months ago. He felt I had better hear it from him, but he did his best to excuse her. He showed wonderfully nice feeling about it all. I was not prepared for his being so scrupulous, and it made me admire him. For she is the sort of person who spends her time in extracting money and presents from every man she can get hold of. Challoner admits he was taken in by her at first, and was foolishly weak with her. She pretended to be almost penniless, and worked upon his feelings so much that he let her live in that house of his in Silver Chine Road, rent free, for nearly two years. And when her demands became too extortionate, and she persecuted him so disgracefully that he was compelled in self-defense to get rid of her, he found her another house at Marychurch, and, I believe, pays half the rent of it for her still. I know he gave her sister, Beattie Stacey—who is engaged to an officer on one of the Cape liners—a beautifully fitted traveling-bag as a wedding present. Marion saw it only last week.—Those are the facts, Joanna. I hope now your conscience is easy."

She stood looking down, pressing back an upturned corner of the rug, upon which Joanna had knelt earlier in the evening, with the pointed toe of her beaded slipper.

"Of course I sha'n't receive her," she said. "I told Challoner my magnanimity wouldn't carry me as far as that after the abominable way in which she's exploited him. All the same, I'm rather grateful to the wretched little woman. But for her I mightn't have known how generous Challoner could be. I really believe the satisfaction of rescuing him from her clutches is among my chief reasons for accepting him—that, and then, of course, Cousin Adrian Savage."

With a sort of rush Joanna came close—the violence of some half-starved creature in her pale eyes, her drawn face and her parted lips.

"Adrian?" she cried. "Adrian? What possible connection can there be between Cousin Adrian and your engagement to Mr. Challoner?"

For some seconds Margaret Smyrthwaite looked hard and thoughtfully at her sister. Then, holding the skirt of her dress aside, she pressed the upturned corner of the rug into place again with the pointed toe of her slipper.

"I shall be so thankful," she said, "when you give up wearing that frightful old dressing-gown, Nannie. Decidedly, it is not as clean as it might be, and it looks so horridly stuffy. I never have understood your craze for hoarding—"

"But—but—Adrian?" Joanna insisted.

"Adrian? Surely you must have seen, Nannie? It's just one of those things which aren't easy to put into words, but which I should have thought even you must have grasped, though you are so different to most people. I sometimes have wondered lately, though, whether you really are so different to other people, or whether you're only extraordinarily secretive.—But, naturally having a young man like Cousin Adrian staying so long in the house this winter, put ideas into one's head and made one think a good deal about marriage, and so on. I took for granted papa had some notion of that kind when he appointed Adrian his executor. He had a great opinion of him, and would have liked him as a son-in-law—or fancied he would. Of course he wanted to bring us together—that was the object of the appointment."

"You think so?" Joanna questioned. Joy, anxious but great, arose in her.

"I haven't a doubt about it. All the same I couldn't, out of respect for papa's wishes, make advances to a young man who showed quite clearly he didn't care a row of pins about me."

"He was always kind and civil to you, Margaret," Joanna interrupted restrainingly. Jealousy folded its beating wings, betaking itself to most unaccustomed repose.

"Civil and kind, I dare say. But—well, of course there are signs one can't mistake, unless one blinds oneself wilfully to their meaning."

She tossed her head, her eyes hard and bright. Joanna's expression meanwhile became increasingly ecstatic.

"Yes, there are signs one cannot mistake—signs which it would be weak and faithless to mistake," she whispered.

"I don't deny I felt rather enraged," Margaret continued, too busy with her own vexation to remark the other's singular aspect. "I could have been very much upset about it all if I had let myself go."

"I am sorry," Joanna murmured, touched by unexpected pity. "Indeed, Margaret, I am sorry."

"Oh, you weren't to blame in any way, Nannie. And, you see, I didn't let myself go. I just turned my attention to Challoner. There is nothing ambiguous about his admiration. And now"—she glanced curiously at her sister—"now," she continued, "as things have turned out, I'm most uncommonly glad I didn't allow myself to get into a state of mind about Adrian."

"As things have turned out?—I understand. I am pleased you do not blame me, Margaret. Yes, as things have turned out!" Joanna repeated excitedly.

For here, as she saw it, was the hour of her triumph, of assured and splendid victory. The room seemed too small to hold her rapture. Hardly aware of that which she did, she brushed past her sister—still standing, fan in hand, beside the chair at the window—and went out on to the balcony.

She required to be alone, so as to savor to the full the heady sweetness of her own emotion. She wanted to forget every one, everything, save that only. She wanted to abandon

herself without reserve to the thought of Adrian Savage; to gloat over every incident of her intercourse with him, and project her imagination onward to the closer, the continuous and exclusive intercourse of the future. For had not Margaret's confession—the more persuasive because reluctantly made—amounted to an admission that Adrian's affection belonged to her, and to her only? Did it not supply reasonable confirmation of her sorely tried faith in him, and ratify all her hopes by setting the seal of witness upon the fact of his love for her?

Such was the meaning she read into the recent conversation, piecing evidence together into a coherent whole. Never before had she been absolutely certain. Now, as she told herself, she was certain—could safely be so, in that Margaret had admitted the fact, if not in so many words, yet implicitly. Her father's wish and purpose had been that the young man should marry one of his two daughters—Margaret had perceived this. And she, Joanna, was the one he had chosen, thereby justifying all her past efforts and labors, and rehabilitating the poor, cynically denuded family system into the bargain. Was not the whole habit and conduct of her life vindicated, inasmuch as it led to this superb result? The years had not been wasted, but were, on the contrary, the patient seed-time of this welcome harvest. She had been right from the first, right in every particular, so that not upon her or her methods, but upon those who differed from, undervalued, or slighted her rested the onus of proof. And here the intellectual and moral arrogance latent in Joanna Smyrthwaite's nature upheaved itself mightily and stood aggressively erect. Overweening self-esteem, as on giant wings, sustained her. For to such disastrous inflations of pride are introspective persons liable when they fail—as they do so frequently fail—to discriminate between deeds and emotions, between the barren power to feel and the fertile, the life-giving power to act! Of all traps set by Satan for the catching of souls, the trap of "feelings" is perhaps the wiliest and the worst. And into this trap poor Joanna walked, head in air, careless of consequence. She felt deified, lifted above the crawling, common ways of common men, defiant of all opposition, all criticism; since, being the chosen and desired of him whom she so dotingly worshiped, she became an object worthy of worship in and to herself.

And the night—playing into the devil's hands somewhat, as at times the aspects of Nature will—in its windless silence and opaque, hot darkness, appeared queerly reflective of and sympathetic to Joanna's mood of portentous self-exaltation. The planes rather than the forms of all which composed the scene were perceptible. Joanna's eyes detected the slope of the veranda roof immediately beneath the balcony, the flat outspread of the gardens and lawns, and the vertical palisade of lofty trees encircling them; but no single object detached itself—all were fused by and soaked in that thick broth of thunder-smoke. And this heated obscurity she welcomed, because it ministered to the sense of solitude and of aloofness which she craved. Nothing visible interfered to distract her attention from herself and the thought of her high destiny. Only once or twice the sky opened, for the distant storm had moved westward, striking the black canopies of the firs, their stems and many branches, into vivid and instantaneous relief, while behind and above them, midway to the zenith, lightning licked and flickered like some miracle of soundless, sardonic laughter playing over the livid features of a corpse nine days dead.

It was in the moment of one such disquieting celestial display that Margaret Smyrthwaite, stifling an audible yawn, strolled on to the balcony. She had gathered up her magazines and papers again, and tucked them under her arm.

"If you don't intend to come in and talk any more, Nannie," she said, rather irritably, "I may as well go. I'm getting frightfully sleepy, and I've promised Challoner to motor him over

to Weymouth to-morrow. We make an early start. Too, Marion's sure to be waiting to hear how my talk with you has gone off, and I've a conscience about keeping her up any longer.—Now, you do quite understand, don't you, that I am going to marry Challoner, and that opposition is absolutely no good? It would look ever so much better, and be so very much more comfortable for every one concerned, if you could only make up your mind to be nice about it. You're always saying how you hate people talking over our affairs. Why give them occasion to talk then by being disagreeable and contrary about a thing which is really no business of yours, and which you are quite powerless to prevent?"

Contemptuously Joanna turned from contemplation of that strangely flickering sky and contemplation of her own—subjective—glory. She resented the intrusion of Margaret, with her perfumes and fashion papers, her complacent utilitarianism, her motor-car and underbred lover; but resented it half-pityingly, as the weakness of an inferior being behaving according to the manner of its kind.

"I may be powerless to prevent your marriage," she said, "still I most deeply object to it. I cannot do otherwise. I consider it unsuitable and most unfortunate. I cannot disguise from myself that it will stand between us in the future and render intercourse difficult. There can be little sympathy between two persons whose aims and interests are as far apart as yours and mine must inevitably be. I feel it my duty to mention this to you, Margaret, although I know that I have ceased to exercise any influence over you. It is all very sad. It is painful to me that you should repudiate our parents' teaching, all the more painful because I never understood as fully as I now do how noble that teaching is, and how much it has done to form my character and tastes, thus preparing me for the position and duties to which I am called."

She drew her breath sharply, raising her hands to her forehead, greatly moved by the thought of that high calling.

"This for us is the parting of the ways, Margaret," she added, a singular effect of dramatic tension in her manner, her pale ungracious face and figure against the red-brick background of the house-front, momentarily illuminated by a swift amazement of lightning rippling and shuddering behind the fir-trees in the west. "The parting of the ways," she repeated. "You go yours, I mine. I deplore your choice. Can I do otherwise, seeing how different my own prospects are? But as, after due consideration, you have made that choice, all further argument must, I fear, be wasted upon you."

"Very well, then—there's an end of the matter."

As she spoke Margaret crossed the balcony, and, leaning upon the balustrade, looked down into the gloom-shrouded garden. The candle-light streaming outward through the open window touched her shapely back and shoulders, and her bright, curled and folded, auburn hair.

"There's an end of it, then," she repeated coldly, rather bitterly. "We agree to part. You might easily have been kinder and nicer to me; but I bear you no ill-will. I suppose you can't help being disagreeable. Certainly it's nothing new.—Only, Nannie, though I don't want to upset you or make a quarrel, there is something I should like to be quite clear about, because, I own, I've been half afraid lately that you were getting yourself into a silly state over Adrian Savage."

She stood upright, looking full at Joanna.

"I know you've corresponded with him a good deal, so, of course, you may know already. Colonel Haig told me. He met her in Paris, on his way to Carlsbad, and was awfully smitten with her. Has Cousin Adrian ever spoken to you about Madame St. Leger?"

Silence followed. A distinct menace was perceptible in Joanna's tone when she at last answered.

"I have never attempted to force myself into Adrian's confidence. To do so would be the worst possible taste under existing circumstances. I should never dream of asking him questions regarding his—his former friends."

"Then you don't know about Madame St. Leger, Nannie?"

"I do not know, nor have I the least wish to hear anything respecting any acquaintance of Adrian's, except what he himself may choose to tell me."

Joanna spoke violently, her back against the wall, both in the literal and figurative sense.

"That's all very proper, but I really think you ought to hear this. In the end it may save everybody a lot of misunderstanding and worry. I'm pretty sure Colonel Haig meant me to pass the information on to you. That was why he told me."

Joanna stretched her arms out on either side, the palms of her hands toward the wall. As her fingers worked, opening and closing, her nails gritted upon the rough surface of the brick.

"I do not wish to hear anything, Margaret, not anything," she repeated vehemently.

"But evidently there's no secret about this whatever. Every one, so Haig says, knows the whole story in Paris. The affair has been going on for ever so long; only until Madame St. Leger's husband died, of course, there couldn't be any question of marriage. I don't mean to imply the smallest harm. Haig says there never has been the slightest scandal. But her husband was years and years her senior, and she is very beautiful—Haig raves about her. I have never heard him so enthusiastic over any one. And he was told Adrian has been in—"

"I refuse to hear anything more. I will not, Margaret—no—no—I will not. This is a wicked fabrication. I do not believe it. It is not true, I tell you—it is not true," Joanna panted, her finger-nails tearing at the brickwork.

"But what possible object could Haig have in repeating the story if it wasn't true? I'm awfully sorry to put you in such a fuss, Nannie, but Haig believes it implicitly himself. There isn't the least doubt of that. And when one comes to think, it does explain Adrian's behavior when he was with us. One sees, of course, how improbable it is that a young man like him should not have some attachment which—"

Joanna quitted the sheltering wall, and came toward the speaker, holding up her hands—the finger-tips frayed and reddened—with a threatening gesture.

"Go away, Margaret!" she cried passionately. "Go away! Leave me alone—you had much better. This story is false—it is false, I tell you. And I forbid you to repeat it. I will not listen. I will not have it said. Go—or I may do something dreadful to you. Go—and never speak to me again about this—never dare to do so—never—never—do you hear?"

"Really, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Nannie," the other protested, half angry, half frightened. "I'm positively astonished at your making such an exhibition of yourself—"

But Joanna laid hold of her by the shoulders, and pushed her back forcibly through the open window, into the center of the quiet, softly lighted room.

"Take your candle and go," she said, and her face was terrible, forbidding argument or rebuke. "This is a wicked falsehood, concocted by some jealous person who is trying to alienate Adrian's affection from me. Who that person is I do not know. I had better not know. It is all very cruel, very dreadful; but I want no explanations, or questions, or advice. Above all I want no sympathy. I only want to be alone.—And I warn you, Margaret, if you ever betray what has happened here to-night I will take my own life. I shall be certain to find you out sooner or later, and I will not survive betrayal, so my death will lie at your door.

Remember that, if you are tempted to gossip about me with Mr. Challoner or Marion Chase.—And now, pray, go away, and leave me to myself. That is all I ask of you. Don't call Isherwood and send her to me. I want nothing—nobody. If she came I should not let her in. Go away—here is your candle—go away and leave me alone!"

Joanna locked the door behind her sister, came back to the middle of the room and stood there motionless, her arms stiffly extended. She had no words, no thoughts, but an ache through mind and body of blank misery, at once incomprehensible and deadening from its very completeness. Presently she blew out the lights. They irritated her as showing her definite objects, her own reflection in the cheval glass beside the dressing-table, her diary and silver writing-set upon the slab of the open bureau, all the ornaments and fittings of her bedroom. She called on the darkness to cover her, and to cover these things also, blotting remembrance of them out. She needed to make her loneliness more lonely, her solitude more unmitigated and absolute.

An intolerable restlessness seized on her. She began to range blindly, aimlessly, to and fro. More than once she knocked against some angle or outstanding piece of furniture, bruising herself; but she was hardly sensible of pain. At last, treading upon the trailing fronts of her pleated *négligé*, she stumbled, fell her length, face downward, and lay exhausted for a time; then slowly dragging herself into a sitting position, she remained there, massed together stupidly, upon the floor—while, through the large, well-ordered, soberly luxurious house, the clocks chimed the hours and half-hours, to be answered by the chime of the stable clock out of doors.

As the night drew toward morning the lightning became faint and infrequent behind the fir-trees in the west, for the drought still held and the refreshment of rain would not be yet. But in the gray of the dawn a cool breathing of wind came up from the sea. Then, for a minute or so, the great woodland stirred, finding its lost voice; and the tree-tops swayed, singing together to hail the sun-rising and the coming day.

The cool draught of air sweeping in at the still open window aroused Joanna somewhat from her stupor. In the broadening light she looked about her. The room was in disorder—chairs pushed aside, a table thrown down, well-bound books, fragments of a gold and glass bowl, sprigs of lemon verbena and fading roses, the wallet in which she kept Adrian Savage's letters lying open, alongside its contents, scattered broadcast upon the ground.

Joanna stared at these treasured possessions apathetically. She put up her hands to push back her hair, which hung down in heavy strands over her face and shoulders. Her fingers felt sticky. They pricked and smarted. She examined them. The nails were nicked and jagged, in places the tips were raw.

"I will wait until they have healed," she said half aloud in her thin, toneless voice, "then I will write to Adrian and ask him if it is true. But I must wait till they are healed, I think. Now I had better sleep. There is nothing else left for me to do."

She staggered to her feet, walked unsteadily across the intervening space and threw herself, unkempt and half-dressed as she was, upon the fine embroidered linen sheets and delicate lace coverlet of the satinwood bed.

CHAPTER IV

"COME UNTO THESE YELLOW SANDS"

"A thousand times welcome, my dear Savage!" Anastasia Beauchamp cried, taking Adrian's hand in both hers and looking up at him affectionately from beneath a broad-brimmed brown hat crowned by a positive vineyard of purple and white glass grapes and autumn foliage, the whole inwrapped cloudily in a streaming blue gauze veil. "You have played the good Samaritan quite long enough in my opinion, and it's high time you bestowed some attention upon the rest of us, though we are neither insane nor conspicuously immoral. And here we all are, that's to say, all of us who matter, in this really quite tidy, comfortable hotel, plus the amiable family Bernard, my devoted, despised little Byewater and his compatriot Lenty B. Stacpole—note the inevitable transatlantic initial, I beseech you! Clever, excellent fellows both of them, though a trifle slight temperamentally. And here, to complete our circle, you arrive as the God in the Car."

Anastasia's smile bore effective testimony to her appreciation of Adrian's handsome looks and gallant bearing.

"Yes, very much the God in the Car, my dear boy," she repeated. "You are the picture of health. Playing the good Samaritan, it must be conceded, hasn't damaged you.—And I honestly believe, though I won't swear to it for fear of committing an indiscretion, that every one, every one, mind you—save possibly our excellent Americans, to whom your near neighborhood may reveal their own temperamental deficiencies—will be as genuinely happy to see you as I am myself."

"Kindest and most sympathetic of friends," Adrian returned, touched both by her words and warmth of manner, "how inexpressibly good you are to me!"

"I only pay an old debt. Your mother was good to me once—well—" She caught at an end of her streaming veil and brought it to anchor under her chin. "Well—when I stood in need of a wise and sweet counselor very badly. And I never forget. Gratitude can be—mind, I don't say it always is, but it can be—a very delightful sentiment to entertain.—But now you are expiring for a detailed account of a certain dear lady. At this moment she is down on the beach with the rest of our company. They will be back shortly for tea. So come here with me on to the piazza, while we wait for them, and I'll give you all the news I can."

Adrian, the brave song of the engines still in his ears, his eyes still dazzled by the seventy-mile rush along the white roads of the rich and pleasant Norman country, followed Miss Beauchamp and her somewhat Bacchanalian headgear from the large, light-colored hotel saloon into the arcade, found her a comfortable seat, and stationed himself beside her.

From thence he commanded a comprehensive view of the opposite side of the shallow valley, dotted with modest green-shuttered villas and rustic chalets set in ledges of roughly terraced garden. Of the rutted road, bordered by elms and sycamores, leading down from the fertile uplands through the straggling gray village of Ste. Marie to the shore. Of the high chalk cliffs forming the headland, which closed the view westward, and the quarter-mile-wide sweep of grass running up the back of it, stunted, bronzed oak and thorn thickets filling in the rounded hollows. Of the curving beach, its rows of gaily painted wooden bathing-cabins, and chairs arranged in friendly groups along the fore-shore occupied by women in airy summer costumes,—their docile men-kind, assisted in some cases by white-capped nurses, dealing meanwhile with a slightly turbulent infant population upon the near shingle and the dark mussel and seaweed covered reef of rocks just below.

Upon that same friendly grouping of chairs Adrian's glance directed itself eagerly, seeking a feminine presence acutely interesting to him, but without result. Open parasols and hats of brobdingnagian proportions rendered their charming owners practically invisible. Wistfully he relinquished the search. Then, looking at the scene as a whole, his poetic sense was fired by the spaciousness and freedom of the expanse of gleaming sands for which Ste. Marie is celebrated. Furrowed in places and edged by rare traceries of blue shadow, traversed by sparkling blue-green waterways, interspersed with broad, smooth lagoons—where the rather overdefined forms of pink-armed, pink-legged bathers, clad in abbreviated garments, swam, splashed, and floated—the sands ranged out under a translucent clearness of early afternoon sunshine to the first glinting ripples of the gently inflowing tide. Farther still, along the horizon, the solid blue of the intervening belt of deep sea melted, by imperceptible gradations, into low-lying tracts of furrowed, semi-transparent opaline cloud.

Those gold and silver shimmering levels, washed by and rimmed with heavenly blue, commanded Adrian's imagination. He found the strong air sweet to breathe, the keen scent of the brine pleasant to his nostrils. Disease, age, death, and kindred ugly concomitants of human experience lost their vraisemblance and meaning. Only glad and gracious things were credible. These in multitude innumerable; and along with them, making audible the note of pathos without which even perfect beauty still lacks perfection, the haunting solicitation of the Beyond and of the Unattained, forever beckoning the feet of man onward with the promise of stranger and more noble joys hidden from him as yet within the womb of the coming years.

Whereupon Anastasia Beauchamp, divining in some sort the trend of her companion's meditations, proceeded to pat him genially upon the arm.

"My dear young god, 'come down off that roof right away,' as little Byewater would put it, and listen to my recital of sordid domestic woes recently suffered by our *belle Gabrielle*."

Adrian became practical, his nose at once pugnacious and furiously busy, on the instant.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, "who has dared to offer her annoyance?"

"Mice, my dear Savage, beetles, and, to be quite plain with you, drains. Yes, you may well make a grimace. That mild-looking little chalet yonder across the valley—the one with the parterre of marigolds—which she had rented without preliminary inspection, proved a veritable pest-house. When I arrived in July—mainly with a view to safeguarding your interests, since frankly I hold most seaside places in abhorrence—"

"How can I ever be sufficiently grateful to you!" the young man murmured fervently.

"I have no child—and—perhaps, at my age, even the ghost, even the fiction, of motherhood is better than nothing.—But this is a digression—sentimental or scientific, which? To return. I found Madame Vernois nervous and debilitated, little Bette with a temperature and sore throat, the indispensable maid Henriette drowned in tears and sulks, and our poor, beautiful Gabrielle in a most admired distraction."

Harrowed by which description, her hearer gave way to smothered imprecations.

"Exactly. At the time I too made little remarks. Then I sniffed once—twice. Twice was quite sufficient. Better sacrifice a month's rent than be poisoned. Without ceremony I bundled them over here, bag and baggage, since when, dear creatures, they flourish. The Bernards, who had taken the villa next door to the pest-house, also had cause for dissatisfaction. They joined us. This addition to our party I could have dispensed with. I entertain the highest respect for M. Bernard's acquirements, only I could wish he had learned early in life that imparting information and making conversation are by no means synonymous. Never am I alone with him for over five minutes but he positively lapidates me with the remains of the

architectural past. Conversation should be interchange of opinions, ideas, experiences, not a bombardment with facts which one is perfectly competent to read up for oneself if one's a mind to. Should you ever be tempted to start a hobby—we none of us know what we may come to!—avoid archæology, my dear Savage, I implore you, out of retrospective tenderness for my sufferings during the last few weeks! Yes—and then I must record one truly alarming episode. The great Zélie and a horde of her nauseating adherents threatened a descent upon Madame St. Leger. Promptly I engaged all the vacant rooms in the hotel—fortunately they weren't very numerous—until the peril was over-past."

"You are not only the kindest and the most superb of friends, but you are a great general. You should command armies," Adrian declared. "Forever shall archæology be anathema to me!"

"Saving the proposed raid of the objectionable Zélie, our history has been of the simplest," Anastasia continued. "People, pleasant and unpleasant, have come and gone; we remain—and there's the sum total of it. Now tell me about yourself. How long do we keep you?"

"Alas, only until this evening. I must go back to Rouen, where my letters await me. We have been moving daily from place to place, as inclination suggested. To-morrow I must rejoin René Dax—for a few days, a week probably, to observe how the new treatment prospers. It is decided that he shall remain in the country-house, near Caen, of an intelligent young doctor who has been in attendance upon him during our touring. His man-servant, of course, is with him. And there he can also have his pet animals."

"Will he recover?"

Adrian raised his shoulders and spread out his hands.

"God knows!" he answered. "He is quite gentle, quite tractable. At moments he is irresistibly entertaining. On his good days he composes little poems of an exquisite fancifulness and fragility—iridescent flowers as of spun glass. But whether he will ever draw or paint again is an open question."

"It is pathetic," Miss Beauchamp put in musingly. "What a sequel to his extravagant popularity!"

And both lapsed into silence, looking out across the immense expanse of gleaming sands. Adrian was the first to speak. He did so with uncertain hesitation.

"You said it was high time I came, *tres chère Mademoiselle*. Does that imply that I have stayed away too long? I feared to be precipitate, lest I might appear to take unfair advantage of the—"

"The studio escapade—precisely."

"And employ it to further my own interests. On that account I have resolutely effaced myself. To do so has constituted a severe penance; but to do otherwise would, in my opinion, have shown an odious lack of imagination and of delicacy."

"I venture to doubt whether in affairs of the heart delicacy has not more miscarriages of happiness to answer for than precipitancy! The word too much, as between man and woman, is more easily forgiven than the word too little."

"It is inconceivable," Adrian broke out hotly, all of a fume and a fluster, "that Madame St. Leger should mistake my motives."

"Take it from me, my dear Savage," Anastasia replied, with a finely humorous smile, "that exactly in proportion as a woman is indifferent is she just and clear-sighted. Let her care for one of you tiresome male creatures ever, yes, ever so little, and those praiseworthy qualities

suffer instant suspension. Reason and probability pick up their petticoats and scuttle. She develops a positively inordinate ingenuity in misconstruction and mistake."

Adrian turned an eagerly inquiring countenance upon the speaker, his whole soul in his eyes.

"But, dearest, most deeply valued friend, tell me, tell me, may I believe that she does then care?"

And asking it he bared his head, instinctively doing homage to that most lovely idea. Miss Beauchamp's smile changed in character, softening to a sweetness which held something of relinquishment and farewell.

"Ah! the good years, the good years," she said, "when love and all the world is young!—May you believe that she cares, my dear boy? Well, without its being the least unnatural, she very well might care, I fancy. But you really must find that out for yourself. Listen—the chirruping of the children. Here they all come."

She rose and went forward; and Adrian, an odd tingling sensation in his blood, went forward too and stood beside her under the central arch of the arcade watching the little procession winding its way by the rough path up the broken grass slope from the beach.

First, slender-legged, short-kilted, fresh as flowers, frisking lambkin-like and chattering in high-pitched, clear little voices, came Bette and her two little friends. Next M. Bernard, dignified, serious, robust, wearing light-brown tweeds, Panama in hand, decidedly warm, expounding, recounting, archæologically dilating to Madame Vernois—refined, fragile, dressed in black—who leaned upon his arm. At a little distance Madame Bernard, small, fair-haired, neat-featured, pretty, inclining to stoutness, her person rigorously controlled by the last word in corsets and clothed in the last word of mauve linen costumes and mauve and white hats. She was not an ardent pedestrian, and mounted laboriously with the help of a long-handled parasol, uttering reproachful little ejaculations and complaints the while for the benefit of the two young Americans, who, good-naturedly loaded up with the ladies' folding chairs, rugs and cushions, followed close behind.

And there, apparently, was an end of the procession. Whereupon Adrian turned to Anastasia with a deeply injured countenance and a quite lamentably orphaned look in his handsome eyes.

"Madame St. Leger is not with them? What can have occurred? Where then can she be?" he demanded, in tones of child-like disappointment and distress.

"There—there!" Anastasia returned, merrily. "See, no ill-chance has befallen your goddess, my dear distracted young god. Look—look—near the cliff edge, to the right."

Then noting the change which came over Adrian's expression and bearing as his eyes followed her pointing hand, Miss Beauchamp's broadly amused smile faded. She shook her head, sighed, turned away, while the witty, large-featured face grew gray, aged, sibylline beneath the shadow of her broad-brimmed, vine-crowned, slightly rampageous hat.

"Like to like," she murmured. "However, others before now have gone through that enchanted and perilous gate! Only may the Almighty permit these two not to cram their romance into one flimsy, purple-patched, paper-bound yellow-back, but print it openly and honestly in three good, stout volumes, of which all save the first twenty or thirty pages deal with the married state."

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH ADRIAN MAKES DISQUIETING ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE LONG ARM OF COINCIDENCE

Adrian sat well back in the car. The tires ate up the long perspectives of white road, while the brave music of the engines made accompaniment to the lyrics of his thought. On either side the lines of poplars galloped, and behind them the great gold, green and rusty-red squares of the crops, marked only by the nature of their respective growths, innocent of dividing fence or hedge-row, swished back, half the circle, as on a turn-table. In the valleys herds of oxen and stout-built, white-bellied, tortoise-shell cows moved leisurely through the rich meadow-grass. Prosperous gray homesteads, flanked by mellow wide-ranging barns and sheds, orchards of reddening apples, and yards containing a cheerfully garrulous population of poultry, calves, and pigs, came into view only to vanish backward along with the rest. In places, tracts of forest, the trees crowded and for the most part very tall and slight, as is the habit of northern French woodlands, made a dark stain amid the gilded brightness, casting long shadows across the downward-sloping pastures at their foot. A note of pastel blue in farmers' and peasants' clothing, now and again of lustrous dappled gray in the barrel or buttocks of some well-shaped draught-horse, of orange or rose in a child's frock or walled garden close, of white in airing linen, struck momentarily into observation. But dominant was the gilt of the level sunlight, the gold of the harvest, and the silver powdering dust of the highway. All these found sublimated repetition in the iridescence of a sunset modulated to rare half-tones by the near neighborhood of the sea. And Adrian sat well back in the car, restful yet keen, affected sensuously and passively rather than consciously and actively by the fair, fruitful landscape fleeting to right and left of him, revising his impressions of the past day.

Those impressions were, as he told himself, in a high degree both stimulating and poetic. He had been happy, very happy; but his happiness was of the traveling rather than the stationary order. No touch of satiety showed in it; rather much haunting solicitation of the Unattained and the Beyond. From Pisgah height he had beheld the Land of Promise, for the first time reasonably secure of entrance into that ardently coveted and most delectable country. But the waters of Jordan still rolled between; and whether these would pile themselves politely apart, bidding him cross dry-shod, or whether a pretty smart bit of swimming would be required before he touched the opposite bank, he was as yet by no means sure. *Enfin*—he could swim for it, if all came to all, and would swim for it gaily and strongly enough!

As that afternoon he first caught sight of Gabrielle St. Leger standing, tall and svelte in her light summer dress, upon a grass-grown mound on the turn of the slope, her strong yet pliant figure detaching itself in high relief against the immense expanse of Ste. Marie's blue lagoons and gleaming sands, Adrian apprehended that she too suffered those solicitations of the Unattained and the Beyond. Her attitude, indeed, was eloquent of questioning expectation. It recalled to him the superb and ill-fated drawing of her, uplifted amid the cruel and witty obscenities of poor René Dax's studio—the exalted Madonna of the Future, her child upon her arm, going forth from things habitual and familiar in obedience to the call of Modernity, of the new and tremendous age. Resemblance was there; yet as he looked a difference in her to-day's attitude soon disclosed itself to this analytic though ardent lover. For, assuredly, the sentiment of this second and living picture of her was less abstract, more warm and directly human? Not devotion to a Cause, to an impersonal ideal or idea, inspired that outlooking of questioning expectation across the shimmering levels to the freedom of the open sea, but some stirring of the heart, some demand of her sweet flesh for those natural joys which were its rightful

portion. This difference—and then another, which, even here by himself in the rapidly running car, Adrian approached sensitively and with inward deprecation. In to-day's picture she had been alone. She had not carried her child on her arm; so that only the woman, beautiful and youthful, not the already made mother, was present.

And the above fact, it must be owned, contributed in no small degree to the young man's content. A thousand times, notwithstanding his love of analysis, he had refused and shied away from analysis of precisely this—namely, the feeling he entertained toward little Bette. She was a delicious being, granted; but she was also poor Horace St. Leger's child, and from much which this implied Adrian did quite incontestably shrink. *La belle Gabrielle* might still be, as he sincerely believed still was, essentially *la Belle au Bois Dormant*, just as he himself was the princely adventurer selected by Providence for the very agreeable task of waking her up. Yet, during that protracted sleep of hers, things had happened, primitive and practical things, to the actuality of which delicious Mademoiselle Bette's existence bore indubitable witness. Hence to carry away with him that other picture of Gabrielle as seen to-day, interrogating the fair sunlit spaces unaccompanied, gave him quite peculiar satisfaction. In the glow of which his thoughts now turned affectionately to the memory of poor Horace St. Leger. For wasn't *la belle Gabrielle*, after all, his, and not Adrian's, discovery? And wasn't he, Adrian, consequently under a gigantic debt of gratitude to Horace for so speedily taking his departure and leaving the coast clear? He might have lived on—agonizing reflection!—ten, twenty, even—since centenarians are at present so conspicuously the fashion—a good thirty years longer; lived on, indeed, until it ceased to matter much whether he took his departure or not. Thinking over all which, Adrian forgave the poor man his abbreviated enjoyment of paternity, and in so doing made his final peace with the existence of little Bette.

Not to have done so would, in his opinion, have betrayed a culpably ungenerous and churlish spirit. The more as when—her attention attracted by the pretty outcry of little Bette herself and of Madame Vernois—Gabrielle turning her gaze landward became aware of his presence, the light in her face and quick welcoming gesture of her hand showed his advent as far from displeasing to her. Both expression and action struck him so spontaneous and unstudied that, without undue vanity, he might well believe himself to count for something in those allurements of the Beyond and the Unattained. Delightfully certain it was, in any case, that she descended with haste from her grassy monticule, and—he could most joyfully have sworn—put some restraint upon herself so as to advance and offer her greetings with due soberness and dignity.

All through his visit her manner had remained gentle, serious, touched even with a hint of embarrassment. From these signs he drew most hopeful auguries. After tea, under the quite perceptibly out-of-joint noses of the two excellent young Americans, she had drawn him aside and plied him with questions respecting his nursing of René Dax. In response he gave her a detailed account of the last two months. With the artist's happy faculty for playing two mutually destructive parts at one and the same time in all sincerity, he mourned René's mental affliction and felt the pity of it while looking into Gabrielle's eyes, watching her every change of expression and reveling in the emotion his eloquent recital evoked. Her quickness of sympathy and comprehension were enchanting. Never had he found her so responsive. Never had he felt so closely united to her in sentiment.—And that the egregious Tadpole, of all living creatures, should prove so excellent a stalking-horse!

Putting aside the high delight of having Madame St. Leger as a listener, he found sensible relief in speaking freely of the subject. For the responsibility of his position had been severe

and wearing. Especially had it been so during those, at first, frequently recurrent periods of acute mania, when his affection and philosophy alike were strained to breaking-point, making him doubt whether the protracted struggle to keep wayward soul and distempered body together was either merciful or obligatory. If this unhappy lunatic of genius was so passionately desirous of letting loose that same wayward soul of his through a gaping wound in his throat, why the deuce should he, Adrian, in company with three or four other strong and healthy men, be at such tremendous pains to prevent it? Mightn't the poor Tadpole know very much best what was best for him? And wouldn't it, therefore, be more humane and intelligent to leave nicely sharpened razors within easy reach, ignoring the probable consequences of such intentional negligence? Are there not circumstances which render connivance at suicide more than permissible? Time and again he had argued the vexed question with himself as to the binding necessity, even the practical morality, of preserving human life when, through disease, life has so cruelly lost its distinctively human characteristics and values.

"And," Gabrielle St. Leger remarked, with a smile edged by engagingly gentle mockery, "then invariably ended, against your better judgment, by still carefully removing the razors!"

That same smile dwelt in the young man's memory as singularly rich with promise, justifying the belief that a lifetime spent in *la belle Gabrielle's* society would fail to exhaust her power of—to put it vulgarly—jumping the unexpected upon you, and bracing your interest by the firing off of all manner of fine little surprises. Monotony, he thanked Heaven, would very certainly not be among the dangers to be feared in marriage with Madame St. Leger!

But while his imagination played about these agreeable matters the music of the engines changed its tune, the brakes gripped under Martin the chauffeur's boot-sole, and the car slowed down to a crawl in passing a flock of sheep. Two large dogs, bobtailed and shaggy, their red mouths widely open as they raced barking to and fro, rounded up the scared and scattering flock into a compact, bleating, palpitating mass of bister color picked out with rusty black upon the dust-whitened strip of turf by the roadside. The shepherd, tall and lean, a long staff in his hand, his felt hat, hawk-nosed face, unkempt beard, ragged cloak and string-girt leggings, presenting a study in rich browns and umbers under the last glinting gold of the sunset, gesticulated and shouted, directing the evolutions of the racing dogs in a harsh and guttural patois. The scene, a somewhat violent pastoral, stamped itself as a picturesque inset upon the wide-margined page of Adrian's reflections.

The sheep once safely cleared and the pace again quickening, his thought centered complacently upon the moment of his farewells. For surely these showed handsomely on the credit side of his day's pleasure?

The friendly little company—not exclusive of the forgiving though cheapened Americans—had gathered at the hotel entrance to witness his start. Anastasia's voice and manner were rich with meaning and affectionate admonition as she invited him speedily to return. In the expression of Madame Vernois's refined face he seemed to read something approaching appeal as she gracefully seconded that invitation. While Gabrielle herself—she standing a little apart from the rest, nearer to the waiting automobile—answered, not lightly, but with a sweet and grave dignity, on his asking her:

"And you, *chère Madame et amie*, have I your invitation also? May I soon come back? Without your sanction it would, perhaps, be preferable, be wiser, more desirable for me to stay away."

"I, too, hope you may find it possible soon to return here. If your doing so depends in any degree upon my sanction I give that sanction readily."

And thus speaking she had looked him full in the eyes. Whereupon, though furiously unwilling to quit the dear sight and sound of her, this very modern young god mounted up into his very modern car in quite celestial serenity of spirit.

But as the dusk deepened and the lights of Rouen multiplied in the distance, happy retrospect gave place to happy on-looking, since, at nine and twenty, no sound and wholesome man seriously questions the existence of earthly bliss.

Yes, a week, possibly even a few days, would suffice to assure him all went well with René in his new quarters. Then he might reckon himself at liberty to return to Ste. Marie and the dear people there. And, once there, no overstrained delicacy should withhold him from putting it to the touch with Gabrielle St. Leger. Bowing to Anastasia's advice, he would risk saying the word too much, so as to avoid the greater danger of saying the word too little;—risk it the more gladly because he gratefully believed it mightn't prove the word too much, but the word acceptable, even the word actually, though silently and proudly, waited for. The immediate consequence of which belief was that, the car striking into the town through the *Faubourg Beauvosine* and traveling the Boulevard and the *rue St. Hilaire* successively, it appeared to Adrian in act of traversing an altogether heavenly city, whose now poetic ancient buildings, now stately new ones, were alike built of silver, and whose deep-resounding streets, in the growing brilliance of the lamp-light, were paved with gold. Such extravagant tricks, even in this machine-made, mammon-worshiping twentieth century, can love still contrive to play upon the happy lover!

On the way to the hotel, where he had left his light traveling baggage when passing through from Caen in the morning, Adrian alighted at the central post-office, in the *rue Jeanne d'Arc*, to claim his two-days' mail forwarded from Paris.

Coming out, he stood awhile at the edge of the pavement verifying the several items. Two consignments of proofs—this pleased him. A slim one from the office, containing, as he knew, his fortnightly *chronique* of current home and foreign politics for the forthcoming number of the Review. The other—and his glance settled upon it affectionately—was stouter, holding the slips of a story of some forty pages. Into that story he had put all the imaginative and verbal skill of which he, as yet, felt himself capable. It was a drama, at once pathetic and brutal, of the Paris underworld which he had this year so intimately investigated during his unsuccessful search for Bibby Smyrthwaite. He felt keen to know how it looked and read in print; for in the back of his mind lurked a hope that just conceivably it might prove a little masterpiece and assure his place among those writers of contemporary fiction whose literary output really counts.

And here for the moment it must be owned the lover was called upon to make room for the artist, while Adrian promised himself the best of good hours, after dinner to-night, in revising punctuation, correcting misprints, and leisurely making those carefully considered alterations in wording so absorbing to one emulous of combining grace and high finish with pungency and vivacity of style. Tenderly he laid the packet down on the seat of the waiting car, and raised his eyes as in invocation to the star-pierced blue of the summer sky roofing the perspective of silver-gray houses and silver-gilt street. For mightn't he take it as a fortunate omen that the proofs should come to hand on this so fortunate day? Omen that the story would strike home and its readers acclaim him as a doer of notable and living work?

He glanced rapidly at the envelopes of his private letters; and, while thus occupied, became aware that Martin, the chauffeur, was engaged—as not infrequently—in an altercation. The man was a clever driver, and to him, Adrian, a willing and trustworthy

servant. But his temper was inconveniently inflammable, and he inclined to pick quarrels with half the men and make amorous overtures to more than half the women he met, thus involving both himself and his master in superfluously dramatic incidents. Under provocation his language became variegated and astonishingly ripe. Epithets of the latter description he was now in process of discharging upon some individual who had knocked up against him, in passing, as he stood at the edge of the pavement bending down to examine the tire of the near front wheel of the car.

"Martin, stop that, if you please," Adrian said, warningly, over his shoulder, and returned to the survey of his letters.

There was one from Anastasia Beauchamp. Bless the dear woman, wasn't she indeed a jewel of a friend! And there was one, black-bordered, and addressed, though less neatly than usual, in Joanna Smyrthwaite's small, scholarly handwriting. Adrian was conscious of impatience, of an unreasoning sense of injury. For why, of all days in the year, should he hear from Joanna to-day? He had thought of her seldom lately, owing to preoccupation with and anxiety regarding René Dax; and it struck him as a rather wanton smirching of his delightful day's record and subtle menace to the success of his precious little story that the rather unpleasant matter of poor Joanna should thus obtrude itself. Undefinable apprehension of coming trouble flashed through his mind.

All this was a matter of seconds; but during those seconds, the voice of the choleric chauffeur had risen from a gusty snarl into the screech of a blazing sky-rocket, bursting finally into a star-shower of unrecordable invective.

Adrian, imposingly tall in his long dust-colored frieze motor-coat, wheeled round upon the man angrily.

"Ah, *par exemple!* but this is intolerable!" he exclaimed. "Have I not already commanded you to be silent? Do you propose to disgrace me, as well as yourself, by fighting in the open street? Behave respectably, not like an idiot. Do you hear—get in behind your steering-wheel and keep quiet until I am ready to start."

"But, Monsieur, the fellow has grossly insulted me. He cannoned into me by design, the thrice filthy animal, the sodden ass, and would have rolled me in the gutter had I not skilfully braced myself. Clearly his intention was robbery. He is a danger to society, a thief, a pickpocket. Only let Monsieur look for himself, and declare whether a more verminous gaol-bird has ever been presented for his inspection?"

And looking, Adrian beheld the chauffeur, fiery-eyed, with bristling black mustache, and, struggling in his vicious grip, Joanna Smyrthwaite herself—Joanna dissipated, degraded, with prominent, blear blue eyes and weak hanging underlip, masquerading in man's attire, as in those infamous, now obliterated drawings upon René Dax's studio wall.

Disgust, and a vague apprehension of something unnatural and outside reason, seized on Adrian Savage. The sight was loathsome, to a degree, both in suggestion and in fact. Then he understood; and, understanding, suffered a moment of acute indecision. But a crowd was collecting. The police might arrive upon the scene. Making a strong effort to surmount his disgust, he said:

"Let him go, Martin. I know him. I will explain to you presently. Now I require your help."

Then he added rapidly, in English:

"Pardon my servant's rudeness. In the end you shall not have cause to regret it. You are William Smyrthwaite—Bibby—are you not?"

Martin relinquished his hold sulkily. His victim, dazed and breathless, stood at bay; a ring of curious, contemptuous faces behind him, and Adrian, stern, yet excited, and with difficulty repressing evidences of his repugnance, in front.

"And, if I am Bibby Smyrthwaite, what the devil is that to you?" he answered petulantly in English. "I never set eyes on you before. Why should you interfere with me? Haven't I as much right to the pavement as that liveried brute of yours? I've got a job as cab-washer. If I'm late at the yard I shall forfeit my pay. And I want my pay."

His loose-lipped mouth twisted miserably and tears began to dribble down his sunken cheeks.

"Let me go," he blubbered. "I haven't done you any harm, and I want my pay."

Then Adrian, moved by compassion, came close to him and spoke kindly.

"See here, my poor boy," he said. "I am commissioned by persons who have a regard for you to provide for you. You need not worry about your pay. I will take care of all that. For months I have tried to find you to tell you this. I am Adrian Savage, a cousin of your late father, and his executor."

The tears ceased, and the young man's face was overspread by an expression of almost imbecile rapture. Adrian turned sick. Exactly thus had Joanna looked, more than once.

"Is my father dead, then?" Bibby asked.

"Yes, he is dead," Adrian replied, in bewilderment.

Bibby reeled forward and squatted on the broad footboard of the car, his head thrown back, holding his sides, his thin, loose-jointed limbs and body writhing with and shaken by hysterical laughter.

"Dead!" he quavered out—"dead! By God! they've got him at last, then—got him, the stinking, slave-driving old hypocrite! And, please God, they're cooking him now—now—at this very identical minute—cooking him to a turn, down in hell."

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING A CURSE, AND THE MANNER OF ITS GOING HOME TO ROOST

The room, furnished in dark walnut, was upholstered in red Utrecht velvet, the walls hung with a striped fawn-and-red paper. A mirror, in a florid gilt frame, was fixed above the low mantel-shelf. The atmosphere held odors reminiscent of cigarettes, patchouli, and food in process of cooking. The dinner-table had, by Adrian's orders, been placed near the central window, the two casements of which stood open to the ground. After so many hours spent in the open air, dining in present company he felt the necessity of such freshness as he could by any means get. In the center of the long flagged courtyard the big palmate leaves of a row of pollarded chestnuts caught the light coming from the offices on the left. White-coated, white-capped *chefs* and scullions passed to and fro. An old liver-colored bitch, basset as to her legs and pointer as to her body, waddled after them, her nose in the air, sniffing, permanently hopeful of scraps. On the flags, just outside the salon window, three tabby kittens played—stalking one another round pots of fuchsia and musk, bouncing out, leaping in the air, spitting, galloping sideways, highly diabolic with teapot-handle tails. Farther along the courtyard, hidden by the lower branches of the intervening trees, a stable-helper sang and whistled as he washed down the hotel omnibus. The servants talked, laughed, scolded over their work. Almost incessantly from the *rue Jeanne d'Arc* came the long-drawn rattle and swish of the electric trams. And opposite to Adrian at table, clad in a complete outfit of his, Adrian's clothes—a white flannel suit with a faint four-thread black stripe on it, a soft, pale blue shirt, an immaculate collar and narrow black tie—sat William Smyrthwaite, outwardly, at all events, surprisingly transformed.

Adrian had hesitated to propose him as an inmate; but an up-to-date motor-car, a ruffling chauffeur, a well-built suit-case and kit-bag bearing an English name, a very good Paris address, are calculated to promote not only faith, but charity. The hotel proprietor, a short, fat, bland little man with a dancing step and a shrewd, rapacious Norman eye, was sympathy itself.

"That Monsieur should remove his effects and seek another, an inferior, hotel would desolate him, was not to be thought of! He would arrange the affair on the instant. Such lamentable lapses will occur at times—are there not, alas, members of the most respectable, the most distinguished, families who turn badly? Let Monsieur, then, rest assured he was infinitely touched by the confidence Monsieur reposed in him. And, see"—tapping his forehead with a fat forefinger—"the little suite at the back on the ground floor, giving upon the courtyard, became precisely this morning vacant. True, these were not the rooms he should have selected for Monsieur's occupation; but, under the circumstances, it was conceivable they would serve. They were comfortable though modest. They were retired—two bed-chambers connected by a salon. There Monsieur and his guest could dine in private, secure from the intrusive observation of strangers. But, indeed, no—Monsieur was too amiable! He himself was undeserving of thanks, since did it not become evident that Monsieur was engaged in a work of the highest benevolence—the attempted reclamation of an unhappy fellow-creature?—With which work to be associated, even in the humblest capacity, could not but be esteemed by any person of feeling as a privilege."

Then with a rapid change of manner, becoming autocratic, Napoleonic:

"Gustave," he cried, over his shoulder, "*portez les bagages de ces messieurs aux numeros sept et huit.*"—And waving Adrian to follow, he bounced lightly away down the corridor; his

eyebrows drawn together as he inwardly debated how many francs extra he dared charge for the Utrecht-velvet upholstered suite without seeming too flagrantly extortionate.

After that first outbreak of unseemly rejoicing at the announcement of his father's death, young Smyrthwaite subsided into a state of acquiescent apathy. He did as he was bid, but with what mental reservations, what underlying thoughts or emotions, Adrian failed to discover. Somewhere, in this weak, slipshod creature, he suspected a bed-rock of obstinacy. He also suspected predatory instincts. Or, was it only that the instinct of self-preservation had taken—as under the stress of poverty it almost must take—a predatory form?

At the beginning of dinner Smyrthwaite spoke little, but sat, his elbows upon the table, his head bent low over his plate, putting away food with the sullen haste of an animal suspicious of its fellow-animal's intentions and appetite. And when Adrian, to whom this exhibition of gluttony proved anything but agreeable, hinted civilly there was no cause for hurry, he looked across the nicely ordered table with a half-sneering yet oddly boyish smile.

"Oh! it's all very well for you," he said. "You're safe enough to have your solid three meals to-morrow, and all the other blooming to-morrows as long as you live. But, I tell you, I mean to make jolly sure of this meal while I can get it. I've learned not to put much trust in to-morrows. I want to be on the safe side, so that if the wind changes, as far as this meal goes, anyhow, I shall have nothing to repent of."

"But, my good fellow, the wind will not change. That is exactly what I have been trying to assure you," Adrian interposed, pity and repulsion playing see-saw within him to a bewildering extent. "For the future you can be just as secure of three meals a day as I myself am if you choose."

"Bully!" Smyrthwaite said. "I wonder! The old man cut up well?" he added, his face again bent down over the table.

"Your father left a large fortune," Adrian replied, repulsion now very much on the top.

"To me? Not likely!"

"To your sisters. And Joanna"—Adrian hesitated, conscious of a singular distaste to using the Christian name—"at once devoted a considerable sum of money to be employed, in the event of your return, for your maintenance."

With his coarse, thick-jointed fingers Smyrthwaite rubbed a bit of bread round his plate, sopping up the remains of the gravy.

"That's no more than right," he said, "if you come to think of it. Why should the girls have all the stuff?"

His hand went out furtively across the table to a dish of braised beef and richly cooked vegetables which he proceeded to transfer to his own plate.

"All the same, it's nice of Nannie. We were rather chummy in the old days—the blasted old days which I've nearly forgot. But I didn't suppose she cared still. Poor old Nannie! What a beastly hash my father made of our lives! Nannie ought to have married Merriman. Then I should have had a home. Andrew's a bit peachy, but he's a rare good sort."

He slushed in the food silently for a while; and Adrian, anxious to avoid observation of the details of that process, watched the kittens sporting round the flower-pots on the flags just outside.

He had searched for Bibby, spending time, money, even risking personal safety, in that search. He had found Bibby. He had brought him here to civilized quarters. He had clothed him from head to foot.—Adrian felt a pang, for they were such nice clothes! He was rather fond of that particular flannel suit. Really it cost him not a little to part with it; and, he could

almost fancy, hanging now upon Bibby's angular, narrow-chested frame, that it bore the plaintive air of a thing unkindly treated, consciously humiliated and disgraced. He apologized to it half sentimentally, half humorously, in spirit.—And then because the small things of life whip one's sense of the great ones into higher activity, the trivial matter of the ill-used flannel suit brought home to Adrian with disquieting clearness the difficulties of this whole third *affaire* Smyrthwaite in which he had, as it now occurred to him, rather recklessly embarked.

As if the two first *affaires*, those of father and daughter, hadn't been enough, he must needs go and add that of the degenerate son and brother! And who, after all, would thank him? Wasn't he very much a fool, then, for his pains? Psychologically and in the abstract, as an example of lapse and degradation, Smyrthwaite presented an interesting and instructive study. But in the concrete, as a guest, a companion, as a young man, a relation, moreover, to be reclaimed from evil courses and socially reinstated, the situation took on quite other color. Looking across the table now as, his plate again empty, Bibby sank back in his chair, slouched together, his hands in his trousers pockets, his blue eyes turned upon the door, anxiously awaiting the advent of the *garçon* with the next course, Adrian was tempted to deplore his own philanthropic impulse. All hope of pulling the boy up to any permanently decent level of living seemed so unspeakably remote.

And, as though some silent transmission of thought had taken place between them, Bibby's next speech went to confirm Adrian's fears.

"You say if I choose," he began; "but the question is, can I choose? You see I'm so beastly out of the habit of all that.—Now I'm getting full I seem to understand things, so I'd best talk at once."

"I ask nothing better than that you should talk," Adrian put in, good-temperedly. For Heaven's sake, let him at least gain whatever scientific knowledge of and from Bibby he could!

"Presently I shall turn sleepy," the other continued, with a curiously unblushing directness of statement. "I always do when I'm first filled up after going short. You see, I've never set eyes on you before, and you come along and tell me some blooming fairy story about poor old Nannie and her money. It may be true or it may be false, but anyhow I don't seem to tumble to it. I fancy these clothes and I fancy this feed, but I don't feel to go much beyond that.—Chicken?—Yes, rather. Leave me the breast. Golly! I do like white meat! Two or three years ago it would have set me on fire. I should have felt like bucking up and making play with it—repentant prodigal, don't you know, and all that kind of rot. But now I don't seem to be able to bother much. If it was winter I suppose I should be more ready to fix on to it, because I'm afraid of the cold. When you're empty half the time cold makes you so beastly sick; and then I get chilblains and my skin chaps. But in the summer I'd just as soon lie out.—Say, can I have the rest of the fowl?"

"By all means," Adrian replied, handing him the dish.

"You see, it's like this," he went on, picking up the bones and ripping off the meat with his teeth, "I've knocked about so long it's grown second nature. I have to move on. I can't stick to one job or stop in one place. I suppose that's left over from the old days, when my father was always down on me with some infernal row or other. He hated me like poison. It's a trick Englishmen have with their sons. They've not got the knack of paternity like you French. I got into the habit of feeling I'd best run because he was sure to be after me; and that's a sort of feeling you can't be quit of. It keeps you always looking over your shoulder to see what's coming next. People haven't been half nasty to me on the whole, and I mightn't have done so

badly if I could have stuck. A little mincing devil of an artist, with a head like the dome of St. Paul's—draws for the comic papers—you may know him—René Dax—"

"Yes, I know him," Adrian said.

"He picked me up this winter when I was just pitching myself into the river. It was cold, you see, and I'd been drinking. It's silly to drink when you're empty. It gives you the hump. He took me home with him, and drew funny pictures of me. They were pretty low down some of them, but they made me laugh. He did me very well as to food and all that, but two or three days of it was enough. I couldn't stand the confinement. I pinched what I could and left."

Adrian raised his eyebrows and passed his hand down over his black beard meditatively. A sweet youth, a really sweet and promising youth this!—René had never mentioned the thieving incident to him, and it explained much. It also showed René's conception of the duty entailed by hospitality in an admirable light. Even active exercise of the predatory instinct must be passed over in silence in the case of a guest.

"What he paid me, with what I took, kept me going quite a good while," Smyrthwaite said, stretching and yawning audibly. "But I'm turning thundering sleepy. I told you I should. I'll be shot if I can sit up on end jawing any more like this," he added querulously. "You might let a fellow have ten minutes' nap."

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, all the minutes of the unnumbered ages spent by Bibby in slumber would, Adrian just then felt, supply a more than grateful respite! He lit a cigarette and stepped out of the open window on to the flags, thereby startling the tabby kittens, who, with arched backs and frenzied spittings, vanished behind the flower-pots. An arc lamp was fixed to the wall just over the kitchen entrance. One of the white-clad *chefs* brought out a chair, and sat there reading a flimsy, little two-page evening paper. The heavy foliage of the chestnuts hung motionless. In the distance a bugle sounded to quarters. And Adrian thought of Gabrielle St. Leger, standing on the grass-grown monticle looking across the gleaming sands of Ste. Marie into the beckoning future. When next they met he would speak, she would answer—and Adrian's eyes grew at once very gay and very gentle. He pushed up the ends of his mustache and smoothed the tip of his pointed beard. Then he remembered on a sudden that in the houroosh over the finding of Bibby he had forgotten all about his letters.

So he took them out of his pocket and looked at them. It wasn't necessary to read dear Anastasia's letter now, since he knew pretty well what it must contain, having seen her so lately. But here was Joanna's black-edged envelope. He shrugged his shoulders.—Oh! this interminable *famille* Smyrthwaite! Why, the dickens, had his great-aunt committed the maddening error of marrying into it? With an expressive grimace, followed by an expression of saintly resignation, Adrian tore the envelope open. The letter was a long one, worse luck! He read a few lines, and moved forward to where the arc lamp gave a fuller light. "*Par exemple!*" he said, once or twice; also, very softly, "*Sapristi!*" drawing in his breath. Then all lurking sense of comedy deserted him. He straightened himself up, his face bleaching beneath its brown coating of sunburn and his eyes growing hot. The old dog waddled across from the offices and planted herself in front of him, wagging a disgracefully illegitimate tail, looking up in his face, sniffing and feebly grinning. He paid no heed to her feminine cajoleries; paid no heed to the fact that his cigarette had gone out, or to the antics of the again emergent kittens, or to the intermittent sounds from the courtyard and city, or to the all-pervasive stable and kitchen smells.

"Dear Cousin Adrian," Joanna's letter ran, "I find it difficult and even painful to write to you, yet I can no longer refrain from writing. In refraining I might be guilty of an injustice

toward you. This nerves me to write. I have suffered very greatly in the past week. I know suffering may purify, but I am not purified by this suffering. On the contrary, the tendencies of my nature which I least approve are brought into prominence by it. I owe it to whatever is best in me; I owe it to you—yes, above all to you—to take steps to check this dreadful florescence of evil in myself.

"But before explaining the principal cause of my suffering, I must tell you this. You may have heard from Margaret. In that case forgive my repeating what you already know. She has engaged herself to Mr. Challoner. The news came to me as a great shock. From every point of view such a marriage is displeasing to me. I have regretted Mr. Challoner's influence over Margaret. Already I cannot but see she is deteriorating, and adopting a view of life dreadfully wanting in elevation of feeling and thought. I know you will sympathize with me in this, and that you will also deplore Margaret's choice. Indeed, the thought of the effect that this news must have upon your mind has caused me much sorrow. You may so reasonably object to Mr. Challoner entering our family. I have never considered that he appreciated your great superiority to himself both in position and in attainments, or treated you with the deference due to you. Mr. Challoner is not a gentleman, and I am humiliated by the prospect of his becoming nearly connected with you by marriage. You are too just to visit this upon me; but it must color your thought of me and of all our future relation.

"I speak of our future relation; and there the agony of suspense in which I have lately lived overcomes me. I can hardly write. Believe me, Adrian, I do not doubt you; I know you are incapable of an inconsiderate, still more of a cruel, action. My trust in you is as deep as my affection. It is myself whom I distrust. Knowing my absence of talent and beauty, knowing my own faults of character from the first, the wonder of your love for me has been almost overpowering, almost incredible."

Adrian folded the thin sheets together and walked back and forth over the flags, looking up at the fair night sky above the big-leaved chestnuts.

"My God! Poor thing! poor Joanna! What can one do? Poor thing!" he said.

Then he stood still again in the lamplight and re-opened the letter.

> "And hence, when gossiping reports reach me, however contrary to my knowledge of you and however unworthy of credence they may be, aware as I am of my many shortcomings, they torture me. I cannot control my mind. It places dreadful ideas before me. I realize my utter dependence upon you for all that makes life desirable—I could almost say for all that makes its continuance possible. Before you came to us, at the time of papa's death this winter, I was unhappy, but passively unhappy, as one born blind might be yearning for a sense denied and unknown to him. Now, when fears regarding our relation to each other assail me I am like one who, having enjoyed the rapture and glory of sight, is struck blind, or who learns that sightlessness, absolute and incurable, awaits him. A horror of great darkness is upon me. Only you can relieve me of that horror; therefore I write to you.
>
> "Col. Rentoul Haig tells Margaret he heard from acquaintances of yours in Paris this summer that you have long been attached to a lady there who would in every respect be a suitable wife for you. I know that this cannot be true. Indeed, I know it. But I implore you to tell me *yourself* that it is not true. Set my mind at rest. The limits of my endurance are reached. Misery is undermining my health, as well as all the nobler elements of my character. I am a prey to insomnia, and to obtain sleep I

am obliged to have recourse to drugs. I grow afraid of my own impulses. Dear Adrian, write to me. Forgive me. Comfort me. Reassure me. Yours,

"JOANNA SMYRTHWAITE."

Adrian folded up the letter slowly, returned it to his pocket, and stood thinking.

Thanks to his strong dramatic sense, at first the thing in itself, the isolating intensity of Joanna's passion, filled his imagination. Every word was sincere, dragged live and bleeding out of her heart. Baldness of statement only made it the more telling. This was what she actually believed regarding herself, what she really felt and meant.—"The limits of my endurance are reached, I suffer too much, I grow afraid of my own impulses." This was not a way of talking, rhetoric, a pose; it was reasoned and accurate fact. And, if he understood Joanna aright, her capacity of suffering was enormous. If the limit of endurance had now been reached, about all which lay short of that limit it was terrible to think! She had been tortured, and only in the extremity of torture did she cry for help.

But here Adrian's dramatic sense gave before the common instinct of humanity. The most callous of men might very well be moved by Joanna's letter; and Adrian was among the least callous of men, especially where a woman was concerned. Therefore, for him, practically, what followed? This question struck him as quite the ugliest he had ever been called upon to answer in the whole course of his life. To use poor Joanna's favorite catch-word, a "dreadful" question—a very dreadful question, as he saw it just now, taking the warmth out of the sunshine and the color out of life. He recalled those extremely disagreeable ten minutes, spent among the sweet-scented allspice bushes, in the garden of the Tower House. He had argued out the question, or the equivalent of the question, then—and, as he had believed, answered it fully and finally, once and for all. But apparently he hadn't answered it finally, since on its recurring now the consequences of either alternative presented themselves to him with such merciless distinctness.—The fact that his conscience was clear in respect of Joanna, that she was the victim of self-invented delusion—in as far as reciprocal affection on his part went—made little appreciable difference to the situation. Indeed, to prove his own innocence was merely to cap the climax of her humiliation with conviction of presumptuous folly.

Indescribably perplexed and pained, shocked by the position in which he found himself, Adrian passed absently back from the courtyard into the salon. He had forgotten the third *affaire* Smyrthwaite in the storm and stress of the second. Here, the third *affaire* presented itself to him under a guise far from encouraging.

Bibby, the whiteness of the flannel suit bringing out his limp, slatternly yet boyish figure into high relief as against the red Utrecht velvet, lay crumpled sideways in the largest of the chairs. His legs dangled over one arm of it, his head nodded forward, sunk between his pointed shoulders, his chin rested on his breast. An ill-conditioned, hopeless, irreclaimable fellow! Yet still the family likeness to Joanna remained—to the degraded Joanna of the "funny pictures" upon René Dax's studio wall—a Joanna wearing his, Adrian's, clothes, moreover, whose mouth hung open as he breathed stertorously in almost bestial after-dinner sleep.

Adrian looked once, picked up his hat, and fled.

For the ensuing three or four hours he walked aimlessly up and down the streets of Rouen, along the pleasant tree-planted boulevards and the quays beside the broad, silent-flowing Seine. He was aware of lights, of blottings of black shadow, of venerable buildings rich in beautiful detail, of the brightly lighted interiors of wine-shops and cafes open to the pavement, of people loud-voiced and insistent, and of vehicles—these in lessening number as it drew

toward midnight—passing by. But all his impressions were indefinite, his vision strangely blurred. He walked, as a living man might walk through a phantom city peopled by chaffering ghosts, for all that his surroundings meant to him, his thoughts concentrated upon the overwhelming personal drama, and personal question, raised by Joanna's letter.

Must he, taking his courage rather brutally in both hands, disillusion her and risk the results of such disillusionment? Chivalry, pity, humanity, the very honor of his manhood, protested as against some dastardly and unpardonable act of physical cruelty. How he wished she hadn't employed that illustration of blindness and sight! The thought of her pale eyes fixed on him, doting, imploring, worshiping, hungry with unsatisfied passion, starving for his love, pursued him, making itself almost visible to his outward sense. How was it possible to sear those poor eyes, extinguishing light in them forever by application of the white-hot iron of truth? Before God, he could not do it! It was too horrible.

And yet, the alternative—to lie to her, to lie to love, to be false to himself, to be false to the hope and purpose of years, didn't his manhood, every mental, and moral, and—very keenly—every physical fiber of him protest equally against that? He saw Gabrielle as he had seen her only this afternoon, in her fresh, grave beauty, the promise of hidden delights, of enchanting discoveries in her mysterious smile. Saw, as he so happily believed, a certain awakening of her heart and sense toward the joys which man has with woman and woman with man. How could he consent to cut himself from all this and take Joanna's meager and unlovely body in his arms? It wasn't to be done. He turned faint with loathing and unspeakable distress, staggered as though drunk, nearly fell.

Bibby Smyrthwaite and Joseph Challoner for brothers, Margaret Smyrthwaite for sister, Joanna for bride—this, all which went along with it and which of necessity it implied, was more than he could face. He would rather be dead, rather ten thousand times. He said so in perfect honesty, knowing that were the final choice offered him now and here, notwithstanding his immense value of life and joy in living he would choose to die.

But in point of fact no such choice was offered him, since in his opinion it is the act of a most contemptible poltroon to avoid the issue by means of self-inflicted death. No, he must take the consequences of his own actions, and poor Joanna must take the consequences of her own actions—in obedience to the fundamental natural and moral law which none escape. And among those consequences, both of her and of his own past actions, was the cruel suffering which he found himself constrained to inflict. He shrank, he sickened, for to be cruel was hateful to him, a violation of his nature. In a sort of despair he went back upon the whole question, arguing it through once more, wearily, painfully, point by point.

Adrian's aimless wanderings had, now, conducted him to a small public garden laid out with flower borders, shrubberies, and carefully tended islands of turf, beneath the shadow of a chaste yet florid fifteenth-century church. Clerestory windows glinted high above, touched by the lamplight, and flying buttresses, thick with fantastic carven flowers and little lurking demons, formed a lace-work of stone against the sky. He sat down on one of the garden benches, laying his hat beside him on the seat. He doubled himself together, his elbows upon his knees, pressing his hands against either side of his head.

He was very tired. He was also desperately sad. Never before had he felt the chill breath of a trouble from which there seemed no issue save by the creation of further, deeper trouble. Never before had he—so it now appeared to him—gauged the possibilities of tragedy in human life. And the present situation had grown out of such wholly accidental happenings—well-meant kindnesses and courtesies, an overstrained delicacy in admitting the reality of poor

Joanna's infatuation and making her understand that his affections were engaged elsewhere. In his fear of assuming too much and appearing fatuous, he had let things drift. He had been guilty of saying that fatal word "too little" against which dear Anastasia Beauchamp to-day fulminated. There he was to blame. There was his real error, his real mistake. It gnawed mercilessly at his conscience and his sensibility. It would continue so to gnaw, whatever the upshot of this disastrous business, as long as he lived. In the restrained and conventional intercourse of modern, civilized life, the difficulty of avoiding that fatal word "too little" is so constant and so great. His mind, spent with thought and emotion, dwelt with languid persistence upon this point. In this particular he had shirked his duty both to Joanna and to himself, with the terrible result that he was doomed to inflict a cruel injury upon her or to wreck his own life.

And at that moment, dully, without any quickening of interest, amiable or the reverse, he perceived that a young woman sat at the farther end of the bench. When he came to think of it, he believed she had followed him through the streets for some little time. Now she coughed slightly and moved rather nearer to him, fidgeted, pushing about the loose, shingly gravel, which made small rattling noises, with her foot. Adrian still sat doubled together pressing his hands against either side of his head. Presently she began to speak, making overtures to him, praising his handsome looks, his youth his dress, his bearing, his walk, flattering and wheedling him after the manner of her sorry kind. While expressing admiration and offering endearing phrases, her voice remained toneless and monotonous. And this peculiarity rather than what she said aroused Adrian's attention. He looked round and received a definite impression, notwithstanding the dimness of the light. Her reddish hair was turned loosely back from her forehead. Her face was gaunt and worn under its layer of fard. Her mouth was large, and the painted lips, though coarse, were sensitive—her soul had not yet been killed by her infamous trade. Her eyes were pale, desperate with shame and with entreaty. And these were the eyes which, if he would save all which made life noble and dear to him, Adrian must strike blind!

During some few seconds he looked straight at her. Then, feeling among the loose coins in his pocket, he found a gold twenty-franc piece and put it into her hand.

"It is no use," he said gravely and very sadly—speaking whether to her or to Joanna Smyrthwaite he could not tell. "I do not want you. My poor woman, I do not want you. It is not possible that I ever should want you. I am bitterly grieved for you, but you waste your time."

And he rose and moved away, having suddenly regained full possession of himself. He had ceased to doubt in respect of Joanna. That passing of money was to him symbolic, setting him free. He understood that to marry Joanna would be a crime against God-given instinct, against God-given love, against the God-given beauty of all wholesome and natural things. The sour, pedantic, man-imagined deity of some Protestant sect might demand such hideous, almost blasphemous sacrifice from its votaries; but never that supreme artist, Almighty God the Creator, maker of man's flesh as well as of his spirit, *le bon Dieu* of the divinely reasonable and divinely human Catholic Church. To marry Joanna would, in the end, constitute a blacker cruelty than to tell her the whole truth. For he couldn't live up to that lie and keep it going. He would hate her, and sooner or later show that he hated her; he would inevitably be unfaithful to her and leave her, thereby ruining her life as well as his own.

He went back to the hotel. The little red Utrecht-velvet upholstered *salon* still smelled of cooking, patchouli, and cigarettes, plus the dregs of a tumbler of brandy and soda and a

something human and insufficiently washed. Smyrthwaite's door was shut, and no sound proceeded from behind it, for which Adrian returned thanks and betook himself to bed. He was dog-tired. He slept till broad day. On making a morning reconnaissance he found Smyrthwaite's door still locked, nor did knocking elicit any response. Somewhat anxious, he went out into the courtyard. The window was ajar, the room vacant, the bed undisturbed. Then he remembered to have seen a tall, slight, loosely made figure, wearing whitish garments, flitting hastily away down a dim side-street as he turned into the *rue Jeanne d'Arc* on his way home. Later Adrian discovered that a pair of diamond and enamel sleeve-links, a set of pearl studs, some loose gold and a hundred-franc note were missing from his suit-case, of which the fastening had been forced.

True to his predatory and roving instincts, Bibby had "pinched" what he could and left.

CHAPTER VII

SOME PASSAGES FROM JOANNA SMYRTHWAITE'S LOCKED BOOK

The long drought broke at last in an afternoon and night of thunder and scourging violence of rain, drowning out summer. A week of chill westerly weather followed, lowering gray skies, a perpetual lament of wind through the great woodland, combined with a soaking, misty drizzle which forced the firs and pines into their blue-black winter habit and rusted the pink spires of the heather. The flower-garden, dashed by the initial downpour, became daily more sodden, its glory very sensibly departed. Water stood in pools on the lawns. Leaves, dessicated by the continuous sun-scorch, fell in dingy brown showers from the beeches; and a robin, perching upon one of the posts of the tennis-net, practised the opening, plaintively sweet notes of his autumn song.

On the Thursday evening of this wet week, Joanna Smyrthwaite went to her room immediately after dinner, and, lighting the candles, sat down at her bureau. The rain beat against the windows. She heard it drip with a continuous monotonous tapping off the edge of the balcony on to the glass and tile roof of the veranda below. She heard the intermittent sighing sweep of the wind through the near trees, and the wet sucking sob of it in the hinges and fastenings of the casements. Nature wept, now petulantly, now, as it seemed, with the resignation of despair; and Joanna, sitting at the bureau with her diary open before her, listened to that weeping. It offered a fitting accompaniment to her gloomy concentration and exaltation of mind.

"*August 29, 190-*

"I supposed that I should have received an answer to my letter in the course of to-day at latest, but none has reached me," she wrote. "I am not conscious of regretting the delay. The reply, when it does come, can only confirm that which I already now know. I am no longer in suspense, and I wait to receive the reply merely to prevent the possibility of its falling into other hands than my own. That I could not permit. Although it can modify neither my intention nor my thought, it is mine, it belongs to me alone; and I refuse to allow the vulgar curiosity of any third person to be satisfied by perusal of it. I am sure that I do not regret the delay. It gives me time to reckon with myself and with all that has occurred. It also gives me time to test myself and make sure that I am not swayed by impulse, but that my will is active and my reason unbiased by feeling. I am quite calm. I have been so all day. For this I am thankful, although whether my calmness arises from self-control or from physical incapacity of further emotion I cannot decide. I do not know that the cause really matters, yet I should prefer to believe it self-control."

Joanna paused, leaning upon her elbow and listening to the sobbing of wind and rain.

"I suppose finality must always produce repose, however dreadful the cost at which finality is obtained. Only so can I account for my existing attitude of mind. I want, if I can, to put down clearly and consecutively exactly what happened last night. I think it may be useful to me in face of this period of waiting for the answer to my letter; also, I wish to live through it again step by step. I have learned very much during the last twenty-four hours. I have learned that pain, self-inflicted pain,

can be voluptuous. Even a few days ago I should have been scandalized by such an admission. I am no longer scandalized. Torture has emancipated me from many delusions and overnice prejudices. I have not time now, even had I still inclination, to be overnice.

"Margaret and Marion Chase dined in town and went to the theater with Mr. Challoner last night. A London touring company is giving some musical comedy at Stourmouth. When they returned I was still awake. I had not taken any of the tabloids Doctor Norbiton gave me to procure sleep. I did not care to sleep. I preferred to think. Margaret and Marion remained some time upon the gallery laughing and talking rather excitedly. They kept on repeating scraps of a frivolous song which they had heard at the play; and of which, so Margaret told me to-day—she apologized for the thoughtless disturbance they had made—neither could remember the exact tune. Their voices and the interest they evidently took in so senseless and trivial a thing jarred upon me. I felt annoyed and resentful. Their behavior offered such a startling contrast to my own trouble and to the whole tenor of my life that I could not but be displeased by their light-mindedness. I felt my own superiority. I did not attempt to disguise the fact of that superiority from myself. I despised them. I may have done wrong in despising them, but I did not care. The ambition to assert myself, in some striking and forcible manner which should compel recognition not only from Margaret and Marion, but from the whole circle of our acquaintance, took possession of me. I have always shrunk from publicity and been weakly sensitive to criticism and remark. I have been disposed to efface myself. To rule others has been an effort to me. Any influence I may have exercised has been exercised in obedience not to inclination but to my sense of duty. Now I felt differently. I felt my nature and intelligence had never found their full expression, that the strength of my character had never fully disclosed itself. I desired—I still desire—to manifest what I really am, of what I am capable. I even crave after the astonishment and possible alarm such a disclosure would create.

"Thinking steadily, I came to the conclusion this desire for entire and arresting self-expression is not actually new in me. I saw that I have always, implicitly though silently, entertained a conviction that the opportunity for self-expression would eventually present itself. This conviction has supported me under many mortifications. In the events of the last six months that opportunity appeared in process of taking tangible and very perfect shape. More than my imagination had ever dared suggest was in process of being granted me. If I married Adrian—"

Joanna raised her hand from the paper, or rather it raised itself, with a jerk, refusing further obedience. She sat stiffly upright, listening to the wind and the rain. The steady drip off the edge of the balcony on to the roof below sounded indescribably mournful in its single, muffled, reiterated note. Taken in connection with the words she had just written, that mournfulness threatened her composure. The muscles of her poor face twitched and her winged nostrils quivered, in her effort to repress an outbreak of emotion. After a struggle she turned fiercely to her open diary.

"If I married Adrian Savage," she wrote, "this, in itself, would bear indisputable witness to the fact of my superiority, would justify me to myself and command the respect of others. But, last night, I saw it was necessary to go beyond that, and ask

myself a question which, even in my worst hours of doubt, I have never had sufficient fortitude to ask myself before. I am anxious here to state positively that I did ask myself the said question; and that I answered it deliberately and calmly before certain things happened, which I shall presently set down. If I did not marry Adrian—"

Again Joanna's hand jerked away from the paper, while every nerve in her body was contracted by a spasm of almost intolerable pain. She put her left hand over her heart, gasping, the agony for the moment was so mercilessly acute. Yet, during that same moment, the old doting, ecstatic expression overspread her face. In a sense she welcomed, she gloried, in this visitation of pain.

"If I did not marry Adrian," she went on, "what then? The need for self-justification, the need for entire self-expression, would in that very dreadful event become more than ever desirable—the only solace, indeed, which could remain to me. Therefore, what had better happen? What—because I definitely and irrevocably willed it—must and should happen? I answered the question last night, and my purpose has never wavered. To-day I have spent some time in examining the stock arguments against this purpose of mine. They do not affect my determination, as I find that each one of them is based upon some assumption which my reason condemns as unsound and inadequate, or which is not applicable in my peculiar case. I know what I am going to do. The relief of that knowledge was immediate. It continues to sustain me."

Here Joanna rose and paced the room. She still wore the black silk and lace evening gown she had worn at dinner. Her hair was dressed with greater care than usual. Plain, flat-bosomed, meager, hard lines seaming her cheeks and forehead, yet there was nothing broken or weak in her bearing or aspect. Rather did she show as a somewhat tremendous creature, pacing thus, solitary, the familiar and soberly luxurious room, bearing with indomitable pride the whole realized depth and height of her trouble—a trouble to the thought of which, even while it racked her, she clung with jealous obstinacy as her sole possession of supreme and splendid worth. Her restlessness being somewhat assuaged, she went back and sat down to write.

"I do not attempt to account for what followed; I only set it down in good faith and with such accuracy as my memory permits. My memory has always been good, and, since now I have nothing left to gain or to lose, I have no temptation either to invent or to falsify. About an hour after Margaret and Marion Chase returned from the theater, and without any intervening period of unconsciousness—my mind, indeed, still occupied with the decision I had arrived at regarding my future action—I found myself walking through the streets of some foreign city. I was anxiously following a person of whose name and character I was ignorant, but who I was aware had a message of great importance which he needed to deliver to me, and to whom I felt an overpowering wish to speak. He walked apparently without any particular destination in view, yet so rapidly that I found it difficult to keep him in sight. Being tall, however, and of fashionable appearance, he, fortunately for me, was easily distinguishable from all other persons whom I met.

"I say, *I*—yet I am conscious, dreadfully, even infamously, conscious, that throughout I shared this experience with a woman of different antecedents, of a lower social position and inferior education to myself. Our two personalities inhabited one and the same body, for independent possession and control of which we contended without intermission, sometimes I, sometimes she, gaining the advantage. This association was very frightful to me. I felt soiled by it. And, not only did I in myself feel soiled, but hopes, emotions, aspirations which until now I had believed to be pure and elevated, assumed a vile aspect when shared by this woman's mind and heart. Still I knew that of necessity I must remain with her, continue to be, in a sense, part of her, if I was to get speech of the man whom I—we—followed, and to receive the message which he had to deliver.

"After long wandering through streets, some modern and reminding me of Paris, others narrow, crooked, and lined with ancient houses, I came to a small, formally laid-out pleasure garden in the center of the town, dominated by a singularly beautiful Gothic building, probably a church. Benches were placed at intervals round the garden along the shingled paths, between massed shrubs and beds of heliotrope and roses. Upon one of these benches, being overcome by fatigue and by a conviction of unescapable fate, I sat down. So doing, I perceived that, at the far end of the bench, the man whom I had so long followed already sat. His attitude was expressive of extreme dejection. His figure was bowed together. His elbows rested upon his knees, his hands were pressed against the sides of his head. I felt drawn to him not only by a very vital attraction, but by pity, for I could not doubt that, for some cause, he had recently suffered severely, and was suffering severely even now. I saw that this suffering blinded him to the outer things, rendering him quite indifferent to or unaware of my presence. Notwithstanding which, I—or she—the woman to whom my personality was so horribly united—after making some vulgar efforts to arouse his attention, began to speak to him, pouring forth, to my utter and inextinguishable shame, a gross travesty of my love for Adrian Savage, of my most secret thoughts and sensations in relation to that love, of my joy in his presence, of my admiration for his talents, even for his person, employing words and phrases meanwhile of a nature revolting to me which outraged my sense of propriety and self-respect—words and phrases which I was utterly incapable of using and of which I had never indeed gauged the actual meaning until they passed her lips.

"A considerable time passed before the man gave any sign that he heard what she—what I—said. He remained immersed in thought, his head bent, his hands supporting it. At last—"

And Joanna closed her eyes, waiting for a space, listening to the sobbing of wind and dripping of rain.

"—he looked round at me. His face," she wrote, "was that of Adrian; but of an Adrian whom I had never seen before. It was worn and very pale. There were blue stains beneath the eyes. All the gaiety, the beautiful, self-confident strength and hopefulness were banished from his expression, which was very stern though not actually unkind. Then I knew that he had received and read my letter; that the marks of suffering which he bore had been caused by the contents of my letter. I knew that

the message which he had to deliver to me, and to obtain which I had followed him through the streets, forcing myself into union with this vicious woman—in whose speech and actions I so dreadfully participated—was nothing less than his answer to that letter.

"At last, looking fixedly at me, he said, very sadly: 'It is no use. I do not want you. Poor woman, I do not want you. It is not possible that I should ever want you. I am bitterly grieved for you; but you waste your time.'

"As he spoke he placed some money in her hand, and, having finished speaking, he rose and went away. Not once did he hesitate or look back, but held himself erect and walked as a man whose decision is deliberate. She clutched the money tightly, whimpering; but I had no part in her tears. I had no disposition to cry then; nor have I had any since. I understood what that piece of money meant. It was the price of Adrian's freedom from my love. He paid me to go away.

"I remember noticing the fantastic carven stonework of the church outlined against the night sky, while shame and despair devoured me—shame and despair intimate, merciless, unmitigated. Still clutching the piece of money, the woman got up. I do not know anything more about her, what she did, or who she was, or where she went. For a time, as far as I am concerned, the pulse of the world ceased to beat. And then I lay here, at home, in my own room at the Tower House, and heard the rain and wind in the trees just as I hear them to-night.

"When Isherwood brought me my tea, at half-past seven, she expressed concern at my appearance. I told her I had not slept and that I felt tired and faint. She insisted upon sending for Doctor Norbiton. I let her do so. It was matter of indifference to me whether I saw him or not. Nothing can change either facts or the event. But Isherwood has always been kind and faithful to me. I did not want to hurt her by opposing her wishes. Doctor Norbiton sounded my heart. He told both Isherwood and Margaret it was in a weak state; but added that he believed such mischief as exists to be functional rather than organic. He recommended me to take the tabloids, which he gave me for insomnia, sparingly, as their effect upon the heart is depressing. I listened and agreed. Margaret expressed regret at my condition. She offered to see Rossiter for me and spare me the trouble of housekeeping. I let her do so.

"It has rained all day; but I have been fully occupied in going through papers and accounts, and making sure that my own affairs and those of the household are in perfect order. This almost mechanical work is soothing. I have always been fond of accounts. I remain quite calm. Why should I be otherwise? I know the truth, and have nothing left, therefore, either to fear or to hope."

The following evening Joseph Challoner was due to dine at the Tower House. Pleading a return of faintness and disinclination for conversation, Joanna remained up-stairs in the blue sitting-room and retired early to bed. The next entry in her diary reads thus:

"THE TOWER HOUSE, *August* 30, 190-, 9 P.M.

"I let Isherwood undress me. I asked her for my white pleated *négligé*, which I found she had sent to the cleaners' during the time my hands were hurt and I had been obliged to give her my keys. I am glad to wear it to-night. Isherwood was very

kind and attentive to me. I could almost think she suspected something, but I did what I could to dissipate any suspicion she might entertain. I promised her I would call her if I wanted her during the night; but all that I really needed is quiet. This is perfectly true. I do need quiet, unbroken quiet.

"Still I must try to put down events in their proper order.—And first, I feel it is only just that I should note how much I have thought of papa during these last two very dreadful days. I have felt singularly near to him in spirit and in sympathy. I know that I have rebelled against his methods; and have both thought and spoken harshly of him. I am sorry for this. I see now that, in his position and possessing his authority, I should have acted as he did. He valued wealth as lightly as I do; though he was interested in the acquisition of it. Business to him was an occupation rather than an end in itself. He craved for entire self-expression—as I have craved for it; and it was impossible for him to find such expression in business. In public affairs, economic or social reform, he might have found it; and to the last, I believe, he hoped some opportunity of entire self-expression would present itself. That, I think, was why he disliked the idea of dying. He was ambitious of impressing himself upon the mind of his generation in the manner he inwardly felt himself capable of doing. It hurt and angered him to leave life with his personal equation unrecorded. He knew himself—as I have known myself—to be superior to others both in intellect and in the nature of his aims and ambitions. He despised weakness. He despised what is common, trivial, ignorant. He could not tolerate that those about him should run after cheap pleasures in which the mind has no part.

"This morning, about twelve o'clock, the rain lessened. I ordered the carriage and drove by myself to the West Stourmouth Cemetery. Leaving the carriage at the entrance gates, I walked to his grave. The cemetery is still but partially laid out. Patches of heather remain, making the tombstones and monuments look bare and white. I am glad papa's grave is on the highest ground. Standing by it, I saw, through scuds of driving mist, the Baughurst Woods, sloping to the shore, and beyond them the sea. The loneliness of this growing camp of the dead was sympathetic to me. I am leaving instructions that I am to be buried beside papa's grave, if not in it. I have never been so much of a companion or help to any one as to him. He, at least, wanted me, though he often frightened and wounded me. So I will go back to him in death; and lie beside him in the rain, and snow, and wind, and sunshine out there under the barren gravel of the moor.

"I received Adrian's answer to my letter by the six-o'clock post this evening. I feared giving way to emotion on opening it; but I experienced very little emotion. Of this I am glad. I am glad, too, infinitely glad, that I determined what I would do before I so strangely saw Adrian and spoke with him the night before last. If I had not determined my state of mind would have been far more agonizing. Calmness and self-respect would have been impossible. Margaret was with me in the blue sitting-room when Edwin brought me my letters. I do not know whether she observed that I received one from Adrian. I fancy not. I waited until she had gone before reading it. It proved just such a letter as I might have anticipated, written with every intention of kindness. It exhibits his character in a very agreeable light—affectionate, courteous, penetrated by regret on my account. He does his utmost to spare my feelings and soften the blow he is compelled to deal me. I appreciate all

this. He praises my intelligence, and points out to me, very gracefully, the advantages of my education and of my wealth. He points out, too, the endlessly varied interests of life. He admits that he has loved Madame St. Leger for many years; and he reproaches himself deeply with not having spoken to me about his affection for her when he stayed here in May, and when I pressed him to tell me whether he was suffering from any anxiety in which I could be helpful to him.

"That is the answer of the man of society, the well-bred man of the world; the man, moreover, of sensibility and nice feeling. I quite appreciate the tone and tact of his letter. But I had already received the answer of the man himself. It was simpler, so simple as to need no supplement—'It is no use. I do not want you. My poor woman, I do not want you. It is not possible that I should ever want you. I am bitterly grieved for you; but you waste your time.'

"*He has never wanted me. I have wasted my time.*—That is all. And assuredly that is enough, and more than enough? I will waste no more time, Adrian. I will go where time, thought, love, and the rejection of love are not.

"The rain has come back. It drips and drips upon the veranda roof. I have burned all your letters. No one has ever seen or touched them save myself. This volume of my diary I leave to you. I shall seal it up, and direct it to you. At least read it—I am no longer ashamed. I want you to know me as I really am. Life is already over. I am already dead. So I am not afraid. I welcome the darkness of the everlasting night which is about to absorb me into itself.—I wear the white gown I wore the second time you kissed my hand.—I do not blame you, Adrian. It is just as natural that you should not love me as that I should have loved you. I understand that.

"And very soon now all my trouble will be over and passed. Soon I shall sleep in the arms of the lover who has never failed man or woman yet—in the arms of Death.

JOANNA SMYRTHWAITE."

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH A STRONG MAN ADOPTS A VERY SIMPLE METHOD OF CLEARING HIS OWN PATH OF THORNS

Challoner stood turning up the collar of his mackintosh. Looking back between the lines of dark, wind-agitated trees, the red mass of the house, through a dull whiteness of driving rain, showed imposing both in height and in extent. Challoner measured it with a satisfied, even triumphant, eye. Its large size suited his own large proportions capitally. This evening, though early and still light, all the blinds were drawn down. This was as it should be. He favored the observance of such outward conventional decencies. Then, as he moved away with his heavy, lunging tread, the rain and wind took him roughly on the quarter.

This rearward onslaught caused him no annoyance, however, since his thoughts were altogether self-congratulatory. Circumstance had played, and was playing, into his hands in the handsomest fashion. Well, every one gets his deserts in the long run; so he could but suppose he deserved his present good fortune! Only in this case the run had proved such an unexpectedly short and easy one. For hadn't he arrived, practically arrived, feeling every bit as fresh as when he started?—Here a turn of half-superstitious, half-cynical piety took him. The Lord helps those who have the nous to help themselves. He praised the Lord! Having offered which small tribute, or bribe, to the Judge of all the Earth who cannot do other than right, he proceeded to check off a few of his well-earned blessings.

The announcement of his engagement to Margaret Smyrthwaite had appeared, about three weeks previously, in the society columns of local and London papers. Stourmouth buzzed with the news, to a loudness which he found both humorous and flattering. In private Challoner laughed a horse-laugh more than once at thus finding how he had made his fellow-townsmen "sit up." He enjoyed the joke of his own social elevation and prospective wealth hugely. And Mrs. Gwynnie had been quite good, thank the Powers! If the rest of his acquaintance had been made to "sit up" by the news, she—to quote his own graceful manner of speech—had "taken it lying down." Really he felt very kindly toward her. She'd given no trouble. But then the world was going a lot better with Mrs. Gwyn than she'd any right to expect. Her rent and her quarterly allowance were paid with absolute regularity. Not every man would have done as much for her after the dance she'd led him! Beattie Stacey was safely married last week to her young R.M.S. second officer. And, so Challoner heard, mainly on the strength of the said young officer's excellent reputation, Gwynnie herself had taken out a new lease of social life since her installation in the white house opposite the Marychurch Borough Recreation Ground. She'd been cute enough to throw herself into that department of Anglican religio-parochial activity which busies itself with variety entertainments, rummage sales, concerts, "happy evenings," bazaars, and such-like contrivances for providing—under cover of charity—audiences for idle amateurs ambitious of publicity. Curates waxed enthusiastic over "Mrs. Spencer's splendidly unselfish helpfulness" and "wonderful organizing power."—The thought of that poor little, earnest, light-weight, impecunious baggage of an Anglo-Indian widow in the character of a church-worker tickled her ex-lover consumedly.

But now Challoner felt constrained to put a term to the slightly ribald mirth induced by this checking of his well-deserved blessings, and bestow himself within the four corners of an appropriately black-edged manner. For, as he turned out of the gates at the end of the carriage-drive, he caught sight of Col. Rentoul Haig's unmistakable figure, pompous and dapper even when clothed in an "aquascutum" and carrying a streaming umbrella, walking briskly down

The Avenue. Making a pretense of deep abstraction, Challoner passed him; then, drawing up suddenly, wheeled round.

"You, Colonel?" he said. "I beg your pardon. For the minute I didn't recognize you. My thoughts were elsewhere."

He looked on the ground, as one who struggles with manly pride against strong emotion.

"You may have heard of the trouble we are in at the Tower House?" he added.

Rentoul Haig disapproved the "we"; but then he warmly and articulately disapproved the whole matter of the Challoner-Smyrthwaite alliance. Nevertheless he hungered for first-hand news, thirsted for retailable detail; and who could supply these better than Challoner? He pocketed disapproval, and answered with fussy alacrity, peering upward, into the younger man's curiously non-committal countenance, from beneath the shelter of his umbrella.

"Very fortunate to run across you like this, Challoner," he said. "I was coming to leave cards and inquire. Shocking news this, most shocking. I heard the report from Woodford, at the Club, after luncheon, and, I give you my word, it quite upset me."

"I'm not surprised, Colonel," Challoner put in gloomily.

"Why, only yesterday morning I saw her out driving between twelve and one—just upon the half-hour it must have been—as I was crossing The Square on my way to the Club. When Woodford told me, I said, 'God bless my soul, it's incredible!' "

Challoner's lips parted with an unctuous smack.

"Incredible or not, Colonel, it is only too sadly true. In the midst of life we are in death, you know. I don't set up to be a serious man, but an event like this does bring the meaning of those words home to you—makes you think a bit, reminds you what an uncommonly slippery hold even the healthiest of us has on life."

Watching the effect of these lugubrious moralizings upon his auditor, Challoner had the pleasure of seeing the latter's face grow small and blue in the shade of the wet umbrella. —"Looks like a sick frog under a toadstool," he reflected. "Well, let snobby old froggy turn blue, feel blue—the bluer the better." It served him jolly well right. Hadn't he said no end of nasty things about his, Challoner's, coming marriage? Then he proceeded with the amiable operation commonly known as "rubbing it in."

"Ah! yes," he said, "I knew how you'd feel it, Colonel. Without being oversentimental, it is a thing to break up one's sense of personal security. And a relation of yours too! Only nine-and-twenty—a mere child compared to you, of course, Colonel. It's always painful to see the younger generation go first. Yes, I knew how you'd feel it. Kind of you to come off at once like this to make inquiries. It will please Margaret, poor, dear girl. She sent for me directly they made the discovery this morning, and I've been with her ever since, looking after her and putting things through. You see, Joanna always kept the management of the establishment in her own hands, and the whole household fell to pieces like a bundle of sticks to-day. All the servants lost their heads. Somebody had to step in and lay hold. Margaret is behaving beautifully. This bearing up is all very well at first, but I'm afraid she's bound to pay later. However, thank God! I've the right, now, to take care of her."

"Quite so—no doubt—yes, exactly," Haig responded, in rather chilly accents. "Of course. But I have heard nothing but the bare fact, Challoner. Quite sudden, was it—quite unexpected?"

"Yes, and no." He spoke slowly, as one weighing his words.

"I sincerely trust there isn't any question of an inquiry?"

From his superior height Challoner looked down at the speaker in momentary and sharp suspicion. What story was current in Stourmouth, he wondered? Could the servants have talked? Had the empty tabloid bottle and the tumbler with a film of white sediment clouding the inside of it, become a matter of common knowledge? He found Rentoul Haig's expression reassuring.

"Certainly not—quite uncalled for, I am thankful to say," he replied largely. "No, no, Colonel, nothing of that sort. An inquest is a pretty sickening business under ordinary circumstances; but it amounts to a positive insult, in my opinion, in the case of a refined, sensitive gentlewoman."

Rentoul Haig came near dancing with impatience.

"True, true," he murmured.

"So, pray put that idea out of your head, and out of everybody else's head, Colonel. You'll be doing Margaret a kindness, doing poor Joanna a kindness too. People are awfully unscrupulous in the reports they circulate. But then, of course, I know we can count on your gentlemanly feeling and good taste."

A moment more and Colonel Haig believed he should burst. He was being patronized—patronized, he the bright, particular star of the most elect circle of Stourmouth society, and by Joseph Challoner!

"The fact is she hasn't been in a good state of health for some time. Margaret has spoken to me about it and a lot of people have remarked upon it. Her peculiarities seemed to grow upon her lately. And she was not an easy person to deal with—in some ways very like our poor friend her father. Margaret hasn't said much to me, but I fancy she's found her sister's temper a little trying. Health, I dare say, as much as anything. Norbiton has been treating her for sleeplessness and general debility—nerves, you know. She always was highly strung. Yesterday morning, they tell me, she looked appallingly ill and complained of having fainted in the night. They had Norbiton in, and he sounded her—was not at all satisfied with the heart's action. I am not surprised at that. You remember how peculiar her eyes were—globular __"

Challoner looked down with rich enjoyment at the "pop-eyes," so he gracefully phrased it, staring eagerly, angrily up from beneath the streaming umbrella.

"Globular," he repeated; "and with that pale circle round the edge of the iris, which invariably, in my experience, indicates a weak heart. Norbiton prescribed for her, and told her to keep quiet. Margaret, poor, dear girl, did her best; but Joanna insisted on driving out. I was dining there last night, and she didn't come down. They told me Norbiton's opinion, but I supposed it was just a case for care. And then, when her maid went to call her this morning, she found her stone cold. She must have been dead several hours—died in her sleep."

And both men stood silent, awed in spite of themselves, by the thought of Joanna Smyrthwaite lying dead.

"Shocking occurrence, very shocking indeed!" Colonel Haig remarked presently, fussily clearing his throat. "You say peculiarities had grown upon poor Miss Smyrthwaite recently. One would be glad to know why—to have some clue to the reason for that. There were rumors, I believe, a few months back of an—er—of an attachment on her part, which—it is a delicate subject to approach—was, in fact, rather misplaced. And—well—you know, one cannot help putting two and two together."

"Oh, as to anything of that sort," Challoner returned somewhat roughly, throwing his big body back from the hips and moving a step aside, as though to conceal justifiable annoyance,

—"you really must excuse me, Colonel. Standing in the relation I do to both the Smyrthwaite ladies, it is a subject I hardly care to discuss. I can't help knowing a good deal, and I can't help what I've noticed; but I don't feel at liberty to speak. Mr. Savage stayed twice at the Tower House this year, as you are aware; and—people have eyes in their heads. I don't mind telling you, he and I came to loggerheads over the division of the property. That's what first really brought Margaret and me together. I had to protect her interests, or she would have come off a very bad second. And, though it's early days to mention it, I don't mind telling you in confidence—the strictest confidence, you understand, Colonel—"

"You know by this time, I hope, Challoner, how entirely you can trust me?" the other remonstrated, at once famished for further information and bristling with offended dignity.

"To be sure I do.—Well, then, it may interest you to hear that Margaret has the old home secured to her. I am pleased on her account, for she's fond of the place. Personally, there are several houses in Baughurst Park I prefer. However, that's neither here nor there. If she's pleased I'm pleased, naturally. But, exclusive of the house and its contents, she hardly benefits at all under her sister's will."

In his excitement Rentoul Haig lost control of his umbrella, which, tilting in a gust of wind, discharged a small cataract of water down the back of his neck.

"Bless my soul," he exclaimed, "you don't say so! What ungodly weather! Where on earth does all her money go to?"

"You may well ask," Challoner replied grimly. "In the case of her dying unmarried her share in the mills and the rest of the Yorkshire property is left to Mr. Andrew Merriman, the partner and manager—a self-made man, who had the wit to get round old Mr. Smyrthwaite. He's feathered his own nest very tidily, it strikes me, one way and another. And the bulk of the invested property—prepare yourself for a pleasant surprise, Colonel—Joanna leaves, on trust, to her scrapegrace, rascally brother."

A flashlight hope of a solid legacy had momentarily illuminated Rentoul Haig's horizon. But the light of hope was extinguished almost as soon as kindled, giving him just time to be mortally disappointed. His face fell, while Challoner, watching, could barely repress his glee.

"But, but," he bubbled, "every one has been assured for years that the good-for-nothing boy was dead!"

"I don't want to be inhuman, but I can only say that, for the sake of my future wife's peace of mind, I most sincerely and cordially trust he is dead—dead and done with. Judging by what you told me yourself, Colonel, from a child he has been a downright bad lot, a regular waster. You may also be interested to hear we owe this precious bit of business to Mr. Adrian Savage. He came to Joanna, when he was over last, with some cock-and-bull story about young Smyrthwaite's turning up, half-starved, in Paris last winter. Worked upon her feelings no end with a whole lot of Frenchified false sentiment—brother and sister, the sacredness of family, and that sort of fluff-stuff. I am bound to say plainly I date the break-up of her health from that moment. He spoke to me about young Smyrthwaite, but, of course, I refused to touch it. Gave him a piece of my mind which I fancy he didn't quite relish, as he packed up and took himself off, on the quiet, next morning. As I told him, if he and Merriman wanted to dump the young scoundrel upon his two unfortunate sisters they mustn't look to me for assistance—the job, as I told him, wasn't in Joseph Challoner's line, not at all. Now, Colonel, I ought not to detain you any longer. I'm pleased to have had the chance to set your mind at ease on one or two points. And you'll do both Margaret and myself a favor if you will tell every one it was heart, just simply heart—a thing that might happen to any one of us, you or me, for instance, any

day. Margaret will feel it very kind and thoughtful of you to call, like this at once, to inquire. Now I really must be off. Good-evening to you. Let you know the date of the funeral? Of course—good-evening."

And he swung up The Avenue, in the shrinking light, under the swaying, dripping trees, highly elate.

"Choked old froggy off neatly," he said to himself, "and got my knife into highty-tighty Cousin Adrian too. I wonder if he did carry on with Joanna. I'd give something to know—dare say it'll come out in time. Anyhow, he wouldn't touch her money; though it would have been bad policy to acquaint old Haig with that little fact. Better take the short-cut home. Stiff from standing so long in the wet; but it's worth while, if only for the fun of making old Haig feel so confoundedly cheap."

Supported by these charitable reflections, he turned off the main road into a footpath which, after skirting the gardens of a large villa facing on to The Avenue, struck northwestward across an as yet unreclaimed portion of the Baughurst Park Estate. By following this route Challoner took the base instead of the two sides of a triangle, thus saving about a quarter of a mile in his walk home to Heatherleigh. A dark plain of high, straggling heather, broken here and there by a thicker darkness of advancing ranks of self-sown firs, lay on either side the grayness of the sand and flint strewn track. Even in sunshine the region in question was cheerless, and, as seen now, in the driving rain and fading daylight, it bore a positively forbidding aspect. But to this Challoner, having returned to enumeration of his well-deserved blessings, was sublimely indifferent.

And among those blessings—here, alone, free to disregard conventional black-edged decencies and be honest with himself—Joanna Smyrthwaite's death, although an ugly suspicion of suicide did hang around it, might, he felt, be counted. Making the admission, he had the grace to feel slightly ashamed of his own cynicism. In the first shock of the tragedy, when Marion Chase sent for him in the morning, he had been genuinely troubled and overset. But, as the day wore on, the advantages of the melancholy event disclosed themselves more and more clearly. Joanna Smyrthwaite never liked him, considered him her social inferior, didn't mince matters in expressing her objection to her sister's engagement. Ignored him, when she got the chance, or snubbed him. Distinctly she'd done her best to make him feel awkward; and there was bound to be friction in the future both in their family relation and in the management of the Smyrthwaite property. Joanna was uncommonly strong. He, for one, had never underrated the force of her character. He even owned himself a trifle afraid of her, afraid of some pull—as he expressed it—that she might have over Margaret. Now he would have Margaret to himself, exclusively to himself—and Challoner's blood grew hot, notwithstanding the chill dreariness of wind and wet, thinking of that.

For his feeling toward Margaret Smyrthwaite had come to be the master power of his life, of all his schemes of self-aggrandizement. After the somewhat coarse and primitive manner of his kind, he was over head and ears in love with her. He was proud of her, almost sensitively anxious to please her; ready, for all his burly, bullying roughness, to play faithful dog, fetch and carry and slave for her. No woman had ever affected him or excited his passions as she did. In food he relished highly seasoned dishes to apprehend the flavor of which you do not need to shut your eyes and listen. And Margaret Smyrthwaite's attractions were of the highly seasoned order, the effect of her full-fleshed, slightly overdressed and overscented person presenting itself without any baffling reserve, frankly assailing and provoking the senses.—Oh! he'd treat her like a queen; work for her; buy her jewels, motor-cars, aeroplanes if she

fancied them; pet, amuse, make Stourmouth bow down to, make himself a great man, for her! —Sir Joseph and Lady Challoner—a loftier flight than that—who could tell? Maybe a peerage. Lord and Lady Baughurst—why not? After all, if you play your cards cleverly enough such apparently improbable things do happen, particularly in this blessed twentieth century, when money is the prime factor.

And there was money in plenty, would be more, unless he was uncommonly out of his reckoning. At the start, so he calculated, their united incomes—his own and Margaret's—would amount to getting on for twelve thousand. All to the good, too, since there was no drain of a large landed estate absorbing more than half its yearly revenue in compulsory outgoings. They would be married soon, quite soon. Her sister's death and her present loneliness supplied ample reason for pushing on the wedding. It must be a quiet one, of course, out of respect for black-edged decencies. But he didn't object to that. The thing was to get her.—And then he'd carry her away, right away, shaking her free of the dismal, old-fashioned, Smyrthwaite rut altogether. They'd take a three months' honeymoon and travel somewhere, anywhere; go a yachting trip, say, up the Mediterranean. Never since he was a boy at school had he taken a holiday. It had been grind, grind, scheme, scheme, climb, climb without intermission. Not but what he'd climbed to some purpose, since he'd got high enough at forty to pluck such a luscious mouthful as Margaret off the apple-tree against which he'd set up his ladder! Now he would take a holiday, if only to show other men what a prize Joseph Challoner had won in the shape of a woman.

Amorous, uxorious, his whole big body tingling with emotion, he forged along the path across the darkling moorland, breasting the wind-driven sheets of cold rain.

"Hi! slow up there, you great, lumbering, greasy-skinned elephant, and tell me where the devil I've got to in this blasted old wilderness!" a voice shouted.

At the same time he was aware that a narrow strip of the gray pathway in front of him reared itself up on end, assuming human form—a human form, moreover, oddly resembling that of Adrian Savage.

The style of the address was scarcely mollifying, and Challoner had all a practical man's hatred both of being taken by surprise and of encountering phenomena which he could not account for at once in a quite satisfactory and obvious manner. He came straight to the baffling apparition, and looked it steadily, insolently, up and down, the bully in him stirred into rather dangerous activity. The ridicule of his personal appearance wounded his vanity. The interruption of his dreams of love and glory infuriated him; while the fancied likeness of the speaker to Adrian Savage sharpened the edge of both offenses.

"I advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head, or you may happen to find this wilderness an even more blasted and blasting locality than will at all suit you," he said threateningly.

At close quarters the slouching figure was certainly not that of Adrian Savage, nor was the weak, dissolute, blue-eyed face. Yet, although seen indistinctly in the waning light, the said face struck Challoner as unaccountably familiar. What on earth, who on earth was the fellow? Not an ordinary tramp, for his speech, though thick with drink, and his clothes, though ill-kept and dirty, were those of a man of education and position. Challoner continued to scrutinize him. And under that unfriendly and menacing scrutiny the young man's tone changed, declining to petulant almost whining apology.

"You needn't bluster," he said. "I meant no harm; and you know you did look awfully funny and shiny! I want to know where I am. I came across from Havre to Barryport in an

onion-boat, because it was cheapest. I'm not overflush of cash. So I've come to look up some of my people who live about here."

"Charming surprise for them," Challoner said.

"And it blew like blazes all last night. Between the motion and the stench of the onions I was as sick as Jonah's whale. Nothing left inside of me except just myself. One of those Breton sailor chaps, hawking his beastly vegetables, came a bit of the way from Barryport with me. He told me to cut across these commons and I should be sure to come out all right; but I expect he lied just to get quit of me."

"More than possible," Challoner said.

"I ought to have stuck to the tram-lines, but my head's rather light. I haven't got over the Jonah business yet. I lost my bearings altogether somehow, through feeling so awfully slack. I've been sheltering in under those mangy old fir-trees for I don't know how long, hoping somebody might pass. And I'm wet to the skin, and as cold as charity."

"Very interesting indeed, but no earthly concern of mine. So if you've got to the end of your tale I'll continue my walk. Good-day," Challoner commented, preparing to resume his homeward journey.

The young man caught him by the arm.

"Say, but you can't leave me alone in this God-forsaken hole?"

"Oh yes, I can," Challoner answered. "Kindly take your dirty paw off my sleeve, will you? else I may be compelled to have a word with the local authorities about a case of assault, attempted robbery with violence, and such sweet little games. However, it wouldn't be the first time you've made acquaintance with the inside of a police cell, unless I'm much mistaken."

"I don't mean any harm. I only want you to tell me the way. I can't lie out here in the wet all night. It would rot me with chills and fever."

The wind had increased in force. Now the tumult of it was loud. It rushed through the firs, bending them low, tearing off dry branches and tufted tassels; then fled on, screaming, across the dark plain of heather like some demented thing let loose. The speaker craned his neck upward and raised his voice to a quavering shout in the effort to make himself heard. His face was close to Challoner's; and again the latter was puzzled by something unaccountably familiar in the features and general effect of it. Whereupon the bullying instinct gave place to caution.

"See here," he said, "you must behave like a reasonable being, not like a driveling sot, if you want me to take any trouble about you. Tell you your way, you young fool, your way where?"

"To the Tower House, something Park—Baughurst Park—that's the blooming name of it, where my people live."

Challoner started; he could not help it. Then he waited till the next gust of wind had spent its fury, and, in the lull which followed, spoke very slowly.

"So that's the blooming name of the blooming place where your people live, is it? And who may your people be, if you please, and what is your business with them?"

"What, the deuce, does that matter to you?" the other answered, trying to ruffle, yet shrinking away nervously, while the wind, gathering force again, whipped his legs and back, showing the lines of his wasted, large-boned frame through his thin, light-colored clothing.

"As it happens, it matters very much to me," Challoner retorted, "because some very particular friends of mine live at the Tower House. It may amuse you to hear I have just come

from there, and that you very certainly can't gain access to the Tower House without my permission, and that I very certainly shall not give that permission. Young gentlemen of your particular kidney aren't required there. The men-servants would kick you out, and quite properly. We know how to treat loafers and tippling impostors who try to sponge upon gentlewomen here in England.—Now come along with me. I'll see you as far as the tram-line, and pay your fare to Barryport, and you can go on board your onion-boat again. Also I'll telephone through to the central police station directly I get home and give the Stourmouth and Barryport police a little description of you. So step out, if you please. No malingering."

As he finished speaking Challoner grasped the young man solidly by the shoulder, propelling him forward, but the latter, slippery as an eel, wriggled himself free.

"Let go, you great hulking beast!" he cried. "I'm not an impostor. I'm William Smyrthwaite, and my sister Joanna means to provide for me. I know all about that. A chap who I ran across three days ago in Rouen told me. We always were chummy in the old days, Nannie and I. She'll tell you I'm speaking the truth fast enough, and make you look d—d silly. She'll recognize and acknowledge me, see if she don't!"

"Upon my word, I'm afraid she's not likely to have an opportunity of doing anything of the kind, poor lady," Challoner returned; and he laughed at his own rather horrible joke. "So come along, Mr. Who-ever-you-are, alias William Smyrthwaite, Esq. I begin to think I'd better see you safe on board your precious onion-boat myself, and have you affectionately looked after till she sails. It may save both of us trouble."

"You beast, you cursed, great, shiny, black devil!" Bibby shouted. And he clawed and struck at his tormentor passionately.

The first touch of those striking, clawing hands let the underlying wild animal loose in Challoner. A primitive lust of fight took him, along with a savage joy in the act of putting forth his own immense physical strength. Still, at first, his temper remained fairly under control, and he played with his adversary, feinted and parried. But the wretched boy did not fight fair. He indulged in sneaking, tricky dodges learned amid the moral and social filth of the Paris under-world and in South American gambling hells and doss-houses. Soon Challoner lost his temper, saw his chance, took it; delivered one blow, straight from the shoulder, which, landing on Bibby's temple, dropped him like so much lead on the rain-washed flints of the crown of the pathway. Then he stood breathing heavily, his eyes bloodshot, the veins standing out like cords on his forehead, the intoxication of battle at once stupefying and maddening him.

Presently Bibby's limbs twitched; and, as though moved by a spring, he sat bolt upright, his elbows set back, his hands, the thick-jointed fingers wide apart, raised to the level of his shoulders.

"He's done me in, the clumsy, murderous brute!" he panted. Then childishly whimpering —"Nannie," he wailed, "poor old Nannie, so you're dead too. Golly, what a sell! Never mind. I'm just coming."

He lurched and fell sideways, rolling over face downward into a long, sandy puddle edging the pathway.

Five minutes, nearly ten minutes passed, while Challoner remained standing stock-still in the volleying wind and blinding rain and forlorn fading light of the moorland. At last he shook himself, went forward and knelt beside the motionless Thing lying close against the black ragged fringe of heath, upon its stomach, in the sandy wetness. For some time he couldn't bring himself to touch it. Then putting strong constraint upon himself, he turned it over and

bent low, staring at it. It reminded him of the big, white, yellow-headed maggots he used to pick out of the decaying wood of the old summer-house in the little garden at home as a boy, and use for bait when he went fishing in the river at Mary church. Yes—it was queerly like those maggots. But somehow it wore the clothes of Adrian Savage. And its poor face was that of Joanna Smyrthwaite as he had seen her this morning in the agitated silence of her room, stretched cold and lifeless beneath the fine lace coverlet of her satin wood bed. Only her eyes were shut, and this Thing's eyes were wide, wide open. Now its loose lips parted. Its mouth opened too, while a dark thread trickled slowly down its chin into the hollow of its throat inside its dirty, crumpled collar.

Challoner tumbled up hastily and waited, breathing hard and brushing the rain and sweat off his face with the back of his hand. Gradually his mind began to work clearly. His sense of ordinary every-day happenings, their correlation and natural consequences, of his own identity, his business, his hopes of worldly advancement, wealth and titles, came back to him. He understood that he must decide, act, cover up what he had done, get rid of this accusing, motionless Thing lying open-eyed, open-mouthed in the pathway.

He knelt down again, put his arms round the limp body, with a mighty lift and heave flung it sack-like across his shoulder, staggered on to his feet, and, heading southwestward in the teeth of the gale, laboring under the weight of that which he carried, plowed his way doggedly across the desolate outstretch of rough, resilient heather, down into the heart of the straining, bellowing, storm-swept woodland.

It was late, long past his usual dinner-hour, when Challoner reached Heatherleigh. To his own surprise, he accounted for himself to his servant as the man helped him off with his mackintosh. He'd been detained, had got a chill, he believed; didn't know that he wanted any dinner. Yes—let them send whatever they'd got ready—hot, and the plainer the better. He'd have it when he came down—in ten minutes. He must change first, he was so confoundedly wet.

For the sake of appearances he made an effort to eat; but the sight and smell of food turned his stomach. Still complaining of chill, he left the table and went into the smoking-room. Though an abstemious man, both from habit and policy, he mixed himself a remarkably stiff brandy and soda, set it down on the large writing-table—loaded with bundles of folded papers, documents engrossed on vellum and tied with pink tape—and forgot to drink it. Went round the room turning all the incandescent gas-lamps full on. The chocolate-colored imitation leather paper with which the walls were hung made the room dark; and Challoner felt a strong aversion to the dark. He wanted to see every object quite plainly and in its entirety. He took a cigar from the cedar-lined silver box Margaret Smyrthwaite had given him, standing on the revolving bookcase—looked at it and put it back. Somehow he couldn't smoke. Sank down in an arm-chair and sat glowering, like some sullen, savage, trapped animal, into the empty grate.

More than once, fatigue overcoming him, he dozed, only to wake, with a start, crying out loud:

"It wasn't my fault. I didn't begin it. He hit me first."

Then, clearer understanding returning, he continued:

"I struck him in self-defense—before God—as I hope to be saved, I did. At most they could bring it in manslaughter. I did it for Margaret's sake, to save her from being exploited and sponged on by the drunken young rotter. Ah! my God—but if it was true, if, as he claimed to be, he was her brother, how can I go to her with his blood on my hands? Margaret—I'm in

hell. Forgive me—don't believe it! Never know—my own poor, splendid darling—God, how I love her—Margaret—Margaret—never know—I can't, I can't lose you."

And Challoner broke down, sobs shaking his great, amorous body and tearing his bull throat.

Toward morning at the turn of the tide the gale abated and the rain ceased. When daylight came, but not until then, Challoner went up-stairs to his bedroom, the windows of which faced east. He drew back the curtains, pulled up the wooden-slatted Venetian blinds and watched the brightness widen outward and upward behind the ragged crests of the stone pines. As a rule he had not time or care to waste on the beauties of nature, but he found vague, inarticulate solace in the gaudy colors of this wild sunrise. He was calmer now, and the strong daylight helped to drive out exaggerations of sentiment and fearful fancies. In short, his impregnable health and physical courage, his convenient coarseness of moral fiber and indomitable tenacity of purpose, began to assert themselves. He began to argue and not unably to plead his own cause to himself.

For, look at the ghastly episode what way you pleased, how could he be blamed for it? The whole thing was accident, accident pure and simple, which he could not foresee, and equally could not prevent. It had been sprung on him out of a clear sky. He was rushed, not given an instant's breathing space for consideration. And that was manifestly unfair. Any man might lose his head and be betrayed into violence by such vile provocation.

His spirits revived.

And, when all came to all, there was not a tittle of evidence against him! After parting with Haig he had not met a soul. He could swear no one had seen him turn out of The Avenue into the footpath. The rain would have obliterated all traces of the struggle by this time, and wet heather, thank goodness, doesn't show tracks. Though why he should trouble about such details he didn't know. It was blitheringly silly, for, who the devil would be on the lookout for tracks? A thousand to one the body would not be found until the estate foresters cut the bracken in November; and by then—

Sweat broke out on Challoner's forehead, and he was not sorry the sun stood high behind the pines, throwing slanting shafts of light between their dark stems across the rain-swamped garden, where the blackbirds and thrushes patroled, worm-hunting, on the turf.

By that time, whatever was left would be in no condition to tell tales. "Painful discovery in the Baughurst Park Woods"—he could see the headlines in the local papers—"Mysterious death"—"No clue to the identity of the remains"—None, thank the Lord, none, none! But for a couple of francs and a few English coppers the boy's pockets were empty. Challoner, praise to God! had mustered sufficient spunk to ascertain that.

All the same—and here callousness failed him a little—his and Margaret's honeymoon should be a long one, long enough to insure their being far away from Stourmouth when the foresters cut the bracken in November. Distance, travel, new scenes and new interests, are said to draw the sting of remembrance. And it was best, immeasurably best, not only for himself, but indirectly for Margaret also, that remembrance should be blunted, that he should—if he only could—forget.

For, after all—his spirits in the honest sunshine reviving yet further—what proof had he the miserable drink and vice corrupted wastrel had spoken the truth? Wasn't it much more probable Haig's story was the right one, and that this was some low, blackmailing scoundrel trading upon scraps of hearsay information he'd happened to pick up? A lying, misbegotten whelp, in short, of whom society at large was extremely well rid—really, to expend sentiment

upon the summary removal of such refuse came near being maudlin. As to any fancied resemblance he bore to Joanna Smyrthwaite, one couldn't attach any serious importance to that. In the ghostly twilight it was impossible to see distinctly. And, after the uncommonly nasty upset of the morning and the bullying he'd been obliged to give that old grannie, Norbiton, before the latter would consent to ignore the empty tabloid bottle, and certify the cause of death simply as syncope, it was hardly surprising if he'd got poor Joanna's personal appearance a little upon his brain. No—it is an awful misfortune, no doubt, to be, however accidentally, the means of taking a fellow-creature's life; but, looking at the whole occurrence coolly, he—Challoner—came to the comforting conclusion that he was hardly more to blame, more responsible, than he would be if some reckless fool had blundered across the road under the nose of his motor and got run down.

Whereupon, the sun having now cleared the crests of the pines and it being imperative not to give the servants any handle for gossip, Challoner undressed and went to bed.

He succeeded in advancing the date of the wedding; but during the five weeks which elapsed before it took place his moods caused some perplexity and no small discomfort to his poorer clients, junior partners, and clerks. At moments he indulged in boisterous mirth; but for the most part was abominably bad-tempered, irritable, and morose.

Colonel Haig, however, noted unexpected signs of grace in him, concerning which he spoke to Mr. Woodford one day at the Club.

"Challoner's coming more into line," he said; "he is less noisy and self-assertive—very much less so. A good deal of the improvement in his manner is due to me, I flatter myself. I have been at the trouble of giving him some very strong hints. If you propose to associate with gentlemen you must learn to behave like a gentleman. His election to the Club vexed me at the time. Too much country-attorney sharp practice in the methods he employed, I thought. So I am relieved, greatly relieved, he has taken my friendly admonitions to heart. It would have annoyed me extremely if his membership had lowered the social tone of the Club. Too, it's pleasanter for me personally, as I am bound, I suppose, to see a good deal of him in the future, on my cousin, Margaret Smyrthwaite's, account."

When alone with his *fiancée* during this period of waiting Challoner's attitude alternated between anxious, almost servile, humility and extravagant making of love. Margaret, however, being a young woman of limited imagination, put down both humility and "demonstrations" to the potent effect of her own charms, thus remaining altogether sensible, self-complacent, outwardly composed, inwardly excited, and, in fine, very well content. While unknown to her, unknown, indeed, to all save the man who so slavishly obeyed and fiercely caressed her, the unsightly Thing, which had once been her playmate and brother, lay out, below the ever-talking trees, among the heath, and sedge-grass, and bracken, the tragedy and unspeakable disgrace of its decomposition not hidden by so much as a pauper's deal coffin-lid.

CHAPTER IX

WHEREIN ADRIAN SAVAGE SUCCEEDS IN AWAKENING LA BELLE AU BOIS DORMANT

In consequence of the bad weather every one returned to Paris early that autumn. Anastasia Beauchamp's first reception—the fourth Thursday in September—proved a crowded and animated function. Each guest expressed rapture at meeting every other guest, and at being back, yes, once again veritably established in our dear, good, brave, inexhaustibly interesting, intelligent and entertaining Paris! How they—the speakers—ever mustered sufficient fortitude to go away, still more to stay away, they could really now form no conception. But it was finished, thank Heaven! the mortally tedious exile; and they were restored to the humanities, the arts, the sciences, in short, to civilization, of which last dear Mademoiselle Beauchamp's hospitality represented so integral and so wholly charming a part. This and much more to this effect. The French mind and French diction rarely fumble; but arrive, with graceful adroitness, squarely on the spot. Lightness of touch and finish of phrase effectually safeguarded these raptures against any suggestion of insincerity or absurdity. They were diverting, captivating, as were the retailers of them. And Anastasia listened, retorted, sympathized, capped a climax with further witty extravagance, heartily pleased and amused.

Nevertheless, to her, this yearly *rentrée* was not without an element of pathos. In the matter of reminiscence and retrospect Miss Beauchamp was the least self-indulgent of women; her tendency to depress her juniors by exaltation of the past at expense of the present being of the smallest. To hours of solitary communing in her hidden garden she restricted all that. Still this joyous homing, when the members of her acquaintance taking up their residence once again in Paris blossomed into fullness of intellectual and social activity, left her a little wistful, a little sad. Recognition of the perpetual shifting of the human scene, of the instability of human purpose, oppressed her. How few of those who greeted her to-day with such affectionate *empressement* were precisely the same in thought, circumstance or character as when they bade her farewell at the end of May! She could not but note changes. Those changes might be slight, infinitesimal, but they existed. Not only do things, as a whole, march on; but the individual marches on also—marches on, too often, out completeness of sympathy, completeness of comprehension, or, through the ceaselessly centrifugal, scattering action of the social machine, marches on actually out of hearing and out of sight! And this thinning of the ranks, these changes in those who remained, did cause her sorrow. She could not bring herself to acquiesce in and accept them with entire philosophy.

Arrayed in a dress of clove carnation satin veiled with black *ninon de soie*, Miss Beauchamp stood near the door opening from the first of the suite of reception-rooms—in which tea had been served—on to the entrance hall. She had taken up her position there when bidding her guests adieu. In the second room two persons were talking, Lewis Byewater's slow, detached, slightly nasal accents making themselves clearly audible.

"Lenty Stacpole feels Madame Vernois is just the loveliest mature French feminine type he has yet encountered. He would be gratified to work up those thumbnail sketches of her he made at Ste. Marie into a finished portrait for exhibition with his other work in New York this winter—"

With an unconscious, but very expressive, little gesture of reprobation Anastasia moved across to the embrasure of the near window, pleasant from the fresh, pungent scent of a bank of white and lemon-colored chrysanthemums. She looked up into the limpid clarity of the twilight sky seen above the house-roofs on the opposite side of the quiet street.

... Yes, the perpetual shifting of the human scene, the instability of human purpose. And, as concrete example of all that, a portrait of gentle, shrinking, timid, pre-eminently old-world Madame Vernois on exhibition in New York! The shouting incongruity of the proposition! Would her daughter, *la belle Gabrielle*, entertain it? And there, as Anastasia confessed to herself, she ran up against the provoking cause of her quarrel with existing conditions and tendencies. For, of the two living persons whom she had recently come to hold dearest, wasn't the one changed and the other absent?

Since that pleasant afternoon at Ste. Marie she had neither sight nor word of Adrian Savage. The young man appeared to have incontinently vanished. She rang up his office in the *rue Druot*. The good Konski replied over the telephone, "Monsieur was, alas! *encore en voyage*." She rang up his home address in the *rue de l'Université*, only to receive the same response; supplemented by the information that Adrian had not notified the date of his return, nor left orders as to the forwarding of his letters. What did this mean? She became anxious.

"Lenty has worried quite a wearing amount," Byewater was saying, "whether it would be suitable he should ask you to let him work up a portrait. I tell you, Madame St. Leger, Lenty's silver-point is just a dream. Do not go thinking it is because I am his friend I judge it so. Mr. Dax positively enthused when he saw some samples last fall; and Lenty has broken his own record since then—"

Anastasia, still consulting the calm evening sky, began to play a quite other than calm little fantasia with the fingers of one hand upon the window-pane. For why, in the name of diplomacy, of logic, of Eros himself, had Adrian Savage elected to vanish at this moment of all conceivable moments? The goal of his ambitions was in sight—hadn't she told him as much at Ste. Marie? Eros awaiting, as she believed, to crown him victor in the long, faithful fight. And then that he, the dear, exasperating young idiot, should gallop off thus, the Lord only knew whither, instead of claiming the enchanting fruit of his victory! Really, it was too wildly irritating. For *la belle Gabrielle* wasn't pleased—not a bit of it. She resented his absence at this particular juncture, as any woman of spirit not unreasonably must. Only too probably she would make him pay for his apparent slight of her. And to what extent would she make him pay? Faster and faster grew the time of the fantasia upon the window-pane, for this question greatly disturbed Anastasia.

For if Adrian must be cited as an example of the absent, *la belle Gabrielle* must be cited as among the changed. Miss Beauchamp, who watched her with affectionate solicitude, perceived something was a little bit wrong with her. She was not quite contented, not quite happy. Her manner had lost its delightful repose, her beauty, though great, its high serenity. Her wit had a sharp edge to it. She avoided occasions of intimacy. To-day she had helped Anastasia receive; and the latter remarked that, during the whole course of the afternoon, men had gathered about her and that she flirted—gracefully—yet undeniably—with each and all in turn. Since her return to Paris she had discarded the last outward signs of mourning. The smoke-gray walking-suit she wore to-day was lavishly embroidered in faint pastel shades of mauve, turquoise, and shell-pink, the pattern outlined here and there in silver thread, which glinted slightly as she moved. The same delicate tones tipped the *panache* of smoke-gray ostrich plumes set at the side of her large black hat. In this donning of charming colors Anastasia read the signing of some private declaration of independence, some assertion, not only of her youth and youth's acknowledged privilege of joyous costume, but of intention to make capital out of the admiration her youth and beauty excited after the manner of other fair *mondaines*.

Clearly Madame St. Leger had arrived at a definite and momentous parting of the ways. Her mourning, all which it implied and which went along with it, was a thing of the past. Her nature was too rich—let it be added, too normal and wholesome—for the senses not to play their part in the shaping of her destiny. She had coquetted with Feminism, it is true; but such appeals and opportunities as Feminism has to offer the senses are not of an order wholesome natures can accept. To Gabrielle those appeals and opportunities were, briefly, loathsome; while, in her existing attitude, an exclusively intellectual fanaticism—such as alone can render advanced Feminism morally innocuous—no longer could control or satisfy her. Against it her ironic and critical humor rebelled, making sport of it. It followed, therefore, as Anastasia saw, that *la belle Gabrielle* would inevitably seek satisfaction, scope for her young energies, for her unimpaired joy of living, elsewhere. And this signaled possible danger. For, just now, being piqued, as Anastasia believed, and pushed by wounded pride, she might commit a folly. She might marry the wrong man, marry for position merely, or for money. Plenty of aspirants, judging by this afternoon, needed but little encouragement to declare themselves. She had borne the trials of one loveless marriage bravely, without faintest breath of scandal or hint of disaster. Throughout she had been admirable, both in taste and in conduct. But what about a second loveless marriage, made now in the full bloom of her womanhood?

Miss Beauchamp's fingers positively drummed upon the window. For she had come to love them both so closely, love them foolishly, even weakly, much—perhaps—this very attractive young couple, of whom the one, just now, was absent, the other changed! Beyond measure would it grieve her if the consummation of their romance should be frustrated or should come about other than quite honest and noble lines. Why, oh! why, in Heaven's name, did Adrian Savage absent himself? Why, at this eminently psychologic moment, was he not here? Anastasia could have wept.

Then, becoming aware of footsteps, and some presence entering from the hall behind her, she turned round hastily to find herself confronted by Adrian himself.

"*Enfin!*" she cried, enthusiastically. "What an inexpressible relief to see you, my dear Savage! You discover me in the very act of exhaling my doubtfully pious soul in prayers for your speedy return. You are late, in some respects perhaps dangerously late; but 'better late than never'—immeasurably better in this connection. Only, pardon me, where on earth have you been?"

The young man held her hand affectionately.

"In a land which possesses no frontiers, alas!" he said; "a land which bears no relation to geography."

"Hum! Hum!" Anastasia responded, just a trifle impatiently, shaking her head. "And in addition to its other peculiarities is this famous country devoid of a postal system, may I ask?"

"Practically, yes," Adrian answered. "Unless one is prepared to make oneself a really unpardonable bore. Some people call it the Land of Regrets, dear friend, others call it Purgatory. The two names are synonymous for most of us, I imagine. I have spent several weeks there, and the atmosphere of the accursed place still so clings to me that, although I needed immensely to see you, I shrank from coming here to-day until, as I supposed, all your other guests would have gone."

Then Anastasia, looking at him, perceived that this delightful young man—her great fondness for whom she did not attempt to disguise or deny—must also be added to the number of the homing Parisians who had suffered change since she saw them last.

To begin with, he was in mourning of the correct French order, which, in man's attire only in a degree less than in woman's, prescribes uncompromising severity of black. But the change in him, as she quickly apprehended, went deeper than such merely outward acknowledgment of mournful occurrence. Some profound note had been struck since she saw him at Ste. Marie of the gleaming sands and alluring horizons, revealing tremendous and vital issues to him; and, in view of those same issues, revealing him to himself. From the effect of this revelation his whole being was still vibrant. Anastasia's heart went out to him in large and generous sympathy; but she abstained from question or comment. The matter, whatever it might be, was grave, not to be taken lightly or played with. If he intended to give her his confidence, he would find an opportunity for doing so himself. Men, as she reflected, in their dealings with women are made that way. Express no desire to learn what troubles them, and they hasten to tell you. Show, however discreetly, your anxiety to hear, and they roll like hedgehogs, prickles outward, at once! So she merely said, smiling at him:

"I am afraid you should have waited even longer, my dear Savage, if your object was to avoid all my guests. Two, in any case, still linger. Listen—we cannot hope for solitude *à deux* just yet."

For once more Byewater's slow, penetrating accents made themselves audible.

"If you feel not to be able to entertain Lenty Stacpole's proposal, Madame St. Leger, I would not have you hesitate to tell me. I believe I catch on to your objection, though in America our ladies do not have such strong prejudices against publicity. I will explain to Lenty the way you feel. I would not wish to put you to any worry of refusing his proposal yourself."

"Eh! *Par exemple*! And pray what next?" Adrian said, under his breath, with raised eyebrows, looking his hostess inquiringly in the face.

"Ste. Marie offered only too many fatally magical quarters of an hour. They are both very hopelessly far gone, the two poor innocents!"

"Both? But it is preposterous, incredible! Dearest friend, you do not say to me both—not both?" Adrian cried, in a rising scale of heated protest.

To which Anastasia, hailing these symptoms of militant jealousy as altogether healthy, replied genially, taking his arm:

"If you doubt my word, come and judge for yourself."

Lewis Byewater, his hands clasped behind him, leaned his limp height against one of the few wall-spaces unincrusted with pictures, mirrors, china and other liberal confusion of ornament. Madame St. Leger stood near him, smoothing out the wrinkles in the wrists of her long gloves. To Adrian, as he entered the room, her charming person presented itself in profile. He perceived, and this gave him a curious turn in the blood, half of subtle alarm, half of high promise, that she once more wore colors.

Anastasia Beauchamp felt his arm tremble.

"Yes," she murmured, "a certain enchanting woman puts on her armor and takes the field again. Believe me, it is time, high time, you came back!"

"You are so very good to try to spare me the pain of making Mr. Stacpole a refusal," Gabrielle was saying sweetly to the young American. "But you do always show yourself so very amiable, so thoughtful I think your countrymen are of the most—how do you say?—the most unselfish of any—"

Turning her head—"Ah!" she exclaimed, quite sharply, living red leaping into the round of her cheeks and living light into her eyes—"it is you, Mr. Savage?"

But even while the answering light leaped into Adrian's eyes, very effectually for the moment dissipating their melancholy, her expression hardened, becoming mocking and ironic.

"You have the pleasure to know my kind friend, M. Byewater?" she asked, with a graceful wave of the hand toward that excellent youth, who had ceased to lounge against the wall and stood rather anxiously upright, the blankness of unexpected discomfiture upon his ingenuous countenance.

"Incontestably I have the pleasure of knowing M. Byewater," Adrian replied. "I have also had the pleasure of reading, and further, of publishing, two of his a little—yes, I fear, perhaps just a little—lengthy articles."

"I did condense all I knew," Byewater put in ruefully, addressing his hostess. "But I presume I was over-weighted by the amount of my material."

"Quite so; and the whole secret both of style and of holding your reader's attention lies in selection, in the intuitive knowledge of what to leave out," Adrian declared, his eyes fixed with positively ferocious jealousy upon *la belle Gabrielle's* partially averted face.

That poor, inoffensive Byewater should receive this public roasting was flagrantly unjust, Anastasia felt, still she abstained from intervention. The silence which followed was critical. She refused to break it. The responsibility of doing so appeared to her too great. One or other of the two principal actors in the little scene must undertake that. She really couldn't. At last, coldly, unwilling, as though forced against her inclination to speak, Madame St. Leger, turning to Adrian Savage, said:

"It is long since we have any news of him. How is M. Dax?"

Adrian shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not heard, *chère Madame*," he replied.

Whereupon Miss Beauchamp, satisfied that, whether for good or ill, relations were safely established between this altogether dear and not a little perverse young couple, called cheerfully to the American youth.

"Come here, come here, Mr. Byewater. I have hardly had one word with you all this afternoon, and there is something I greatly wish to ask you. What is this that I hear about our good, clever Mr. Stacpole's leaving for New York?"

"It is so, Miss Beauchamp. Lenty is fairly through with the work for his winter exhibition, and he looks to start the first of the month."

"But I do not comprehend how it is you do not bring any news of M. Dax. Have you not then been with him all the time since we have last seen you?"

"I have been abroad," Adrian replied. "My cousin, of whom you may remember to have heard me speak—Joanna Smyrthwaite—"

He hesitated, and his companion, though stoutly resolved against all yielding and pity in his direction, could not but note the melancholy and extreme pallor of his handsome face.

"But certainly I remember," she returned rather hastily. "Is she ill, then, poor lady, one of those pensive abstractions whom it has been your interesting mission to materialize and rejuvenate?"

"She is no longer ill," he answered. "She is dead."

"*Ah! quel malheur inattendu*! Truly that is most sad," Gabrielle said in accents of concern. Then for a moment she looked at Adrian with a very singular expression. "I offer you my sympathy, my condolences, Mr. Savage, upon this unhappy event."

And, turning aside, she began to move toward the doorway of the outer room, upon the threshold of which her hostess stood talking to Byewater.

But Adrian arrested her impetuously.

"Stay, Madame!" he cried, joining his hands as in supplication. "Stay, I implore you, and permit me a few minutes' conversation. By this you will confer the greatest benefit upon me; for so, and so only, can misunderstandings and misconstructions be avoided."

Thus admonished, Gabrielle paused. Her aspect and bearing were reserved, as those of one who yields in obedience to good manners rather than to personal inclination. But Adrian, nothing daunted, followed up his advantage.

"I came here to-day, *chère Madame*," he said, "as soon as possible after my return. My idea was to consult our friend Miss Beauchamp, to ask her advice and enlist her assistance. I feared my conduct might have appeared erratic, inexplicable. I proposed begging her to act as my ambassadress, asking her to recount to you certain things which have taken place since we parted at Ste. Marie—things very grievous, in a way unexampled and unnatural. But as I have the good fortune to find you here, I entreat you to wait and hear me while I acquaint you with those occurrences myself. You will remain, yes? Let us go over there then, out of earshot of the insupportably recurrent Mr. Byewater. I need to speak to you alone, *chère Madame*, without frivolous interruptions. And Mr. Byewater is forever at hand. He annoys me. He is so very far from decorative. He reminds me of a fish—of an underdone *filet de sole*."

Madame St. Leger's reserve gave slightly.

"Unhappy Mr. Byewater!" she murmured.

"Yes, indeed unhappy, since you too observe the likeness," Adrian pursued, darting positively envenomed glances in the direction of the doorway. "Yet is it not unpardonable in any man to resemble the insufficiently fried section of a flat fish? You recognize it as unpardonable? Sit down here then, *trés chère Madame*, at the farthest distance possible from that lanky *poisson d'Amérique*. Ah! I am grateful to you," he added, with very convincing earnestness. "For in listening you will help to dissipate the blackness of regret which engulfs me. You will hear and you will judge; yes, it is for you, for you only and supremely to do that—to judge."

"I fear you will be no end fatigued, Miss Beauchamp, standing all this long time talking," the excellent, and, fortunately, quite unconscious Byewater was meanwhile saying. "I believe I ought to go right now. I had promised myself I would escort Madame St. Leger home to the *Quai Malaquais*. But I don't believe I stand to gain anything by waiting. Recent developments hardly favor the supposition that promise is likely to condense into fact."

He nodded his head, indicating the couple ensconced at the opposite end of the room in two pillowed, cane-seated, cane-backed gilt chairs of pseudo-classic pattern. The wall immediately behind them carried a broad, tall panel of looking-glass, the border of which blossomed on either side at about half its height into a cluster of shaded electric lamps. The mellow light from these covered the perfectly finished figures of the young man and woman, sitting there in such close proximity, and created a bright circle about them, as Anastasia Beauchamp noted, curiously isolating them from all surrounding objects save their own graceful images repeated in the great looking-glass. Her eyes dwelt upon them in indulgent tenderness. Might they prosper! And therewith, very genially, she turned her attention to the fish-like Byewater once more.

But that same bright isolation and close proximity worked strongly upon Gabrielle St. Leger. Her pulse quickened. A subtle excitement took possession of her, which, just because of her anxiety to ignore and conceal it, obliged her to speak.

"Your cousin's death has evidently pained you. You mourn her very truly, very much?"

"I cannot mourn enough."

"Indeed!" she said, dwelling upon the word with a peculiar and slightly incredulous inflection.

"No," he repeated, "I cannot mourn enough. But to make my state of mind intelligible to you—and it is vitally important to me to do so—it is necessary you should know what has happened. I cannot deny that I am very sad."

He bowed himself together, setting his elbows on his knees, pressing his hands against either side of his head.

"I have cause to be sad," he continued. "Involuntarily I have contributed to the commission of a crime. All the values are altered. I am become a stranger to myself. Therefore I ask just this of you, to hear me and to judge."

Surprised, impressed, alarmed even, Gabrielle St. Leger gathered herself back gravely in her gilded, long-seated pseudo-classic chair. The young man's genuine and undisguised trouble combined with his actual physical nearness to threaten her emotional equilibrium. More eagerly than she cared to admit even to herself had she looked forward to his return to Ste. Marie. Her disappointment was proportionate, causing her anger. The thought of the slight he had put upon her rankled. She was, or rather wished to be, angry still. But just now wishes and feeling ranged themselves in irritating opposition and conflict. And during the silence following his last strangely sorrowful and self-accusing words—he so very near to her, dejected, abstracted, with bent head—feeling gained, waxing masterful and intimate. The personal charm of the man, his distinction of appearance, his quick brain and eloquent speech, his unimpeachable sincerity, his virility—refined, but in no degree impaired by the artificial conditions of modern life—even his boyish outbreak of jealousy toward Lewis Byewater, stirred and agitated her, proving dangerous alike to her senses and her heart. The culminating moment of that terrible experience in René Dax's studio, when, half beside herself from the horror of madness and death, she had flung herself upon Adrian's breast, there finding safety and restoration to all the dear joys of living, presented itself to her memory with importunate insistence. Was it conceivable that she craved to have that moment repeat itself?

"Mr. Savage—you asked me to listen. I listen," she said, and her voice shook.

In response the young man looked up at her, a rather pitiful smile on his white face.

"Thank you—it was like this, then, *chère Madame et amie*," he said. "Pushed by certain sinister fears, without waiting to communicate with you or with any one, I went straight to England on receiving from her sister the announcement of my cousin's death. Letters had passed between us during the previous fortnight which rendered that announcement peculiarly and acutely distressing to me."

Adrian bent his head again and sat staring blindly at the floor.

"She had asked a pledge of me which neither in honor nor in honesty could I give," he said, bitterly. "My cousin was an admirable woman of business. I knew that all her worldly affairs were scrupulously regulated. I was in no way concerned in the distribution of her property. I went to attend her funeral as a tribute of regard and respect. I also went in the hope the sinister fears of which I have spoken might prove unfounded. I stayed in London, merely going down to Stourmouth for a few hours. It was a wretched, wretched day, the weather cold and wet."

He ceased speaking. For at this moment—whether through some inward compelling, some mental necessity to arrive at a just and comprehensive estimate of the history of the last eight months, or whether through some external influence emanating from the unseen world of

spirit and striving to dominate and coerce him, he could neither then, nor afterward, determine —the whole gloomy *affaire* Smyrthwaite, in its entirety, from start to finish, presented itself to his mind. The slightly bizarre yet charming room, its crowded furniture, subdued gaiety of lights and flowers, even Gabrielle St. Leger's well-beloved and ardently desired presence, became strangely unreal to him and remote; while his mind fixed itself in turn upon the autocratic, self-centered husband and father warping the lives of wife and children in obedience to cold-blooded theory; upon the interruption of his own work, and prosecution of his fair romance, by the tedious labors of the executorship; of his long fruitless search amid the filth of the Paris underworld for the wastrel degenerate, Bibby; of the squalid finding, the still more squalid redisappearance of the wretched fellow, and the disquieting uncertainty which even now covered his whereabouts and his fate; and lastly, with sharp inward shrinking, upon the commencement, the progress, the extinction, of Joanna's infatuation for himself.

And as sum total and result what remained? What was there to show in the way of harvest for all that strenuous and painful sowing? Only this—that now, very strangely, he himself at once participant and spectator, he saw in the mournful chill of the rain-swept September day a dark, straggling, ill-assorted procession passing up a trampled, puddle-pocketed road between ranks of pale and vulgarly commonplace monuments set against a backing of somber fir-trees and heather. Margaret Smyrthwaite, composed, callous, and comely, swathed in abundance of brand-new crape, walked beside him immediately behind a coffin—the hard, polished lines of which were unsoftened by pall or by flowers—carried shoulder high. The big Yorkshireman, Andrew Merriman, followed in company with Joseph Challoner—the latter oddly subdued and nervous, obsequious even in bearing and in speech. Next came fussy little Colonel Haig, Doctor Norbiton, and the amazon Marion Chase. A contingent of servants from the Tower House, headed by Smallbridge, the butler; Johnson, the portly coachman, and Mrs. Isherwood, brought up the rear. Isherwood, alone of the company, wept, silently but heart-brokenly, mourning not only a mistress who was to her as a daughter, but the passing of an order of things which had filled and molded her life and in the service of which she had grown old. To Adrian the faithful woman's tears supplied the one sincere and human note in the otherwise cruelly barren and perfunctory performance. And, to his seeing, her desolation found sympathetic echo in the desolation of the autumn moorland, of the bare coffin, and the gray curtain of drifting mist blotting out the distance—the vast amphitheater of the Baughurst Park woods, the streets and buildings of Stourmouth, and all the noble freedom of the sea. The hopelessness of that desolation clutched at him still, penetrating him, even now and here, with conviction of failure and futility, with doubt of any eternal and reasoned direction and purpose in things human, and with very searching doubt of himself. His fine and healthy optimism—in other words, his faith in God's goodness—suffered bitter eclipse.

"I would not be surprised if I concluded to take the trip with Lenty the first of the month, Miss Beauchamp."

As he spoke Lewis Byewater's mild and honest eyes, half humorously, half reproachfully, sought the delightful young man and young woman sitting silent in their gilded chairs.

"I am ever so grateful to you for all the splendid times you have given me," he continued, rather irrelevantly; "but I begin to have a notion it would prove healthier for me to leave Paris this fall."

Again his eyes sought the silent couple enthroned before the tall mirror.

"Yes," he said, "I feel pretty confident I will accompany Lenty. Seems as though this gay city had turned ever so lonesome and foreign to-night. Europe is enervating for a continuance.

I know others who have found it affect them that way. There is too much atmosphere over here. I have a notion my moral system is in need of toning up; and I believe our bright American climate might help me some if I took a spell of it."

Madame St. Leger threw back her head and loosened the lace scarf about her rounded throat.

"Return, Mr. Savage. Again I remind you that I wait to hear that which you ask to tell me, that I listen. Return, lest I grow too impatient of waiting," she said.

Adrian straightened himself. His looked dazed, absorbed. He passed his hands across his eyes and forehead, as one who awakens from a feverish sleep.

"Ah! forgive me, *chère Madame*," he answered. "But that is precisely what I need, what I desire—just that—to return, to come back; and to come back by your invitation, at your calling. I ask nothing better, nothing else."

He spread out his hands, leaning sideways in his chair, looking at her.

"Forgive me. I am very stupid, incoherent; but the events of the last three weeks are still so vividly present to me that they confuse and distract me. I cannot see my way clearly. I find it difficult to tell you what is necessary, just what I should. See, then, it had been the habit of my cousin to keep a journal daily from early childhood. The last volume of that journal she had, I found, left as a legacy to me. Her sister gave it to me after the funeral. I took it back with me to London. The night was wet, and I was in no humor for amusement. I remained indoors, in my room at the hotel. The sinister fears which I entertained in connection with my cousin's death had not been allayed by my visit to Stourmouth. A certain mystery appeared to surround the circumstances attending it. I perceived a great unwillingness to answer my inquiries on the part of those most nearly concerned. That night, after dinner, I opened the packet containing the journal, unwillingly, I own; I would rather have delayed. But I could not do so. With the muffled roar of the ceaseless London traffic in my ears I sat and read the journal from cover to cover. Having once begun, I could not leave off. I did not go to bed that night. In the morning early I left London. I left England. I traveled. I hardly know where I went, Madame. I wanted to escape. I wanted to get away from every person I knew, whom I had ever seen. Above all I wanted to get away from myself; but I was obliged to take myself along with me. And I found myself a dreadful companion. I hated myself."

Madame St. Leger moved slightly in her gilded chair.

"My poor friend!" she murmured almost inaudibly.

"Yes, I hated myself," Adrian repeated. "That journal is the most poignant, the most convincing human document I have ever read. My cousin had the misfortune to love a person who did not return her affection. In the pages of her journal, with uncompromising truthfulness, with appalling self-scrutiny, self-revelation and unflinching courage, with, I may add, the amazing abandon possible only to a rigidly virtuous woman, she has recorded the successive phases of that love, from its first unsuspected and almost unconscious inception to the hour when by an act of will, so extraordinary as to be little short of miraculous, she sent her soul out of her body, across land and sea, in pursuit of the man whom she loved and forced from his own lips the confession of his indifference to her."

Again Madame St. Leger moved slightly.

"You tell me this soberly, Mr. Savage?" she asked. "In good faith?"

Adrian looked fixedly at her. Her beautiful face, her whole attitude, was tense with excitement.

“In absolute good faith, Madame,” he replied. “I have not only the detailed testimony of her journal, but the perfectly independent and equally detailed testimony of the person whom she loved. The two statements agree in every particular.”

“Still,” Gabrielle cried, a sudden yearning in her eyes, “still I cannot count her as altogether unfortunate, your poor cousin! For it is not given to many—it is the mark of a very strong, a very great nature, to be capable of such love. And when she had obtained this man’s confession?”

“She decided to live no longer,” Adrian replied hoarsely. “She had no religion, no faith in Almighty God or in the survival of human personality and consciousness, no hope of a hereafter, to restrain her from taking her own life. She made her preparations calmly and silently, with the dignity of sincere and very impressive stoicism. The concluding words of the terrible book, in which she has dissected out all the passion and agony of her heart, of her poor tortured body as well as her poor tortured soul, are words of pity, of tenderness, toward the man who found himself unable to return her affection.”

For a time both remained silent, while in the outer room Miss Beauchamp bade a genial farewell to the disconsolate Byewater.

“Yes, go, my dear young man, go,” she said, “and breathe the surprising air of your very surprising native land. I shall miss you. But I understand the position, and give you my blessing. Later you will return to us—for Europe is full of illumination and of instruction. You will return, and, be very sure, we shall all be delighted to see you. Be sure, also, that you leave an altogether pleasant and friendly reputation behind you.”

“But, but,” Gabrielle said, presently, with a certain protest and hesitancy, “it pains, it angers me to think of so great a waste. For it is no ordinary thing, the bestowal by any woman of so magnificent a gift of love. That a woman, young and rich, should die for love—and now, at the present time, when our interest moves quickly from person to person, when we console ourselves easily with some new occupation, new friendship, when our morals are perhaps a little—how do you say?—easy, is it not particularly surprising, is it not, indeed, unique? To reject such affection, is not that to throw away, in a sense, a positive fortune? How could such devotion fail to attract, fail to create a response? Why, Monsieur, could not this man of whom you tell me return your cousin’s great love?”

Adrian Savage spread out his hands with a gesture at once hopeless and singularly appealing.

“Because, Madame, because the man already loved you,” he said. “And, that being so, for him there could be no possible room, no conceivable question, of any other love.”

Madame St. Leger remained absolutely motionless, expressionless, for a moment; then she threw back her head, closing her eyes. “Ah!” she sighed, sharply. “Ah!”

And Adrian waited, watching her, a sudden keenness in his face. For what, indeed, did it betoken, where did it lead to, this praise and advocacy of Joanna Smyrthwaite’s tragic devotion, followed by that singularly unrestrained and unconventional little outcry? The said outcry struck right through him, giving him a queer turn in the blood—carrying him back in sentiment, moreover, to the horrible yet perfect experience in René Dax’s studio, when he had felt the whole weight of Gabrielle’s beloved body flung against him and the clasp of her arms about his neck. He straightened himself, took a deep breath, his nostrils dilated, his lips parted. He emerged from the confusion and lethargy which had oppressed him, quickened by that same outcry into newness and fullness of life. To him all this was as the drawing aside of some gloomy, jealously impenetrable curtain—the curtain of desolate gray mist, was it,

blotting out the distance, the town, the great woods, and the noble freedom of the sea, when he walked in that ill-assorted funeral procession up the wet road behind Joanna's coffin?—a drawing of it aside and letting the glad and wholesome sunlight shine on him once more. He no longer felt a stranger to himself. The past—all which had happened, all which went to shape his character and inspire his action, all which he had desired and held infinitely dear before the *affaire* Smyrthwaite imposed itself upon him—linked up with the present, in sane and intelligible sequence of cause and effect. Thus, chastened, it is true, a little older, sadder, wiser, but fearless, ardent, purposeful as ever, did Adrian the Magnificent come into his own again.

He drew nearer to her, laid his right arm somewhat possessively upon the arm of Madame St. Leger's chair, and spoke softly, yet with much of his former impetuosity.

"See, *chère Madame*, see," he said; "do you perhaps remember, this winter, in the week of the great snow, when I came to tell you I was summoned to my cousins' home in England? You were not quite, quite kind. You mocked me a little, suggesting a solution of the problems raised by my impending visit. The solution you proposed was, as I ventured to explain to you, impossible then. It remained impossible to the end, the cruel end, and for the same reason."

His manner changed. His voice deepened.

"Yet, believe me, when by degrees, against my will, against my respect for my cousin and sincere desire for her happiness, the fact of her unfortunate partiality was brought home to me, I tried with all my strength to command my heart. Twice I faced the situation without reserve, and tried to submit, to sacrifice myself, rather than cause her humiliation and distress."

Adrian looked away across the crowded, pleasant room, with its scent of autumn flowers, cedar, and sandalwood, and its many shaded lights. His lips worked, but at first no sound passed them.

"I could not do it," he said. "I could not. I loved you too much."

He raised his hand from the arm of *la belle Gabrielle's* chair, turning proudly upon her, as a man who on his trial fiercely protests his own innocence.

"I had given her no cause for her disastrous delusion—before God, Madame, I had not. And my passion, too, has its authority, its unalienable rights. I could not, I dared not, betray them. It may be that the happiness to which I aspire will never be granted me. Very well. I shall suffer, but I shall know how to accommodate myself. But to cut myself off voluntarily from all hope of that happiness by marriage with another woman was like asking me to mutilate myself. I refused. Could the situation repeat itself, I should again refuse, although when I read her terrible journal and learned the reason of my cousin's suicide I was consumed by remorse, by grief and self-reproach."

Adrian paused.

"Now I have told you everything, Madame," he added, quietly. "I leave myself in your hands. It is for you to condemn or to acquit me, to judge whether I have behaved as an honorable man, whether I have done right."

After a silence, a pathetic bewilderment in her mysterious eyes, Gabrielle St. Leger answered brokenly:

"I do not know. I do not know. I cannot presume to judge. What you tell me is all so difficult, so sad—only I may say, perhaps, that I am glad you did not sacrifice yourself."

"You are glad? Then—" Adrian stammered, "then you will marry me?"

"Eh! but," *la belle Gabrielle* cried, and her voice shook, though whether with tears or with laughter she herself knew not, "you go so quick, so very quick!"

“You are mistaken—pardon me. I do not go quick, but slow, slow as the centuries, as æons, as innumerable and cumulative eternities. Have I not served for you, *tres chère Madame*, a good seven years?”

“So long as that?”

“Yes, as long as that. Ever since the day I first saw you. You had but recently come to Paris. Much has happened—for both of us—since that date. Yes, I can still describe to you the gown you wore, the manner in which your hair was dressed, can recall the subjects of our conversation, can repeat the words which you said.”

Madame St. Leger gathered herself back in her gilded chair, her head bent. For a quite perceptible space of time she remained absolutely still. The inclination of her head and the shadow cast by the brim of her hat concealed her face. Adrian’s heart thumped in his ears. His breath came short and thick. At last he could bear the suspense no longer. He leaned forward again.

“Madame, Madame,” he called softly, urgently, “think of the seven years. Remember that I am young and that I am on fire, since I love as the young love. Do not prolong my trial. Give me my answer—yes or no—now, here, at once.”

Thus adjured, Madame St. Leger raised her head, looked full at him with wide-open eyes, something profound, exalted, in a way desperate, in her expression. She shivered slightly, and holding out both her hands:

“I surrender,” she said.

The young man took her extended hands in his, bent down and kissed them reverently; then looked back at her gravely, resolutely, though he was white to the lips.

“But not under compulsion, not out of pity?” he said. “Now, even now, with the consummation of all my hopes and desire within my grasp, I would rather you sent me away than, than—that—”

La belle Gabrielle shook her head gently, smiling.

“No, no,” she answered. “Not under compulsion, not out of pity, *mon ami*; but because I find nature is too strong for me. Because I find I too love, and find—since you will have me lay bare my heart and tell you everything—it is you, precisely and solely you, whom I love.”

And from the inner room—into which Anastasia Beauchamp had passed unperceived by her two guests during this, for them, momentous colloquy—came strains of heroic music, good for the soul.

THE END

[The end of *Adrian Savage* by Mary St. Leger Kingsley (as Lucas Malet)]