AS OTHER MEN ARE

DORNFORD YATES

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE "BERRY" BOOKS

THE BROTHER OF DAPHNE
THE COURTS OF IDLENESS
BERRY AND CO.
JONAH AND CO.
ADÈLE AND CO.
AND BERRY CAME TOO
THE HOUSE THAT BERRY BUILT

THE "CHANDOS" BOOKS

BLIND CORNER
PERISHABLE GOODS
BLOOD royal
FIRE BELOW
SHE FELL AMONG THIEVES
AN EYE FOR A TOOTH
RED IN THE MORNING

OTHER VOLUMES

THE STOLEN MARCH
THIS PUBLICAN
ANTHONY LYVEDEN
VALERIE FRENCH
SAFE CUSTODY
STORM MUSIC
AND FIVE WERE FOOLISH
AS OTHER MEN ARE
MAIDEN STAKES
SHE PAINTED HER FACE
GALE WARNING
SHOAL WATER
PERIOD STUFF

AS OTHER MEN ARE

BY

DORNFORD YATES

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To those, alive or dead, with whom I had the honour to serve overseas, during the Great War.

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JEREMY

JEREMY

EVE MALORY CAREW tilted her sweet pretty chin.

"It's my hair," she said.

"Exactly," said Jeremy Broke. "That's why to cut it would be so—so blasphemous. If it was anybody else's, it'd be their funeral. But your hair's a sort of national treasure, like Ann Hathaway's Cottage or Arthur's Seat—I mean, Leith Hill. It's not really yours to cut."

"It's mine to brush," said Eve: "and fix and do generally. If you had a beard——"

"That's an idea," said Broke. "If you cut your hair, I'll grow a blinkin' beard: a long, spade-shaped one—by way of protest."

Eve laughed delightedly.

"But how," she gurgled, "how would that affect me? If we kissed when we met, or always dined *tête-à-tête*. . . ."

"I trust," said Jeremy stiffly, "that the indecent spectacle of an old friend gone wrong would twist the tail of your conscience. Besides, you wouldn't like it when I accosted you in Bond Street, beard in hand."

Miss Carew shuddered.

Then—

"Seriously, Jeremy, why shouldn't I have it off? Listen. First, it would suit me. I went to see Sali to-day, and he said it'd look immense. It isn't as if it were straight. It's naturally curly, and I'd have it really well cut. Then, I go through such hell—hell, morning and night. I wish you could see it down. Then perhaps you'd realize what I mean."

"I have," said Jeremy Broke. "The night of the Lyvedens' ball."

"Well, how would you like to have to cope with it twice a day?"

Jeremy inclined his head.

"I cannot imagine a greater privilege."

Eve smiled very charmingly.

"Let's drop hypothesis," she said, "and come back to facts. I've given you three good reasons for having it cut. Except that it's a national treasure, of which, I assume, I am the luckless trustee, can you give me one single reason why it should be preserved?"

Jeremy hesitated.

Then—

"No," he said quietly. "I can't."

There was a silence.

The man smiled thoughtfully, staring straight ahead. With a faint frown the girl regarded the leisurely disintegration of the logs in the grate. The distant throb of ragtime filtered into the room, only to subside, as though abashed, before the stately lecture of a Vulliamy clock.

"Let us talk," said Eve, "of the past."

"Good," said Jeremy. "I'll begin. If I'd been brought up to be a plumber, instead of a diplomat——"

"Oh, I wish you had," said Eve. "My bath's gone wrong again."

"What, not the Roman?"

"The same," said Eve.

"There you are," said Broke. "I told you not to have it. You cannot introduce a relic of the Stone Age into a super-flat. It can't be done. If you must have a circus leading out of your bedroom, the only thing to do is to set it right up and then build a house round it."

"We're off," said Eve, bubbling.

Jeremy swallowed.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"Won't empty," said Eve. "I'm—I'm having it taken away."

"Taken away?" cried Broke.

"Well, filled in or something. I don't know what the process will be. I simply said it was to be washed out and an ordinary bath put in its place."

"Why on earth?"

"Because experience has shown me that your advice was good. Between you and me, it nearly always is—though why you keep on giving it me when I only chuck it away, Heaven only knows. *I* should have got mad months ago. I think you must be very—very strong, Jeremy. At least, I'm very conscious of being the—the weaker vessel."

"A most appropriate sensation."

Eve shot him a lightning glance.

Then—

"We were to talk of the past," she said quickly. "D'you remember this day a year ago?"

Jeremy knitted his brows.

"Was that the first time we met?"

"It was," said Eve. "May Day 1929. Here in this house. . . . Jeremy, I've a confession to make. I asked that you should be introduced to me."

"Well, I asked too."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to know you," said Jeremy Broke.

"Why?"

"I suppose you attracted me."

"I must be attractive," said Eve.

"You are."

Miss Carew shrugged her white shoulders.

"I'm still unmarried," she said.

"That," said Jeremy Broke, "is your little fault. At least, Rumour has it that you've turned a good many down."

"Rumour is wrong," said Eve. "I admit I've had one or two overtures, but the idea of being married for my money never appealed to me."

"I shouldn't have thought," said Broke, "that you need be afraid. If you were forty, instead of twenty-four; if you had a face like the back of a hansom; if——"

"Here," said Eve. "Don't cut out the gilt. There was the making of a compliment. Besides, I value your opinion. What is my face like, Jeremy?"

The man regarded her.

“It’s not like anything I’ve ever seen,” he said.

“My mouth,” said Eve, “is too large.”

“No, it isn’t,” said Broke. “It’s just perfect. So’s your nose, an’—an’ the rest. That’s why it seems so wicked to cut your hair.”

“Was it my face that attracted you—last year?”

The man considered.

“Your face and your pretty ways.”

“You just felt you wanted to know me?”

“Yes.”

Eve sighed.

“Well, you’ve had your wish,” she said. “I mean, you’ve got to know me pretty well.”

“You’ve been very sweet,” said Jeremy.

“Don’t mention it,” said Miss Carew. “It’s—it’s been a pleasure. Besides, I’m very lonely. And I wanted to know you, you know. . . . Never mind. I hope, when you’re married——”

“I’m not engaged yet.”

“That’s your little fault,” said Eve. “I could mention several ladies who have put their arms round your neck—certainly figuratively and, for all I know, literally.”

“Rot”—incredulously.

“My dear, I’ve seen it going on. Don’t be afraid—I’m not going to mention names.”

“But I’ve no money.”

“What does that matter? They have.”

“I think you’re mistaken,” said Broke. “Everyone’s always very nice, but people don’t pick up stray curs——”

“How dare you say such a thing?”

Eve was on her feet. Her brown eyes were flaming, and there was wrath in her voice.

Slowly Jeremy rose.

"My dear Eve——"

"How dare you speak like that? It's cheap and paltry and it's a wicked lie. D'you think I'd give my friendship to—to a stray cur?"

"You have," said Broke. "I've seen you. Down on the Portsmouth Road. His blood was all over your dress, and he died in your arms."

"Yes, but——"

"I'll take back 'cur,' if it offends you: but I'm a stray, Eve. I've nothing to offer at all. I can only just live. A plumber makes twice the money that they pay me. The jobs I was trained for are bust or sold or given to—to 'business men.' If it wasn't for Babel, I should be on the streets, and—— Oh, Eve, my lady, for God's sake don't cry. I didn't mean. . . ."

Instinctively he put out his arms, and the girl slipped into them. . . . He held her gently enough, comforting her, patting her shoulder, talking in steady tones of bygone days and gilding the future with a laughing tongue. . . .

After a little, Eve had herself in hand.

As he released her—

"Let's—sit—down," she said jerkily.

They sat down together, and she slid an arm through his.

"Listen," she whispered. "I can't talk loud, because I shall cry if I do. Listen to me. I'll tell you the name of one woman who's put her arms round your neck. She's done it for nearly a year—not very glaringly until to-night. Her name's Eve. . . . Eve Malory Carew." His fists clenched, Jeremy sat like a rock. The girl continued tremulously. "I've given you opening after opening. I've put the very words into your mouth. I've given myself away. I've asked and pleaded and begged. I've done what I've never done in all my life, what I never dreamed I should do—sunk pride, vanity, self-respect . . . to—make—you—speak. . . . I'm not good at 'the arts,' but I've used them all to-night. I gave you my profile, stared, tried to get my soul into my voice. I didn't cry to make you take me in your arms—that was a piece of sheer luck. But I did everything else. . . . Well, there you are. I've failed. And now I want to know one thing. There's only one answer you can give me, but from the way you give it I shall be able to tell if you're speaking the truth. Do you love me, Jeremy?"

The man laughed.

"You know I've been mad about you for just one year."

Eve sighed very happily.

"And I'm quite silly about you," she said. "I started dreaming about you months ago. But I think up to now I've behaved all right, haven't I?"

"Perfectly," said Broke.

Eve squeezed his arm.

"I'm glad of that. And now suppose you kissed me. Or d'you think I ought to kiss you?"

Suddenly she was in his arms, blushing and breathless.

"You witch," breathed the man. "You exquisite, glorious witch. I've steeled myself and fought a thousand times. And to-night I swore I'd see you—and kiss the rod. 'Rod'? Sword. It's been like a sword in my side to wait upon you. To-night was laden with memories, but I swore to come through. I swore I'd recall them . . . and bow . . . and come away—walk through the wet streets triumphant, because I'd flirted with fire and not been burned. And now—I've failed." He lifted up his eyes with the look of one who is looking into heaven. "I shan't walk home, Eve. By rights I should slink, because I've broken my oath. But—I—shan't—slink. I think I shall dance, Eve . . . dance, leap, run . . . give silver to the beggars I meet . . . shout . . . because you love me . . . because of the stars in your eyes and the flower they call your mouth." Eve flung back her beautiful head and closed her eyes. The smile on her parted lips was not of this world. "You ask if I love you. I love the lisp of your footfalls and the print of your tiny feet. I love the rustle of your gown and the silence your laughter breaks. All that you do I love—because you do it . . . you . . . Eve . . . my princess. . . ."

He kissed her lips.

"I'm very happy," said Eve. "I hope you are."

Broke picked her up in his arms.

"You wicked child," he said.

"Witch, princess, child," said Eve, with an arm round his neck. "Which will you marry?"

"The child," said Jeremy Broke.

“That’s right,” said Eve. “The others have served their turn. The stick to persuade you to jump: the sceptre to dazzle your vision.” She fell to stroking his hair. “I’m really more of an artist than I thought. Looking back, I wonder I had the courage to be so indecent. Of course, I was desperate. Still . . .”

“It is the prerogative of royalty.”

Eve made a maddening mouth.

“Diplomat!” she said. Then—“As a matter of fact, stacks of us do it all the time, darling. But I never thought I should.”

* * * * *

The two were married one brilliant June morning, full of the airs and graces of a belated spring. Broke received twelve presents, Miss Carew six hundred and four: such is the power of money. The former had already resigned his ghost of a job and was earning much less than a living by plying his pen. From this Eve sought to dissuade him, but the man was resolute. Marriage had brought him a livery more gorgeous than any he could win, but he would stand upon his own shoe-leather.

Jeremy Broke was thirty and of a cheerful countenance. His grey eyes were set well apart, and his forehead was broad. His nostrils were sensitive, his mouth firm and shapely, his thick brown hair well-ordered, his head carried high. He was tall, and his shoulders were square. He had good hands, and cared for them as a man should. His manners were above reproach: his style, that of a gentleman. So were his instincts. . . .

He brought his wife no debts. He sold his great-grandfather’s chronometer to pay such expenses of the wedding as are usually met by the groom; and, once married, that the money they spent was not his he made most evident. Friends, acquaintances, strangers, servants—none must credit him with Eve’s wealth. He did not insist upon the truth—go about shouting ‘It’s hers’: but the things that were Cæsar’s unto Cæsar he scrupulously rendered. Most of all was he careful in private to assume no whit of that authority which riches give. He never stooped: but he never sat in her seat. It was impossible not to revere feeling so fine. His wife found it worshipful—with tears in her eyes.

Eve Malory Broke was a very striking example of the Creator’s art. Her features were beautiful, and she was perfectly made. The curves of her neck and shoulders, her slender white wrists, her slim silk stockings and the shining arches of her feet—these and other points lifted her straight into the

champion class. She was lithe of body and light as air in the dance. The grace of her form and movement were such as Praxiteles rejoiced to turn to stone. You would have said that only an etching-needle could catch her very delicate dignity—but for one thing. That was her colouring. Her great brown eyes and the red-gold splendour of her amazing hair, the warm rose of her cheeks and the cream of her exquisite skin—never was leaping vitality more brilliantly declared. Old Masters would have gone mad about her. Adam would have eaten out of her hand. In a word, she became her name.

A warm, impulsive nature, rich in high qualities and puny faults, made her a wife to be very proud of, to love to distraction and occasionally to oppose. . . .

After doing their best to spoil one another for nearly ten months, Eve and Jeremy had their first pitched battle in Rome one tearful April morning. . . .

"In other words," said the former silkily, "I can't carry my liquor."

"I never said or suggested such a thing. For all I know, you could drink me under the table."

"Then what's the point of your protest?"

Short-skirted, perched upright on a table, her knees crossed, one admirable leg slowly swinging, her beautiful fingers drumming deliberately upon the table's edge, Eve was superb. If her wonderful hair had been about her shoulders, she might have sat to a Greuze and furnished gaping posterity with a new ideal.

Jeremy swallowed.

"I think it's a pity," he said, "deliberately to put off what so very few women have."

"What's that?"

"Your ladyship."

Eve raised her brown eyes to heaven.

"Because I drink two cocktails instead of one——"

"It's tough," said Jeremy. "It's a tough thing to do. A woman's supposed to drink, not because she likes it, but because it's the fashion or because she needs bucking up. Very well. It's the fashion to drink a cocktail before your dinner. To that fashion women subscribe—many, perhaps, cheerfully, but that's their business. If they make a meal of it—ask for a second helping—

the assumption or fiction that they're following a fashion is gone and they're merely advertising an appetite which isn't particularly becoming to a man, but actually degrades a woman whoever she is."

"I'm much obliged," said Eve. " 'Tough' and 'degraded.' I am a topper, aren't I? I suppose you realize that this is 1930."

"If you mean I'm old-fashioned, I admit it. I don't like to see a girl drink. But that's beside the point. I mayn't like the fashion, but I don't shout about it. You can't curse anyone for toeing the line. But I think it's a thousand pities to overstep it."

Eve smote upon the table with the flat of her pretty hand.

"You don't seem able to see," she cried, "that you're blowing a whole gale about nothing at all—*nothing*. Because there's a cocktail going spare and I'm fool enough to give it a home, d'you seriously suggest that I shall be branded as a sot? One swallow doesn't make a drunkard."

"That's better," said Jeremy, smiling. "That's the way to talk. And of course I don't, sweetheart. I'm not such a fool. But . . . You are so attractive, Eve, so—so dazzling, you set such a very high standard of sweetness that when you do something that brings us down to earth we've got such a long way to fall. A taste for liquor seems so much worse in you——"

"But I haven't a taste for liquor. I hate it. I don't care whether I drink a cocktail or not. Yes, I do. I'd much rather drink water."

"I know you would," cried Broke; "but no one else does. And when, to put it plainly, you have a couple, then——"

"Everyone knows I don't drink."

"But you *do* . . . you *are* . . . you're inviting attention to the fact. Thoughtlessly, idly, of course. You don't care a damn about liquor: but by having a second cocktail you're declaring your liking for drink."

"I don't agree," said Eve, "but supposing I am. Why shouldn't I like my liquor?"

"I've tried to point out," said Jeremy wearily, "that a taste for liquor doesn't become you. But I think in your heart you know that. What you won't see is that to drink two cocktails is tough."

"I confess I can't," said Eve. "What's more, I propose to drink two more to-night."

"Look here," said Broke, deliberately ignoring the glove. "It used to be the fashion to wear short skirts, usedn't it? Very well. You subscribed to the fashion and wore them, too. But you didn't exaggerate that fashion—turn out in a dress that stopped half-way to your knees, did you?"

"What d'you think?" said his wife.

"Some girls did."

"Some."

"Exactly," cried Broke. "And because they went beyond the dictates of Fashion, they were properly judged to be tough."

"That didn't make them tough. They were tough already, or they wouldn't have done it."

Jeremy spread out his hands.

"Out of your own mouth . . ." he said. "Only tough people do tough things; or, in other words, tough things are only done by tough people."

There was a moment's silence.

Then—

"Right-oh," said Eve. "I'm tough. And just to leave no doubt upon the subject I'm going to drink two and probably three cocktails to-night. If as a result I get tight, it'll be your privilege to escort me upstairs and apply the usual restoratives. Really," she added, raising her delicate arms and stretching luxuriously, "it's a great thought that if I like to exceed I shall be properly cared for. A minute ago I was wondering why I'd married you, but at least a tame missioner has his points. Even if you do choke him off, it's his job to return good for evil."

Jeremy turned to the window.

"Are you trying," he said, "to get a rise?"

"No," said Eve calmly. "I never attempt to accomplish a *fait accompli*."

"Why d'you call me a missioner and talk about choking me off? You know it's unfair and uncivil."

"I don't consider it unfair, and whether it's civil or not doesn't concern me."

"Then it should," said Broke shortly. "And in future I'll be glad if it does. I'm not rude to you, and I see no reason why you should be rude to

me."

Eve laughed musically.

"You have been most offensive," she said. "Familiarity breeds contempt, I know. Still, one likes it to be veiled. At least, I do. You might make a note of that. And next time you feel impelled to review my manners . . ."

"Eve, Eve, why do you speak like this?"

"In the hope that you'll understand. If we're to continue to live together, I advise you to pull up your socks. Because it amuses me to let you hold the reins——"

Jeremy turned.

"You're determined to force my hand," he said quietly. "I beg that in future you will take only one cocktail before a meal."

Eve raised her eyebrows and sighed.

"Your request is refused," she said.

"Must I make it an order?"

Mrs. Broke stared.

"An order?" she said, rising.

"An order . . . which I shall enforce."

Jeremy watched the blood mount to the glorious temples, the exquisite lips tighten, the red glow of anger steal into the great brown eyes.

He continued evenly.

"I am determined that my wife shall not cheapen herself. I've entreated in vain; I've used argument, and it's failed; and so I must use—power."

"Power?" breathed the girl. "Power? . . . When you make enough money to pay your washing-bills . . ."

Jeremy stiffened suddenly and went very pale.

With a hammering heart, his wife stood still as death.

For a moment he spoke no word. Then—

"I'm going out," he said shortly. "Don't wait for lunch. I shan't be back till seven. I shall come back then—this time. But if ever you say such a thing again or anything like it, I shall walk right out for good."

He picked up his hat and coat and passed out of the room. . . .

Rome has much to offer. She offered much to Broke that April morning. But all he took was the aged Appian Way, tramping this steadily with an empty pipe between his teeth and the thin rain playing on his face. He had no eyes for his flank-guards, no thoughts for the pomp of traffic that had swept or stalked or stumbled over his present path to build a world. He was aware only of a proud, passionate face, angry, yet exquisite in anger—the face of a spoiled child.

Sixteen miles he covered before he returned to the hotel, hungry and healthily tired, but with a clear brain and steadfast heart.

He had been checking and weighing many things. He had reviewed his married life, faced the mistakes he had made and steeled himself to pay for every one of them. He had found himself wanting in patience, slow to make due allowance, visiting Eve with ills which his own shortcomings had begotten. More. The bill his heart had run up was truly formidable. To do his darling pleasure he had let everything rip for month after flashing month. He had smiled at this extravagance, abetted that whim, encouraged that vanity. They had drifted—gone as they pleased. The trivial round had been bought off; the common task compounded with. Discipline had become a dead letter; indulgence, Lord of Misrule. . . . And it was his fault. She was a child and—she had great possessions; so Life and Love had become two excellent games, effortless, fruitful. Indubitably it was his fault. He should have pointed the child, steadied her, used his experience. His failure was inexcusable, because he had been through the mill, seen that Life, at any rate, was no game—a stroll or a struggle, perhaps, according as Fate laid down, but not a game. The pity was they might have strolled so pleasantly. . . .

Jeremy had also reviewed the recent affray. He had decided that he had been clumsy, quick to anger and blunt. But he was perfectly certain, first, that his contention had been sound, and, secondly, that his withdrawal was wholly justified. Moreover, cost what it might, if ever again Eve laid such a whip across his shoulders, he would have to go. Had he been less punctilious, had he ever given his wife the slightest cause, it would have been different. As it was, to condone such usage would be fatal. Her respect for him, his respect for himself, would rapidly bleed to death, and Happiness would shrivel like a fallen leaf. There would, in fact, be nothing at all to stay for—unless one cared for Love with his tongue in his cheek. . . .

That she had drawn such a whip had opened Broke's eyes. He had been hurt—naturally; but he was far more concerned. Ten months ago . . . Jeremy blamed himself very much indeed. He was, of course, most deeply in love with his wife. . . .

And she with him.

When he came in that evening she flung her arms round his neck and burst into tears.

"What do you think of me?" she wailed. "I must have been mad. You are so wonderful, Jeremy, so wonderfully sweet about it all: and then I take up your sweetness and slash you across the face. Jeremy boy, you've got a cad for a wife."

Jeremy kissed her hair.

"My lady," he said. "My darling."

Eve shook her glorious head.

"No," she said. "No lady. Don't call me that again. I've done the unspeakable thing. I know it. If you'd given me cause, it would've been the grossest form. But as things are . . ." She drew away and passed a hand over her eyes. "I think I must be possessed, Jeremy. Of course I hadn't a leg—about the drinks, I mean. You were perfectly right. But I can mend that. I'll never touch a cocktail again as long as I live. But I can't mend the other."

"It's mended," said Jeremy, taking her hands in his. "I made you mad as a hornet. I didn't mean to, dear, but I'm clumsy, you know. Well, when you're mad, you just pick up the first brick. You don't care what it's made of or what it is. The point is it's something to heave."

Eve looked him in the face.

"There was a label on that brick—'Not to be Thrown,' " she said. "We've all got two or three bricks labelled like that—'Do Not Touch,' 'Dangerous.' . . . I think from what you said that brick is marked 'Dangerous' too."

Jeremy bowed his head.

"Yes."

"Jeremy," said Eve, "you've something I haven't got—thousands of things, of course, but especially one. And that's my respect."

Her husband smiled.

Then he extended his arms and brought her face to his chin.

"You've got mine, any way," he said.

"Rot."

Jeremy nodded solemnly.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "you never lost it. If you could have seen yourself. . . ."

"A sulky child," said Eve.

"No," said Broke. "A—a princess."

"That's not what you married."

"I know. But that was your fault. You went and gave me my choice."

A mischievous look stole into the big brown eyes.

"What a fool I was," said Eve and put up her mouth.

* * * * *

If the Brokes had slid back for ten months, for the next six they went steadily forward, hand in hand. It was the strangest progress. Luxury, Idleness, Ease certainly came behind, but dutifully, as servants should. A jovial Discipline jogged by their side. Respect and Self-Respect marched solemnly ahead.

Jeremy did admirably.

Eve had never been mouthed—and she was twenty-six. She was worth twenty thousand pounds a year. Finally, she was American. . . .

With infinite patience, with gentleness, firmly her husband went to work—helping his wife, helping himself, helping his wife to help him and always giving her the glory. Eve gave it back always, with a look in her eyes that money cannot buy.

The vanities of a wicked world were against her, but her love and respect for Jeremy beat them back. She began to see the smile on Discipline's face, look for his cheerful wink, glow before his bluff praise.

One November morning Jeremy woke to find her fully dressed.

This was unusual. That one's fast should be broken in bed was one of the articles of Mrs. Broke's faith.

So soon as her husband could speak, he asked what was wrong.

After a while, a child told him her tale.

"You remember that poor man yesterday I gave half a crown to? Well, what's half a crown to me? It wasn't giving him anything really. I mean, I wasn't missing anything. It wasn't hurting me. So I thought if this morning I got up at seven o'clock. . . . It sounds silly, because it hasn't done him any good. But he did have his half-crown, and I—— Well, I'm glad I'm up now, but I do hope it was a deserving case, Jeremy. . . ."

Her husband slid out of bed and picked up her hand.

"I take my hat off," he said uncertainly.

And, as is so often the way, two days later the pretty pilgrims' progress came to a violent end.

It was a bleak afternoon, with a sky of concrete and a wind that cut like a lash.

Eve, who had been to the dressmaker's, was sitting before the fire, reflecting comfortably that in ten days' time she and Jeremy would be in the South of France.

Her husband entered quickly.

"Sorry I'm late, my darling, but when he'd finished with me he said he was going south, and I was fool enough to offer to drive him down. You know what these artists are. Five-and-twenty minutes he kept me waiting." He stooped and kissed her. "And—and I've a confession to make."

"Go on," said Eve, smiling.

"I've done it again, Eve."

"What?"

Jeremy stepped to the fire.

"Got stopped in the Park."

"Jeremy!"

"I'm awfully sorry, dear. It's a kind of disease with me."

"But you gave me your word——"

"I know. I'm frightfully sorry. I wasn't thinking about speed. As a matter of fact, I was talking to Hudibras. And then, just as I was going to switch out

of Clarence Gate, they pulled me up. Perfectly ridiculous, of course. The road was clear."

"That's hardly the point," said Eve coldly.

"I know, I know." He paused. Then: "Of course, you'll think I'm mad, but—Eve, ten minutes later I did it again."

His wife sat up.

"Again?"

Jeremy swallowed.

"Again," he said uncomfortably. "Down Constitution Hill. I tell you, Eve, I could hardly believe my eyes. Just as I got to the Palace, out they stepped. Thirty-three miles an hour. They're perfectly right."

"And you promised to keep to twenty."

"I know. I'm frightfully sorry. It just shows——"

Eve laughed.

"It shows you don't care a damn. I've begged and prayed you just for my sake to go slow. You know why. Because I'm worried to death when you're out alone. You know it. Over and over again you've given your word."

Jeremy stared upon the floor.

"I'll give up driving," he said.

"I don't care what you do. The damage is done. I begged, you swore, and now you've broken your word. If the police hadn't stopped you, I should never have known. The obvious inference is that you're breaking it all the time."

"I haven't really, Eve. I've crawled about. But to-day I got talking, and ____"

"Why," said Eve, "should I believe you? What does it matter whether I do or not? Day in, day out, I try to do what you want. I'm sick and tired of trying to do your will. Yet I keep on because it amuses you—amuses you to see me cramp my style. God knows why. It's a funny form of love. But that's by the way. I try. I sweat and grunt and slave—for peace in our time. . . . And you stand over me and keep my nose to the stone. . . . I'm not like that. It wouldn't amuse me to put you through the hoop. Only one wretched favour I've ever asked: and that I asked because I loved you."

“I know,” said Broke. “I’m sorry. I’ve no excuse. But don’t lay on so hard, Eve. You know it doesn’t amuse me to——”

“Then why do you do it?” said Eve. “Don’t say ‘Out of love,’ or I shall burst.”

“I do what I do,” said Broke, “because I want you to get the most out of Life.”

“Oh, let us pray.”

Jeremy bit his lip.

“You do it,” continued his wife, “to assert your authority. If the money was yours and not mine, you’d have the whip-hand. As it isn’t, you play the priest, trade on my better feelings, take advantage of my love—I didn’t marry you for that, you know.”

“You will please,” said Jeremy, “take that back at once.”

His wife stared.

“You’re out for trouble,” she said. “Well, here it is—hot and strong. I said I didn’t marry you for that. Well, I don’t pay you for that, either.”

Without a word, Jeremy left the room.

Ten minutes later he passed out of the house.

* * * * *

For month after halting month Eve carried on. The girl hoped desperately that Jeremy would return. If he did, he should find her soul swept and garnished. She dressed soberly, spent so much and no more, rose always at eight. She kept the same state, but entertained the less fortunate, was always lending her cars. When she saw some object she fancied, she asked the price and gave the amount to charity. Herein she was scrupulous. A chinchilla stole attracted her very much. Still, her sables were perfect. Besides . . . After careful reflection she decided that but for Jeremy’s teaching she would have bought the fur and wrote a cheque for the sick for four hundred pounds.

She made no search for her husband—not because she was proud, but because she felt that it was vain. If he was coming he would come. If he was not . . . Had she stumbled across him, she would have begged and prayed. But look she would not. She had no doubt at all that she was up against Fate.

And Jeremy had always said that Fate didn't like you to try to force his hand. 'So sure as you do, my lady, you lose your labour.'

She often wondered why she had lost her head that bitter afternoon. After all, to exceed a limit was not a grave offence. He was careful in traffic, no doubt: and then, slipping into the Park, he hurried along. Besides, he was only hastening back to her. . . . And he had been so humble.

Eve decided that she had been possessed. Some malignant devil had entered into her soul, distorting truth, ranting of motes and beams, raising a false resentment of a fictitious injury.

To say that she missed him is to call Leviathan a fish. Only the fetish that she must do his will saved her alive. The night of his going she lifted up her head, shook the tears from her eyes, and answered two letters that she had left too long. . . .

And now four months had gone by. . . .

Sitting before the fire, Eve thought of the past with blank, see-nothing eyes. For the millionth time she wondered where Jeremy was, how he was faring, what he was doing to live. Never had riches seemed so empty, luxury so drear as they had seemed since she had been alone. The thought that, as like as not, he was going hungry tore at her heart. . . .

She picked up the paper to try to distract her thoughts.

Staring straight at her was the advertisement of *The St. James's Review*. This was announcing the contents of the current issue. Third on the list was:

BABEL . . . . Jeremy Broke.

A child fell upon the telephone. . . .

A sub-editor or someone was speaking.

"I'm afraid we're not at liberty to give his address, but if you write him a letter care of this office, it will be sent on at once."

"All right," said Eve. "Thank you."

A child's letter went off by messenger within half an hour.

My Darling Jeremy,

I would like to come to you if you will tell me where you are. I have tried very hard to do what you would have liked ever since

you went, and if you had been here I should have been very happy. Please let me come, because, if you don't, I don't think I shall be able to go on. I would try, of course, but I think I should break. I've tried to write calmly, darling, but I shall be very glad to hear as soon as you can. Oh, Jeremy, my precious, I suppose you couldn't wire.

Your very loving

Eve.

No sooner had the letter been dispatched than a terror that it would miscarry flung into Eve's heart. She saw it being mislaid, forgotten, let to join the faded habitués of some dusty mantelpiece. Of course she should have marked it '*Important*,' enclosed it in a note to the editor saying how serious it was, asking for it to be expressed or sent by hand. Then, at least, he would have taken action. Besides, it *was* serious—desperately so: and urgent—most urgent. Yet she had done nothing to accelerate a reply—*nothing*. What a fool she was! She had certainly asked him to wire, but why not to telephone? If the letter had gone to him by hand and he were to have telephoned. . . .

The tide of apprehensive impatience rose to an intolerable height. . . .

Eve rose to her feet and stood twisting her fingers.

After a moment, trembling a little, she stepped to the telephone. . . .

"Oh, I rang up a little while ago and asked for Mr. Broke's address—Mr. Jeremy Broke. And you said—I think I spoke to you—you said that if I sent a letter——"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I've just sent you a letter by hand, but I ought to have marked it '*Important*' and—and . . . Well, I really should have enclosed it in a note to you because it's very urgent, and I would like it sent on by messenger-boy if you could do it. At once—to-night, I mean. You see——"

"I don't think he's in London. Wait a minute." The voice became almost inaudible. Frantically Eve strained her ears. . . . "Broke. Jeremy Broke—fellow that wrote *Babel* . . . messenger-boy. . . . Rome, isn't it? Poste Restante, Rome. . . ." The voice returned to the mouthpiece. "No. I'm afraid —— Hullo! Are you there? . . . Hullo . . . Hullo . . ."

After a moment or two the speaker replaced his receiver with a sigh.

"Cut off," he said wearily. "Never mind. She'll ring up again."

He was quite wrong.

He had had his last conversation with Mrs. Broke.

The latter was already preparing to leave for Italy. . . .

Two days later the lady had reached Rome and was being rapidly driven to the Ritz Hotel. Purposely she avoided the Grand, where she and Jeremy had stayed—centuries ago.

She passed into the hall and up to the polished bureau.

The reception-clerk was busy—speaking into the telephone.

"*Oui, madame. . . . Parfaitement. . . . Jusqu'à samedi prochain les deux, et après samedi les trois avec un salon en suite. . . . C'est entendu, madame. . . . Merci.*"

He left the instrument, stooped to make an entry and turned with an apology to Eve.

"Hullo, Jeremy," said his wife.

* * * * *

At half-past eight that evening Jeremy Broke, Gentleman, entered the Grand Hotel and sent up his name.

His head was aching, and he felt rather tired.

He wondered dully what this dinner with Eve would bring forth. The great gulf fixed between them seemed exceeding wide: everything was insisting upon its width. Not since the day on which he had left her house had he been used as a gentleman: now he was treated with respect—which her wealth had induced. A page she would presently tip was dancing attendance; here was the pomp of a salon which she had purchased; there was champagne waiting for which she would pay. . . .

As the door closed behind him, another was opened, and Eve in a plain black frock came into the room.

"Oh, Jeremy."

He went to her quickly and kissed her hands and lips.

The big brown eyes searched his steadily.

He smiled back. . . .

“What is it, Jeremy? Why are you playing up?”

Jeremy dropped her fingers and turned away.

“The burnt child,” he said slowly, “dreads the fire.”

“Are you sorry I came?”

“Oh, Eve.”

He drew in his breath sharply, hesitated and fell to playing with his moustache. . . .

Dinner was served.

The meal did much for both of them, as meals can. Jeremy’s headache passed, and Eve was refreshed. The flesh being fortified, the spirit lifted up its head.

By the time the servants had withdrawn they were exchanging news with zest. . . .

“So, really,” concluded Jeremy, settling himself in a chair, “I’ve—I’ve done very well. It’s a most entertaining job—smoothing down the indignant, humouring the whimsical, bluffing the undesirable, assisting the helpless, shepherding the vague. . . . I never had the faintest idea how many remarkable people are floating around. We had a fellow one day who stayed for six weeks. He went to bed when he arrived and he never got up. For six solid weeks he stayed in his bed. Nothing the matter with him. No suggestion of ill health. It was just his way of life. He did it wherever he went. Chauffeur and valet kicking their heels all day. He wouldn’t have the valet in his room except to shave him. Said he didn’t like his face. Then one day he got up and left for Naples. . . . I got off once—with an old English lady. She had a courier and two maids and travelled her own bath. She used to be ringing me up the whole day long, and she never went out or came in without speaking to me. It was most embarrassing. She gave me a cheque, when she left, for a hundred pounds. I tore it up, of course. . . .”

“You would,” said Eve.

“Well, I couldn’t take money like that.”

“Plenty of people do.”

“Yes, but . . .”

Eve leaned forward.

“She wanted you to have it, Jeremy. She was rich, and it gave her pleasure to spend her money like that. Your conscience was clear.”

Jeremy shifted in his chair.

“It wouldn’t ’ve been,” he said, “if I’d frozen on to it.”

“Why not?”

“Because I didn’t deserve it.”

“Wasn’t that a matter for her?”

The man hesitated. Then—

“I just couldn’t take it,” he said.

“Because it was a tip?”

“Oh, no. If it had been a fiver—well, I suppose I’d been attentive and I’ve no false pride.”

“Then why,” said Eve, “why did you turn it down?”

Jeremy laughed.

“I’m damned if I know,” he said. “But it couldn’t be done.”

Eve lay back in her chair and crossed her legs.

“Shall I tell you?” she said. “Because you’re a gentleman. You thought she’d lost her head—she probably had: and you weren’t going to take advantage of a runaway heart. . . . That hundred pounds was Cæsar’s: you rendered it whence it came.”

Broke got upon his feet and turned to the mantelpiece.

Presently he took out a pipe and a well-worn pouch.

“I suppose you’re right,” he said slowly.

After a long look Eve lowered her eyes to the floor.

“You got off once before, Jeremy—nearly three years ago now.”

“Yes,” said Jeremy, pressing tobacco home.

“Did you think I’d lost my head?”

“No.”

“Or that to take my money would be taking advantage of my heart?”

“No.”

"Yet you rendered it to Cæsar—every cent." She leapt to her feet and caught the lapels of his coat. "Every rotten cent that the good God had given us to make us happy you rendered unto Cæsar, as though it were Cæsar's. *And it wasn't Cæsar's*, Jeremy. It was ours—yours and mine. . . ." Her voice broke, and the tears came into her eyes. "I was so happy, dear, to think I was rich, because I felt I'd got something worth sharing—which you would share. I was so proud and happy. . . . And then—you—wouldn't—share—it. . . . Well, at first I was dismayed, as children are. You married a child, you know. . . . I tell you, I was ready to cry for disappointment. And then, suddenly, I saw something very magnificent—unearthly handsome, Jeremy, in your refusal. It was something so bright and shining that I couldn't think of anything else. I found you were paying me a compliment for all the world to see such as no woman with money had ever been paid before. . . . Well, I'm vain. And the childish impulse to burst into tears was swallowed up in pride to think that I had for my husband so fine a gentleman. I found it so flattering, Jeremy: I was just drunk with vanity. And so I became a princess—you made me one, dear: and the child that you married disappeared. . . . And with the child disappeared the idea of sharing—a princess doesn't share. That it was *our* money never occurred to me again. I had no eyes for such an idea. Every hour of every day you showed me that it was *mine*. And I came to prize its possession because it had brought me this superb allegiance. I sank to be a queen, Jeremy: and dragged you down to be the keeper of my purse . . . you . . . And then a day came when the queen became imperious—high with her faithful servant . . . thought him presumptuous . . . rose in the dignity he'd given her and asked who paid him to keep the privy purse." There was a long silence. Presently Eve went on. "And then a strange thing happened. You went, of course. But so did the queen, Jeremy. So did the pride and vanity and all the false position you had built up. And if you could have seen what was left, you'd 've seen a child crying—because it had no playmate to share its pretty toys. . . . I say the false position *you* had built up. Jeremy lad, it's true. I let you build it, of course. I gave you the bricks. If I hadn't been so vain—so hellishly vain, I'd 've caught your arm at the beginning and stopped the rot. You built so faithfully, Jeremy—with the cleanest, honestest heart. And I watched you and let you build and thought how wonderful it was. And all the time you were rendering our happiness to Cæsar. He's had four months of it already, four long, matchless months out of our little treasure. Oh, Jeremy, Jeremy, you're not going to give him any more?"

Jeremy caught her to him and held her close.

“My eloquent darling,” he said, with his cheek against hers. “But you’ve forgotten my sex. A man——”

“You’d ’ve married me if I’d been poor?”

“You know I would.”

“It was because I was rich that you wouldn’t speak?”

“Yes.”

“It was the child you wanted to play with—not her toys?”

“Yes.”

“Why, then your honour is clean. And it’ll always be clean—so long as you’d play with the child if she had no toys. . . . You wouldn’t want me to throw my toys away—I’ve always had them to play with. Yet how d’you think I feel when the child I’ve picked to be my playfellow won’t share my pretty toys?”

“I wonder,” said Jeremy slowly, “I wonder whether you’re right. ‘Unto Cæsar.’ You mean I’ve been paying conscience-money—which I never owed?”

Eve nodded.

The man put her gently aside and began to pace the room.

Slight fingers to mouth, Eve watched him, as one watches the flow of a crisis which one is powerless to treat. Her face was calm, and she stood like statuary: only the rise and fall of her breast betrayed her hammering heart. Her brain was straining frantically to perceive the line she would have to take. She had moved him—shaken him plainly. Everything in the world was depending on how she handled the next thing Jeremy said. . . .

Suddenly he swung round.

“Eve, if I come back, my livelihood’s gone. And I mayn’t be quite so lucky . . . another time.”

His wife stood up.

“You go too fast, Jeremy. I’ve suffered, you know—most terribly. And I can’t go through it again.” She hesitated. “Before you come back, you must promise . . . to play with my toys.”

For a long minute Jeremy stood regarding his wife.

Then suddenly he smiled—the smile of a man who has suddenly come upon the truth.

He stepped to Eve and put his arms about her.

“What a fool I’ve been,” he said. “What a blinking, blear-eyed fool. Of course, it’s partly your fault. You gave me my choice when you had no choice to give.”

“What do you mean, Jeremy?”

“You asked me which I would marry—the child or the witch or the princess. Well, I couldn’t pick and choose. I had to marry the three—or none at all.”

“But——”

“Listen. When you’re a child, I’ll play with your pretty toys: when you’re a witch, I’ll—I’ll play with your beautiful hair: and when you’re a princess. . . .”

“Yes, yes,”—eagerly.

“Why, then,” said Jeremy proudly, “I’ll play the prince.”

A glorious smile swept into his darling’s face.

“And they lived happily,” she breathed.

Jeremy nodded.

“Ever after,” he whispered.

SIMON

SIMON

"OH, SIMON dear," said Patricia, "why aren't you rich?"

"If it comes to that," said Simon ruefully, "why are you poor? You've less excuse than I have. At least, your mother was an American."

"Yes, but she married for love—and got cut off for it. Which is why her poor little girl must marry money."

Simon Beaulieu regarded the firmament. This was arrayed in black and silver. There was no moon: only the countless stars at all lightened the darkness, their dim, peculiar radiance turning the countryside into a kingdom of dreams. As though to indorse such witchcraft, the strains of a distant valse stole in and out of earshot, rising and falling into the trough of Silence, intoning a love-sick litany and rendering exquisitely the mystery of the hour. The air was magically still and quick with the sweet perfume of new-mown hay. Midsummer Night had come to Castle Breathless in all her glory.

"You know," said Simon, extracting a cigarette, "I dare say it's just as well. We think we're suited, but we probably aren't. If we joined up, we should probably scrap like hell."

"I doubt it," said Patricia, slipping a bare arm through his. "You've got your faults, of course: and so have I. But they're—they're quite bearable, Simon."

"It isn't a question of faults," said Simon slowly. "I love your faults, Pat. . . . It's a question of temperament. You know. Everything in the garden looks lovely—so long as you're outside. If we got in, it might be a very different shout. Supposing you didn't like the colour of my vests."

"I'm sure I should," said Patricia solemnly. "And if I didn't, they could easily be dyed."

"Yes, but I shouldn't want them dyed. You see? You'd say you couldn't stick them, and I should retort that I had to wear the swine, an' before we

knew where we were we should be in over our knees."

Patricia Bohun frowned.

"What colour are they?" she demanded.

"A warm biscuit," said Simon.

"You must look maddening," said Patricia. "And I like biscuit very much. So you see it's all nonsense to say we shouldn't get on."

"Yes, I knew that was coming," said Simon. "That was easy. But you know what I mean, Pat. Life's rather like a film, and a friendship like ours is like a jolly good act. But marriage is a 'close-up.' Well, I don't say ours wouldn't 've come off: but there are plenty that don't."

"D'you honestly think that our marriage would have been less successful than those we propose to make?"

"I don't propose——"

"Yes, you do. Simon, you can't let me down. You're going to marry Estelle."

"I can't bear it," said Simon. "She's so—so fidgety. Always chucking herself about. You're so calm, Pat. . . . Besides, she wouldn't look at me."

"Well, she's looked at you pretty hard for the last twelve months," said Patricia sagely. "Besides, you can but try. If she says 'No,' well, then, you've done your bit. But it'd make it easier for me. I'd like to feel we were both in the same old boat. I know I've got your love, but then I'd have your understanding too. I'd feel you knew what it meant. I don't want you to be unhappy, Simon dear: but I think you'd be less unhappy if you were married. And—and it'd be putting two hedges between us, instead of only one. . . . You see, when I marry George—as I suppose I shall: we're supping together, and you know what that means. . . . Well, when I marry George, that won't wash you out. I'll be bound to think of you. And if I think of you single, unmarried—*available*, Simon, it'll be ten times as hard to chase you out of my mind. And I want to play the game. One may have to marry for money, but at least one can honour one's bond. . . . And I think, perhaps, it'd be the same for you. You *needn't* marry money, because you're a man: but three hundred a year isn't much, and it's growing less. And in these days. . . . Well, Estelle's got fifteen thousand. Besides, she's awfully nice. And if you were married, you'd have a game to play. D'you see, Simon?"

"Yes," said Simon Beaulieu. "You mean that in love, as in everything else in the world, the positive's easier to deal with than the negative. Better a

Dead Sea apple than only forbidden fruit."

"And you say we shouldn't get on!" said Patricia deliberately.

There was a silence.

Shoulder to shoulder, the two stood still as statuary, looking into the night. For such an exercise their coign of vantage was superb. The balustrade before them severed the gardens from the park. This for the most part was walled with rising woods, but here the ground fell sharply into a valley which ran like a giant gutter, straight and clean, to the jaws of Peering Gap. Such was the darkness that the gap was not to be seen, but a starlit scallop of sky showed where it lay.

At length—

"We mightn't," said Simon doggedly.

"I mightn't get on with George. Or you with Estelle."

"You won't," said Simon Beaulieu. "Neither shall I. There won't be any question of getting on. Our respective unions will be marriages of convenience, business deals. They'll proceed mechanically, like a couple of cars. Now and again some slight adjustment'll be made, but, in the ordinary way, so long as they're watered and fed, they'll go right on. The chauffeur'll do his bit and the car'll do hers. No understanding will be necessary—there'll be nothing to understand. If you stick to your book of instructions, it's a fool-proof show. But ours—our marriage would have been like a man on a horse, journeying over the world day in day out, sharing fair weather and foul and getting to know each other inside out. Well, they get on or they don't—a man and his horse. It's a question of temperament. And there ain't no book of the rules for dealin' with temperaments."

Patricia laid her head against Simon's shoulder.

"Yes, there is, dear," she said. "I've studied yours so often. You carry it in your eyes. I wonder if Estelle will be able to read it. I don't think so. And mine. . . . Haven't you ever read mine?"

"Pat," said Simon gently, "don't make things worse. We agreed to wash Sentiment out."

"I know, I know. But don't say we shouldn't get on. Leave me my pretty dream."

"All right, lady. I—I dare say we should. But you never can tell," he added, "and I don't know that dreams aren't rather dangerous things."

“D’you mean that I mustn’t dwell on what might have been?”

“I think you should try not to. I mean, it’s unsettling. After all, we’re not madly in love. I don’t stop breathing when you go out of the room, and you don’t come over queer when I come in.”

“I feel all pleased, Simon.”

“That’s more fellow-feeling than love. I’m a congenial soul. We’ve fitted in very well, and that’s as much as you can say. We don’t give up things for one another. I haven’t pawned my boots to buy you a wrist-watch or soaked in money on flowerets. When I’ve given you dinner——”

“I’ve chosen the place and the play. And you always give me melon because I like it so. And why have you asked me so many, many times?”

“To please myself. You’re a congenial soul.”

Patricia turned and lifted a beautiful leg.

“Can you see?” she demanded, pointing.

“I see your ankle, Pat, and your little foot.”

The girl leaned back against the stone balustrade.

“I dress to please you,” she said. “Even to-night. I put on light stockings to-night, when I should have worn dark. I like dark better, and I’d ’ve been more in the mode. But you like me in light stockings, Simon, and so I put them on. . . . I may be only congenial. I hope to God I am. You’ll get off lighter then. But . . . Well, Simon, it’s pretty obvious that I love you.”

The man’s arms were about her, and his cheek pressed tight against hers.

“Pat, Pat, my precious, you know I’ve been covering up. You know I’m mad about you and always have been. And you know that whatever happens there’ll never be anyone else as long as I live.”

He breathed the words rather than spoke them. His tone, touch, frame were vibrant as any wire.

The girl slid her arms round his neck and held him close.

“I know,” she whispered.

Caress and word seemed to relieve the strain. The man relaxed sensibly. After a moment’s silence he turned and kissed her mouth.

“I blame myself,” he said quietly enough. “I’m older than you, and I shouldn’t have let it go on. I know we’d an understanding—a blessed,

faithful agreement, faithfully kept. There never was, I believe, such natural sympathy. But these things bank up, Pat: and, if we weren't to marry, we should never have been engaged. . . . It was defying Nature. In a way it was our affair, but it was out of joint. It's been—perfect. . . . But it was out of joint. Well, now that dislocation has got to be reduced. Very good. We knew it must come. Our eyes were open. That was the basis of our understanding—that sooner or later it must end. But I think we forgot—the adhesions . . . the seals that Nature sets upon things that are out of joint. They take some breaking—adhesions. . . . And—they've—got to be broken—to-night." With a sharp sob Patricia drew in her breath; then she let it go pelting and drooped her head. "We've played about so far. You know we have. Feinting, ducking, side-stepping, covering up. Well, now we've got to mix it and knock Things out."

The girl clung to him desperately.

"Oh, Simon, I can't, I can't. Not all at once like this. I know they've got to be broken, but they needn't be torn. Just once or twice we can be alone again. I shan't be married at once. Let's break them gradually, darling. Then I'll have something to look for—to buoy me up to-night. Life looks so terribly dark, Simon. Let me have just a ray of light. Just once or twice—that's all. You know. Just a word and a kiss. Don't smash my world to-night. Even the torturers, Simon, never did things like that. They worked by degrees—gradually, so that the torture could be borne."

The man smiled into her eyes.

As a moment ago her touch had soothed him, so now her weakness seemed to have made him strong.

"Pat, this isn't like you. We must keep troth. If we didn't end it to-night and go down smiling, we should spoil everything. Together we planted the prettiest little flower: and it's grown so lovely, Pat, and smelled so very sweet: and now—it's time to pick it. . . . Well, we must pick it properly—not drag it up piecemeal. And then—for ever, think what a memory we'll have—that we weren't afraid to pick our pretty flower . . . when it was in full bloom. We'll be so proud and happy to remember that. It won't have faded or died. It'll 've been just perfect—all the time. . . . And we must pick it smiling, Pat—just for each other's sake."

"Oh, Simon, Simon, I shall break. It's like Death. I can't face it."

"You can with me. We can face anything. What's death to us, so long as we go out well?"

Patricia lifted her head.

"You're right," she said quietly. "We—we must go out well." For a moment her eyes wandered over the heaven. Then they returned to his. She put up a little hand and touched his hair, setting it back from his temples and patting it as she pleased. Then she smiled very tenderly. "Let's pick our flower now, darling."

The man smiled back.

For a minute they kissed and clung—while the world rocked. . . . Then he loosened his hold, and she fell away.

He picked up her hand and kissed her finger-tips.

"My beautiful darling," he said. "My sweet, my sweet."

Then he leaned back against the stone-work and took out a cigarette.

For a moment he fingered this, smiling thoughtfully.

Then he looked up.

"Pat," he said, "what about a glass of champagne? Between you and me, I think we've earned it."

"My dear," said Patricia Bohun, "your brain's in your head." They started to stroll towards the mansion. "By the way, did I tell you to back Grey Ruby for the Stewards' Cup?"

"Who gave you that?" said Beaulieu.

"No one," said Patricia. "I dreamed it. I dreamed I saw the posters—STEWARDS' CUP RESULT. I was wondering what had won when I woke to see Matilda with my letters and tea. The first letter I opened was from a girl called Ruby Grey."

Simon grunted.

"I should have a bit on *sans doute*," he said lightly. "But these 'ere indications are treacherous things. Look at poor Barley McFinn. Two nights before the St. Leger he dreamed he was giving bananas to a baboon; and as fast as he gave them the brute kept shaking its head and slinging them back. Well, Barley woke up and rushed off and put his binder on Monkey Nut. . . . Well, I don't know where Monkey Nut finished, but a horse called Peelam won. Barley couldn't see it for weeks."

Patricia laughed gaily.

“You’re not a bit like your namesake, Simon,” she said. “He would have plunged. And yet . . .”

“Yet what?”

“In a way you are. I mean . . . Never mind. I’ll leave it there. What’s this they’re playing?”

Conversing evenly, they came to the flagged walk and the windows belching ragtime and blazing lights.

By one consent they turned and looked back into the night.

Then they passed up the steps and joined the carnival.

* * * * *

Let who will throw a stone at Patricia Bohun.

She certainly promised to marry a man whom she did not love. But if George Persimmon believed that such a lady would consent to bear his name for any earthly or heavenly reason other than to share his riches, then he deserved to be confined. But George was no fool. You may take it from me, Sirs, she did her neighbour no wrong. Whether a woman should sell herself is another matter. From the age of twelve Patricia had been schooled—cleverly schooled to take that unpleasant fence. Her aunt, Lady Coblow of Breathless, had not only shown her that she must marry money, but had taken care to surround her with the paraphernalia of wealth. From the age of twelve Patricia had lived and lain soft. Footmen, tiled bathrooms, French cooking, sables, limousines helped to create the atmosphere in which she moved. Use of that sort holds hard. By the time she was twenty-two she had come to regard the idea of parting with Luxury much as she looked upon that of committing suicide—a step taken only by the temporarily insane.

That Beaulieu’s outlook was different is natural enough.

He had no patron to pave his path with gold, and it was all he could do to keep his head above water. The man had gone hungry. Had he stepped out of his world, he might have waxed fat and kicked. But that would have meant leaving every friend that he had—including Patricia Bohun. He worked hard, driving a promising pen, but the promise was shadowy stuff, and his earnings were fitful and slight. It follows that while he perceived the extreme desirability of riches, he knew that they were not essential to life and more than suspected that happiness could be found without them.

Marriage itself Patricia and Simon viewed in much the same light. Wedlock for them was an earthy business, the Solemnization of Matrimony differing but a little from the conveyance of land. In the actual service they saw a fine old tradition well worth preserving in these degenerate days. Had they been bidden to witness a Livery of Seisin they would have gone in the same spirit. I do not know that I blame them. Few of the unions with which they were brought in contact were made in heaven; some were patently home-made; many were fearfully and wonderfully made; while one and all were discussed as worldly engagements the letter of which should not be flagrantly dishonoured. To them the plighting of troth was a common or garden contract and nothing more. It is to their credit that it was nothing less. What lifted them out of the ruck was that to their way of thinking all common or garden contracts were sacred things. Their word once passed must be religiously kept. With the letter they were not concerned; the spirit was the thing. The game *had* to be played.

Simon did not ask Estelle to become his wife. Had she asked him, he would, I believe, have consented to become her husband. But then, somehow, the doctrine of *caveat emptor* would have applied. It would have been her look-out. Whereas, if he approached her, his very approach would suggest a regard which he did not feel. Besides . . .

A month limped by.

Patricia and Simon were meeting continually—by chance. From their easy, casual fellowship no one would ever have dreamed that they were in love. But then no one ever had suspected anything. They were just carrying on—with hearts of lead.

Presently the date of Miss Bohun's wedding was announced and invitations were issued.

Then two things happened—simultaneously.

The first was that Castle Breathless was entered by burglars while the household was at meat. The burglars, however, were disturbed and made good their escape. A footman was knocked down and a maid-servant frightened to death. Apparently Miss Bohun's bedroom was the only room which had been entered. There a drawer had been forced and a gold bag taken. Curiously enough, the thieves overlooked what they were undoubtedly seeking. This was a magnificent rope of pearls, 'the gift of the bridegroom,' which was lying where Miss Bohun had left it upon a bureau.

The second was that Simon in some excitement began to do sums.

For the sake of brevity, let us look over his shoulder.

Unearned Income	£300	*a year*
Earned ”	£250	”
Grey Ruby	£450	”
Total	£1000	*a year*

You see, now, what was in the man’s mind.

That morning had brought him a cheque for seven pounds and a request to be shown the next tale that he wrote. Simon reckoned that he could write three tales a month.

So much for *Earned Income*.

Simon had just been left three hundred pounds. The money lay at the Bank. If he put it all on Grey Ruby at thirty-three to one and Patricia’s dream came true, Simon would win nine thousand nine hundred pounds.

So much for *Grey Ruby*.

As for the total, the man shall speak for himself.

“A thousand a year. It isn’t too much, but supposing we lived abroad. Say, Paris. I think she could stick it all right. I think she’d be happy. I believe, in a way, she’d find it rather fun. Of course she’d miss all the show—flunkeys and cars and the rest. We might run to a Citroën. And she could have half a maid. Clothes’d be the snag. We couldn’t put up a fight where clothes were concerned. But if she could rule them out—I don’t think she really cares about anything else. The idea of Life without luxury’s never entered her head. It doesn’t follow that if it did she’d fire it out. I don’t think she would. I don’t think Patricia’s that sort. If it weren’t for the clothes question . . .”

Simon rose to his feet and fell to pacing the room.

“One thing’s clear—a thousand’s the rock-bottom figure. I must make up my mind to that. Under a thousand a year it can’t be done. It *could* be, of course. We shouldn’t *starve* on five hundred. But . . . No, a thousand’s the lowest possible. With a thousand I could temper the wind. Unless Grey Ruby comes up and unless I can get thirty-threes . . .

“What’s the alternative? The alternative’s plain hell—for me, any way. I suppose I can plough through, but face it I can’t. I’ve tried and I can’t—can’t pretend to . . . if she was in love with Persimmon, if she was going to

be happy—happier than with me—well, I could stomach that. As it is . . . I don't know why I didn't see it that night at Breathless. I came pretty near, too. I said we'd defied Nature. But for some fool's reason I assumed the adhesions could be torn. That that was further defiance I never saw. I suppose I was exalted, drunk with a sort of heroism. That's all right to die on, because you're dead before it wears off. You can take a life-sentence with a laugh: but you don't laugh much when you're in prison, and after the first month. . . .

"The point is I may *have* to go on. No, it isn't. The point is I may have a chance—a chance of being happy and making her happy too. I wish to God she and I could thrash this out. But that's impossible. For one thing, her opinion's valueless. Whether she'd be happy, poor, she hasn't the faintest idea. And so I've got to decide for both of us. . . .

" 'Got to decide'? The point mayn't ever arise. Unless she makes a move, everything goes by the board. And as like as not she won't. . . . Well, then—finish. If she can get through, I must. She's free to change her mind, but I can't do another man down. I can't reopen things. That's plain. Heaven or burning hell, my mouth's shut and locked, unless and until she speaks. If she says she can't go on, an' if . . ."

He passed to the open window and stood looking down upon the fading street and men as trees walking and lamps beginning to come into their own.

After a little he laughed.

"I've lost my balance, I think—leapin' about like this before I come to the ditch. The first thing I've got to do is to raise the wind."

He sat down then and there and acknowledged his cheque. Then he rough-hewed the themes of another two tales. Finally, he retired—to lie awake until dawn.

That morning he visited a firm of bookmakers.

Grey Ruby, however, was being mentioned. They would not lay him more than twenty-five sovereigns to one.

After a little reflection, Simon wrote them a cheque for four hundred pounds—an act which reduced his balance to eleven pounds ten.

* * * * *

Goodwood was looking superb.

It was a perfect day, airy yet cloudless. Rain had fallen in the night and, stopping at cock-crow, left everything refreshed. Distance was clean-cut. For such as had eyes, the sheep grazing in the valleys made sharp white dots upon the green, the Isle of Wight rode like a ship at anchor between earth and heaven. Background, indeed, had much to answer for, lending the meeting the air of the old prize-ring, rigged like lightning, deep in some unsuspecting dingle of the suspected countryside. The artifice of gardens and playgrounds, jealously kept against the builder's hand, had here no place. Time had stepped back into an England where men passed out of doors on to the open road and, lifting up their eyes, beheld more meads than bricks and woods than mortar, where parishes were worlds and London Town was half a fairy-tale.

After a last look at Grey Ruby, Beaulieu strolled out of the Paddock and back to the Lawn. There he encountered Miss Bohun almost at once.

"Where's George?" he said, taking her hand.

"In bed with a touch of the sun. It's nothing serious. I want to go to the Paddock. Will you come with me?"

The man hesitated before complying.

Patricia knew him so well that, unless he could smother his feelings as never before, she would be certain to see that something unusual was afoot. Then she would question him: and Beaulieu did not want to be questioned—till after the Cup had been won.

He need have felt no concern.

As they passed to the back of the Paddock—

"Simon, I'm up against it."

The man braced himself. The time was not yet.

"Hush, my lady. Let's talk about something else."

"Listen. You don't understand. It's—it's not what you think, Simon." The man looked at her sharply. "I'm in the most awful trouble. I'm—I'm being blackmailed."

"Blackmailed?"

The girl slid a letter into his hand.

"Read that," she said. "Sit down here and read it. And then come and find me again. I'll be in front of the weighing-room."

Simon lifted his hat and turned away.

Mechanically he took a few steps: then he sat down on a seat and tilted his hat over his eyes.

12, Clock Lane,
Crutched Friars.
July 29th.

Dear Miss Bohun,

The object of my visit to Castle Breathless two evenings ago was, as our valuable Press has rightly surmised, to obtain possession of your pearls. That I failed was not my fault. My arrangements were perfect, but the car bringing three of my men broke down on the way, so that two had to try to perform the duties of five. It seems I might still have succeeded if I had used my eyes. Indeed, that the rope was awaiting collection would be a disturbing thought, but for my foresight in taking with me the letter which lay in the drawer which I had time to force. You remember. The one addressed to Mr. Beaulieu.

I think you would like this back. At least, I do not think you would like it to go to Mr. Persimmon. You may have it for ten thousand pounds.

If the money is not paid on or before the seventh of August, upon August the ninth the original will be received by Mr. Persimmon and copies by your aunt and uncle and twenty of your intimate friends.

Just three points more.

If you call in the Law or seek to avoid my conditions the several communications will be dispatched at once.

Secondly, overtures are useless. I will not extend the time, nor will I accept one penny less than ten thousand pounds in Bank of England notes.

Thirdly, I will deal with you or Mr. Beaulieu, but no one else. His production of this note will accredit him: and his production of the ten thousand pounds will bring him a letter which I am sure he will value, as well as twenty-two typed copies, which, if he pleases, I will burn before his eyes.

I shall be at the above address daily from eleven a.m. until noon.

Yours faithfully,
The Master.

Miss Patricia Bohun,
Castle Breathless,
Surrey.

Simon put the letter into a breast-pocket and returned to Patricia like a man in a trance.

His brain was trying to cope with too much for a brain to control. Dreams, hopes, mountainous fears—the powers of light and darkness fought like mad to be considered.

The runners were going down, for the Stewards' Cup.

Simon watched them dazedly.

Grey Ruby was moving well.

"Let's go to the Lyvedens' box," said Simon Beaulieu. "They won't be there, and I want to see this race."

Patricia shot him a glance.

Then—

"All right, Simon," she said.

They passed to the back of the stand and up the stairs. . . .

Simon took out his glasses and put them up.

"I take it," he said quietly, "that if you had ten thousand, that letter's worth it—to you."

"Yes," said Patricia, "it is. It's—it's a question of saving my name." She hesitated—then burst out. "But what can I do? Of course they think I'm rich. Not rolling, perhaps, but rich enough to get loans—borrow—find the money somehow, as rich people can. And I haven't two hundred pounds. I've got my pearls, but what can I do with them? I couldn't explain their disappearance. I might pretend I'd lost them, but they're insured. Oh, Simon, isn't it cruel? All round us people are sinning—callously, wantonly sinning—sinning for the sake of sin: but they never get caught. And I—I who've tried to live clean and play the game—because I love you I write one wretched letter that I've no business to write—and get clean bowled."

A bell stammered, and the tumult and shouting of Tattersalls' ring, died a sudden death. The race had begun.

Simon put down his glasses and wiped them carefully.

Then he put them back to his eyes.

"That's always the way," he said. "Would you like me to take it on?"

Patricia bit her lip.

"Well, *I* can't, Simon."

The field appeared.

Grey Ruby was on the stand side and showing up well.

"No, that's plain. Besides, it's a man's job. I'll stick to the letter, shall I?"

"Yes, if you will. But, Simon, what can you do?"

Grey Ruby was coming up. Yes, there was no doubt about it. Half the field was beaten, but the grey was coming up.

"Pat," said Simon, "I don't know what I shall do. My impulse is to break the gentleman's back. But I'm inclined to think that he means what he says, and so that wouldn't help you."

Grey Ruby was lying third now and full of running. A bay on the rails was leading and going uncommonly well.

"Nothing can help me," said Patricia listlessly. She shivered. "It's like a fearful dream. The impossible's got to be done, lest a worse thing befall."

Grey Ruby was second now.

A chestnut was leading, and the bay was falling back.

The chestnut was leading by a neck and holding his own.

"Buck up, Pat," said Simon shakily. "We're both—both in this. I mean—one second. . . ."

A confusion of shouting arose.

The whips were out now, and it was either's race.

The chestnut, if anything, was slightly ahead.

The shouting swelled into a roar.

"My God," said Patricia quietly. And then again, "My God." She drew in her breath. "I turn to you in my trouble—my hideous, ghastly mess. Not for

help, because you can't give it. I just call to you out of hell—call for a drop of water to wet my lips. And you—*you* can't give it me . . . because you're rather busy . . . *watching a race*." She laughed wildly. Simon put down his glasses. "And the letter that's doing me in—— Never mind. What's won?"

"Grey Ruby," said Simon shortly, marking his card. "And don't you worry, lady. You're out of the wood."

Patricia stared.

"Out of the wood?" she repeated.

Simon smiled back.

"Clean," he said. "Bless your pretty bright eyes. Going to the Wakefields' dance on Tuesday night?"

"I was."

"Well, go. I give you my word that there and then you shall have your letter back." He opened the door of the box. "And now let's find the Club tent and try some tea."

* * * * *

At a quarter to twelve on the following Tuesday morning Simon was ushered into a private room.

This was an office, smart and well furnished, with ground-glass panes in the windows and three oak doors massively built.

A peculiarity of the doors was that they had no handles.

A large, bland, smooth-faced gentleman, wearing blue glasses and sitting behind a table, rose to his feet.

"Sit down, Mr. Beaulieu."

"I prefer," said Simon, "to stand."

The other inclined his head and resumed his seat.

"As you please. You have your credentials?"

"There they are." The Master's letter passed. "I have the money also."

"But naturally," said the smooth-faced gentleman. He took an envelope from a drawer and smiled affectionately upon it. "This is Miss Bohun's letter. I like her handwriting. It reminds me of my dear mother's."

“Indeed,” said Simon. “May I see it—as a matter of form?”

The other tossed it across.

“Pray observe that I trust you,” he said.

“Why not?” said Simon Beaulieu.

He took out the letter, glanced at beginning and end, put it back in its envelope and slid this into a pocket. Then he took out ten packets of notes and laid them upon the table.

“Count them, please,” he said.

The smooth-faced gentleman smiled.

“I always do,” he said, “as a matter of form.”

Each packet contained ten notes—for one hundred pounds apiece.

That this was so The Master proceeded to verify, taking his own time.

Simon stood like a statue.

At length the other looked up.

“Quite right,” he said comfortably. He pointed to a pile of envelopes. “There are the twenty-two copies. Will you take them also? Or shall I burn them now?”

“Burn them, please.”

The Master stepped to the fireplace, set the envelopes in the grate, and lighted a gas jet which was fixed beneath the bars.

The papers began to flame almost at once.

In silence the two men stood, watching them burn.

Presently The Master turned and, picking up his own letter, added that to the pyre.

“A distressing incident,” he said, “now happily closed. This little room has seen the dissipation of so many tragedies.”

“You don’t say so?” said Simon dryly. “It’s almost a shrine, isn’t it?”

The other laughed.

“At least,” he said, “its suppliants are very generous.”

“You choose them for their generosity?”

The rogue spread out his hands and put his head on one side.

"That," he said, with the air of a past-master, "that is the secret of blackmail."

"Then if I were you," said Simon, "I should chuck in your hand." The other stiffened. "If Grey Ruby hadn't won the Stewards' Cup, I imagine you would have died about five minutes ago."

The other stooped to rake the ashes to dust.

"Perhaps," he said. "But what a magnificent race! Neck and neck for a furlong, and won by a head. I lost a bit on Sweden, but I must confess I enjoy——"

Simon lunged.

"Take my advice," he said, "and chuck in your hand. You've got your money by a fluke—the purest fluke."

The Master straightened his back, poker in hand.

Two spots of colour burned in the great smooth face.

"I never fluke," he said majestically.

Simon smiled back. Then he raised his eyebrows and turned to the door.

"I say I never fluke. *Take—back—those—notes.*"

Simon turned, still smiling, to look the speaker in the eyes.

"I wouldn't touch them," he said, "with the end of a ten-foot pole."

The Master recoiled. Then he seemed to shrink into himself.

The two red spots spread into deep blotches, and a hand went up to cover the quivering mouth.

For a moment he stood motionless. Then, with a visible effort, he touched the arm of his chair.

A bell throbbed.

Almost at once the door opened, and Simon passed out.

* * * * *

Patricia fingered her letter as though it were unreal.

At length—

"I—I can't say much," she said shakily. "And I can't attempt to thank."

"You know that I want no thanks," said Simon Beaulieu.

"But I'd like to beg your pardon for what I said at Goodwood. I might have known, Simon . . . I—I've no excuse."

"I think you had every excuse," said Simon Beaulieu. "I should have been most bitter. If I'd just shown you my death-warrant out of the blue, and you—you'd said, 'One moment . . . I jus' want to see a man about a dog,' I should have gone off the deep end."

Patricia stared at the letter.

"I'm dazed," she said. "Dazed. I owe you more than my life, yet—I can't thank you, Simon. It—it won't go into words. . . . I'll pray for you every night: but, then, that's nothing. I've done that for months. The queer thing is I feel more proud than grateful—proud of . . . my man. . . ."

There was a long silence.

Then—

"Thank you, Pat," said Simon tenderly. He rose to his feet. "And now let's go an' have a dance."

The girl rose and led the way to the door.

Arrived there, she closed it carefully and swung about.

"Simon!" Her hands were upon his shoulders, and her face three inches away. "Simon, you terrify me! What have you done? From the moment you left me at Goodwood, I've been frightened to death. When first I saw you that day, there was something wrong. Then you behaved so strangely—as if you didn't care. Suddenly you promised me the letter, as one promises sweets to a child. And now—here it is. . . . Simon, for God's sake tell me! What have you done?"

Simon patted her arm.

"Done?" he said, smiling. "Nothing."

"But why—how. . . . How did you get my letter?"

"To tell you the truth, I bought it."

"*Bought it?*"

"Bought it. I happened to have ten thousand and I bought it with that."

Patricia tried to speak, but no words would come.

She began to tremble.

The man put an arm about her and guided her to a chair.

"Listen, dear," he said, and told her his tale.

When he had finished—

"Why," said Patricia slowly, "why did you put so much on? Four hundred on an outsider's the bet of a desperate man."

"Oh, I don't know," said Simon, regarding his feet. "I suppose one goes mad now and then. Wonderful shoes Stoop makes. D'you know he made me these before the War?"

"Why did you put so much on?"

The man made fast a shoe-lace before replying.

Then he looked up.

"Pat," he said quietly, "I'm not going to tell you why."

"You needn't," said Patricia. "I know."

She took the letter from her dress and put it into his hand.

"Read that," she said. "And see how minds think alike."

July 27th.

My Darling,

I'm writing this letter because if I don't, I shall go mad. My gorgeous engagement ring glares at me: the pearls George has given me sprawl, pale and indignant, by my side. I've taken them off. I don't want his pearls about me; I want your arms.

Simon, that last night here we buried our love alive—our glorious, blessed passion, we buried alive. I must have been mad. I suppose I thought it'd die—if I thought at all. I was nearly out of my mind that awful night. I did faint once—in your arms, but you never knew it. . . . "Die?" It'll never die. Think what that means. A living thing immured, that can never die. That can starve, but never to death. . . .

I want to unearth it, Simon. I must. I must have it back to dandle and cherish and clasp—to warm my soul and body—bring the blood back into my heart. I must . . . I must. . . . But I can't dig

it up without you. We buried it together, and, if it's to be unearthed, it's plain I can't do it alone.

Oh, Simon, my king, have mercy. For once in your life be weak. Go back on your word—for once. I've spoiled our flower by writing. Well, spoil it, too. We'll plant another, my blessed, that we shan't have to pick. . . . Just breathe the word, and I'll break my engagement off. And we can marry, my darling, and live or starve or die in each other's arms. I don't care how I live or whether I live at all, if I can be with you . . . you. . . .

Well, there you are. If ever a girl was at a man's mercy, Simon, I'm at yours. If you're going to steel your heart—well, I'll go on. I must, I suppose. There's nothing else for me to do. Besides, I don't care. George Persimmon or a tramp I've never seen—what does it matter? It's you—or anything, Simon. Because anything else is nothing. D'you understand?

We could live on three hundred a year. And if we couldn't we could die. I've thought of it all. Squalor, dirt, rags—they wouldn't count, Simon, beside the light in your eyes.

I know I've broken my word. I know, I know. But if you don't break yours, you'll break my heart.

Oh, Simon, I love you so.

Patricia.

Simon dropped the letter and covered his face.

Patricia watched him with the tenderest smile. She was quite calm now. She was out of the wood—in the sunlight. And Simon was close behind. In his own outrageous way, Fate had played into their hands.

Suddenly Simon turned.

"Oh, Pat—my lady . . . could you bear it?"

His voice was shaking: his eyes, the eyes of a man looking into the promised land.

"I couldn't bear anything else," said Patricia Bohun.

"No cars, no servants, no clothes——"

"No cares," said Patricia tremulously. "I'm getting all excited. Besides, I've had my whack. And——"

“But, Pat, think. We’ll be beggars. With that ten thousand behind us we might have put up a show, but——”

“You only wanted it, dear, to spend upon me. And now—you’ve had your wish. Besides, I don’t care a damn. I want to be poor. . . . But, Simon dear, how like you to turn that money down! When he offered to give it back. Only a giant could have done a thing like that. But, then, you are a giant.”

“My dear,” said Simon, “I’m the weakest——”

“You’re not weak at all,” said Patricia. “Neither am I. We’ve played a splendid game. *It happened to be the wrong one*, but we were so mad to play it that we never saw that. . . . We’re a couple of shorn lambs, Simon—and that’s the truth. We sheared each other that dreadful night at Breathless—and went out into the cold. I was a fool, and you who knew better—you wouldn’t open my eyes. And then the wind blew—a wind like a knife. . . . That was to cure us of our folly. And now the good God has tempered the wind. . . .”

“That’s right,” said Simon slowly. “You’ve driven the nail, Pat. We put up a show all right, but we were trying to play an impossible game. It was when I realized that that I decided to put the money on. I didn’t know how you felt, but I wanted to have it ready—in case you moved.”

“In case I moved?” said Patricia, knitting her brows. Suddenly she sat up. “D’you mean you’d ’ve waited on me?”

“Of course,” said Simon. “Even with the money behind me, I couldn’t ’ve given tongue. I love you better, Pat, than heaven and earth, and I wouldn’t give you up now for fifty rolling worlds—but if you hadn’t spoken I couldn’t have opened my mouth. But then you did speak, lady. You wrote me the sweetest letter that ever—— What is it, Pat?”

Patricia put a hand to her head.

“This,” she said faintly. “If that letter hadn’t been stolen, it wouldn’t ’ve gone.”

“*Pat!*”

The girl nodded.

“I hadn’t the heart to destroy it: but I’d locked it away and thrown the key into the garden, because—I was so anxious . . . to play the game.”

* * * * *

Six months had gone by, and Simon Beaulieu had earned three hundred pounds.

The little flat at Chartres was becoming a luxurious apartment. Now that the tiles were down, the tiny bathroom alone was a flashing chapel of ease. . . .

Sitting at work at his table, Simon looked out of the window with a thankful heart.

"I'm one franc out," murmured Mrs. Beaulieu. Pencil to lip, she regarded the cornice thoughtfully. "Now what did I spend that on?"

Her husband surveyed her profile with some emotion. He may be forgiven. Its beauty was really startling.

At length—

"Cream?" he suggested.

"No. I've got that down. Oh, I know. There was a poor woman at the butter-stall with the cutest little boy. She was getting the cheapest butter, and when they told her eggs were seven francs—they've gone up, you know—she wouldn't have any. And there was I, getting the best butter and a pot of honey and some cream. It seemed so awful. . . . And the little boy was watching me with great, big eyes. So I asked him if he liked honey. . . . D'you know, wrapped up in paper he'd got a little empty jar? And his mother said that he always took it when he went to the market with her, and that if ever she had a little money over, then they spent it on honey, and his little jar was filled. She said he was wonderful—never complained. For weeks he'd brought his jar back empty, but he'd never cried or asked for anything. And he was only four. . . . You ought to have seen his face while it was being filled."

"I'd rather 've seen yours," said Simon Beaulieu. His wife blew him a kiss. "By the way, I've always meant to ask you and I've always forgotten till now. That night at Breathless, as we were going in, you said I was unlike my namesake because he would have plunged."

"I remember," said Patricia.

"And then you qualified that, and said that in a way we were alike."

"Yes."

"I've always meant to ask you—what did you mean?"

Patricia crossed to her husband and set her cheek against his.

“I meant that you had the keys of heaven,” she said. “And I was perfectly right.”

TOBY

TOBY

"YOU know," said Cicely Voile, "you're a great relief."

Her companion opened one eye.

"Why?"

"Because you don't make love."

Captain Toby Rage folded his hands upon his stomach and regarded the blue heaven. This the April sun had to himself and, making the most of his monarchy, set the whole firmament ablaze.

A mile away the Atlantic simmered contentedly—a rolling, laughing steppe of blue and silver; the lazy murmur of its surf gladdened the ear. To the left the mountain-sides smoked in the heat, the comfortable haze blurring their grandeur to beauty. To the right the coast of France danced all the way to Biarritz, her gay green frock flecked with the dazzling white of villas, edged by the yellow road that sweeps to Spain. Behind, the countryside, a very Canaan, basked in the earnest of summer, peaceful and big with promise of abundance to come.

From the moor where the two were sitting all these things could be enjoyed. It was, indeed, a superb withdrawing-room, for, while an occasional snarl told of a car flying on the broad highway, no one essayed the by-road which led to the yellow broom.

"The art of life," said Toby, "is to be fancy-free."

Cicely Voile clapped her sweet-smelling hands.

"We're going to get on—you and I," she cried excitedly. "I can see that."

"Why?"—suspiciously.

"Because our outlook's the same. Think of the friendships that have been wrecked by love."

Captain Rage groaned.

“Don’t,” he said. “It’s too awful. But I’m thankful you see my point. Conceive some cheerful little playground—Honolulu, for instance—peopled by an equal number of youths and maidens, all reasonably attractive and all proof against affection.”

“I can’t,” said Cicely Voile. “It’s too—too dazzling. Never mind. Go on.”

“Well, what a time they’d all have. No jealousies, no heart-burnings, no schemings, no inconvenience. . . .”

“I can see,” said Cicely, “that you have been through the hoop.”

“Haven’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, isn’t it a curse?” said Rage heartily. “When I look back and think of what I suffered, I go all goose-flesh. Turning out when I wanted to stay at home, staying up when I wanted to go to bed, going to plays I didn’t want to see, sloshing money about, writin’ letters, travellin’. . . . I tell you, Love’s a mug’s game. It’s—it’s buying trouble at a top price. That’s the wicked part. If you must buy trouble, you may as well get it cheap. But Love’s a disease. One becomes temporarily insane. I’d a very nice Rolls then, and I actually let her drive it.” He sighed memorially. “It was never the same car again.”

“That,” said Cicely, “was probably imagination. Still, I know what you mean. The misery I went through, trying to be in time! Alfred couldn’t bear being late.”

“Exactly,” said Rage. “Yet I’ll bet he used to wait by the hour, poor devil. I know. I’ve had some. I tell you, Love’s a disease.”

He sighed comfortably, settling his head upon its pillow of broom.

Cicely regarded him, speechless with indignation.

At length—

“I was endeavouring to point out,” she said coldly, “that I was the sufferer. Being fool enough to worship Alfred, I used to wear myself out—humouring his whim.” She paused dramatically. “Then, again, I used to leave parties early. He used to say one should be asleep by two. Time and again I’ve left a dance in the middle so that Alfred could go to bed.”

“I think,” murmured Captain Rage, “that I should have liked Alfred.”

“I quite expect,” flashed Cicely, “that I should have got on with—what was her name?”

“Rachel,” said Toby. “And I’m quite sure you would. In fact, I think you’d probably ’ve been fast friends. The silly part of it is that so might she and I. I did get on with her—extremely well, until I fell to Love.” He sat up there and set his hands on his knees. “Still, I’m not ungrateful. One attack like that does you a lot of good. But for the doing I’ve had, you’d almost certainly ’ve knocked me out.”

“Do look out,” cried Cicely.

“It’s all right,” said Rage. “Don’t you worry. I’m not within miles of making love. But I’ve watched you for months, I have; and there’s something very charming about you. Besides, you’re quite beautiful.”

“As beautiful as Rachel?”

“Oh, much more. Look at your throat, for instance. Oh, you can’t, can you? Never mind. What——”

“Oh, but I do mind,” said Cicely, wriggling. “This is a perfect experience. For anyone to tell me I’m beautiful, except as a prelude to familiarity, is something I’ve never known.”

“Surely, Alfred——”

“Oh, I always had to kiss him, or something. Not that I minded particularly. I rather liked kissing Alfred. But a compliment without any sort or kind of corollary is really delicious.” She whipped off her hat and put her chin in the air. “Don’t you love me like that?”

“Oh, gorgeous!” said Toby. “Now, Rachel’s stockings weren’t silk all the way.”

Hastily Miss Voile adjusted her frock.

“I was referring,” she said stiffly, “to my profile.”

“Equally lovely,” said Rage. Cicely choked. “I think I like your mouth best of all. I can quite understand people wanting to kiss you, you know. That short upper lip brings it, as it were, into the alert position. It sort of says, ‘Kiss me, you fool. Go on. I shan’t bite you.’ ”

“I shall in a minute,” said Cicely, bubbling. “How about my nose?”

“Oh, that’s well out of the way.”

“I suppose you mean it turns up.”

“The best ones do,” said Toby. “Besides, you needn’t worry. From temples to chin, you’ve got a face in a million. And then you are so sweet.”

“Now, do be careful,” said Cicely. “Don’t spoil it.”

Rage waved her away.

“Try to remember, my lady, that I do not care. I see that you’re awfully attractive, but you don’t attract me. No woman does. I tell you, I’m case-hardened.”

“I will try,” said Cicely humbly. “But you must forgive me if I forget now and then. Of course I’m the same myself. Men mean no more to me than so many blocks of wood. I certainly find them convenient. I tell you frankly, I find you very convenient. But that’s as far as it goes.”

“Well, isn’t that nice?” said Toby. “Isn’t it an agreeable reflection that you and I can consort together, take pleasure in each other’s company, and remain heart-whole? I’m not much to look at, so——”

“I think,” said Cicely Voile, “you’re very good-looking.”

“I’m not really,” said Rage, “but I suppose you feel it’s up to you to say something. Any way, we’ll pretend you think so. I’m good-looking, and you—well, you’re just exquisite. I can admire you and say so—‘without prejudice.’ You can glory in my homely features—dote, for instance, upon my ears and tell me how much they move you—without being misunderstood. Think of the things we can discuss, the interests we can share, the easy intimacy we can enjoy—all ‘without prejudice.’ Look at the terms we can use.”

“Terms?”

“Terms. Why shouldn’t I call you ‘darling’? I like the word, and it suits you uncommonly well. Coming from me, it’s not an expression of love.”

“I think you’d better begin with ‘Cicely.’ ”

“I don’t care what you think,” said Captain Rage. “That’s the beauty of it. If you were to say you’d never speak to me again, I shouldn’t care a curse. Still, I’ll temper the wind—Cicely. Besides, it’s a sweet, pretty name. Suits you down to the ground.”

Miss Voile put a hand to her head.

“It’s terribly difficult to get hold of,” she said. “You’re quite sure I don’t attract you?”

“Absolutely,” said Rage. “If you were to go up in smoke—now, I shouldn’t turn a hair. I like you as I like a work of art. If you were damaged or removed, I should deplore your removal: but I shouldn’t come unbuttoned about it. But, surely, if you feel the same, you can appreciate——”

“I do,” said Miss Voile quickly. “But then I’m a girl. Men don’t attract women: they sort of bear them down.”

“Ugh, the brutes!” said Rage.

“But women are always supposed to attract a man. Of course I know you’re impervious, but when you speak and look so—so naturally, it’s almost impossible to believe that there’s nothing doing.”

“You’ll soon get used to that,” said her companion. “When you’ve called me ‘Toby darling’ a few dozen times without a sign of a rise——”

“D’you think you could stand it, Toby? I mean, Alfred used to say my voice——”

“My sweet,” said Toby, “I could listen to your voice all day . . . listen. . . . It has quality.”

With that he lay back on the turf and closed his eyes.

Cicely set her teeth.

Then—

“Toby dear,” she purred, “I left my coat in the car.”

“That’s right,” said her squire. “I saw you. Hangin’ over the door.”

“If I had it, Toby, I could make it into a pillow and go to sleep—too.”

“So you could,” said Toby.

There was a silence.

“But—but it’s in the car, Toby dear.”

“I know,” murmured Rage. “Hangin’ over the door.” He sighed. “If you do go and get it, you might bring me back my pouch. But don’t go on purpose.”

There was another silence.

“Are you sure,” ventured Miss Voile, “that you aren’t confusing ordinary politeness with love?”

“Positive,” said Toby. “You’re proving me, you are. Shove your little face down on the broom, sweetheart, and I’ll tell you a fairy-tale.”

A silence, succeeded by a rustling, suggested that Cicely had capitulated.

“Go on,” she said presently.

“There was once,” said Toby, “a King: and he had a daughter who was as lovely as the dawn. That’s why they called her Sunset. She attracted like anything—especially the Master of the Horse. Well, one day, just as the King was about to sack the Master of the Horse for being attracted, a voice said, ‘You’d better not.’

“ ‘Who’s that?’ said the King, looking all round the room.

“ ‘I rather think,’ said the Master of the Horse, ‘that it’s my uncle. He said that if ever I was in trouble I was to rub this ring, and I’ve just rubbed it.’

“ ‘Oh, did he?’ said the King. ‘I mean, have you? Then it was a piece of great presumption. And now push off.’

“ ‘Very good, sir,’ said the Master of the Horse. ‘Good-bye.’

“ ‘Good-bye,’ said the King.

“ ‘Good luck,’ said the voice.

“ ‘You shut your face,’ said the King. ‘What’s all that shouting about?’

“Nobody answered him this time, but he had not long to wait. In fact, the door had hardly closed behind the Master of the Horse when it was burst open by the Lord Chamberlain.

“ ‘Sunset’s gone into a trance,’ he announced. ‘You know. A sort of swoon, only worse.’

“ ‘Curse these enchanters,’ said the King, catching up his crown. ‘Where is she?’

“ ‘In the forecourt,’ said the Lord Chamberlain. ‘She was playing with the State bloodhound when all of a sudden she collapsed. She’s still got the dog by the ear.’

“This was true. What was more to the point was that the physicians advised that, since she was under a spell, any attempt to interfere with her grip would probably prove fatal.

“The position was really extremely awkward.

“With incredible difficulty Sunset was got to bed, while the dog, who was becoming every moment more suspicious and impatient of his detention, was persuaded to lie upon a divan by her side.

“Then a council was held.

“Violence to the bloodhound seemed futile, and mutilation as bad. If Sunset was destined for an indefinite period to grasp a piece of flesh, it seemed best that it should be alive. The dog, however, would require exercise—an obviously delicate business, since the sleeping princess must accompany it upon its rambles.

“ ‘The dog,’ said the King, ‘must be duly tended and controlled. Who’s to do it?’

“ ‘Nothing doing,’ said the Lord Chamberlain. ‘I’d rather resign. The brute jolly near had me when we were going upstairs.’

“ ‘He never did like me,’ said the Comptroller hurriedly. ‘Always growls when I pass.’

“ ‘That’s nothing to go by,’ said the King. ‘Heaps of dogs——’

“ ‘It’s good enough for me,’ said the Comptroller shortly.

“ ‘The truth is,’ said the Treasurer, ‘that he’s not a nice dog. There’s only one man who ever has got on with him, and that’s the Master of the Horse.’

“ ‘But I’ve just fired him,’ said the King. ‘Besides, he’s got off with Sunset. That’s what I fired him for.’

“Here the door was opened, and a servant put in his head.

“ ‘Excuse me, sir,’ he said, ‘but I think the dog wants to go out.’

“By the time the King, with his daughter in his arms, had been twice round the forecourt, over the drawbridge, down a steep bank into a ploughed field through a brook, in and out of an orchard, over two walls and along an evil-smelling drain, his mind was made up.

“As the Court arrived—

“ ‘Issue two orders,’ he said faintly. ‘First, all cats are to be collected and kept under lock and key until further notice. Penalty for disobedience, Death.’ He nodded at the bloodhound, who was eating heartily. ‘God knows where I should be, but for that sheep’s head.’ He paused to mop his face. ‘Secondly, the Master of the Horse is to be found forthwith.’

“Half an hour later the two men once more faced each other. The Master of the Horse had Sunset in his arms, with the dog stretched at his feet. The King had his cheque-book in his hand.

“ ‘Supposing,’ said the King, ‘supposing you rubbed that ring.’

“ ‘Why?’ said the Master of the Horse, glancing at the beautiful face upon his shoulder. ‘I’m not in any trouble.’

“The King fingered his beard.

“ ‘You can’t go on like this,’ he observed. ‘It’s—it’s unheard of.’

“ ‘It is at present,’ was the reply. ‘But it’ll soon get about. You know what Scandal is.’

“The King rose to his feet and took a short turn.

“When he felt better—

“ ‘What,’ he said, ‘do you suggest?’

“ ‘A priest,’ said the Master of the Horse. ‘Oh, and witnesses.’

“After several more turns the King sent for a priest.

“ ‘After all,’ he said to himself, ‘she can’t respond; so I can always get it annulled. And what price “undue influence”?’

“At the critical moment, however, Sunset responded heartily. Then she released the bloodhound and blew her father a kiss.

“ ‘I’d no idea,’ she said, ‘you could go so well. The way you flew those walls! But I do wish you’d have that drain cleaned out. I don’t think it’s healthy.’

“The King was nothing if not a man of action.

“He seized his son-in-law by the ear and fell into a trance.

“This was a real one, and lasted for several days. So the King got a bit of his own back.

“The first thing he did upon recovery was to make the practice of ventriloquism a capital crime.”

There was a long silence.

At length—

“Don’t say you’re asleep?” said Toby.

Cicely started guiltily.

"Certainly not," she said. "Go on. Sunset went into a trance. I suppose the uncle did that. What then?"

"Oh, the vixen!" said Rage. "Just 'cause I wouldn't get her coat. Never mind. 'Full many a tale is told to float unheard, And waste its neatness on the *distrait* ear.' Besides, it's the effort that counts." He sighed. Then, "D'you often laugh in your sleep, Cicely?"

So soon as she could speak—

"I'm not surprised," said Miss Voile in a shaking voice, "that Rachel turned you down."

"But she didn't," said Rage comfortably. "It was I who, er, withdrew. What shall we do to-morrow?"

Cicely rose to her feet and smoothed down her dress.

"Why," she said, "should we do anything?"

"Because we get on so well. You don't want to be loved, because men mean nothing to you. Well, I should think I'm one of the few men living who could withstand successfully your physical and mental charms. Besides, you find me convenient—very convenient. On the other hand, while I've not the slightest desire to bear down any woman, most of the women I know seem to expect to be overwhelmed. Of course I except my Aunt Ira. She's in a class of her own."

"Is she so strong?" said Cicely.

"It's not exactly strength. It's sheer weight. She's rather like lava. Her personality submerges—flattens. After half an hour of her I'm all over at the knees. Add to this that she's a bigoted mid-Victorian, has made a will in my favour and is enormously rich, when you'll see that our relations are delicate indeed. She's very hot on what she calls 'round' dances and the decay of chaperonage."

"She would like Biarritz, wouldn't she?" said Miss Voile.

Her companion shuddered.

"The bare idea," he said, "is bad for my heart. What were we saying? Oh, I know. I was indicating the convenience of our future conjunction."

"Perhaps you're right," said Cicely slowly. "Let's get up early and go up into the mountains."

“What exactly,” said Rage, “do you mean by ‘early’? By the time I’m able to differentiate between the bell and light switches which dangle over my bed, and so obtain breakfast, it’s usually about eight.”

“Let’s leave at five, Toby.”

“Five!” screamed Toby. “Why, that’s B.C.—Before Cock-crow. You oughtn’t to talk about such hours.”

“All right,” said Cicely. “I’ll get someone else to take me. I wonder if Teddy Bligh would.”

“Firkin’s the man,” said Rage. “He’s mug enough for anything. You ask Firkin.”

A dreamy look stole into Cicely’s eyes.

“The trouble is,” she said, “that either of them’ll make love.”

“Well, it would be asking for trouble, wouldn’t it, Cicely dear? Up at dawn, and then hey! for the mountains in the half-light and a two-seater. What?”

“Don’t you think,” said Miss Voile, “that, as I want to so much, it’d be a friendly act if you were to step into the breach?”

“I think it’d be more than friendly,” said Rage. “Almost—almost familiar.”

“Once you’re up,” said Cicely, “you feel most awfully fit.”

“So I’ve heard,” said Toby. “It’s a compelling phrase that, isn’t it? ‘Once you’re up.’ ”

Miss Voile began to laugh.

“I give in,” she said. “Fix your own time, Toby, and I’ll be there.”

Captain Rage pulled his moustache.

“My dear good child,” he said, “I don’t want to spoil your day. If it’ll really amuse you to leave at five——”

“Oh, I should love it, Toby. I’ve always wanted to drive up into the dawn. You see, with summer time it’ll be four really.”

“Yes, I—I’d thought of that,” said Toby.

“And we’ll have the roads to ourselves, and you can let her out and—and—oh, it’ll be glorious.”

“So be it,” said Toby Rage. “Five B.C. to-morrow as ever is.”

“Oh, you darling!” cried Cicely.

“And listen,” continued Toby. “Quarter ’f an hour I’ll give you for the sake of your pretty face. But at five-fifteen sharp I shall return to bed.”

Cicely blew him a kiss.

“Ugh,” said Toby.

* * * * *

The blue landaulette rolled over the saddle of Sévignac and began to descend slowly into the valley of Laruns.

“Pull the check-string,” said Mrs. Medallion. “I wish to admire the view.”

Her companion put out her head and called on the driver to stop.

As she resumed her seat—

“I wish,” said Mrs. Medallion, “you’d do as you’re told. I ordered a cord on his arm, and there it is. Why avoid a convenience?”

“To tell you the truth,” said Miss Woolly, “I was afraid he mightn’t understand.”

“In that case,” said Mrs. Medallion, “we could have enlightened him.”

Head in air, she turned to survey the prospect.

“Isn’t it enchanting?” said Miss Woolly, gazing over her shoulder.

“No,” said Mrs. Medallion. “It isn’t. And I wish you wouldn’t exaggerate. My father detested exaggeration. He said it was subversive of conversational dignity.”

“Well, it’s very restful, any way. Look at those sheep.”

“I refuse,” said Mrs. Medallion. “We’ve passed four flocks on the road since we left Pau, and I’m sick and tired of sheep. What is abundantly clear is that France is a very rich land. Why doesn’t she pay her debts?”

“I can’t imagine,” said Miss Woolly.

“I’ll tell you,” said Mrs. Medallion. “Because she and her creditors are friends. You can’t combine friendship with business. It’s an inviolable rule. Pull the check-string.”

The landaulette proceeded silently and at a sober pace.

Presently the road became a curling shelf, with, on the left, first, a miniature wall, and then a ten-foot drop into gay meadows. On the right, a rough and tumble of rock, with rags and tatters of greensward interspersed, climbed to the mountains. Except for an open car, drawn up by the miniature wall, and an approaching waggon, the road was empty.

As luck would have it, the waggon was about to pass the car when the landaulette arrived. There not being room for three vehicles abreast, the landaulette had to wait. This she did quietly enough six paces away.

The waggon went rumbling. . . .

Then the bullocks saw Mrs. Medallion's blue parasol and sought to leave the road. Their frantic owner strove to correct them with blows and howls. . . .

Pipe in mouth, the fair-haired man who had been tightening a bolt beneath the grey car's wing watched the scene with a smile. . . .

Mrs. Medallion put up her lorgnettes.

"Desire that man to come here," she said. "He's my nephew."

Miss Woolly descended and went up to Captain Rage.

"Please will you come," she said, "and speak to Mrs. Medallion?"

Toby started violently, dropped his spanner and snatched his pipe from his mouth.

Then, with a sickly smile, he took off his hat. . . .

As the waggon swayed by—

"How d'ye do?" said Mrs. Medallion, extending her hand. "Don't you feel well?"

"P-p-perfectly, thank you, Aunt Ira," stammered the unfortunate Toby, touching her glove. "D'you feel all right? I mean . . . I—I do hope you're well," he added piously.

After a long look—

"My health," said Mrs. Medallion, "leaves little to be desired." She turned to her companion about to re-enter the car. "Miss Woolly, this is my nephew, Captain Rage. Captain Rage—Miss Woolly." The two bowed. "Why are you here, Toby?"

“Well, I’m—I’m really at Biarritz,” stammered Rage. “You know, taking—taking a sort of holiday there.”

“Well, I’m really at Pau,” said his aunt, staring. “Taking a sort of rest. I don’t know what from, but the doctors advised the change. What’s your trouble? Nerves?”

“Good Heavens, no, Aunt Ira.” He laughed uneasily. “I’m perfectly well. But I was so—so dumbfounded. You know. Er, er, astonished.”

“ ‘Dumbfounded’ will do,” said his aunt. “I’m quite familiar with the word.”

“Of course,” said Toby. “What I mean is I never dreamed——”

“Why should you?” said his aunt. “Neither did I. But I don’t stammer about it. Tell me about Biarritz.”

“Oh, it’s not much of a place,” said Toby cautiously. “And it’s awfully full. I spend most of my time getting away from it. I like the peace of——”

“Are there public dances there?”

Captain Rage appeared to consider.

“I believe they do dance at the Casino,” he said. “Yes, I’m almost sure they do.”

“Are you, indeed?” said his aunt. “It’s wonderful how these things get about, isn’t it?” Toby blenched. “Where is the English Church?”

Painfully conscious that his reply would almost certainly be compared with that of Baedeker, Captain Rage swallowed.

“Well,” he said, “when you get out of the hotel, instead of going down to the sea——”

“*Toby darling.*”

The clear voice floated musically over the miniature wall.

The worst had happened.

Cicely had awaked.

After one frightful moment, Captain Rage plunged on desperately.

“In—instead of going down to the sea, you—you turn——”

“Somebody,” said Mrs. Medallion in a freezing tone, “*somebody* appears to desire your attention. Didn’t you hear them call?”

Her nephew put his head on one side and appeared to listen.

"Did they?" he said.

Grimly his aunt surveyed him.

"You must be deaf," she said. "Never mind. If you don't answer, I dare say they'll call again."

She was perfectly right.

Almost immediately—

"*Toby darling*," cried Miss Voile, "*have you got a cigarette?*"

There was an awful silence.

Miss Woolly, who had a keen sense of humour, set her white teeth and fought to suppress her mirth. Head up, Mrs. Medallion stared in the direction from which the voice had come, as one who has detected an unlawful and offensive smell. Fingers to mouth, Captain Rage was glancing over his shoulder with the nervous apprehension of the escaped felon who has heard his pursuers decide to bomb his lair.

Two sweet, pretty hands appeared upon the miniature wall.

The next moment, looking extraordinarily lovely, a flushed and hatless Cicely pulled herself abreast of the parapet.

Toby stepped forward, put his hands under her arms and lifted the lithe figure on to the road.

Then he turned to his aunt.

"This is Miss Voile, Aunt Ira—Miss Cicely Voile. Cicely, this is my aunt, Mrs. Medallion."

Cicely stepped to the car and put out her hand.

"How d'ye do?" she said with a charming smile.

In stony silence Mrs. Medallion touched the slight fingers.

"Are you engaged to my nephew?"

"Of course I am," said Cicely. "That's why we're alone. We got engaged last night, so we're spending to-day in the mountains to recuperate. D'you think he'll make me happy?"

The ghost of a smile stole into Mrs. Medallion's face.

"That depends on his wife," she said. "Why didn't he tell me?"

“We haven’t told anyone yet,” said Cicely Voile. “And I expect he’s shy. Men are funny like that, you know. They seem to regard their engagement as a confession of weakness.”

“It frequently is,” said Mrs. Medallion. She turned to her nephew. “Toby, you’re a fool. Why shouldn’t you be engaged?”

Captain Rage grinned sheepishly.

“No reason at all,” he said. “Only—only it was all rather sudden, you know. The—the words wouldn’t come.”

“Yes, I noticed that,” said his aunt. “They still seem rather reluctant.”

“What did I say?” said Cicely, sliding an arm through Toby’s and addressing his aunt. “You see? He’s ashamed of himself. He feels his position. They can’t help it. Where are you staying, Mrs. Medallion?”

“At Pau. Should I like Biarritz?”

“I should come for the day. It’s not very far. I think Pau’s quieter, you know.”

Mrs. Medallion regarded her.

“I heard you ask,” she said, “for a cigarette.”

“I didn’t know you were here,” said Cicely Voile. “I shouldn’t smoke before you, because I’m younger than you and so it’s up to me not to give you offence. I’ve got an aunt called Susan who simply loathes it. So I never smoke before her.”

Mrs. Medallion turned to her companion.

“A very proper spirit,” she said defiantly.

“Admirable,” said Miss Woolly.

“Miss Voile, this is Miss Woolly, who bears with me.”

Miss Woolly laughed, and Cicely stepped on to the running-board and put out her hand.

“It can’t be a very hard life,” she said. “You’re looking too well.”

“I suppose you dance, child?” said Mrs. Medallion.

“I do,” said Cicely. “I love it. I know the dances of to-day aren’t all they might be, but neither is anything else, for the matter of that. I imagine that convents are as conservative as ever, but outside them——”

“I doubt it,” sighed Mrs. Medallion. “Look at the gaols. I don’t believe in torture, but I always had a weakness for the discouragement of crime. Never mind. Come back to Pau now, and I’ll give you some tea. Toby!”

“Yes, Aunt Ira.”

“Take Miss Voile out of sight and give her her cigarette. I think she’s earned it. Then follow us back to Pau. By the way, d’you feel better now?”

“Much better, thank you, Aunt Ira,” said Captain Rage.

“What a fool you are,” said his aunt. “I don’t expect to be welcomed, but misprision of my understanding I cannot endure. But for your pretty advocate, your ghastly endeavours to dissemble would have cost you extremely dear.” Her nephew quailed. “Besides, aren’t you proud of her?”

“I should think I was,” said Toby heartily.

“Then act accordingly,” said Mrs. Medallion. “And if ever again you want to throw dust in my eyes, throw dust—not clods of earth. If you can manage to blind me, that’s one to you. But I won’t be assaulted.”

“I’m very sorry, Aunt Ira,” said Toby humbly.

“I’m glad to hear it.” She turned to address Miss Voile. “Now don’t go and heal those stripes as soon as my back is turned. Give him the cold shoulder for a quarter ’f an hour. And please tell the driver to turn and take us to Pau. I shall expect you at four at the Hôtel de France.”

“Thank you very much,” said Cicely. “I’m sorry my entrance was so abrupt, but——”

“I wouldn’t have missed it for worlds,” said Mrs. Medallion. “It was—enchanting.”

In silence the landaulette was turned and the ladies were driven away.

As the dust swallowed them up, Toby turned to his companion with a glowing face. Then he caught her hands and pressed them against his lips.

He looked up with shining eyes.

“Cicely darling,” he cried, “you’re an absolute brick.”

Miss Voile disengaged herself.

“No endearments, please,” she said calmly enough. “This is a serious business. I’ve compromised myself good and proper, you know. And until we’re out of the wood I’d rather go slow—dead slow.”

“My dear——”

“Don’t call me your ‘dear,’ ” cried Cicely, stamping her foot.

“It’s ‘without prejudice,’ ” said Toby.

“What about our engagement? That’s ‘without prejudice’ too. The trouble is we omitted to point that out to Mrs. Medallion.”

“Well, I’m very sorry,” said Toby. “But what did you do it for?”

“Why do people go in after drowning men? Because they can’t stand still and see them drown. I did it out of common humanity. When I looked over the wall I saw how matters stood—saw in a flash. It wasn’t particularly bright of me. If you could have seen your face. . . . Well, there was only one thing to be done. The difficulty was how to do it. And then with her very first words she smoothed that away.”

“Common humanity or not, it was a most handsome act. And I’m deeply, deeply grateful. I’ll put things right, of course.”

“How?”

“I don’t know yet, but I will—before any damage is done. I’m afraid it’s spoiled your day, and I’m frightfully sorry. But there you are. And now let’s go to Eaux Chaudes and find some tea.”

“Eaux Chaudes?” cried Miss Voile. “But we’re booked to your aunt! Don’t look so amazed. If I start on a thing I like to see it through. And what on earth’s the use of all I’ve done if we don’t——”

“I refuse,” said Captain Rage. “As you’ve said, you’re deep enough in. If I hadn’t been so rattled——”

“I never said that,” said Miss Voile. “And now please don’t interfere. This is my show. You say you’re grateful. Very well, then. Do as I say. I shan’t get in any deeper by going to tea. I don’t suppose it’s a party.”

“I wish you wouldn’t,” said Toby. “I—I don’t like it. What with bein’ heckled by that woman, then all of a sudden lugged out of the muck, an’ then all dazzled an’ blinded by the way you handled her, it never occurred to me that you were paying the score. It sounds ungrateful and selfish, but there you are. Now that I do see, for Heaven’s sake have a heart. Don’t make me feel more of a worm.”

With a sudden movement Cicely put out her hands.

"Toby, I'm sorry," she said. "And please don't feel like a worm. It is so—so very inappropriate. I was so glad to help you." Rage took her hands in his. "I *am* so glad I've helped you. And I'm glad to go on helping you—awfully glad. And then we'll help each other—out of the wood. . . . I'm afraid it sounded as if I repented what I'd done. I don't, Toby, I don't. And I don't quite know why I said such rotten things. Only, when you called me 'darling' on—on the top of it all, it . . . seemed as if you were forgetting . . . that it's only—only a game."

Toby Rage looked into the great brown eyes.

"I—I believe I was," he faltered.

"Well, please don't, Toby dear," said Cicely Voile. "I'll tell you why. *I've banked on your not forgetting.* I've put—not exactly my honour, but my—my value in your hands. The moment that you forget I become cheap." The man started. "You won't have made me cheap. I shall have made myself cheap. Cheap in my own eyes—and yours. And I like you just well enough, Toby, not to want that."

"You know that I'd never——"

"You wouldn't at once. But after a little you'd see. Time makes things so painfully clear. Never mind. Now that I've told you, I'm sure that you won't let me down." She whipped her hands away and put them behind her back. "And now be nice to me, Toby, and give me a cigarette."

* * * * *

Twenty-four hours had gone by, and the two were sitting again on the rolling moor.

An urchin breeze darted and hung, Puck-like, in the brave sunshine, while earth and sky and sea lifted up radiant heads. Time nodded drowsily over a golden world.

From a little fellowship of chestnuts in a neighbouring dell the pert insistence of a cuckoo cheered to the echo the excellence of present mirth. Out of the sweetness of a hawthorn a fragrant eulogy of idleness stole upon the air. The lazy hum of bees about their business swore by content.

Miss Voile, however, was not smiling, while Rage was regarding the jovial landscape with a perfectly poisonous stare.

"How," said Cicely, "are you getting on?"

Toby started and picked up a writing-pad.

"Give me a chance," he said. "I'm not a journalist. Besides, a letter like this takes some composing."

"It's got to go off to-night," said Cicely Voile.

"Well, don't you rush me," said Toby. "It's a very delicate job. Any fool can say 'The engagement's off,' but that won't do for Aunt Ira. What I've got to do is to word it in such a way as to stifle the instinct of cross-examination. Well, bein' an optimist, I'm not going to say it's impossible, but, if I can't do it, she won't come over for the day—she'll come for a week. I shouldn't wait for that. I've only one heart. But she'll metaphorically sack Biarritz."

"Oh, it's easy enough," said Cicely. "Shove it on to me. Say you find I'm a waster. I don't care."

"Well, I do," said Toby violently.

Cicely shrugged her fair shoulders.

Presently—

"Read me as far as you've got," she commanded.

Captain Rage cleared his throat.

My dear Aunt Ira,

When I remember our fortunate encounter yesterday afternoon and your subsequent kind hospitality at the Hôtel de France, I find it more than painful to have to tell you that the marriage which had been arranged between Miss Voile and myself will not take place. The rupture between us is still so recent that I am not in a condition of mind conducive to conducting correspondence, still less to recording in black and white the ruin of my hopes, but I feel that in view of the interest which you were good enough to take in my engagement, it is my duty, cost what it may, to put you in immediate possession of the unhappy truth. This, I fear, may possibly affect your decision to come to Biarritz. I do not propose to weary you with the details of our sudden estrangement further than to confess . . .

"Oh, that's maddening," cried Cicely, clapping her hands. "Go on."

"But I can't go on," cried Toby. "That's the devil of it. I don't know what to confess. All that first bit's eye-wash—quite all right as a lead. But now I've got to land a hell of a punch. The next two lines have got to do the trick.

They've got to satisfy, allay and crush. They've got to satisfy her curiosity, allay her suspicion and crush her initiative."

"That's easy," said Miss Voile. "Give me the pad."

In a silence too big for words the writing-pad passed.

Cicely finished the sentence and threw it back.

> *. . . . that it is now quite clear that we do not and never did love one another.*

"That's no good," said Toby. "That's simply inviting investigation. How can you reconcile that with, er, with the '*Toby darling*' of yesterday afternoon?"

"Then cut me out," said Miss Voile. "Say—

> *. . . . clear that I do not and never did love her.*

How can she go behind that?"

"That," said Captain Rage, "would bring her over by return."

"Why?"

"Because the inference is that you still love me. Remembering the violent fancy she's taken to you, is it likely that she'd sit still and allow me to turn you down? She'd come over here like a bear robbed of her whelks—whelps."

Cicely stared upon the ground.

"Well, I'll tell you what," she said uncertainly. "Stick to my first suggestion and add these words."

She began to dictate slowly.

> *You must not think this conclusion inconsistent or precipitate, because this is not, as you know, the first time that I have been engaged, while——*

"No, no. I can't say that," cried Toby. "It's—it's out of the question. She—I never told her about Leah."

"Leah?" cried Cicely. "Oh, you Mormon."

“I mean Rachel,” said Rage hurriedly. “Leah—Leah was her second name.”

Miss Voile stared at the sea with trembling lips.

So soon as she could trust her voice—

“The trouble is,” she said, “you’ve written in the wrong strain—sounded the wrong note.”

“That,” said Toby, “I can entirely believe. When one’s got to convey some singularly distasteful intelligence to a woman who invariably receives good tidings, first, as a personal affront, and, secondly, as evidence of the messenger’s mental deficiency, it is extremely easy to sound the wrong note.”

In a shaking voice—

“Give me the pad,” said Cicely.

Once more the writing materials changed hands. . . .

Sitting a little behind her, Toby frowned into the distance, thoughtfully pulling his moustache and stealing an occasional glance at the slim brown hand which was steadily driving the pencil across the grey-blue sheet.

Presently his eyes climbed to the exquisite face. . . .

There they rested.

This is not surprising. The man was human. And at that moment Cicely Berwick Voile was a sight for the high gods.

The girl was always beautiful. Her features and colouring alone established that. Hers was the gay, fresh beauty of Nature herself. It argued the Spring in her blood. She was radiant, eager. The expectation of her mouth, the light in her big brown eyes were living, breathing glories that lifted up the heart. But now my lady was grown pensive. She had exchanged her ‘meadows trim, with daisies pied’ for ‘the studious cloister’s pale.’ Mirth sat in Melancholy’s seat, adorning that cold throne as never did its mistress. Her serious mien, the droop of her precious lips, the way she would fling up her head to gaze for an instant seawards while she sought for a phrase—her breathless, glowing charm, plunged for the moment into the dignity of thought, made an arresting picture. Rage had not seen her like this. Few people had. This was as well. Heaven knows, she was dangerous enough. Amaryllis weaving a garland sends your heart to your mouth. But

Amaryllis contemplative, pacing the garden of Philosophy, shall send the blood to your head.

Miss Voile turned suddenly to meet her companion's eyes.

Instantly both looked away—Toby at the parcel of chestnuts, and the girl at the broom by her side.

Presently—

"Here you are," she said quietly, passing the writing-pad.

Toby stared at the letter as at a death-warrant.

My dear Aunt Ira,

This is just a line to thank you very much for all your kindness yesterday and to say how much I am looking forward to seeing you here on Thursday. I quite expect it will be fine, for the weather seems settled now, and I think you will enjoy the run. It is impossible to mistake the road, which runs through some lovely country as well as that charming and historical old town, Bayonne. I shall expect you about half-past one, and shall be at the entrance to the hotel from one on in case you are before time.

I have no news except that Miss Voile and I have broken off our engagement, as we do not think we should get on together.

Always your affectionate nephew,

Toby.

P.S.—There is another road by Bidache, but I should not come by that because it is longer and not so easy to follow.

"You see," explained Cicely, "the two outstanding characteristics of Mrs. Medallion are, first of all, her contrariness, and, secondly, her conviction that all men are fools. Well, I've given her a glorious opportunity of indulging the former, and I've supported the latter by a piece of documentary evidence of which she will talk for years. In fact, I should think she'd have it framed. After this, she'd rather die than come to Biarritz. The bare idea of your waiting for hours at the entrance to the hotel, not daring to go away in case she arrives, will give her a better appetite for lunch than any Hula Hula that ever was shaken."

Captain Rage lifted his eyes to heaven.

“Trust a woman,” he said, “to put it across a woman. Of course, I take off my hat. It’s a work of art. That postscript alone. . . .”

He ripped the sheet from the pad, folded it very carefully, and, after staring upon it, took out a cigarette-case and bestowed the paper inside.

“Well, that’s that,” said Cicely, getting upon her feet.

“Here,” said Toby. “You’re—you’re not thinkin’ of going, are you?”

“Why not?” said Cicely calmly. “We came here to fix up that letter, and now it’s fixed.”

Toby swallowed.

“I know,” he said. “But it seems a pity to rush off. I—I rather like this spot. Look at the sea over there, all—all glassy. Reminds me of some hymn.”

By a superhuman effort Miss Voile maintained her gravity.

“I’ve got to get back,” she said.

“Oh, not yet,” said Toby. “Not yet. Besides, I—I’ve—I wanted to tell you about Rachel.”

Miss Voile appeared to hesitate.

Then she sat down.

“What about Rachel?” she said.

“Well, I—I made up Rachel,” said Toby. “You know. Invented the nymph.” He stared uneasily upon his finger-nails. “God knows why. I think I had some idea of makin’ you think I was an old campaigner, with a trick or two up his sleeve.” He hesitated. “Well, I’d like you to know I’m not. I’ve danced attendance once or twice—most men have—and been properly stung for my pains. But that’s as far as it’s gone. I’ve—I’ve never been engaged—before.”

“I’m glad you told me,” said Cicely. She turned a glowing face. “I knew it, of course.” Toby started. “All along. But I’m glad you told me.”

There was a long silence.

At length—

“You remember,” said Toby, “what you said yesterday about my not letting you down?”

Cicely nodded.

"Well, if I've seemed off-hand since then, it's because of what you said. That's why I've not called you by name or—or told you how sweet you are. You see, it began as a game—'Without Prejudice,' but when you said what you did, you opened my eyes. . . . And then, suddenly, I realized that for me the game had slid into reality . . . that I had quite lost sight of the very first rule of the game. . . . And so—I had to stop. I couldn't call you 'darling' or speak of the stars in your eyes, because . . . I find you a darling and I love the stars in your eyes."

Cicely bowed her head.

The man continued slowly.

"Well, there you are. I've bought it. I've queered my rotten pitch. I suggested the blasted game. I gave it its footling label and let you come right in—*under that shelter*. Now you're in balk, and I've got to let you go. . . . Don't think I'm trying to get out. I'm not. I'll post this letter to-night as I'm a living fool. But I'd give ten years of my life to call back the idle moment when I started that game."

For a moment the two sat silent. Then, as if by one consent, they rose to their feet.

Cicely put out a hand, and the man took it.

"Thank you, Toby," she said, "I knew I could bank on you. I put my value in your hands, and you've given it back. And I think you're perfectly right. It's a stupid game. And—and I'm very glad it's over."

Rage put her hand to his lips and turned away.

Her words were equivocal. There was a chance that she meant. . . . But the chance that she meant nothing must turn the scale.

"And—er—Toby."

"Yes."

"I'm afraid I made up Alfred."

"Yes, I thought you did," said Toby.

"Why?"

"Because the man isn't foaled who after an hour of your sweetness could refuse you anything. Besides, unless he was mentally deranged, once having got so far, no man on earth would ever have let you go."

"Perhaps—perhaps that's why he did," said Cicely.

Toby stared.

“But I thought you said——”

“Oh, I wasn’t thinking of Alfred. There was—another man. He—he was such a dear. It never occurred to me that he was mad. His—his aunt wasn’t. I mean—— Oh, Toby!”

The man’s arms were about her, and his cheek against hers.

“Cicely darling, d’you love me?”

“It sounds very weak, Toby dear, but I’m dreadfully afraid I do.”

“My blessed lady,” said Toby, and kissed her mouth. . . .

“Oh, do be careful,” said Cicely. “Love’s a disease, you know. Supposing you caught it.”

“You wicked child,” said Toby. “I gave it to you.”

“O-o-oh!”

“Yes, I did. I’ve had it for months and months. But I never knew what it was till . . .”

“When did you know, Toby?”

“At sixteen minutes past five,” said Toby, “yesterday morning.”

OLIVER

OLIVER

"D'YOU REALIZE, OLIVER, that this is our wedding-day?"

Letter in hand, Oliver Pauncefote looked up.

"By Jove, so it is," he said. "May the eighth. So it is. Many happy returns, m'dear."

Jean Ludlow Pauncefote did not reply. For a moment she stood staring at her reflection in the tall pier-glass. Then she slid slowly out of her striking cloak, threw this across a chair, lighted a cigarette, and flung herself upon the bed.

"What did you think," she demanded, "that marriage was going to be like?"

Her husband lowered his letter in some surprise.

"My dear," he said, "it is now a quarter of three, and two bottles of '98 Mumm require sleeping off. If we must search each other's hearts——"

"*In vino veritas*," said Jean. "Go on."

Oliver put down his letter and took off two coats. Then he bestrode a chair, pulled up his shirt-sleeves, and proceeded to fill a pipe.

"Say it again," he said.

"What did you think," said Jean, "that marriage was going to be like?"

Her husband reflected, frowning.

At length—

"I really don't know," he said. "I got a bit rattled once or twice. You know. After bein' congratulated by some strong, earnest mortal with a pre-war hand. Enough to make anyone suspicious. And I asked one or two coves who'd done it. All they said was that it all depended on the girl. . . . But I'm very happy, Jean. I've no complaints. If you ask me, I think we've got on damned well. We've been married a solid year and we've never had a first-class row."

“That,” said Jean, expelling a cloud of smoke, “is because we don’t care.”

“Oh, rot,” said Oliver stoutly. He felt for a match. “Rot. At least, I can’t speak for you, but I certainly care.”

“Up to a point—yes. So do I. But we don’t mean anything to each other.”

“You mean something to me,” protested Pauncefote.

“So does your bath before dinner. You’re accustomed to me—that’s all. If you went out to-night, I should wear black for a year. It’s the fashion. But I should be fed to the teeth to think that my green lace dress was going spare. . . . And if I popped off to-morrow, you’d curse the fact that you couldn’t go to Ascot. And you’d soon be putting out feelers to find out whether it’d be decent to show up at Goodwood and saying to yourself, ‘She would have liked me to go.’ ”

“I—I don’t think I should,” faltered Pauncefote.

“Why not?” said Jean. “You wouldn’t feel any grief. We don’t mean anything.”

Oliver frowned. Then he took his pipe from his mouth and regarded its bowl.

“Assuming you’re right,” he said, “—mark you, I don’t admit it—but, assuming you’re right, why is it?”

Jean shrugged her shining shoulders.

“*C’est la mode*,” she said. “It’s the age, the time—what you will. Married love’s out of fashion—that’s all.”

“I loved you before,” said Pauncefote.

“In a way you did,” said Jean, staring upon the cornice. “And I loved you. Then we got married, and it was all over. You ought to count more with me—now.” She sat up there, with a laugh, and waved a small hand. “My dear, you count less. ‘Less’? You don’t count at all—now. We’ve—we’ve pulled our fire-cracker. We pulled it a year ago.” She threw herself back on the pillows, inhaled deeply and let the smoke steal out of her beautiful mouth. “Don’t think I’m getting at you. I’m not at all. I’m just making faces at Fate.”

“Why?”

"Because I'm disappointed. When one was married I thought one got down to things. I thought one found the emotions that poets write about—love, hope, joy, grief, hate. They're the foundation of life. I brushed against them all when I was engaged. I imagine you did too—in a sort of way."

Pauncefote shifted upon his chair.

"We're much better out of it," he said. "Give me a quiet life. Emotion's all very well, but it's sticky stuff."

"It isn't fashionable," said Jean.

"For a very good reason," said her husband. "It isn't convenient. We're just beginning to appreciate the wisdom of eliminating mental inconvenience. Look at Dickens, Thackeray, and the rest. Yarn after yarn founded on human emotion. Sighs and yells and tears because someone's got stuck. That's what you get for playing with fire. Now it's dawning on people that use their brains that if you let sleeping dogs lie you won't be chewed. An' so we go quietly along—*without looking for trouble*. Hang it all, Jean, I think we've done very well. We don't get in each other's way. We ____"

"We should," said Jean. "We ought to. That's my point. Marriage means getting in each other's way. If you don't, you might as well not be married. One's style ought to be cramped. Not necessarily unpleasantly cramped, but cramped. If you were just going to drive and a priceless girl came up and asked you the time—well, she'd 've got in your way, but that wouldn't worry you. In fact, if you could square your partner, you'd sling your driver away and take her into the pine-woods to look for clocks."

"I shouldn't at all," said Pauncefote uneasily. "I should direct her to ____"

"No doubt—if you were playing with me," said Jean dryly. "Appearances have to be kept up. Never mind. The point is that one's style can be agreeably cramped. Marriage can cramp it pleasantly or unpleasantly, but it ought to cramp it. Look at us. We aren't affected at all. We don't care. If we did, we shouldn't dare show it. It—it isn't done. . . . Life's like ale—good, strong ale. History will show you that. But we don't get further than the froth. That's all right when you're a child, but if you're not going to get down to the liquor when you're married, when are you?"

"My dear," said her husband, "why worry? I've drunk some damned bad beer."

"Haven't you drunk any good?"

Oliver sighed.

"Of course," he said, "if you're not happy, Jean——"

"I'm not. Neither are you. We don't know what it means."

"I'm comfortable," said Pauncefote. "And that's something."

"Listen. When you die, the tankard of Life is taken away from you. Well, supposing then you found out that the ale you'd always given a miss was the most glorious liquor you'd ever dreamed of . . . Wouldn't you want to kick yourself?"

"Weather permitting," said Pauncefote, "*ça va sans dire*."

"And, good or bad, don't you fancy you'd feel a bit cheap beside people who'd drunk their whack?"

Oliver pulled his moustache.

"Sort of 'What did you do in the Great War Daddy?' idea?"

"Exactly," said Jean. "Well, don't you think wedlock's the time? It seems the obvious moment for our little crowd. 'Marry and settle down.' That's a time-honoured phrase. 'Settle down.' What to?"

"Drinkin' the ale, I suppose."

"I imagine so," said Jean. "Look at the words of the Service—'love and cherish.' I take it they mean something."

"They did when they were written," said Oliver. "But times have changed, Jean. I'm ready to love an' cherish, but—but the occasion doesn't arise."

"What you mean is, it isn't done. . . . I kiss you, of course, but then I kiss other men. And you kiss other girls. It's the fashion. We don't love each other at all; we love ourselves. We don't cherish each other; we each take blinking good care to look after ourselves. It's the fashion. . . . It's the fashion to live together, and so we do. Bar that, we mightn't be married." She set her cigarette in a tray, laced her pointed fingers and put them behind her head. "Why am I wearing this frock? Because Pat Lafone said that he loved me in black."

Oliver raised his eyebrows.

"Did he really?" he said.

"Why shouldn't he?" said his wife. "There's nothing wrong in that. What *is* wrong is that I put it on to please him. You needn't worry. That's as far as it's gone. Besides, he wasn't there, so I've been stung. The point is we mightn't be married. In theory, I should care for you and nobody else. And you for me—exclusively. In practice, if you discount habit—I'm accustomed to you, you know—you come third on the list. I care first for myself, then other attractive men, finally my husband."

Oliver rose to his feet and laid down his pipe.

"That's pretty straight, any way," he said.

"You know it's the same with you. The tragedy is we don't care. . . . If you cleared out and left me, that might bring me up short. I think it probably would. I should come down to Things then—with the hell of a jar. The ale'd be bitter then."

"Jean, why dig up this ground? It's not particularly sweet. You say you don't care about me. Well, let it go. I'm sorry you don't, but——"

"Why will you blink the facts? Why can't you be frank, as I am? I won't tell anyone."

"I don't care who you tell, but——"

"Of course you do," said Jean, uncrossing and recrossing her legs. "More. You care so much that you won't give yourself away—even to me. Sentiment's bad form. Besides, you're self-conscious—awkward. This discussion's inconvenient. You'd be thankful if I'd drop it. . . . Why don't you take the plunge? It won't involve you. Drop the mask for ten minutes and face the rotten facts. . . . If you were a waster by nature I should have saved my breath."

There was a long silence.

At length—

"What," said Oliver, "do you suggest?"

"Do you admit the evil?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

"But it's in the age," said Pauncefote. "We're over-civilized. Money and civilization have emasculated Things. Our crowd's never up against it. We don't comfort each other because we don't need comforting; and gradually

we're losing the art. If you don't use your arm, it'll wither away. There's no 'stern stuff' in our lives, and how can you lug it in? For years we've all been fightin' to wash it out—to make Life into a song-an'-dance show; and now we've done it. Well, an odd weddin'-chime isn't going to turn it back into Eden." He thrust the chair out of his way and began to pace the floor. Jean, smiling lazily, watched him with half-closed eyes. "Once the man hunted—for food; and the woman kept the cave—against his coming. And when he came, she fed him—bathed his wounds—took his head in her lap. And he was her man. . . . And she was his woman. . . . They didn't want any Service to tell them that. But now the wheel's swung round to the other extreme. Hardship and peril are out, and luxury's in. Nature's been swamped by Art. Emotion's a branch of Nature, and it's withered away. . . . If ever the man was late, the woman wept for joy to see him alive. You don't do that because you assume I've stopped somewhere to have a drink."

"Why did I dress to-night to please Pat Lafone?"

Oliver hesitated. Then—

"Because," he said sharply, "because you must have a thrill. The man and the woman were thankful to be alive. Between the wolves and the weather their lives were exciting enough. But ours—ours run on greased wheels. We have to devise our excitement. And the easiest, most satisfying way is to rob an orchard." He stopped still there and flung up his head. "And there's the honest value of marriage to-day. When you marry you merely add a tree to the common or garden orchard of forbidden fruit."

Propped on a white elbow, his wife regarded him.

"Good for you," she said. "You've put it uncommonly well. You see—right down at bottom you feel as I do. I had an idea you did, and I'm rather glad. We may be a couple of wasters, but at least in the security of our own bedroom we've the daring to admit the fact."

Oliver opened a window and stood for a moment staring upon the silent dignity of the *Place Vendôme*.

"That's not much to be glad of," he said slowly. "What d'you suggest we should do?"

"Nothing," said Jean. "My dear, I'm purely destructive. I can see the rot and I've made you confess you can see it: but I can't stop it. . . . If you cared, perhaps I should care. If I cared, perhaps you would. But I can't swing my propeller, and you can't swing yours. That's Fate's job. The age has produced our crowd—a crowd of wasters, run by a sort of Baal that

they've set up. The worship of Baal consists in sailing close to the wind. The closer you sail, the better worshipper you are—other things being equal, of course. I mean, you must do it neatly. . . . And as someone's constantly sailing a point closer than anyone's ever sailed before, the standard of worship is rising. It's higher this year, for instance, than it was last. If you want a good example, look at the way we dress. Frankly, can you beat it? . . . Well, why do we do it? Why don't we turn it down? I'll tell you. Because the penalty for non-worship is rather worse than death. It's not ostracism: it's not even social extinction. *You just become a mug.* And that's a fate no waster can ever face."

"We could break away," said Oliver gloomily. "Clear right out, I mean."

"And be bored to death in a week. My dear, we've tasted blood. That's one of the rites. . . . No. Don't you worry, me lad. We're tied tight enough. So long as we've money to burn——"

Oliver gave a short laugh.

"Six weeks ago," he said, "we were worth sixty thousand pounds. I shoved the lot into francs at a hundred and ten. To-morrow my cheque'll be cleared at sixty-six. . . . There's another forty thousand quid for the coffers of Baal."

"That's right," said Jean. "If you'd lost it instead, we might have had a chance. Necessity knows no law—not even that of Baal. As it is . . ." She swung her legs off the bed and slid to her feet. "As it is, we're doomed. I'm doomed to disappointment, and you—what are you doomed to?"

Oliver closed the window before replying.

"I may be wrong," he said, "but I think you put it too high. It's perfectly true—we lead a poisonous life. But there's no reason why, if you care——"

"I don't. I've told you so. I've nothing to make me."

Pauncefote swallowed.

"At least," he said, "we've got the same point of view."

"What you mean is we both see the rot," said Jean, preparing to fight her way out of her dress. "But I regret it. You only deplore it, you know. You said you were comfortable."

"I said I cared," said her husband. "And—and so I do."

"Perhaps you're right," said Jean, slipping into a dressing-gown. "The trouble is that I don't. You're quite all right, you know. I've no complaints—

either."

She took her seat at the table and began to loosen her hair.

"I beg your pardon," said Pauncefote. "I—I'm very fortunate."

"Don't!" cried Jean sharply. "Don't!" The man started at her tone, and their eyes met in the glass. "Don't!" she repeated fiercely. "I can't bear it. Once—yes. A year ago. . . . But now it's too late. Besides, I made you say it. I dragged the words out of your mouth: and so they're worthless. Worse. They're a travesty—that's how they talked in Eden. But we're in a song-and-dance show—don't forget that. We're under contract to Baal. Of course you *can* 'pot' Eden, but I—I couldn't play Eve. I know I don't care, but I'm just—just soppy enough not—not to want to pretend." Her voice broke there, but she plugged the hole with a laugh. "And there's some real sob-stuff for you. Never mind. You won't hear it again. It's the swan-song of my mughood—the last flare-up of the lamp of a foolish virgin, who thought—thought . . ."

She clapped her hands to her face and burst into tears.

Oliver flashed to her side, fell upon one knee and slid an arm round her waist.

She shook him off—savagely.

* * * * *

Jean Pauncefote might have been a great lady.

Had she lived seven centuries ago, she would certainly have been fought for, probably have been chosen Queen of Beauty and Love at several tournaments and possibly have made history as, in the absence of her lord, a chatelaine *sans peur et sans reproche*.

But Fate was against her.

In October 1918 she was still at school. Three months later she had left Philadelphia for ever and was dancing at London night-clubs five nights of the week. Such a *début* at such a moment into such a world would have demoralized nine girls out of ten. The fair American was not demoralized: but she would not have been human if she had even attempted to swim against the stream.

After all, if we may believe Sir Toby Belch, Feste, the Clown, had 'a contagious breath.'

What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure. . . .

She had no money: yet might, I think, have married anyone. But rank and riches to Jean meant nothing at all. She married Oliver Pauncefote because she liked the man, found him a gentleman, firmly believed that he would not let her down.

Herein she was right.

Pauncefote had been through the War and was out to forget. With eighty thousand pounds behind him, he began to forget very well. Feste's doctrine suited him down to the ground.

In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

But he never forgot that he was a gentleman.

The two were lovely and pleasant in their lives.

Tall, straight, limber, Jean's form was superb. Her beautiful features, her fearless grey eyes, her magnificent golden hair and her exquisite skin were straight from Malory. Her mouth was proud. Her charm of manner was notable. Jean had a quick brain and a gay heart. She made a wonderful waster, adorning even that sumptuous, flashing world in which she moved. That it was not her setting is rather painfully clear. If a fountain must run with wine, there are just as good-looking liquors as old Falernian.

Oliver Pauncefote looked what in fact he was—a soldier taking his ease. Tall, fair, fresh-faced, his was a lazy air. The man might well have been handsome; but Achilles with his feet up would not have made an Iliad. The strength was there in his face, but it was always off duty. An easy smile sat on his fine mouth; his clear eyes were half veiled; he spoke with a drawl. His manners were delightful. At his worst, he was easy-going; at his best, debonair. And that was a pity. A head that can carry a casque should not wear nothing but a bycocket.

Captain and Mrs. Pauncefote lived soft.

Finding their income insufficient, they spent their capital freely, proposing by happy speculation to replenish their hoard. The deal which Oliver was just completing was, of course, a coup phenomenal. To do him

justice, it would not have been so phenomenal if it had not been so daring. Fortunes are not made at chuck-farthing. They are won by pitching fortunes upon the table.

So also are they lost.

When, seated at breakfast in their *salon* some seven hours after Jean had burst into tears, Oliver read in the paper that *Plaisir et Cie*, Bankers, had suspended payment, he put a hand to his head. . . .

For a full minute he sat, staring. . . .

Then the door was opened, and Jean came into the room.

Oliver laid down the paper and buttered some bread.

"Well, old lady," he said, "what's the programme to-day?"

"Lunch with the Bostocks," said Jean, selecting a roll. "Then to Molyneux with Maisie. Dinner with Pat Lafone. It's his birthday, he says, and he swears we'll light such a candle——"

"Let's call it off," said Pauncefote, "an' keep the day to ourselves."

Jean lifted her beautiful head.

"For Heaven's sake—why?"

"Oh, I don't know," said her husband. "Only—only it's our weddin'-day"—Jean frowned—"and I think perhaps we might mark it. You know. Just draw in our horns."

" 'In loving memory'?"

"If you like," said Pauncefote. "Let's—let's go for a walk in the *Bois*."

Jean gave a little shriek of laughter.

"My dear Oliver," she said, "your efforts to play the mug are too good to be true. Now eat your bread-and-butter like a good little boy and tell me what won the Church Congress—I mean, the Two Thousand. Where was Fire Guard?"

"Don't know," said her husband shortly. "But I mean what I say. I want to talk things over."

"Well, I don't," said Jean. "I had my bust last night—my final bust. The incident's closed. Besides, in the cold light of day——"

"I'm afraid it isn't," said Pauncefote.

His wife's eyes flashed.

"Oliver," she said, "we've never yet had a row—a proper row. But if you're going to rake up the muck we picked over last night, we shall break our record with a bang. Now listen to me. Women are not like men. They may be as tough as teak, but once in a while they crumple—for half an hour. Something inside gives way. It's humiliating, but there you are. . . . Well, I crumpled up last night. And you—you saw me. You witnessed my humiliation. Are you going to take advantage of what you saw?"

"No," said Oliver, "I'm not. I'm not that sort of man. But I've things to say to you, Jean, that—that don't concern the Bostocks or—or Pat Lafone."

Jean raised her eyebrows.

"It's only ten now," she said, "and what's the matter with this room?"

Oliver rose to his feet and pushed back his chair.

"Perhaps you're right," he said slowly.

The man's brain was pounding. Jean's sentences seemed to reach it by a circuitous route. On arrival they had to be parsed . . .

Mechanically he took out his case and lighted a cigarette. Then he continued slowly.

"You know what you said last night . . . about being tied tight . . . so long as we'd money——"

"One moment," said Jean coldly, "I don't seem to have made myself plain. I endeavoured to point out just now that reference to what passed last night would be bad form. And I hinted that I should resent it—most bitterly."

Oliver passed a hand across his forehead.

"I know," he said. "I'm not referring——"

"You quoted what you said were my words."

"I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. . . ."

"Well, please pull yourself together, because I mean what I say. This is a question of honour—between the sexes. I broached certain matters last night which we never should have discussed in a thousand years. You know that as well as I do. I never should have broached them if I hadn't gone to bits. You'd never have heard me broach them if I hadn't been your wife."

“I know, I know,” said Pauncefote wearily. “Don’t say it again.” He drew in his breath as one about to make an effort. “Jean.”

“Well?”

“Supposing . . . all of a sudden . . . we—we became poor . . . You know. Lost all we’d got. . . . Supposing——”

He stopped there.

His wife was standing before him, with blazing eyes.

“I shan’t strike you,” she said, “because that’d be coming down to your level. Besides, you’d probably strike me back. But the impulse is there. . . . I knew you were selfish, of course. And a waster. And other things. But I never knew you were trash. . . . Only trash would discuss the whimper of a maudlin girl.”

Pauncefote regarded her steadily.

The lash had recovered his nerve.

“No doubt,” he said dryly, “no doubt. Let’s leave it there, shall we?” The light of attack in Jean’s eyes slid into a stare. “What I was trying to do was to temper the wind. . . . We’re broke, my good lady. Bust. We haven’t a bean. Our hundred thousand’s gone.” Jean started back, and a hand went up to her mouth. “Plaisir and Co. have failed.”

“Oliver!”

“It’s been done before,” said her husband carelessly. He stepped to one side and past her and flung himself into a chair. “But the point I wish to make is that this is where we get off. I’ve about twelve hundred in England, but that won’t pay our debts. We shall get a bit on your pearls and the Rolls and other things, but you’re always stung to glory when you’ve got to realize quick.” He paused to inhale comfortably. “Can you get packed in time for the two o’clock train? It’s no good staying here.”

Jean pulled herself together.

“But, Oliver, what shall we do?”

“I’ve no idea. I must try to get work, of course. If you had money, or I had any to give you, we could each go our own way. As it is, I’m afraid your only immediate hope is to stick to me. What work I can get I don’t know. A soldier’s not much good outside his own job. . . . By the way, I’m extremely sorry I’ve let you down. I should never have put the lot into one concern. I’m afraid you’ll find it pretty thick.”

"What about you?"

Pauncefote shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't imagine I shall like it, but that's neither here nor there. The first thing we've got to do is to fade away. Again, we must be in London. We must be on the spot. We must pay up what we owe, but if I can stop any orders—well, we might be glad of the dust. I ordered three suits at Brandon's before we came away. I told him he needn't hurry, so there's just a chance they're not cut. An' Whippy's makin' a saddle, an' Hardy a rod, an'—an' . . ."

He caught his breath sharply and let the sentence go, sitting still in his chair with fixed, unseeing eyes.

The stabbing thought that never again would he hear the whimper of hounds in the soft, sweet-smelling burthen of a November day ripped and tore at Oliver Pauncefote's heart. Memories came with a rush to rub salt in the wound—a tremendous day with the Cottesmore—a check at Garter Spinney, when the birches had looked like fountains and Sir Barnaby Shrew had come up and asked him to Stomacher Place—Mandarin's joyous fly-jumps and the swift tremor of his ears—a burst up Sweeting Valley, when hounds were running mute and Fantasy jumped the Chaffer as though it were a garden-path. . . .

"Oliver! Oliver!"

Jean was beside him on her knees, with an arm round his neck.

Pauncefote put her aside and rose to his feet.

"Don't let's pretend," he said quietly. "It's hardly worth it. Besides, to tell you the truth, reach-me-down sympathy never cut very much ice with me. Finally, you'll need all you've got for yourself before we're through. I've let you down badly, I know. But God knows I've got my punishment. . . . And I'll do my very best to break your fall." Jean sat back on her heels and stared at the floor. "When you feel most sore—murderous, please try to remember the intolerable position I'm in. If we meant anything to each other, it would have been less odious. As it is—well, obviously, I'd rather have died by torture than let you down."

He passed to the door of the *salon*. With his fingers about the handle, he stopped and spoke over his shoulder.

"Can you manage the two o'clock train?"

Jean never moved.

"I'll—I'll be ready," she said.

* * * * *

Three ghastly months had gone by, and Captain and Mrs. Pauncefote were down to seven pounds.

Their liabilities had proved higher than they had feared: their personal effects had fetched even less than they had expected. Cars, jewels, clothing—everything had been sold to pay their debts. The two were determined to keep their memory clean. The mighty had fallen, but at least their stalls should be left swept and garnished. What they owed they paid to the uttermost farthing. By the time the last cheque had been signed, Destitution had crept very close.

Plaisir et Cie had paid nothing. Whether they would ever pay anything seemed doubtful indeed. That they would never pay anything to Pauncefote was painfully clear. The man was powerless. He was out of touch. To employ a Parisian lawyer was beyond his means. Remembering a recent threat to transfer his deposit account, his English Bank wagged familiar forefingers and 'advised' him to lodge his claim and 'wait and see.' Pauncefote did so, as well as he could, and received no reply.

The two lived in rooms in a mean street and boarded themselves. Pauncefote went from pillar to post, seeking work ceaselessly and finding none. Jean raked the newspapers, cursed her own uselessness and watched the grey creep into her husband's hair. She also found that food was far cheaper at stalls than it was in shops. . . . Neither complained of their lot. They walked a good deal together, avoiding familiar neighbourhoods, breaking new and unlovely ground. They never referred to the old days. Their relations were desperately strained, but the strain was always masked. They laughed little, hid their misery somehow, respected each other's reserve as a sacred thing. Under it all, their hearts yearned upon each other. . . .

With infinite precaution against detection, each sought by hook or by crook to smooth the other's path. So often as he was abroad, Oliver went without food—and swore he had lunched at Lyons' and done himself well. Jean crept to the basement and cleaned her husband's shoes—and let him commend the slut that stole their food. Awakened one night by pain in a game knee, the man lay still till daylight for fear of disturbing her rest. Jean bargained for hot shaving-water—and got it too. It cost her one set of

exquisite underclothes every month. They came to cherish each other as they had never cherished themselves. . . .

And now—three months had gone by, and Captain and Mrs. Pauncefote were down to seven pounds.

There was no work in London.

Wondering whether there was a God in Heaven, the Pauncefotes went to the registry office from which six months ago their servants had come.

They asked for the head of the firm, and, when they were ushered in, recalled who they were and offered themselves as caretakers—with tightened lips.

As luck would have it, the man was gentle. He knew them at once, and the grievous Saturnalia hit him between the eyes. He saw no reason to exult. He perceived a clear occasion for delicate courtesy—for serving two patrons in distress far more diligently than he had served them in prosperity. He spared them spoken sympathy. It was not his place.

"We ought to have come in by the Servants' Entrance," said Jean gaily. "But we thought, as we knew you——"

"There is only one entrance for you, madam, so long as this office is here."

He sent for the registers, scanned them, turned up his nose.

Then he took their address and begged them to be of good cheer.

"I shall do all I can at once, madam. In two or three days, perhaps. . . ."

"What—what about references?" said Pauncefote. "I suppose——"

"I'll get over that, sir."

They rose to their feet.

Jean stammered something about a booking-fee.

The man inclined his head.

"There is nothing to pay, madam."

He came with them to the door and bowed them out.

The two passed down the blazing pavement, unable to speak. . . .

Two days later a messenger brought them a letter and waited for a reply.

For two months certain . . . a country house in Wiltshire . . . one mile from the village . . . servants' hall and bathroom . . . wages—three guineas a week, fuel and light . . . sole charge. . . .

The note concluded—

As is usual in such cases, I beg to enclose five pounds to defray expenses, to be repaid from salary at your convenience.

The Pauncefotes left for Wiltshire the following day.

* * * * *

Supine on the turf beneath a chestnut, Oliver laid down his pipe and praised God. By his side, Jean, looking years younger, sat clasping her knees and regarding a peerless avenue of aged elms. Behind them, Hallatrow Hall, grey and long and low, basked in the evening sunshine like an old hound.

It was the quiet hour.

The Pauncefotes' work was over for the day.

The house had been thoroughly aired, two rooms had been cleaned, their quarters had been put in order, a report had been written, letters had been re-addressed. The latter lay in a pile upon the turf, awaiting the postman.

"Jean," said Oliver suddenly, "we've much to be thankful for."

"Yes," said his wife, "we have."

"We had much more once," said Pauncefote. "But it never occurred to us then."

Jean shook her beautiful head.

"We never had more," she said, "to be thankful for. We never had half so much. Still, we might have been grateful."

"We had more, really," said Oliver, "but we didn't appreciate it. Now that we've been through the mill——"

"I never had more," said Jean.

There was a silence.

At length—

"What do you mean?" said Oliver.

"I mean I've got down to the ale."

There was another silence.

"I'm afraid it's been rather bitter, dear," said Oliver.

"Ale is bitter sometimes, but it warms the blood. I think I count with you now. Why, I don't know, but you talked in your sleep once. . . ."

"What did I say?"

"It was the night of my birthday—six weeks ago. You seemed worried to death. 'I want her to have some flowers,' you kept on saying. 'I want her to have some flowers—my . . . darling . . . wife.' And then you said, 'It's too late now'—over and over again. And then you laughed terribly and said, 'A present from Eden.' "

Oliver sat upright and put out his hand.

"That's why you never had them," he said. "I was afraid . . . they'd seem a travesty . . . because they were—too late."

Jean put her hand in his.

"You called me 'your darling wife.' You. After what I'd said and done. Remembered my rotten birthday—wanted to give me blossoms when you couldn't afford to smoke."

"Do I count with you, Jean—now?"

"You always counted, Oliver; but, because it wasn't the fashion, I covered it up. I broke out that night to see if I counted with you. And when I found I didn't, I made up my mind to kill my love for you."

"You did count, dear," said Oliver. "Down at the bottom of things. But I think I'd rather have died than let it appear. It seems very silly now, but—I was ashamed. When I was alone in the room, I used to kiss your gloves; but when you came in—well, I didn't so often kiss you. Even that night at the *Rhin*, with all the openings you gave me——"

"You saw them?"

"Yes. But I couldn't step in. It was Balaam's ass over again, with Sentiment full in the way with a drawn sword. I think—I believe I could have done it if we'd been in the dark. As it was, I was on the edge. . . . And then you landed me one—a regular stinger. . . . You said you kissed other men, and you mentioned—Pat Lafone."

Jean nodded.

“I did it to get a rise,” she said quietly. “It—it wasn’t true.”

Oliver’s grasp tightened.

“When we were engaged,” he said, “I heard two women talking—talking of you and me. I cleared out as soon as I’d tumbled, but I’d heard a thing first that stuck. They said there was only one man on earth who could take you away from me . . . and they mentioned . . . his name.”

Jean gave a tremulous laugh.

“Good lord,” she said. “Why, I wouldn’t be seen dead with him.”

“I didn’t know that, Jean. It—it looked the other way. And—and I sort of came unbuttoned at the thought of losing you. I let out, if you remember, about ‘forbidden fruit.’ ”

“Yes,” said Jean slowly. “I remember. I never got it, of course. I couldn’t see anything except the blinding fact that you didn’t care. And . . . all the time . . . you did.”

Oliver got to his knees and put her hand to his lips.

“I worship you, Jean,” he said. “I always have. I worship your glorious body and I worship your darling ways. I love your laughter and your precious, blessed voice. I love your footfalls and the breath of your parted lips. But that was always . . . Now I’ve got something more, something to kneel to. . . . You’re made of the stuff that queens are made of, Jean. I let you down—most terribly. I know I never meant to, but that’s no defence. You left the finance to me, and I broke up your life. . . . Well, women don’t like their lives being broken up, even by accident. But never once, by word or deed or look, have you so much as hinted that I might have taken more care. . . . More. You’ve never complained, you’ve never murmured once—and it’s been far harder for you. Instead, you’ve stood beside me, quiet, steadfast. If you’ve wept, I’ve never seen it. If you’d liked to make it *your* trouble, you’d every right. But you wouldn’t do that. You wouldn’t even let it be *our* trouble. *It hasn’t been ‘trouble’ at all.* You’ve charmed it into just an incident . . . an incident in *our* life. . . .”

Jean stood up and took his face in her hands.

“It’s the ale, my darling,” she said. “The ale I spoke of. So long as we drink it together. . . .”

Oliver rose to his feet and took her in his arms.

“ ‘And he was her man,’ ” whispered Jean.

" 'And she was his woman.' "

They looked up to see the postman ten paces away.

"There now," he said. "I thought this was 'Allatrow 'All. An' lo! and be'old, if it ain't the Garden of Eden."

"Don't say you're the serpent," said Oliver, laughing.

"Oh, shame!" said the postman, producing a letter. "Never min'. 'Ere's a napple."

They laughed with him, gave him their letters in exchange and watched him tramp down the avenue under the rook-ridden elms.

"Hullo, it's for me," said Oliver. "Oh, I know. It's from the *Rhin*."

"The *Rhin*?" said Jean, peering. "How have they got our address?"

" 'Member those wires we never paid for? And I was always going to send the porter a cheque? Well, when we got here I remembered, and, as we weren't so tied up, I sent him five bob."

He ripped the envelope open, to find another inside.

This had been sent from London some time in May.

"Ancient history," said Pauncefote, and broke the seal.

COLD'S BANK LIMITED.
Pall Mall Branch.

London, S.W.
May 7th.

Capt. O. Pauncefote,
Hôtel du Rhin,
Place Vendôme,
Paris.

Private and Confidential.

Sir,

A week ago you sent us a cheque on Plaisir et Cie for 6,600,000 francs, with instructions to clear at 66 or better and place upon deposit to your account.

Two days ago the rumour that Plaisir et Cie were in difficulties reached me from a very secret but highly reliable source.

I at once endeavoured to communicate with you, but found that you were in Paris.

It was manifest that, if action was to be taken at all, it must be taken instantly, and, believing that, if I could have advised you, you would have told me to clear at any cost, I sold your cheque within the hour for ninety-two thousand pounds.

Particularly in view of the fact that this is your first transaction with us, I need hardly say that I am greatly relieved to see from the evening papers that our disregard of your instructions was apparently justified.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
E.S. Nield,
Manager.

For a long time neither spoke.

Presently Jean touched Oliver on the arm and pointed to the old grey house.

"It's for sale, isn't it?" she faltered.

Oliver nodded. He dared not trust his voice.

"Shall we—— Would you like to live here?"

Oliver's arms were about her, and his cheek against hers.

"Jean, my darling, my darling."

"I mean," said Jean, with a little half-laugh, half-sob, "it seems—a pity—to leave—the Garden of Eden."

CHRISTOPHER

CHRISTOPHER

THE engine of the great car hesitated, sighed and then rested from its labour.

With a faint frown, its driver threw out the clutch and, using the slight gradient, coasted to the side of the road to berth her charge beneath the shadow of a convenient oak. Then she applied the hand-brake and opened her door.

"My dear," said Mrs. Trelawney, "tell me the worst. Have you done this on purpose? Or is it *force majeure*?"

"I'm afraid it's stopped on its own," said Audrey de Lisle. "But don't worry yet, Aunt Lettice. I——"

"I shouldn't think of worrying," said Mrs. Trelawney. "I'm much too fat. Besides, the prospect of being able to say 'I told you so' is most agreeable. Finally, what a charming spot! I always think I should like to be buried beneath an elm, but I suppose the roots would get in the way."

Audrey laughed.

"There's nobody like you," she said.

"Don't be absurd," said her aunt. "I'm a most ordinary type."

Audrey shook her sweet head.

"Most people," she said, "would have been off. I admit it isn't yet time; it's quite on the cards that I can put the trouble right. Still, the motor's stopped on its own, and we, against your advice, are alone in the car. That would have been enough—for most people."

"My dear," said her aunt, "it's all a question of girth. Besides, you're a sweet, pretty child. If all priests were as fat as I and all sinners as charming as you, Purgatory would close down." Audrey stepped to the bonnet. "Now, don't go and get oil on your fingers. They're much too dainty."

"I believe it's a question of fuel," said Audrey, laughing. "I may be wrong, but I think we've gone dry. Any way, I've got my gloves on."

She opened the bonnet and sought to flood the carburettor. No petrol, however, appeared.

"That's right," said Audrey. "We're dry. But this is easy because we've a can on the step."

Mrs. Trelawney sighed.

"These technical terms," she said, "are entirely beyond me. My impulse is to express surprise that 'we have a can on the step.' Why hasn't it fallen off?"

"It's a can of gasolene—petrol," said her niece, bubbling. "It's kept there on purpose in case any time we run out. What I don't understand is that Budge assured me last night that the tank was full. I suppose the gauge has stuck. Still . . ."

She passed to the rear of the car.

A glance at the dial showed that the gauge was working. The arrow was pointing to 'EMPTY.'

Audrey unscrewed the cap of the petrol-tank and peered at its depths. These were certainly dry. What was more to the point, a tiny rent in the metal was admitting daylight. . . .

After digesting this phenomenon, Audrey screwed on the cap and returned to Mrs. Trelawney.

"Aunt Lettice, darling," she said, "I've let you down. We're helpless. Our tank's been holed. Even if Budge were here, we couldn't move."

"Then how," demanded her aunt, "have you let me down?"

"You're very generous," said Audrey. "But if he were here, at least he could go and get help. Now I shall have to go and leave you alone."

"My dear," said Mrs. Trelawney, "I'm fifty-six, I'm sleepy and I have my tea-basket. To go further, the weather's superb, and I'm under an elm. Any woman who cannot in such circumstances face an hour of solitude must be unnaturally made. You go, my dear, and prosper. I've no fears for you. The first farmer you smile at will put a team at your service."

"I'm afraid we mayn't get to Salisbury," said Miss de Lisle.

"Then we'll stay at a village inn and forget the world. I love an adventurous life. You go and smile at your farmer, and I'll take care of the car. If anyone comes and asks if we want any help, what shall I say?"

“Say we want to be towed,” said Audrey, “as far as—— Wait a minute.” Hastily she consulted a map. “As far as Sundial. That’s the nearest village now. I know it was Pullaway Brow where we met the sheep, because I saw the Post Office; and the next is Sundial.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Trelawney, “you know far more about England than I do. I once had a footman who came from Pullaway Brow, but I’d not the faintest idea that I’d ever been there. Never mind.” She stifled a yawn. “I had to send him away because he would hiss at table—a pleasant but disconcerting shibboleth.”

“I only know England,” said Audrey, “because I look at the map,” and with that she took off her hat and threw up her head luxuriously.

“You’re enterprising,” said her aunt. “All Americans are. We’ve got the pretty garden, but you enjoy it. What’s so pleasant is when you make us enjoy it too.”

“Wait till to-night,” said Audrey, and blew her a kiss.

A moment later she was padding along the lane with silent foot—a slim, beautiful figure, lithe, natural. When she came to a bend she turned and waved her hat.

Mrs. Trelawney waved back—tearfully.

“She has no business,” she said, “to be so exquisite.”

Audrey de Lisle would have been equally at home among a herd of deer or at a State Banquet. What is more, she would have graced either company. Her dark hair was framing features which would have done credit to the coin of any realm. Her hands and her little feet were lovely things. In movement, as in repose, she was the pink of easy gracefulness. Three things, however, especially distinguished her. They were the light in her soft brown eyes, the colour springing in her cheeks and the eager smile that flashed to her little red mouth. Having seen but one of these things, a man might count himself rich; having seen two, he would certainly become meditative; but the man who had seen all three she could, if she pleased, twist round her delicate finger. That such was her power never occurred to Audrey. She was as natural as the dawn. Indeed, this and other things natural—the spring and the wind and the manner of falling water, were in the girl’s blood. Her father’s town house had been in Boston, but the country had been her home. Not until three years ago had she tasted a city life. Rich as the fare had been, it was not to her liking. The death of her parents, however, had kept her in town. Sweet and twenty cannot rule a country estate; moreover, she must

conform to the ways of her world—see and be seen, stand in the marriage-market, eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. . . . Audrey de Lisle was no fool, took things as they came, found Life a most excellent thing, hoped deep in her heart to find it still more excellent—one day.

With the scent of hay in her nostrils, treading the curling lane that led to Sundial, Audrey snuffed an earnest of that rare excellence to come. . . .

The lane rose a little to an old oak stile on the left; the scent of hay grew stronger: voices and the jingle of harness came to the girl's ears.

Audrey quickened her steps. Here was her team.

That two magnificent greys were there is beyond question; and, further, a mighty roan in the shafts of a waggon of hay. A man was up on the top, piling the load, while two others were pitching him bottles with shining forks. On the ground, by the horses' heads, sat a little boy, eating an apple, to which first one and then the other of the greys would advance an expectant muzzle. The child pushed them away nonchalantly. The meadow, now nearly clear, was flanked by a great beech-wood, which, with the sun behind, made a broad strip of shade down all its length. This was insisting upon the heat of the day, for the rest of the field was ablaze, and the sky cloudless.

Audrey was wondering how to make known her need, when the taller of the two pitchers planted his fork in the ground and mopped his face. Then he turned towards her and made for the stile.

As he approached, it appeared that, workman or no, he was not of the labouring class.

His shirt was open at the neck, and his sleeves rolled to the elbow; loose grey flannel trousers and brogues seemed to complete his attire, save for a soft grey hat on the back of his head. His face and arms were burned to a deep brown, his fair moustache brushed clear of a well-shaped mouth. His eye was grey and clear; his features, clean-cut; his hands, cared for. He walked slowly, as a man healthily tired, but his carriage was upright and his shoulders square.

Head in air, he passed in front of Audrey and came to the ditch. There was a stone jar. . . .

The stranger was about to drink, when Miss de Lisle lifted up her voice.

"Are you a farmer?" she said.

The other turned.

Then he lowered his glass and took off his hat.

"Not yet," he said. "But I live in hopes. At present I'm half a land-agent —and your servant, of course. I became the latter about five seconds ago."

Audrey smiled very charmingly.

"Thank you very much," she said. "And now please put on your hat and drink your beer."

"Your very good health," said the stranger, and emptied his glass. "If I had another tumbler I'd offer you some. And now—must it be a farmer? Or can half a land-agent help?"

"I want a horse," said Audrey. "It sounds like a fairy-tale, but that's as it should be. This corner of England is full of nursery rhymes."

"There's one," said the stranger, "beginning, 'Where are you going to, my——' "

"I want a horse," said Audrey hastily. "I've a car in the lane and an aunt in the car, but my tank's holed and I can't move."

"There we are," said the stranger. "Horse, horse, bite aunt; Aunt won't push car; Car won't take the road; And I shan't get home to-night."

Audrey bowed before a little gale of laughter.

At length—

"Listen," she said. "If we could be towed to Sundial——"

"Is that as far," said the stranger, "as you want to go?"

"If we can put up at the inn."

The man appeared to consider.

"There's nothing the matter with *The Doublet*," he said slowly. "In fact, the parlour was made to eat bread and honey in. It's panelled with old beech boards. And then there are hives in the garden, and they bake their own bread. They're very proud of their bathroom."

"It sounds too good to be true," said Audrey de Lisle.

"It is—very nearly; only, it's rather rough. Primitive, I mean. They're a simple crowd at Sundial; they'll speak of you as 'the quality,' and you'll certainly have to show them how to do those pretty white shoes."

"I've done them myself the last two days," said Audrey. She drew her skirt close and regarded her little feet. "Don't you think they're rather

good?"

"They're sweet," said the stranger, gazing. "I didn't know they made them so small. Never mind. Where's the car?"

"About quarter 'f a mile—that way." She pointed a rosy finger. "How far is Sundial?"

"Less than a mile from here. If you'll let me dispose of this waggon, I'll come back and help. If you've got a spare can, I don't think we'll need a horse."

"But how——"

"If we fill up the vacuum tank," said the stranger, "that should get us a mile."

Miss de Lisle reflected.

"Now why," she said, "didn't I think of that?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps an appreciative Providence didn't want you to spoil your fingers. Perhaps . . ."

"My name's de Lisle," said Audrey suddenly. "Audrey de Lisle."

"I'm known as John," said the other. "Christopher John. You know. Wot 'went to bed with his breeches on.' "

"Do be careful," bubbled Audrey. "In a minute I shall really believe that I have stumbled into fairy-land, and—and try to live up to it."

"That should come easy to you," said Christopher John. "I haven't placed you yet, but you're in The Book. And now I must go to my labour. I shall be through in ten minutes' time. Please don't start without me. Spanners are slippery things."

"I'll wait for you here," said Audrey.

As he walked back to the waggon she took her seat on the stile. . . .

Presently a whip cracked, and amid creak of wheels and cries of men the waggon lumbered out of the meadow and swayed down the lane towards Sundial, its load paying toll as it passed, till the green walls were hung with sweet-smelling wisps and the road laid with a carpet fit for a king.

At last the rumble faded, and a tall figure came stepping along the sunflecked corridor.

As he drew near to Audrey—

"I've got it," he cried. "You're 'the maiden all forlorn, That drove the car with a crumpled horn.' "

Audrey laughed delightedly.

"You're determined to work me in," she said. "But I'm afraid I'm too modern."

"Whatever," said Christopher John, "makes you think that? Why, you were before the hills."

"I feel an onlooker. I've strayed into a fascinating world, to which I don't belong. I'm—I'm a visitor to the kingdom, and you're going to show me round."

"In forty-eight hours," said John, "you'll be the Queen. You mark my words. If you stay two days at Sundial, at the end of that time you'll be 'Miss Audrey' to every soul in the place. They're like the frogs in the fable; they want a sovereign—an idol. . . . Well, you've been sent."

Audrey slid down from the stile and into the lane.

"Any way, you're a wonderful courtier," she said, smiling. "And now let's come down to earth and find the car. You'll love Aunt Lettice."

" 'Lettice,' " said Christopher thoughtfully. "It's a sweet, pretty name. But I like 'Audrey' best."

"Oh, shame," cried Miss de Lisle. " 'Lettice' is incomparable."

"You can have it," said Christopher John. "Give me 'Audrey.' "

"That," said Miss de Lisle, "is because some time or other you've known a girl called 'Audrey' you rather liked."

The man nodded.

"No doubt that's the explanation," he said gravely. "She was certainly dazzling. I always associate her with King Richard the Third."

"For Heaven's sake," said Audrey. "But why with him?"

"Because, my lady," said Christopher, "if Shakespeare may be believed, upon a certain occasion *he demanded a horse*."

* * * * *

As Christopher John had foretold, so it fell out.

Audrey was Queen of Sundial within the week.

At the moment when she rounded Mow Corner and saw her heritage—at that moment she lost her heart.

Thatch, brick-nogging and lattice; the greys knee-deep in a pool, raising dripping muzzles to stare at the car; hollyhocks gay in a garden against a black and white wall; the cheerful ring of an anvil and the rush of a sluice; lichened stocks on a greensward and a grey lych-gate beyond; the great yews in the churchyard and an apple-cheeked swain in a smock; the blessed scent of jasmine and the flash of the setting sun upon bottle-glass panes—these and other treasures took her by storm. She worshipped the place openly—and was found worshipful.

The frogs wanted a king. The Manor House was vacant; the Vicar, a celibate recluse; Minever Park was for sale. Niche after niche was empty. And Sundial was of the old world and loathed the nakedness. The village was all agog to have a great lady.

Audrey slid into the position naturally enough.

The Doublet ceased to be an inn and became 'her lodging.' Men went quietly until she was awake; the first-fruits were brought to her board; on Sunday she and her aunt were led to the Manor House pew—a tremendous affair, with a fireplace and a private door in the wall, leading out of the miniature chancel and commanding the church.

The throne was waiting; that Audrey sat it so well she owed to herself. Proffering friendship, seeking friendship in return, she received devotion. The village life was simple, unspoiled: Audrey entered into it with a whole heart. Forge, stable, dairy—she was at home in them all. Eager, appreciative, swift, the freedom of Sundial was hers: she revelled in its possession: Sundial found her revelry gracious indeed.

As for Mrs. Trelawney, she was entirely content to play the dowager. The dressing-gown of Dignity was a precious change of raiment which she had never known. To be thought resplendent daily in her most comfortable hat. . . . Her pleasant quarters at *The Doublet*, the simple, abundant fare, the fragrant garden, suited her down to the ground. Besides, her darling was happy as the days were long.

Salisbury was forgotten, the tour abandoned. A new tank arrived from London, but the great car seldom went forth from the coach-house where it was bestowed. If ever it did, it was sure to return before the sun was down.

As for Christopher John, he watched his mistress' progress with love in his eyes. . . .

That the two saw each other most days was natural enough.

If the man worked long, she found his work engaging, delighted to learn of him and study husbandry with him for husbandman. His leisure she shared naturally, as children do. He had installed her at Sundial. Besides . . .

So much for Audrey.

For the man—well, the love in his eyes had to be served.

Often enough they repaired to Domesday Mill—a place of memories. The great wheel is silent, and the house tumbling. Ivy has run riot over the gabled roof, and the proud water, once so troubled but now unearthly still, has come to mirror the passing of the glory which it begot. But chestnut and ash and lime have come to cherish Domesday, keep it against the weather, ring it against the wind. Year by year they draw closer, put out more sheltering arms. Even now the mill lies snug in its bower as a hare in her form. True offspring of Nature, Nature is taking it back. Domesday Mill will not die; it is being translated.

Audrey de Lisle was quite silly about the spot. That Christopher John had made her aware of its existence goes without saying.

Thither the two had strolled one July evening, exactly a fortnight after the car had broken down.

"And how," said Christopher John, filling a pipe, "how do you like your kingdom?"

"I love it," said Miss de Lisle. "Why is everyone so nice?"

"Because they love you. And they love you because you fit into their nursery rhyme."

Audrey took off her hat and shook her head.

"I don't even pretend to," she said. "I never could. I'm pure 1930—and American. You can't turn that into verse."

"You're Audrey de Lisle," said John. "And Audrey de Lisle might have sat for most of the sonnets I know."

Audrey tilted her chin.

"Sonnets aren't nursery rhymes."

"Or rhymes, either. Hang it, my dear, if you're 1930, so's Sundial. Don't forget that. I don't say it looks it, but then—neither do you."

Audrey plucked at her dress.

"This came from Paris," she said, "six weeks ago. I hardly think Bo-Peep was so extravagant. And then I sleep in pyjamas and use bath-salts and smoke. And I powder my nose and drive a high-powered car. You won't find that sort of stuff in a nursery rhyme."

" 'The Queen was in the parlour,' " said Christopher John. "It doesn't say how she was dressed, but I imagine she did herself just as well as she could. I don't know about the pyjamas, and I'm sure her stockings weren't in the same street as yours, but I've always sort of believed that the—the contents were. And that's the point. One reads of queens and fine ladies and maidens and all, and then one day, if one's lucky, one comes across you. And there's the original of the lot."

Audrey lay back on the turf and stared at the trembling green and the blue beyond.

"That's very charming of you, but——"

"It isn't at all," said John. "It's the unvarnished truth. And if you want any further argument, always remember this. When you came to Sundial you went straight up to the throne. Well, once you're there, pyjamas and such things don't count. The Queen can do no wrong."

Miss de Lisle laughed.

"Listen to the Queen-maker," she said. "Well, be it so. I'm up on the throne of Sundial—Heaven knows why. The trouble is I've only a pasteboard crown."

"What do you mean?" said Christopher, lighting his pipe.

"I've no power," said Audrey. "At best, I'm only a doll."

"I should have said you were omnipotent. You've only to breathe to ____"

"Real power," said Audrey. "I can't put anything right. I can smile and say 'Never mind,' but that's where I get off. Now, the Lord of the Manor's got power. He's a real king—worse luck."

" 'The Lord of the Manor'? Who's been talking of him?"

“My subjects, of course,” said Audrey, crossing her ankles. “They hate him like anything. But what can I do? I’ve only a pasteboard crown.”

“Why do they hate him?” said John.

“Because he’s a sweep,” said Audrey. “He doesn’t play the game. He shoves up the rents, he never does any repairs, he makes them pay for grazing on Mesne Holms, he stopped a funeral going by Witchery Drive, and worst of all, he never comes near the place. I know you’re his agent’s pupil, but that doesn’t alter the facts.”

“I’ve only been here a month,” said Christopher John, “and the agent in question has left me to shift for myself. At the moment I think he’s——”

“He’s with his master,” said Audrey, “trying to temper the wind. Everyone says *he’s* all right. He does his best, but the Lord of the Manor’s a sweep. He won’t hear a word. Warthog’s sick and tired of doing his dirty work—says so openly.”

Christopher frowned.

“Perhaps, if he came to Sundial——”

“But he won’t,” said Audrey, sitting up and smacking the turf with her palm. “Warthog’s implored him to come time and again. He says he believes it’s because he hasn’t the face.”

Christopher sighed.

“Well, well,” he said. “There’s nothing like a fool in his folly. Fancy owning Sundial, an’ letting it rip. . . . An’ a pew like a loose-box. . . . Still, it’s an ill wind. If he’s such a sweep, we’re better without the gent. Would you like to see the house—‘that Jack built’?”

“The Manor House? Rather.”

“I’m going to-morrow—officially, at ten o’ the clock.”

“I’ll be there,” said Audrey, pulling the grass by her side. “But I wish I could do something,” she added wistfully.

“Don’t get embroiled in politics, my pretty maid.”

Miss de Lisle frowned.

“I’ve a jolly good mind,” she said, “to write to him.”

“You don’t even know his name,” said Christopher John.

“Yes, I do. Pendragon. And you can get his address.”

Christopher swallowed.

"I'm sure you'd be asking for trouble," he said uneasily. "Why not let sleeping dogs lie? You can't believe all the gossip that——"

"I can and do," said Audrey. "I don't say I'm going to write, but I'd like his address. I shall expect it at ten to-morrow morning."

"Very good, m'lady," said John, and pulled his forelock.

"Here, I'm not a Queen to you," said Audrey de Lisle.

"You give me orders, and reject my advice."

"That's not a royal prerogative. Every woman does that. But I won't accept homage from you—not even in jest. I don't like it."

"You called me a courtier once," said Christopher John.

"I take it back," said Audrey. "I didn't know you then."

"Too late," said Christopher mournfully, shaking his head. "The damage is done. You ought to be more careful. If you didn't want my, er, homage, you should have stayed away. You came: I saw: you conquered. Now I'm your thrall. Of course I'm familiar—rather like an old nurse. I grin when I see you coming, I call you 'Audrey'—at least, I'm going to in future—and I criticize your clothes. I also make personal remarks. I'm not sure we oughtn't to kiss one another. For all that, I'm your thrall—Audrey."

Audrey put a hand to her temples.

"This is terrible," she said. "I'd no idea I was so—so compelling . . . Christopher dear."

"Look in your glass," said John. "The pier-glass, I mean. Not that the other won't do, but the pier-glass'll hit harder. What colour are the pyjamas?"

"Periwinkle blue," gurgled Audrey.

"Oh, I can't bear it," cried Christopher, covering his eyes. "Never mind. Look in the blinkin' glass. . . . That'll give you an idea. Of course, it won't be the same. You've a way—a carelessness of pose and gesture that takes a man by the throat. It's a sort of assault—a precious battery. Sitting up on that stile, just as if you'd alighted—dropped out of the sky, swinging your sweet, pretty leg, with a hand on your hip and a maddening smile on your mouth, 'all on a summer's day'—well, I give you my word, I almost expected you to say 'He's pinched the lot.' "

In a shaking voice—

"I'm sure," said Audrey, "Bo-Peep would never have——"

Christopher rose to his feet and knocked out his pipe.

"Who's talkin' about Bo-Peep?" he said contemptuously. "The lady I saw was H.M. The Queen of Hearts."

* * * * *

At five minutes to ten the next morning Audrey was leaning against the Manor House gates. These were of wrought iron and great beauty.

As Christopher John approached—

"Have you got his address?" she demanded.

Christopher mentioned a Club.

"That's all I can find," he said. "But why——"

"Warthog's been sacked," said Audrey with blazing eyes. "That's why."

"The devil he has," said Christopher. "What about me?"

"What about Sundial?" said Audrey. "The village has lost its shepherd—its only friend."

"It's still got its Queen," said John. "I can see that."

Audrey stamped her foot.

"Don't laugh," she said. "I'm in earnest. I'm going to write to the brute."

"Audrey, I beg you——"

"Show me the house," said Audrey. "As soon as I've seen it, I'm going straight back to write."

Christopher took out a key and unfastened the padlock.

With the chain in his hand, he looked at her.

"I know every woman does it," he said gently, "but they don't all do it like you."

Audrey said nothing at all.

In silence they passed up the avenue. . . .

So they came to an archway with a coat of arms cut in the grey stone. This admitted to a courtyard, silent and sunlit.

For a moment they stood gazing. Then a touch on his arm made Christopher John look round.

A grave-eyed maiden was looking him in the face.

"I beg your pardon," she said in a low voice. "I had no right. It was very"—her eyes fell, and she blushed exquisitely—"very rotten of me to take it out upon you."

She was in his arms, and his face three inches away.

"Audrey, my sweet, my darling. . . ."

"No, no! Not that! Not that! I mean . . ."

The man let her go instantly.

For a moment Audrey stood, with her hand to her heart, breathing uncertainly.

Then—

"What a beautiful courtyard," she said. "Will you go and unfasten the door? And I'll come on."

* * * * *

A week toiled by, during which the two met hardly at all.

Then one morning a sweet-smelling note arrived at Christopher's lodging before he was up. . . .

That evening found them both on the sward before Domesday Mill.

"The Lord of the Manor," said Audrey, "has a pretty wit."

"Yes?" said Christopher John.

Audrey produced a letter.

"Read that," she said.

Dear Miss de Lisle,

I know you well by repute, and I am satisfied that, when one so correct as yourself is impelled to take up the cudgels upon my tenants' behalf, only a high sense of duty can have created that impulse. I therefore accept your letter as that of a cousin, and as such I answer it.

You and I are plainly of different schools. You believe in the snaffle, and I believe in the curb. I do not suggest that you are wrong or argue that I am right, but what I have I will hold—in my own way. Call me hard, if you please, and say that I gather where I have not strawed. My withers are unwrung. I am of the other school. While I am Lord of the Manor, I will sell none of my land nor will I alter my ways. Horses are meant to be ridden, and, while I am in the saddle, I will ride Sundial on the curb.

I say 'while I am in the saddle.'

Your letter was unusual enough to interest anyone. Coming from you, it interested me very much. I therefore sent for Mr. John, the pupil to my late agent, and, as I expected, he was able to tell me as much as I wanted to know. I have requested him, should you desire it, so far as he can, to do you the same office. Ask him, and he will tell you what manner of man I am.

You will wonder why I should take pains to put such information at your disposal. It is because I am willing to strike a bargain with you.

If you will become my wife, I will give to you absolutely all my title-deeds (including, of course, those of the Manor House) and assign to you every manorial right that I possess. In a word, I will make you the Lady of the Manor.

Yours faithfully,
Charles Pendragon.

"Why, the man's mad," cried Christopher. "Stark, staring. He's got his dates wrong. This is the sort of deal they did in the Stone Age."

"It sounds," said Audrey, "as though he meant what he said. I suppose, in your innocence, you gave me a pretty good chit."

"He asked what you were like, and I told him the truth. I never dreamed ____"

"Of course you didn't," said Audrey. "He took jolly good care of that. I know just what he's like. He's a brilliant, *blasé* Gallio—with a pretty wit. He might have done anything: in point of fact, he's done nothing. When he plays, he plays high: and whether he wins or loses he doesn't care—with the result that he usually wins. He doesn't care. He doesn't care about Sundial: he doesn't care about me: we're pawns. He'd sell his birthright, not for a

mess of pottage, but for a cup of spice. That letter's typical—because it's a masterpiece. Think what the man who wrote that could have done as a diplomat."

"I don't see that it's anything wonderful," said Christopher John. "It's a piece of damned impertinence, but——"

"Think," said Audrey. "In effect he says, 'Your interference was bad form: the only possible excuse for it was a sense of duty too strong to be withstood. Whether you were really so actuated remains to be seen.' "

Christopher shrugged his shoulders.

"You would write," he said.

"I *had* to, Christopher. I couldn't sit still and have everyone so sweet and not raise a finger to help."

The other sighed.

"Well, it's done now," he said. "I suppose you won't let me take it up with the brute."

"Take what up?" said Audrey.

"This letter, of course."

"But it's unexceptionable," said Audrey. "That's what's so clever. He stepped out and met me on my own ground. It may be out of bounds, but I can't curse him for that. I chose it. . . . Besides, if it comes to that, he may be bluffing: but if I like to call his bluff, I'll bet he pays. And he stands to lose a bit."

"*'Lose'?*" screamed Christopher. "Oh, the girl's mad. 'Lose'?"

"It's a sporting offer," said Audrey. "You can't get away from that. And that's the strongest card in a very strong hand, my friend. If I turn it down ——"

" 'If,' " cried Christopher John. "You don't mean to say you're even contemplating doing anything else?"

"It's been done before," said Audrey. "Lady Godiva was a sport."

"Yes, but hers was a two-hour stunt. This is a lifer. You can't chuck away your life so that half a dozen clowns can shove their rotten sheep on to Mesne Holms."

"They're not rotten sheep," said Audrey. "Besides, I mightn't be chucking it away. I might get to like him very much. You never know. What sort of eyes has he got?"

"Watery ones," said Christopher. "Looks as if he drank."

Miss de Lisle frowned.

"How old is he?" she demanded.

"I believe he's about thirty-five. He's a proper waster, you know."

"He would like to hear his mediator, wouldn't he?"

"I never undertook to plead his cause."

"You've broken his bread," said Audrey.

"I wish I'd broken his neck," growled Christopher John.

Audrey threw back her head and fell into silvery laughter. Then she drew out a letter and put it into his hand.

"I think I've teased you enough," she said.

Dear Mr. Pendragon,

It is indeed plain that you and I are of different schools. I should not, for instance, have 'pumped' a gentleman who, had he dreamed of the use to which his information was to be put, would have seen you dead before he had opened his mouth.

I refuse your offer because I do not think there is a poor man in Sundial who would not rather go hungry, with you for lord, than that I should pay so dear to become his lady.

One thing more.

Unless I hear from you by return of post that you will immediately—

(a) reinstate Mr. Warthog,

(b) throw open Mesne Holms,

(c) let me the Manor House for a term of seven years at a rent not exceeding twice that which a reputable firm of house-agents shall consider just,

I shall hand a copy of this correspondence to the local Press.

Yours faithfully,

"D'you think that'll fix him?" said Audrey.

"It'll certainly shake him up," said Christopher John.

The Lord of the Manor replied with commendable dispatch.

Dear Miss de Lisle,

I beg that you will include a copy of this letter in the dossier which you hand to the Press.

I shall not reinstate Warthog.

I dismissed him because upon a belated investigation of his stewardship many things became apparent. Of these I will mention three only:—

(a) he has for three years robbed me right and left:

(b) the better to line his pockets, he has consistently represented me to be a harsh and unconscionable landlord, to whom money was a god:

(c) the respective epidemics of smallpox and diphtheria, by reports of which he deterred me from visiting Sundial, never prevailed.

I have not the power to throw open Mesne Holms. It is common land, and if grazing fees have been paid for its use, they have been appropriated by Warthog.

I will not let you the Manor House, because I propose quite shortly to reside there myself.

Yours faithfully,
Charles Pendragon.

So did Audrey de Lisle.

Dear Christopher John,

Thank you very much for your letter. I'm sorry I called you a 'sweep' and I'm sorry that I believed all the gossip I heard. That comes of going outside my nursery rhyme. I won't do it again.

I never knew you were Pendragon till I saw that the Arms on the archway were the same as those on your ring. I ought to have realized then that you knew your job, but the dismissal of Warthog stuck in my throat. It never occurred to me that he was a rogue.

Your self-indignation the other evening was priceless. I loved it. I had to join in, of course, but I didn't mean all I said.

Please may I see the Manor House again? Last time I was rather preoccupied. Will you take me there this evening, and tell me if I may tell Sundial the truth and say that the Lord of the Manor will be in his family pew on Sunday morning?

AUDREY.

* * * * *

It was the quiet hour.

The sun had just gone down, and the broad terrace was flushed with a rosy pride: the aged giants upon the lawn stood up like gentlemen-at-arms, majestic monuments of silence; the sweet air was breathless. Somewhere a wood-pigeon was chanting the ritual of Peace.

"May I tell Sundial?" said Audrey.

"Yes."

"And will you be in your pew on Sunday morning?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?" said Audrey.

The Lord of the Manor smiled.

"You made a most excellent Queen. If I had said who I was, it would have cramped your style."

"You let me sit in your pew, find favour by calling you names, order you about your own business. . . . Why did you do that, Christopher?"

The Lord of the Manor stared at the plumes of the cedars against the blue of the sky.

"You know why," he said.

There was a silence.

At length—

"The end had to come," said Audrey: "the end of the fairy-tale. We came for a night and we've stayed for nearly a month. It was very nice of you to let it go on so long."

"If I'd had my way," said Pendragon, "it would be still running. But the Queen wandered out of the parlour and into the counting-house."

"A most undignified act," said Audrey de Lisle. "If she'd stuck to her bread and honey, all would have been well."

"It wasn't undignified at all," said the Lord of the Manor. "It was purely feminine."

"The truth is," said Audrey, "you can take a maiden all forlorn and put a crown on her head: but that doesn't make her a Queen."

"And a Queen," said Christopher John, "can put off her crown and call herself over the coals and say the fairy-tale's over and get into her car and drive out of the nursery rhyme: but that doesn't alter the fact that she's a fine lady. 'She shall have music wherever she goes.' "

Perched upon the broad balustrade, her little hands folded in her lap, Audrey stared upon the flags.

"Why," she said, "did the Lord of the Manor make the proposal he did? Surely he never thought that I should accept it."

"There was no reason why you shouldn't. Sundial means everything to you. I didn't imagine you'd wire back 'Every time,' but I thought you'd negotiate."

"Christopher!"

"Why not? The offer was honourable—the sort of offer that's made by a King to a Queen."

"Perhaps," said Audrey slowly, "perhaps that's why I didn't take it. Being only a maiden all forlorn, my tastes are more simple. Besides, what makes you say that Sundial means everything to me?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"I'd like you to know," he said, "that, if you'd negotiated, you would have won hands down. The deeds would have been yours—with nothing to pay."

"What makes you say that Sundial means everything to me?"

Pendragon stared into the distance with eyes that saw nothing.

"A fool finds out things," he said, "when a fool's in love . . . I fell in love with you. But then you know that. I loved you the moment I saw you standing there by the stile. And you were so very nice that, idiotically enough, I began to think that perhaps I meant something. It was great presumption, of course—but I did. I thought perhaps I figured in the nursery rhyme. . . . The trouble was that you were a Queen, while I—well, I wasn't a King. . . . And then one day you came right down from your throne and kneeled at my feet—that morning, in the courtyard. . . . Well, we both know what happened then. Late as it is, my lady, I beg your pardon. But that's by the way. The point is, it opened my eyes. It showed me that Sundial *without me* was still Sundial, but that I *without Sundial* was less than nothing at all—in a word, that I did *not* figure in the nursery rhyme."

Audrey raised her straight eyebrows, and a faint smile played about her beautiful mouth.

"You know," she said dreamily, "it's a shame about you." The man started. "You're a King really, but you choose to masquerade as a 'man all tattered and torn.' One day you find a 'maiden all forlorn' and put a crown on her head. Then you're all upset because you want to kiss her—stay where you are, please—but you can't do that because she's a Queen. So you sit all still and gloomy and listen to her railing against the King. Then, having worked her anger against the King up to fever heat, you tell her that you're the King and try to kiss her. . . . Well, whatever do you expect the poor girl to do?"

"May I move now?"

"Certainly not. Besides, how many times d'you think the man all tattered and torn tried to kiss the maiden all forlorn before she let him do it?"

"Once," said Pendragon, putting his arms about her and drawing her on to her feet.

As she slid down from the stone—

"I never said you could move," said Audrey de Lisle.

"You shouldn't 've made me a King," shouted her squire, and with that he kissed her.

"I wanted you to do that the very first day," whispered the girl. "But if you had I'd never have stayed at Sundial." She slid an arm round his neck. "And you say you didn't figure . . ." She threw up her glorious head and

smiled into his eyes. “Why, my blessed, *you made it*. It’s not been a nursery rhyme—it’s been my love-story.”

“Audrey, Audrey, my darling. . . .”

“When I saw the Arms that morning, I nearly fainted. Then I went all cold, to think that you—*my* Prince Charming—were really the wicked lord. . . . The moment you let me go I saw my mistake. In a flash I realized that you were playing some game. Then I got all mad to think that you’d kept it from me—so I started in too. . . . But I nearly gave it away that evening at Domesday Mill, when you said he had watery eyes. It—it was so libellous, Christopher. . . .”

Pendragon smiled.

“My beautiful lady,” he said, “that came to me out of the blue. There never was, I believe, such a fairy-tale. I was afraid to kiss you for fear of breaking things up. You know. The Sleeping Beauty. If I waked you with a kiss, you might kiss me back: but then, again, you mightn’t. And then in the end I did . . . and the worst happened.”

“But you didn’t, dear,” said Audrey. “If you had . . .”

Pendragon sighed.

“Of course,” he said, “I shall never understand women.”

Audrey put up her mouth and closed her eyes.

“Real men don’t,” she murmured. “That’s why I love you so.”

* * * * *

Sunday morning came, and the great sun with it. The day was all glorious.

Excitement in Sundial was running high.

All that the village knew was that Warthog was proved a rogue, and that the Lord of the Manor would take his rightful seat that August morning.

The tiny church was packed ten minutes before the hour.

At five minutes to eleven the private door was opened, and amid a breathless silence a well-dressed but familiar figure appeared in the Pendragon pew.

Sundial’s heart stood still.

Then—

"Why, it's Mister John," piped an old, tremulous voice.

Pent-up feelings vented themselves in an hysterically explosive 'Sh-h-h.'

Pendragon rose to his feet and glanced down the church. Then he stepped down from the chancel and passed to Mrs. Trelawney and Miss de Lisle.

A whisper, and the ladies rose and preceded him to his family pew.

The ranks of Sundial 'could scarce forbear to cheer.'

But when, after the Second Lesson, the Vicar published 'the Banns of Marriage between Christopher John Charles Pendragon, Bachelor, and Audrey de Lisle, Spinster, both of this Parish,' the concluding sentences were lost in a spontaneous rendering of Sundial's favourite hymn.

This was the Old Hundredth.

The villagers of Sundial are simple folk.

IVAN

IVAN

BELINDA SENESCHAL, spinster, leaned back in her chair.

"What's to be done?" she demanded.

Her solicitor fingered his chin.

"It's simple enough," he said, surveying a letter. "The house and its contents are yours—and Captain Pomeroy's. They've only to be made over, and then, er, then . . ."

"Exactly," observed Miss Seneschal. "What then?"

Forsyth, solicitor, frowned.

"Then you arrange to take possession."

Belinda raised her sweet eyebrows.

"Mr. Forsyth, d'you know Captain Pomeroy?"

"Very well. He's a client of mine. As a matter of fact, he's due here in ten minutes' time—I imagine, to discuss a similar letter to this." He tapped the document. "It's rather convenient."

"It isn't convenient at all," said Belinda Seneschal. "I'll tell you why. Six months ago Captain Pomeroy and I were engaged. It wasn't announced, but we were. Well, now we aren't."

Forsyth thought very fast.

"I see," he said slowly. "Ah, yes, I see now. That explains the bequest. The testator——"

"We met him at Biarritz," said Belinda. "His dog was run over by a car, and we did what we could. Poor old man, he was beside himself. After that we used to go and see him sometimes to try and cheer him up. It wasn't much to do, and he was pathetically grateful. Of course, we never dreamed . . ."

"One never does," said Forsyth. "Yes?"

"Well, that's all," said Miss Seneschal. "He knew of our engagement and naturally assumed it was going to end in marriage. So out of the kindness of his heart he's left us his house. It was extremely handsome of him. It's a perfectly lovely place."

Forsyth referred to the letter.

> . . . . *my property at Biarritz, known as* Les Iles d'Or, *including the villa and all its contents, jointly to Miss Belinda Seneschal . . . and Captain Ivan Pomeroy . . . in the belief that they will appreciate it and neither sell nor let the same*. . . .

"It's a question of arrangement," he said. "That's all I can say. I don't suppose you want to renounce—surrender your share?"

Belinda sat up.

"And have him take both? Not much."

"Well, there you are," said Forsyth. "In view of the testator's words, I take it you won't care to sell, so there's nothing for it. You must arrange to share it." Here a telephone buzzed. "Excuse me." He picked up the receiver. "Yes? . . . Right. Show him into the waiting-room." He replaced the receiver. "Here he is, Miss Seneschal."

That lady leaped to her feet.

"Then I'm off," she said.

"Wait a minute," said Forsyth, rising. "If he's prepared to meet you, won't you stay?" Belinda shook her head. "It's infinitely better to talk this over at once. It'll save no end of correspondence."

"I can't help that," said Miss Seneschal. "The position's impossible enough. Think, Mr. Forsyth. We've each got to share something with the one person in the world with whom we can share nothing. We're mutual thorns in the flesh. I tell you frankly, the very thought of him makes me tired, and I fancy the sight of me would send him out of his mind."

"If you'll forgive my saying so, it would be a great deal more likely to bring him to your feet."

"I don't want him at my feet."

"It's a very good place to have a joint-owner," said Forsyth.

Miss Seneschal hesitated.

“D’you say it’s necessary for us to meet?”

“By no means. But it’s highly expedient.”

Finger to lip, Belinda stared at the door.

At length—

“Very well,” she said.

“That’s right,” said Forsyth relievedly. “I’ll go and bring him up.”

As the lawyer turned—

“Mr. Forsyth.”

“Yes.”

“You’ll—you’ll make it plain that, er, that I . . .”

“I shall say I wrung your consent from you.”

“Of course,” said Belinda, with a dazzling smile, “you should have been an ambassador.”

Forsyth smiled back.

“Sometimes I am,” he said.

The next moment he was gone.

As he entered the waiting-room—

“Good morning, Forsyth,” said Pomeroy. “Here’s a go.”

“What’s happened?” said Forsyth.

“Ointment for two,” said Pomeroy, searching his pockets, “complete with bluebottle. Listen. The deceased—God bless him—has left me a most desirable residence—cesspool and all. It’s a peach of a place, overlookin’ the Bay of Biscay. What’s torn it up——”

“I know,” said Forsyth.

Pomeroy stared.

“Know?” he said. “But——”

“Miss Seneschal’s upstairs.”

Pomeroy started. Then he picked up his hat and was stepping a-tiptoe to the door.

“Here,” said Forsyth, detaining him, “I’ve—I’ve persuaded her to see you.”

“Not on your life,” said Pomeroy. “I—I’m rather frail this morning.”

“Will you renounce?”

“What, an’ let her have the lot? Not likely.”

“Then come upstairs,” said Forsyth. “The matter’s got to be discussed—obviously. You don’t want to write about forty letters, do you?”

“No, but——”

“Well, that’s what it means. More. In a case like this *oratio obliqua*’s hopeless. One never gets down to things.”

Pomeroy hesitated.

“It’s all damned fine, Forsyth,” he said uneasily, “but we haven’t met since—since the dust-up. Besides, it’s—it’s a very ticklish business—revivin’ memories.”

With a considerable effort Forsyth maintained his gravity.

“I beg that you’ll do as I say. Miss Seneschal sees the wisdom of an ordinary business talk. Surely you’re not going to be the one to resist.”

Pomeroy stared upon the floor.

At length—

“Oh, all right,” he said. “If she wants it. . . .”

“That’s right,” said Forsyth, shepherding him out of the room. . . .

A moment later he stood before his lady.

“Hullo, Belinda,” he said. “How—how are you?”

Miss Seneschal nodded.

“Full of it, thanks,” she said composedly. “How are you?”

“Bursting,” said Pomeroy. “Simply bursting, thanks. Awfully nice of old Drawbridge to do us so proud.”

“Perfectly sweet of him,” said Belinda.

Forsyth brought forward a chair.

“Sit down,” he said.

Pomeroy subsided gratefully.

"The property," said the lawyer, resuming his seat, "has been left to you two jointly. I take it you came to see me to ask—not so much what that means as where you each come in." The two nodded, and Pomeroy crossed his legs. "Well, first let me tell you what it means. It means that each of you is absolute owner of *Les Iles d'Or* and all the villa contains—subject only to the other's right. Each of you can take possession as and when you please, invite what guests, install what servants you like. Neither of you can exclude the other. If A is there, and B decides to come, A can't exclude B—or his servants or his ox or his ass or anything that is his. B has a co-equal right. Very well. The only way to enjoy a property so held is to make and abide by an arrangement. The obvious and most simple way is for each to agree to use it for half the year."

Miss Seneschal frowned.

"My plans," she said, "are rather unsettled. I don't think I want to bind myself . . ."

"I agree," said Pomeroy. "The Biarritz feelin' is apt to come with a rush. An' supposin' one chose the wrong half."

"Supposing," said Belinda dreamily, "supposing, to begin with, we took it for three months each. This is March. Well, you have it till the end of June, and I'll have it from then to October. Then if that works——"

"Nothing doing," said Captain Pomeroy. Belinda started, and Forsyth's hand flew to his mouth. "The Biarritz season is short, but it's very sweet."

"When is the season?" said Forsyth.

"Well, there are really two seasons," said Belinda. "The Spring season and——"

"Yes, you can have that one," said Pomeroy. "What about July *nach* September?"

"Oh, of course it's more crowded then," admitted Belinda, "but to my mind the pleasantest time is in the Spring."

"All right," said Pomeroy promptly. "You have it now, and I'll take over on the first of July."

Miss Seneschal swallowed.

"I can't do that," she said coldly. "I—I'm engaged from now till July."

“So’m I,” said Pomeroy shortly. “Six deep. London season.”

There was a pregnant silence.

At length—

“I think we’d better renounce,” said Belinda shakily.

“Renounce?” cried Pomeroy. “Not in this suiting. It’s the first villa I’ve been left at Biarritz, an’ the next one mayn’t be so nice.”

“It’s—it’s very nice, is it?” said Forsyth.

“Perfectly charming,” said Belinda. “It’s got the most glorious position.”

“Almost sacred,” said Pomeroy. “Five minutes from everywhere.”

“I meant the views,” flashed Belinda. “You can see for miles.”

“Quite that,” said Pomeroy. “And what about six bathrooms, Forsyth? Six. All tiled.”

“It’s the last word in luxury,” agreed Belinda. “And there’s practically nothing to be done. When that stuff on the edge of the terrace has been taken away——”

“What stuff?” said Pomeroy suspiciously. “D’you mean the balustrade?”

“Well, it isn’t really a balustrade.” She addressed herself to the lawyer. “It’s a hideous sort of parapet, Mr. Forsyth. It doesn’t go with anything and it just ruins the whole *ensemble*.”

“My dear Belinda,” said Pomeroy, “you can’t take that away. It mayn’t be a work of art, but it’s pretty useful. You must have a rail or something.”

“Why?”

“There’s a twelve-foot drop,” said Pomeroy. “That’s why. You can’t have a depth like that unflagged. Supposing one of your guests came in a bit lively—by starlight.”

“I don’t entertain drunkards.”

“Well, I protest,” said Pomeroy. “I—I like the balustrade.”

“Unfortunately I don’t,” said Belinda in a freezing tone. “That’s why I shall have it removed. When you come you can fix up a life-line—for night-work.”

Forsyth cleared his throat.

"I'm afraid any structural alterations would have to be agreed, Miss Seneschal."

"But it isn't a structural alteration."

"My dear child," said Pomeroy, raising his eyes.

Belinda regarded him furiously. Then she averted her gaze and tilted her chin.

"Mr. Forsyth," she said, "the house is ours. If it was mine I should put in a caretaker at once. But I suppose I mustn't do that."

Forsyth turned to Pomeroy.

"Have you any objection?" he said.

"None," said Pomeroy, "provided the caretaker has instructions to take orders from me."

Miss Seneschal gasped.

"I don't think you quite understand," she said. "I should be paying the caretaker."

"Exactly," said Pomeroy. "And when I rolled up with my baggage she'd send for the police."

"She'd have instructions to permit you to enter."

"She'd have ten minutes to clear out," was the violent reply. "I'm not going to be followed about my own house by a glassy-eyed sleuth in somebody else's pay."

Speechless with indignation, Belinda crowded lightning into her beautiful eyes.

"I know a very good man," continued Pomeroy, apparently addressing the cornice. "If you like I'll send him to see you. I shall tell him that you are his mistress and——"

"That," said Belinda, "would be misleading. No nominee of yours will enter *Les Iles d'Or*."

"Look here," said Forsyth. "By the merest chance I happen to be going to Biarritz in six days' time. If you like I'll install a caretaker and have an inventory made. Copies to each of you, of course. I'll find a good agent and tell him to pay the caretaker and keep an eye on the house. He'd better report to you both once a month. When you propose to reside you'll let him

know and he'll make the necessary arrangements. If anything has to be done at any time he'll write to you both, and your two signatures will be his authority to go ahead."

"Forsyth," said Pomeroy piously, "what should we do without you?"

"You really are an angel," said Miss Seneschal. "Now help us out with the dates."

The solicitor picked up a pencil and began to draw lines upon a pad.

"Whenever," he said slowly, "I deal with a Will I always feel that I am treading venerable ground. A Will is an essentially human document. It is the spokesman of the dead. . . . Man can take nothing out of this world. Therefore one day he sits down and puts upon record—secret record to whom, when his wealth is left masterless, he desires it to pass. Sometimes his directions are rational: sometimes they seem unkind: sometimes they are unexpected. But, as the spokesman says, so it must be done. We cannot reason with the spokesman—perhaps that's as well. But, what is more to the point, the spokesman cannot reason with us. Its principal is dead. . . . Well, because it cannot reason, it is to my mind our duty to reason with ourselves on its behalf. *Noblesse oblige.* We that are quick owe it to the pitiful dead. We must look to see what is written—between the lines. . . . Here is a bare bequest. *Why was it made?* Because the old man liked you—liked you both. He hoped it would bring you happiness—joint happiness. He assumed, of course, that you would marry. He thought about you when you were gone. It gave him rare pleasure to picture his two young friends enjoying his home. Therefore he left it you. . . . Well, you're not going to marry. There goes half his dream. I'm sure for his memory's sake you won't shatter the other half."

There was a long silence.

At length—

"You're perfectly right," said Pomeroy uncertainly. "I'm afraid I rather lost sight of that—that aspect."

"So did I," said Belinda shakily. "And I feel very much ashamed. Ivan, if we can't behave ourselves we ought to renounce. It's—it's not decent."

"Don't rub it in, dear," said Ivan brokenly. "You—you can shift the blinkin' balustrade."

"I shan't," said Belinda. "He—he put it there." Ivan groaned. "I shan't touch a thing," she continued tearfully. "And we won't have any arrangement about residing. I don't think it's necessary now."

“That’s right,” said Ivan. “After all, one doesn’t have to have a lawsuit as to who’s to have the first bath. If one wants hers at half-past eight, the other can have his at nine.”

“Exactly,” said Miss Seneschal. The two rose to their feet. “Well, thank you very much, Mr. Forsyth. You’ll let us know whatever we’ve got to do.”

“I will,” said Forsyth, rising. “When either wants to occupy they can send the other a card. If any difficulty arises you can always come to me. But I’m sure it won’t.”

He passed to the door.

“Good-bye, Forsyth,” said Pomeroy. “And many, many thanks. For takin’ other people’s bulls by the horns you have no equal.”

Belinda laughed mischievously.

“Whose bull did you take this morning?” she said.

“No one’s,” said Forsyth. “I took a lady by the hand and a soldier by the arm, and the three of us did some reading between the lines.”

“What did I say you should have been?”

The solicitor smiled.

“I told you I was—sometimes.”

As the two passed down the stairs—

“I—I suppose you wouldn’t lunch with me, Belinda?”

“Not—not to-day, Ivan.”

“You will one day?”

“Perhaps—one day.”

They passed into Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

The lady’s car was waiting, and Pomeroy opened the door.

“It’s—it’s been a great pleasure,” he said, “to see you again.”

Belinda put out a small hand.

“I hope you’ll be very happy at *Les Iles d’Or*, Ivan.”

Pomeroy took off his hat.

“I might have been,” he said.

With her hand in his, Belinda looked down and away.

"Good-bye," she said gently.

The hand slipped away, and my lady got into the car.

"You will lunch—one day?" said Ivan.

Belinda nodded.

* * * * *

The London season was drawing to a close.

The two had met little: it seemed as though Belinda was avoiding her sometime swain.

Naturally enough, the latter's thoughts were turning towards Biarritz and *Les Iles d'Or*. He decided, however, that the lady must make the first move.

One morning a letter arrived.

July 7th.

Dear Ivan,

If it's convenient to you, I propose going to Les Iles d'Or *for a few days next week. Let me know when you want to come, and I'll clear out.*

Yours,
Belinda.

A reply went pelting.

July 8th.

My dear Belinda,

Of course it's convenient. I hope you have a topping good time. Stay as long as you like, dear, and send me a line when you go. I'd sort of like to follow you.

Ivan.

Nearly a month slid by.

The weather in England was consistently vile. According to the papers, Biarritz was bathed in sunshine day after day.

Pomeroy comforted himself with the reflection that Belinda was happy.

Then a telegram arrived.

Are you at Les Iles d'Or if not I go there next Thursday for a fortnight have been unable to get off before Seneschal.

Pomeroy read the message with starting eyes.

After a frightful half-hour he sat down and replied by letter.

August 5th.

Dear Belinda,

All right. I wish I'd known you weren't at Biarritz, because I'd have gone. Never mind. A fortnight from next Thursday will bring us to the 21st. That'll be all right because I shan't want to come before September 5th. When you leave you might tell the agent to expect me that day.

Yours,

Ivan.

August was cold and stormy throughout the British Isles. In the South of France prayers for rain were being offered. The papers said that the Biarritz season was the most brilliant ever known.

Pomeroy, who was at a loose end, began to count the days.

Then came a post-card.

August 28th.

Leaving for Biarritz on September 1st. Could you postpone your visit till the 15th? I should have gone before only it's been impossible to get away. If I don't hear I shall assume it's all right.

B.S.

Receiving it from the hall-porter, Pomeroy had to be assisted out of the vestibule.

For a long time he seemed to have lost the power of speech. Then this returned—in spate.

Pomeroy raged.

He telephoned to Forsyth, but Forsyth was out of town.

Then he wrote to Belinda—a letter three sheets long. This, when written, he destroyed.

Finally he telegraphed.

Shall arrive September 15th as sure as water's wet please inform agent Pomeroy.

It was the last straw.

* * * * *

The fifteenth day of September was the monarch of a glorious week.

The sky was cloudless, and the sun, a beneficent giant, beamed upon a fabulous world. The ocean stretched, a flood of dark-blue quicksilver, brilliant and tremulous. The yellow coast and gay green countryside made up a ragged counterpane vivid and vast enough to shoulder Mandeville. The breath of a slumbering breeze tempered the savoury air.

Ivan, who had lain at Bordeaux the night before, came floating into Biarritz with a thankful heart.

As his car swept up the drive of *Les Iles d'Or*, his servant, unshaven and travel-stained, rose from a pile of luggage beside a bed of hydrangeas.

"What's the matter?" said his master, setting a foot upon the brake. "Can't you get in?"

"No, sir. The villa seems to be occupied, sir."

"*What?*"

"A quarter to eight we arrived, sir, just as you said. The door was open then, an' a fellow was sweepin' the steps. I took 'im for the caretaker. So I says, 'Good mornin',' I says. 'Jus' give me a 'and with this stuff.' 'E stares very 'ard, so I says it again in French. 'E didn' seem to get it, so I mentions your name. At that 'e tells me to wait an' goes orf indoors. I gets out Mrs. Dewlap an' the 'ouse-maid an' begins fetchin' the small things out o' the bus. . . . Then another man appears. 'Appily 'e could talk English. 'You've made an error,' 'e says. 'You've come to the wrong 'ouse.' 'What?' says I. 'Ain't this *The Eel's Door*?' 'Perfectly,' says 'e. 'Well, then, wot's wrong?' says I. 'This is Captain Pomeroy's stuff. Are you the caretaker?' 'I'm the butler,' 'e says, lofty. 'Ooze Captain Pomeroy?' 'You'll soon find out 'oo 'e is,' I says, 'if 'e sees you in them canvas shoes. An' 'oo are you, any'ow? Ooze butler?' . . . 'E gets very excited then, sir, an' starts on me in French

an' wavin' 'is arms. So I leaves 'im to it an' starts gettin' the stuff orf of the 'bus. When 'e sees the trunks comin' down 'e gets more excited than ever. 'No, no,' 'e shouts. 'Wrong 'ouse. You must go away,' 'e shouts, 'an' take your baggage.' Of course I takes no notice but lets 'im rave. Then a trunk comes down with a bang. 'Quiet, quiet,' 'e yells. 'You'll wake my lady.' 'You've woke 'er long ago,' says I, 'for the matter o' that. An' ooze your lady?' . . . Well, I couldn't get the name, sir. Mademoiselle Seashell, it sounded like. Any way, I told 'im that there was trouble to come and that if 'e wanted to weather it the sooner 'e let me inside an' on to the telephone, the better for 'im. The idea was to speak to the agent, sir. You gave me 'is name. But 'e wouldn' let me in. I tried the back door, but they'd got that fast, an' the other fellow inside with a broom in 'is 'and. By the time I got back the front door was shut an' barred. . . . By the time I'd paid the driver Mrs. Dewlap was feelin' queer, sir. So I took 'er to the kitchen window an' asked for a cup of tea. After a lot of talk they passed some tea through the bars, but it was that filthy she couldn' touch it. So I sent 'er an' Polly orf to walk to the town an' find a restaurant. I 'aven't seem them since an' I s'pose they've lost themselves. I've stayed 'ere with the baggage an' watched that door. But it's never opened again."

"I see," said Pomeroy grimly. "Well, I'm much obliged. I'm glad you warned the butler and I hope he passed it on."

With that, he got out of the car, mounted the broad steps and rang the bell.

After considerable delay the door was opened by a fat servitor.

"Miss Seneschal?" said Pomeroy curtly.

"Mademoiselle is engaged, sair."

Pomeroy took out a card.

"Take her that card," he said. The man accepted the pasteboard and was for closing the door. "And tell her I'm waiting," added Pomeroy, as though by accident leaning against the oak.

The butler boggled.

"But Mademoiselle is not receiving, Monsieur."

"Do as I say," said Ivan.

"When Mademoiselle is descend, sair, I will give 'er the card. Eef Monsieur will return these afternoon——"

“Send the card up,” said Ivan. “And say that I am below.”

The butler began to perspire.

“Verry good, sair . . . Monsieur will excuse me, but Monsieur is again’ ze door.”

“You can leave it open,” said Ivan comfortably. “I’m not here to steal.”

The butler took a deep breath.

“Mademoiselle ’as gommanded——”

“No doubt,” said Ivan drily. “Tell her that I prevented you. Tell her I said that if you tried to shut it I should tell my servants to put you in the road.”

The butler looked round wildly. Then he caught Ivan’s eye and blenched. Finally, after one frightful spasm of irresolution, he flung up despairing palms and staggered into the hall.

A flurry of furious whispering came to Pomeroy’s ears.

Then the butler returned, with starting eyes.

“Mademoiselle regrets that she cannot see you, sair.”

“Right,” said Pomeroy, lighting a cigarette. Then, “Dewlap!” he cried. “Berryman!”

“Sir,” came a ready chorus from valet and chauffeur.

“Bring in those things.”

“Very good, sir.”

A moment later, bearing a trunk between them, the two ex-soldiers reached the top of the steps.

“Into the hall for the moment,” said Pomeroy. “They can go upstairs later on.”

“Very good, sir.”

The trunk and its bearers passed in, with Ivan behind, the butler retreating backwards before the *cortège* after the manner of a chamberlain preceding Royalty.

As they deposited their burden upon a marble pavement, Belinda rose from a chair in all her glory.

“What does this mean?” she demanded, addressing Ivan.

“It means,” said Ivan calmly, “that I’m a man of my word. I said I should come on the fifteenth, and here I am.” He turned to his men. “Put the rest just inside and wait within call.”

“Very good, sir.”

“But I’m in residence,” flashed Belinda.

“Yes, I’d gathered that,” said Pomeroy, hanging his hat on a peg. “So’m I.”

“D’you mind getting out?” said Belinda in a shaking voice. “Or am I to ring up the police?”

“You can ring up the Bastille, if you like. But don’t do the instrument in. I hate being without a telephone.”

Miss Seneschal stamped an extremely pretty foot.

“Will you get out of this house?”

“No,” said Ivan, “I won’t. For ten solid, soul-searing weeks I’ve let you have it, and this is where I get on. I admit my leg’s elastic, but you’ve rung the bell. It won’t stretch any more.”

“Ten weeks?” cried Belinda. “Why, I’ve only been here four days!”

“I put it at your disposal on the eighth of July. Eight from thirty-one leaves——”

“You also begged me to stay as long as I liked.”

“I hope you will,” said Ivan. “There’s plenty of room,” and, with that, he sank into a chair.

For a moment Belinda never moved. Then she gave a light laugh and, opening an Old Chelsea box, selected a cigarette. When she had lighted this she took her seat upon a table.

“Your bluff,” she said, “is vigorous, if not in the best of taste. I think it’s time I called it. I’m not going out, Ivan.”

“Aren’t you?” said Pomeroy. “I am. Not yet, but after lunch. The air’s lovely.”

“I mean,” said Belinda coolly, “that I’m not going to vacate this villa.”

“Good,” said Ivan cheerfully. “Neither am I.”

Miss Seneschal stared.

Then she slid down from the table and stepped to his side.

"But if I stay here, you can't."

"Can't I?" said Ivan. "Well, I'm going to have a blinkin' good try."

"Are you serious?" demanded Miss Seneschal.

"My dear girl," said Pomeroy, "at considerable inconvenience and expense I've brought about two tons of luggage, four servants and a car some seven hundred miles. Would you do that by way of being comic?"

"I can't help that," said Belinda. "You should have inquired before you started."

Pomeroy leaned back and covered his face.

"Oh, give me strength," he murmured. Then: "D'you mind indicating the nature of the inquiry I should have made?"

"Whether I was here, of course."

"I see," said Pomeroy uncertainly. "In view of our correspondence, I disagree. The fifteenth was your suggestion, which I was mug enough to accept. But let that go. What difference d'you think such an inquiry would have made? It would certainly have satisfied curiosity, but I don't happen to be curious."

"I like to think," said Belinda, "that you would have postponed your visit."

Pomeroy sighed.

"Of course," he said, "the trouble is that I'm just an ordinary ass. If I was a half-baked worm with a game spine we should have our arms round one another's necks."

"And if," said Belinda sweetly, "you were a gentleman, you'd get up and beg my pardon and walk right out of this house."

"What, an' leave my luggage?" said Pomeroy.

Belinda shrugged her shoulders.

"That," she said, "could be thrown after you."

Pomeroy closed his eyes.

"I should simply hate," he murmured, "to be a gentleman."

With a look of unutterable contempt, Miss Seneschal re-ascended the table and folded her arms.

"The villa belongs," she announced, "to the one who's in possession."

"That's not the law," said Ivan, "but never mind. I'm in possession, too."

"You forced your way in."

"I did nothing of the sort. The door was opened by your butler, thereby occasioning a void through which I passed."

"Against my will," said Belinda. "I shall cable to Forsyth."

"Do," said Ivan. "Mind you give him my love."

Belinda set her teeth.

"If he says I'm to go, I'll go. Till then——"

"But he won't," said Pomeroy. "You've every right to be here—and so have I."

"But we can't both stay in this house."

"That," said Ivan, "is a matter of opinion. To the best of my recollection there are seven principal bedrooms and six bathrooms. I don't know how many you take, but I can struggle through on a couple of each."

Belinda consulted her wrist-watch.

"Unless," she said, "you withdraw in two minutes, I shall ring for Henri to take your luggage outside."

"Have a heart," said Pomeroy. "Henri's already lost half a stone over this business. If you give him an order like that, he'll become a total wreck."

"He's devoted to me," said Belinda.

"I'm sure of that," said Ivan. "But he loathes the look in my eye. It's the combination of devotion and abhorrence that makes him get so hot. They sort of seethe together."

"D'you propose to interfere with his execution of my orders?"

"Not exactly 'interfere,' " said Ivan. "It'll be more mental. I shall sort of discourage him."

Belinda drew in her breath.

"How long," she demanded, "are you going on like this?"

Pomeroy rose.

"I'm not going on any longer," he said quietly. "I'm through. More. I've just come across from Bordeaux and I want a bath and a change. Reason suggests that you're using a first-floor suite. Very well. I shall go up to the second floor."

Belinda sprang to her feet.

"I absolutely refuse," she flamed, "to consider such an idea. Good heavens, man! Think of what people would say. What about my name?"

"Belinda," said Pomeroy sternly, "you should have thought of that before. I gave you—not an inch, but an ell. What's my reward? You take a furlong. . . . Good, full measure I gave you, without a word. You chuck it in my face—and ask for more. Once would have been enough for most men: because I loved you"—Belinda started—"yes, loved you, I let you do it twice. I believed you merely thoughtless—wanted you to have a good time, even if I had to pay. It never occurred to me that you were twisting my tail."

The girl's eyes fell, and a finger flew to her lip.

Pomeroy proceeded quietly.

"If you neither love nor respect him, you can twist a man's tail nearly off—provided he loves you. But the man mustn't know it, Belinda. The moment he does, his self-respect won't allow you to twist his tail any more."

For a moment the two stood silent.

Then the girl turned and, walking across the hall, entered one of the salons and closed its door.

Pomeroy called his servants, and his luggage was taken upstairs.

* * * * *

For the burden of the next six days Lady Cherubic shall speak.

> *My dear*, she wrote to her sister, *I can't come yet. If I do I shall spoil such sport as never you saw. I told you Belinda Seneschal had compelled me to become her guest—at half an hour's notice, quite late last Monday night. And I told you why. Well, it's better than any play you ever thought of. Captain Pomeroy is a perfectly charming man. He's tall and fair, and he's got a merry eye and a very good nose. He's thirty-four, clean-shaven and laughs delightedly. Very easy-going and a strong sense of humour. We get*

on admirably. He loves Belinda very much. Belinda's dark and a beauty. Great brown eyes and an exquisite mouth: straight as an arrow, and the figure that everyone wants. You know. The more you take off, the better it looks. In her bathing-dress. . . . And she's really a sweet girl. Since I turned fifty I've learned to expect nothing from twenty-five. But this child is not like that. Belinda treats me as if I were her very rich aunt. But she treats Ivan Pomeroy as if he were a hideous wedding-present which she can't throw out for fear of offending the donor—a certain sign of love, as you will agree.

Well, there you are, Mary.

Tuesday—my first day here—was rather hectic. The servants, of course. Rival staffs in the same basement, determined to serve two masters with the same range and pantry at the same time, were almost bound to realize the worst misgivings of The Litany—even if they were all compatriots, which they aren't. Ivan has brought out his English servants. Only a man could do such a hopeless thing. An English cook-housekeeper who can't talk a word of French and is accustomed to dealing in St. James's! Can you see her in a French market? More. Can you see her in a French kitchen, explaining in the tone one reserves for the stone-deaf to a French cook who believes in France for the French that 'the Captain deserved the best and it wouldn't be her fault if he didn't get it'? I intervened at last, to prevent murder being done. The French butler had been ducked in the sink and then shut in the coal-cellar. This, because he had intimated that the kitchen crockery was good enough for Ivan. The brosseur *had been obstructive when Ivan's housemaid had sought for a dust-pan and brush and, when she found them, had tried to drag them away. Polly criticized his conduct, and the* brosseur *pinched her arm. Ivan's chauffeur immediately knocked him down and was kneeling on his stomach when I arrived. The two cooks were under arms, eyeing each other wildly and giving violent tongue. Belinda's maids and Polly and Dewlap—Ivan's man—were in support, reviling one another's countries in terms which, had they been intelligible to those for whom they were meant, could not have been endured. I straightened things out somehow. Then I called a council upstairs. I told Belinda that if I wasn't fed I should go, and I said that I shouldn't be fed if she didn't tell her staff that Ivan's servants had as much right here as they. Finally things were*

arranged—in the only possible way. Henri was compensated and fired, and Dewlap was given his place. Belinda's cook was appointed cook to the household, and Ivan's housekeeper put in charge of the house. Since then peace has reigned—below stairs. It was also a step forward upon the ground floor, because it meant that we three must feed together. . . .

Our meals are a perfect scream. Belinda sits at one end of the table, Ivan at the other, and I sit in between. They both talk to me vivaciously, but such conversation as they use to each other is of the armoured type. The impression that I am the guest of a married couple who are upon their dignity is sometimes overwhelming. Ivan delights to enhance this. The other night he looked across at Belinda. 'I don't like these finger-bowls,' he said. 'Haven't we got any other ones, dear?' Belinda choked, and I began to laugh. Then—'Aren't these big enough?' says my lady. 'Too big,' says Ivan. 'I'm afraid of wetting my ears.' Belinda fought not to smile. 'Consult the inventory,' she said. 'Right,' said Ivan. 'What's the French for "finger-bowls"?' 'Consult a dictionary,' says Belinda. 'I can't,' says Ivan. 'I gave mine to Henri. His need was greater than mine.' Belinda broke down at that, as was right and proper: but order was soon restored. They never meet except at meals, but never once so far has either had a meal out. Thus, under the guise of insisting upon their rights, they improve the opportunity of being together.

Ivan keeps his end up and is thoroughly at home, but he never intrudes or oversteps the mark. After dinner we go to the drawing-room, and he retires to the library. Both rooms command the terrace, but if we sit outside Ivan never comes out. Of course he's as much my host as Belinda's my hostess, but he never lets me feel that. His attitude to me is that of a fellow-guest.

To-day Belinda's car was out of action. The first she or I knew of it was when we came down to go out and found Ivan's Rolls at the door. Belinda stopped dead. Then she turned upon Dewlap. 'I thought you said the car was here.' The chauffeur intervened. 'You've broken a spring, Miss. So Captain Pomeroy 'opes that you'll use 'is car.' Belinda began to flush, so I got in—quick. After a moment she followed me. 'I couldn't let you refuse,' I said. 'Ivan's not the man to do this for gain.' She just squeezed my

fingers. 'I hoped,' she said, 'I hoped you would force my hand.' 'I'll remember that,' said I. She blushed exquisitely.

So, you see, the end is approaching.

And now I must fly down to dinner. I wouldn't be late for worlds.

Your loving sister,

JANE.

P.S.—I said the end was approaching.

After dinner we sat on the terrace—a perfect night. Presently I called Ivan. He appeared at the window, pipe in hand. 'Why don't you come and sit here?' I said. 'It's wicked to stay indoors.' 'D'you think so?' he said, hesitating. 'I'm sure of it,' said I. 'Of course, if you'd rather read . . .' He came out and sat down. He and I talked for a while, and then Belinda joined in. By ten o'clock the tambourine was rolling. When we got up to go to bed, Belinda gave Ivan her hand. 'It was very nice of you to lend me your car,' she said. Ivan bowed. 'It was very nice of you to use it,' he said gently. I tried to escape, but Belinda caught me up. Still, the last act has begun.

J.

Lady Cherubic was right.

As a matter of fact she accelerated the *dénouement* by setting her foot firmly on the pedal of opportunity and pressing it right down.

In a word, on the very next evening the three had not been together for a quarter of an hour when she rose and announced her intention of retiring to take a short nap.

With that, she walked into the library.

After a moment Ivan, who had risen also, resumed his seat and put his pipe back in his mouth.

"I—I hope she's all right," said Belinda presently. "D'you think I should go and see?"

Ivan shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said.

There was a silence.

“I think I’d better,” said Belinda.

“I—I shouldn’t,” said Ivan uneasily. “Er, supposing you woke her.”

Belinda flitted across the pavement and stole into the room. . . .

Her back towards the window, her shoes in her hand, Lady Cherubic was in the act of stealthily opening the door.

Belinda sank to her knees behind a bureau.

When the door had closed, she rose and turned to the terrace. . . .

As she sank into her chair—

“All right?” queried Ivan.

Belinda nodded.

The night was marvellous.

The moon sailed in the heaven, a clean-cut stoup of glory upon a violet field. Far on the left Spain sloped to the ocean with the crouch of a drinking beast. To the right a lazy school of surf marched out of vision. A fitful breeze played with the sweet-smelling air as a kitten will play with a fringe.

Belinda sighed.

“The worst of a place like this,” she said slowly, “is that it always seems such a shame to go away.”

Ivan’s heart stood still.

“I—I hope you aren’t going,” he stammered.

“I must on Thursday,” said Belinda, twisting her pretty hands. “Lady Cherubic’s sister is beginning to stamp, and I can’t presume upon her kindness.”

“I won’t hear of your leaving,” blurted Ivan. “Of course, I shall go to an hotel.”

Belinda shook her head.

“It’s very kind of you,” she said, “but it can’t be done. For one thing, I don’t think Henri’s available.”

“Thank God for that,” said Ivan fervently. “And of course Dewlap’ll stay. He’s crazy about you.”

“You’re very good,” said Belinda, “but I’m afraid I must go. I think if I were you I should keep the cook on, but Jacques is a wash-out.”

“I—I shan’t stay on if you go.”

Belinda started.

“You—won’t—stay on?” she faltered. “Why on earth not?”

Ivan shifted uneasily.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said. “Why—why should I?”

“Well, that’s what you came for—Ivan.”

“I know. But . . . Well, it’s a bigger house than I thought. You know. A shade roomy for one. The thought of five empty bathrooms’d make my blood run cold.”

“Isn’t there someone you can ask?”

Pomeroy shook his head.

“Not a soul.”

“But this is absurd,” said Belinda, crossing her legs. “One day you won’t come because I’m here, and the next you won’t stay because I’m not.”

“ ‘Won’t come’?” cried Ivan. “How could I?”

“Well, you did eventually, didn’t you?”

“I know, but——”

“If you’d liked,” said Belinda, “you could have come on the fifth.”

“I precious near did,” said Ivan. “When I got your card I nearly went off the deep end.”

“But you should have, Ivan.” The man took his pipe from his mouth and stared at the maid. “You should have written back, telling me to beat it for The Hothouse and saying that, come snow, September the woolly fifth would see you here.”

“Oh, you ungrateful girl! What if I had?”

“Then,” said Belinda, with a dazzling smile, “then I should have come on the fourth.”

“*What?*” screamed Ivan, leaping up.

“Hush,” said Belinda, laying finger on lip. “You’ll—you’ll wake her.”

“D’you mean,” whispered Ivan hoarsely, “d’you mean you were waiting for me?”

“Listen,” said Belinda. “Do you remember what Forsyth said that day about the Will? He made us read between the lines, didn’t he? He showed us *the implied condition* upon which we were left this villa—that we should enjoy it *together*. Well, that implied condition stuck in my mind. . . . Presently I turned it round. If you remember, he said we ought to reason upon the Will’s behalf. And I asked myself whether, if Colonel Drawbridge had known that we were going to enjoy his home *apart*, he would have left it us. . . . And I came to the conclusion that he wouldn’t. . . . Well, that being so, there was only one thing to be done. *Noblesse oblige*, you know. You can’t take advantage of the dead.”

“Belinda!”

“Wait. That’s only my point of view. There’s no reason on earth why you should adopt it. My conclusion may be all wrong. But if ever I come again, I’ll get hold of Lady Cherubic and I hope you’ll come too. . . . And when—when I marry, Ivan, I shall renounce.”

There was a long silence.

At length—

“I—I thought you were twisting my tail,” said Ivan Pomeroy.

“I know. I—I wasn’t. A girl never twists the tail of a man she respects.”

Pomeroy stepped forward and picked up my lady’s hand.

“I don’t take your view,” he said steadily, “about the Will. The implied condition was blunter and much more precise. You can’t make ‘enjoyment’ a condition—that’s merely a matter of hope. But you can make—wedlock.” The hand began to tremble, and Belinda lifted its fellow and covered her eyes. “Let’s do as you did, dear, and turn it round. If old Drawbridge had known of our bust-up, d’you think he’d ’ve left us this place?”

The girl hesitated. Then—

“He—he might have, Ivan . . . just as—a matter of hope.”

Ivan fell on his knees and drew her hand from her face.

This was all rosy.

“Don’t let’s get out of our depth, dear. There’s something above inducements and villas and old fellows’ whims. Something stronger. It kept me out of this villa for ten long weeks.”

“And me,” whispered Belinda. Ivan put her hands to his lips and let his head fall to her lap. “When you asked me to lunch and said what you did—that day, it made me think . . . And then, suddenly, I was all sorry I hadn’t gone. . . . And then—I thought of the Will. . . . I thought, perhaps if we saw something of each other—not exactly off parade, but at—at home, Ivan. . . .”

The man put his arms about her and kissed her mouth.

“I love you,” he said simply. “I love you far better than ever I did before. When I came in that morning and found you here in the hall, I—I felt I always wanted to find you there when I came in. You looked so wonderful, Belinda.”

With her hands on his shoulders—

“You didn’t behave as though you did.”

“Respect had to be served.”

Belinda nodded gravely.

“That’s right. When you told me off at the last——”

“I beg your pardon, my darling. I didn’t know.”

“How could you, dear? Well, I felt an enormous respect.”

“I wonder you didn’t hate me.”

“I did—till luncheon next day. Like thunder. And then . . .” She hesitated there and slid her arms round his neck. “You looked so nice, my darling, across our own table.”

“My sweet, my sweet . . .”

Ivan rose to his feet and put a hand to his throat.

A moment’s fumbling, and in his hand lay a ring. This was fast to a cord about his neck.

The girl gasped.

“Ivan! Since when?”

“Since the night we tore it,” he said.

He snapped the cord and took her left hand in his.

Then he slid the ring on to her finger and put her palm to his lips. . . .

Her arms were close about him, and her cheek against his.

“Ivan, Ivan, my blessed! *Now I know.* . . . Till a moment ago I wasn’t sure that it wasn’t the Will.”

The man picked her up in his arms.

“You faithless child,” he said. “It was always only a question of finding a way. And then you found it.”

Belinda regarded him with shining eyes.

“That’s easy enough,” she said, “where there’s a Will.”

HUBERT

HUBERT

JULIA STANE WILLOW passed into the cool library, took off her hat, pitched this on to a table, and flung herself into a chair.

"If you want a drink," she said shortly, "toll the bell."

Her *fiancé* limped to the fireplace, dabbed at a button, turned, sank into the depths of a sofa and closed his eyes.

"What a truly leprous day," he murmured. "Six fly-blown flats and four houses in five and a half hours. An' I wouldn't be seen dead in one of them."

Julia shook back her curls.

"That one in Sloane Street wasn't so bad," she said.

"What, the one with the pitch-pine doors and a bathroom like a priest's hole?"

"They weren't pitch-pine," said Julia. "They were maple. Besides, we could easily have them painted. And I don't like too big a bathroom."

"Neither do I," said Hubert Challenger. "But I hate not being able to get off the cork mat. Why, I've been in more roomy limousines."

"I don't know what you do in a bathroom," said Julia, "but I usually bathe. So long as there's room for a tub . . ."

"Ah, that's the trouble," said Hubert. "You see, I dry myself too. Sometimes I even go so far as to put on a good-looking vest before bursting once more upon an expectant world."

"Of course, if you want a bathroom like the Albert Hall. . . ."

"I don't," said Hubert. "That would be too big." His *fiancée* choked. "But the Sloane Street appendix isn't even life-size. Standing in the middle of it, I could bolt the door, lean out of the window, switch on the light, turn on the bath, wash my hands in the basin, and change the bulb—all without moving my feet. Besides, I think two bathrooms 'd earn their keep."

Julia frowned.

"The first house we saw had three."

"Yes, and seven floors," said Hubert. "If it had had a two-way escalator and a couple of non-stop lifts. . . ."

Here a servant entered.

"Gin and ginger-beer?" said his hostess.

"Please."

"Right," said Julia. "And, Perkins, I'll have some tea."

"Very good, miss."

As the door closed—

"Of course," said the lady, "you want to force my hand. You want that flat in Hill Street, and that's that."

"Don't you believe it," said her squire. "I'm for peace in our time. If you want The Eighty-nine Steps, you have 'em. If you want a midget wash-house, say the blinkin' word. After all, we can always cut the cork mat down. I'm only out to——"

"You want that flat in Hill Street," declared Julia. "And you're out to crab everything else. And I suppose by a process of exhaustion you'll get your way."

Hubert Challenger sighed.

" 'Exhaustion' is good," he said wearily. "Never mind. Let me repeat, my lady, that I do not care. I've criticized as a third party, purely to facilitate your choice. As a future inhabitant of the kiosk, you can count me out."

"Don't you take any interest in your own—your own——"

"Dunghill?" said Hubert cheerfully. His *fiancée* stiffened. "To a certain extent. But that extent has been reached."

"Exactly," observed Miss Willow. "It was reached in Hill Street."

"I won't say it wasn't," said Hubert. "First, because it was the forty-second covert we had drawn, and, secondly, because the best is good enough for me. When I've been offered a peach, you can bury the cooking apples under the lilacs. But that's neither here nor there. Bed me down where you like, my dear, and I'll be all grateful."

"Let me congratulate you," said Julia, "upon your sleight of tongue. Of course, it's been done before. 'And whispering "I will ne'er *dis*sent"—

*dis*sented.' Still, the way in which your preference for Hill Street worms its way out of every protest you make is rather precious. Never mind. I'll try and ignore it." Lazily she selected a cigarette. "I think if we painted those pale doors black . . . and the ceilings. . . ."

"And the walls," said Hubert. "Don't forget the walls."

Miss Willow frowned.

Then—

"It would be very effective," she continued, crossing her legs.

"One moment," said her swain. "Are you being serious?"

"Why not?" said Miss Willow. "Black is most decorative."

"It's damned suggestive," said Hubert. "Fancy shaving in a black bathroom. You couldn't help cutting yourself, could you?"

"I really don't know," said Julia. "But if you did—well, the sponge would be within reach, wouldn't it?" She paused to light her cigarette. "I repeat that, properly done in black, that flat would be most effective."

"All right," said Challenger. "I don't care. Have it black outside, too, if you like. That might tempt them to let us change the name—4, Coroner's Court, 'd sound very well. Telegraphic address, Morgue."

Julia waved her cigarette.

"You see?" she said silkily. "Of course it may be coincidence, but I've only to mention a flat which isn't in Hill Street for you to perceive insuperable objections to our tenancy."

"My dear," said Hubert, "you're talking through your switch. If you had suggested putting Hill Street in black, I should have been still more emphatic. Then it would have been sacrilege as well."

"As well as what?" said Miss Willow.

"Nihilism," said Hubert, and closed his eyes.

There was an indignant silence.

The two were to be married within the month.

The news of their engagement had been received with general satisfaction, for, while there were many young men in love with Julia and many maidens who could have done with Hubert, both were so popular that such as had lost the race felt that they had been beaten by a better horse.

An only child, rich and of great beauty, Miss Willow might well have been spoiled. Her character, however, was proof against such corruption. She was spirited, liked her own way, but she was not headstrong. Upon occasion she would take the bit in her teeth, but that was as much out of play as anything else. There was no vice in her. Her charm was swift: all she did she did eagerly: if she was careless, hers was a careless age. Her admirable figure was always admirably dressed, her little feet perfectly shod. Some men swore by her eyes, which were grey, others by her exquisite mouth; but all were most proud of her acquaintance and adored her company.

Hubert Challenger was a good-looking man. He had a fine record, a keen sense of humour, and a way of getting where he wanted to go at once more effectually and with less apparent effort than any man about town. His engagement, therefore, to Julia was good for his soul. He was tall, fair, keen-eyed, a beautiful horseman and a sound judge of men. Although a man of means, he was never idle: his small estate in the country was excellently administered: he was his own bailiff. He was generous, did all he had to do handsomely, was naturally amiable, could be most resolute—if occasion arose. His pleasant personality had much to answer for. Whenever he made an acquaintance, Challenger made a friend.

"Good lord!" cried Julia suddenly, leaping to her feet. "We've never been to see South Street."

Her *fiancé* started guiltily.

"Nor—nor we have," he stammered.

With a withering glance, Julia sped to the mantelpiece and began in feverish haste to powder her nose.

Hubert stared at his watch.

"Don't you think it's a bit late, dear?"

"Why?" demanded Julia over her shoulder. "We said 'before six.' "

"Did—did we?"

"You know we did," said Julia, seizing her hat.

Challenger smothered a groan.

"Let's have tea first," he suggested.

"Then it would be too late, wouldn't it? Hubert, you make me tired."

Challenger laughed wildly.

“Supposing,” he said shakily, “supposing I said I was whacked—whacked to the blinkin’ wide, lame, over at the knees an’ ripe for palsy. Whose fault would that be?”

“Come on,” said Julia shortly. “We can pick up a taxi on the way.”

“Just let me have the drink,” pleaded Challenger. “Not all of it. Just ____”

“When we get back,” said Julia, opening the door. “I’m going without my tea.”

With a frightful look, Hubert rose from the sofa and followed his lady out. . . .

Five minutes later the two were in South Street.

The flat, which had just been finished, took them by storm. It was ideal. Apart from its excellent style, every convenience that the wit of man can devise seemed to have been embodied in its construction. Its walls were sound-proof: so were its ceilings and floors. Its rooms were invisibly lit: it could be centrally heated at will: there were four bathrooms: the servants’ quarters were paved with rubber throughout: the telephone could be connected to a private exchange: there was even a chute to a private posting box in the common hall. Light, airy, perfectly arranged and admirably decorated, it had only come into the market the day before, and that by accident.

The porter who showed them over was patently proud of his charge.

“She’ll go on Monday,” he said. “If you don’t take ’er, madam, there’s plenty as will.”

It was long after six when at last the two emerged, swearing to be at the agents’ on Monday at nine o’clock.

As they slid back to St. James’s—

“Aren’t you thankful I made you come?” piped Julia.

“You darling,” said Hubert and put her hand to his lips. . . .

An hour had gone by, and Challenger, refreshed and comforted, was on the point of taking his leave when Julia knitted her brows.

“I suppose we’re wise,” she said.

Her *fiancé* stared.

"What—what d'you mean—'wise'?" he stammered.

"To take this South Street flat."

Challenger recoiled. For a moment he appeared about to founder. Then he strove to speak—ineffectually.

At length—

"You're tired," he said hoarsely. "That's all. Tired and overwrought."

"Rot," said Julia. "It's this flat or Hill Street, of course. The question is which. Hill Street is very——"

"But it's settled," screamed Hubert. "It was settled two hours ago. The moment we saw——"

"That," said Julia, "is my trouble. Now that I've had time to think, I'm not at all sure that Hill Street wouldn't be best. For one thing——"

"Look here," said Hubert uncertainly. "Yesterday we saw Hill Street. We both found it a most elegant, agreeable apartment, more than suitable to our requirements and cheap at the price. To-day we inspected ten of the most bestial lodgments that ever cumbered the earth. When I ventured to compare them with Hill Street I was reviled as a slow belly."

"How dare you?" said Julia. "I never——"

"That," said Hubert, "was what you inferred. To-night—thanks entirely to your tireless enterprise, which I readily confess I did my best to embarrass—we totter slap into H.M.'s Dolls' House—life-size. . . . Well, we both go wild about Harry. We rise up and call one another blessed. For an hour we stagger deliriously about our future home, repeatedly disclosing to each other its perfectly manifest excellence and fatuously declaring our relish by word and deed. The idea of comparing it with its predecessors never occurred to me. It wouldn't have occurred to anyone, because—it is incomparable."

"So you think," said Julia.

"So did you. Now—one brief hour after we've left it, you begin to boggle at what you call the wisdom of pickin' the godsend up."

He flung up his hands with a despairing gesture and subsided heavily upon the club-kerb.

"I'm afraid the gent's fickle," said Julia, "as well as selfish." Challenger set his teeth. "On Friday Hill Street has it. On Saturday South Street's the

peach. I wonder what'll win it on Monday."

"Monday?" cried Hubert. "You don't mean to suggest——"

"Why not?" said Julia.

Her *fiancé* drew in his breath.

"If you seek sorrow on Monday, you seek it alone."

"Don't be absurd," said Julia.

"I'm not being absurd," raved Hubert. "The whole thing's monstrous. One of us is insane."

"I agree," said Miss Willow. "But for me, you'd 've taken Hill Street. Now I've shown you something better you're all over that. On Monday ——"

"You admit it's better?"

"Not at all. We've got to make up our minds between the three. If we had those doors gilded—— Where are you going?"

"I'm going to some place where I can burst," said Hubert wildly. "I don't want to do it here. I've no quarrel with your parents."

"Have you a quarrel with me?"

"I soon shall have," said Challenger, wiping his brow. "It's eighty-eight in the shade, I've walked about sixteen miles over bare boards, and now I'm expected to sit still and watch you tear everything up out of sheer, wanton, blasphemous caprice. It's enough to induce a blood-clot."

"Of course," said Julia, "you're making me simply hate South Street. That's my nature, you know. I'm really too easy-going. Treat me nicely, and I'll eat right out of your hand from morning to night. But if you try and ram something down my throat, it just revolts me."

"First the truth," said her squire, "and then the fiction. If you were easy-going, we shouldn't have visited over half a hundred private residences in six days. Unless I was easy-going and a full-marks fool, I shouldn't have gone with you. As for——"

"When I said 'easy-going,' " said Julia, "I did not mean 'indolent' or 'labour-shy.' "

"And when I called you 'capricious,' " retorted Challenger, "I meant 'capricious' with a well-known adverb in front." Two red spots appeared in

Miss Willow's cheeks. Hubert proceeded vigorously, "For Heaven's sake, Julia, pull up your socks. By noon on Monday I'll bet that flat has gone. The next fool that sees it won't wait. And while we're sweating up strange staircases, wondering whether we should be wise to have the Sloane Street doors nickel-plated or the bathrooms at Hill Street filled in, the last word in habitations will be signed over. Then I suppose I shall get it for being dilatory."

Julia rose to her feet.

"Wrong again," she said. "You won't even get it for being abusive—because you won't be engaged." The man's lips tightened. "This little episode, Hubert, has opened my eyes. And I fear that life with you in South Street or anywhere else would be just a shade too exacting for this little girl."

There was a moment's silence.

Then—

"As you please," said Hubert carelessly.

The girl hesitated.

"I—I'm afraid I can't give you back your ring, because I've lost it."

"What?"

"Lost it," said Julia coolly. "You know. Like 'mislaid'—only worse. I know I had it this morning when we started out: but it was a bit big, if you remember, and it must have slipped off."

Challenger swallowed violently.

"When did you miss it?" he demanded.

"About two minutes ago—when you first went off the deep end. I started to take it off then, only it wasn't there. I've been wondering what to do ever since. You see, it's never happened to me before, and for the moment I was rather nonplussed. Then it occurred to me that, after all, a ring's only a symbol, and its giving or restoration purely a matter of form—so why worry? As soon as I find it, I'll send it you."

"I see," said Hubert drily. "Well, I'm afraid I don't quite agree. For one thing, this happened to be rather a good, er, symbol. For another, I might very well need it to offer to somebody else. For another, you're only human."

"What do you mean?"

Challenger rose.

"I mean that if the search for a symbol which is no longer symbolic, the discovery of which will only benefit a man you dislike, is to be seriously prosecuted, some incentive is necessary. Pending, therefore, its return, I shall not regard our engagement, however inconvenient, as broken off."

Miss Willow yawned.

"I'm not concerned with how you regard it," she said.

"I'm sure of that," said Hubert suavely. "But I think other people's views might interest you. Should anybody seem to think that we are no longer engaged, I shall explain the position."

Speechless with indignation, Julia regarded him.

At length—

"I should bring an action," she flamed, "for Breach of Promise."

Mournfully Hubert shook his head.

"I've nothing in writing," he said. "Besides, it's the symbol I want. So the correct action would be one for Detinue. I wonder which one you dropped it in," he added musingly. "I seem to remember some felt being down somewhere, and it may have been there. That would account for our not hearing it fall." He knitted his brows. "Now, where was that blinkin' felt? Oh, I know. It was at The Eighty-nine Steps."

"Must you rush off?" said Julia shakily.

"Must, I'm afraid," said Hubert, opening the door. "Sleep well, sweetheart. I'll ring up one day next week—just to say I'm alive."

A moment later he let himself out of the house.

* * * * *

Twenty-four hours had gone by.

"George," said Miss Willow, "do you love me?"

Setting his elbows upon the severing march of table-cloth, George Fulke crowded into his eyes as much devotion as they would hold.

"You are my star," he said fervently.

“Good,” said Julia. “Well, now let’s come down to earth. I wired for you because I’m in need of a—a——”

“Knight?” suggested George Fulke.

“Yes, but dismounted,” said Miss Willow. “Don’t be soppy. This table isn’t round. . . . And now listen. Entirely between you and me, I want to break off my engagement.”

“Julia darling!”

“That’s better,” said Miss Willow. “Now listen again. I tell you I want to break it, and so I do. But I can’t do it.”

“Why on earth not?” cried Fulke.

“Because I’ve lost my ring. It was a perfectly beautiful ring—an enormous solitaire emerald. Heaven knows what it was worth. And of course I can’t possibly fire Hubert without handing it back.”

George found his moustache and pulled it respectfully.

“But supposing,” he said, “supposing you can’t find it.”

“I *must* find it,” said Julia. “At least, you must.” She produced a sheaf of papers. “There are some ‘orders to view.’ The ring’s in one of those flats—or houses: I don’t know which. I may have dropped it in a taxi, but I don’t think so. All you’ve got to do is to go and ask to see over these places as if you wanted to take them. Then, while you’re being shown round, you can look for the ring.”

Fulke received the papers with a bewildered air.

“I see,” he said slowly, counting. “Ten. You’ve no idea which, of course.”

“Not the remotest,” said Julia, sipping her coffee. “But you might find it in the first.”

“I might, of course,” said Fulke thoughtfully. “Have you been to Scotland Yard?”

“Not yet,” said Julia.

“Well, I’ll go there first,” said George. “Just in case——”

“No, I’ll go to Scotland Yard. You must start on the flats. There isn’t a moment to lose. Supposing a caretaker found it.”

“They’d probably take it to the police.”

“They’d probably freeze on to it,” said Julia. “I know I should. It’s a most beautiful ring.”

Fulke drank some champagne.

“I think,” he said uneasily, “I think when I ask to see over, I’d better say why I’ve come.”

“Why?”

“Well, they’ll think I’m mad or something—staring all over the floors.”

“Not if you do it properly. You see, my dear, you mustn’t give it away. If you do, they won’t half show you round, and the moment you’re gone they’ll go through the place with a tooth-comb.”

“All right,” said Fulke gloomily. “I don’t care. Only, if I do find it there’ll be a hell of a row. They’re bound to see me pick it up, and if it looks as valuable as you say it is——”

“Then you can explain,” said Julia, lighting a cigarette. “Once it’s found, you can tell them that that’s what you came for. The great thing is to find it.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Fulke. “It’s the goin’ I’m thinkin’ about. If I don’t find it, they’ll think I’m mad: if I do find it, they’ll think I’m a thief: and if I try to explain, they’ll probably knock me down. . . . However, if it’s going to bring you freedom . . .”

“That’s a dear,” said Julia.

There was a moment’s silence.

Then—

“Look here,” said George suddenly. “Why did you send for me?”

Miss Willow, who had been about to drink, set down her cup.

“Because I knew you would help.”

“Why?”

“Because you love me,” said Julia boldly.

Fulke emptied his glass.

“If I find it,” he said, “will you marry me?”

Miss Willow started. This was not according to plan. For a moment she thought very fast. Then—

“You’re too young, dear,” she said gently. “You shall take me about, I promise—until I’m engaged again. And I’ll be awfully nice. But I couldn’t marry you, George.”

“Then where,” said George slowly, “where do I come in?”

There was a pregnant silence.

At length—

“I thought,” said Julia coldly, “that I was your star.”

“You told me to come down to earth,” said Fulke doggedly.

“You called yourself my knight.”

“You told me to dismount,” was the disconcerting reply.

“You said you loved me,” said Julia.

“So I do. But I’ve had some. When you got engaged to Hubert, it broke me up. And now I’m wise, Julia. I’m not going through it again.”

“D’you mean you won’t help me?” cried Julia.

“I’ll go to Scotland Yard.”

There was another silence.

“But, George darling,” purred Julia, “you don’t understand. Marriage is merely a form—a worldly ceremony. Sooner or later every girl has to take her place. It’s a cruel law, but then Convention is cruel—where girls are concerned. And so I’ve got to conform. But that doesn’t mean that I want to. My heart will always be in your care.”

“Nothing doing,” said Fulke shortly. “You mightn’t think it, but I’ve already got Sarah Pardoner’s and Nell Herrick’s. I reminded Sarah of that about six weeks ago, but all she said was that she was glad it had a good home: and when I told Nell she only shrieked with laughter and said that if it wasn’t claimed soon I’d better sell it to defray expenses.”

“Of course, you’ve changed,” said Julia shakily. “You’ve become commercial. I used to think you were the one man I knew who wasn’t out for himself.”

“Nor I was—once. But it’s worn off. You’ve no idea of the dirty work I’ve done—all women’s, of course. And often enough before I was through they’ve forgotten they asked me to do it. As for being grateful . . .” He let

the sentence go and struck a match with great violence. “Look at Madrigal Chichele,” he added.

“What about Madrigal?”

“She told me she was tied up for money and wanted to raffle her Rolls, and would I sell the tickets, as it was awkward for her? Well, I went to no end of trouble. Got the car photographed and went all over the place selling tickets at a quid a time. I touched people all over the Continent—complete strangers. Once a week I wrote to Madrigal to say how I was getting on. One day I ran into her in Bond Street. ‘Oh,’ says she, ‘I’ve been meaning to write to you, George. I’ve sold the car.’ ”

“What did you say?” said Julia, struggling with laughter.

“I don’t know what I said,” said George wearily. “I know I damned near died there and then. I tried to explain it was fraud: but she said that was all rot, and that it often happened, and that all I had to do was to give the money back.”

“How—how many tickets had you sold?” said Julia tearfully.

“Over six hundred,” said Fulke. “Half of them haven’t seen their money—never will see it. I don’t know where they are. I tell you, complete strangers came in on the deal. I’m afraid to go abroad. . . . Well, that sort of thing’s learned me. I like to know where I am and where I come in.”

“But I can’t say I’ll marry you, George. I’m engaged to Hubert.”

Fulke handed the papers back.

“Sorry,” he said, “but this is no ordinary job. If you wanted me to take you to Goodwood or Lords or The Zoo or something like that, I should be tickled to death. But I’m not giving any more pints of my blood away.”

“George,” pleaded Julia, “you’re not going to let me down.”

“I shouldn’t think of such a thing,” said Fulke. “But I’m not going to help you out of one preserve into another. It’s not good enough. You seem to forget I love you.”

“But if the ring isn’t found I shall have to marry him. D’you want me to do that?”

George shrugged his shoulders.

“Hubert’s all right,” he said. “I’d just as soon it was him as somebody else. I rather like Hubert.”

Miss Willow sat back in her chair and regarded her hands. These were small and beautifully shaped. She remembered that Hubert had once said that he would rather kiss her fingers than any other woman's lips. Suddenly it occurred to her that she rather liked Hubert too. . . .

Of course, his behaviour had been monstrous. It had been very hot, certainly. Abnormally hot. But that was no excuse. Still. . . . He had had no right to do it—not a shadow of right, but he had spoken the truth. She *had* been outrageously capricious—for the love of the thing. She had meant to pull his leg, and had twisted his tail. She had deliberately devilled him just to see how far she could go: and, before she knew where she was, she had gone too far. . . . Of course, that was no excuse. Still . . .

Suddenly she remembered that Hubert had a game leg.

All those miles with a knee that wasn't sound, that, when it was tired, hurt. . . . And he had never pleaded it . . . never so much as referred. . . .

And George Fulke was demanding to occupy Hubert's stall. . . . George Fulke . . .

Julia sat up in her chair and picked up the reins.

"What are your terms?" she said.

"Marriage," said George laconically. "Our engagement to be announced within one month of yours and Hubert's being called off. Then I'll spread myself, Julia. Hang it, I shall have something to sweat for."

"Of course you're spoiled," said Miss Willow. "Utterly spoiled."

"In other words, I'm not such a mug as I was. Well, you can thank Sarah and Co. for that."

"D'you still pretend you love me?"

"I'm mad about you," said George. "It's just because I'm so mad that I can't and won't go and hand you to somebody else. Why, I'd—I'd never get over it."

"But if this is how we get engaged, what will our marriage be like?"

"Julia," said Fulke earnestly, "I'll do you a blinkin' treat. I really will. You know me pretty well, and you know it isn't my nature to want to see your money before I deliver the goods. I'm only doing it now in self-defence. If you'd been stung like me, you'd be doing it too. Once I've got you I'll never bargain again."

"Would you be kind to me, George?"

In a trembling voice George protested that he would be insanely kind.

"Very well," said Julia, returning the 'orders to view.' "I accept your terms. Find the ring, and a month after my engagement to Hubert's been officially cancelled——"

"Oh, you darling!" said Fulke rapturously.

"Hush," said Julia. "You're not there yet, you know. Listen. There's a house with no end of stairs in Prince's Gardens. I think I should try that first. But between the others there's really nothing to choose."

"Good," said Fulke enthusiastically.

That Julia was as wise as she was pretty is a true saying. But, what is more to the point, she was wiser than Fulke.

George made an admirable swain. As a husband, he would have been a complete failure. This was generally recognized. Mrs. Pardoner had seen it, and so had Mrs. Herrick. Miss Willow was no whit less shrewd. Besides . . .

When, therefore, she accepted his terms, she knew what he did not suspect—that of his innocence he had left her a loophole of dimensions so ample that it was resembling a grand entrance.

In a word, while she very much wanted her ring—it being a beautiful gaud and of great value—she had not the slightest intention of becoming disengaged.

That Fulke's cake, then, was dough is perfectly plain.

Secured by this comfortable reflection, Miss Willow was in very good cue. The bargain struck, George had recaptured his former excellence and had made very seasonable love. She held great expectation of his finding the ring, and was more than thankful to be spared the grisly ordeal of revisiting her haunts of Saturday upon such a delicate quest. As for Hubert, her peace must be made with honour: but that, she decided, should not be difficult. Indeed, by the time she had parted with George and was once more at home she had become quite hopeful that Hubert would make the first move.

The sight of a note addressed in his well-known hand set the seal upon her content.

She opened it with a faint smile.

My dear Julia,

I'm afraid I didn't play the game yesterday evening.

What does the rotten ring matter? It's served its turn. If it doesn't turn up, let it lie. If it does, keep it 'with my love.' Any old way I've written to The Times, *telling them to insert the usual notice. You know. 'The marriage arranged, etc., will not take place.'*

Yours,
HUBERT.

After one frightful moment, Julia fell upon the telephone.

Two minutes later she was curtly informed that Captain Challenger was out of town.

* * * * *

"It's no good you seein' over," said the porter at Sloane Street. "The flat's took."

"I see," said George thoughtfully. "I see. It—it wasn't took—taken on Saturday."

"Oo said it was?" said the porter, who was of the new school.

George felt for a note.

"Look here," he said. "I want to see over this flat. I don't care whether it's taken or whether it isn't. I think it'll just suit me—provided the floors are good."

"They aren't," said the porter. "They're rotten."

George swallowed.

"Well, you let me see for myself. If you're busy, you needn't come. You won't lose by it, you know," and with that he fingered a note.

The porter leaned against the wall.

"Now, wot are you gettin' at?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said George indignantly. "I just want to see that flat. From what—what I've heard, it'll suit me down to the ground."

"But I tell you it's took."

“That doesn’t matter,” said George. “If it suits me I’ll square the other fellow somehow.”

The porter looked George up and down.

As if without thinking, George reinforced the note.

“Yes, that’s all right,” said the porter. “I see the two ’alf-quids. But I’m goin’ to get into trouble over this show. Once a flat’s took, it’s took. I ain’t got no business to let you inside.”

“No one need know,” said George thoughtlessly.

“Yes, they need,” said the porter. “Wot if you wants to ’ave it? The firs’ thing the agent’ll say is, ‘ ’Ow did you get inside?’ ”

George began to hate the porter very much.

“That’s easy enough,” he said. “I shall say I saw it on Saturday afternoon.”

There was a silence.

“Let’s ’ave a look at that ‘order,’ ” said the porter suddenly.

For the ninth time that day an ‘order to view’ passed.

“Are you Keptin Chellenger?”

“That’s right,” said George boldly.

The porter folded the ‘order’ and put it away.

“Right-oh,” he said shortly.

They passed to the second floor. . . .

“This is the ’all,” said the porter supererogatively.

“I see,” said George, raking the floor with his eyes. “It’s—it’s not very light, is it?”

“Depen’s wot you want to see,” was the dark reply.

George began to wish that he had given Sloane Street a miss.

That the porter’s suspicions were aroused was manifest. He stuck to Fulke as a policeman sticks to his prey. Thus embarrassed, the latter’s endeavours to behave like a prospective tenant lost much of the life which they had begun to acquire, while any proper prosecution of his search was out of the question. The tour of the gaunt rooms became a hideous business —costly, futile, critical. What he should do in the actual event of discovery,

Fulke tried not to consider. He supposed vaguely that there would be a free fight. All the time an inexplicable feeling that he was what children call 'warm' pricked the unhappy youth into the cannon's mouth. . . .

Presently they came to the bathroom.

This was laid with cork carpet of dark green hue. Falling upon it, a ring would hardly be heard: lying upon it, an emerald might well escape detection.

Fulke's eyes almost left his head.

The chamber was small enough, but one's view of the floor was obstructed. The basin got in the way: the bath could have hidden about five hundred rings.

Frantically George sought an excuse for dalliance.

"I—I like this room," he said, looking up and around as though he were in a cathedral.

"No accountin' for tastes," said the porter, folding his arms.

Fulke frowned.

Then he tapped the linoleum with his foot.

"Does this go with the flat?" he said.

"Wot?" said the porter, staring.

"This linoleum."

The porter eyed Fulke with a supreme contempt.

"Oh, less of it," he said. "Ten feet o' secon'-'and lino in a six-'undred-quid flat. An' you ask if it goes. Why, it ain't worth——"

"I happen to know something about linoleum," lied Fulke furiously. "Why, if I told the Stores to put a new piece down, they'd charge me about ten pounds."

"Would they, though?" said the porter. "They must 'ave got your number."

There was an unpleasant silence.

At length—

"I—I take it the bath works all right," said George desperately.

"It don't leak," said the porter, "if that's wot you mean."

Once more George looked round, racking his brain and trying to remember that one day the porter would die.

Then he turned to the basin and pushed back his cuffs.

"I think I'll wash my hands," he announced. "Can you get me a towel?"

"An' then you're wrong," said the porter. "There ain't no water."

George could have broken his neck.

Instead, he turned to the window, trying to keep his head and wondering vaguely what constituted 'justifiable homicide.'

Suddenly the idea flashed, and he swung on his heel.

"Who's that?" he said sharply, and listened.

The porter started.

"Ooze wot?" he said.

"Somebody closed the front door."

The porter slipped out of the room and tiptoed towards the hall.

Instantly George fell upon his face. . . .

He had one arm beneath the bath when the porter reappeared.

"Thort as much," said the latter, "you young cunnin' brute. An' now I 'ave got yer—cold. You're for it, my son. I wouldn' give much fer your chances. 'Tempt ter commit a felony—that's wot it is. Stolen 'order to view'—passin' yerself orf as Keptin Chellenger—temptin' ter bribe . . . *an' all fer a little green stone as don' belong to yer*."

George extricated his arm and rose to his feet.

"Don't be a fool," he said shortly. "When was it found?"

The porter entered the bathroom and approached to Fulke's a perfectly furious countenance.

" 'Fool'?" he breathed. " 'Fool' did joo say?"

George recoiled, and the face proportionately advanced. Its eyes were blazing: its chin protruded out of all reason.

"You 'as the blarsted nerve to call me a fool. You 'as——"

There was not much room to duck, but Fulke did it.

As the fist sang over his shoulder, he landed a vicious punch.

The porter staggered backwards. Then the porcelain rim caught him under the hocks, and it was all over.

As he fell into the bath, George slid out of the room and, finding a key in the door, turned it gratefully.

A moment later he was streaking up Sloane Street. . . .

* * * * *

It was, perhaps, ten minutes later that Julia, frantic, ran Hubert Challenger to earth.

"Hubert, where have you been?"

"Hurlingham," said Hubert calmly. "How lovely you look."

"Not all day?"

"Very nearly. I came up to town this morning, did one or two jobs of work and——"

"At your rooms they said you were in Bucks: at Bucks they said you were in town: I wired to each of your clubs and half the restaurants in London: I——"

"You also warned the barber," said Hubert. "Only a genius would have thought of that. I've come straight along."

"Can you stop that notice going in?"

"With the acme of ease," said Hubert. "I haven't posted the letter."

"But you said——"

"I said I'd written, dear. I didn't say I'd posted it."

Torn between relief and indignation, Julia felt rather faint.

"Hubert," she said weakly, sinking on to the arm of a chair, "I may tell you you've shortened my life. Last night I dined with George Fulke."

"Naturally," said Hubert, sitting down. "They all do. As a second string, George's position is unique. And I'm glad you did. I rather like George."

"Well, I don't," said Julia. "He's—he's utterly spoiled."

"In other words," said Hubert, "he's getting wise. Don't say he's done it on you."

“He behaved abominably. I told him to find the ring. D’you know he actually tried to bargain with me?”

“Quite right too,” said Hubert. “Why shouldn’t he have a look in? What was his price?”

“Only me,” said Julia. “If he found the ring I was to marry him.”

Challenger nodded approval.

“It is clear,” he said, “that George is finding himself. What did you say?”

“I said that if he found the ring he could announce our engagement one month after yours and mine had been cancelled.”

Challenger opened his eyes.

“You must like George very much.”

“I wouldn’t be seen dead with him.”

“Then where,” said Hubert, “is the snag?”

Julia hesitated.

“I—I said ‘officially cancelled.’ You know. Put in *The Times*. But I never meant it to be done. I—I thought we could just tell people.”

“Oh, what a dirty one,” said Hubert.

“It wasn’t at all,” said Julia indignantly. “Besides, he asked for it. He tried to do me down. . . . And then—then I got your letter.”

“Ah,” said Hubert. “That shortened George’s price.”

“It was two to one on him,” cried Julia. “You’d disappeared: he’d only to find the ring—and that he did, my dear, quite early this morning.” She held up a delicate finger, at once adorning and adorned by a magnificent gem. “A messenger-boy——”

Challenger looked down his nose.

“As a matter of fact, he was scratched at half-past nine. I found the symbol, my lady, and sent it along.”

Julia started to her feet.

“*You*—found—it?”

“I,” said Hubert, “with my little eye. I found the ring. I happened upon it, as they say, in the course of a job of work.”

"Where?"

Challenger rose to his feet.

"Julia," he said, "after the barber had cleansed me I was going to call upon you. I was going to beg your pardon and ask you very humbly to have another dart. I don't want to stimy George, but I've taken Sloane Street on a seven years' lease, and——"

"Hubert, you haven't!"

"Why not, dear? I took it first thing this morning, and, being so close, I just felt round for the ring. There it was—in the midst of the bathroom. I gave the porter a fiver just for luck, and——"

"But, Hubert, I've taken South Street."

"*Julia!*"

Miss Willow nodded. Then she put out her hands, and Challenger caught them in his.

"You were perfectly right," she said. "You always are. South Street is incomparable. And I thought, perhaps, if you didn't think me too capricious to live with . . . in South Street . . ."

"My blessed darling," said Hubert, with his cheek against hers. "My beautiful——"

Here the telephone stammered an interruption.

Challenger kissed his lady. Then he lifted his head.

"George," he said, "for a monkey."

Miss Willow picked up the receiver.

"Is that you, Julia?" cried Fulke.

"Oh, George," said Miss Willow, "I am so glad you rang up. I want you to do something for me."

There was a choking noise.

At length—

"Not—not really?" said Fulke hysterically. "What about the ring?"

"Oh, I've got the ring all right. This is instead. Among those 'orders' I gave you was one for a flat in Sloane Street. We took it this morning, but now we've seen one we like better. Will you go and tell the porter to go on

showing the flat? Just mention Hubert's name, and—— Hullo, hullo! Are you there? Are you there?"

But George had rung off.

And now Julia Challenger has superseded Madrigal Chichele.

TITUS

TITUS

"I TELL you," said Titus, "you should have married money."

"If you like to put it that way," said Mrs. Cheviot, "there's nothing to stop you."

"My dear," said her husband, "it happens to be the truth. Three thousand a year's no earthly use to you."

"It would be if I had my share."

Titus took out a note-book and put a glass in his eye.

"This is May," he announced. "The twelfth of May. I don't know exactly how much you consider your share, but since the beginning of the year you've had seven hundred and ninety for clothes alone."

"You would write it down," said Blanche contemptuously.

"If you mean that it's like me," said Cheviot, "that isn't true. But we've had these discussions before, and the absence of any figures has materially helped your case. In the first place, I've always put it too low—to be on the safe side. In the second, you've always sworn that I put it too high."

"I suppose you want me to be dressed."

Titus took down his eyeglass and put his note-book away.

"You were clothed," he said, "as a spinster. I remember it perfectly. But two hundred a year was all you had to do it on."

"Are you suggesting——"

"I'm suggesting nothing," said Cheviot. "I'm pointing out hard facts."

"I suppose you consider you're very generous."

"Well, I don't think I'm stingy. Seven hundred and ninety quid in less than——"

"It would interest me to know what you consider my share."

“I don’t know,” said Titus. “I don’t pretend to know. The flat and the car cost about eighteen hundred. I spend about a hundred——”

“We could live much more cheaply,” said Blanche.

“I don’t quite see why we should.”

“Exactly. You choose the style in which we live. If we spent less money on that, we should have more money to spend on other things.”

“Such as clothes,” said Titus. “What a truly solemn thought. Never mind. You chose the flat when I was out of town. And the car.”

“Because I knew you wouldn’t be content with anything else.”

“In fact, you sank your wishes to do me pleasure?”

“I did—like a fool,” said Blanche.

“You covered it up very well,” said Cheviot. “When the flat in St. James’s fell through, you cried all night. And that was more expensive.”

“It’s no good talking,” said Blanche. “You don’t understand. In America ——”

“I know,” said Titus. “I know. In America you’d have four-fifths of my income, and I should pay for your furs. All I can say is I’m damned glad I’m English.”

“In America men work.”

“Is that your trouble? Well, I’ve worked pretty hard in my time and I’m forty-two. Moreover, I’ve got a game leg. Never mind. What about the car?”

“Well, what about it?” said Blanche defiantly.

“This,” said her husband. “You say that you chose it because you knew that I should not be content with anything else. Do you remember the car I used to have?”

“Did you expect me to go about in that?”

Cheviot sighed.

“I expected nothing,” he said. “That is the art of life. Then you don’t feel such a mug when you find a wiggle-woggle in your grease.”

Mrs. Cheviot shuddered.

“Need you be disgusting?” she said.

"I need," said Titus violently. "Dudgeon will out. For the last nine months I've fought like a super-fiend to keep our home together, and here you are doin' your level best to break it up. I love you. I want you to blaze. I want you to put it across all other Eves. But you *have*—you *do*—you can't help it. The clothes you wear don't count. If you wore a set of loose covers, you'd get there just the same. But will you see it? No. Somehow you've made up your mind you've got to splurge." He jumped to his feet and started to pace the room. "Well, if you must, you shall—on eight hundred a year. I can't spring another cent. You talk about living cheaper—cutting out the flat and the car. But what's the use of sables if you live an' move in Clapham an' have to come up by tram? Don't think I care—I don't. But how will it help you on? To get your effect you must soak in a bit all round. If you want the fun of the fair, you must split up your pence. If you blue them all on the swings, you can't go on the roundabouts."

"Who said 'live in Clapham'?" said Blanche.

"I did," said Titus. "I also said 'come up by tram,' an' I meant what I said. Your words were 'live much more cheaply.' Did you mean what you said?"

"I didn't say 'pig it,' " said Mrs. Cheviot.

"They don't pig it in Clapham," said Titus. "They live much better than us. But they live much more cheaply too—for obvious reasons. They don't feed five servants for one thing—they've too much sense."

"We must keep our end up," said Blanche. "The Willoughbys have started a second chauffeur. At least, they're trying to find one."

"They'd better have ours," said Titus. "If we cut out the car——"

"Don't be a fool," said Blanche. "We must have a car and we must have a decent address. We must be served, and I must be well turned out. If——"

"Exactly," said Titus. "Now let's translate that saying. What you really mean is, 'We must have a Rolls, and I won't live West of Park Lane. We must have at least five servants, and I've got to dress accordin' an' a big bit over.' Well, that's all glorious, but the brutal answer's this. Someone once said in his thirst that to get a quart into a pint pot was beyond the power of miserable man. Well, the converse is equally melancholy and equally true. The man who can get a quart *out of* a pint pot has never been foaled—or if he has, my dear, his name's not Titus. And there we are. We've three thousand pounds a year—to spend. If you can divide it by ten an' get six hundred for answer, I'll climb up the nearest steeple an' push myself off."

He flung himself into a chair and put his head in his hands. “I’m not certain that wouldn’t be the best move, any way. Then at least you wouldn’t——”

“Ti, Ti, how can you talk like that?” Blanche was down on her knees with her arms round her husband’s neck. “I’m a selfish sweep, Ti, and you’re an angel.”

“Rot!” said her husband, taking her in his arms.

“I am, I am. It’s the truth. You give, and I take—all the time. I take and take and take. What fun do you have? None. Every penny you can spare—more goes on my back. And then when we’re up against it I kick and scream. Ti, I’m ashamed of myself.”

“I can’t bear it,” said Titus brokenly. “Why shouldn’t you have a show?”

“I do—I have. You give me a wonderful show. Everything I’ve wanted I’ve always had. There isn’t a husband like you in all the world. You’ve given up thing after thing—you know you have. You never hunt now, you wear the same old suits, you’ve chucked the Bath and the Bachelors’——”

“Never went inside ’em,” muttered Titus. “What was the good of——”

“You gave them up to save money—for me to blow. And I—I let you do it. I traded upon your love. I let you go hungry whilst I was bolting your share. And then . . .” Blanche covered her face and burst into tears. “I’m a rotten thief,” she sobbed, “a rotten, selfish——”

“Blanche, my lady,” begged Titus, “don’t cry about me. It’s amused me to death to give you what little I could. It’s been my delight to see you enjoying life. And when you say I’ve let you drink my liquor it isn’t true. I’ve done myself proud all the time.”

“You’ve given up cigars,” wailed Blanche. “And you swapped your one pearl pin for an arrow to go in my hat.”

“Have a heart, my beauty, have a heart. You’re the only thing I’ve got, and if it gives me pleasure to——”

“I asked for ‘my share,’ Ti. I actually asked for ‘my share.’ Why didn’t you get up and shake me when I asked for ‘my share’?”

“I damned near did,” said Titus. “But it seemed a pity to disturb you—you looked so sweet. Half on an’ half off the table, with your precious chin exalted and a couple of hands in your lap. I don’t wonder I’m mad about you.”

Blanche continued to weep violently, refusing to be comforted. Titus sat down beside her and did what he could. The terrier, greatly distressed, alternately nosed his patrons and lay on his back before them with his paws in the air. . . .

Presently the telephone-bell began to throb.

Titus left the room to reply to the call.

Once outside the door, he covered his eyes.

"It's coming," he said brokenly. " 'There isn't a husband like you in all the world.' That's what she said. Oh, my blessed darling, our summer's coming again."

Titus had wooed a lady that loved him heart and soul and had married one that had come to love only herself. This was his own fault. Blanche Dudoy Guest was a darling, and he had spoiled her to death.

Their engagement had been childishly happy—a glorious summer of content. Then they were married less than a year ago, and instantly winter had set in.

Titus did what he could and, though he was no fool, made a pack of mistakes. This was easy. Blanche out of humour was the devil and all. The winter, which had never been kindly, began to grow harsh.

With it all, the man never lost heart.

He could not believe that his darling was gone for good, that the selfish woman of the world usurping her throne would not one day be dislodged. He told himself fiercely that one day summer would return—that peerless season when she had returned his love and had cared for the light in his eyes.

And now, for the first time since their marriage, Blanche had shown him affection though he brought her no gift. More. The darling had turned and rent the woman of the world.

It was the first swallow.

Summer was coming back.

When Titus re-entered the room, his wife, who was stroking the terrier, looked up with shining eyes.

"I've got it, old fellow," she said. "I know what my trouble is. I've nothing to do."

Titus Cheviot stared.

"This is reaction," he said. "You stay where you are, sweetheart, and I'll get you a drink."

"No, it isn't," said Blanche. "I'm sane as sane. I've not been happy, you know—splashing about. That's really why I splurged. I felt if I went all out perhaps I'd get there. I haven't, of course. You never do. That way there's nowhere to get. Then again—without an anchor I'm frightfully weak. I'm not a waster by nature, but put me among the wasters and I'll waste away. I must have an anchor, Ti—an object in life. When you first knew me I had one. It was—to marry you. Then I lost that anchor . . . last June . . . in Eaton Square. . . . Since then . . . Ti, my dear, I'm going to open a shop."

"Moses' boots," said Titus, sitting down on a chair. "What are you going to purvey?"

"Brains," said Blanche. "My brains. And yours, if you will. It'll cost us next to nothing except the rent. And we ought to make that on our heads. If we make no more, it doesn't matter. I shall have something to do. But we must have a decent pitch."

"Of course," said Titus, "of course you've got me beat. I thought you sold brains by the pound."

"Ideas, my darling, ideas. *The Cheviots, Decorators.* We've each got an excellent eye. You can do the halls and libraries, and I'll do the drawing-rooms. We shall be frightfully *chic* and outrageously expensive. But we must have a decent pitch."

Titus put a hand to his head.

"I don't know about the *chic*," he said dazedly, "but I shall be expensive all right. I'm sure of that. Almost costly. By the time they've paid me a tenner and then paid somebody else two tenners to rub it all out and do it again——"

"A tenner?" cried Blanche. "Why, you won't look at a room under fifty guineas."

"Oh, here's wickedness! Here's fraud and everything! Fifty guineas to *me* to look at a room? Why, it's almost burglary."

"Not at all," said Blanche stoutly. "If they don't like your taste, that's their funeral. They shouldn't have bought it. But they will. You've a splendid eye. Besides, they won't know any better. And we must ask a wicked price, otherwise no one will buy. The world takes you at your own

valuation—always. I forget who said that, but he knew. Besides, we must become the vogue: and you can't do that unless you're irrationally dear. Once you're off it's too easy. People will simply love to be able to say, 'This is a Cheviot room,' because it'll be tantamount to saying, 'I'm so rich that I blued a hundred on this room before ever the paper went up.' "

"It's a hundred now," said Titus. "I'm getting all hot in the palms. Never mind. Ramp or no, I'm beginnin' to see your point. An', to tell you the truth, I could do with a bit of work—nice, gentle exercise, you know, entailing extended week-ends and entirely suspended during the more important race-meetings."

"That's the idea," said Blanche. "Now what about a pitch?"

Her husband looked down his nose.

"That telephone-call was from Forsyth. He wants to know if I'll take five hundred a year for——"

Blanche leaped to her feet.

"Not 68, Old Bond Street?"

Titus nodded.

"Only the shop, you know. The rest of it's let. Nearly half our income comes from that little old house."

Blanche danced across the room and took his face in her hands.

"It's kept us long enough." She bent and kissed him. "Let's keep it instead."

* * * * *

Had the Cheviots opened a shop because they *had* to make money, they would almost certainly have failed. For one thing, that fair-weather friend, Confidence, would have let them down. As it was, entering the arena of Commerce to kill a time which was waxing obstreperous and being not at all desirous of too extensive a *clientèle*, they were immediately successful beyond all understanding. This, in a way, was no more than they deserved. To say that they did things in style conveys nothing at all. Within one week of the cold June morning when the curtain rose upon 68, Old Bond Street, the name of Cheviot had become a household word. It had become a synonym for '*de luxe*.'

The window was admirably dressed.

Standing upon the pavement, you seemed to be peering into a library. Eight feet from the front yawned a tremendous chimney-piece of chiselled stone, topped by a black oak screen and flanked by shelves laden with precious books. Upon the hearth well-wrought andirons bore a fair fire of logs which flamed and glowed engagingly. A broad, low club-kerb, covered in scarlet, compassed the fireplace, and upon a Kulah hearth-rug of unusual beauty a mighty leather chair, patently bursting with philanthropy—the very lap of Luxury—sprawled in the colours of a cardinal. By the head of the chair rose a slender pillar of bronze, bearing a lamp, and by its side, within reach of any that sat upon such a throne, a massive oaken table carried the decent furniture of drink. There were cigarettes there, too, and an ashtray, and, what was more important, an open book. Who passed might read.

A CHEVIOT ROOM

THAT IS TO SAY,
A ROOM DECORATED ACCORDING TO
THE ADVICE OF

CHEVIOT'S
(FOUNDED 1930)

From time to time hangings on the left parted to admit the pink of footmen, who added fuel to the fire and swept and garnished the hearth before retiring. So soon as it was dusk the footman switched on the lamp, which was heavily shaded. Save for the flickering fire, this was the sole illuminant. Not until half-past eight were the window curtains drawn and 'the Cheviot room' veiled from curious gaze.

The door of the shop admitted to a stately entrance-hall, paved with black and white marble, panelled with old grey oak, invisibly lit. Four aged chancel stalls, each dight with a crimson cushion, faced a pair of huge oak doors hung in the opposite wall. On the left, a superb triptych of the Flemish School surmounted a carved oak chest; on the right, a tall case clock rose between two panels which suggested the brush of Dürer. Upon the ceiling was stencilled a golden cipher, whose interlaced initials seemed to be T.B.C. In the centre of the hall was a table, and by the table a bench, heavily carved and bearing a cushion covered with crimson brocade.

To such as entered the shop a footman immediately appeared and, conducting them to the table, respectfully drew their attention to an ivory horn-book inlaid with ebony lettering.

> UPON REQUEST MR. OR MRS. CHEVIOT WILL VISIT YOUR HOUSE TO SURVEY THE ROOM YOU MAY WISH TO DECORATE.
>
> THEIR OPINION WILL BE SENT TO YOU THE DAY AFTER THEIR VISIT HAS BEEN PAID.
>
> NEITHER FOR THEIR VISIT NOR FOR THEIR OPINION WILL ANY CHARGE BE MADE.
>
> UPON FURTHER REQUEST MR. OR MRS. CHEVIOT WILL REVISIT YOUR HOUSE WHEN THE WORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND, PROVIDED THE DECORATION IS TO THEIR SATISFACTION, WILL BE PREPARED TO AFFIX TO THE CEILING THE BADGE OR CIPHER WHICH ALONE WILL ENTITLE THE CHAMBER TO BE STYLED ‘A CHEVIOT ROOM.’
>
> THEIR FEE FOR AFFIXING THE CIPHER IS FIFTY GUINEAS.
>
> THE INSCRIPTION OF YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS IN THE VOLUME UPON THE TABLE WILL BE TAKEN AS A REQUEST TO VISIT YOUR HOUSE.
>
> SHOULD A REQUEST TO REVISIT BE RECEIVED, YOUR ENTRY WILL BE WAFERED.

It will be seen that the Cheviots knew their world.

They were, in fact, purveying pomps and vanity, admirably camouflaged to resemble virtu and guaranteed to afford the purchaser a feeling of warmth upon every remembrance of their possession.

They were also effectually exploiting moral cowardice.

Few, having read the terms, felt able to surprise the footman, who plainly took it for granted that an entry would be made in the book and had been specially chosen for his wholly respectful yet stern and compelling personality: and none, having registered therein, had the courage to allow their name to stand unwafered and so proclaim their disregard of what could only be regarded as a debt of honour.

They had luck, of course.

That the first person to enter the shop should have been Mrs. Drinkabeer Stoat was sheer good fortune.

Extremely rich, a firm believer in display and the accumulation of worldly goods, the lady was secretly tormented by an anxiety lest such as beheld her possessions should form too low an estimate of their value as recorded by her pass-book: and since she delighted to maintain that the advertisement of payments made was the essence of vulgarity, much of her time was given to the contrivance of apparently innocent references to her latest extravagance from which should emerge such data as would enable and induce all within earshot to form an accurate opinion of what it had cost.

There being many of Mrs. Stoat's school, it follows that that lady's patronage was worth a leader in *The Times*.

Be sure she declared it from the housetops.

"A long-felt want," she boomed. "The moment I entered the shop I felt at home. At first I couldn't think why. Suddenly it occurred to me—*style*. The Cheviots can visualize style. My dear, I could have wept with relief. When I think of how I implored Bucher's to do the drawing-room in dove grey . . . I almost went down on my knees, but they wouldn't listen. Blanche Cheviot comes to survey it, and what's the first thing she says? 'Dove grey.' I've just sent her opinion to Bucher's and told them to carry it out."

And so on.

It was, of course, but natural that Titus should lose his nerve.

When, upon being shown the first day's entries, he perceived 'requests to survey' one library and two halls, he appeared for some moments to have lost the power of speech. Then he gave tongue. . . .

Mercifully the storm broke behind closed doors.

"I refuse," he raged. "It's criminally insane, and I won't touch it. 'Decorate a hall.' I couldn't decorate a bear-pit. An' if I did, the bears wouldn't work. They'd get egg-bound or something."

"Now, don't be silly," purred Blanche. "It's the easiest——"

"I'm not being silly," raved Titus. "I'm simply announcing my limitations. I tell you, it's out of the question. *I cannot decorate.*"

"Nobody's asking you to decorate," said Mrs. Cheviot. "All you've got to do is to look at a room."

Titus inspired.

"Let's be honest," he said. "I don't mean with the public. On the eve of assisting to launch one of the biggest outputs of treachery ever dreamt of, that would be hypocritical. But let us be frank with ourselves. I say I cannot decorate. By that I mean that I am totally incapable of conceiving any conjunction of garniture which would not irritate or frighten all who beheld its execution."

"That," said Blanche, "is because you've never tried. As a matter of fact, you've got an excellent eye."

"No, you don't," said Titus. "My vanity's in balk. I tell you——"

"My darling," said Mrs. Cheviot, "if I wasn't sure of you I'd be frightened to death. More. Unless I knew you were safe, I wouldn't let you touch the business with the end of a broken reed. I'm out to get right away, Ti." Her husband's eyelids flickered, and a hand went up to his mouth. "I don't want to persevere and do my best to please. There aren't any stairs in my scheme—only an elevator that doesn't know how to stop. Well, if I couldn't trust my partner, d'you think I'd let him out?"

Titus Cheviot shifted in his chair.

"It's all damned fine, old lady, but I've no ideas. If I'm paid to say a room's bad, I'll say it's poisonous. But when they say, 'Very well, my bright and bonny. Poisonous it is. Now show us a better 'ole'—I—I shall come all unstuck."

"Not you," said Blanche. "Besides, you mustn't criticize. Don't say anything is poisonous, for goodness' sake. We don't want to be hauled up for libel. The existing decoration you entirely ignore. You simply walk into a room. Don't slide in. Stroll in and take a look round. If it isn't panelled you're off. Panelling always looks well. Then you——"

"Supposing it is panelled."

"Then you decide it's too dark. It probably is. So you make a note for the walls to be done in canary."

"There you are," said Titus. "It's nothing to you. I should never have thought of canary in fifty years. Any fool can look at a room. The thing is to think of canary. I can think of a red or a green, but——"

"What's the matter with red?" said Mrs. Cheviot. "A rich wine colour. Think of a library done in the colour of port. What goes with port?"

“Gout,” said Titus. “I mean, mahogany.”

“Good. Port-coloured walls—mahogany doors with massive silver handles—glass mantelpiece—biscuit-coloured ceiling and paint-work, and there you are. What could be better?”

“That’s an idea,” said Cheviot. “Reproductions of familiar circumstances. Golf, for instance. Nice, soft green walls—sand-yellow doors and windows—white ceiling checked—mantelpiece of burnished steel. What? Oh, an’ two or three texts.”

“Simply maddening,” cried Blanche, laughing. “And you say you’ve no ideas.” She raised her brown eyes to heaven. “And now that’s settled. By the way, never open your mouth while you’re in the place. Always wait till ——”

“Don’t you worry,” said Titus. “I don’t want to be assaulted before my time. No *viva voces* for me. They can bite the opinion if they like, but——”

“They’re more likely to have it framed,” said Mrs. Cheviot.

The lady was perfectly right.

At the end of three weeks Blanche and Titus, who were booked up for six, put up their fees, charging seventy guineas a room, if the house was in town, and regretfully refusing to visit the country unless they were asked to survey at least three rooms.

Audacity, Carelessness up, always wins.

Business at 68, Old Bond Street, actually increased.

The stalls began to be constantly occupied by patrons who were waiting to occupy the bench. Among them was Mrs. Drinkabeer Stoat, who, somewhat disconcerted by the reflection that, if necessary, about five thousand people could prove that the cipher upon her drawing-room ceiling had cost but fifty guineas, hastened to request that her hall and dining-room might be surveyed forthwith.

Firms of decorators who had at first been plainly contemptuous changed their coats forthwith and began to remember ‘Cheviot’s’ in their prayers.

The weather becoming hot, the great fireplace was replaced by an oriel out of whose leaded casements was plainly visible a blue and sunlit sky. Its deep window-seat was laden with cushions of powder-blue. The mountainous chair and its henchmen had gone with the fireplace, to be replaced by a fair ‘gate’ table, which the footman laid for lunch and later for

tea. From six o'clock the gleaming paraphernalia of cocktails burdened the board. With the approach of evening the window was not illuminated: only the sky beyond became suffused with the glory of some sinking sun. Even the open book, which declared its legend from the floor, was sacrificed to this effect, which attracted much well-deserved attention and was commended by several newspapers.

Early in September the Cheviots raised their fee to a hundred guineas and declined to go into the country to survey less than five rooms, *three of which*, said their gracious intimation, *may be in one house and two in another not more than ten miles distant*.

By the end of the month they were making four thousand a week.

The two worked hard, employing five secretaries.

One controlled their movements, arranging each day what visits should be paid on the next, and having two programmes ready each evening at six o'clock. The same man affixed the wafers and kept the accounts. Of the others two were always in attendance upon Mr. and Mrs. Cheviot, taking down their 'opinions' in shorthand and transcribing their notes the next day. In addition to their wages, which were high, two per cent. of the takings was handed to them and the footmen every week. Thus was efficiency encouraged, if not assured.

Each evening, but at no other time, the Cheviots repaired to Old Bond Street to confer, sign their 'opinions,' peruse the additions to the register, and deal with any business that awaited them.

It was at one such hour in mid-November, when the two were left alone behind the tall oak doors, that Blanche leaned back in her chair and looked at her watch.

"A quarter of nine," she said, "on a Saturday night. Since ten this morning between us we've netted twelve hundred and sixty quid. I lunched off a glass of milk at a quarter to three, and I've had nothing since. And now I'm too tired to eat. What about you?"

"You may cut out the milk," said Titus. "Never mind. The figures sustain me. This week's been a record. Over six thousand——"

"It's a dog's life," said Blanche. "Why don't we stop?"

"Stop?"

"Stop. Chuck it. Finish. We've made enough."

"My dear, you're not serious?"

"I am indeed," said Blanche, "and a bit over."

"You can spend to-morrow in bed."

"I could spend six weeks in bed. I tell you, I'm through. This—this high-brow robbery's getting beyond a joke. I haven't been out for months. I don't even know the name of a musical play. I've forgotten how to dance. Why, I haven't changed for dinner since——"

"Sunday last," said Titus. "Never mind. What about it, my dear? One can't have everything. I like changing myself, but if I can nobble a hundred by staying foul, I'll make the sacrifice. Why, for half six thousand a week I'd sleep in my clothes. An' we don't have to."

"But what's the good of it all if we don't enjoy it?"

"I hope to," said Titus. "I hope to enjoy it very much."

"When?" said his wife.

"When the boom's over," said Titus. "This sort of thing can't last. Don't you believe it. It's just on the cards that it might hang on for a year, but ——"

"A year?" screamed Blanche. "Well, if it does you needn't count on me. I've lost five months of my life and I'm not going to lose seven more."

"Lost?" cried Titus. "Oh, the girl's mad. Twelve hundred a day, an' she talks about 'losing' time." He covered his eyes. "Give me strength," he murmured. Then—"You only get one orange," he said solemnly. "If you like to chuck it away before you've sucked it dry, you can do it all right. Nothing's easier. But if you do you'll repent it. For one thing, you're flouting Fortune—throwing her goods in her face."

"Rot," said Blanche shortly. "We've made enough. We started in to give me something to do—not to make money. Well, I've had my whack. I've had enough to do to last me the rest of my life. Incidentally, I've been paid —very handsomely paid. Well, I'm extremely grateful. I've got my pretty cake and I've eaten it too. And now I'm for putting my feet up."

"That's very specious," said Titus, "but the answer is this. The 'incident,' as you style it, has swallowed the main idea. To be truthful, it swallowed it before we opened the shambles—or, if not before, as soon as the sheep rolled up. When you're out for a walk and you strike a trail of nuggets, you're apt to forget that you're only out for exercise. And quite

right too. Why? Because you usually have to dig for nuggets, and then like as not you're wrong."

He paused there to steal a glance at his wife.

Blanche was holding off her hand and regarding one of her rings with her head on one side. This was a trick she practised when she was ill at ease.

'Before we opened the shambles.'

As though by accident, Titus had hit the nail square on the head. Yet it was not by accident, as both of them knew.

There are occupations other than commerce.

But Blanche had chosen commerce, because commerce not only can occupy, but may quite possibly enrich.

The woman of the world believed in apparel—its purchase, setting and display, and cared for little else.

More money meant more clothes.

But the purchase alone of apparel was nothing worth. Clothes were meant to be worn. An occupation which promoted the acquisition of clothes but precluded their display was inconvenient. . . .

So the two sat still in their counting-house—the one regarding the other, and the other regarding her ring.

There was no sign of summer.

There had been one swallow, of course, six months ago . . . *one* swallow. . . .

Blanche lay back in her chair and achieved and then stifled a yawn.

"I seem to remember," she said, "that the first day we struck the nuggets, you weren't particularly anxious to pick any up."

"I confess it," said Titus. "It seemed such nerve, somehow. But now I've got my hand in, it's as easy as wink. I've done some lovely chambers," he added musingly. "I shouldn't wonder if they became historical."

Blanche would not have been human if she had not succumbed to such gratuitous good-humour.

She clapped her hands to her face and began to shake with laughter.

"Titus," she said, bubbling, "when you get all wistful and dreamy about the heritage we're creating for posterity, I could weep for pure joy. It's like a

lion getting all worked up about the view from his lair. Of course, you're nothing but a great big child who's been given a nice new game. But I do wish you'd tire of it, dear. Don't you think you've made enough history?"

"Not yet," said Titus slowly. "But I've got a fruity idea. You go away for a bit. Take a fortnight off, while I carry on the good work. Go to Paris with Madge an' take an easy."

"And leave you here?"

"Why not? I've got my box of bricks. But I can't have you ill, my lady. Therefore be wise. Take a fortnight out of the shambles, and you'll come back thirsting for blood."

"Don't you believe it," said Blanche.

"Well, by then the boom may have cracked. Or I may have had enough. One never can tell. But I beg that you'll do as I say. I've only one wife."

After a little Mrs. Cheviot allowed herself to be persuaded, and, promising to clean up and follow within half an hour, Titus put her into a taxi and sent her home.

Returning to the office, he resumed his seat at the table and opened a drawer of which only he and the principal secretary possessed duplicate keys.

Here lay two files, respectively labelled "ANSWERED" and "UNANSWERED."

Cheviot took out the latter.

Somewhat to his relief, it contained but one letter.

The day before it had contained three.

Titus proceeded to read it with a faint frown.

Malison Hall,
Kent.
November 14th.

The Manager of Cheviot's,
68, Old Bond Street, W.
SIR,

Upon returning from abroad yesterday after an absence of some months I was dumbfounded to find that the character of the

great hall of this residence had been deliberately and ruthlessly destroyed.

I am informed that it was upon your advice that this destruction was carried out. I am informed that you recommended that the superb panelling should be torn down, the Grinling Gibbons mantelpiece replaced by a steel platform, which is, of course, already covered with rust, and the heavily timbered ceiling overlaid with plaster and then so treated as to resemble inferior linoleum. I am further informed that when this and other devilry had been executed, you had the audacity to express yourself satisfied with the result, the impudence to stencil the ceiling with the badge of your firm and the face to accept a cheque for three hundred guineas by way of payment for the abominable outrage which you have committed upon this and two other chambers, the present condition of which I prefer not to describe.

This morning I consulted my solicitors only to learn that, since you were requested to advise and then unaccountably requested to approve your vile handiwork by Mrs. Blatchbourne, your villainous conduct is within the Law, but I find some slight measure of relief in warning you that I shall do my utmost by word and deed to expose what is nothing less than a gang of dangerous charlatans who are inducing a lot of idiots to pay unheard-of prices to have their apartments desecrated and their sense of decency demoralized.

I am, Sir,
Yours, etc.
James Torridge Blatchbourne.

Titus laid down the letter and looked down his nose.

"Gathering clouds," he said thoughtfully. "An' this is as hot a one as we've ever had. If Blanche but knew . . ." He drew out a little note-book and blinked over a page. "Seventy thousand to date," he continued musingly. "I'd like to get to a hundred before the crash, but ninety would do. . . ."

Presently he closed the note-book and took up a pen.

After a little reflection he wrote his reply.

68, Old Bond Street.
November 15th.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge your letter of yesterday's date and to express regret that you do not share my views of quality or style.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
Titus Cheviot.
J.T. Blatchbourne, Esq.

As he blotted the words—

"I'll bet he doesn't hand that about," he muttered.

Then he copied his letter on to the back of Mr. Blatchbourne's and restored the latter to its drawer.

When he had prepared an envelope and covered his reply he lighted a cigarette and left the shop.

* * * * *

Mrs. Cheviot had had a most gorgeous time.

Never had idleness seemed so full of spice.

Her fortnight in Paris had grown into three fat weeks of merry-making. Parties, dances and plays had all contributed to the delicious orgy, but by far the handsomest contribution had been made by fashion parades. Indeed, with Madge Willoughby to pace her upon the track of models, Blanche had broken all her records of extravagance. When she rolled out of the gay capital in her luxurious car bound for Boulogne she had expended upon clothes alone very nearly six thousand pounds.

The prospect of returning to work was none too engaging. But while she loathed the thought of working ten hours a day, the reflection that Mrs. Willoughby had been left standing went far to cure her melancholy. Indeed, by the time she had crossed the Channel and was sliding through Kent she had come to the conclusion that Titus was right and that 'not to see the boom out would be the act of a fool.'

Then a lorry came out of a by-road at thirty-five and knocked her limousine into a quickset hedge. . . .

By the time assistance arrived Blanche, who had recovered her wits, was able not only to direct her extrication, but to resist all endeavours to convey

her to hospital.

"I should like to sit down somewhere," she said faintly. "Perhaps there's a house somewhere near where they'd give me some tea or something, and let me sit down. I'm not a bit hurt. What about the chauffeur?"

The chauffeur, who should have been killed, was safe and sound and more than occupied. It is good to think that he was kneeling upon the stomach of the driver of the motor-lorry, at once reciting the latter's lineage and failings and compressing his windpipe until the delinquent's eyeballs started from his head.

Twenty-five yards away an imposing gateway argued the presence of a mansion, so two very civil strangers offered Mrs. Cheviot their arms and assisted her up the drive.

Then a bell was rung, and when a servant arrived shelter was asked.

The man went running for his master, and two minutes later Blanche was seated in a deep chair before a fire, sipping a brandy-and-soda and absently listening to her host's explosive indignation while her two assistants were relating the manner of her mishap.

The spirit worked wonders.

By the time the strangers had departed and her host was excusing his wife, who was indisposed, Mrs. Cheviot felt able and wishful to proceed on her way.

"If you would be so kind as to telephone for a car. The nearest garage, you know. I'd ring up my husband, but it's no good frightening him for nothing, and he would be certain to think, whatever I said, that I was more or less hurt."

"You're sure you mean this?" said her host, a giant of about fifty with a handsome but choleric manner and the physique of a smith. "Because, if you feel the least shaky—and I'm very sure I should—I'll be happy to put you up and your husband too."

"You're most awfully good," said Blanche, "but——"

"Nonsense, my dear lady, nonsense. When a crime is committed at my very door, the least I can do is to offer the victim such shelter as she cares to accept. I say 'a crime.' If I had my way, madam, that swine should be drawn and quartered. But for the mercy of God you would be in the mortuary instead of in that chair conversing with me. Why? Because a blackguard in charge of a waggon deliberately chooses to convert it into an engine of

destruction so that he can be done with the labour for which he is paid twenty minutes before his just time." He broke off to stamp violently about the floor. Presently he swallowed his wrath and came to rest. "A car, you say. Very well. I think you're very well plucked, but I'll do as you say. And while it's coming the servants will bring you some tea."

He strode to a door and passed out.

It was when Mrs. Cheviot had made the most of a mirror and had lighted a cigarette that she noticed the room.

This appeared to be a hall of fine proportions.

The walls had been painted black and then varnished. They gave the impression of having been japanned. Above them was a frieze, six feet in depth, of the colour of chocolate and as glossy as the black walls. The ceiling was more remarkable, presenting a pale brown surface covered with what appeared to be a rash and somewhat resembling linoleum which has been lightly waxed. The doors had been painted bright pink picked out with white, and the chimney-piece, which was of steel and must have weighed about three tons, was suggesting that a power-house had been spoiled of some doubtless locally useful but ungainly member of its plant.

As first one and then another of these peculiarities attracted her attention, Mrs. Cheviot began to wonder whether, after all, she had been killed and this was the antechamber of another world. The furniture, however, seemed normal, and the sudden appearance of a butler with tea-things was less supernatural than anything she could imagine. When the man addressed her there was no longer room for doubt.

"Excuse me, madam, but I won't put the table by you, for as soon as the fire's burned up, madam, I'm afraid you'll 'ave to move. You see, that steel, madam, gets practically red-'ot."

"I thought I smelt something funny," said Blanche, rising. "Of course ____"

"That's right, madam. It's the metal 'eatin'. An' if I may advise you, madam, don't you forget an' lay your 'and on it. I did it once without thinkin', stoopin' to put on some coal." He raised his eyes to heaven. "You don' do it twice. . . . An' rust."

"It must be terrible to keep."

"Madam," said the butler, "it's crool. You can't touch it with oil, or the moment you light the fire the 'ole 'ouse reeks like a dozen engine-rooms. It

'as to be burnished with chains to do any good. We jus' manage to keep the front, but the top's a mask of rust an' so are the sides."

As if the remembrance of this condition was more grievous than he could bear, the fellow turned away and fell to arranging the tea.

Blanche took another seat and, furtively regarding the apartment, began to wonder what effect, if suffered daily, such a scheme of decoration would have upon her mind. She also wondered if her host had ever heard of 68, Old Bond Street. Black and pink and chocolate were pretty thick, but there was something about the ceiling, something which was not only repugnant, but——

Mrs. Cheviot stiffened with a shock.

Her heart gave one bound and then stopped.

Her gaze riveted upon the ceiling, her fingers clamped upon the arm of her chair, she sat rigid and breathless as statuary itself, while her brain plunged and flounced and refused to obey her will.

Then the spasm passed, and she faced the hideous truth.

The cipher on the ceiling was no illusion.

The hall was fully entitled to be styled 'A Cheviot Room.'

Appalling reflections came surging into her brain.

Titus. This was his work. And he had been paid money for conceiving—*this*. There were possibly two other chambers under this very roof which he had—decorated. More. All over England there were rooms with chocolate friezes and bright pink doors, bearing the Cheviot cipher, the hall-mark of style—*the badge of infamy*. As like as not he had done five or six to-day—*at one hundred guineas apiece*. . . . And there he was walking about, all cheerful and unsuspecting, while battle, murder and sudden death at the hands of infuriated clients must be crouching to spring upon his shoulders. Any moment the storm must break. Why hadn't there been protests—riots? Why hadn't Old Bond Street——

Here her host reappeared to say that a car would be ready in half an hour.

Blanche tried to thank him and to keep her eyes on the floor. . . .

Twenty-five ghastly minutes went halting by.

Mrs. Cheviot swallowed some tea, toyed with a scone, the very sight of which choked her, and by superhuman efforts succeeded in keeping the

slippery ball of conversation upon the field of sport. Out of doors, out of mind. . . .

It was natural that hunting should figure, if late, upon her list.

"My husband used to hunt with the Quorn, and I've done a bit with the Heythrop, but not just lately. It's so frightfully expensive now. There's nothing quite like it, of course."

"My dear lady," said Mr. Blatchbourne, "a good day with the hounds is more physically and mentally exhilarating than any exercise I know. It brings out the best in every man. All his senses are regaled with the finest and purest fare. The movement of the horse beneath him, the music of the pack, the smell of the countryside——"

"And the colour," cried Blanche excitedly. "You're perfectly right. No one can witness a meet without feeling the better for the sight. Why will men wear pink in the evening? The only place for pink is out in the open air on the top of a ripping horse. Then it's just——"

"I agree," said her host grimly. "Then it's superb. How does it look there?"

Blanche started violently. Then as a matter of form she suffered her gaze to follow the damning finger.

"I—I—frankly, I don't quite like it," she stammered. "You know. It seems out of place."

"It is," said Mr. Blatchbourne. "Those doors are of oak." Mrs. Cheviot shuddered. "Even if they were of deal, I should not have chosen pink. Look at the walls," he continued. Blanche obeyed tremulously. "Above all, observe the ceiling. And then that chimney-piece. I was away at the time, but I'm told they rigged up a derrick to get that in place."

"You—you were away?"

"Unhappily—yes. Otherwise my wife would not have been bamboozled and betrayed, madam, into seeking and then taking the advice of as arrant a gang of scoundrels as ever bluffed a fool out of his money."

White to the lips—

"How—how terrible," quavered Mrs. Cheviot.

"One hundred guineas," roared Mr. Blatchbourne, slamming the arm of his chair with a hand like a maul. "And another two hundred for another couple of rooms which I'm afraid to enter." Blanche made ready to die.

“Once this was a gentleman’s apartment: now it is ‘A Cheviot Room.’ There’s the cipher, madam, they had the effrontery to affix. That set the seal of their approval upon this—this barbarous pleasantry.” He rose to his feet and flung clenched fists to heaven. “Oh, if I’d only been here when the blackguard came down for his cheque.”

He laughed like a madman and, crossing to the hearth, stared violently upon the fire.

So he stood for a moment. Then, as though to brace himself, he laid hands upon the mantelpiece.

The screech of agony which instantly succeeded this action would have done any torturer credit.

For one long hideous moment Mrs. Cheviot, whose knees were knocking, supposed that insanity had supervened. Then a frightful apostrophe brought the butler’s warning to her mind.

“Goats and monkeys!” screamed Blatchbourne, uplifting his palms. “*I’ve done it again.*”

That the household had recognized the burden of the plaint was manifest.

Three servants arrived at a run, bearing oil and linen with which they proceeded to minister to their injured lord.

The latter, half-mad with pain, submitted blasphemously to their attention, alternately reviling his wife and cursing the house of Cheviot, root and trunk and bough, till Blanche could have fallen in her tracks.

“Grievous bodily harm,” he mouthed. “That’s what it is. They’ve deposited dangerous goods. They’ve done it maliciously. They intended me to be burned. They hoped I should be burned—burned to hell. It’s a diabolical plot. They’re poisoners. First they poison the mind and then the body. They’re proffering robbery and murder, and fools all over England are buying their treacherous wares. Three hundred guineas I’ve paid to have my mind diseased and my body burned to hell.”

Here a bell stammered.

That no one heard it but Blanche is not surprising.

Without a moment’s hesitation she slipped unobserved from the hall into a vestibule, and a moment later she was on the steps.

As the chauffeur opened the door of a landaulet—

“Take me to London,” she gasped, “and put me down at the Ritz.”

In another minute she was flying up the broad highway.

* * * * *

An hour had gone by, and Titus was sitting at his table with a frown on his face.

The man looked tired, as well he might. In the last ten days he had ciphered one hundred and eighty rooms. During this period he had surveyed none at all. The sowing season was past: it was time to garner the harvest—high time. The boom was cracking.

Requests to visit were falling rapidly: so were requests to revisit: in the latter’s stead indignant letters of complaint were arriving by every post. That the latter included one from Mrs. Drinkabeer Stoat suggested that the end was at hand. Some of Titus’s calls were beginning to be returned by furious clients, who, refusing to believe that the Cheviots were not at home, simmered in the stalls for hours at a time.

Titus glanced at his watch.

“She won’t come now,” he murmured. “I suppose she’s wired to the flat that she’s stayin’ on. Waitin’ on Worth or something for a monkey.” He regarded his finger-nails. “Damn it, I wish she’d come back,” he added suddenly. “If I have to send, it’ll give the game away, an’ it’s—it’s close on closing-time. Very close. An’ there ain’t no blinkin’ market for a business wot’s closed its doors. If she isn’t back to-morrow—— Thunder of heaven, here she is.”

It was true.

As he rose from his seat, the shop-door was slammed to, and an instant later Mrs. Cheviot was in his arms.

“Titus, my darling, we must go—leave England at once.”

Cheviot’s brain reeled.

“Leave England?” he gasped. “Why?”

“Listen. D’you want to be murdered?”

“Not particularly,” said Titus. “But——”

“Then we must go,” said Blanche. “Why you’re still alive I can’t imagine. Have there been any riots yet?”

"Not that I know of," said Titus. "I haven't had much time for the papers lately. In the last ten days——"

"Well, there will be soon," said Blanche. "To-morrow probably. Come on."

"What on earth d'you mean?" said Titus dazedly. "What riots?"

"Listen," cried Blanche, catching him by his lapels "This evening—no matter why—I, er, called on a Mr. Blatchbourne. He's got a house in Kent. Well——"

"Blatchbourne," said Titus. "Blatchbourne. Now, where have I seen that name?"

Suddenly the truth dawned upon him—and with it came daylight in one blinding flash.

Blanche was about to play straight into his hands.

He had meant to show her the letters of violent complaint. He had meant them to frighten her out of her very life. And then, when she had decided that they must fly, he had meant to announce his intention of carrying on. Finally, he had meant to give way—*upon certain terms*.

With a truly lightning brain he picked up his cue.

"Oh, I know," he said. "I know. I did three rooms for them."

"At three hundred guineas," said Blanche. "My dear, you did. I had tea in your hall this afternoon."

"What a funny thing," said Titus. "Did you say who you were?"

"No," said Blanche faintly. "I didn't. Like you, I value my life. Apparently you got busy while Blatchbourne himself was away, and his wife put through the deal. When he came back, it was all over. Of course he's mad as a hornet, and I don't blame him. Titus, that hall would make a saint see red."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Cheviot. "I remember it perfectly. That's one of my favourite designs. The 'Boot and Saddle' I call it. Did you notice the pigskin ceiling?"

"I did," said Blanche wildly. "And the steel mantelpiece. Mr. Blatchbourne forgot and leaned on it just before I left. Of course he was terribly burned, and he says you did it on purpose, and he's going to have your blood. I tell you——"

“He can’t,” said Titus calmly. “If he likes to take my advice, that’s his look-out. Probably his burning was a judgment for abusing me. Besides, when all’s said and done, whether the room looks well is purely——”

“I’m not going to argue,” cried Blanche. “But we must close down at once. That’s certain. If, as you say, you’ve done other rooms like that——”

“I should think about fifty,” said Titus. “I tell you——”

Blanche felt rather faint.

“I say,” she said shakily, “that we must close down. It’s only a question of hours—it must be—before a mob arrives. And then we shall be torn in pieces.”

“My dear,” said Titus, “come home and sleep it off. Of course you can’t please everyone, and of course we’ve had complaints. Every firm has.”

“When? You never told me.”

Cheviot shrugged his shoulders.

“It wasn’t worth while.” He pointed to a file on the table. “There are some of them. But business keeps up.”

Blanche fell upon the file with shaking fingers.

As she peered at their contents, sentence after sentence flamed.

A barefaced attempt . . . I defy you to take action . . . the most horrifying result . . . brazen impudence . . . I shall do my utmost to expose . . . actuated by malice . . . an offence against decency . . . full particulars to the Commissioner of Police . . . inwardly ravening wolves. . . .

Blanche let the file go and put her hands to her head.

“And yet he’s gone on!” she wailed.

“Of course he’s gone on,” said Titus. “The vast majority are as pleased as Punch. I tell you, business is wonderful. Last week——”

“You must stop at once,” screamed Blanche. “I won’t have another——”

“My dear,” said Titus, “come home. I’ve a full day to-morrow, and I want you——”

“You haven’t. You shan’t have. You—Titus, for Heaven’s sake——”

“The orange,” said Titus firmly, “is not yet sucked. I’m not going to turn down ten thousand quid a week because two or three gents prefer their taste to mine. My conscience is perfectly clear and my hands are clean. There

isn't a letter there that isn't libellous. If I liked to take 'em to Court, I could get a verdict on every one of them. What authority have I professed? None. It's all very well to get excited because they don't like my advice. I never asked them to take it. I never said it was worth having. But as long as they like to seek it——"

Blanche was down on her knees.

"Ti, I implore you to give it up. By all that's holy, I beg you——"

"Why?"

"Because if you don't I shall go mad. Because someone else will go mad and try to kill you. Each time you go out to cipher you take your life in your hand. If Blatchbourne had been at home when you went to approve that hall, he'd 've broken your back. You've not the faintest idea——"

"Ten thousand a week," said Titus, "is better than any ideas."

"We've made enough," wailed Blanche. "More than enough. How much have we made?"

"Ninety-six thousand—to date."

"For Heaven's sake," screamed Blanche, "how much do you want?"

"The orange," said Titus ruthlessly, "is not yet sucked."

Blanche clung to his knees.

"Ti, Ti, if you love me—if you care in the least whether I live or die—if there's ever to be any tiny atom of happiness between us again, you'll turn this down."

Cheviot appeared to hesitate.

Then he picked up his wife and put her upon the table.

"How much did you spend in Paris?"

Mrs. Cheviot started.

"I—I'm not quite sure," she said. "I—I think I went rather a bust."

"Quite right too," said Titus. "I hoped you would. As a matter of fact, you got away with over five thousand pounds."

"Titus!"

Cheviot nodded.

"And more also. I put that amount to your credit, and I got a letter this morning saying your account was overdrawn. Don't think I'm kicking. I'm not. You've earned every quid, sweetheart, and I'm only too glad. But that's a pace, my lady, that only a Crœsus can stand. And so I'll do a deal with you. We agreed to invest what we made. Ninety-one thousand sounds a good deal of pelf, but when everything's paid it means, say three thousand a year. Very good." He drew some paper towards her and set a pen in her hand. "You write as I dictate. And then, if you feel inclined, you can sign what you've written. If you don't feel inclined—well, then you can tear it up. But if you sign—I'll put up the shutters to-morrow at nine o'clock."

Mrs. Cheviot slewed herself round and slid on to a chair.

"I'm at your mercy," she said.

Titus proceeded to dictate, pacing the room.

In consideration of my husband's desisting from visiting or revisiting strange houses, surveying rooms, stencilling ceilings or accepting money therefor—a practice which I admit he has found extremely lucrative—I hereby undertake never to demand or expend by way of dress-allowance a sum in excess of three thousand pounds a year.

"That's all," said Titus.

Without a word, Mrs. Cheviot affixed her signature.

Then she took a fresh sheet.

"I'll make a copy," she said.

"Very well," said Titus, lighting a cigarette. . . .

When Blanche had finished writing she rose and crossed to a glass.

"Take your choice," she said over her shoulder. "They are—facsimiles."

Titus shot her a glance and stepped to the table.

The 'copy' seemed longer than the 'original'—much longer.

There was once a dear called Titus. He was most awfully handsome and generous, and when he married he spoiled his wife to death. She was as greedy and selfish as he was sweet, and though he gave her everything he'd got, that wasn't enough. So then, though he was all tired, he took off his shabby coat and

began to work. He worked and worked and always swore he liked it, but he loathed it really. And they both knew why he was doing it, but he pretended it amused him, and she pretended to believe him for very shame. And then one day she really did want him to stop. And when he saw that she meant it, he gave her all the gold he had made. "If that's enough," he said gently, "why, then I'll stop. But if it isn't, dear, I must try to go on." And when he said that, all of a sudden HER DESIRE FOR RICHES DIED. . . . And she didn't know whether to laugh or whether to cry because at last she saw that, money or no, nothing could ever alter the fact that she was the richest woman in all the world—because she was

TITUS' WIFE.

Titus folded the 'copy' and slid it into his case.

Then he struck a match and burned the 'original' up.

Blanche never turned.

As he put an arm about her—

"Which did you burn?" she said.

Titus laid his head against hers.

"I kept my love-letter," he said.

His darling flung her arms round his neck.

Summer was in.

* * * * *

'Cheviot's' was closed the next day.

A week later a letter bearing the post-mark of Rapallo was delivered at Malison Hall.

Its contents consisted of a document and three hundred and fifteen pounds in Bank of England notes.

The document appeared to be a bill which the notes were paying.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Mrs. Titus Cheviot.

Dr. to J.T. Blatchbourne, Esq.

December 6th.	*One brandy and soda*	105	0	0
	One telephone call	105	0	0
	One tea	105	0	0
		315	0	0

PEREGRINE

PEREGRINE

"I SOMETIMES think," said Mrs. Carey Below, "that you are losing your mind."

Peregrine Carey Below put a hand to his head.

"I'm not so sure I'm not," he said wearily.

"Is that meant to be rude?"

Peregrine raised his eyes to meet the glint of steel in those of his wife. For a moment he seemed upon the edge of protest: then the cold, level gaze bore down his spirit. Peregrine felt as though he were seated in cold water. He shifted uneasily.

"No, no," he said. "Of course it isn't. I—I only——"

"Because if it is," said Mrs. Below silkily, "if it is, we shall have to have an understanding." She bridled menacingly. "I was not bred to rudeness. Selfishness I can put up with—fortunately for me: I can suffer a fool—I've done it day and night for seven years: but rudeness is an assault, and that I will not endure."

"I assure you, Marion——"

"D'you mind holding your tongue?" The words bit at the air, and Peregrine winced. "As I say, I was not bred to rudeness. My father was old-fashioned enough to treat my mother with courtesy, if not respect. I'm not such a fool as to expect those emotions from you because my father was a gentleman, but if you could manage to suppress your coarser instincts at least in my presence, I should be grateful. Personally, I see nothing heinous in my wish to attend a dance. Life's flat enough, Heaven knows. Besides, it's been done before. That is what dances are for—Peregrine. I confess I did not expect my suggestion to be cordially received. That would have been unreasonably optimistic. It hasn't taken me seven years to discover that social intercourse doesn't appeal to you. But it never occurred to me that my mere expression of a very natural desire would be the signal for an outburst of abuse. But there again—I never expect contumely. I've had it and stood it

for seven years, and I suppose most women would have become case-hardened. But I'm different. I cannot realize that the old order is changed, that you cannot spell the word 'chivalry,' that to you women are chattels whose only office is to reflect the glorious will of man. What if our passages are booked? I suppose they can be cancelled."

"Certainly, dear," said Peregrine. "I'll—I'll do it this morning."

"No, you won't," said his wife. "You'll do it this afternoon. This morning we're playing golf. Which reminds me—have you ordered a car?"

"I will if you like," said Peregrine, rising. "I shouldn't think it was necess——"

"Why argue?" said Mrs. Below grimly. "Why not be big-minded enough to admit your mistake? If there is one thing I despise more than another, it is a man or woman who deliberately sticks to their point when they know that they're wrong. And why should I run the risk of having to walk because you won't take the trouble to order a car? Of course it's the old thing—lack of consideration. First, every possible obstacle is put in the way of my going to a dance just because you don't want the bother of writing a note. Then my convenience is to be jeopardized. . . ." She raised her eyes to heaven and let the sentence go. "You ought to have known my father," she continued piously. "With him my mother came first *always*. It never occurred to him to argue. She only had to . . ." She stopped there to peer violently at the floor. "What have you got on your feet?"

"My—buckskin shoes, dear," said Peregrine.

"Rubber-soled?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Below inspired vehemently, cast a reproachful glance skywards, as though to suggest that, while allowing and prepared to suffer the inscrutable authority of God, she expected it to be counted to her for righteousness, and set her teeth.

"Go and change," she said shortly, using the tone of one who, tried beyond endurance, forgets that he is addressing a fellow-man. "I never thought I should have to dress you, but it seems I was wrong. We're going to play golf, my darling—not tennis. Golf."

"I—I know," faltered Peregrine, "but——"

"That's right," said his wife. "Argue the point. Give me the lie. Where are you going?"

"To change," said her husband thickly.

"What about the car?"

In a silence too charged for words, Peregrine turned.

"You see?" continued his wife. "Your own convenience first, and mine second. The car's for me, the shoes are for you. Instinctively you put the shoes first. . . ." She shrugged her shoulders, and a bleak look settled on her face. "Of course I blame myself. I've spoiled you. You're naturally selfish, and because I loved you and wanted you to be happy I spoiled you to death. And now I'm paying for it." For a moment she appeared to contemplate her state. Then she flung up her head. "And you stand by, looking like a plaster saint!" Her eyes raked him vertically. "My word, that injured air! Always the little innocent—the poor little village idiot that's always being accused of something he's never done. I suppose you hope one day to get away with it. Melt my heart, or something. Well, the sooner you realize that martyrdom makes me tired, the better for you. If you don't agree, why not say so and put your point like a man? But you could never do that. The trouble with you is that you weren't at a Public School. There you'd have learned manners and—well, they've got a very short way with plaster saints."

After a moment—

"I'll go and order a car," said her husband quietly, and left the room.

The disorder was a very ordinary one, but it was a bad case.

In the first place, it is due to Peregrine to say that he was not fair game.

When Mrs. Below observed that her husband ought to have gone to a public school she hit the nail on the head. That would have altered everything. But Peregrine was an only and delicate child. When he was twelve he had spent six years on his back. Not until he was twenty had he been 'passed sound.' His most impressionable years had been spent in a shelter such as only a widow's devotion to a son who is not expected to live can ever erect. He certainly went to Oxford, but use held. His vacations were happier than the terms he kept, and after two years he returned to his mother's side. Then the War came. . . . One morning his Commission arrived. His mother shared his joy, but died in her sleep that night. Three years later the sparrow fell on the ground.

Peregrine Carey Below had fallen in love with his wife, and she had exploited his fall to the top of her bent. I say 'fallen.' To be more accurate, he had ventured to look in the pool, and his future wife had promptly kicked him in.

Swiftly, though imperceptibly, the garlands which he had twined rapturously about his limbs had turned to fetters which he could not unloose. The garlands had been supplied by Mrs. Below.

The man was in thrall to a personality—a vigorous magnetism, which sucked the marrow from his bones and, waxing fat on it, grew more exacting and savage every day. Physical bonds there were none. The two were childless: in her own right Marion Carey Below had not a penny piece. Yet so well had she wrought that full two-thirds of his income went into her privy purse, while of that which was left, her husband accounted to her for every farthing. For seven years she had bluffed him—with an empty hand: and he paid and paid and paid. . . . The bluff slid into torment—for the love of the thing: the torment, into the order of the day. Mrs. Carey Below had reduced nagging to a fine art. Her vocabulary was rich, her tongue fluent, her brain quick. Perversion, avoidance, falsehood were so many irons in the fire. It was a bad case.

The lady was thirty-eight, handsome and as hard as nails. Always ruthless, she had appropriated Peregrine out of hand. The fact that he was betrothed to another girl did not concern her. I doubt if his marriage would have stood in her way. The best was good enough for her, no matter to whom it belonged. The idea of troubling to hold him never entered her head: the very sublimity of her self-confidence grappled him to her soul. There was no love in her—nor ever had been. Women disliked her with cause, but to men she appealed. The appeal was deliberate. To her, male admiration was the breath of life. 'A born *vivandière*,' says someone. Not at all. She would have loathed the job. The salt would have lost his savour. Male admiration must be won at another's expense. To diminish all other women was her heart's desire. Money, convenience—everything was offered upon this altar. Peregrine's money, Peregrine's convenience. Marriage had brought him indeed more kicks than halfpence.

The man was thirty-six, quiet, tall, good-looking. You would not have written him down as overborne. His brown eyes were mild, certainly, but his mouth was firm and his carriage dignified. He was easy-going and regarded the Line of Least Resistance as the Rock of Ages. Such confidence had proved fatal. Long ago the Rock had become a straw, but he clung to it desperately. That the torrent was but breast-high he did not appear to perceive. Possibly he was fascinated. There was, certainly, much of the python about his lady. The probability is that he was afraid—had not the moral courage to throw off the yoke. One might have thought that the instinct of self-preservation would have hounded him out of his hell. But the

instinct was always stillborn. Her careless, rampant personality scorched it in embryo. It was a bad case.

Peregrine descended listlessly to the cool hall.

The Carey Belows had only arrived at Biarritz the night before, and had been due to leave in ten days' time: but, as we have seen, the date of the Domino Ball had altered everything. For the second time in three weeks their passages to New York were to be cancelled, and fresh arrangements made. Hotels, Banks, Solicitors would have to be told. Policies of Assurance would have to be reindorsed. . . . Peregrine had learned to leave nothing to chance. It was not good enough.

The porter was previsionally urbane.

"A gar for thee gough? Certainly, sir. Do you wand it at once?"

"No, but I want one ready."

"Verry good, sir. There are always some taxis here. When you gome down——"

"Order it now," said Below. "And let it wait."

"As you please, sir."

He touched a bell-push, and a gong stammered outside.

Peregrine stepped to the lift.

As he did so the gates were opened, and two people emerged—a gentle, white-haired woman and a tall, steady-eyed girl of thirty-four.

Idly Peregrine registered them as an English lady of title with an American niece.

Herein he was perfectly right.

That, as she passed him, the girl turned very pale he did not remark.

He had no idea who she was.

After all, he had not seen her for more than seven years.

* * * * *

That Joan Purchase Atlee, young, rich, attractive, would never marry seemed to be past all question. Her aunt, however, refused to abandon hope. Joan was so obviously cut for wedlock and motherhood. To suckle the memory of a broken dream was out of all reason. 'Men were deceivers ever.'

Besides . . . But Joan was resolute. She had loved Peregrine with a whole heart, and no other man had ever touched her at all. More. Peregrine had loved her. He had not left her: he had been stolen away. She had never seen Mrs. Below, but she was certain of that. Her man was faithful. If he had been bewitched, so much the worse for them both. Her man was faithful, and she would be faithful to him.

Joan bore Peregrine no grudge. It was not a case of forgiveness: Joan had nothing to forgive. Peregrine and she had been undone—by a third party. The wretched, stumbling note that had broken her heart was in his handwriting, but it was not his note. Their common enemy had written it—the future Mrs. Below. Joan hated Mrs. Below with a bitter, undying hate.

She hoped—prayed that Peregrine was happy: that he never could be so happy as he would have been with her she had no manner of doubt. He was her man.

It follows that when after seven years Joan Purchase Atlee encountered Peregrine *and found his eyes lacklustre* she was profoundly moved.

Her letter to her twin-sister in distant Philadelphia shall speak for itself.

> *. . . . I've seen him, Betty—at last. He's here, in this hotel—Peregrine Carey Below, my man. Two hours ago I stepped out of the elevator almost into his arms. I nearly fainted. The hall seemed to heel over and I had to walk uphill. Betty*, he—didn't—know—me. . . . *That hurt rather, at first. You know. Nasty jar to one's pride. The answer is that I've changed even more than I knew. After all, seven years isn't a week-end. . . . But that's by the way. The sting soon died in a sense of immeasurable relief. Truly Providence is wise. Supposing he had known me. What a hellish position it would have been! Melodrama with an edge. . . . Never mind, Peregrine didn't know me, and that's that. But, Betty, he's miserable—so very wretched. The moment I saw him I knew. He's going grey at the temples, but that's nothing—he's rising thirty-seven. But his eyes, Betty, his eyes. I could have wept to see them. Dull and strained they were—dull and strained and listless . . . his blessed, gentle eyes. . . . Don't think I'm such a fool as to think it's because of me. If it were, he'd have known me. No. It's his wife, Betty—Mrs. Carey Below. She's making my man wretched. Seven years ago she smashed my life, and now she's smashing his. . . . I don't know how long it's been going on. I don't know anything—yet. But I saw them go out this morning, and I had a good look at*

her. Man-mad, Betty. Tough as you make 'em, with a mouth like a steel trap. Rather like Nesta Dudoy, but better-looking. No use for women at all. Very well dressed, and her clothes well put on. Hair too good to be true and a nice skin. And Peregrine fears her, *Betty. There wasn't a taxi or something, and he was all hot and bothered and ready to cry. 'I ordered it,' he kept saying, 'nearly an hour ago.' She just purred back at him, with veiled eyes. . . . It was really painful. Peregrine rattled because she must wait thirty seconds whilst they sent for a cab! One's seen it before, of course: but not in a man like him. He's so quiet and reserved and strong naturally that only a proper shock should be able to shake him up—visibly, at any rate. And here he was—frightened, for all the world to see. . . I say 'all the world.' Perhaps I'm wrong. I saw it as clear as daylight, but then I know my man. It was so grievous, Betty. The impulse to go and touch him and talk about something else was almost irresistible. Anything on earth*—anything *to drive that hunted look out of his eyes. . . . But I had to sit impotently by, pretending to read. I feel I must do something, but what can I do? I wish to God you were here. I can't trust myself to write more than I have about his wife. You'll find her and her future in the New Testament. 'Where their worm dieth not. . . .'*

The hotel was crowded, but Joan and her uncle and aunt kept to themselves. The Carey Belows, however, were soon in the thick of things. Within three days the lady had established a Court of which the most favoured members were married men. Peregrine danced with their wives, waited outside the hairdresser's, reserved tables and cabs, and was reviled night and morning for his pains. Joan was spared the spectacle of the daily drubbings, because those rites were always performed in secret, but she had pieced together the rubric of Peregrine's life, and to fill such gaps as there were was only too simple. The man's demeanour alone . . . Peregrine hangdog! Joan's blood boiled. Besides, she had a maid, and so had Mrs. Below. As luck would have it, both hailed from Camden Town. The rest was easy. The rubric was hideously verified, monstrously annotated. Joan began to see red.

* * * * *

"What have you done about your dress?"

"D'you mean for to-night?" said Peregrine.

Mrs. Carey Below sat back in her chair.

"What d'you think I mean?" she said.

"My dress for the dance, of course. It was very stupid of me."

"No, not stupid," said Mrs. Below. "Ill-mannered. Rather than take the trouble to use your brain, you'll let me spoon-feed it. Never mind. What have you done?"

"I haven't done anything," said Peregrine, "so far. But——"

"Why not?"

"Well, it's not till to-night, dear. I suppose Pickford can knock me out something this afternoon."

"Does it occur to you that I may need Pickford's services—this afternoon?"

Peregrine waved a desperate hand.

"If you want them you'll have them, of course. I only meant——"

"You're very kind," said his wife, with a metallic laugh. "D'you really mean that I can make use of my own maid?" She tapped the floor with her foot. "Of course, this is too handsome. Never mind. Supposing I am so reckless as to accept your offer—what are you going to do about your dress?"

"I won't go," said Peregrine. "I don't want to go. Masked balls aren't much in my line, and——"

"I never knew any entertainment that was," said Mrs. Below sweetly. "Not to put too fine a point upon it, you're about the most effective wet blanket I've ever seen."

"I realize that," said Peregrine bitterly. "That's largely why I don't want to go."

"I see," said Mrs. Below. "And what if I need you? Supposing I'm taken ill, or something like that." She silenced his protest with a shrug. "You see? Your convenience again, as opposed to mine. Instinctively, yours comes first. Never mind. For God's sake don't let's discuss it. For the third and last time—what are you going to do about your dress?"

"I'll buy one," said Peregrine wildly.

Instantly the merciless point rose to his throat.

"Where?"

"Oh, I'll find some place."

"Rot!" The word left her mouth like the crack of a whip. Mrs. Carey Below was getting angry. "This isn't Paris. You can't buy dominoes like jujubes. They don't sell them by the pound."

"I know," said Peregrine quietly. "I'm very sorry, dear. If you could spare me Pickford for half an hour . . ."

"I must. You've forced my hand. *My* dress must go by the board, while yours is made." She raised her voice. "Pickford!"

The bedroom door opened, and the maid came in.

"Did you call, madam?"

"Mr. Below has nothing to wear to-night. He will get the material, and you must make him a dress. How many yards do you want?"

Pickford considered.

Then—

"Six, madam, single width, or three double."

Her mistress addressed Peregrine.

"D'you hear?" she demanded.

"Yes, but I don't understand. What is a single width?"

"They'll know in the shop."

"All right," said Peregrine. "What's the stuff called?"

Humanity was insisting that Pickford should intervene.

"I can easily go, madam. Now that I've done your dress——"

"That will do," said her mistress, bristling.

Pickford withdrew.

As the door closed—

"She's gone," said Mrs. Below. "You can take off that martyred air. Of course it's a wonderful card to have up one's sleeve—if one wants to get off with servants. They love it."

Her husband ignored the insult.

"What stuff shall I get?" he said.

"Any damned stuff," said his wife. "D'you want me to dry-nurse you? I shouldn't say you want it for a domino, or they'll think you're out of your mind. Say you want it for a shroud—they'll believe that. . . . Just as a matter of interest, can you look cheerful? Or have you lost the knack?"

"I've lost the knack," said Peregrine. "Our marriage has been a failure, and——"

"Whose fault is that?"

Peregrine shrugged his shoulders and rose to his feet.

"Mine, I suppose," he said, with a ghost of a laugh.

"Oh, you darling," said his wife.

Peregrine shuddered.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Marion."

His wife stared.

"You wish I wouldn't—what do you mean?" Peregrine stood silent. "You'd better pull yourself together, hadn't you?"

Peregrine sought the door.

"I'll go and get the stuff," he said shakily.

"Stop!" Mrs. Below's voice was vibrating with passion. "I'm not going to try to teach you manners, because it's waste of time: but you said just now that entertainments weren't in your line. Well, kindly remember that lectures aren't in mine—even when delivered by imitation wash-outs. I can stand an undertaker—in his place: I can even bear Little Lord Fauntleroy: but a cross between the two *on his hind legs* is just a shade too thick even for me."

For a moment her husband hesitated, pale-faced.

Then he opened the door and passed out.

* * * * *

That Miss Atlee's maid should sit and talk with Pickford while the latter was doing her work was natural enough, and when she produced some silk to make a frill for the hood of Peregrine's gown Mrs. Below's maid was delighted with the attention.

“It’ll give the ole long-cloth a flip,” explained Miss Mason. “Won’ look so much like a shraoud. There’s enough fer a pair o’ cuffs too, while we’re abaout it.”

Two hours later she reported to Joan that Peregrine might be known by his frill and his cuffs.

“You can’t mistake them, miss. It isn’t likely as there’ll be another gentleman there with silk on a long-cloth gaown, but if there was, you’ll be sure to know the silk. It’s a bit that was left over from linin’ your ermine coat.”

“Right,” said Joan. “Thank you. What time do we unmask?”

“Not before midnight, miss.”

“I imagine dancing will start about half-past ten.”

Mason was, as they say, very quick in the uptake.

“Mrs. Below’s maid is ordered for ten o’clock: but that means nothin’, miss. Still, you never know. If you come upstairs at ten, that’ll give me time to dress you, an’ then I can slip off to their floor an’ watch them daown. Then you’ll know where you are, miss.”

“All right, Mason. Thank you.”

So it fell out that evening that the Carey Belows descended the great staircase with Joan Purchase Atlee a dozen steps behind. . . .

They reached the painted ball-room in the same order.

To identify Mrs. Below required but a nodding acquaintance with that lady’s way of life. Her domino eclipsed all others as the moon the stars. It was of cloth of silver, freckled with pips of gold. She was out for blood to-night. To be outstanding in disguise, to beggar all concealment, to blaze—a glowing houri in a shoal of ghosts. . . . Such was her dream. Be sure it was realized. Her progress was one long triumph. As she entered the ball-room her courtiers swarmed about her, pleading the favour of a dance.

Peregrine slid to one side and got his back to the wall. . . .

The spectacle was fantastic, suggesting the practice of mysteries which might be evil. It was the hour of counterfeit. Hooded and cloaked and masked, Secrecy whirled and flitted, finger to lip. Whispers and stifled laughter, red mouths and shining feet, white wrists upon hidden shoulders were mocking Truth. Broad shafts of coloured light, the only luminants,

ranged to and fro over the company. Robed as familiars of the Inquisition, a cunning orchestra lent scene and music alike a devilish air.

"Well, Perry, won't you ask me to dance?"

The man started violently.

"Who are you?" he breathed, taking cool fingers in his and sliding an arm about a yielding waist.

As they slid into the fox-trot—

"I oughtn't to tell you really, but as we're such old friends . . . I'm Joan Atlee—*that was*."

Peregrine's heart gave one tremendous bound.

For a moment he said nothing, dancing mechanically and trying to find his voice.

Then—

"How on earth you knew me I can't conceive, but it was . . . very handsome of you . . . to come up and speak—Joan."

"Steady," said Joan, wondering if he would notice the way her heart was pounding against her ribs. "There's something you ought to know. We were engaged once, and you—you broke it off." She felt his frame quiver. "If you'd waited another day, you'd never have written at all."

"Why?"

"Because I'd written to you, Perry, turning you down. My letter wasn't posted, so I took it and tore it up. I'm not very proud of myself, but I feel better now."

The lie sailed straight to its mark.

"I'm—I'm so awfully glad you did, Joan." Peregrine's voice was trembling. "At least—you know what I mean?"

"I know, my dear, I know. You needn't explain to me." For an instant the hand on his shoulder rested less lightly. "The sea doesn't run so high when you're not alone in the boat."

The pregnant saying sank into Peregrine's brain like molten lead. Its poignant pertinence, the old, dead fellowship it brought to life, the hint it held of an acquaintance with grief, lightened his darkness with three dazzling beams.

“Oh, Joan, I’m so—so thankful we’ve met,” he stammered lamely enough.

Joan thrilled to her core.

“You’re not half as thankful as I am, Perry,” she said. “We may have tired of each other—or thought we did—but at least we understood.”

“By Jove, yes,” said the man violently.

They danced the length of the chamber in eloquent silence.

Then—

“You know I’m married, Perry?” said Joan in a low voice.

“Only from what you said a moment ago.”

“Well, I am. We won’t mention his name—for reasons which will appear: but I’m going to tell you about him because I *must*.” Her tone sank to a whisper tense and vibrant. “I’ve bottled it up, Perry”—the man started, and the clasp of the cool fingers became a grip—“till I’m nearly out of my mind. Think what it means to have no confidant—not a single soul to talk to who can ever begin to understand. . . . I drove over here from San Sebastian, praying for death by the way . . . *I came to find a confidant*—some stranger that I could talk to, under the mask, and then—then I saw you.”

Peregrine felt rather dazed.

“Let’s get outside,” he said uncertainly.

They made their way through the press, across the echoing hall and on to the terrace without.

This was silent and starlit, cool with the faint crush of breakers, full of the airs and graces of the summer night.

As they sat down—

“Tell me about him,” said Peregrine.

The girl leaned back in her chair and cupped her chin in her palm.

“I often wonder,” she said, “what made me marry him. Some evil spirit, I suppose . . . I wasn’t a prisoner then. He is so very obviously not my style. But for some strange reason or other I fell in love with him, Perry, and before I knew where I was the damage was done.” She sighed. “So much for me . . . He married me for my money and because a wife—in her place—can be a convenient thing. He soon had me in my place. . . .”

She threw back her head there, to stare at the stars. Presently she continued dreamily.

"I've many failings, Perry, but I'll tell you one of my worst—*I loathe a row*. . . . It's a very perilous failing, because you're at the mercy of the person who finds it out. . . . Well, that's how my downfall began. Rather than have unpleasantness, however just my case, I always gave way—with the inevitable result that now I've lost the very knack of moral courage, while the unpleasantness I sought to avoid has become the feature of my life."

She paused there, to steal a glance at the man. Peregrine was staring straight ahead, his hands clenching the arms of his wicker chair.

Joan proceeded steadily.

"I said that he wasn't my style. That's putting it rather low. He's rather like a tiger, while I'm like a poodle-dog. . . . He's a brilliant, striking personality—swift, heartless and unearthly strong. Women go mad about him: men dislike him—but they always give him the wall. Wherever he goes he dominates. It isn't force of will, because it's effortless: he never makes up his mind to get his own way—he just takes it, always, no matter at whose cost. But he—he never pays. . . . Well, if that's his way with the world, you can imagine, Perry, how far the poodle gets. . . . But that's not all. I've come—it's very natural—I've come to irritate him. . . ."

She sighed heavily, and a dreary, hopeless note slid into her voice.

"You've seen a leaf on the road before the wind. Well, I'm like a leaf on a road—the open road of life. A dry, shrivelled leaf before the north-east wind. The wind's pitiless—devils the wretched leaf from pillar to post, never gives it a second's rest. And the road's open, and the leaf . . . can't get away. . . ."

There was a long silence.

At length—

"Why," said Peregrine hoarsely, "why can't the leaf get away?"

Joan threw up her hands.

"I knew you'd say that," she said. "It does seem strange, doesn't it—that the leaf shouldn't be able to get away? Well, Perry, you'll hardly believe me, but it's a matter of pluck. The door's open—I've only got to walk out. *But I can't do it.*"

“D’you mean . . . you love him?”

“ ‘Love him?’ ” cried Joan. “Does the leaf love the north-east wind? Of course, it’s different for you because you’re a man. Women can be very trying, but they can’t reduce men to pulp. So you can’t put yourself in my place. But if you were a slave and your master had given you hell day in day out for five long, frightful years—well, d’you think you’d love him, Perry?”

Peregrine stared upon the ground.

“Have you—a child?” he said.

Joan shook her head.

“Has he control of your fortune?”

“Not a cent. I tell you,” she added wildly, “the door’s open.”

“Steady, dear, steady. . . . Tell me, d’you feel—d’you feel you oughtn’t to leave him? I mean . . . D’you feel it’s your job to stay—because you’re his wife?”

“No, indeed,” cried the girl. “I feel it’s my job not—not to go to anyone else. It sounds rather out-of-date, but I’ve got old-fashioned views. He’s my husband: and neither time nor distance can alter that. But I don’t feel bound to stay with him—until he sends me mad. Would you feel bound . . . Perry?”

“Good God, no!” The man flung out the words. “As you say, you needn’t. . . . Besides, I should think you’re fed up with men. I—I should be.” Joan winced. “Give me my freedom. . . . I’d only get into a hole—some wretched, back-stair lodging in some tiny place where I could sit and read. I’d have one servant, and I’d potter about the streets. I wouldn’t want any excitement—I’d ’ve had enough of that.” He laughed bitterly. “I only want”—he swallowed and corrected his tense—“I’d only want peace, Joan.”

The girl nodded her head.

“I knew you’d understand, Perry.”

The man sat back in his chair.

“The door’s open, Joan. Why can’t you walk out?”

“Because,” said the girl slowly, “because I haven’t the nerve.” She paused there, wide-eyed, as though plunged in bitter meditation. After a moment she continued absently. “There’s nothing on earth to stop me, but I know that for me to leave him would be *against his will*, and I can’t stand up against that.”

"But he needn't know, Joan. You can just fade away and never see him again."

"I know," said Joan wearily. "I've got it all worked out. It's the easiest thing in the world. We leave for Paris to-morrow"—Peregrine started—"by the evening train. Separate sleepers, of course: he likes plenty of room. I've only to leave the train at some station during the night. . . . We've taken rooms at Paris—I took them, of course. When he gets there he finds awaiting him a letter to say I've gone. . . . It adds that *so long as he doesn't molest me* a thousand pounds a quarter will be paid into his account, but that if he tries to find me the allowance will stop. . . . It's the easiest thing on earth. I worked it out months ago, and I've had chance after chance, for we're always moving about. But I can't do it, Perry. He's broken my nerve."

Peregrine set his teeth.

"I know what you mean, Joan. But——"

"No, you don't, Perry. No one who's not been through it could ever understand. Why should one *need* any nerve to step out of hell? That's all it is. Hell can't follow—won't even try to follow. There's nothing to fear. I've everything to gain and I can't lose. But I can't take the plunge. . . . 'But there *is* no plunge,' you'd say. I know. But then your soul's your own. Mine isn't my own, Perry. . . . And that's why you can't understand."

"I—do—understand."

"How can you?"

"Never mind how I can. I do." The strong, almost stern tone lifted up Joan's heart. The flax was smoking. "You're under a sort of spell—that's all it is."

"All?"

"All. Your words betray you. Your soul, you say, isn't your own. That's pure fantasy—it must be. You're under no physical restraint, and you're mentally free. You can think out your way of escape—discuss it with me. You couldn't do that if your soul wasn't your own. You're not even hypnotized. But because for years you've been hammered you think that you can't hit back. The bare idea staggers you." He leaned forward and set a hand on her arm. "*But you haven't got to hit back*, Joan. Do get that into your head. Slipping out of the ring while he's sleeping isn't hitting him back."

Joan began to tremble.

"But after, Perry, *after* . . . Supposing——"

The grip on her arm tightened.

"There'd be no 'after,' dear. The spell 'd be broken. As you stood on the platform and watched the train's lights fading, your confidence 'd come back pelting. You'd want to shout and sing. You'd wonder why on earth you'd stuck it so long. You'd find yourself laughing to think what a fool you'd been. You could afford to laugh, because you'd be free—*free*."

Joan put a hand to her head.

"It's the plunge," she whimpered. "It's taking the plunge, Perry. I'm afraid. If I'd someone to hold my hand . . . You know what I said just now. The sea doesn't run so high when you're not alone in the boat."

Peregrine pushed back his hood and wiped his face. This was streaming with sweat.

"Could—could you take the plunge with me, Joan?"

Joan started violently.

"With you, Perry? What d'you mean?"

"I mean, if I held your hand. You see, *you're not alone*, Joan . . . not—alone—in the boat."

"*Perry!*"

Trembling with excitement, the man continued jerkily.

"All you've said of yourself you might have been saying of me. I'm in the same boat, Joan. I've been there for seven years. And I haven't the nerve to plunge—either. I can preach, but I can't practise. But I think I might save myself if I tried to save you."

Joan clapped her hands to her cheeks.

"Oh, Perry, I'm frightened," she breathed. "Supposing he——"

"He'll be asleep," said Peregrine. "Listen. We get to Bordeaux about one. Bordeaux's the place. Come out of your sleeper there. I'll—I'll be in the corridor. We must let our big baggage go." The sweat was running on his forehead. Impatiently he wiped it off. "Write your letter to Paris the moment you're back."

With a bursting heart—

“You’ll—you’ll leave me on the platform, won’t you? I mean . . .” The girl was panting. “Not that I don’t care, dear, but I wouldn’t like . . .”

“I—I swear,” said the man uncertainly.

Joan’s brain staggered.

“We must—must play the game,” she faltered, half to herself. Suddenly she caught at his arm. “Oh, Perry, you *will* be there? You won’t let me down? If I came out of my sleeper, and you weren’t there . . .”

“I will be there.”

Joan gave a little sob.

Then she looked up.

“I’m an awful funk,” she quavered.

Peregrine rose and put her hand to his lips. He was quite calm now.

“Buck up, my lady,” he said. “The sea’s falling.”

Joan’s world rocked.

The trick had been done. The game was as good as played. The fallen sparrow was up—spreading its wings. Very soon now it would be out of sight. Only the decoy would be left—fallen on the ground. Only the decoy. . . .

Her own words flamed at her.

‘The door’s open—I’ve only got to walk out.’

It was, indeed, ‘the easiest thing in the world.’ One didn’t need any nerve to step *into heaven*. Besides, he was her man—had always been. Already they’d lost seven years. . . .

Two figures loomed out of the shadows.

“The only objection to masks,” purred a familiar voice, “is that if a wife should want her husband she can’t find him.”

With his back to the speaker, Peregrine stood like a rock.

“For my part,” came the reply, “I should call it a virtue.”

A provoking laugh answered him.

As the figures passed on, the mist lifted and Joan saw her path clear cut. ‘He that hath clean hands . . .’ She was out to rescue, but not to rob.

"Let's go and dance once more," she said quietly. "Then I'll slip away."

Peregrine muffled his face, and they passed back into the ball-room, the slam and stutter of ragtime and the slash of the coloured lights. . . .

As the dance ended—

"God bless you, Perry," breathed Joan. "It's—it's been like heaven. You—you *will* be there, dear?"

Peregrine smiled back.

"Buck up, my lady."

An instant later the girl was lost in the press.

* * * * *

Some thirty-six hours had gone by.

Joan Purchase Atlee was nearing Biarritz, Peregrine was in a car heading for Havre, and Mrs. Carey Below was sitting in a Paris hotel, staring upon a letter, with her eyes aflame and her underlip caught in her teeth.

A second letter lay on the floor by her side, its single sheet crumpled as though in wrath.

By your leave, I will straighten it out.

Dear Marion,

I have decided that we are better apart. If you will write to Forsyth, saying you accept this decision, he will send you a cheque for five hundred pounds, and, so long as you do not seek to avoid this decision, on application to Forsyth, one thousand pounds will be paid to you every quarter.

Peregrine.

The second letter, though not the envelope, was in the same handwriting. Mrs. Below had dictated it—some seven years ago.

My dear Joan,

This is rather a difficult letter to write, but I have come to the conclusion that it would be a fatal mistake for us to be married. We're friends, I know, but there must be something more than friendship if marriage is to be a success. Where there is no true

understanding there can never be real happiness. I am sure that after a little you will see the force of my words and realize with me that I am taking the wisest, although by no means the easiest, course in asking you to release me from my engagement. If I don't hear from you I shall know that you agree.

Yours very sincerely,
Peregrine Carey Below.

P.S.—I think it best for both of us that we should not meet again, so I am leaving for London to-night.

Mrs. Carey Below stared and stared.

Presently she glanced round, folded the letter swiftly and thrust it into her bag.

Out of sight, out of mind. . . . Out of sight. . . .

With an effort she wrenched at her thoughts, speaking mechanically to give her brain a lead.

"So nothing," she rasped, breathing heavily through her nose, "*nothing* is sacred to him. This—after seven years. . . ." She raised her voice. "Pickford!"

But Pickford was in a taxi, heading for the Gare du Nord.

DERRY

DERRY

THE windows were wide open, and Carlton House Terrace was agog with ragtime. The saxophone, Lord of Misrule, swerved and staggered, and the band with it, playing such tricks with rhythm as a juggler will play with a plate. The bladder entering into the soul, an elegant company was dancing hilariously and letting the world slip with an efficiency which Epicurus himself must have applauded.

Two of the dancers, however, were not smiling, and, though they passed through the press with an ease and grace of movement which few other couples could display, neither of their hearts was wearing a wedding-garment.

Suddenly the girl turned and looked into her partner's eyes.

"Derry," said Rosemary Chase, "I've known you a heap of years."

"That's right," said Derry Peruke. "Ever since you were sweet seven and I was a beastly fifteen."

The tall, dark girl looked away.

"I don't remember you being beastly," she said. "Never mind. Seventeen years ought to beget an understanding."

"They have," said Derry Peruke.

The two danced the length of the great chamber without a word, the man knowing what was coming and the woman wondering whether he had an idea.

As they turned—

"My only husband," said Rosemary, "is in love with your wife."

"Yes," said Peruke quietly. "That's half the truth."

"D'you mean that, Derry?"

The man nodded.

“My dear,” he said, “so far as Virginia’s concerned, the sun, moon and stars rise and set between Roger’s shoulder-blades.”

“Well, what on earth,” said his partner, “are we to do? Between you and me and the joker I rather like Roger. He has his faults, but——”

“You must call him off,” said Derry. “Virginia’s a very good girl. He’s enticed her away.”

“Rot,” said Rosemary. “She’s been trying to get him for months. Never mind. Don’t let’s scrap about it. The truth is they’ve both played with the hive, and now we’re stung.”

Peruke glanced down the gallery.

“Where are they gone?” he said.

Rosemary shrugged her white shoulders.

“Probably to drive round the Park.”

“And a very good idea—if you want to talk. Let’s do the same.”

Rosemary Chase hesitated.

Then—

“Right-oh, Derry,” she said.

The fact that the Perukes’ limousine was not to be found argued that Rosemary’s assumption was well founded. Her coupé, however, was waiting. . . .

“Shall I drive? Or will you?”

“As you please,” said Derry.

The girl stepped into the car and slid to the driver’s seat.

As her companion followed—

“That’s all to-night, Mason,” she cried to the chauffeur without.

“Very good, madam.”

A moment later the car was stealing out of St. James’s. . . .

Presently it swung westward at an increased speed.

The turmoil of the day was over, and the ways were empty and silent under the high stars. Once in a while another car sang by or a waggon lumbered, but for the most part man and his works had yielded possession to

Fantasy, who had done all things well. The stage of London Town was set for a masque. Substance was gone, and Shadow was up in his seat: the streets had become dim, monstrous lanes that led to Mystery, paved with the sheen of silver, hung with a sable arras behind which Echo hid: gardens were swollen to parks, and parks to kingdoms: Harlequin was abroad.

"How can I call him off?" said Rosemary suddenly. "Virginia's got my whistle."

Derry regarded the end of his cigarette.

"I'll speak to Virginia," he said, "if you'll tell me what to say."

"How can I do that?"

"You're a woman," said Derry doggedly.

"I'm not Virginia," said Rosemary. "And only Virginia knows how she wants her gruel."

"Exactly," said Derry. "D'you think it's likely that I should mix it right? I'd 've spoken weeks ago but for the fear of doing more harm than good. An' if I speak now an' make the slightest mistake, it'll be all over. Give me the Middle Ages," he added savagely. "The flat of the sword for her, an' the point for Roger."

"Thanks very much," said Rosemary. "You would come out all right, wouldn't you? And after the obsequies I suppose I could begin again. Still, I agree with half your sentiment. What they both need is the flat of the sword. The tongue's too dangerous, the pen repellent and suggestive. I'm not going to correspond with my husband upon a subject like this. But the flat of the sword is genially disconcerting and quite unanswerable."

"My dear," said Peruke, "to be eloquent here is too easy. In Virginia's absence I can send her to bed without a tremor. And I'll bet a puncheon of rum it's the same with you. And there we are. Our two little households are heading straight for the Court. If we do nothing, we shall get there in about a month. If we do the right thing, we shall heave to. But if we do anything else, we shall get there in twenty-four hours."

"I should hate to suggest," said Rosemary, "that you were being eloquent."

There was an indignant silence.

At length—

"Why," said Derry Peruke, "did you approach me?"

Rosemary put up a hand and touched his face.

"Because I thought it was silly for two such old friends to go down without discussing their fate."

Derry turned his head quickly and kissed her fingers. These flew back to the wheel.

"And now," said Rosemary contentedly, "what are we to do? We haven't been wasting time, because we've decided two things. The first is that action is rather better than speech, and the second that if we're to act we'd better look sharp about it."

"Supposing," said Derry Peruke, "supposing we fell in love."

Rosemary started violently, and the car swerved.

Then she began to laugh.

"By way of curing them? Or consoling ourselves?"

"Both," said Derry. "If the sight of us getting off doesn't open their eyes, then will nothing this side of a lawyer's clerk. Secondly, I don't know about you, but I'm ripe—ready to drop for consolation of a tangible sort. And what more natural than that I should turn to my loving little friend—Rosemary Chase? She's sweet, she's beautiful: I've loved her for fifty years: she's got the prettiest hands and a face like a fairy-tale: her hair—what have you got on your hair? It's all—all mellifluous. Oh, and just look at your mouth!"

"That'll do," said Rosemary shakily. "Privy scandal's no good."

"Rot the scandal," said Derry. "Besides, I'm naturally virtuous, so if I'm to come off in public I must have a smell at the jumps. Quite apart from that, my darling, it's making me well. I've always found you lovely, and a chance of telling you so is good for my heart. And it ought to be good for yours—unless you hate me."

"You know I don't hate you, Derry, but I'm rather bad at games."

"What good d'you think I am? I've never kissed a woman but Jenny since I was wed. The mercy is that, now that we've got to play, we've drawn each other instead of a couple of souls. It's not a game that I'd play with everyone."

Rosemary threw up her head.

"I'm not going to keep Virginia's saddle dry."

"Or I Roger's," said Derry. "Don't you believe it, my dear. If I didn't think I could stand on my own flat feet, I'd get out of this chaise."

"But it wouldn't console me at all to throw my arms round your neck. I'm very fond of you, Derry, but Roger's my man."

"And Jenny's my girl," said Derry. "That's why I want her back. And I think the way to get her is to show her that she hasn't got me. Very well, then. I've got to find a playmate."

"That shouldn't take you long," said Rosemary Chase. "I could mention ____"

"I've a weakness," said Derry Peruke, "for playing the game. I hate making love to a girl with my tongue in my cheek. Yet to explain the position would be to court trouble of the corrosive sort."

Rosemary laughed.

"It's perfectly obvious," she said, "that you've known me too long. Familiarity has bred a wholesome contempt."

"One moment," said Derry calmly. "All I've just said about me can be said about you—except that, even if you explained the position to your prey, he wouldn't retort with vitriol. In fact, you're so very charming that he'd probably jump at the chance. But that's beside the point—which is that we each need a playmate by whom we can play the game. Well, our respective spice have fairly slung us into each other's arms. . . . If you don't want to play, say the word. But I think it's a chance. Perhaps I was foolish to say that I loved you, dear, and that, as the game had to be played, I'd be happy to play it with you, but seventeen years of admiration are bound to leave their mark." Rosemary bowed her head. "With anyone else I'd hate it. In fact, it couldn't be done. With you—well, it's very easy, lady, and that's the truth." He slid an arm round her waist. "I know I'm in love with Jenny, but when I say that I love you you know it's true. For one thing, who could help it? Look at your mouth. . . . But it wouldn't console me to kiss you, if you didn't—understand. A state of emergency exists, requiring special measures of an abnormal kind. That I find those measures sweet is pure good fortune: they might have been nauseous. Of course, if you find them——"

"I don't," said Rosemary, laying her head against his. "I—I rather like them, Derry. . . . I wonder what Roger would say if he——"

"Will say," corrected Derry. "Unless I'm much mistaken, it'll send the blood to his head. An' the same with my lawful wife. Then perhaps they'll

begin to perceive that marriage is not like bettin' an' you can't have a bit each way. Whereupon they'll gird up their loins and return to the fold."

"And we?"

"I suppose we shall have to do the same," said Derry ruefully. "It's rather hard, isn't it? They've gone an' thrown us together an' presently they'll tear us apart. Never mind, I shall write to you surreptitiously. And when I smudge the letter you'll know that I'm thinking of a night when your hair was full of the Rubaiyat and your blessed cheek stung me till I wanted to pick you up and carry you into the hills."

Rosemary lifted up her voice—

What'll I do
When you
Are far away,
And I
Am blue—
What'll I do?

Derry picked up his cue in a pleasing baritone—

What'll I do
When I
Am wondering who
Is kissing you—
What'll I do?

They finished the chorus together.

"Oh, you darling," breathed Derry. "Of course, Roger must be out of his mind."

Rosemary decelerated and slid an arm round his neck.

"So must Jenny," she whispered.

As she gave him her lips, headlights leapt out of the darkness and four tires tore at the road.

Peruke wrenched the wheel round, and they missed a head-on collision by an inch and a half.

There was nothing to be said or done.

The coupé alone was to blame, Rosemary having allowed her to stray to the right of the road.

As the cars drew apart—

"They must have seen us," said Rosemary. "Let's pray it was no one we knew."

"At least," said Derry Peruke, "they can't have been angry. To see all is to forgive all. And next time, sweetheart, I think I should put her in first."

* * * * *

As the cars drew apart—

"Did you see who that was?" said Virginia in a freezing tone.

Captain Chase inserted a finger between his collar and throat.

"I saw your blasted husband kissing my wife."

"How dare you?" cried Mrs. Peruke. "She had her arms round his neck."

"He was taking advantage of her," declared Roger. "Rosemary's not that sort."

"What d'you mean—*that sort*?" said Virginia furiously.

In view of the powder yet adhering to her companion's shoulder, the peculiar pertinence of the question was undeniable.

Captain Chase swallowed before replying.

"I only meant," he explained, "that—that she wouldn't make the running."

Virginia replied with a noise which cannot be reduced to writing, but was indicative at once of great contempt, loathing, and incredulity. Then, after the manner of one who fears contamination and desires to advertise the fact, she withdrew as far from Captain Chase as the construction of the limousine would allow.

"You seem to forget," she said coldly, "that Derry is very attractive."

"I say he's deceived her," was the violent reply. "Made her blind or something."

"Why not face facts?" said Virginia. "She's been trying to bring this off for weeks and months, and now——"

“It’s false,” roared Roger. “He’s managed to get her alone, an’—an’ . . . . ”

“I see,” said Virginia. “Once aboard the coupé and the girl is mine.” She laughed icily. “The only snag is that it’s *her* coupé.”

“What if it is?” cried Roger. “He’s waited his chance—that’s all. He’s asked her to give him a lift, an’——”

“Where to? Kingston? We live in Curzon Street—six miles the other way.”

“I don’t care about that,” said Roger savagely. “He told her some tale, of course. Rosemary’s very trusting.”

“I suppose he put her arms round his neck.”

“She was struggling,” screamed Roger. “You saw for yourself the car was all over the road.”

“She was making a meal of it,” said Virginia, shuddering. “Ugh! Don’t think I’m defending Derry,” she added suddenly, “because I’m not. *But I know how he felt.*” Roger started. “When you’re pursued and badgered by someone who says they’re dying for love of you, it’s very awkward to keep on putting them off—especially if you know them pretty well. One doesn’t want to hurt their feelings, and one doesn’t want a scene, and so for the sake of peace——”

“I can’t bear it,” said Roger thickly. “I don’t say I’m blameless, but ____”

“I wonder,” said Virginia relentlessly, fingering a note in her bag, “I wonder if she has written to him.”

Here was treason, unconscionable, barefaced.

Captain Chase could hardly credit his ears.

After a frightful moment—

“I wonder if he’s ever rung her up,” he said brokenly.

Virginia, who believed in the telephone, stiffened.

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” she said. “Out of kindness of heart.”

“And when she came to the telephone told her he couldn’t sleep until ____”

“Do you remember your reply?” said Virginia in a shaking voice.

Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"To keep you awake," he said, "would have been uncharitable."

So soon as she could speak—

"Poor deluded Derry," said Virginia uncertainly: "I feel quite sorry for him."

"You'll feel much more sorry for him to-morrow morning," said Roger violently.

"Why?"

"In fact," said Captain Chase darkly, "I shouldn't faint with surprise if he felt sorry for himself."

"Why?"

"Well, you don't think I'm going to pass this over, do you? D'you think I'm going to have my wife hugged an' kissed in broad—broad lamp-light ——"

"In her own coupé, at her own request."

"Never," shouted Roger. "He was assaulting her."

"Then why," said Virginia swiftly, "why didn't you stop the car?" Captain Chase started. "I thought men fell over themselves to rescue, er, virtue in distress. Oh, and when you tackle Derry, supposing he denies it, what are you going to say?"

"I shall say I saw him."

"Where from? The interior of his own car . . . which you were sharing with his wife . . . at one o'clock in the morning . . . five miles from Berkeley Square?"

The sudden perception that his guns were spiked seemed to deprive Captain Chase of the power of utterance.

At the third attempt—

"Well, you can't scratch Rosemary, either," he blurted.

Having no answer at hand, Mrs. Peruke preserved what she hoped was a contemptuous silence; but presently, after endeavouring vainly to digest the unsavoury fact that if Derry was safe from Roger he was equally safe from her, she burst into tears of aggravation.

She had caught her husband bending, but, because her hands were tied, she could not strike. The rod was in pickle, and in pickle the rod must stay. As for Rosemary . . . .

Roger was speaking.

"I say, don't cry, Jenny. I can't bear it."

"Men are brutes," sobbed Virginia. "All of them. They just use women like gloves and then they throw them aside."

"No, they don't," said Roger. "They——"

"They do-o-o. You know it. Look at you and Derry."

With goggling eyes, Roger begged her to overlook their profligacy.

"We're fools. That's all," he asserted. "Prize fools. But we aren't vicious."

"That's just what you are," wailed Virginia. "And you take it out on mugs like Rosemary and me. I'm not a bit mad with her—I'm simply sorry. I imagine life with you must be p-purple hell—like mine is with D-D-Derry. You spend your rotten time playing us up, an' then when you've played us up you let us down."

Captain Chase felt inclined to scream.

Instead—

"Gently, old lady," he said. "Easy with the weaker vessel. I know it looks bad, but—well, girls like you an' Rosemary, you don't realize your power. Poor devils like Derry an' me—we haven't a ghost. An' as if your natural beauty wasn't enough you actually fuss yourselves up to—to make us think. It's like goin' out after sheep with a smoke-screen and a couple of tanks."

"It's a wicked lie," shrieked Virginia. "How dare you say such a thing? You're not like sheep. You're wolves. And we don't go after you. You come and pester us till we're nearly out of our minds, and when for the sake of peace we try to be nice, you take what you want and then you turn us down."

Roger took out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

From the opposite corner of the limousine Virginia continued to dispense indignation in the shape of spasmodic inspirations which shook the seat.

The man who can withstand that particular form of emotion has yet to be sired.

After the tenth appeal, which was more of an *ultimatum* and fairly rattled round the car, Roger returned to the assault.

"Jenny, my dear, have a heart. For God's sake don't cry like this. I swear I never meant any harm. You know I didn't. And—and we'll get back on them somehow. I've got an idea already—it only wants working out."

"I don't want to get back," said Virginia, dabbing her eyes. "I'm not revengeful. To-morrow I shall go into retreat. I know a place in the Midlands. You live very simply and do your own cell, and you don't see any papers or anything. And there aren't any men for miles, except one priest."

"Poor devil," said Roger thoughtfully. "Does he muck out his own cell too?"

"Oh, of course you can laugh," said Virginia hotly. "But I mean what I say. I'm utterly disillusioned, and I'm going to clear out and leave the lot of you to it. What's your rotten idea?"

Roger took out a case and selected a cigarette.

"I'm afraid it's too worldly," he said. "Besides, as you don't see the papers——"

"Now, where's that note you sent me?" said Virginia, ransacking her bag. "The priest'll want that to send to Derry."

Captain Chase sat very still.

Then—

"Oh, the vixen!" he said. "Never mind. In return for that note I'll hand you my rotten idea."

With an envelope, pinched between her forefinger and thumb, Virginia tapped her small nose and stared at the chauffeur's shoulders and the black and silver habit of Night beyond.

At length—

"I give you it back," she said, "unconditionally." The letter passed. "You should never have written it, Roger; but that was my fault. I've been a fool, and I've made a fool of you. And between us I quite believe we've driven Derry and Rosemary into each other's arms. . . . Well, it's no less than we deserve. Derry's a wonderful husband, and Rosemary's a peach of a wife."

"So she is," muttered Roger.

"But now . . . we've fed them up. . . . How far it's gone—how long it's been going on I haven't the faintest idea. And how on earth we're to stop it I can't tell. If your idea will do that, I'm ready to try. But I will not put it across them. I—haven't—the right."

Chase tugged his moustache.

"Virginia," he said, "I can't let you talk like that. I'm too much—ashamed. I'm not going to say I regret the—the interlude, because that wouldn't be true. You see, I'm only human, while you're divine. But it's been a shady business, and I'm frankly ashamed. Which of us two has been to blame won't bear argument. I started it—that we both know: and to-night you've—you've ended it, dear." He took the slight fingers in his and put them to his lips. "As for Derry and Rosemary, I've no doubt you're right. If they're assembling, we've only ourselves to thank. But I'm ready and willing to bet it's not gone very far. If I'm right, the threat of exposure will kill it dead. An affair like this, while it's young, can be frightened to death."

"After all," said Virginia slowly, "you ought to know. And I hope to Heaven you're right. I like you, Roger, you know. And I'm fond of you—in a way. But the thought of losing Derry . . ."

She let the sentence go and put her face in her hands.

Captain Chase had switched on the light and was scribbling on the back of his envelope.

After a correction or two—

"How will this do?" he demanded. "Agony Column of *The Times. Unless owner of valuable closed car receives an abject apology from each of the occupants of the coupé which at a moment when they were* OTHERWISE ENGAGED *was driven across his path, thereby almost occasioning a serious accident, he will publish the time and place at which the incident occurred, together with the number of the offending car.*"

Virginia Peruke sat up, with a mischievous light in her eyes.

"I should simply love," she said, "to see his apology. And yet," she continued gently, "I should hate him to be all upset. You see, if ever he's worried he always comes to me. And he couldn't come to me about this. And—and I should feel awfully guilty and dreadfully mean."

"I don't want her to come unbuttoned," said Roger musingly. "I couldn't bear that. But I'm out to stop the rot—without involvin' ourselves."

Virginia interlaced ten rosy fingers.

"I don't quite know what I want," she said, as though thinking aloud. "Yes, I do. I want Derry back—terribly. Yet I want him to be smacked—not hard, just enough to sting. But I couldn't enjoy his smacking unless I was smacked too. Can you ever begin to understand? You see, we ought to be involved—if justice is to be done."

"That's right," said Roger. "You've assaulted the nail. My tail ought to be twisted, but not by Rosemary. Rosemary ought to be gingered but not by me. What we all want is a public executioner."

Virginia nodded.

"That's the idea," she said. "Someone to clear the air. I don't think we'll need that notice. Any way, to-morrow we'll know. And if this affair's going strong, you can shove it in. But I don't believe it is. If I love an' cherish Derry, I think he'll come back. And Rosemary too. What's beginning to break my heart is that *things won't be the same*. I'd jump at a general confession, but if they didn't join in, it'd only make matters worse. If only something would happen to clear the air."

"The god in the car," said Roger, nodding his head. "That's the wallah we want. You know. The Greeks were poets all right, but they couldn't write plays. They could mess up their characters' lives, but when the time came they couldn't straighten them out. And as it was a case—the audience bein' strict—of a small hemlock or a happy endin', in the last act they always roped in a god on board a truck who made the garden lovely before bringin' the curtain down."

This admirable exposition was rudely received.

"In fact," said Virginia fiercely, "your wretched god in the car is about as much use to us as a witch in a fairy-tale. Upon my soul, what an idiot a man can be. I ask for ideas; and you hand me a lot of wash about——"

"You said we wanted something to clear the air. I only corroborated ——"

"Who wants corroboration? Do you? I know I don't. Do pull yourself together and try and think. It'll seem strange at first, of course—using your brain. But you can sleep it off."

As the car turned into Pall Mall—

"Any way," said Roger thickly, "those two have opened my eyes. You're undeniably lovely, but you're devilish——"

“Strict,” said Virginia, laying a hand on his arm. “Like your Athenian audience. I want a happy ending—so very much.”

The man turned and looked at the beautiful face.

This was eager, but the great grey eyes were wistful, and the exquisite mouth——

It occurred to Roger suddenly that the mouth could not be compared to that of Rosemary.

“So—so do I,” he faltered.

* * * * *

The Inspector leaned back in his chair and took his cigar from his lips.

“Look ’ere,” he said. “Before you asks for your summons you must ’ave your witnesses.”

“That’s right,” said Constable Bloke of the Metropolitan Police.

“Well, where are they?” said the Inspector, with the triumphant air of one who knows that whatever answer he receives can be ground to powder.

P.C. Albert Bloke consulted his notes.

“They was in the car bearin’ the number XH 2908, sir.”

“Then you mus’ see them,” said the Inspector, “an’ take their statemen’s.” He restored his cigar to his mouth. “If they was as near smashed up as wot you say, they’ll be ready enough to come: an’ any way, if you don’t give ’em their choice, they’ll think they’ve got to.”

“That’s right,” said P.C. Bloke.

“Well, you get ’old of them this afternoon. Don’t touch the chauffeur till you’ve seen ’oo was in the car. Then ask respectful if you may see ’im. If their statemen’s is O.K., we’ll get legal assistance ’ere.”

“We did ought to,” said the constable earnestly. “It’s as wicked a case of ____”

“No case ain’t wicked without evidence,” said the Inspector. “Don’t you forget that, sonny. An’ yours alone ain’t worth a couple o’ kicks. You must ’ave corroboration. That coopy’ll bring down counsel—you see if it don’t. An’ if you ’adn’t got no backing—why, ’e’d turn you inside out before your eyes.” He raised his own to heaven and sighed as one who trusts that his enemies’ offences against him are not forgotten. “I’ve ’ad some,” he added

heavily. “Never min’. Statemen’s, summons, legal assistance and conviction. That’s the order, me boy, an’ statemen’s first.”

“Very good, sir,” said P.C. Bloke.

The constable was ambitious.

Ever since orders had come through that the reckless driving of motor vehicles was to be actively discouraged, P.C. Albert Bloke had been awaiting his chance. This, until one that morning, an inscrutable Fortune had obstinately withheld. Then all of a sudden she had smiled—dazzlingly.

At dangerous cross-roads a coupé, proceeding at an unlawful speed, had swerved right across the roadway, almost collided with a limousine, very nearly knocked him down, passed a refuge on the wrong side and taken no notice at all of his orders to stop. (Such disregard was hardly surprising, for by the time the orders were given the car was out of earshot: but P.C. Bloke had decided that the ends of justice should not be defeated like that, and that if the coupé’s misconduct had cramped his style that was its own funeral.) More. The coupé’s tail-light was luminous, its number-plate clean, and P.C. Bloke had his note-book in his hand. As though to crown his endeavours, the limousine, plainly indignant, had dallied just long enough to enable him to add her number to that of the offending car.

Reference to the licensing authorities had given him the names of the owners of the respective cars, and an interview with his Inspector had, as we have seen, pointed the path to glory and the surest way to tread.

When he turned into Curzon Street at a quarter past five, P.C. Albert Bloke was prepared to wring a statement from a Trappist.

Peering into the library of the house which he was seeking, you might have thought that the bird of Care had there no rest for the sole of its foot. To be frank, it was on the wing.

That morning Virginia had breakfasted downstairs for the first time for half a year. Afterwards, at her suggestion, she and Derry had played a round of golf. The game did much, but the way in which she had asked him to give her lunch was irresistible. Her husband’s surprise at her attention was swallowed in a spring-tide of joy. This was infectious. Resolutely thrusting Rosemary out of her thoughts, Virginia found him attractive as never before and, surreptitiously comparing him with Roger, began to wonder whether she had been bewitched. When in the afternoon they repaired to Lord’s, pride of possession came to steal her content. Thronged as was the ground with a distinguished company, brilliant as was the parade upon the mighty

green, Derry Peruke stood out, a notable figure of a man. Virginia was equally conspicuous, but love had no eyes for that. Presently Royalty saw them, and the two were sent for. Virginia's cup was full. . . .

The match was over early, and as they were leaving the ground two familiar figures emerged from a covered stand and, apparently engrossed in mutual admiration, stepped almost into their arms.

For a second Virginia's sun lurched in his heaven. Then, quick as a flash, she did the right thing.

"My dear," she said to Rosemary, "but what a peach of a dress. Come back and have tea in Curzon Street and let me digest its style. And I'll show you one from Michele that I'm afraid to put on."

Mrs. Chase picked up her cue. . . .

The four shared a taxi to Mayfair and, putting their shoulders to the tambourine, kept this upon the move. Their efforts met with success. By inches uneasiness was shunted, and by the time that tea was served the four were displaying a fellowship which was every moment becoming more spontaneous. Old days, old laughter were recaptured: umbrage was overwhelmed, the sense of injury starved. The spectre of resentment was there, but it was under hatches.

Then the butler entered and spoke to Derry.

"A policeman?" said the latter. "Oh, a summons, I s'pose. Jenny, m'dear, have you been stopped in the Park?"

"That's right," said Virginia, turning. "On Monday. But what a sinful shame. I wasn't doing thirty, and they said at the time—— Constable!"

"Madam," said P.C. Bloke and entered the room.

"Who applied for this summons? Was it a keeper with a grey moustache?"

P.C. Bloke stared.

"What summons, madam?" he said blankly.

Amid a roar of laughter, Virginia clapped her hands to her mouth.

"I have said the wrong thing, haven't I? Never mind. Constable, I'm sure from your face you know when to be deaf."

P.C. Bloke grinned respectfully.

“I ’ope so, madam.”

“That’s right,” said Virginia. “And now what can we do for you?”

The constable turned to Derry.

“Major Peruke, sir?”

“That’s right,” said Derry comfortably. “What have I done?”

“Nothin’ at all, sir,” said Bloke hastily. “I’m not after you. But I think you’ve a limousine car, sir,” he added with a business-like air.

“So I have,” said Derry Peruke.

“Number XH 2908, sir.”

“Quite right,” said Derry, wondering what was afoot.

“Were you usin’ ’er early this mornin’, sir?”

Virginia started, Rosemary caught her breath, and Roger, who had been about to drink, held his refreshment for a moment half-way to his lips and then replaced it untasted upon a table. Of the four Peruke alone betrayed no emotion at all.

“Yes,” he said casually enough. “Drove here from Carlton House Terrace about—about half-past two, wasn’t it, dear?”

Bitterly conscious of an unusually high, if becoming colour—

“Exactly,” replied his wife. “I heard the clock at the Palace strike as we passed.”

“Did you use ’er before that, sir—this side of midnight?”

In an electric silence Derry shook his head.

“Not after midnight,” he said. “I drove to Carlton House Terrace about eleven and home about half-past two, but that was all.”

The constable raised his eyebrows.

“Then I’m afraid she was bein’ used, sir, without your authority. An’ as this is rather important, I’d like a word with your chauffeur—if you’ve no objection.”

There was another silence.

Violently red in the face, Captain Chase sat like a graven image, wide-eyed but sightless. One slight hand to her mouth, Rosemary, still as death, stared upon the floor.

Realizing that something must be done, and done quickly, Virginia took a deep breath.

"You say 'before midnight'?" she said barefacedly.

"*After* midnight, madam," corrected P.C. Bloke.

"Oh, I used her *after* midnight," said Virginia. "I thought you were talking about before."

"No, after, dear," said Derry gallantly.

"Oh, I used her after midnight." She turned to her husband. "I felt I must have some air, so I sent for Filmer and went for a little drive."

"Ah, that explains it," said Derry, waving a hand. As though released from a spell, Captain and Mrs. Chase relaxed their muscles and murmured their concurrence. "Anything else, Constable?"

"If you please, sir." He turned to Virginia. "Excuse me askin' you, madam, but were you alone?"

Supercharged with resentment and mortification, Virginia could have burst.

Instead, she turned to Roger.

"Did you come with me or not? I know you said you were going to, but I went to sleep almost at once, and——"

"Yes, I came," said Roger, uncrossing and recrossing his legs and mentally consigning all women and police-officers to outer darkness. "Don't you remember when I woke you to say we were back?"

"I can't say I do," said Virginia ruthlessly. "Never mind." She turned to the constable. "This gentleman says he was with me."

P.C. Bloke addressed himself to Roger.

"D'you remember anythin' 'appenin,' sir, during your drive?"

With goggling eyes, Roger assured the ceiling that he could recall nothing.

"It was a most—most uneventful progress," he added thickly.

A deeper tinge of colour stole into Virginia's cheeks.

P.C. Bloke frowned and fingered his chin.

"Nothing at all, sir?" he ventured.

Not daring to trust his voice, Captain Chase shook his head.

Rosemary cleared her throat.

"Perhaps," she said slowly, "—it's nothing to do with me—but perhaps if the constable could give you some sort of idea of what he wants to know . . ."

"I agree," said Derry heartily, taking out cigarettes. "What are you after, Constable? Somebody been knocked down?"

"We never knocked anybody down," said Virginia. "That I'll swear."

"Oh no, madam," said P.C. Bloke. "I'm not suggestin' it. It's rather the other way. But as neither you nor the gentleman don't recall no inciden', I'm afraid p'r'aps I'm wastin' your time." He turned to Derry. "Can you tell me where I shall find your chauffeur, sir?"

For the second time reference to the chauffeur as a possible fount of information produced an immediate effect.

"Ha-half a moment," said Roger desperately. "I mean, as my wife was saying, can't you give us any idea of what you're getting at?" He laughed inanely. "You see, you've—you've aroused our curiosity, and I—we feel it's only fair to put us wise."

He stopped there to wipe the sweat from his brow.

The constable glanced about him before replying.

Virginia, scarlet in the face, was smoking furiously and regarding an exquisite Herring with narrowed eyes. Handkerchief to lips, Rosemary, whose sense of humour her husband's agonized travail had rendered mutinous, fought to suppress her mirth. With the idiotic grin of one who is seeking to maintain his gravity by entering the cataleptic state, Major Peruke gazed upon a bowl of sweet-peas.

Wondering if this deportment was that generally obtaining in Curzon Street, P.C. Albert Bloke referred to his notes—less for the purpose of refreshing his memory than with some hazy idea of stabilizing his wits, the formation of which was beginning to get ragged.

Almost unconsciously he began to read aloud his report.

"*At 1.10 a.m. on July the eighth I was on duty at the junction of Roe'ampton Lane and Dandle Row. A limousine car, ooze number I afterwards ascertained to be XH 2908, was about to turn out of the Row towards Richmond at a slow pace. Its lights was burnin'. As it turned out I*

made to pass be'ind it to cross the Lane when a coopy, ooze number I afterwards ascertained to be XL 9436, proceedin' at a 'igh speed in the direction of Putney 'Eath, swerved right across the roadway an'——"

Derry's cigarette-case fell to the parquet with a crash.

Everyone jumped violently, and Rosemary, white to the lips, stifled a cry. Purple in the face, the culprit stammered apologies and garnered his cigarettes with trembling fingers. Remembering her recent ignominy, Virginia surveyed his efforts with a cold and glittering stare. His hands clapped to his face, Roger furtively regarded his wife between his fingers.

"Go on, Constable," said Virginia sweetly. " 'Swerved right across the roadway' directly into the path of the limousine, whose headlights were on."

"Thank you, madam," said Bloke triumphantly. "I couldn't say that myself because I was be'ind your car. But it passed so close to me that I felt the wind on me face." He turned to Roger. "Do you remember it too, sir?"

As though wishful to uproot it, Captain Chase tugged his moustache.

"I—I have a faint recollection," he said uneasily. "If I remember, they—they swung away again. You know. Corrected their error an'——"

" 'Appily for you, sir," was the grim reply. "Otherwise it'd 've been manslaughter. As wicked a piece of reckless drivin' as ever I saw. Passed the refuge on the wrong side——"

"Had to do that," said Derry. "I mean—they probably couldn't 've got back without countin' the refuge out."

"Very probably, sir," said the constable. "You can't bother about them things at forty-five miles an hour."

This was too much.

"O-o-oh!" cried Rosemary. "I wasn't going——" She stopped dead there and swallowed violently. "I wasn't going to—to tell you," she continued desperately. "But I saw a car going fast the other day. Not—not so fast as that, though," she added with a sickly smile.

P.C. Albert Bloke put a hand to his head.

With shaking fingers, Major Peruke was lighting a cigarette: as he did so a bead of sweat rolled down the side of his nose. Virginia looked as though about to burst into hysterical laughter. The idiotic grin which had lately inhabited Derry's face seemed to have shifted bodily to that of Roger.

Once again the constable referred to his notes.

"*I called upon them to stop, but they took no notice.*"

"Perhaps—perhaps they didn't hear you," blurted Derry Peruke.

"That's their look-out, sir. One can't do no more than shout." He turned to Virginia. "And now if you please, madam, I'd like to take your statemen'."

A rustle of consternation greeted this curt announcement.

As the fellow felt for a pencil—

"I—I don't quite follow," said Derry. "Are you, er, proposing to prosecute?"

"We are that, sir," was the reply. "The Commissioner 'e's determined to put down this dangerous drivin'." Again he turned to Virginia. "May I 'ave your full name, madam?"

Mrs. Peruke hesitated.

"I really saw very little," she said, frowning.

"Quite so, madam," said P.C. Bloke. "They was goin' too fast to see much. But you saw them comin', didn't you?"

"Oh, I saw them all right," said Virginia, determined to get her own back. "There's nothing the matter with our headlights. You couldn't help seeing—*seeing right into the car*, could you, Roger?"

Roger was understood to concur.

Letting his pencil wander idly across a page, P.C. Bloke took on an absent air.

"Did the man who was driving——"

"It was a woman," said his victim promptly.

As if by an effort recalling his attention—

"Oh, you couldn't see that, madam," said P.C. Albert Bloke.

Oblivious of the agonized signals which Derry was making behind the officer's back—

"Of course I could," cried Virginia. "The car had right-hand steering, and she was on the right—with a man by her side. She had one hand—on the wheel."

Her cheeks flaming, frantically twisting her rings, Rosemary moistened her lips and prayed for death.

The constable shrugged his shoulders and let his pencil stray.

"If you was to say that, madam, you'd be asked if you'd know 'em again, an' then you would 'ave to say 'No.' "

"On the contrary," said Virginia, "*I should know them anywhere*."

"Bee-utiful," said Derry, wiping the sweat from his face. Virginia started at his tone and a finger flew to her lip. "Constable, I congratulate you. As delicate a piece of leading as ever I saw. Step by step, right over the edge, into the muck-heap. And now we *are* all right. 'I recognize the defendant as the woman I saw: I also recognize the man.' Any more for the witness-box? My God, what a scoop for the Press. And I should think 'the woman' driving 'd get about five years."

Rosemary went very white.

"Maximum penalty, three months, sir."

"That all? What a shame! Never mind. Read out your shorthand notes before you transcribe them. I'd like to hear the—the death-warrant."

In the midst of an appalling silence Rosemary burst into tears.

"I—I think you're very unkind," she sobbed, addressing Virginia. "Poor —poor 'woman.' I—I don't suppose for a moment she meant any harm. And but—but for you she wouldn't have been hauled up and sent to prison."

Virginia was on her knees at Rosemary's feet.

"Oh, my darling," she cried, "what a poisonous fool I've been! I only meant to pull your leg. I never dreamed——"

A hurricane of coughing from Major Peruke cut short the sentence.

As the paroxysm subsided he turned to P.C. Bloke.

"The lady," he said gravely, "is naturally upset. If you remember, she saw a car going fast the other day. Besides, we don't talk about it, but when quite a child her grocer was convicted of pound-breach, and she's never got over it."

Supposing Mrs. Chase to be simple and wondering what pound-breach might be—

"Quite so, sir," said P.C. Bloke. "Might I 'ave your lady's full name?"

“Certainly. Virginia Stacey Peruke. What had she better wear when she goes to Court? Mourning?”

Virginia began to weep violently, and P.C. Bloke, who was writing, dropped his pencil and regarded her open-mouthed.

“Supposing,” said Roger suddenly, “supposing you took my statement.” Derry started and Rosemary stiffened in her chair. Virginia continued to sob explosively. “I mean, as the lady’s going, I may as well back her up.”

“Without doubt, sir,” said the constable greedily. “May I ’ave——”

“I first saw the coupé,” said Roger, “when it was almost upon us. The headlights picked it up and enabled me to see right into the car. As our chauffeur applied his brakes, the man who was driving the coupé——”

“ ‘The woman,’ I think you mean, sir.”

“No, no,” said Roger calmly. “It was a man driving. As I was saying, he ——”

“But the lady’s stated——”

“Has she?” said Captain Chase, stifling a yawn. “Oh, well, I can’t help that. He had a hand on the wheel, and——”

“One moment, sir. Which side was the steering on?”

“On the right,” said Roger. “The man was driving with a woman by his side.”

For a moment nobody breathed. Then the constable took out a handkerchief and mopped his face.

“Well, that beats it,” he said wearily. “ ’Ere’s a direc’ conflic’ on the most important point. They can’t both ’ve bin drivin’.” He turned to Virginia. “Madam, are you sure——”

“P-positive,” quavered Virginia.

“Oh, don’t be silly,” said Roger. “He had a spade-shaped beard.”

“She hadn’t,” said Virginia stoutly. “She looked perfectly sweet.”

P.C. Bloke put his note-book and pencil away.

Then he turned to Derry.

“One or the other’s mistook, sir. That’s perfectly plain. And there for the moment I’ll leave it. If I may ’ave a word with your chauffeur . . .”

"I see," said Major Peruke. "I suppose you want him to give the casting-vote. If he says a woman was driving, you'll call the lady. If he says a man was driving——"

"Well, sir," said Bloke uneasily, "we mus' do our best. The Commissioner's orders——"

"Assume he says that the driver of the coupé was a man. Very good. In that case you call that gentleman. *Supposing the defence were to get hold of Mrs. Peruke.*"

"We mus' 'ope they wouldn't, sir."

"*But they have*," said Derry. "In fact, they've got hold of them both: and whichever one you don't want they're going to call."

The constable stared at the speaker with starting eyes.

Then he glanced round wildly.

Virginia and Captain Chase were nodding confirmatively.

"But the summons ain't issued," he cried. "There ain't no defence—not yet. Why, the coopy don't even know that its number was took."

"Oh yes, it do—doth," said Derry. "You told us as much—just now. 'Whose number I afterwards ascertained to be XL 9436.' "

"Yes, but you ain't the defence, sir."

"Not yet," was the pregnant reply.

The luckless officer recoiled against the wall.

" 'Not yet'?" he said hoarsely. "*'Not yet'?* Why, then, you . . ."

"We were the coupé," said Derry. He nodded at Mrs. Chase. "That lady and I."

"You . . . you was—oh, Gawd, what a perishin' 'ave," said P.C. Bloke.

The serio-comic note which the apostrophe sounded was irresistible: the realization that it was also sounding the retreat was overwhelming: the four dissolved in peals of hysterical laughter.

With tears running down his cheeks, Derry sloshed whisky and soda into a glass and pressed the beverage into the constable's hand.

"You've earned it," he sobbed. "Earned it better than you know. 'One crowded hour of glorious life is worth' a spot without a stain—and a bit

over. We'll adjust the balance in a minute. What are you going to tell the Commissioner?"

Albert Bloke put his empty hand to his head.

"I never see such a case," he said unsteadily. "Talk about 'and in glove. Why, the pro'ibited degrees ain't in it. An' there's my answer. *'Usbands an' wives ain't competent witnesses, sir.*"

There was a sudden silence.

Then—

"Thank you," said Derry softly. "I—I think we'd forgotten that," he added, glancing around.

"It's—it's a very good rule," said Virginia gently.

"It is," said Roger.

"It's of pure gold," said Rosemary. "But it doesn't sound like the Law. It's more like the Book of Proverbs."

"I've no doubt it dates from then," said Derry Peruke. "Solomon probably made it in self-defence."

"Seven 'undred statemen's," said P.C. Bloke brokenly.

"He had a spade-shaped beard," said Roger, laughing.

"But the Queen of Sheba was driving," said Mrs. Peruke.

"The gods," said Rosemary Chase, "were in the other car."

Virginia shook her head.

"I never saw them," she said. "There were a couple of goats."

"That's right," cried Roger excitedly. "The god in the car was on foot."

"Masquerading," said his wife, "as a recording angel."

"Which shows," said Derry, "that the cobbler should stick to his last. As a recorder, he's failed. As the god in the car, he's done what we couldn't have done in a thousand years."

"Exactly," observed Virginia. "He's cleared the air."

"And that," said Rosemary Chase, "with the flat of the sword."

P.C. Bloke, whose brain had been out of its depth ever since the Queen of Sheba, plunged to where it could touch bottom and raised his glass.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “your very good health.”

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *As Other Men Are* by Cecil William Mercer (as Dornford Yates)]