MAIDEN STAKES

by

Dornford Yates

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THE COURTS OF IDLENESS
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AS OTHER MEN ARE
THE STOLEN MARCH
MAIDEN STAKES
BLIND CORNER
PERISHABLE GOODS
BLOOD royal
FIRE BELOW
SAFE CUSTODY
STORM MUSIC
SHE FELL AMONG THIEVES
SHE PAINTED HER FACE
THIS PUBLICAN
GALE WARNING
SHOAL WATER
PERIOD STUFF
AN EYE FOR A TOOTH

MAIDEN STAKES

BY

DORNFORD YATES

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TO

Those exquisite summer evenings, when I have sat, in my shirt-sleeves, two thousand five hundred feet up, watching my elders and betters using the scythe, and, by their comfortable labour, performing the incredible feat of adding sweetness to the mountain air.

CHILDISH THINGS

CICELY RAGE's letter reached me when I was in a receptive mood.

I had just returned from Harley Street, where I had rather childishly paid three guineas to be told what I already knew to be the truth.

"My dear sir, of course it's the concussion. If every vehicle were electrically propelled and ran upon comfort tires, or if twelve years ago you hadn't been shot through the brain, London Town wouldn't give you a headache to-day. As it is . . ."

"I know, I know. But the country in bad weather . . . . I mean, last summer was awful. Besides, my friends . . . ."

"Why don't you travel for a bit?" said the physician, rising. "And marry. Marry a nice, quiet girl."

"There aren't any left," said I.

He laughed and saw me out, and I drove to the Club.

Five minutes later the letter was in my hands.

March 28th.

DEAR ADAM,

Toby and I have found a peach of a place, but it's too big for us alone. Will you come in? We can have it from now for six months. Up on the top of a hill, four bathrooms, private plage, quarter of an hour from Biarritz—and the rest. Please wire because we've got to decide. Too hot to write more.

CICELY.

And overleaf was scrawled—

This is a real good thing and the cellar is half full of Roederer 1914. I've bought that, any way—just in case.

TOBY.

It was absurdly vague and ridiculously attractive. 'Too hot to write more.' I raised my eyes from the sheet. In St. James's Street a fine snow was

falling. . . .

After a little reflection I sent my reply.

I will come in and shall leave for Biarritz on Thursday next.

I was really extraordinarily thankful.

I had known and loved Cicely for twenty years, and Toby had chosen me to be his best man. Indeed, they were, both of them, after my own heart. They were reasonable and did reasonably in an unreasonable age. They liked the high lights, rejoiced in revelry, could lift a dragging party into a blazing success: but their lives were not founded upon these things and never had been. They could dine alone together for a month and afterwards sit by the fire and find each sober evening a refreshing festival. One of their closest friends was a High Court Judge who had never entered a Casino and drank cocoa with every meal. The two were pre-war.

But for the invitation I do not know what I should have done.

Thanks to a patient sniper, for eleven long years I had been at a very loose end—an existence which may suit some men, but was to me obnoxious. The Boleyns have always been Heralds, and, but for that enemy marksman, I should have been engaged at the College of Arms. I was not made to be idle, and hated the state: neither was I made to dwell in the countryside—at least, not alone: finally, to set down the truth, I did not seem to have been made to enjoy the post-war world. Fashions, outlook, the spirit and manners of the age—I found the lot beyond me. To condemn them would have been presumptuous. I merely deplored the fact that I could not adapt myself to their demands. The dance of life had altered, and I could not master the steps. So I had withdrawn from the struggle and gone back to what was left of the old highways which people used to tread before the War, passing along them soberly and for the most part alone, and occasionally wondering whether, after all, the sniper had not known better than the surgeons who saved my life.

I was a young fogey.

My life was orderly to the last degree. Nothing was ever out of place. I never hurried, because I was always in time. The groove I was in was always swept and garnished. Regularity and Convenience became my gods. I hated them bitterly, but so often as I offended against their laws I was plagued with regret and depression within the hour. At such moments I

began to understand why men who have no worries sometimes find life too much for them.

'And marry.'

As I drove back to my flat, I decided that she would have to be very, very quiet. . . .

One advantage of being at a loose end for eleven years is that you and your servants become mobile. On Wednesday morning all my arrangements were complete. Banner was to take the big baggage, and Wiseman and I were to go down to Biarritz by car.

Cicely's wire was delivered about midday.

Splendid my dear please bring Judy.

Supposing rather bitterly that the weather at Biarritz was still too hot to permit of detailed correspondence, I decided that to wire for information would be to court trouble. Judy was probably a dog—possibly a lady's maid, and my arrangements provided for the conveyance of neither; but if Judy's instructions were as blunt as mine, it was more than likely that before the lady reported, I should be on the road.

Indeed, by six o'clock that evening I was growing quite confident. . . .

Then quite suddenly the door bell was rung, and I knew it was all over. The same bell had been rung quite half a dozen times since Cicely's wire had arrived, but there was an ominous resolution about this particular peal which there was no mistaking.

I sat extremely still on the arm of a chair, listening to Banner's footsteps and wondering why on earth I hadn't gone to the Club.

The next moment the door was burst open by an enormous Alsatian, which crossed the floor in one bound, put its forepaws on my shoulders, knocked me backwards into the lap of the chair, and, having me thus at a disadvantage, proceeded exuberantly to lick my face.

Somebody began to wail with laughter.

When I could do so, I rose.

At the other end of the lead, that is to say, about five feet away, stood a girl with the finest eyes that ever I saw. They were big and grey and steady, and once you had seen them it was hard to look away. I didn't try. The rest of her fitted in. Her hair was thick and dark and curly—cut, of course: her

eyebrows were straight, and her nose aquiline. She had a glorious colour and an exquisite mouth. On her head was a little peaked hat that would have done for Rosalind, and below that a squirrel coat that came as far as her knees. The rest was pale silk stockings and patent-leather slippers as small as you please.

"My name's Sentinel," she said. "And I know you're Captain Boleyn. I'm very sorry."

"Not at all," said I, shaking the whiskey and soda out of my sleeve. "Won't you sit down?" She took a seat on the table, while the dog climbed into my chair. I pointed to the darling. "Don't say that's Judy," I added brokenly.

For a moment Miss Sentinel stared: then she gave a light laugh.

"Good Heavens, no," she said. She hesitated, regarding me curiously. Then, "May I have a cigarette?"

"You're too young to smoke," said I, opening a box. "But here you are."

As I lighted a match—

"But I've come about Judy," she said. "What train are you going by?"

"I'm not going by train. I'm going down in the car."

"I thought perhaps you would," said the girl, swinging a leg. "Well, that's all right. Judy won't take up much room."

"I'm not certain she'll take up any room," said I severely. "When I know what——"

"But Cicely said——"

"I know. It's a way that Cicely has. But I'm not going to travel a maid six hundred miles by road. Besides, it's a coupé."

"Who ever heard of a maid called Judy?" said Miss Sentinel.

"No one," said I stoutly. "But that's not my fault. I don't know what Judy is. But I know Cicely. And for those two most excellent reasons I reserve the right, upon being shown Judy, to refuse to convey her."

Miss Sentinel tilted her chin.

"I am Judy," she said.

Looking back, I assume I was bewitched.

Of course I refused point-blank. A condemned murderer might as well have refused to be hanged.

Judy was quiet, smiling and inevitable.

"Cicely said that I should be safe in your hands."

"That's not the point."

"It's my point."

Half an hour later I took her down in the lift, utterly vanquished and listening to Judy's terms.

Then I returned and broke the news to Banner.

"Mrs. Rage has asked me to take that young lady with me. She's got to go out to Biarritz, and she's rather too young to travel so far alone. You'll take her big baggage with mine."

"Very good, sir. And the dog, sir? Will the dog go with you?"

"The dog is not going," I said boldly.

I was quite wrong.

The dog travelled in the coupé.

I hate to advertise my departure from Town. I like to leave for America with no more outward signs than I give when leaving for Sandown. But before we started on Thursday most of St. James's must have known that I was going to France, and Judy with me.

The most arresting moment of a crowded afternoon was that at which Judy indicated from about two tons of luggage those pieces which were indispensable to her convenience for the next three days.

Regardless of the onlookers, we stood on the pavement in Bury Street and argued it out.

"There's the car," I said. "It's one of the longest chassis built. But if you can get two cabin-trunks, a hat-box, two dressing-cases and a chauffeur into that boot——"

"I must have them," said Judy definitely. "And that suit-case too. My bedroom slippers are in that."

There was an awful silence.

"All right," I said at last. "Wiseman must take it by train and pick us up each night."

“If I could repack,” said Judy, “I might get through with a trunk.”

“Make it a dressing-case,” said I.

“Very well.”

The stuff was lugged upstairs, and Judy ‘repacked,’ calling to me for advice from time to time.

“How many stockings shall I want, Captain Boleyn?”

“Six pairs,” I said glibly. It seemed the easiest way.

It was when we were downstairs again that she remembered her sponge-bag.

As Banner went to find it—

“Could you put it in your pocket?” said Judy. “I’m always so afraid of its wetting something.”

“So be it,” I said grimly.

That her fears were well founded I saw from Banner’s face. . . . A towel was fetched, the bag was unpacked on the pavement and a pint and a half of water was wrung into the gutter. The homely operation was witnessed and enjoyed by several strangers, some of whom offered advice.

We started at last, an hour and three-quarters late.

I stopped inexplicably in Knightsbridge to buy her some flowers, and at Hammersmith Judy discovered that her wrist-watch was not on her wrist. We went back that time, but when later we had passed Purley and she remembered that Nanette’s biscuits had been left in the hall, I hardened my heart.

I let the car go, but dusk was falling as we ran out of Lewes. Then Nanette had to ‘have a run.’ I pulled up with some misgivings, and Judy opened the door. Nanette sprang out and disappeared in a wood. . . .

Nanette is not a good name to shout, but we all did it. Judy, Wiseman and I shouted and yelled ‘Nanette’ for fifty sodden minutes into the night. Judy shouted from the car, I shouted from the road, and Wiseman shouted from the recesses of the wood. Finally Nanette returned. She was very effusive, very wet, very happy and heavily coated with fish manure.

“Oh, how awful,” said Judy, holding her delicate nose. “What did you say it was?”

“The polite name,” said I, “is fertilizer.”

“Is—is it anything like manure?” said Judy faintly.

“Almost exactly,” I said.

“Then that’s why,” said Judy triumphantly. “She always rolls in manure if she gets a chance.”

I tried not to scream. . . .

I shall always associate Newhaven with the ablutions of Nanette. These were performed surreptitiously in an hotel bathroom by Wiseman and myself, took the best part of an hour, cost me two pounds in hush-money and constituted at once the most revolting and strenuous ritual to which in war or peace I have ever been called upon to subscribe.

Then we dined—at least, I watched Judy dine, which was almost as bad. Afterwards we walked on the quay. There were few enough people about and only one I knew: he was plainly the worse for wear and fast asleep. His name was Kenner, and we were at school together till he was fired. The stars were out and the sea was like a great fleece of black and silver.

Judy slid an arm through mine.

“I think the hotel people think we’re eloping,” she said.

“That,” said I, “is more than probable.”

“Well, I don’t care,” said Judy.

We walked the length of the quay.

“It’s quite absurd,” said Judy, “for me to go on calling you ‘Captain Boleyn,’ isn’t it?”

“Idiotic,” said I, “considering I’ve carried your sponge-bag.”

“Then I shan’t any more, Adam.” For a moment she stared seawards. Then she peered up at my face. “Why are you nice to me?” I suppose I hesitated, for she went on swiftly. “I mean, I’ve messed everything up. I’ve made you late and tired you and crowded you out. We’ve come like a drunken circus instead of like—like Captain Boleyn.”

“There spoke Miss Sentinel,” said I—truthfully.

The girl frowned.

“I’m not always a child,” she said. “Sometimes I get, as Americans say, a hunch. So I sit up straight, and all of a sudden I’m wise.” She withdrew

her arm from mine. “Those sponges!” she cried. “And you ate nothing because you felt all sick—washing that filthy dog.” She stamped her foot. “Why don’t I think? Oh, I’m all upset at the way I behave. I might be nine, and I’m really twenty-one.”

“You have no age,” I said. “That’s the warrant you hold for all you do. I saw that the moment you came. And that’s—that’s why I’m nice to you, Judy.” I took her arm and we turned landwards to the lights swaying on the water and the faint hiss of steam. “Don’t you bother about it—just go straight on. Besides, Nanette was very good—stood like a lamb, and I wasn’t really hungry.”

“She is good, isn’t she?” said Judy eagerly.

There was only one cabin available, and that was the one I had reserved. I like to think that Judy slept well. I did not sleep. The reek of disinfectant in the car was overpowering. Besides, I am out of the way of slumbering in my clothes. But I was ashore at dawn and had shaved and bathed and changed before she was up. As I went down to breakfast I came upon Wiseman cleaning a small pair of shoes. . . .

The idea was to stay at Tours, but I gave that up. ‘Fresh woods and pastures new’ call for inspection: this was the very first time that Judy had been in France.

I got her out of Rouen by three o’clock, and two hours later I sighted the spires of Chartres.

When I pointed them out to Judy she jumped up and down, and Nanette got up on the seat and mauled us both.

“Yes,” I said, “that’s the place where we’re going to stay: and now be a good little girl and listen to me.”

“Go on,” said Judy.

“I have decided,” I said, “to stay in the same hotel.”

“As what?”

“As you.”

Miss Sentinel opened her eyes.

“But why on earth not?” she said.

“Convention,” I said. “It isn’t usually done.”

“Oh, blow Convention,” said Judy, pushing Nanette into place and dragging her scrap of a skirt to cover her knees.

“I’m going to blow Convention, but she’s got to be blown my way.”

Judy laid her head on my shoulder and rubbed her cheek up and down.

“I love little Adam,
His coat is so warm,
And if I don’t hurt him,
He’ll do me no harm.”

I didn’t know whether to laugh or whether to cry. . . .

To stay in the same house was out of all order, yet how could I leave her alone in a strange hotel? There was Nanette, of course, but—— Oh, it was unthinkable.

“Look here, Judy,” said I. “The general idea is for me to be within call, and the pet, particular, special is to prevent the public from thinking that we have, er, eloped.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m funny like that. Now then. I’m going to drive to the station and pick up a cab. Wiseman will take my place and drive you to the hotel. It will be your car, and he will be your chauffeur. You are a lady of consequence, travelling alone. You and Wiseman will forget about me—I shan’t exist any more. Meanwhile I shall come on, having travelled by train. I shall arrive after you and take a room. We may meet at dinner, but you mustn’t know me——”

“From Adam,” said Judy swiftly. “But this is silly. Why shouldn’t we meet by accident in the hotel? That’s natural enough.”

I swallowed.

“All right,” I said reluctantly. “I suppose we can run into each other in the dining-room: but you must play up and take your cue from me. And you’re not to go out without Wiseman.”

“But I want to see the Cathedral.”

“I’ll meet you there to-morrow: and to-night—remember, I shall be there if you need me. It’s not a big house, and you’ve only to call my name. But that’s an emergency measure. Otherwise——”

“I think it’s a stupid game,” said Judy. “I was looking forward to to-night. I wanted you to take me to the movies.”

“I can’t help it,” said I doggedly.

“You can’t love me,” said Judy, shaking her head. “And I was just beginning to think you did.”

“I expect that’s it,” said I.

In dudgeon Miss Sentinel lighted a cigarette.

I got out of the car at the station, and Wiseman extracted my case. I explained the position briefly.

“Remember,” I concluded solemnly, “Miss Sentinel is in your charge. Pretend I’ve gone back to England and you’ve got to see her through. You’ll take the dog out, of course.”

“Very good, sir. And if there’s any trouble. . . .”

“There mustn’t be any trouble.”

“Very good, sir.” He looked about him. “I don’t see a cab, sir.”

“There’ll be one in a minute. Carry on.”

As the car slid away Judy blew me a kiss.

There was not a cab in a minute. After a quarter of an hour I decided to walk. The way lay uphill, and my coat was not made for walking: neither, for the matter of that, was my dressing-case made to be carried: it was made to be wheeled or lifted by two very strong men. The thought, however, of Judy pricked me along. . . .

I asked for a room with a bathroom, hoping hard against hope. When they said there was one available I could have thrown up my hat. Then my case was shouldered, and I followed it up.

Of course we were next door.

I might have guessed that would happen, and I didn’t know for a moment whether to be sorry or glad. Our bathrooms were separated by a lath and plaster wall—French laths, French plaster—probably run up by a plumber’s apprentice during the Christmas recess. I could have done it better myself. It was certainly sight-proof, but I could hear Nanette lapping water as soon as I entered my room.

As the porter closed my door—

“Adam, dear,” said Judy.

“Be quiet,” said I. “Go away. Supposing it hadn’t been me.”

“I heard your voice,” said Judy indignantly. “I heard you say ‘*De la bière*.’ I wish I’d thought of beer—the tea’s rotten.”

“For God’s sake stop,” said I. “The man’ll be back in a minute.”

“All right. Did you get a cab?”

Here a waiter entered to ask if I wanted some beer.

“Did you get a cab?” repeated Judy.

The waiter’s face was a study.

I gave the order fiercely and then told Judy off.

“You’ve torn everything up,” I raged.

“Then, if I have,” said Judy, “we may as well talk.”

I replied by slamming my bathroom door. . . .

The beer calmed me down. Moreover, my walk from the station had reduced a bath from the order of luxurious to the ranks of necessary things.

Presently I opened the door like a thief in the night.

“At last,” said Judy. “My dear, you’ve got my sponge-bag.”

If I had been quick, I should have sworn I’d lost it. But I am not quick.

I said, “Good God, so I have.”

“Well, what about it?” said Judy. “The easiest way would be to push it through the wall, but I suppose you won’t do that.”

“You must do without it,” said I.

“Don’t be indecent,” said Miss Sentinel. “I’ll tell you what to do.”

“What?”

“We’ve each got a balcony. If you’re a good shot, you could throw it across.”

That seemed an idea.

As I opened the window I was glad to see it was dark.

“Don’t try to catch it,” I said. “Let it fall and then pick it up.”

Of course she tried to catch it, and of course it fell into the street. People were passing and I heard them start and exclaim. Judy began to shriek with laughter. . . .

I don't know what I said, but everyone was very polite and understanding. The peals of laughter alone would have disarmed an inquisitor. I had to laugh myself as I threw it up from the street. Then I bowed very low.

"*A votre service, Madame.*"

"*Merci, Monsieur*," cried Judy in a ravishing tone.

I returned somewhat comforted. The episode had been shared with those in the street. The hotel had seen nothing.

During our baths I made Miss Sentinel promise that, if I consented to converse when we were upstairs, outside our respective doors we should appear utter strangers. The recognition in the dining-room was definitely washed out, and we were not to address one another publicly till we were ready to leave the city. The rendezvous was to be the Cathedral.

I let her go down first and gave her five minutes' grace in case of accidents. Then I descended the stairs.

Afterwards it transpired that she had forgotten a handkerchief.

Be that as it may, we met face to face in the lounge. I saw her coming when she was ten yards away. And she saw me. What is much more to the point, so did Nanette. . . . I might have been her long-lost whelp.

With a whimper of delight the great dog sprang upon me, bringing her mistress in her train. I was licked furiously, fawned upon, pawed, flogged with an excited tail. Judy was licked and embraced. I said "Down, Nanette," and was licked and buffeted again. Judy caught at my arm and fell into tremulous mirth. And Nanette, having done her bit, began to bark. . . .

The whole hotel was laughing, and Convention was sent empty away.

We dined together, shared a bottle of Cliquot and went to a cinema in great contentment.

At least, I extracted a promise that she would not address me upstairs.

I felt that Convention ought to have those crumbs.

It was two days later, as we were nearing Angoulême, that I felt a familiar chill strike into my limbs.

My malaria is nothing serious. Sometimes a year goes by without an attack. But when the bouts come they come swiftly, and while they last I am completely out of action.

Mercifully the city was only ten miles away.

My one idea was to get there while I could drive. . . .

I did it, but my body was shaking as I whipped up the winding hill, and as I turned into the yard I felt Judy catch at my arm.

"*Adam!*"

"N-nothing," I chattered. "Only——"

"*You're ill, Adam. My dear, you're terribly ill.* Your face. . . ."

"N-no. Malaria, Judy. It's n-nothing at all. I've had it m-millions of times. W-Wiseman knows. I've g-got quinine in my d-dressing-case."

"You must have a doctor at once."

"No, no. Ask Wiseman. I'm speaking the absolute t-truth. But I must get to bed. It's n-nothing, honestly."

The hotel staff thought I was dying, but I laughed them away. Then they gave me a room and I hurried upstairs.

"L-look after Miss Sentinel, Wiseman. D-don't leave the place. Where is she now?"

"I don't know, sir," said Wiseman, unpacking my case.

"Well, g-go and find out."

"When you're in bed, sir," said Wiseman stubbornly. . . .

I was frightfully, hideously hot. The sheets burned me and the pillows seemed to be on fire. It was only a phase, of course. I knew it of old. And of old I had found it interminable. My brain was aching, and my body was racked with pain. But the heat was the worst of all. I was being consumed. The room was dim, and I wondered if it was night. I wanted very badly to know the time. The last thing I could remember was being blue with cold. No. A long, hot flush, warming my shaking limbs—the beginning of the bad stage. That was what I remembered. How long ago was that? Three hours or three minutes. The bad stage is the devil for magnifying time. You lose your

bearings in an instant. Your standards are subverted. There's a hymn that says 'A thousand ages in Thy sight Are like an evening gone.' Well, with the bad stage it's the other way round. And always when you least expect it the sweat breaks out. And then it's all over. It's very simple—and harmless. Only, at the time it's like death. I would have sold my soul to know the time. . . .

"Poor old fellow," said Judy, laying a hand on my brow.

I sat up and tried to argue, but she made me lie down at once and covered me up.

"Your reputation," I cried. "Judy, I beg you to go."

"Hush, dear," said Judy gently. "I knew you'd say that. And listen."

"I won't, I can't. Where's Wiseman? I told him——"

"My reputation is safe. They think I'm your wife."

I sat up again at that, but she pushed me back.

"Wiseman is calling me 'Madam,' and I rushed out and bought a ring."

I stared at the thin gold circlet and tried to speak, but either because I was voiceless or because of the fire in my brain I could say nothing. After a moment I took the little pink hand and put its palm to my lips.

Judy held it there tight and hid her face in the sheets. . . .

At last the sweat broke and the fever began to fall.

At ten o'clock that night I was perfectly well.

After some supper had been served I sent for Wiseman, and when he had shut the door I made him a little speech.

"It sometimes happens, Wiseman, that something we would particularly like to remember we have to forget. When I say that, I am speaking for you and me. But I am speaking for Miss Sentinel too when I say that *we are all three going to forget that we have ever seen a city called Angoulême*. If we have never seen it, it is obvious that we can never have stayed there, and that when we reach Biarritz, as we shall to-morrow evening, we must have come from Tours in the day, stopping nowhere at all and eating our luncheon by the wayside."

"Very good, sir."

I turned to Judy, curled in a chair by my side and smoking a cigarette.

"It's time my lady was in bed." I put out my hand. "Good night, Judy, and thank you very, very much." For a moment the girl regarded me. Then she slipped to her feet and took my hand. "I've never come through a go so quickly or easily before. You were just wonderful."

"Rot," said Judy. She passed to the bathroom which lay between our rooms. "I think in the morning you'd better have the first bath. Will you knock on the door when you've done?"

"I will."

Still she lingered, with her hand in Nanette's collar and her eyes on her cigarette.

"If you'd another attack, you'd call me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," I said. "It'd be silly not to."

Judy's face lighted, and all her sovereign charm came flooding into her eyes.

"You're getting quite sensible," she said. "Good night, Wiseman."

"Good night, madam."

The next moment she was gone.

I looked at Wiseman.

"Go and get a drink," I said. "And take off your leggings and boots. You've got to spend the night in this room."

"Very good, sir."

Scurvily or no, Convention had to be served.

"Is this Biarritz?" said Judy suddenly.

"Not quite," said I, with my eyes on the splash of white which the headlights made. "But it's very close now."

There was a silence.

Presently Judy laughed.

"Some trip," she said. "I'll bet you won't fall over yourself to convoy a girl again." She turned swiftly and laid a hand on my arm. "It sounds stupid, I know, but I'm very grateful. I know I've been very trying. But you've been a dear, Adam. Nobody could have been sweeter."

"Nonsense," I said feebly.

"And I've enjoyed every minute—at your expense."

I shook my head.

"I have—you know it. When I look back I'm ashamed. That awful scene at Chartres." She clapped her hands to her face. "Why on earth am I like this? What's the matter with me? Other women behave—don't let themselves go. Look at my hat." This was lying on Nanette. Judy snatched it up. "And my skirt—at least, don't." Judy dragged this down. "Of course I shall take a bad toss one of these days. Someone'll put it across me—publicly: and that'll make me think. Some other woman, you know—someone who counts. With the sweetest smile and a drawl and a voice like silk. And she'll rip the skin off my back with what she says."

"May I be there," I said grimly, "Miss Sentinel."

"Good old Adam," said Judy. "You'd try and put it back, wouldn't you? Or would that be too familiar? I mean, Convention——"

"You wicked child," said I.

Judy pulled on her hat and smoothed down her dress.

"I've strayed," she said. "I set out to thank you, Adam."

"You've nothing to thank me for. I'm in your debt."

"I don't know when, if ever, I'll see you again, and——"

"*What?*"

I started so violently that the car swerved.

"At Biarritz," said Judy coolly, "I've got to sort of report. And I'll have to do as I'm told. If the people I'm joining want to push off to-morrow, to-morrow I fade away. But I hope they won't. I want to see something of Cicely. And Toby. I like Toby, don't you?"

"Oh, damn Toby," said I. "What d'you mean—'fade away'? What's the good of my bringing you out to Biarritz, if you're going to clear out the next day?"

"To join my crowd, of course. As I say, they may want to stay or they may want to go. Any way, I don't see how it affects you, Adam. You've ——"

"No, I don't suppose you do," said I savagely.

Miss Sentinel tilted her chin.

"I was going to say you could write to me," she said. "But I don't think I shall now. Oh, and please stop, will you? I want to change my stockings before we get in."

I stopped by the side of the road, and Nanette and Wiseman and I descended and took a turn.

As I resumed my seat—

"Now I'm all nice and fresh," said Judy comfortably.

"That's imagination," I said. "You're always that."

"Am I really, Adam?"

I nodded.

It was true. She always looked a picture. Even after a run of a hundred miles she was the pink of daintiness.

"The best of you," said Judy, taking my arm, "is that you mean what you say. Now I know that I'm always nice and fresh. And I know that I've got pretty feet—you said that too. But I'm rather upset about my hair—you've never mentioned that: and up to now I've always been rather proud of it."

"It's the best I've ever seen."

We covered a mile in silence.

"Is this Biarritz?" said Judy.

"Yes."

Judy let go my arm and sat up in her seat.

I drove to the Palais Hotel.

As we entered the grounds, I put her hand to my lips.

Judy caught her breath.

"Oh, my—my sponge-bag," she said.

Between us we dragged it out.

"Souvenir," murmured Judy.

"What did you say?"

Miss Sentinel shook her head.

As the car came to rest—

"There's Cicely," cried Judy, pointing into the lounge. She turned about and gave me her little hand. "Good-bye, Adam dear, and thank you so very much."

"I've loved it," I said.

She and Nanette got out and stormed the place.

I saw her and Cicely meet. Then I let in the clutch and drove to the Carlton Hotel. . . .

I always feel in its pockets before I take off a coat.

The one which had held her sponge-bag contained a wedding-ring.

'Souvenir.'

I met the Rages next morning at ten o'clock.

"Nunc, nunc," said Toby. "I tell you it's a fruit of a place. And the champagne wine. Thirty dozen, father. . . ." Reverently he raised his eyes. "Amminadab's over there now—fixing things up."

"Who's Amminadab?" said I.

"Amminadab is the fourth," said Cicely Rage. "She's a most charming girl. American and foolishly rich. A quarter 'f a million a year or something like that. If you don't get off, Adam, I'll never forgive you."

"That's right," said Toby. "You'll soon get used to her feet."

"She's one of the best," said Cicely stoutly. "What are you doing this morning?"

"Nothing," said I, like a fool.

"Then Rooster can drive you over. Toby and I are playing golf. I want you to tell Amminadab. . . ."

I listened to my instructions with a sinking heart.

I didn't want to tell Amminadab anything.

I wanted. . . .

When Cicely gave me a chance—

"How's Judy this morning?" said I. "Yesterday was a hell of a run."

“She seemed fit enough,” said Cicely. “She and her mammoth burst into my room this morning as though they’d slept for a week. It was awfully sweet of you to bring her, Adam. You know, I felt afterwards perhaps I shouldn’t have asked you because she’s so utterly lawless. But she really isn’t safe to travel alone.”

“That’s a hard fact,” said I. “But we really got on very well. What I don’t understand is why you——”

“She sent a message to you,” said Cicely Rage. “She wants you to come to lunch. So you’d better push off to Iriberri if you’re to be back in time.”

“Nunc, nunc,” said Toby. “It’s a fruit of a place. Tell Amminadab to show you the champagne wine.”

Iriberri was dazzling.

The house was white and low, and the roof was red, and the shutters were myrtle green. It stood in a big property, and as you whipped to and fro up the curling drive you had first the sea at your feet and then the mountains, with a pageant of woods and valleys in between.

I found it all quite lovely—with lunch in my mind’s eye.

As the car swept to the steps Cicely’s maid appeared.

She showed me into a handsome living room which opened on to a terrace commanding Spain. The windows were set wide open, and instinctively I stepped outside. For a moment I regarded the prospect, which was superb. Then came the rush of a body, and Nanette nearly knocked me down. . . .

I dealt with her welcome feebly, as a man who will brush aside a vision. . . .

Judy was standing in the window, leaning against the jamb, watching us both and laughing, with the grandest light in her eyes.

I don’t know how long I stood there, but after a little I just put out my arms and she flung hers round my neck.

“D’you love me, Adam?”

“I’m mad about you,” I faltered.

“That’s right,” said Judy, rubbing her cheek against mine. “I like you to be mad about me. I’m going to marry you, of course. Perhaps I’ll sober down then. I’m Amminadab, you know. Toby invented the name.”

“I can quite believe that,” said I. “In fact, I can see his hoof-marks all over the place. Why did you give me the ring?”

“I don’t know. It was all I had. And I wanted to give you something because I loved you so.”

“Judy, Judy!”

“But, my dear,” said Judy, smoothing my hair. “I couldn’t help it. Men either get wild with me or try to kiss me. Always. But you did neither.”

“I was shot through the brain in the War.”

“That isn’t why. You understood, Adam.”

I let her go; then I took her little hands.

“There was nothing to understand,” I said. “You don’t have to understand the sea or the sky—or a flower of the forest, Judy. You just thank God for them.”

Judy put up her mouth.

“We’ll go away when we’re married. D’you know where I’d like to stay?”

“Yes.”

I produced the ring.

“That’s right. They were very nice, and when they called me ‘*Madame*’ I felt all thrilled.”

“It was my proudest moment, Judy, when Wiseman said good night.”

“You see,” said Judy, “it really comes to this. Convention’s all right in her place: but when you get two people——”

Nanette growled there and rose in one bristling piece.

In a flash Judy had her by the collar, and I swung round to see Kenner at the foot of the terrace steps. . . .

“Good morning, Boleyn,” said he. “Can I have a word with you?”

I stared, and so did he.

I hadn’t spoken to the fellow for sixteen years.

“What d’you want?” I said.

“Well, it’s like this,” he said. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but I’ve got to live, and the Yankee Press won’t wait. Minna Sentinel’s name in Richmond is just about twice life-size.”

“D’you mean that you’re a reporter?”

“Well, I’m not on the staff,” said he, “but they know my name. My special stunt is—idylls.” He took out a little book. “Can you tell me your plans? I just want to round this off. I’m told this is Iriberri—that’ll look well in print. But so will Chartres, and so will—Angoulême.”

I turned to Judy and spoke in an undertone.

“Rooster’s outside with the car. Tell him to drive you to Biarritz. Find Wiseman and bring him here.”

When I heard the room’s door close I passed to the top of the steps.

“You’re a pretty blackguard, Kenner. You always were.”

“ ‘What’s in a name’?” said Kenner. He put up his book and lighted a cigarette. “But I know a cinch by sight. D’you know what she’s worth, Boleyn?”

“You can leave her out,” I said.

He raised his eyebrows.

“You must be pretty rich. This isn’t a question of a monkey in a couple of goes.”

“There’s nothing doing, Kenner.”

He frowned.

“Why take this line, Boleyn? I’ve got you cold. You know it as well as I do. Don’t think I’m suggesting things. I know you’re much too pi. But you know what the papers are. Or perhaps you don’t.” He jerked his head at the ocean. “Our hottest rag’s a prayer-book to what they set over there.”

“They’ll print nothing of this,” said I.

“No,” said Kenner, “I don’t suppose they will. It’s too—what shall we say? Sacred?”

“That’s a very good word.”

“Or ‘valuable’?”

I shook my head.

“It’s of no value,” I said.

Kenner laughed.

“Why try to bluff me?” he said. “You haven’t a card in your hand. And if you had I could pull it before your eyes. D’you know who you’re up against?”

“I’ve told you once.”

“Then why don’t you order me off?”

I said nothing, because there was nothing to say, but I willed him with all my might to mount the steps.

The man had to be crushed. He meant what he said. Judy and I were at bay, and he meant to keep us there. He meant to live on our nerves for the rest of his life. Pay once, pay twice. I knew. I could see it there in his eyes. ‘I know a cinch by sight.’ I had known what must happen before he had spoken twice, and I had sent Judy for Wiseman to help me to bury my dead.

I do not expect to be commended or even excused. A cleverer man than I would have found another way out. But I am not at all clever—and I had my back to the wall.

So we stood in silence—he at the foot of the flight and I at the head, and, between us, half-way up, a little fawn-coloured glove, lying where Judy had dropped it before I came.

The sun was blazing, and Kenner stood, a black smudge on a golden world. The silence was infinite: it seemed to consist of the steady drone of insects and the pulse of the distant surf.

Kenner was speaking.

“Why don’t you order me off?”

“Because we don’t want you to go,” said Judy gently.

Both of us jumped, I think. I know I did.

Judy came and stood at the top of the steps.

“I don’t know what Adam’s been saying, but he doesn’t understand.” She laid a hand on my arm. “He’s English, you see. But I know the American papers, and they’ll fairly eat this up. And I don’t mind a bit—I’ve had it since I was ten and father died. They haven’t known where I was for the last six months, but they’ll stand up now and shout.” She turned to me. “Don’t forbid him, Adam. It may help him, and it can’t do us any harm.”

Kenner's face was a study.

He didn't know what to say or what to do.

Presently he moistened his lips.

"You'd better explain, Boleyn."

"I think that's your job," said I.

Judy knitted her brows.

"What is there to explain?"

Kenner cleared his throat.

"Boleyn's afraid your trip won't read very well. You see, Miss Sentinel, if I may say so, you rather defied Convention."

"I know," said Judy, smiling. "In fact, we left her behind." She turned to me. "My darling, that's why the papers are going to eat this up. They simply worship scandal." She returned to Kenner. "You know they thought we were married at Angoulême?"

Kenner began to look scared.

He swallowed violently.

"D'you want the Press to get that?" he blurted.

"Why not?" said Judy simply. Kenner recoiled. "They will any way—probably have by now. I gave three interviews last night and one this morning. And I told all four what happened at Angoulême." She turned to me. "I know you wanted to keep it quiet, my dear, but that was hopeless. And so it was better to tell them. They'd only have found it out and got it wrong."

There was a deadly silence.

Then Kenner's forgotten cigarette burned its way to his fingers and he flung it down with an oath.

"I'm sorry," said Judy swiftly, addressing his obvious chagrin, "but I didn't tell them my plans. You see, I hadn't any then. But you can announce our engagement."

"Thanks," said Kenner thickly, with a bitter laugh. "But an anticlimax hardly earns its keep. Besides, I—I guess that's assumed."

"I don't think it is," said Judy earnestly. "All of them wanted to announce it, but I said it'd be premature."

The queerest imaginable expression came into Kenner's face. He looked like a puzzled child, half-way to tears. As if to complete the illusion, a finger stole up to his mouth.

Presently he turned his head and stared at the sea. For a long time he stood like that: then, without moving, he spoke.

"Boleyn."

"Yes."

"Come here."

I left Judy's side and passed down the terrace steps.

"What is it?"

He took out his cigarette-case, but this was empty.

As he snapped it to—

"Don't tell her," he said.

"Very well."

I offered him my cigarettes, but he did not seem to see them and turned away. Then he looked up to Judy and took off his hat.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," said Judy. "I'm sorry."

"That's all right," said Kenner. "Luck o' the game."

He turned and walked away the way he had come.

After a moment Nanette stole down and followed to see him out.

"Poor man," said Judy. "I'm afraid he was awfully disappointed. He thought he'd got a peach of a scoop. I'd 've liked to offer him something, but one couldn't, could one?"

"No," said I.

Judy lifted her head and looked at the mountains of Spain.

"What shall we tell Wiseman?"

I stared at her open-mouthed.

At last—

"You—you knew?" I stammered.

Miss Sentinel nodded.

“At once. It was in his face.”

I put a hand to my head.

“But—d’you mean to say you’ve bluffed him?”

Again Miss Sentinel nodded. Then she slid an arm through mine.

“I told you,” she said, “I wasn’t always a child.”

ST. JEAMES

JOHN RODNEY SHERE was old for his age.

His parents had died whilst he was yet at school, and at fifteen he had become the ward of an old attorney who proceeded to care for the boy according to his lights. These were dry as dust. From that time on, John Rodney Shere was administered, as an estate. He was visited six times a year: he was inspected: he was reported upon: he was maintained: he was improved. At the end of each term he stayed with his guardian for one week—dismal periods, during which old Matthew Fennel suffered more than his ward. The former was desperately anxious to do the right thing by the boy—and perfectly certain that he was doing the wrong. As a matter of hard fact, he did very well: but he knew no more of children than he knew of lug-worms, and he was too old to learn.

No man knew better than the lawyer how to treat his superiors, his equals and those below him in estate: but everyone he met went into one of those compartments, and his ward was no exception to the rule. At the little old house in Curzon Street, Rodney was treated as his guardian's compeer. The two dined in state every evening and retired at half-past ten. In the mornings, under escort, Rodney walked in the Park and rode in the Row: in the afternoons he was taken to the tailor, the boot-maker, the Zoological Gardens or the Stores. At the end of the week he was dispatched to a Devonshire farm.

It was at the long, low homestead that the boy passed his happiest days. The farmer had been the bailiff of a great landowner and knew how to keep 'the young gentleman' happy and well. His dame was the kindest of women and the best of farmers' wives. But there were no children at the farm.

All things considered, it is not surprising that at twenty-three John Rodney Shere was old for his age.

It was the tenth of July, and Rodney had just left Oxford for the last time.

His guardian was dead: he was absolute master of six hundred pounds a year: he was staying at his Club in St. James's, and he had no plans at all.

This night there was a dance in Arlington Street, to which Rodney had been bidden by the hostess, whose son he knew. He went reluctantly. He

could not dance and was not at his ease with women he did not know. But he had been asked of civility, and of civility he must go. And within the week he must call. Rodney was nothing at all, if not correct.

Behind this precise outlook a keen sense of humour stood him in excellent stead. It was, indeed, the very salt of his life. Few people suspected this. All saw a young man of more than average height, very well built and looking remarkably fit, a young man with thick black hair, grey eyes and an aquiline nose, a young man, curiously solemn, wearing the gravity of a Justice upon his Bench. Only a very few saw the laughter which inhabited his eyes: this was seldom rampant, but it was always there.

Rodney had been at the dance for half an hour, had spoken with no one but his hostess and was wondering how soon he could in decency withdraw, when the son of the house appeared, dragging a girl by the wrist.

"Let me introduce Mr. Shere—Miss Bearskin, commonly called ' 'Owdareyou'. He'll swear he can't dance, but I've seen him: but, if you don't fit, you can always muck in with the thirsties and tell one another your sins."

The next moment he was gone.

"How d'ye do," said Rodney.

"D'you really mean you can't dance?" said Miss Bearskin.

"I'll convince you—if you like," said Rodney.

They pushed off into the stream. . . .

After the longest minute that Rodney had ever known—

"No, you can't dance," said Miss Bearskin. "What can you do?"

"I can drink," said Rodney.

Miss Bearskin regarded him.

"You don't look as if you could," she said. "Anything else?"

"I can answer questions," said Rodney.

"I shall call you 'Truthful Joseph'," said Miss Bearskin. "And now let's go and coal."

She led the way to a room in which supper was being eaten and drinks were being drunk.

"What may I get you?" said Rodney.

"Some *foie gras*, a roll, some butter and some champagne."

The champagne was easy, but it was fully two minutes before the requisite viands came Rodney's way.

With a plate in each hand, he struggled back to the corner in which he had left Miss Bearskin sipping champagne.

The lady's glass was empty, and the lady was gone.

Rodney was rather relieved, and, when he was sure that she was not to be seen, rid himself of the plates and returned to the ball-room.

He was, indeed, upon the edge of approaching his hostess, when he observed Miss de Swete. And when a man observed Miss de Swete for the first time, he was apt, as the saying is, to lose his place.

Estelle de Swete was probably one of the most beautiful women alive. She was certainly one of the proudest. As an only child, she had been spoiled to death: and at seventeen she had been soured. Till then she had had everything that money can buy: then her father had broken his neck in the hunting-field, and the Jews, of whom no one had dreamed, had asked to be paid. The double shock killed her mother within the month, and, instead of emerging to rule a London season, Estelle had seen her home sold, her wardrobe fought for by dressmakers who believed that two birds in the hand are worth more than one in the bush, and the footman she had always detested, smoking in her boudoir and pointing out, with all the irrelevance of a drunken revolutionary, that he was her creditor to the extent of eighteen pounds.

Estelle had been sent to her grandfather to share with him an aged Somersetshire mansion and, when her father's debts had been paid, almost exactly one thousand pounds a year.

Her visits to Town were rare. But, when she came, it was not to hide her light. She could have gone everywhere and always went where she could. People should see for themselves that she did not care. That her hackles were always up is not surprising. She was deadly proud, and Fate had hit this proud girl between the eyes. Very well. People should see. . . .

So it happened that, wearing a simple frock, without a jewel upon her body, Estelle danced that hot night at Arlington Street with such as offered themselves and when she had no partner, stood, looking scornfully about her, with her back to the wall.

She was standing so, when Rodney saw her for the first time.

As a Lawrence might stand out of a bevy of Impressionists, so Estelle de Swete, granddaughter of the tenth baronet, stood for Rodney out of that glittering throng. Her beautiful, imperious countenance, the infinite dignity of her carriage, the scorn of her magnificent eyes engraved themselves upon his brain. People pushed past him, bumped into him, trod upon him, but he took no notice at all. He had no eyes or mind for anything but the girl. He was obsessed, rapt. . . .

Suddenly her eyes met his across the breadth of the floor. For an instant they looked each other full in the face: then a man addressed her, and she turned away. The man, a complacent satyr, with an unpleasant neck, was proposing himself for a dance. Estelle looked him up and down. Then she set a hand on his shoulder, and they began to move.

Rodney sought his young host, but the latter was not to be found. When he returned from the search, the lady had disappeared. He began to seek her exhaustively. . . .

At last he came to a balcony, overlooking the park. There were no lights here, and at first the place seemed empty: then his diligent eyes caught the white of a frock. Quietly he moved towards it and presently slid into a chair.

Suddenly a girl's voice flashed.

"Do you mind letting me pass?"

The reply was inaudible.

"You intolerable outsider," said Estelle. "Because, thanks to the War, you are admitted to this house, can you see no difference between yourself and me? At a dance like this the food and the band are hired, but not the women. Be good enough to let me pass."

"Not after that," said the man.

Rodney took him by the seat of his trousers and his unpleasant neck, swung him over the low balustrade and let him fall ten feet into a flower-bed which was wet.

He stood up to find Estelle staring.

A flurry of oaths from the garden was succeeded by the crunch of gravel and a further explosion of wrath. As the steps died away—

"I could have dealt with him," said the girl.

"I'm sure of that," said Rodney, politely enough.

“Then, why did you interfere?”

“To spare you, I suppose.”

“I see. A damsel in distress. Do I know you?”

“No,” said Rodney.

“If I did, you’d know that I’m not the clinging sort. And in any event these aren’t the Middle Ages. However, I suppose you meant well.”

“I’d do it again,” said Rodney cheerfully.

For a moment Miss de Swete was bereft of speech. Such a reception of her patronage was very nearly unique.

At length—

“What on earth do you mean?” she said.

“That next time anyone pesters you I only hope I shall be there.”

“Why?”

The man hesitated. He could see her form, but not the expression of her face. Of him she could see no more, for his back was towards the window from which a faint glow came.

“Why, please?” repeated Estelle, tapping the stone with her foot.

“Because I love you,” said Rodney.

There was a moment’s silence.

Then the girl drew a deep breath.

“Insolence,” she said, and struck him full on the ear.

Rodney swore under his breath: then he began to laugh. An opponent’s loss of temper always steadied his own.

“I wish you were in trousers,” he said.

“Why?”

“Because then I should drop you into the flower-bed.”

“I see. Do you still—love me?”

She made the sneer very broad.

“Yes,” said Rodney. “But, if you strike me again, I shall drop you into the flower-bed, trousers or no.”

Estelle struck him again.

In a flash he had her by the arms and had swung her up and over the balustrade. For a moment he held her so. Then he kissed her lightly, lowered her as far as he could and let her go.

As she met the wet earth—

"Damn!" said Estelle violently.

After assuring himself that the shaft of light illumining the garden came from an open door, Rodney returned to the ball-room and bade his hostess 'good-bye'.

"I've enjoyed myself immensely," he said.

This was perfectly true.

Then he found the son of the house and asked him the name of the girl who looked so proud.

"Oh, you mean Estelle," said the latter. "Estelle de Swete. The tenth baronette. She's a corker. She's up on one of her raids. Periodically erupts from Somerset, does more damage and makes more enemies in a week than a rogue elephant does in a lifetime and then disappears. Whatever you do, don't touch her. She's lovely to look at, but she's a man-eater."

"Is she though?" said Rodney.

Ten minutes later he was back at his club.

He had, I think, done quite well, but he had made one mistake. He left the balcony too soon. If he had waited, after hearing Estelle's healthy exclamation, he would have heard something which would have done his heart still more good.

He would have heard the lady fall into silvery laughter.

Man but proposes. . . .

Rodney awoke the next morning, determined to marry Estelle within the year: and, being old for his age, he did not rush at the business, but decided to arm himself before he made the assault.

He had no idea at all that Estelle de Swete was poor. He assumed, perhaps naturally, that she was reasonably rich. That being so, his income

must be increased. Must. . . . The parable of the talents pointed an obvious path.

A man he had known at Oxford was now ‘in the City’, a stockbroker—or something. Rodney visited his office, to find that his friend had taken some post in the Argentine. The head of the firm, however, received him charmingly.

Except that Rodney’s resolve to treble his fortune enabled the head of the firm to avoid bankruptcy for nearly six months, of their business and other relations there is little of interest to be said. It had been done before.

Suffice it that one dull December day John Rodney Shere, gentleman, found himself with not very many clothes, twenty thousand shares which were entirely valueless, and thirty-two pounds in the world.

Then at last he did what he should have done five months before. He set out for Somerset.

Now whether he did so in the hope of marrying Estelle or merely of seeing her again, or just of looking upon her home, I cannot tell: and I very much doubt if Rodney knew himself. The lady attracted him: and, after resisting his instinct for five disastrous months, he let it have its way.

The village of Cockcrow is distant from London one hundred and thirty-five miles.

Rodney walked there, sleeping at farms by the way and earning his lodging and board. He was soon satisfied that, if work was scarce in the country, that was the labourer’s fault. Before he had come to Yeovil, he had had five several offers of a permanent job. This encouraged him greatly, and, when, at eight o’clock of a brilliant morning, the potman of *The Maiden* at Cockcrow told him the way to Feathers and added, that unless he was mistaken, the farm two miles farther on was short of a cowman, he could have thrown up his hat.

A job two miles from Estelle. . . .

A de Swete had inhabitated Feathers for more than four hundred years. Rodney knew this. Yet the idea of the new cowman at Bluecoat Farm raising his eyes to the granddaughter of the tenth baronet did not seem to him in the least preposterous.

Which shows that the last five months had had one healthy effect. He was no longer quite so old for his age.

The three miles to Feathers were lovely, for they were three English country miles and there was a hoar frost.

The white magic of the hedgerows, the bewildering tracery of the woods, the exquisite filigree of wayside trees made up a glowing canticle: the road rang under the feet—a jolly sound: free of his swaddling mists, the sun, a merry monarch, rejoiced a gay, blue sky: a sober flight of rooks cawed and swung in the air: in the distance, a hazy Mendip lifted a sleepy head: and, presently, in the immediate foreground, a grey, old gate-house was framing two wrought-iron gates with the peculiar dignity of Henry Tudor.

The gates were shut, but their bars could not hide the venerable quire of elms, at the end of which Rodney could see a gable of mellow stone.

The gate-house was untenanted: one of its panes was broken and the casement had been boarded up: the gates had need of attention—urgent need: in the avenue weeds were sprouting. To go farther afield, an oak had fallen in the park; this had been struck down in leaf and still lay as it had fallen, with its broken roots in the air: and ten feet of the park's wall had bulged, and the coping had slipped.

Rodney's stare slid slowly into a frown.

He walked on slowly in the hope of seeing the house, but after a quarter of a mile he began to retrace his steps.

As he approached the gate-house, voices came to his ears—a woman's shrill voice, raised in anger, and the rumbling agreement of a man.

Wondering what was afoot, Rodney came abreast of the gates.

A procession was descending the avenue.

First came the man and woman whose voices Rodney had heard. They were of middle age and were laden with all manner of traps—brown-paper parcels and bundles, an umbrella and cheap leather bags. Behind, astride of an iron-grey horse, came Miss de Swete. She was hatless, but gloved, and was wearing a soft leather jumper above her breeches and boots. Her lovely dark brown hair rendered the sunshine. Her beautiful face was like a mask.

"Nigger slaves," shrilled the woman. "That's wot you want. Decen' respectable bodies is no good to you."

"That's right," affirmed the man.

"Our souls is our own," said the woman, "an' nobody don't grind us. You talk about 'bad service'. Why, you can't afford service at all. You ought

to be in 'n office an' boardin' at Golder's Green. Airs an' graces don' go with a ruing like this. Silver-gilt on the table, an' the cheese straws you 'ad for supper warmed up for lunch."

"Dressin' for dinner," said the man, "an' nothin' to drink."

He set down the bags he was bearing and started to open the gates. These resisted his bungling, so Rodney stepped forward and quietly swung one of them back.

The three stared at him.

Rodney took no notice, but stood with his back to the gate, plainly expecting the servants to go their way.

The woman forced out a laugh.

"We're goin' all right," she said. "You needn't look like that. Anybody'd think we was rioters. Follerin' us on 'orseback, an' another one 'oldin' the gate. Come on, Badger."

They passed out into the road, and Rodney closed the gate.

Then he turned to Estelle and spoke humbly enough.

"I'm looking for a place as a servant. If I am right, you need one. I haven't had much experience, but I can very soon learn."

Coldly Miss de Swete regarded him.

"You heard what they said—about the place?"

Rodney nodded.

"I don't value their opinion very much."

"What can you do?" said Estelle.

"Most things," said Rodney boldly. "What was that man?"

"He called himself a 'working butler'."

"I can beat him at that."

"You won't stay if you can't," said Estelle. "What wages do you ask?"

Rodney hesitated. Then—

"Thirty-six pounds a year," he said.

"I'll pay you forty," said Estelle.

“Thank you,” said Rodney. And then, “Shall I come at once? I mean I can send for my clothes.”

The girl raised her eyebrows.

“If you like,” she said. “What do you call yourself?”

“My name is Rodney—madam.”

“Do you mean you want to start now?”

“At this moment, madam.”

“Very well,” said Estelle slowly. She turned her horse. “Follow me.”

She rode back up the avenue, as she had come.

Her new ‘working butler’ followed obediently.

Two months had gone by, and life at Feathers was more easy than it had been for years. The new ‘working butler’ had become the pillar of the house.

Sir Richard, aged eighty-four and, though he refused to admit it, now totally blind, had come to cling to Rodney with the faith of a child. He had not known such attention, since his body-servant, Filmer, had died twenty years before. And Rodney was better than Filmer had ever been. But that was nothing. Rodney had taken control of the establishment. I suppose he had the gift of organisation. Be that as it may, he set the house in order and so maintained it. He was butler, footman, valet, but he was steward, too. He found enough silver in use for a party of thirty guests. At his respectful suggestion five-sixths of it was listed and presently lodged at the Bank. He found twenty-five rooms open when ten would have been enough. He suggested respectfully that fifteen of these should be closed and, with the required permission, saw to the matter himself. He sought and procured a housemaid who was willing to work. He sold the fallen timber, and the gardener and he, together, rebuilt the tumbling wall.

The old groom and cook—man and wife—revered him: the housemaid thought he was a god: Sir Richard said loudly and often that he was worth his weight in gold, and Estelle felt curiously ill at ease.

This stray, this broken gentleman was shouldering her burdens, her world. More. He was carrying her and her grandfather, the very fortunes of her house. But for his coming, life at Feathers must have come to a sordid end. Instead, it had been revived—given a fine, new lease. She was able to live and move as a lady should. Her shoes were beautifully cleaned, the

rooms were in perfect order, the silver was always brilliant, the meals were admirably served. The inevitable 'trivial round' had been effaced. The common and unclean spectre had slunk away. More—much more. Visitors saw how things ought to be done. Her pride had been served—at a cost of forty pounds a year.

She never gave Rodney an order, seldom made him a request. Of respect and self-respect she spared him as much as she could.

One wet February day she went further.

The shelves of the stately library were to be unloaded and cleaned. At least, Rodney had advised it, and Rodney was always right.

"I will help you," said Estelle.

Rodney hesitated. Then—

"I'm afraid it will be rather dirty work, madam."

"I will help you," said Estelle. "When do you want to begin."

"After luncheon, madam."

"Very well."

Three o'clock found them at work.

For an hour they laboured in silence. Then came the pulse of an engine, and the front-door bell was rung.

Rodney plunged his hands into a pail. Then he whipped off his apron and slid into his coat.

"You are not at home, madam?"

"No."

The next moment he was gone.

He returned with three cards upon a salver.

When his mistress had inspected them, he took them away.

A moment later he was again in his apron, piling the books.

Estelle looked down from the ladder on which she was perched.

"Tell me," she said quietly. "Why are you doing this?"

"For my living, madam."

"There are plenty of people who would give you two hundred a year."

“I’m very happy here, madam.”

“Don’t call me ‘madam’. It’s indecent. You know it is.”

“I——”

“Call me ‘Estelle’.”

Rodney set a hand on a pillar and stared on the floor.

“How can I?” he said.

“You’re my equal.”

“I’m your butler.”

“Then get me a cigarette.”

Rodney did so without a word.

“Now take one yourself.”

Rodney threw in his hand and began to laugh.

For a moment they smoked in silence.

“Now call me ‘Estelle’.”

“All right—Estelle.”

“That’s better,” said Miss de Swete.

“Why?” said Rodney.

“I must give something,” said the girl. “On March the first I shall pay you three pounds odd. If it was three thousand, it wouldn’t discharge our debt. That won’t go into money, as you very well know.”

“There is no debt,” said Rodney.

“Of course there is. And each time you call me ‘madam’ up goes the score.”

“You’ve got it all wrong,” said Rodney. “You——”

“I haven’t. You must understand. Try to put yourself in my place. Supposing you had been beaten—had your back to the wall, and the wall had been giving way. No system, no servants, no money, and Feathers on its very last legs. And then I’d blown in and pulled the whole show round. And licked your boots and ‘sirred’ you from morning to night.”

“I’ve never licked your boots,” said Rodney.

“And supposing you couldn’t sack me”—Rodney looked up sharply —“and—and end it all.”

“I can’t suppose that,” said Rodney.

Coldly Estelle regarded him.

“In view of my grandfather’s state, how can I send you away?”

Rodney looked her full in the eyes.

“In view of your grandfather’s state, how can I go?”

Under his steady gaze the blood came into her face.

Abruptly she rose to her feet.

“We’d better get on,” she said shortly.

They laboured till five in silence and stopped for the day.

Three days later the last books were going back.

Estelle was up on the ladder and Rodney was giving the volumes into her little hands. Not since that first afternoon had they spoken at all.

Estelle sat down on the ladder and folded her hands in her lap.

“I’m a rotten bad debtor,” she said. “I set out to pay and then I climb deeper in. I wouldn’t send you away for a thousand a year. You’re indispensable.”

“To your grandfather.”

“To Feathers—to us.”

“That’s much too handsome,” said Rodney.

“It’s true. If you were to say you were going, I’d go on my knees to you to stay.”

“That’ll do,” said Rodney. “You’ve paid your debt.”

Estelle shook her lovely head.

“That’s so much nonsense,” she said. “And now, please, listen. I’m going to help you every day. We’ll clean the silver, or dust, or do something that has to be done. And while we’re at work, I shall be plain Estelle.”

“But——”

The girl held up a small hand.

“That is an order,” she said. “If you don’t like it you can go. My grandfather’s never seen you, or we shouldn’t have come to this. He would have interfered ages ago. You wait upon us hand and foot, when you should be at table yourself. Well, that’s all right in a way, so long as it’s perfectly clear that we’re playing a game. If not, it becomes indecent. You remember the Saturnalia? When once a year, at Christmas, the Romans served their slaves? Well, that would have been indecent, if it hadn’t been perfectly clear that it was only a game.”

John Rodney Shere swallowed.

“This is different,” he said. “We made a contract, you and I. I made it with my eyes open and I am perfectly content.”

“But my eyes weren’t open,” said Estelle, “and I am not content.”

Steadily Rodney regarded the lady he loved.

Sitting on the top of the ladder, her delicate fingers laced about a slim knee, her exquisite chin lowered, her big, brown eyes upon his, she had the unconscious glory of a beautiful child. The proud look was out of her face, which was very grave. Only the parted lips argued an eagerness as takes a man by the throat.

If Rodney had found her lovely as My Lady Disdain, he found this eager child peerless indeed. . . .

With a pounding heart, Rodney lowered his eyes.

A hand came to rest upon his shoulder.

“Please do as I say. You’ve taken away every bit of my self-respect. Won’t you give me a chance to win some of it back?”

Rodney looked up quickly.

“All right—Estelle,” he said gently.

The hand left his shoulder and was stretched down for his.

Rodney put it to his lips. . . .

“I meant you to shake it,” said Estelle severely. “Did you think——”

“I didn’t think at all,” said Rodney.

For a moment his lady regarded him, chin in air.

Then she began to laugh.

“At least,” she said, “no butler would have done that.”

Spring was in, but the winter had done its work.

Sir Richard de Swete was failing. Take to his bed he would not, but his natural strength was constantly giving way. He would walk for awhile upon the terrace, to totter into the library and sleep like the dead. He would fall asleep at dinner, before the cloth had been drawn. His ascent and descent of the stairs became hazardous things. Estelle and Rodney had their hands very full. The latter, of course, was a very tower of strength: no servant could ever have taken the place he filled. The former's artless devotion quickened more hearts than one. The two became brother and sister, succouring the lord of their house.

The baronet's frailty bore heavily upon Shere. The sick man would dress twice a day, and Rodney dared not leave him to dress alone. After awhile he shaved him morning and night. His other work must have suffered but for Estelle. Together they cleaned the silver and kept the rooms. Together they pointed masonry and painted window-frames. They drifted into sharing the maintenance of their world.

Then one day came a letter which made Estelle knit her brows.

As she laid it down, she exclaimed.

Her grandfather, more sprightly than usual, put his white head on one side.

"What is it, little lady?"

"Cousin Frederick proposes himself for lunch."

The baronet frowned.

"I never liked Frederick," he said. "He was an untruthful child. The last time I saw him his manners left much to be desired."

"I hate him," said Estelle. "Shall I say we're going away?"

"No, no," said the baronet. "He is my sister's son. If he asks for lunch he must have it. What is he doing down here?"

"Except that he's going to Cornwall he doesn't say."

This was hardly surprising. The intelligence would have been ill received. Cousin Frederick had been summoned to appear at a Cornish Petty Sessional Court for 'driving dangerously' and 'failing to stop' after an accident. As the result of the accident, a donkey had had two legs broken and its owner, aged seventy-seven, lay between life and death.

What worried Estelle most of all was that Rodney would have to wait upon this detestable man.

She broke the news the next morning, whilst she was arranging the flowers.

"There's a rotten brute coming to lunch on Wednesday."

Rodney, cleaning the fire-dogs, sat back on his heels.

"Sorry," he said. "Perhaps he won't stay very long."

"He's certain to bring a chauffeur. George will look after him."

"I don't mind in the least, Estelle. It's——"

"I do. Like master, like man. George will look after the chauffeur and put him where he belongs."

"Right you are," said Rodney. "What will the other one drink?"

"Gin, whiskey and brandy—in that order. Vermuth with the first, soda with the second, and brandy with the third."

"The old school," said Rodney. "I see."

Estelle peered into a mirror and patted her hair.

"I may as well tell you," she said, "that he doesn't know how to behave."

"Are you afraid," said Rodney, "that I shall laugh?"

"Of course not." She returned to her flowers. "But he—he doesn't know how to treat servants, and—and—well, he's my cousin and I've seen him forget that other people's servants weren't his."

"Let him forget," said Rodney. "I shan't."

Estelle bent over her basket.

"Hark at St. Jeames," she said, addressing some daffodils.

Rodney swallowed.

"It was very sweet of you to warn me, Estelle."

"Don't be a fool," said the lady. "And, by the way, it's late in the day to discuss it, but don't you ever want some time off? I know you said you'd tell me when you did, and, after that, I forgot. But you've been here nearly five months and you've never had one afternoon."

Rodney shook his head.

“I don’t want one,” he said. “I’m—very happy.”

With that, he went on with his work.

“Why are you happy?” said Estelle.

“I don’t know. I just am. You’re very good to me.”

Estelle sat down in a chair and crossed her legs.

“Tell me, St. Jeames, where have I seen you before?”

Rodney straightened his back.

“At a dance,” he said.

“At the Jermyns’? Last July?”

“That’s right. I was looking at you and you looked up.”

“But we weren’t introduced, St. Jeames?”

“Oh no,” said Rodney. “Our eyes just happened to meet.”

“Then how,” said Estelle, “how is it I know your voice?”

Rodney felt rather faint.

“I—I can’t imagine,” he said, resuming his work.

There was a short silence.

“Nobody loved me that night,” said Miss de Swete.

“What makes you think that?” said Rodney.

“I had a bad time. I wasn’t popular.”

“Rot,” said Rodney.

“Well, you never even asked to be introduced.”

“You disappeared,” said Rodney. “I looked for you everywhere.”

“Oh, St. Jeames!”

“I wanted to know you,” said Rodney desperately.

“If you’d really wanted to know me, I think you’d have found me, St. Jeames.”

Rodney rose to his feet.

“I tell you, you’d disappeared. I went all over the place.”

“Who did you ask?” said Estelle.

“I didn’t know your name.”

“You could have described me.”

Rodney passed to the door.

“I don’t think anyone could do that—madam.”

The next moment he was gone.

Wednesday came, and Cousin Frederick with it.

Rodney had taken his measure before he had taken his coat.

The man was bad. The best was good enough for him, but too good for anyone else: his instinct was to give offence: poverty was a cock-shy. These things were written in his face.

Rodney decided to go very carefully indeed.

Except that he did not go backward, he led the man to a bedroom, as though he were preceding a king. Thence he brought him to the drawing room.

As he opened the door—

“See to my chauffeur,” said Cousin Frederick.

“Very good, sir.”

Luncheon passed off pretty well.

The guest did most of the talking, made two clumsy allusions to his uncle’s infirmity and, conscious that his host could not see him, grimaced at Estelle after each. He also advised them to ‘sell those chairs at Christie’s and buy a cheap car’. Estelle’s eyes had narrowed, but the baronet turned it off. Only when the fellow declared that Estelle was ‘wasting her life in this one-horsed rut’, did his uncle pull him up. “Be that as it may,” he said firmly, “she is not wasting mine.” Never at a loss, Cousin Frederick put his thumb to his nose and extended his fingers towards the blind man’s face. Subduing the desire to kill, Rodney replenished his glass.

It was after luncheon, when Sir Richard had been led to the library and Estelle and her cousin were sitting upon the terrace, that the latter began to look Rodney up and down.

I suppose there was a natural antipathy between the two. Maybe he suspected that Rodney admired Estelle. Probably the perfectly obvious fact

that the butler was as well-bred as he and about twice as presentable stuck in his ugly throat.

When Rodney came for the coffee-cups, the other stopped talking and followed him with his eyes. Rodney gave no manner of sign that he was aware of this attention. Estelle looked straight in front of her, white and cold.

"Get my cigars," said Cousin Frederick.

"Very good, sir," said Rodney.

When he returned with a cigar-case, a bright red spot was adorning each of his lady's cheeks.

Cousin Frederick took the cigar-case and threw it down upon the ground.

"Take that back," he said, "and do as you're told."

The case sprang open with the fall and disgorged a sheaf of cigarettes. The mistake, if Rodney had made one, was not his fault.

"Rodney," said Estelle, "leave that case where it is." She turned to her cousin. "Kindly beg my butler's pardon for behaving like a first-class cad."

Cousin Frederick appeared to have lost the power of speech.

"We are waiting," said Estelle grimly.

"Are you out of your mind?" said her cousin. "I gave the fellow an order ——"

"Who are you to give orders here?"

"I requested the man," said Frederick, "to——"

"You did nothing of the sort. You ordered him to fetch your cigars. He brought your rotten cigar-case. Do you suggest it was his duty to look inside?"

"If you think——"

"I don't," said Estelle. "I know. Are you going to beg his pardon?"

"Certainly not. The man's behaviour——"

"Has been superb," said Estelle. "I admit I warned him. I told him what to expect. I told him that he would have to wait upon the most insufferable swine that ever stepped into this house. I told him what you would say and how you would act. I didn't tell him what you were fit for—I left him to see that for himself. And now I should fade away. Don't bother to wake my grandfather. I hate to deprive you of a chance of exploiting his lack of sight,

but he always rests after lunch and he's not at all well." She turned to Rodney. "Rodney, send round the chauffeur and stay in the stable-yard."

"Very good, madam."

Rodney withdrew, but, fearing trouble, returned as soon as he could to the terrace-hall.

He was, however, some twenty seconds too late.

"I tell you he's ill," cried Estelle. "A shock——"

"You should have thought of that before. Uncle Richard!"

The baronet started violently, got to his feet somehow and stood shaking from head to foot.

"What—what is it?" he stammered. "You were just saying . . ."

Estelle and Rodney, coming from opposite doors, reached him at the same time.

"You'd better dismiss your butler. If you weren't blind, you'd never have taken him on. He doesn't know his place. And, if I were you, I should get a companion for Estelle. Otherwise, one of these days, you'll find yourself with a grandson who's not in the book."

The baronet had stopped shaking. Now he drew himself up.

"Better be blind," he said, "than have an unclean sight. When I permitted you to come here, I assumed that you would remember that this was your mother's home and would control the instincts you seem to possess. It seems I was mistaken. I shall not repeat my mistake. And now take your things and go. People call earlier than they did, and I am not prepared to introduce you to my friends."

Cousin Frederick went.

As the door closed behind him, Sir Richard collapsed.

Called upon for an effort, the dying man had responded as only a thoroughbred can. But the strain was fatal. His old, tired system had broken down.

Rodney bore him upstairs and got him to bed. . . .

The doctor was downright.

"A stroke. It's a matter of hours or days—probably days. I don't think he'll speak again. He mustn't be left for an instant."

“I shall nurse him, of course,” said Estelle.

“You can’t do the twenty-four hours. By your leave, Miss de Swete, I’ll get you a night-nurse from Wells. Would you like another opinion?”

“If you advise it.”

“I don’t. I’m dreadfully sorry, but I know that this is the end. His pulse alone . . .”

As much friend as doctor, he fetched the night-nurse himself, and at half-past eight that evening Rodney was standing as usual behind his mistress’s chair.

Not until he had brought her coffee, did the latter open her mouth.

“It’s a matter of days,” she said.

“I’m most awfully sorry, Estelle.”

“Sit down and smoke, please. I want to talk.”

Rodney set down his salver and lighted a cigarette.

“Why do I rush in?” said the girl. “If I hadn’t——”

“That’s absurd, Estelle. Besides, if it comes to that, I was the cause of the row.”

“I made it.”

“He forced your hand. If I’d been in your position I should have done the same.”

“No, you wouldn’t, St. Jeames.”

“Please don’t blame yourself,” said Rodney. “I can’t bear it.”

“Why did you give me champagne?”

“As a medicine,” said Rodney. “You’ve had a trying day.”

“Will you do me a favour?”

“Perhaps.”

“Open another bottle and drink it yourself.”

“That’s very sweet of you,” said Rodney. “But I’m a butler all right. I drank what you left.”

Estelle shook her head.

"A butler would have opened a bottle: you only opened a half-bottle."

She sipped her coffee thoughtfully, with her eyes on the fire.

At length—

"Wasn't he magnificent?" she said. "With Frederick, I mean."

"He was always magnificent," said Rodney, taking her cup. He hesitated. "And I shall always be proud to remember that I was his—man."

"Thank you, St. Jeames," said Estelle shakily. "I wish he could have seen you. He used to say he wished he could. He liked you so very much. He was always saying 'What should we do without him?' And—and—— Oh, St. Jeames, I don't know what we should."

She flung herself down on the sofa and burst into tears.

Rodney knelt by her side and said what he could.

After awhile she sat up with her hands to her eyes.

"I think," he said gravely, "that you should go to bed."

She nodded, and they got to their feet.

"Good night," she whispered, and put out a little hand.

"Sleep well, great heart," said Rodney.

Then he bowed his head and put the hand to his lips.

The other hand touched his hair.

"I wish he could have seen you," she whispered.

The next moment she was gone.

Five days later, Sir Richard, last baronet, went to his long home.

After the quiet funeral, the whole of which Rodney arranged, old Scarlet of Cockcrow had some speech with Estelle. Amongst other things, they agreed that she should become his guest upon the following day.

"For as long as you like, my dear. Amy will love to have you, and I'll see you through the Will."

"Thank you very much," said Estelle.

When he had gone, she went at once to her bedroom and there remained. Her dinner was sent upstairs.

The next was a summer's day.

Walking back from the gate-house, whither he had carried the suit-case of the protesting nurse, Rodney found Feathers the most beautiful seat in the world.

Not a breath of wind ruffled the delicate armour of that King's Company of elms: the song of a lark fell out of a cloudless sky: wood-pigeons called from the beechwoods, and, somewhere at hand, a cuckoo was insisting upon the pride of the year: the park was all wet silver, and the house a warm, grey mystery, filched from some comfortable dream.

The man passed through the mansion and entered the library. This was cool and full of the scent of flowers: it had been swept and garnished two hours before. Old oak, steel and silver flashed in the light of the sun: the leather walls were glowing: above the door that led to the terrace the purple of wistaria swayed and trembled under the robbery of bees.

Rodney's quick eye could find no fault with the chamber: it was as fit for his lady as his hand could make a room.

He turned to see Estelle in the doorway, a slight figure, clad in black.

"I beg your pardon, madam. I did not know you were there."

Estelle inclined her head.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning, madam."

She passed to a window-seat, and Rodney stepped to the door.

"Wait a minute," she said. And then, "I'm going away."

"Very good, madam."

"Lord Scarlet has asked me to Cockcrow. It's better so. And he'll help me out with the Will. You'll take it easy, won't you, while I'm away? You must be worn out."

"Thank you, madam."

"I shan't stay more than ten days, and, when I come back, we'll—we'll pick up the reins again. I shan't go to London this year."

Rodney moistened his lips. Then he took a deep breath.

"I can't stay, Estelle," he said.

The girl sat still as death.

Presently her eyes sought his.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve—I’ve served my turn,” said Rodney, “and so I must go. While Sir Richard lived, it was different.”

“Your consideration for him is not extended to me?”

“You know that’s untrue,” said Rodney.

“Then, why, the moment he’s dead, do you let me down?”

“I’m not letting you down, Estelle.”

“Why play with words?” said the girl. “If you go, I must give up Feathers. You know that as well as I.”

Rodney put a hand to his head.

“I can’t help it,” he said miserably. “Oh, can’t you see what I mean?”

Estelle rose to her feet.

“Do you mean to insult me by suggesting that, now that Sir Richard is dead, I can’t have a man-servant here?”

“I’m not a servant,” said Rodney. “And there’s the rub.”

“I should have agreed with you—a moment ago. But I see that, like all servants, you can’t stand corn.”

Rodney went very pale.

“You will please take that back, madam.”

Estelle shrugged her shoulders.

“And if I refuse?” she said.

“Then I must leave to-day.”

“Very well.”

Rodney inclined his head and passed to the door.

With his hand on the latch he turned.

“Estelle,” he said, “don’t let us part like this. I put it all wrong, I know: but I’m only thinking of you. If I had my way, my dear, I’d wait upon you, hand and foot, for the rest of my life.”

“Yet you pretend to care what people like Frederick might say.”

Rodney stepped to a window and stood looking out.

The sunlit park seemed blurred as he strove to marshal his words. He put his hands on the sill and bowed his head. After a little he spoke.

"I don't suppose I should care, if I didn't love you. But I do love you, you see: and that's what tears everything up."

Estelle neither spoke nor moved, and presently Rodney went on.

"That night, at the Jermyns', I fell in love with you. . . . I found out who you were, and I set out to make our fortune as quick as I could. I was so wild to make it, that within six months I'd lost every penny I had. Well, that was the end of my dream. . . . But I thought that, at least, I could be near you, so I worked my passage from London down to your gate. At Cockcrow they told me that Redfern was wanting a cowman at Bluecoat Farm. I was going to ask for the job, when you rode down to the gate. I saw my chance and took it. The rest you know. . . . I came because I loved you. And now, because I love you, I'm going away."

A warm arm stole round his neck.

Rodney clung to the sill with all his might.

Estelle laid her cheek against his.

"Can't we find a way out, St. Jeames? I mean, I've loved you for ages. In fact, to tell you the truth, that's why I took you on."

The man started at that: but he held to the sill.

"I've not a penny, Estelle. I can't live upon you."

"You're to be Lord Scarlet's land-agent. His own will retire next Easter, and, till then, he'll teach you his job."

The man braced himself.

"There's something I've never told you," he said at length. "Something you don't suspect. It was I . . . that night . . . at the Jermyns' . . . that dropped you into the flower-bed."

The arm round his neck drew tighter.

"I know," breathed Estelle.

She was close in his arms and her face two inches from his.

"You *know*?" he gasped. "You *knew*?"

Estelle nodded gravely. Then she raised her eyebrows and lowered her glorious eyes.

“And if I may say so, St. Jeames, your manners were better then.”

Rodney released her, staring.

“What do you mean?”

“You certainly dropped me into the flower-bed, but at least you had the good taste to kiss me first.”

For two minutes the world stood still. . . .

At length—

“What’s your full name, my darling?”

“John Rodney Shere.”

Estelle nodded approvingly.

“But I think,” she said, “I shall always call you ‘St. Jeames’.”

AESOP'S FABLE

William Red Spenser lived by his pen.

Neither of his grandfathers would have approved this calling, but theirs were the days of rent-rolls and fortunes invested in 'the funds,' and, since old orders change and the devil drives high and low, the son of fifty squires lived by his pen.

Had he cared to live in a city, to write more quickly, to study the public taste, he could have made more than he did: but the Red Spensers had never been townsmen, and the love of the countryside was in his blood. More. He came of a line of landlords that loved their land. An acre of his own, in the midst of which he could live, meant more to Spenser than ten times its worth in shares: and, since in post-war England such a life was beyond his means, he had bought a tiny estate in the foot-hills of the Pyrenees.

When his freehold had been paid for, his old English furniture installed and a pocket bedchamber made into a decent bathroom, the owner of the old white-walled homestead had found himself poor indeed. Happily, however, he had a market for his work, and, before six months were over, he was abreast of his outlay and able to pay his way.

And now two years had gone by, and William Red Spenser, recluse, was doing well. The old house was in order, the little property flourished, the massive coach-house sheltered a serviceable car. The friends who declared that he was wasting his life paid him flying visits and went away less sure. There was a stable peacefulness about Piétat which was not of their world. The place and its pleasant master stuck in their minds, rose up before them like a proverb the comfortable wisdom of which is not to be denied.

Belinda Pomeroy, popularly supposed to get the most out of life, made no bones of her approbation.

"Rufus knows how to live. I get more satisfaction out of a day at Piétat than out of Ascot itself. Why? Because I get down to Nature. We're all on the wrong tack—Gadarene swine, if you like, rushing into the sea. But Rufus sees further. He sits right down in his castle and watches the crowd go by. He lives as men and women were meant to live. But he ought to marry."

“He can’t take a wife,” said her husband, “out of the Gadarene swine. That would be a *mésalliance*.”

“There must be others,” said Belinda.

“There are. But they wouldn’t suit Rufus. He buries himself alive, but he doesn’t go rough.”

This was most true.

When Spenser emerged from his kingdom, he might have stepped out of his Club. Beyond a certain gravity of manner, solitude and simplicity left no mark upon the man. A handsome villa at Biarritz brought the Pomeroys thither twice in the year. When Spenser visited them, his clothes were faultless and his address was superb. As he danced at the Casino, nobody would have dreamed that his heart was in a fold of the foot-hills forty miles off.

“We’re not Gadarene swine,” said Belinda. “We may be Gadarenes, and I admit that we rush: but we don’t rush quite so violently as the—the—as some do.”

“True,” said her husband, holding his glass to the light. “But, even so, can you reclaim a Gadarene? I can’t see you dwelling at Piétat, brushing the sheep before breakfast and turning out after dinner to gather the slugs.”

“I should love it,” said Belinda. “Let’s go to Biarritz next week.”

“What, an’ miss Goodwood?”

Mrs. Pomeroy hesitated. The raiment she had chosen for Goodwood was very fine.

“Of course,” she said, “I’m afraid I’m in over the knees. Before we married, I had begun to rush. And now . . .”

Her husband drained his glass, rose to his feet and picked her up in his arms.

“I’m a born Gadarene,” he said, “and I married the best of my kind. But for you, I should have been a Gadarene swine. And there you are. Rufus commands our admiration, but then and there we get off. And so, I’m afraid, my beauty, will everyone else. But I shouldn’t trouble your head. Rufus is very happy and thinks far too much of my wife to look twice at another girl.”

Belinda kissed him. Then she sighed contentedly.

“At least,” she said, “he’s only just twenty-nine. And we can always hope.”

She could not know that at that very moment William Red Spenser was trying not to despair.

The man was standing in his courtyard, by the side of his well, frowning upon a fine cord, of which twenty inches were wet.

Water.

Piétat had but one well, and now, before the great drought, its springs were beginning to fail. . . .

Spenser lifted his head and looked at the sky.

This was mercilessly blue: where the earth rose up to meet it, outline was blurred: distance was dancing, and the sun swaggered in the heaven, a heavy-handed monarch of all he surveyed.

Spenser looked again at the cord.

Less than two feet of water, instead of the normal six. There had always been six—always, no matter how much you drew. And this was July. Once the spring began failing, it would not rise again till the end of the year. If the drought were to end to-morrow, twenty inches of water would have to meet Piétat’s needs for the next four months. Well, that would do—well enough. But, if the drought did not break, in another month the well would be dry as a bone. And then . . .

Spenser thought of his garden, his house, his handful of sheep; of the borders he had created, the turf he had slaved at, the bathroom he had installed. The nearest stream was three miles from where he stood. To have water brought thence would cost a little fortune: as like as not, no one would undertake to bring it so far: such water-carts as there were would be serving less distant farms.

It was a heart-breaking business.

Sitting in his study that evening, correcting some proofs, the man found his mind straying back to the Spanish well-digger’s words.

“I cannot deepen this well, sir, for you are down to the rock. If one can go deep enough, one will come to another *couche d’eau*. That is abundant and will never give out. I have found it at Belet, seventeen miles from here. And I will dig a new well whenever you please. *But I must be told where to dig.*”

When Spenser had spoken of diviners, the Spaniard had thrown up his hands.

"I know of three, sir, and I cannot recommend one. If I knew a good water-finder, I should never be out of work. But a failure is bad for me, too. It is about in a moment—in everyone's mouth. And no wells are dug for a twelvemonth, and I must go into the towns and dig their drains for my bread."

Before he went to his bed, Spenser walked in his garden and wondered what he had done.

His little home seemed like to be broken up. If the rain did not come, Piétat would have to be abandoned for three or four months. The house would have to be shut, the garden let go: the sheep would have to be sold, the servants dismissed. He would have to lodge himself somewhere, so that his work might go on. And, when December was in, he would start again—*with a new, unspeakable curse hanging over his head*.

There was no blinking the truth: the tenure he had thought so stable was depending upon the grin of a heathenish god. His first summer he had used little water: his second had been curiously wet: and this was his third. . . .

The night was lovely. The perfect sky was sown with a million stars. There was no moon, but Spenser's practised eye could tell the points of the plot he loved so well—the whispering beechwood and the slope of the pasture beyond, the file of veteran poplars lining the road, the sweet-smelling avenue of limes. The house they kept lay, like a slumbering sovereign, amid its lifeguard of oaks; the spire of its single turret attested the fairy-tale. The light from the study windows laid two dim paths upon the lawn: and owls were crying, and the exquisite scent of jasmin laded the cool night air.

These things were Spenser's fortune—his goose of the golden egg. And to-night he had no pleasure in them. . . .

Water. Without water you could not go on.

A month of anxiety dragged by. The drought broke, and for three days the rain came down. Then the sun reascended his throne, like a giant refreshed. By the tenth day of August water was being sold.

Then came a note from Belinda, forty miles off.

Les Iles d'Or,

Biarritz.

Dear Rufus,

We are here. Please come over on Tuesday and stay for at least two nights. We have a table for the opening of The Superbe. A thousand Gadarenes will be there, so come and rush down a steep place for once in a way.

Yours,

Belinda.

The day Spenser left for Biarritz was very fine. There was not a cloud in the sky: what little wind there was sat in the east: and there were six inches of water in Piétat's well.

Miss Lettice Longwood was as bored as she looked.

She had been led to believe that the opening night of *The Superbe* would be worth attending. She would have attended it any way, but she had been misled. It was exactly the same as any other night anywhere else. The band was coloured and played the same tunes. The food was fairly good and worth about a tenth of its price. She had received the same favours in Boston six months before. The floor was far too crowded, and her dress was the best in the place. When she danced, all eyes were upon her: when she passed between the tables, conversation died down. Everything was exactly the same.

She had been 'the Longwood girl' for nearly five years. For the last three, certainly, she had carried all before her, wherever she went. It had never been very amusing, and now she was very bored.

She danced again listlessly. Very soon she would go home, or, perhaps, 'on somewhere'. It was only just three.

The music ended with a crash, and she found herself next to Belinda, whom she had met in Town.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "I thought I had the best dress, but I see I was wrong."

"Thank you very much," said Miss Longwood. "May I come and see you one day?"

"Come to lunch on Friday, will you? Let me introduce Mr. Spenser—Miss Longwood. He's a hermit and a writer of books."

“He doesn’t look either,” said Miss Longwood. “But that, I believe, is the mode.”

As a matter of form, Spenser asked for a dance.

The lady inclined her head.

“Shall we say the one after next?”

“If you please,” said William Red Spenser.

As Belinda resumed her seat—

“I’ve introduced you,” she said, “to ‘the Longwood girl’. Don’t fall in love with her, Rufus, because it’s no go.”

“I shouldn’t think of doing such a thing,” said Spenser. “She’s undeniably lovely, but—well, I don’t think I’ve ever seen apathy so pronounced.”

“A Gadarene,” said Ivan. “But she’s rushed down so many steep places that now nothing short of a precipice shakes her up.”

“That’s so much surmise,” said Belinda. “I imagine her life’s been so easy that now at twenty-three she’s got nothing left.”

Both these conclusions were right—so far as they went. Lettice Longwood had been born with a golden spoon in her mouth: she would have been happy, had she been born beside a hedgerow. Her quality was her eagerness, and this had never been served. The world into which she was brought had always been at her feet. Her strongly desirous nature had never had anything to desire: her instinctive efforts to find the food it needed had exhausted all the resources of Vanity Fair.

Most women disliked her, as was natural: most men liked her very much. It was ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ always. You could not be indifferent to ‘the Longwood girl’. The indifference was all on her side. She neither liked nor disliked: she did not care. Men fell in love with her beauty, but not with her mind. She never admitted them to that. Few tried to force an entry—she had the reputation of being unusually wise. Such as did try were lazily cross-examined and contemptuously dismissed. Occasionally a fool would believe that he had found favour in her eyes: his fall was invariably great. Lettice Longwood was a very hard case. . . .

When Spenser came for his dance, he entered the field of observation and was curiously observed. People saw a tall well-built man, with the colour of health in his face, and hair that every woman would like to

possess: a man with a pleasant manner, though something grave, with wide-set, steady grey eyes, a firm but kindly mouth and a resolute chin. They imagined, no doubt, that he was suppressing his pride. As a matter of fact, he was thinking of Piétat.

For a little the two danced in silence.

Then—

"You're a Red Spenser," said the girl.

The man inclined his head.

"How did you know?"

"By your hair," said Miss Longwood. "My grandfather once went to Daybreak, and he used to tell me of the portraits all with the same red-gold hair."

"That's right," said Spenser. "Daybreak has gone now, but I've six of the portraits here."

"Where?"

"At the hermitage, forty miles off."

He told her of the fold in the foot-hills, where he had made his home.

"A miniature Daybreak," said Miss Longwood.

The man coloured with pleasure.

"That was the childish idea."

"I think it's a very good game. Why do you say 'was'?"

With a heavy heart, Spenser related the truth.

'The Longwood girl' heard him out.

As the music stopped—

"I can find water," she said. "I have the power."

Spenser could only stare.

"My grandfather wanted water, and he sent for a man. I was twelve or thirteen, and I watched him at work. When he'd done, he gave me the rod—as a toy to a child. To his surprise, it turned for me more than for him. For the rest of the summer it was my favourite game—finding water and learning to judge its depth. Then I left the country, and I've never been back."

The quiet, confident tone compelled belief.

William Red Spenser could hardly control his voice.

“I hardly dare ask you, but will you be so generous as to lend me your skill? I mean, there may be no water. I know that perfectly well. But, if there is . . .”

Miss Longwood stifled a yawn.

“If you’ll call for me at two to-morrow, I’ll do what I can.”

“You’re awfully kind,” said Spenser. He hesitated. Then, “I’m afraid my car’s not very comfortable,” he said.

“I expect it holds two,” said Miss Longwood. “Good night.”

Some twelve hours later the serviceable car came to rest under the shadow of the Piétat oaks.

Miss Longwood alighted stiffly, to be received by a rout of Spaniel puppies, whose affection outran respect.

Before Spenser could come to her rescue, she had two of them in her arms.

“Hermits aren’t allowed dogs,” she said, “or places like this.”

“They’ll make you all dirty,” said Spenser.

“I don’t care at all. May I take them into the house?”

“Of course.”

He led the way to the study and told his man to bring tea.

To the delight of the puppies, Miss Longwood sat down on the floor. From the arm of a chair Spenser admired his guest.

After a moment she lifted a glowing face.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten the water, but I haven’t been childish for years.”

“I’d forgotten it,” said Spenser, “for the first time for more than a month.”

“Then I’ve done some good,” said Miss Longwood. “How beautifully cool it is here.”

“They knew how to build,” said Spenser. “Piétat’s walls are nearly four feet thick.”

“Who’s ‘they’? The gnomes? The brownies? I’m sure they drew the plan.” She got to her feet. “And now please show me the pictures my grandfather saw.”

He led her into the panelled dining-room.

Miss Longwood studied the portraits one by one.

At length—

“How well they go here,” she said. “I think they must feel at home.”

“You couldn’t have said a thing which would please me more.”

“It’s true,” said the girl. “I don’t know who thought of this house, but it’s like some woodcut I’ve seen—some tail-piece in an old book.”

They passed out into the garden, and he showed her the lie of his land.

Then Frodsham came out to tell them that tea was served.

As they strolled the lawn in his wake, Miss Longwood hung on her heel and surveyed the house.

Presently she nodded.

“We must find that water,” she said. “You can’t leave this.”

As was to be expected, her downright appreciation took Spenser by storm. Her apathy was forgotten, her reputation became a myth. Her swift understanding, her fellowship carried the man off his feet. Her notable charm overwhelmed him. It only remained for her beauty to deal him the *coup de grâce*.

Sitting by her side in his study, her host could find no fault in her, body or soul.

The setting suited her well: her natural dignity went with the sober room: her soft voice enriched its quiet: the William-and-Mary settee might have been made for her pose. Her firm, slim hands used the aged silver with infinite grace. Her little hat lay beside her, and her fine, raven hair gave back the light: her eyes were grey and fearless, and there was pride in her mouth: her cherry-coloured dress was perfect as the figure it served.

Before her cigarette was finished. Miss Longwood rose to her feet.

“Have you a rod for me?” she said.

There were hazel twigs in the car. Spenser had cut them that morning at eight o'clock. He brought them at once.

"They'll do," said my lady. "I think I like that one best. Will you cut it down a little? It's rather too big."

When he had shaped it to her liking, it resembled the letter Y, twelve inches by eight.

"Now may I see the old well?"

He led her round to the courtyard and watched her compass the well.

The rod never moved.

"I don't wonder you're short of water! there's next to none here. I—I can't even feel the spring. . . . Yes. Wait a minute. . . . Here it is. But it's very slight. And now for the depth. . . . Don't tell me. I should say it was thirty feet down. Perhaps twenty-nine."

"Well done indeed," said Spenser. "It's twenty-eight."

Miss Longwood took a deep breath.

"For one dreadful moment I thought I had lost the knack. What would you have said, if I had?"

"I should have tried to thank you for coming at all."

"I don't quite see why," said Miss Longwood. "I'm enjoying myself very much." She took a step back and looked round—at the well and the oaks and the gable and the slope of the meadow beyond. "But I wish I could place your home. I've seen it before somewhere. It's all so simple that it's immensely rich."

As though to applaud this sentiment, a splendid rooster, exultant upon an old mounting-block, crowed lustily.

The two laughed naturally.

"He's right in the picture," said Miss Longwood. "And now to business."

They began to pass round the property, keeping close to its verge, the girl going first and Spenser stepping behind, with his eyes on her back. . . .

Three times the rod declared water, but its signals were very faint. With the greatest care Miss Longwood explored the clues, and each time, after a little, she shook her fair head.

With a sinking heart, Spenser followed her round to their starting point. . . .

One by one she searched the meadows, across and across: she scoured the beechwood and she compassed the house: she proved the lawn and the flower-garden—even the drive, in vain. In desperation she entered and walked the rooms, but without avail. There was no water.

She asked for another rod, and started again.

Slowly and with infinite patience she covered the ground she had covered an hour before. When Spenser begged her to stop, she waved him away. It might have been her home she was striving to save.

At half-past six o'clock they stood again upon the lawn.

"Please come in," said Spenser. "You must be ready to drop. I can never thank you enough for——"

"If you talk like that," said the girl, "I shall begin to cry. I came to help you to live here. All I've done so far is to make it plain that you can't. But I'm not through yet. I found water down there, didn't I?" She pointed to the poplars fringing the road below. "Well, how did it get there? Down hill. It comes from above. Very well. I'm going to try once more at the back of the house."

Together they climbed the orchard which presently slanted steeply to a little stone wall. This was Piétat's boundary. Beyond lay the rough of a meadow, scrambling up to a bluff.

The girl stared at the wall. Then she turned and looked at the house, and, below, the row of poplars and the sheep cropping the shadows they threw on the turf. Presently she returned to the wall and the meadow and the brown bluff beyond.

"Will you help me over?" she said.

Spenser mounted the wall, lifted her up very gently and set her down on her feet on the further side.

As he leaped down beside her—

"You're very strong," said the girl.

Then she glanced about her, took fresh hold of her rod and walked for the bluff.

Almost at once the rod began to move.

Another three steps and it was bending. It was plainly all she could do to hold the fork of it straight. Spenser watched it, as a man in a dream. The tail of the Y, which had been pointing upwards, was pointing outwards and down . . . actually *down*.

Very slowly its mistress was turning towards the right: her delicate wrists were quivering under the strain: without looking at Spenser, she spoke.

"Please come and take off my hat."

This was tight-fitting, and resisted: Spenser drew it off with the utmost care.

Miss Longwood shook back her curls and continued to move.

The rod relaxed slightly, and she bore to the left. As she did so, it dipped sharply. Another two steps, and, before Spenser's eyes it assumed the form of a hook.

The girl stood still, trembling.

"This is the place. Will you peg it? Between my feet."

The man went down on his knees and pressed a peg into the ground.

Miss Longwood shut her eyes and lifted her chin.

For a moment she stood swaying.

Then—

"Forty-two feet, I should say. Perhaps forty-three. D'you think they'll sell you this land?"

"Yes," said Spenser shakily.

"Good," said the girl.

Then she put a hand to her head and fainted.

Spenser caught her as she fell, and carried her into the shade. She came to her senses, before he had laid her down. For a moment their eyes met. As she closed hers again, the colour came into her cheeks.

"Stupid of me," she murmured. "Don't go. Let me lie quiet for a moment, and then we'll go back to the house."

Not knowing what else to do, Spenser sat down by her side and stared at the tops of the oaks, showing over the wall.

So for, perhaps, two minutes.

Then—

"I know," said the girl. "I remember. It's straight out of Aesop's Fables, this pretty place. The rooster and the well and the puppies and the cool of the little old house—they all fit in. And I'm sure the old pictures talk when they're left alone."

"They'll have something to say to-night," said William Red Spenser.

Miss Longwood, completely restored, sat back in her chair.

"I shan't rest till you've bought it," she said. "When will you know?"

"To-morrow morning," said Spenser. "I'll send you a wire."

"And when can you start digging?"

"The moment it's mine."

"May I come and watch?"

The man got to his feet and stepped to the open window commanding the lawn. For a moment he stood, looking out: then he turned to the lady adorning his room.

"I'm afraid I've been very silent," he said quietly. "The truth is, I'm rather tongue-tied. You've tied up my tongue. Our lives are so very different, and the gulf between us is so wide. You're 'the Longwood girl'. Why should the life I was living have mattered to you? It didn't, it doesn't, it can't—it's out of Miss Longwood's ken. Yet you've taken infinite trouble to save it for me. And now you actually ask if you can come and look at—at——"

"At Aesop's Fable," said Miss Longwood, swinging an exquisite leg. "May I?"

"Oh, my dear," said Spenser, "what do you think?"

"That's better," said Miss Longwood, laughing. "And please don't talk about gulfs. We're two of a kind, aren't we? Even if you live in a fable, and I in an ultra-film?"

Spenser's impulse was to kiss her smart little foot. Instead——

"I wish," he said, "that I had a painting of you. Just as you are, sitting back, with a light in your eyes and your hands in your lap."

“To go with the others?” flashed Miss Longwood. “What about ‘The Daw and the Peacocks’?”

“To go with the others,” said Spenser. “It’s time the Frogs had a queen.”

With a maddening smile, the lady regarded her watch.

“I hate to say it,” she said, “but in ten minutes’ time I must go. Are you coming to Biarritz again?”

“I hadn’t meant to, after I’d taken you back. But——”

“Then don’t. I’ll come. I promise. But I like you best here. Aesop belongs to his fable.”

“That’s the difference between us,” said Spenser. “I belong to my fable, but Lettice Longwood belongs wherever she goes.”

The girl shook her head.

“I don’t think I belong anywhere,” she said.

“You’ll always belong here,” said Spenser quietly.

“The freedom of Piétat. In return for——”

“In return for nothing,” said Spenser. “Neither Piétat nor I can ever make any return. We shouldn’t think of trying. You just belong to it—that’s all. That’s why I’d like your picture to hang with the other six. And now, if you’ll let me, I’d like to cut you some flowers.”

“May I come too, Aesop?”

“Certainly not,” said Spenser. “You’ve walked far too far as it is. If I had my way, you’d put up your little feet.”

“I will—on the lawn. I want to watch—the sun going down.”

“As my lady pleases,” said Spenser.

Half an hour floated away, before she had done with the garden and had bade the puppies ‘Good-bye.’

“Which one would you like?” said Spenser, as Frodsham gathered them in. “I’ll house-train him before you leave Biarritz, and then you can take him away.”

“Oh, Aesop, I’d love to have one. I’ll call him ‘Tail-piece’.” She pointed a delicate finger. “I think that one likes me best.”

“He’s yours,” said Spenser.

Then he let in the clutch.

Their way lay by by-roads, and the two had sundown to themselves. The country was full of magic: Harlequin's sword was out. This comfortable stream ran crimson: that line of hanging woodland was turned to gold: the mountains became a miracle of rose-red stone.

As they slipped into Biarritz, Spenser switched on his lights.

At the famous hotel the porters and pages were waiting to usher her in.

"I'm afraid you're very late," said Spenser, with his hat in his hand.

"What for? My film? You're going to be later still. Won't you come in and have something?"

The man shook his head.

"Thank you very much, but——"

"I hoped you'd say 'No', Aesop. Will you remember to wire?"

"How could I forget—anything? When will you come back?"

"I don't know. Very soon. Good-bye. I've had such a happy time."

The man bent over her hand. Then he looked into her eyes.

"D'you wonder that I'm tongue-tied?" he said.

Nearly three weeks had gone by.

The land had been bought and paid for, the new well was forty feet deep, Tail-piece had bitten a brother for disrespect, and Captain and Mrs. Pomeroy were deeply concerned.

"My dear," said Belinda to her husband, "it's the most dreadful thing that ever happened. He's mad about her, and she's amusing herself. When she goes——"

"He'll have to come here," said Ivan. "We'll see him through."

"He'll have to go back some time. And Piétat without her will drive him out of his mind. I tell you, he's mad about her. When he heard her car coming, you should have seen the look in his eyes."

"Perhaps she's mad about him."

"I wish she were," said Belinda. "But she isn't. She's just friendly. And she has this extraordinary charm that makes her friendliness dazzling—

knocks you out. I can't be angry with her, though she's doing this rotten thing. She's accustomed to adoration. If Rufus didn't adore her, she'd be amazed. She's behaving quite normally and perfectly well. So is Rufus. In loving her he's doing the natural thing. The tragedy of it is—he isn't a Gadarene. He leads a life that matters immensely to him. The consequence is that her coming into that life is a terrific affair."

"The Queen of the Gadarenes goes into the hermit's cave?"

"And finds it great fun, while the hermit goes off the deep end. Exactly. Oh, my dear, whatever are we to do?"

"Stand by with the sponge," said Ivan. "We can't interfere. If Rufus is going to crash, he'll have to do it. And, when he's down, you must go and render first aid. Here and now I give you permission to stroke his hair."

"It won't do any good," said Belinda. "I shan't have the requisite touch."

Her husband inspected her fingers and then put them up to his lips.

"*Chacun à son goût*," he said.

The Pomeroys' concern was natural. Nobody likes to see a good friend go down. Yet, they need not have been so dismayed. If Spenser had lost his heart, he had kept his head. The man was desperately in love, but he had counted the cost and was fully prepared to pay, when the moment came. He knew that 'the Longwood girl' was out of his reach. He knew that Piétat appealed to her, was sure she liked its master, hoped she would remember them both. But that was all. Aesop must stick to his fable, and she to her film. If he had had money—not very much, but enough to let him wander through Vanity Fair—he might have lifted his eyes. As it was . . .

And so he 'went off the deep end', determined to swim. He could hardly have done anything else. Had he detested Miss Longwood, in view of what she had done he could scarcely have been 'out' when she came. Fate bowed him down the smooth path. He let himself go—well aware of the cliff to which he must come.

As for the lady, she shall speak for herself.

"You must have an ox," said Miss Longwood. "I'm sure he'd be very useful."

The two were climbing the orchard which led to the well.

"He could fetch his own food," said Spenser, "but I can't think of anything else."

“I’m sure he’d be a good influence. The other animals would listen to what he said. And then you should have an ass, as a sort of foil. The ox could rebuke him.”

“But not for indolence,” said Spenser. “The trouble is I’m not in the picture myself. I should be a husbandman.”

“You’re near enough,” said Miss Longwood. “Besides, Aesop wrote. But you will have some bees, won’t you? Hullo, I believe they’ve found.”

The Spanish youths at the well were speaking their father below. As the two came up to the wall, they pulled off their caps.

“My father can smell water,” said the elder. “He has found a great stone and he says it must be beneath that.”

“Lift me over,” said the girl. “I want to be in at the death.”

As once before, Spenser swung her over the wall. Then he stepped to the well and set his hands on the tripod which straddled the shaft.

“Very careful, my lady. Use my arm as a rail.”

Miss Longwood did so, and the two peered into the depths.

Presently they made out the Spaniard and the flash of his pick.

“Where’s the stone?” breathed the girl. “I can’t make it out.”

“Directly below us,” said Spenser. “He’s clearing the soil from around it, to set it free. Then he’ll drive the pick under and prize it out.”

It was impossible not to be excited.

The two boys were lying prone, with their chins on the edge of the well. Below, their father was striving with all his might. The fellow was stripped to the waist, and, despite the chill below, you could see the gleam of the sweat running over his back. The tackle on the tripod swung idle: the buckets must wait. For three weeks he had laboured for this moment, blindly obeying his orders, and doing his best to smother his unbelief.

Three pairs of eyes watched him, hung on each movement he made. The fourth was steadily regarding William Red Spenser.

The latter stood like a rock, but his heart was full. All along he had been mortally afraid that they would strike rock. The girl had said quite frankly that whether there was rock in the way she could not tell. And now the danger was past, and Piétat was saved. In another moment they would have

reached the spring. Then again, his darling was there, with her hands on his arm. . . .

The Spaniard scraped back the earth and drove his pick under the stone. Then he put his whole weight on the helve. The watchers above saw it moving, saw the stone shift and turn. The Spaniard let the pick go and plucked out the stone with his hands. Then he cast it down and leaned back against the wall.

In the form of the stone lay a winking puddle of light.

The Spaniard shook the sweat from his brow and called to his sons.

"Send down the bucket. This time to-morrow I shall be working in water up to my waist."

"Has he found?" cried the girl.

"Oh, my dear, haven't you seen?"

"I—I wasn't looking," said Miss Longwood.

As the bucket went swinging, the elder boy showed his white teeth.

"*Madame* may sleep soundly to-night. There is water in abundance. The pretty flowers of her garden will never want."

With her hands upon Spenser's arm, Miss Longwood smiled back.

"That's a great thought," she said gently. She turned to her squire. "Aesop, you must have been right. He thinks I belong to the fable."

Spenser stiffened. Then he looked at the boy.

"*Mademoiselle* is a great lady—a great princess. She honours me with her friendship, but she is not my wife."

The boy mumbled an apology. Then, with a scarlet face, he bent to the rope.

As they turned to the wall,

"Poor child," said Miss Longwood softly. "He'd never have seen me again."

Spenser stopped dead.

"Are you leaving Biarritz?"

"I must, Aesop. I ought to have gone last week, but I—I wanted so much to see the water come in."

“You’ve a very sweet nature,” said Spenser. He swung himself on to the wall and handed her up. “I shall feel lost when you’re gone.”

“No one to lift over the wall?”

“That’s right. May I lift you down?”

“Yes.”

In silence they passed through the orchard and through the little courtyard. As they came to the lawn, Tail-piece emerged from the house, with a collar about his neck. For a moment he stood like an image: then he flung himself at his master with a whimper of joy.

Spenser picked him up in his arms and made much of the scrap.

“I can’t take him,” said Miss Longwood. “He—he loves you. And he’ll never be so happy again.”

“He’s a very lucky fellow. I envy him very much.”

“Aesop! You’re not tired of your fable?”

“You belong to it,” said Spenser quietly. “And now you’re going away. It won’t be the same.”

“For heaven’s sake—why?”

“Because—there’s no one like you.” He laughed shortly. “But I rather imagine you hear that once a week.”

“They don’t put it so simply,” said Miss Longwood. “And then, again, you say it as though you thought it were true. But you mustn’t believe it, Aesop. I’m only one of the stars in an ultra-film.”

“I’ve seen you close up,” said Spenser, “and—and off parade. ‘The Longwood girl’ is a picture, but Lettice Longwood is a work of Nature herself.”

Miss Longwood shaded her eyes and looked at the hills.

“Talking of pictures,” she said, “I’ve been drawn. Etched. Tilsit is staying at Biarritz, so I asked him to try his hand.”

“Tilsit? It must be lovely. He’s got a wonderful touch.”

“If you’d like to see it,” said Miss Longwood, “it’s in the car.”

The well-found coupé was standing in the shade of the oaks. A large rectangular package was lying within the boot. Spenser withdrew it with the greatest possible care. The etching was glazed. An article of such virtue

must be uncovered indoors: the dining-room table offered the most convenient site. . . .

Leaning against the dresser, Miss Longwood watched the brown fingers busy about the string.

As he threw back the paper the man gave a cry of delight.

Tilsit might have worked in his study, and have etched his mistress as she sat back in his chair. The beautiful pose was the same, as was the dress, and, though the master had drawn but her head and shoulders, the head of the chair was behind them, as it had been that first day.

"You like it?"

"It's perfect," cried Spenser. "It's you. Whatever will everyone say? It's you, as you are. It isn't 'the Longwood girl'."

"No one will see it," said Miss Longwood. "That's the only copy, and I have the plate. I—I had it done for you, Aesop."

"Lettice!"

"You say things as if you mean them, and you said you'd like my picture to hang up in here. And I should be . . . very honoured. And, when people come, you can always say I'm a benefactress—that I found the water for Piétat, and that that's why you've got my picture up on the wall."

Spenser laid down the picture and took the slim hands in his.

"I think," he said shakily, "I think you have the sweetest nature in all the world."

He bent his head and put the hands to his lips.

"Why do you say that, Aesop?"

"Because I think you know that I love you and you want to do what you can to break my fall."

He let the slight fingers go and turned away.

"I shall hang it up there," he said quietly, "directly—directly you've gone."

Lettice put a hand to her throat.

"That—that isn't why I gave it you," she said. "I mean, why does one give presents? To people one likes? Because you want them to be happy. That's why I gave it you."

“You have made me happy, Lettice. Most awfully happy and proud.”

“But, if it’s true—what you say, I’m afraid you’ll be . . . unhappy, when I have gone.”

The man dared not look at the girl. Instead he stared at the picture with hungry eyes.

“That’s my funeral,” he said slowly, as though he were speaking to himself. “And I shall come through.”

“I don’t want you to be unhappy. I love your fable, Aesop. It’s the most perfect thing. How do you think I’ll feel, if I think that I’ve spoiled it all?”

“You’ve made it, my lady,” said Spenser. “I was fond of it for itself, but now I shall love it because it has been your setting and because you liked it so well. I’ll have to pay, of course. One always does. But I wouldn’t go back. And now that I’ve got your picture. . . .”

The girl braced herself.

“I’ve been very happy, Aesop. But then you know that.”

Spenser put a hand to his head.

“I—I hoped you had. Piétat’s a change—something different. You’ve found it refreshing, after—the fun of the film.”

“Quite right,” said Lettice. “I have. But the fable is Aesop’s fable. I’ve been . . . very happy with him.”

“I shall never forget that, Lettice.”

The girl moistened her lips and the colour came into her face.

“And I shall be . . . very unhappy, when I have gone. . . . Oh, my dear, I’ve given you the picture. Won’t you give me something . . . to break my fall?”

She was close in the man’s arms and looking up into his eyes. As he spoke, his voice was trembling.

“My darling, my hands are empty. My fable’s all I’ve got. I’ve nothing—nothing that I can offer ‘the Longwood girl’.”

“You have, you have, Aesop. Don’t make me ask right out.”

“Oh, Lettice, for what it’s worth, will you take my name?”

With her eyes fast shut, the girl nodded her head. Then she put her arms round his neck. . . .

Five minutes later she seated herself on the table and demanded a cigarette. When the man had lit it, she laid it down and took his face in her hands.

" 'The bride's presents to the bridegroom included an ox.' I'm going to choose him to-morrow. And he'll advise his master, until I come back. I expect he'll rebuke you, my darling, but you mustn't mind that. And you really do deserve it. I've been throwing myself at your head for over a week."

"But, Lettice, sweet, how could I? I mean, the gulf I spoke of——"

"Between you and 'the Longwood girl'? I know. It's immense—not to be bridged. But then, you see, Aesop dear, it's Lettice that's fallen for you—not 'the Longwood girl'; and Lettice has always been on the same side as you."

The two drove to Biarritz that evening and up to *Les Iles d'Or*.

As luck would have it, the Pomeroys were alone.

"Will you give us some dinner?" said Lettice. "Just as we are? I'm going to share Aesop's fable."

"Oh, you darling," said Belinda. "I did so hope you would. When I introduced him that evening——"

"That's right," said Ivan. "The moment she saw you, she said——"

"You be quiet," said Belinda. "And go and see about the champagne."

VANITY OF VANITIES

THE only three living descendants of Richard Stone Ludlow were gathered about the great table which had been made to his order in the reign of William the Fourth. One sat there of right, for he had inherited the table as Richard Stone Ludlow's son; the others sat there because their host, their great-uncle, had asked them to dine and because, when he asked them to dine, they always went.

George Stone Ludlow was eighty-nine and a true pillar of the state. He was the son of his father, and everything that he touched derived from him that grey magic of stability which had sprung from his grandfather's loins. Solid, regular, imperturbable, nothing could shake the Ludlows or anything that was theirs. Merchants of the City of London, their name at the foot of a letter turned the paper to sheepskin, the ink to blood: residents of St. James's Square, they had come to leaven even that standard loaf: squires of a Dorsetshire parish, their word was law. The threefold tradition had passed from father to son and had stood immaculate for over a hundred years. Men used to say that the only things that the War had left as they were were the Pyramids of Gizeh and George Stone Ludlow and all his works.

The man was a figure-head, proverbial, commanded a reverence which was honoured behind his back: perhaps his greatest achievement was that he had gained and held the confidence of his great-nephew and -niece.

These were entirely modern. . . .

The cloth having been drawn, the butler approached Miss Edgecumb and offered her cigarettes.

The girl looked at her host.

"Is this allowed, sir?" she said.

The old man smiled and nodded.

"To-night, yes. I trust you will stay at table and drink your coffee with us."

"I don't have to smoke, sir."

"I know that. I'd like you to."

Natalie Edgecumb did as she was bid.

Her cousin, Jonathan Baldric, sat back in his chair.

"Which reminds me," he said. "A week ago I sent you some cigarettes."

"Whatever made you do that?" said Natalie.

"I can't think," said Jonathan. "Did you get them?"

Natalie nodded.

"I rather liked them," she said.

Her great-uncle turned to Jonathan.

"I'm sure," he said, smiling, "that's all you wanted to know."

"I suppose so," said Jonathan. "But you must admit, sir, that her manners leave much to be desired."

The old man laughed.

"The true woman's always do. I see a night-club was raided on Monday last. I hope you weren't there."

"I cannot tell a lie, sir," said Natalie. "I left ten minutes too soon."

"And I, sir," said Jonathan, "arrived ten minutes too late."

"Then all's well," said their great-uncle. "But you mustn't run things too fine. Oh, by the way, I have to send to Paris to-morrow. Can my messenger do anything there for either of you?"

"He can bring me some scent, sir," said Natalie. "And six pairs of silk stockings, if he can get them through."

Her cousin raised his eyes to heaven.

"I should like two cigars," he said meekly. "Of course he must declare them to the Customs and pay whatever they ask."

"That's right," said Natalie swiftly. "And all the time he can have the scent in his hat."

"I think he'd better wear the stockings," said Jonathan. "If he doesn't run about, it won't do them any harm."

The old man laughed.

"I'll send him to see you," he said, "before he goes. Then, if he's willing to play, you can settle the shape of the game. But you mustn't shock him too much. He's been very well brought up, and I think he sings in a choir."

“The very man,” said Natalie. “I wonder if he’d bring me a dress.”

Coffee was served.

“When do you go to Buckram, sir?” said Jonathan.

“The first week in May,” said his great-uncle. “I hope you’ll pay me a visit whenever you please.”

“Thank you very much, sir. I——”

“I’m coming, sir,” said Natalie, “as soon as you’re settled in. May I bring a poet I know? We met in the sea at Biarritz, and he’s written a sonnet about my bathing-dress.”

“Something quite slight, I suppose,” said Jonathan.

“My dear,” said her great-uncle, laughing, “I shall be most happy to have you, and, if you get on with the poet, why, so shall I. Was he a poet before he saw you in the sea?”

“I don’t know,” said Natalie. “I must ask him.” She looked across at her cousin. “You weren’t, were you?” she said.

Jonathan wrinkled his nose.

“Mind he doesn’t forget his banjo,” he said contemptuously.

The door closed behind the servants, and the three were alone.

For a little the light conversation held its own, the old man taking his share, but no more than that: with eighty years of memories to draw on, no single reminiscence passed his lips. George Stone Ludlow was an excellent host.

At length—

“Now I want to talk business,” he said, “for ten minutes of time. When I leave this room, I get sleepy, as you very well know: and then, again, business should be talked about a table and not from an easy chair.”

He paused there, and, after a moment’s hesitation, took a cigarette from the box and lighted it thoughtfully. The act was significant: George Stone Ludlow had not been known to smoke for twenty years.

For a moment he inhaled luxuriously.

Then—

“It’s like this,” he said. “I’m eighty-nine years old—rising ninety. And, as men don’t live for ever, before many months I shall go to my long home.

Your great-grandfather had three children, of which I was one. Had he been asked to predict how many descendants of his would be living to-day, I daresay he would have said 'About thirty'. As we know, he would have been wrong. He has only three. Soon he will have only two.

"I know it's the fashion to mock at a man of substance, a man who behaves himself and honestly holds what he has. His regularity is sneered at: his belief in law and order is pitied: because he expects those who have passed their word to keep it, as he does himself, he is abused. But I think that, if you examine the circumstances of his traducers, you will always find that their quarrel with him is *personal*. Either they do not behave themselves or do not honestly hold that which they have. Frequently they have nothing. Or law and order are distasteful to them. Perhaps at some time or other they have not kept their word. . . . I don't think I'm wrong in this. I have found the personal reason over and over again. I have, therefore, no shame in being a man of substance: and, though I'm not proud of it, for I see in it no reason for pride, I believe that men and women of substance, high and low, are what this country needs. A decent, orderly home, inhabited and maintained according to the means of its owner, is a rock upon which a statesman can build and points a moral which agitators find it hard to refute. The bigger the home, of course, the more its influence: but a crofter's cottage can offer as sound foundation as any County seat.

"Very well. My father made two such homes, and he handed them on to me: it was his wish that I should inhabit and maintain them, as I have done: before very long, one of you will be the mistress of one, and the other master of the other. You will each have the means to keep them—indeed, you will have much more, for I'm very rich. Between you, you will share my fortune—upon condition that you use and maintain your homes. Should either of you fail in that, his or her home and share will at once revert to the Crown.

"And now let's go to the library. I have a lot of new records, and I'd like you to see what they're worth."

The cousins left, as usual, at half-past ten.

As the car which bore them stole out of the famous square—

"He's a great old fellow," said Jonathan. "I'm damned proud to be his kin."

"There's no one like him," said Natalie shakily.

"Quite so," said Jonathan thoughtfully. "No one. I—I wonder who's going to get which."

"Oh, you brute," said Natalie. "Hardly out of his house, full of his wine, sprawling about his car—and you begin to pick over——"

"Easy over the cobbles," said her cousin. "Who's pickin' over what? And I'm nothing like full of his wine. I wish I was."

"It's indecent," said Natalie. "You know it is. For no reason on earth, you're going to be left half a kingdom, and you can't even wait till you're home to try on the crown."

"The correct answer to that," said her cousin, "is very short. I hope you don't know it, but I think you probably do." Natalie choked. "Yes, I thought so. And now let's get this straight. For no reason on earth, you're going to be left half a kingdom. Are you going to ask me to believe that you don't care which half it is?"

"I suppose you mean that you want St. James's Square."

Jonathan Baldric sighed.

"I don't," he said. "I mean that since half-past nine you've never stopped prayin' that you get Buckram Place."

Natalie shrugged her white shoulders.

"I shall," she said shortly. "It's really hardly likely that he'll leave it to you."

"Why not?" said Jonathan.

"He knows you loathe it," said Natalie. "That its beauty, its peace, its traditions, mean nothing to you."

"Well, I'm banking on getting it," said Jonathan. "I'm going to roof in the terrace an'——"

"*What?*"

"My dear, you can do what you like with St. James's Square."

"Of course he'll leave me Buckram," said Natalie. "Knowing how much I love it, it would almost amount to an insult to leave it to you."

"Oh, feel the brakes," said Jonathan. "Feel the brakes. An' who's tryin' on the crown now? An' climbin' up on her chaser, because she's not sure of its shape."

Natalie bit a red lip.

After a moment she put out a little hand.

"I withdraw," she said softly. "I—I hope very much I'll get Buckram. I can't help that. But——"

"Tears for two," said Jonathan, putting her hand to his lips. "Cool hands you've got, haven't you? And very well-shaped. I don't wonder he's doing you proud. Oh, an' look at that leg."

"Be quiet," gurgled Natalie, sliding her arm through his. "He's doing us proud, because he likes us—both, and because we've never slimed round him, but just shown him decent respect."

"That's his fault," said Jonathan. "And I like our dinners together. He's human: it's like hob-nobbin' with a Van Dyck or drinkin' out of a flagon that Lamerie made. Besides, I like seeing you there. You know. Apart from the crowd. It's like——"

"Now do be careful," said Natalie. "These similes."

Her cousin frowned.

"Respectability," he said, "is devastatingly dull. If it weren't, I should be respectable. But your presence leavens the lump. I've been wholly respectable to-night, but I haven't been dull."

"That," said Natalie, "is nothing to do with me. Any woman——"

"And then you're wrong," said Jonathan. " ''Owdareyou' Bearskin's all right: but put her at George Stone's table and all her paint'd come off. She wouldn't fit, my lady: none of 'em would. But you're at your best."

"Perhaps," said Natalie, "the germ of respectability is in my blood. Naturally, then, I should thrive at St. James's Square. I'm not at all certain, Jonathan, that, when I do get Buckram, I shan't withdraw."

" 'Withdraw'?" cried her cousin. "What from?"

"Town, night-life, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world."

"Oh, you can't do that," said Jonathan. "At least, not yet. It's—it's not to be thought of. You're a very desirable maiden, and, as such, you mayn't be immured. I think there's a law against it. Besides, if ever there was one, Buckram's a pomp. And then again, you may get St. James's Square."

"Which is a vanity. Oh, Jonathan, I do hope I shan't."

“So do I,” said her cousin heartily. “St. James’s Square would suit me down to the sub-soil—and a bit over. Buckram’s all right to hunt from, but ——”

Natalie squeezed his arm.

“If,” she said sweetly, “if by any chance—I don’t think it’s likely—but, if by any chance I did get St. James’s Square, if the law will allow us, Jonathan, will you promise to swap?”

“My dear,” said her cousin, “will I promise to back a winner whenever I can?”

“What ever happens? I mean, he may live for years—I jolly well hope he does. And you may be married, and your wife may fancy sticking to Buckram Place.”

“I promise. I know what I want. Besides, I shall simply tell her I loved you first.”

“Another wrecked home,” sighed Natalie. “However, you’ve been very sweet.”

The man looked round and down at the eager face.

“There are times,” he said, “when I can deny you nothing. This is one of them. I know you set out to beguile me, but I’ve allowed for that. You’re amazingly attractive, you know: but ten times out of ten you’ve got the notice-boards out. You know. ‘Visitors are warned not to touch’.”

Natalie nodded.

“That’s right. I’m a woman of substance. I hold what I have.”

Jonathan sighed.

“At any rate,” he said, “I’m your cousin. You can’t alter that.”

“I don’t want to—to-night,” said the girl.

“Because I’ve done as you asked?”

“Perhaps. I don’t know.” She turned a glowing face. “And I’m sorry about the boards, but that’s my way.”

“It is a pity,” said the man. “I mean——”

“Here’s the club,” said Natalie swiftly, withdrawing her arm.

Jonathan shrugged his shoulders.

“After you, the deluge,” he said. He sighed again. “Well, well . . . An’ there’s ‘ ’Owdareyou’.”

Five minutes later he was dancing with Dorothy Bearskin.

That Natalie loved her cousin there can be no doubt. Jonathan Baldric was a very attractive man. Lazy, good-tempered, fearless, he sloped through life, doing all that he did handsomely, taking all things as they came and changing the rough to smooth with his pleasant, infectious smile. Add that he was very good-looking, and you will see that the ball of feminine friendship was at his feet. He kicked it along skilfully, kept his head and his heart, stayed unspoiled. But, if he kicked skilfully, he kicked the delicate ball, and that was the sum of the trouble with Natalie Edgecumb. She knew that he liked her, suspected that he loved her—and continually pushed him away. She could not bring herself to give an opening to the man to whom openings were being given by everyone else. The others made themselves cheap: determined not to do this, she made herself too dear. She wanted all of the man, wished him to single her out and let the others go hang. This he must do—for all the world to see. The world must see that Natalie Edgecumb at least had not shown him the way. So she hung out her boards for him, as for everyone else. Jonathan respected their warnings, naturally enough: he could hardly be expected to divine that he alone was to ignore their burden. The position was inviting disaster as plain as could be.

If Natalie played her cards badly, Jonathan played none at all. He looked upon his cousin and loved her, frowned at the notice-boards, sighed and returned to his ball. Only their blood relation prevented the gulf between them from becoming a sea. And once their great-uncle was dead . . .

George Stone Ludlow died in his sleep on a starlit midsummer eve, some three months after the dinner at which he had told his two relatives what to expect.

Not until the obsequies were over did each of the cousins receive a copy of the Will.

This was commendably brief.

By its provisions, J. G. Forsyth, Solicitor, was appointed sole Trustee, Jonathan Baldric became master of Buckram Place and Natalie Edgecumb mistress of 37 St. James’s Square: each of the legatees was to receive the income of four hundred thousand pounds, so long as they ‘regularly inhabited and faithfully maintained’ their respective properties.

Natalie stood at a window which commanded a slice of Mayfair and admitted the roar of the battle which the traffic continually waged.

Her mourning suited her well, declared her beauty, insisted on her exquisite shape. The pink and white magic of her skin, the warm gold of her hair, the slim perfection of her legs were always notable: the black showed three several wonders, which a man having seen would remember so long as he lived.

The girl stood very still, grave-eyed, hearing the warfare of the traffic and remembering the stately silence of Buckram Place.

A bell throbbed, and she passed to the telephone.

"Yes."

"Mr. Baldric to see you, madam."

"Show him up, please," said Natalie.

A moment later Jonathan entered the room.

He laid down his hat and stick, lowered himself into a chair and closed his eyes.

"Behold me aged," he said. "Too old at twenty-nine. And I don't mind if I never see Lincoln's Inn Fields again. They may have been all right before the lawyers blew in. But now . . ." He shuddered. "There's doom in the very air, documents in the trees, writs in the stones and——"

"What on earth do you mean?" said Natalie.

"My dear," said her cousin, "if you have hopes, prepare to scrap them now. Forsyth was civility itself, and about as helpful as a hangman explaining the drop. The Will's like a slab of cast iron on a snowy day. Monkey with it, and it bites. . . . I'm the comic squire of Buckram and you're the lovely *châtelaine* of St. James's Square. And nothing this side of witchcraft can cross it out."

"But, surely——"

"Yes, I'm tired of that phrase," said Jonathan. "I'm surfeited with it. If I've used it once this morning, I've used it a thousand times. I tell you, the thing's above grammar and any construction I know. Even blasphemy won't faze it. The Will says what it means and blinkin' well means what it says, and, if we want the jujubes, we've got to swallow the rules. Talking of drink . . ."

Natalie pointed to a sideboard.

With a grateful look, her cousin crossed the room and poured himself gin and ginger-beer.

“Did Forsyth say how much of each year we’d have to reside?”

“Nine perishin’ months,” said Jonathan, over the rim of his glass. “I bit and I scratched for six, but he wouldn’t budge.”

Natalie took her seat upon the arm of a chair.

“When are we to start?” she demanded.

“As soon as may be,” said her cousin. “The servants don’t know where they stand. Whether they’re sacked or kept on is for us to decide. An’ the bailiff keeps wirin’ from Buckram about some right of way. I’ve no idea what it means, but it seems there’s a horse-pond involved.”

“That’s right,” said Natalie. “You’d better go down to-night. Odd Acre’s always watered at Firefly Splash. The people who’ve bought Jay’s Hanger are trying to close the lane on the left-hand side. They’ve not a shadow of right. The lane’s been open for twenty-five years or more. And the water at Firefly’s better than anywhere else. But you don’t want a lawsuit, and so you must snuff them out.”

Her cousin regarded her dazedly.

Presently he set down his glass.

“Can’t be done,” he said weakly. “Geography was always beyond me, and——”

“But you must,” cried Natalie. “You can’t sit down and quietly watch an outrage committed on one of your farms. Besides, its not faithful maintenance.”

“Can’t help that,” said Jonathan. “I’m—I’m not equal to it. Why can’t the bailiff——”

“Because you’re the head. An attack on a right of way is a frightfully serious thing. You must go down to-night and bust it. It only needs a gesture, and the others ’ll crumple up.”

Her cousin sank into a chair and mopped his face.

“I don’t know any gestures,” he said. “At least, not the sort you mean. As to ‘busting a right of way’—well, I can’t even spell it. I—I don’t know where to begin.”

“You’re not busting a right of way,” screamed Natalie. “You’re keeping it alive. The whole idea——”

“All right, all right,” said Jonathan. “I thought I was to do it in. But it doesn’t make any odds. I’m just as incapable of busting it as of saving the wallah’s life. And any way, I’m not going down. If Holly can’t work the oracle, God’s Acre ’ll have to go round another way.”

“Jonathan, I beg you——”

“My dear, it’s no good. I can’t put over the *grand seigneur* and father-of-’is-people, and I’m blinkin’ well not going to try. More. I shall have plenty of chances of making a blue-based fool of myself without mixin’ it with my neighbour over a scent I can’t smell. If you like to go and represent me——”

“How can I?” said Natalie. “Besides, if I’m to enter St. James’s Square, I must see a builder at once.”

“A builder,” said Jonathan. “Why?”

“To fill in the basement,” said Natalie. “I know it’s damp. And a ground-floor kitchen——”

“I refuse,” said her cousin excitedly. “I mean, I protest. That isn’t maintenance: that’s destruction—layin’ indecent waste. You can’t have a kitchen on the street in St. James’s Square. And what about all the wine?”

“The workmen can move it.”

“The workmen?” screamed Jonathan. “The work—Oh, Moses’ button boots!”

“What’s the matter?” said Natalie.

“Angina pectoris,” said her cousin, covering his eyes. “That cellar at St. James’s Square is holy ground. It’s not a cellar at all: it’s a treasury. It ought to be scheduled as an ancient monument. There are bins there you oughtn’t to talk about, except in church.”

“I don’t propose to talk about them,” said Natalie. “But I’m not going to settle down in a house that’s damp. Besides, as I was saying, I don’t like a basement kitchen. If they take down the library wall——”

“I can’t bear it,” said Jonathan wildly. “There’s the finest residence in London, absolutely perfect from bottom to top, and you want to turn it into something between a gun emplacement and a railway buffet. Besides, it has memories for me.”

“What about Buckram?” said Natalie. “How do you think I feel to see you letting that lovely estate go west?”

“It’s entirely different,” cried Jonathan. “What’s the closing of a one-eyed mule-run compared with the sacking of a shrine?”

“It’s all the world to Odd Acre,” flashed Natalie, “the second-best farm you’ve got. They wouldn’t swap the water at Firefly for the wine at St. James’s Square.”

Jonathan loosened his collar and wiped the sweat from his face. Then he rose and passed to a window, to look down upon the street. Presently he took a deep breath.

“There is a way out,” he said quietly, “a clean way out of the pass. I didn’t mean to mention it, for fear you would take offence. But I laid it before Forsyth, to see what he’d say: and he confirmed my opinion that, if ever this course was taken, the Will couldn’t stand in the way.”

Natalie said nothing, and after a while he went on.

“I mean our marriage. That would make you mistress of Buckram, and —and we could discuss the—the improvements at St. James’s Square. And —well, of course I shouldn’t bother you. You’d spend as much time at Buckram as ever you pleased, and—well, you’d know where to find me, if ever you wanted me down.”

“A marriage of convenience?” said Natalie.

“I suppose so,” said Jonathan slowly. “I—I should be very proud of my wife. And she would have nothing to fear.”

“Are you content to do this?”

The man turned.

“Very well content,” he said. “I’ve everything to gain and nothing to lose.”

Natalie raised her eyebrows.

“Let’s keep on the ground,” she said. “This is a business transaction, and it won’t look pretty dressed up. You’re ready to sell yourself, if I’ll do the same?”

The man shook his head.

“I’m afraid I’m not,” he said slowly. “What makes the deal possible for me is that I’m dealing with you. It’s right that you should know that. I’ve

been half in love with you for more than two years. That I've never got any farther has not been my fault: but, under the circumstances, perhaps it's as well. So you see, I'm not selling myself, and it's rather a one-sided deal."

Natalie rose to her feet, crossed to a table and took up a cigarette. She did this in self-defence. Her brain was rebelling, refused to obey her will. She wished to reply to her cousin: instead, she could only dwell upon what he had said.

'Half in love with you for more than two years . . . not my fault. . . .'

As she lighted her cigarette—

"I hope very much," said the man, "that you'll take no account of that. You needn't even believe it. I probably shouldn't have told you, if I'd been a business man. And, as I've said, I shan't bother you. I only wished you to know that, if you came in on the deal, you'd be paying considerably higher than I." He took a deep breath. "And now will you fire me out, or shall I go?"

Natalie's brain cleared.

"To be perfectly honest," she said, "I think you deserve another drink."

Jonathan raised his eyes to heaven.

"I wish," he said, "there was dust on your little shoes. Then I could make a light lunch." He turned to the sideboard. "Are you quite sure you can't play with some ginger-beer?"

"I'll try," said Natalie. "And thank you very much for breaking my fall. I should hate to have been married entirely for my '34 port."

Her cousin looked over his shoulder, bottle in hand.

"Happily," he said, "I am not a vain man. Otherwise. . . . I mean—well, I'd rather be married for my cellar than Blowfly Splash. By the way, will you go down?"

Natalie nodded.

"But I must have a warrant," she said.

"Of course," said Jonathan. " 'The beautiful bearer having become my betrothed, I hereby——' "

"An engagement ring would be simpler."

“But, what a brain,” said the man. “I’ll seek one at once. Are you above rubies?”

“Not the best ones,” said Natalie.

“Good,” said Jonathan. “If I find what I want, you’ll have to dim it at night.”

“What about the size? Shall I——”

Jonathan bowed.

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” he said. “No one who knows them as I do could ever forget your hands.”

He brought her glass to her and returned for his own.

“Well, here’s luck,” said Natalie. “I hope you’ll be very happy.”

Jonathan raised his glass.

“I can hardly congratulate you: but here’s your very good health.”

There were moments when Natalie Edgecumb was frightened at what she had done.

She would soon belong to the man whom she wished to own her—as the result of as deliberate and cold-blooded a deal as ever was done. She, the unapproachable, had ‘gone with’ 37 St. James’s Square.

The woman of substance raised her eyebrows and smiled. It was an age of commerce, but such deals were not done every day. She had got the man she wanted: Buckram was hers. Assets like those were fantastic: before them Criticism was dumb.

But the lovesick girl was scared. She had purchased a man who might have come to love her: she had studiously loaded the dice against herself. Worse. She had ended the game which she had played so badly, and how to start the new one she did not know. Jonathan would not start it—the honour was hers. And how on earth could she start it? The slightest gesture she made would have a new significance, could mean but one thing, would be, in fact, a blunt request to be loved.

The lovesick girl wrote two letters, to break the engagement off: the woman of substance re-read them and tore them up: and Natalie lingered at Buckram when she ought to have been in Town.

If Jonathan had his misgivings he thrust them aside. Marriage to-day was always a sticky affair: logs were rolled, axes were ground, backs were scratched: if ever Love sat at the board, it was somewhere below the salt. He could count himself most lucky to have got the best house in London and the girl of his choice. That such possession had put her out of his reach was certainly a fly in the ointment: he steadfastly refused to consider that the interloper might breed.

'The marriage will be very quiet, and the honeymoon will be spent on the Italian Lakes.'

So said the society reporters—and spoke more truly than they knew.

It had been privately arranged that Natalie should favour Como, while Jonathan fleeted the days by Maggiore.

This idea had been Jonathan's and had been presented with a lazy nonchalance which no one would have suspected of concealing regard. Indeed, throughout the engagement the man behaved very well. He paid his respects, did escort duty, saw the girl through formality—all with an easy friendliness before which embarrassment fled. Neither gallant, nor casual, he steered a most delicate course, yet gave the constant impression that he was drifting.

The girl was thankful—and desperate. Here were the footings of a wall which, once raised, she would never break down. One might have dealt with difficulty: out of a dilemma anything might have come: as it was, her path being made so smooth, there was nothing to do but walk down it day after day. . . .

So till the first of August, on which day they were to be wed.

The wedding was to take place at two o'clock.

At a quarter to two Natalie received a bouquet, accompanied by a note, the superscription of which was in Jonathan's hand.

The envelope contained two documents.

One was a cheque for six thousand two hundred pounds.

The other was a letter from a firm of wine-merchants.

Jonathan Baldric, Esq.
Sir,

In accordance with the terms of our agreement to Purchase the contents of the cellar at 37 St. James's Square, we beg to say that the removal of the wine has now been completed and to enclose our cheque, made payable, as you directed, to Mrs. Baldric, for six thousand two hundred pounds.

We have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servants,

——and Co.

There had been no reception, but fifty friends had been dealt with at ——'s Hotel: the bride was changing: and the bridegroom was sitting in the lounge, with a cigarette in his mouth and both his eyes on the clock.

Lady 'Sue' Fustian, who had attended the bride, emerged from the lift and crossed to where Jonathan sat. As he rose to his feet, she put out her hands.

"Jonathan," she said, "I'm just going. I think you might have kissed me in the vestry, but I shall try to forget. Don't be away too long: we shall miss you both. And Natalie wants me to say she'd like to see you upstairs."

Two minutes later Jonathan entered the room where, six weeks before, his marriage had been arranged.

This was empty.

After a glance at the door which led to a bedroom, Jonathan passed to a window and stood, looking down upon a Rolls. This was a claret-coloured cabriolet, perfectly appointed, gleaming from stem to stern. Its chauffeurs sat like images, looking steadily through the wind-screen, giving their dignity rein. Directly behind was another, but wholly closed car, with luggage, carefully shrouded, upon its roof. Beside this stood Jonathan's valet, with his hand on the door.

A rustle, and there was Natalie, papers in hand.

"M'dear," said her husband, "the carriage continues to wait."

"I know," said Natalie. "I've seen it. It looks very nice."

"It'll have to go very nice, if we're to dine at Folkestone with any sort of content."

“I know. I can’t help it. That’s the worst of a wife.” She held out the cheque and the letter. “Jonathan, why did you do this terrible thing? How could you——”

“Oh, the weddin’-gift,” said the man. “Bride-groom’s present to the bride.” He sank into a chair. “I’m not sure you can’t arrest me for sellin’ your wine.”

“Why did you do it?” said Natalie.

“If you simply must know,” said her husband, “I did it to remove an impression.” He crossed his legs. “You had an impression that I was a-marryin’ you for the cellar of wine you’d got in St. James’s Square; or, at any rate, that the liquor that lay therein had gone towards makin’ the match. I don’t blame you. I’m a notorious wine-bibber, and, if I remember rightly, the deal we’ve just done rose, so to speak, like Aphrodite, from the foam of the must. Well, there you are. The clearer I saw the impression, the less I liked it. It offended me, m’dear, and so I removed it.”

“Why did it offend you?” said Natalie.

“Because it wasn’t fair. My sense of justice was irked. We may have done a deal, but, as I tried to tell you six weeks ago, a proper deal has two sides, and this has only got one. I’ve all four boots on my feet. Girls like you don’t go with wines and spirits or anything else. Their face and their ways are their fortune, and nothing else counts.”

“Did you do it because you were ‘half in love with’ me?”

Jonathan got to his feet.

“I suppose I did,” he said slowly. “But I think we can wash that out. I swear it wasn’t a gesture. I felt that this deal of ours was involving a slight—which you deserved rather less than any woman I know. And so, in my clumsy way, I sought to cut the slight out. I admit I’m a rotten bad surgeon, but there you are. An’ now, havin’ stripped my soul, what about the Folkestone road? The family coach is waitin’, and——”

“I like to think,” said Natalie, “that the reason why you did it was because you were half in love. I mean, that intrigues a woman much more than the thought that you did it to do her justice or something like that. If you do her justice, her vanity is disappointed: it’s like giving her something useful: but, if you do something because you are half in love, her vanity of vanities is touched. And, by the way, if ever you’re all in love, you might let me know.”

Jonathan started forward.

"Natalie!"

The girl put up a small hand.

"I only mean that then I'll consider your claims. I want to be——"

"Consider them now," said her husband, taking her hand. "Say 'This fool would have loved me, if I'd given him half a chance.' Say 'I took him because I had to, but——' "

"That wouldn't be true," said Natalie.

"Near enough," said the man. "Buckram——"

Natalie withdrew her hand, flung herself on to a sofa and burst into tears.

Distressed beyond measure, her husband sat down beside her and stroked and patted the shoulder which he could reach.

"Natalie darling—my dear, I can't bear you to cry. I shouldn't have said what I did. I never meant to presume—I never will. I'm just your jolly good friend—remember that. I'll see you safe to Como, and——"

A hand came out, seeking his.

Suppressing the impulse to kiss it, Jonathan held it fast.

So for a little space. Then Natalie sat up straight, with her other hand to her eyes.

"Listen," she said. "I've got to tell you the truth. You think I'm white: but I'm not. I've played the rottenest game. A month before George Stone died, he showed me his Will. He'd left me Buckram, and you St. James's Square. *I asked him to alter it, Jonathan—leave them the other way round.*" The man started violently. "You see, I thought it might help me to marry the man I loved."

Jonathan gave a great cry.

Then he took her two arms and put them about his neck. When he spoke, his voice was trembling.

"My beautiful darling," he said, "tell me one thing. Didn't he tell you I loved you?"

Natalie nodded.

"Ah."

“And I thought you did—in a way. But I wanted all of you, Jonathan. And I thought if once you had me, if once you could look at me and say ‘This is mine’, I thought that then perhaps you wouldn’t look anywhere else.”

Jonathan kissed her lips.

“I’ve adored you,” he said, “from a distance, ever since I knew what was what. If ever I’d had a close-up, I should have gone over the edge. But that you wouldn’t give me.”

“You should have taken it,” said Natalie. “I tell you, I’m a woman of substance—I hold what I have . . . until *someone who’s stronger than me* comes and takes it away.”

Jonathan held her close.

“I know. I understand. It’s in the blood. I never knew how much I loved you until I came into this room ten minutes ago.”

His wife laid her cheek against his. . . .

Presently a mischievous smile stole into her face.

“It’s my duty to remind you,” she whispered, “that the family coach has been waiting——”

“Let it wait,” shouted Jonathan. “I’ve waited for more than two years, and, now that I’ve got the bowling, I won’t be rushed. Of course, if you feel you must be going . . .”

Natalie’s cool fingers came to rest on his mouth.

FORCE MAJEURE

From a point at the head of the gorge the man watched the lights of a car which was making its way up the pass.

It was late August, and night had fallen some two and a half hours ago. The heaven was cloudless and starlit: there was no wind: the silence was absolute. All around, the mountain-tops could be seen cutting the sky: but the forests and falling water, the glens and torrents, the superb confusion of pasture and crag and timber and plunging streams were out of sight: a mystery of breadth and depth lay in their place, majestic, unfathomable.

The car came on steadily, making its way up the pass.

The man watched it curiously, for the infamous *Col d'Erreur* was not a road to travel except by day. Some of the turns were the devil: in several places water had welled out of its channel to slime the way: there were points where your wheels had a bare four inches to spare. Make a mistake to your right, and your car was ditched: but make a mistake to your left, and you lost your life.

The car disappeared behind foliage: when it came again into sight, one of its headlights had failed. Still, it progressed steadily.

Terence Ammiral, frowning, took his pipe from his mouth.

"Blind or mad," he murmured. "An' I'm glad I'm not sitting behind."

The point at which he was standing was close to the road. As a matter of fact, it commanded the only place in the pass where one road became two. Not that mistakes were made—a notice-board saw to that: besides, after thirty paces the second road slid into a grass-grown track. Sometimes at dawn or at dusk a driver would hesitate, but that was all.

It occurred to Ammiral that the car would stop at the fork to make sure of its way. He began to descend cautiously . . .

The car was very near now: the steady drone of its engine made itself heard: the man could see the beam of its headlight raking the mountain beyond. As the car reached the turn below him, the beam began to swing round.

The bend was a stiff one, but the car came up and round as though it were day. For a moment Ammiral was blinded: then the light passed him and the car stopped.

It was a big car, a coupé, whose hood was up. Its driver was doubtless peering to see which might be his way. Ammiral stepped to the door. . . .

From the driver's seat a girl—a child—met his gaze. No one was with her. Her big, grey eyes had a resolute, fearless look.

"I want to go over the mountain. Which way should I take?"

"You can't—by night," said Ammiral.

"Is it closed?"

"No, but——"

"Which is the way, please?"

Ammiral hesitated. Then—

"Don't be unreasonable," he said. "I know the pass very well, but I wouldn't drive over by night for a thousand pounds. You've been awfully lucky to get as far as you have, but what you've passed is nothing to what's ahead."

"I must go on," said the girl. "Which is the way?"

The car was plainly heavy, and the lady was plainly tired: her knee was quivering under the strain of holding the brake-pedal down.

"Excuse me," said Ammiral, and, with that, he mounted the step and clapped the hand-brake on.

The girl had it off in an instant, but she let in her clutch too fast, and the engine stopped.

As the car fell back, Ammiral applied the brake. Then he switched off the engine and kept his hand over the key.

"How dare you?" flamed the girl. "How——"

"Listen to me," said Ammiral. "In the first place you've nothing to fear. We're both of us English, and——"

"I'm not. I'm American."

"Well, we both speak English and we're both in a foreign land. Secondly, I'm older than you. Thirdly, I'm at your service in every possible way. If it was safe, I'd drive you over the pass."

The girl's lip curled.

"I'm not afraid," she said.

"I know," said Ammiral. "That's the difference between us. Never mind. If you must go on, you must walk. You can leave the car here, and I'll walk with you over the pass."

The girl shook her head.

"Thank you," she said. "I think you're trying to help, but you don't understand. I can't leave the car, and I've simply got to get on. You say you're at my service. Then say nothing of having seen me and let me go."

Ammiral hesitated. Then he took the key from the switch.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I won't. I haven't the right. You see, you don't know, and I do. There are bends coming on which you'll have to reverse—with a precipice waiting and not so much as a kerb. I'll drive you over at dawn. I swear I will. But not to-night. And I won't let you go alone."

The girl looked him full in the eyes.

"Is that true—about the bends?"

"It is indeed," said Ammiral. "You'll see for yourself to-morrow. I tell you, I'd drive you up now, if I dared. It's because I know what's coming that I'm afraid."

"Oh, that's rot," said the girl. "I take it back. The truth is you're not such a fool." She looked round helplessly. "I seem to be in your hands. What shall I do?"

"Put the car there," said Ammiral, pointing to the road on the right. With that, he unlocked the switch.

The girl obeyed.

"And now?" she said.

The man pointed up the track.

"I'm encamped up there—about ten minutes away."

"All by yourself? What fun!"

"It is rather. I've got a dog: he's guarding the camp. Will you come and have supper? Or shall I bring some down?"

The girl turned out the lights and opened her door.

“I’ll come. I’m tired of sitting. May I wash my face and hands?”

“Of course,” said Ammiral.

For five minutes they walked in silence. Then a glow leaped out of the darkness a little ahead.

“My beacon,” said Ammiral.

“Good,” said the girl. “I’m tired. I’ve come a long way.” She threw up her head and breathed deep. “What lovely air.”

“The top of the world,” said the man “is the only place. Once you’ve tasted its fare, you’re spoiled for everything else. Will you give me your hand here? It’s rather treacherous going, until we’re over the brook.”

As he spoke, the gush of water came to their ears.

The girl put her hand in his without a word.

Twice she stumbled, and each time he held her up.

When they came to the water, he paused.

“You’ll never do it,” he said, “in high-heeled shoes. Will you let me carry you over?”

“Yes.”

Ammiral picked her up, walked through the icy water and set her down on the turf.

Two minutes later a nose was thrust into his hand.

“Well, Roster. And here’s a lady that likes good dogs.”

“How did you know?” said the girl, caressing the eager muzzle at the hem of her dress.

“Instinct,” said Ammiral shortly. “Will you go in?”

The girl stepped under the canvas. Then she cried out with surprise, as well she might.

The tent was a small marquee, divided in two by a curtain of soft, grey rep. The walls and roof were lined with the same material, and an aged Persian carpet covered the floor. A table and one or two chairs were all the furniture: a candle-lantern was shedding a decent light.

Ammiral stepped to the curtains and felt for a switch. The next moment, beyond the curtain, the tent was brilliantly lit.

"I'm going to the kitchen," said the man, "to raise some food. I shall be away ten minutes. You'd like to wash, while I'm gone. There's water behind the curtains, and soap and towels."

"Thank you very much," said the girl. She pulled off her hat. "This is better than the *Col d'Erreur*."

"I'm so glad you think so," said Ammiral.

Supper had been served and eaten: by the man's direction, a small bottle of wine had been drunk, and the lady sat back in her chair, with a cigarette in her hand and the Airedale's head in her lap.

"My name," said the man, "is Ammiral. Terence Sadleir Ammiral. Please don't think I want to know yours."

"My name's Elaine Carey. I'm twenty-one next Tuesday, and I'm running away."

"What ever from?" said Ammiral.

"The most hideous thing," said Elaine. She put a hand over her eyes. "Marriage. To a Frenchman, of course. You see, my step-mother's French. My father was very rich. He left me two-thirds of his fortune provided I didn't marry before I was twenty-one. If I did, it went to my step-mother—every cent. But I never knew that. . . . *I* was to have married her son—it was all arranged. They told me father had wished it—showed me a letter in which he said it was the wish of his heart. Forged, I suppose; but I believed it. We were to have been married in June. Then one day he married a typist, without a word. I was too thankful, but step-mother went off the deep end. Of course, it tore everything up. If only I'd known . . .

"Ten days later the two of us sailed for France. You see, she hadn't much time, and, being French, I suppose, she knows the ropes. Besides, I can't speak a word. We came to a *château* near Biarritz that her mother has. All the family were there—the most poisonous crowd. The worst was a nephew, Georges. He looked like a third-class waiter. If ever we went into Biarritz, I was ashamed to be seen . . .

"One day I had to go to the *Mairie*—something about my passport. Heaven knows what I said and signed; they saw me through—I tell you, I can't speak a word. And then, this morning, a housemaid came to my room. She used to serve English people and knows a few words. She asked if, when I was married, I'd take her as maid. Of course I laughed and said there

was plenty of time. She stared at that, and, after a little, I found that *I was to marry Georges to-morrow at twelve o'clock*. At the *Mairie*, of course. The whole thing had been arranged. If I resisted, I was mad—the doctors were there . . .

"When she was gone, I felt dazed. I couldn't believe that such a thing could be done. Then I saw how easy it was. Manners, customs and a language I didn't know. The pack of them against me—as well as my own signature, as likely as not. What I couldn't understand was *why*. Why must I be married like this against my will? I went straight to my step-mother's room to have it out. She wasn't there, but a letter from father's lawyer was on the floor. I read it and saw the whole thing. Of course, he's in on the deal. He and she are my guardians, my two trustees. . . .

"Well, the obvious thing to do was to disappear. Once I'm of age the game's up. A consul might have helped me, but step-mother's very slim, and I'm still her ward. And then the doctors." Her hand began to tremble. "That's what I really fear. I didn't know they were doctors, until the housemaid spoke: but one was always with us wherever we went. I think the notion's been spread that I'm not myself . . .

"I just went straight to the stables and took the car. I didn't dare take any luggage. I drove to Bordeaux. There I stopped for petrol and asked for the Paris road. But I didn't take it—I doubled, and drove for the Pyrenees. There's a place called Vernet-les-Bains. . . . Father had a *chef* called Henri. I always liked him, and, when he left us, he cried. He lives at Vernet-les-Bains, where he keeps a little hotel. If I can get there, he'll help me. Step-mother sent him away."

Ammiral stepped to the table and took up a map.

After a moment—

"From here to Vernet," he said, "is between two and three hundred miles. Very severe going. It's asking a lot of a car to do it all in a day. D'you know whether Henri's there?"

"I imagine so. He sent me a card at Christmas."

"If he isn't, what will you do? I mean, I'll go with you, of course: but, if we can't find him . . ."

"We can try," said Elaine. "I don't know another soul."

"Even if we do," said Ammiral, "we're advertising your presence all the way. The car's got numbers and you don't see a Packard coupé every day.

Have you got your papers?"

"I have none. The car is mine, but step-mother said I'd better not drive in France."

Ammiral frowned.

"Can you tell me at all where you were when you put on your lights? I mean, from there on they wouldn't see you."

The girl thought for a moment. Then—

"I had them on," she said, "when I came to a place called Aire."

Ammiral returned to the map.

"That's right," he said. "Aire. About sixty miles away. Where did you last take in petrol?"

"Not since Bordeaux."

"Which means that we'll have to fill up at the first village over the pass. And that's a pity, for just at the moment you're sixty miles out of their ken."

The girl rose to her feet.

"D'you believe me?" she said. "It's such a fantastic tale that I thought you'd ask some questions. But you haven't asked one that counts."

"I know. I believe what you say. I've seen people out for money. And I think you were very prudent to disappear. In fact, if you'd got a passport, I'd take you straight to England: there—well, you'd be safe enough there."

"You're very kind," said the girl tremulously. "I've had such a rotten time, and——"

The flap of the tent swayed, and she started violently.

"What was that?" she cried.

"The wind," said Ammiral. "See. Roster hasn't moved."

The girl was shaking like a leaf.

Ammiral stepped to her side, put his arm round her shoulders and took her hand.

"You must stay here," he said. "I won't let you down. The camp's out of sight of the road, and, with Roster and me to guard you, you'll be as safe as a house. And then, on Tuesday . . ."

The girl stopped shaking and held his hand very tight. Then she went down on her knees and made much of the dog.

After perhaps a minute—

"You're very good to me," she said. "I'll—I'll be very glad to stay. But the car——"

"I'll fix the car," said Ammiral.

Elaine returned to the dog.

"He'll fix it he says, Roster. I can't think how he'll do it, but I'm not going to ask. I believe him, you see." The dog licked her face. "And I don't feel afraid any more with him and you." She flicked the tears from her eyes and got to her feet. "Oh, but I'm tired, Mr. Ammiral. And that ought to show you that you've managed to take the strain."

"Sit down," said Ammiral, smiling. "And listen to me for two minutes and then you shall go to bed."

The girl sank into a chair.

"This car," said her host. "I've got two gallons of petrol and I'm going to drive her back as far as she'll go."

"Not now?" cried Elaine.

"At once, of course. If the petrol holds out, I'll be through Aire long before dawn. Then I'll drive her into a wood and take the train back. With luck I should be back here soon after midday. But I might not get in till evening. In any event, remember you're perfectly safe. Roster will guard you to the death, and I'll give you my pistol, to make you feel safer still. But you mustn't stir out of this tent till I come back. I'll leave some food for you both before I go. And now to bed."

The girl rose at once.

When he had shown her the switches, she put her two hands in his.

"I shall look for your coming," she said. "I can't begin to thank you and I'm not going to try. But I'll be very happy and thankful to see you again."

Twenty minutes later the little camp was in darkness, Roster was listening to the breathing of his delicate charge, and the coupé was stealing back the way it had come.

"And I brought you some shoes," said Ammiral. "I do hope they'll fit. I didn't dare get any stockings or anything else of that sort. But shoes seemed essential."

He produced a very small pair of rubber-soled shoes.

Elaine cried out with delight.

"Oh, how splendid."

She whipped off a little slipper and put out her foot. The man went down on his knees and, using a card as a shoe-horn, fitted the shoe.

"Like a glove," said the girl. "What a wonderful eye you must have. And now I've got everything. I can wash my stockings and go without till they're dry; and if you could spare one or two of your white silk shirts . . ."

"My wardrobe's at your service," said Ammiral, fitting the second shoe.

"Like everything else that you have. Why are you so good to me?"

The man looked up into the eager face.

"*Force majeure*," he said, smiling. "You've a compelling way." He rose to his feet. "And now I must bathe in the brook and make myself clean. And then we'll have tea."

Elaine stared at the plates and the glasses which she had used.

"I can wash these up," she said. "If you'll bring a tub of hot water, I'd like to do my bit."

Ammiral hesitated. Then—

"All right," he said. "But first I must light the fire. While the water's boiling, I'll bathe and change. You shall wash up while I shave. And then we'll have tea. But I think, first of all, I'll take my gear out of the bedroom, if I may go in."

"No. I can't have that," said Elaine. "I suppose you'll insist that I sleep there, as I did till midday to-day. But I won't have you take out your things. I'll be out of the room by seven or any hour that you like. And then you can get up in comfort."

"My dear," said Ammiral. "I flatly refuse. I've a car fifty paces away, crying out to be used. There's nothing the matter with its mirror, and——"

"You can't dress in a car," said Elaine. "And supposing it's wet. And I know those driving-mirrors: you can't see a thing. Why can't you do as I

say?"

Ammiral pointed to the curtains.

"Because that is your apartment, so long as you stay—your private, personal chamber, your very own. I want us both to feel that."

Elaine sat back helplessly.

"This is Quixotic," she said. "I wonder you don't decide to sleep in the car."

"I'm going to."

Elaine sprang to her feet.

"In that case I'm going," she said. "I simply won't stay on here at such a cost. Good heavens, my dear, I trust you. I've put myself in your hands. There's no question of compromise, for no one will ever know. Besides, I want you near me. Last night I woke in the night and was frightened to death. If Roster could talk, he'd tell you." She came to Ammiral's side and laid her right hand on his arm. "Mr. Ammiral—Terence, please let me have my way. You've put me under a debt that can't be reckoned—an obligation that I can never lift. Let me contribute something . . . You give me the whole of this tent—this exquisite little home that I shall never forget. Very well. I accept it. And now I give half of it back. Do me the honour to take it. I'll make your bed every evening, before I go to my own, and, as soon as you're up in the morning, I'll do the rooms. Please say you agree to this. It's little enough."

Ammiral looked at the fingers that lay on his arm. These were firm and well-shaped, rosy, beautifully kept. The slenderness of the third was protested by an Antoinette ring. Slowly he raised his head to meet the steady, grey eyes.

"There's no obligation," he said. "I'm very proud of my guest. Indeed, I'm very lucky. Any man would jump at the chance of waiting on you."

"D'you think I'd let any man? Any man that I've ever seen? It's because you're different that I didn't clear out last night directly you'd gone. I let you shoe me just now without a thought. No man's ever done that, outside a store. I'm not giving you any favours, because I've none to give *you*. Other men, yes: but not you. Can you understand? I call you 'Terence', and I hope you'll call me 'Elaine'. There's no favour there—it's natural. And so, as my treasury's empty, I want to play my part in keeping your home."

“All right,” said Ammiral suddenly. Elaine clapped her hands. “But, if your treasury’s empty, so is mine. I didn’t mind being alone. I’ve been here alone for a month. But, if I had found you gone this afternoon—I should have felt very left.”

“I’m so glad,” said the girl simply. “And please try and call me ‘Elaine’. I suppose I mayn’t make the tea, while you’re having your bathe.”

“Certainly not,” said Ammiral. “You mustn’t go out till dusk. But we might get up early to-morrow—as soon as it’s light. Then we can go as we please for two or three hours. I’ve never seen anyone here before eight o’clock.”

“But can’t I just——”

“Look here,” said Ammiral. “I absolutely refuse to——”

A peal of laughter interrupted him.

“Oh, Terry dear, I love you when you get on your horse. And now call me ‘Elaine’.”

“Elaine is a wicked child,” said Ammiral shakily.

That evening, when dusk had come in, they walked for an hour in the shadows, but when Ammiral would have lingered, a slight hand laid hold of his arm and haled him back.

“You’ve had no sleep at all for a day and a night and a day, and you’re going to get up at dawn to give me a run. Besides, by now they’ve probably traced me to Aire, and to-morrow will be the first of the dangerous days.”

“Let’s stay a little, Elaine. I’m perfectly fresh.”

“Not another minute. Besides, I want my meal. And I think it’s a good thing I came. I don’t believe you half looked after yourself. Your shirts and things aren’t aired. Damp as a fish. To-morrow I want you to put them all out in the sun.”

“Very well,” said Ammiral obediently.

Their simple supper over, the two talked for an hour, without any sort of restraint. If this was largely due to the lady’s outstanding charm, it must be fairly allowed that Ammiral’s tinder was near as fine as her spark. If she struck the pretty fire, be sure he glowed: but he did not smoulder nor did he burst into flame. This to his infinite credit: to play such a game badly was the simplest thing in the world.

The man was gentle, scrupulous to a hair. His guest was, of course, as safe in his keeping as if she had lain in a hospice governed by nuns. What worried Ammiral was that he had care of her mind: this was as quick and clear as a mountain spring: that such a fount should be troubled was not to be thought of. The man knitted his brows. Chance had made him her partner in this preposterous figure of the Dance of Fate, and, if she was not to stumble, he would have to be nimble indeed. Had she been altogether a child, it would have been easy enough; but the girl was half-child, half-woman, and to follow her steps in a measure so rare and fantastic was requiring exceptional skill. Her present position was unheard of, had only to be coldly focused to be found big with confusion—a very Caliban of abashment, to haunt her days. A glance, a careless word, even an awkward silence would instantly present this view, and that with a blunt directness which could neither be mistaken nor ignored. Ammiral set his teeth. The man was resolved that, when Tuesday had come and gone—and she with it—her outlook should be fresh and sweet-smelling as the breath which she drew. The simile pleased him for a moment. Then, with a frown, he wrenched his thoughts back into line. 'Eyes have they, but they see not . . .'

The girl was lovely as a flower, with a grave, delicate beauty that her eagerness lighted as a lamp: her mouth would have been disdainful, if gaiety had not made it its home. Looking upon her, Ammiral remembered the Iliad—Andromache, perhaps, but not the desolate captive: Andromache care-free, betrothed. That the man was passably handsome is not to the point and may be disputed. What is quite certain is that he was not an 'idol of the heathen, the work of men's hands': he was an observant and healthy young bachelor, aged not quite twenty-nine, and of his five senses all were active and none were at all impaired.

The lady regarded her wrist-watch.

"Half-past ten," she murmured. "I suppose you won't let me carry the tray to the kitchen and bring myself some hot water, before I retire."

"I will not," said Ammiral, rising.

"Oh, Terry, do you 'absolutely refuse'?"

"Roster," said Ammiral. The dog sprang to his side. "The maiden is mocking your master. What shall we do?"

"Roster," said Elaine mischievously. The dog bounded across. "Your mistress . . ."

Ammiral seized the tray and made himself scarce. . . .

To heat the water took him a quarter of an hour.

When he returned, half the tent was in darkness, and my lady had disappeared. In a corner, however, was a most excellent bed. Its linen was straight and smooth: its upper sheet and blanket were folded back: on a chair by its head lay a little pile of fresh linen from which he could take what he pleased.

For a moment the man stood staring. Then he stepped to the bed.

One touch was enough: the bed had been made upon a mattress some two inches thick.

Ammiral cleared his throat.

"Look here, Elaine——"

A resolute voice cut him short.

"Sorry, my dear, but I—I—'absolutely refuse'. I'm sorry to have asked for the water, but I had to get you out of the way. And now I'm washed and in bed and just falling asleep. And this bed doesn't need a mattress: I never was so comfortable before. And warm and everything. So please don't disturb me any more, and I hope you'll sleep very well. Good night, Terry."

Ammiral regarded the curtain helplessly.

At length—

"Good night, Elaine," he said.

Ten minutes later he was sleeping like the dead.

Six hours had gone by, and the two were standing together at the top of the infamous pass, watching the splendour of the sunrise light up the majesty of earth. The scene was incomparable. Slowly mountains and valleys lifted their heads: gradually colour came stealing out of the grey of the dawn: the firmament was changing its raiment for one of blue and green, flecked here and there with crimson, slashed with gold: a magic overlay of dew confounded the sight.

"The coronation," breathed Elaine. "Our kingdom is being crowned."

"That's right," said Ammiral, nodding. "And this you may see any day for nothing at all."

"Have you seen it often, Terry?"

“A good many times, Elaine. But it’s always new.”

The girl nodded gravely.

“I’ll never forget it. Or how you showed it to me.” She pointed a delicate finger. “I’d like to walk that way.”

“And a very good way, too,” said Ammiral. “Come on, Roster. We can walk on the top of this ridge for nearly four miles.”

“On this sort of going? How lovely. And with no one on earth to see us. When I ran away from the *château*, I never expected to fall on my feet like this.”

“You’re very easy to entertain,” said Ammiral.

“I’m not at all really,” said the girl. “But you’re very nice to me, and I like your ways. And, oh, I meant to tell you, I’ve got an idea. Don’t you think that during the day we could open one side of the tent? The far side, I mean. Then I won’t be shut up, but still I’ll be out of view.”

“I don’t see why not,” said Ammiral. “I think we’d better shut it while I’m away getting supplies. That’ll take me an hour and a half this afternoon. But the rest of the time we can sit with one side open and take the air.”

“We?” said Elaine. “I’m not going to keep you in. Because I must be a prisoner——”

“My dear,” said Ammiral, “I’ve nothing on earth to do. If you weren’t here, I should stay in camp during the day. I walk like this in the morning; but during the heat I read and write and generally potter around.”

“Who do you write to, Terry?”

“The public. I try to write books.”

“Oh, my dear, what about?”

“Anything I can think of,” said Ammiral. “That’s how I live.”

Elaine stood perfectly still, finger to lip.

“Ammiral,” she said. “I knew that I knew the name. Didn’t you—didn’t you write *The Bow in the Cloud*?”

The man coloured with pleasure.

“That’s quite right,” he said. The girl caught her breath. “But I can’t think how you remember: it hardly sold.”

“Because I loved it,” cried Elaine. “And why on earth didn’t it sell?”

“Because most people didn’t love it. But I’m so glad you did.”

“I loved every word,” said Elaine, catching his arm. “I can’t get over it being you. Of course, that’s why we’re not strangers. Oh, Terry, I’m so glad to have found you. If you knew how I’ve read that book. I love the bit where the maiden helps the shepherd to write his love-letter and all the time it’s going to go to her. How did you think of it all? Have you ever been in love?”

“Not that I know of,” said Ammiral.

“That’s right,” said Elaine. “I don’t want you to be in love. I like you to be as I found you—all alone with Roster, high up in the hills.”

“I have to come down in the autumn. I’ve a little house in London——”

“Like the one the maiden lived in, in Witchery Lane?”

“That’s right,” said Ammiral.

“With a forecourt and a sundial and a letter-box in the wall?”

“It has all those pretty things.”

“Oh, Terry, my dear, to think that I know your home! Knew it and loved it long before I knew you. Are you sure you made up the maiden?”

“I give you my word,” said Ammiral. “I haven’t even a sister.”

Elaine regarded the heaven, now full of light.

“You described her very minutely.”

“I tried to make her look nice.”

“She was perfectly lovely,” said Elaine. “I wonder where you met her.”

“I never met her,” cried Ammiral. “I tell you I made her up.”

“ ‘So the shepherd kissed her’,” said Elaine, addressing the air. “ ‘He’d never kissed anyone before, but he knew how it ought to be done. He never forgot his surprise at the feel of her lips: it was so refreshing and comfortable—just as though they had been made to be kissed, as, of course, they had.’ And now I’ve left out some.”

“You’ve a wonderful memory,” said Ammiral.

“Nothing to the shepherd’s,” said Elaine.

Ammiral sighed.

“Have it your own way,” he said. “I’m a dissolute and profligate——”

"You're not, you're not! No one who was could have written so simply as that. Oh, Terry, I love to tease you. You take everything so gravely."

"I know," said Ammiral ruefully. "It's a terrible fault, but——"

"It isn't. It's just your way. And I think I'm very good for you."

"I'm sure of that," said the man, and meant what he said.

"It's like a dream," said Elaine. "You write the book and I love it, and then I run away blindly and stumble right into your arms. You were very stern that first night, weren't you?"

"I suppose I was, but something had to be done."

"I shall never see why. I was an utter stranger, and, once you'd warned me, my blood was on my own head."

"Stranger, perhaps," said Ammiral. "But you were 'within my gates'. Besides, you—you—well, I didn't want your blood to be on your head."

Elaine tilted her chin.

"I don't see why you shouldn't say you liked the look of me. I mean, I think that's the truth. Of course you're quite right to be careful, but I like you so much that I'd like to know you like me."

The man's heart bounded within him. The world about him grew misty. Every nerve in his body was tingling, and the beauty that stepped at his elbow stung him like an exquisite flame.

By a prodigious effort he steadied his voice.

"I liked the look of you," he said. "And I'm very glad you like me, and I do like you very much."

With a maddening smile, the lady peered into the distance, shading her eyes.

"Well, that's something," she said. "But I can't help feeling that the shepherd would have—Oh, look at that baby village beside that flock of toy sheep. Will you get them for me to play with, while you're away?"

Four golden days had gone by, and Miss Elaine Carey was twenty-one.

Nothing had happened to disturb the peace she had found or to put in peril her freedom from her step-mother's rule. If search had been made for her, no news of it reached the camp, and nothing had appeared in the papers

which Ammiral saw. Cars had gone by up the pass, as they always did, but none of them took the by-road, and none of them stopped. And that was as near as interference had come. The two could not know that a car containing a doctor and the inelegant Georges had passed on Sunday morning about eleven o'clock, or that a smooth-tongued widow had spent a fruitless Friday at Vernet-les-Bains. . . .

That Ammiral loved his guest there can be no manner of doubt. He had loved her, I think, as he plodded back to his camp that first afternoon, with her little shoes in his pocket and her parcels under his arm. Certainly the last three days had been punching a driven nail. He was mad about the lady, found her superlative, a daughter of the high gods. His best friends waited upon her: Nature was radiant whenever she was abroad: the silver trumpets of Romance sounded continually in his ears. The man saw and heard these things—and kept faith with himself.

"Boulogne?" said Elaine.

"Boulogne," said Ammiral, lighting a cigarette. "There we try for an emergency passport—a refusal won't matter now. And so to London. I know a solicitor there, who'll see you through. He'll know what ought to be done and how to do it. And his name at the foot of a letter will make the recipient think."

"Yes," said Elaine. "And then?"

"I shall bow and retire," said Ammiral. "He'll see you through. I must get back to Roster—we can't take him. I shall leave him at the farm in the valley where I get the milk. And they'll keep an eye on the camp."

"I see," said Elaine thoughtfully.

"We needn't leave here till the evening," continued Ammiral. "There's a train from rail-head for Paris that leaves about ten."

"Good," said his guest, rising. "I'll like to have one free day. When I've washed these things——"

"I'll bring you the water," said Ammiral.

"My dear," cried Elaine, "don't forget that the danger is past. To-day I can see and be seen."

Ammiral got to his feet.

"Not here," he said. "Not as my guest. In the car, on the road, in the train: but not in this camp."

“Oh, Terry, what can it matter? Don’t be so strict. Besides, it’s a chance in a million. We can’t be seen from the road.”

“I don’t care. It’s a chance I won’t take. You and I know why you are here, but——”

A low growl from Roster snapped the sentence across.

For a moment the two stood listening. Then—

“Into the bedroom,” breathed Ammiral.

As the girl slipped behind the curtain, he took his stand in the gap which led to the inner room. Then he leaned against one of the tent-poles casually enough.

“May I blow in?” said a voice.

Ammiral nodded to the Airedale, whose eyes were upon his face. Then —

“By all means,” he said.

“What ’o,” crowed the other. “I’d ’ve laid a till to a toothpick that you weren’t French,” and, with that, the genial intruder followed his Cockney accent into the tent. “Come on, Walt,” he shouted, “here’s an English gentleman wants you to ’ave a drink.”

“Sit down,” said Ammiral pleasantly, nodding towards a chair.

“I don’ mind if I do,” said the other, sinking on to a seat. “An’ many thanks. Tight little place you’ve made here, an’ no mistake. Caravannin’?”

Ammiral shook his head.

“Just camping out,” he said.

Walt appeared in the doorway—as fair a foil to his fellow as could have been found.

Both were fat and of a cheerful countenance: both were exuding goodwill: both were suggesting an honest belief in beer. But, while Walt was plainly retiring, and a schoolboy shyness looked out of his jolly blue eyes, the other wore an air of familiar confidence which was not only manifestly invulnerable but positively disarming in its absolute assumption of reciprocal esteem.

“ ’Ope I don’t intrude, sir,” said Walt, staring.

“Not at all,” said Ammiral falsely.

The position was absurd—ludicrous.

The devil was driving no longer: instead, Low Comedy was flaunting its borrowed plumes. Clown had stolen Harlequin's sword and was holding the flickering point to Ammiral's throat.

Hospitality *had* to be rendered.

In the brook, a hundred yards distant, were two or more bottles of beer. Yet how could he leave the tent? Walt and his friend were human—earthy of the good, red earth. The moment he was gone, they would surely explore his bedroom and discover Elaine. As if that were not enough, the débris upon the table was declaring a breakfast for two.

Ammiral could have stamped for vexation.

Till this morning he had been so careful, had never relaxed for an instant his precautions against surprise. And now . . .

With a hazy, halting idea of gaining time, his host waved Walt to a chair and crossed his legs.

"Are you doing the Pyrenees?"

"That's right," said Walt's companion. "Beeritz to Karkersong. The charrerbang's down the road with a wheel in the ditch. An hour an' a 'alf it'll be before she's out. An' the sun on them cushions that 'ot you can burn your 'and. When I said we'd walk on to the pub, the driver laughed. 'Ad quite a game with us, didn' 'e, Walt?"

"That's right, Tom," grinned the other.

"Presently a French gent steps in. 'Next pub ten miles,' he says, 'oldin' up both of his 'ands." Walt began to shake with laughter. "I give you my word, Walt 'ere had to 'elp me away."

"So I did," bubbled Walt. "I never see anyone so floored. An' the 'ole of the charrerbang laughin' fit to burst."

He wiped his eyes reminiscently.

A cool hand stole into Ammiral's—held it fast. As he strove to read its message—

"I—I see," he stammered desperately. "And—and then you saw my tent."

"That's right," said Tom. "Takin' a stroll we was—to try to forget. Then we come round the corner right on top o' this nest. The moment I see it I

says ‘That’s an Englishman’s pitch.’ Everything clean an’ ship-shape, an’ a nice, white——”

Elaine appeared in the doorway, her hand on Ammiral’s arm.

“That’s quite right,” she said. “My husband’s very particular. I’m American myself, but he’s taught me any amount.”

The two strangers were on their feet.

“Proud to meet you, m’lady,” said Tom. “I ’ope we ’aven’t disturbed you. It’s early yet.”

“I’m very glad to see you,” said Elaine. “If I hadn’t been finishing dressing, I’d have appeared before.” She turned to Ammiral. “And now that I’m on parade, will you get some beer?” She returned to her new-found friends. “I’m sure you must be thirsty: and to walk ten miles in this sun is a shade too thick.”

“So it is, m’lady,” said Tom heartily.

Ammiral left the tent, like a man in a dream. . . .

Five minutes later he returned, to find my lady discoursing of Prohibition, with Tom and Walt hanging upon her lips. The Antoinette ring which glowed from her wedding finger might have been there for years.

“And so, you see,” she concluded, “it all comes of using the Law as it wasn’t meant to be used. If a man oversteps the mark, the Law’s the thing to put him back in his place. But use the Law to monkey with human nature, and you’ll buy a bag full of trouble and lose your match.”

Tom raised his eyes to heaven and took a deep breath.

“I’d like some of the black gloves in England to ’ear you talk,” he said gratefully. “That’s the stuff to give ’em, m’lady, ain’t it, Walt?”

“Every time,” said Walt, nodding his head.

Ammiral poured the beer, cool from the brook . . .

Half an hour later the strangers took their leave.

“We shan’t never forget this,” said Tom, looking round the tent. “Entertained us like kings, you ’ave. I know I’m free, m’lady, an’, when I see you in the doorway, I was frightened at what I’d done. An English gentleman’s different—he knows a frien’ when he sees one, an’ don’ care where he was born. But you . . .”

“That’s right,” said Walt thickly. “You.”

Elaine smiled very charmingly.

“I’m so glad you won’t forget us,” she said.

“That’s right,” said Ammiral, shaking Walt by the hand. “My wife knows a friend when she sees one, as well as I.”

Tom bowed over Elaine’s fingers. Then he turned to his fellow with shining eyes.

“Guess we’ll put it over that driver,” he said. “Maybe the nex’ pub’s ten miles, but we’ve each of us ’ad a couple at the sign of *The ’Eart of Gold*.”

Their host saw the two as far as the curling by-road. Then he returned to the tent.

Elaine was standing with her back to the entrance gap, holding off her little left hand and regarding the Antoinette ring with her head on one side.

As Ammiral hung on his heel—

“Don’t be cross with me, Terry,” she said.

Ammiral stepped to a chair and sat himself down.

“I can’t be cross with you,” he said. “For one thing, it wouldn’t be fair, and, for another, I—I don’t feel like it. But I’m wild with myself.”

“For heaven’s sake, why?”

“For being caught bending.”

“Oh, Terry. And it was such fun. They were so nice and gentle, and they were so glad of that beer.”

The man put his head in his hands.

“My dear, you avoid the point, which is that I’ve let you down. You saved the situation and you did it devilish well. But—well, Tom and Walt look healthy, and I daresay they’ll live for years.”

“What if they do? We’ll never see them again.”

“I hope to God we shan’t,” said Ammiral fervently. “But, when you inherit, I expect there’ll be rather a shout. Pictures of you in the papers, and paragraphs. . . . And, when you’re engaged and married, the same sort of thing. Well, that’s all right, but what about Tom and Walt? I mean, I guess they can read.”

Elaine leaned against the table and stared at her shoes.

"Perhaps. But they'll hold their tongues. Our secret's quite safe with them."

Ammiral jumped to his feet.

"They haven't got our secret. And there's the rub. If they had, I wouldn't care. But it breaks my heart to think that they'll——"

Elaine's hands were on his shoulders and her face was two inches from his.

"Terry, my dear, you leave out the redeeming feature—the thing that saves the game. Perhaps they'll know my picture, but they'll never forget your face. Or the look in your eyes. It's honest, you see. . . . And so, whatever they read, they'll know there's some good explanation of my being here."

The man put his hands behind him and stared at the roof.

"Elaine," he said, "they were men. And so I doubt if they'd know me, if they met me a month from to-day. They were, I think, decent men, and I find it most hard to believe that, whatever they read, they'll think any harm of you. But the age is against us. And I'd give a year of my life for them to have passed us by."

There was a little silence.

Then—

"Look at me," said Elaine.

Ammiral lowered his eyes.

"If I'm so compromised, so are you. I've posed as your wife."

Ammiral's finger-nails dug into his palms.

"To my lasting honour, Elaine," he said steadily.

"Why do you say that, Terry?"

The man looked away.

"I—I don't know. I suppose a man likes to be trusted by the—by a woman he likes. It—it serves his vanity."

"I see. Did I serve your vanity by pretending to be your wife?"

Ammiral nodded. He dared not trust his voice.

“Not good enough,” said Elaine. “Look in my eyes.”

Ammiral met her gaze.

For a moment grey eyes held brown.

Then she drew down his head and kissed his lips.

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

“Elaine, Elaine.”

“Say you love me, Terry. I know you do. I’ve seen the look in your eyes. But I want to hear you say it.”

“I loved you that first day, my darling. I——”

“That’s right. I knew you did. But I knew you would never say so and I didn’t know what to do. And then Tom and Walt blew in and opened the door. Don’t you think we might be married in Paris? As soon as we can?”

“But you don’t really love me, Elaine. I mean, you’ve only known me ____”

“My dear, you’re the shepherd. I’ve loved you for months and months. We’ve been engaged for ages. And then Fate stepped in and brought me ‘within your gates.’ ”

“My beautiful stranger,” said Ammiral, putting her hand to his lips.

“And will you take me to Witchery Lane? I mean, it’s my house really. What are you laughing for?”

“Because I can’t fight any more. *Force majeure* can have it. I know when I’m beat. That night there was nothing to do but take you in: once you were in—well, if you went for a walk with a Trappist, I’ll bet he’d be quoting Swinburne before you got back: then Tom and Walt fall from heaven clean into the—the private bar: and now you bend against me *The Bow in the Cloud*.”

Elaine threw her arms round his neck.

“Of course I do: I’ve the right. It wasn’t a book.”

“What was it then, my darling?”

“My love-letter,” whispered a child, and hid her face.

BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

NADÈGE LAMBERT, spinster, tilted her chin.

"Don't be absurd," she said shortly. "I agreed to marry you, not to ignore the existence of everyone else."

The man pulled his moustache.

"I never see you, Nadège. You know I don't expect you to give up your friends, but—well, we mightn't be engaged, might we?"

The girl shrugged her white shoulders.

"I don't know what you expect. I never pick up a paper without seeing some reference—usually nauseating—to our approaching union: I flaunt your quite excellent ring: you have the right to kiss me whenever you please."

"I want some of your time, Nadège."

Miss Lambert rose to her feet and stretched luxuriously. His eyes on the lithe figure, Dominick Medmenham, bachelor, sat very still.

"I'm afraid you're out of date," said the lady. She raised her beautiful eyebrows, to point the sneer. "A woman's time is her own. It wasn't once: she had to give it up right and left: the process was called 'devotion'."

"You mean——"

"This. You're all right. If you weren't, we shouldn't be engaged. As a husband, you'll be quite admirable. Clean, not too good-looking, civil. We shall muck in together very well. But you must be content with that."

"With what?" said Dominick quietly.

From over her shoulder, powder-puff in hand, Miss Lambert looked him in the eyes.

"Are you out for trouble?" she said.

Medmenham smiled back.

"You know that I'm not, my lady. But we must have this out. Of course your time is your own, and always shall be. But—well, I don't want to

sound soppy, but I rather like being with you. Don't you like being with me?"

"If I couldn't bear it, we shouldn't be wrangling now. But I do wish you'd get it straight. A girl believes in amusement: it's the article of her faith: but she doesn't marry for amusement, unless she's a fool. She takes the best man she can get that won't let her down."

"Thank you," said Dominick gently.

He rose, stepped to the fireplace and took the girl in his arms.

"I love you, Nadège," he said simply. "I'll never quote it against you, but —don't you love me?"

Miss Lambert averted her face.

"I imagine I do. I don't know. Need you be so Victorian?"

"I must be natural," said Dominick, "now and again. And so must my wife." The girl slipped out of his arms: he let her go. "I don't know whether you love me, and I want to know very much."

"At the present moment," flashed Miss Lambert, "the answer is definitely 'No'. But that's your own fault. Everyone dislikes being badgered."

Dominick stared upon the ground.

"I want you to be happy," he said: "but I want to be happy, too. And I shan't be happy, Nadège, if I haven't your love."

The girl hesitated. She perceived very clearly that she had gone too far. She had meant to lead Dominick a dance; and he had smiled and watched her, but had not danced. And now her pride was involved. She must confess that she loved him, haul down her pert little flag, or the balloon would go up. Of that there was no doubt at all. Dominick was in earnest: everything was hanging upon her reply. If only he would look up . . . and see the light in her eyes . . .

The sudden blare of a fox-trot staggered into the room. The band had returned to its labours, and 'Pony' Bullock would be coming to claim his dance. And that would tear everything up. They couldn't be seen 'philandering'. If only he . . .

As she put out her arms towards him, someone half entered the room, stifled an exclamation and withdrew precipitately.

Nadège could have screamed with rage.

Instead, she took her seat upon the arm of a chair, white to the lips.

“Have we done enough damage?” she said.

Dominick drew himself up.

“I want to know where I am.”

“I’ll tell you. You’re on the edge. And, if you want to stay there, I’d have a care. You can’t ‘come thro’ the rye’ in Charles Street. It isn’t done. And, in any event, I don’t like it. Our marriage will be convenient; your name is quite a good one, and I can put up the wealth. Try to dig any deeper, my friend, and, I warn you, you’ll ring the bell.”

Dominick looked away.

“You may take it as rung,” he said quietly.

Miss Lambert drew off her ring.

“Catch,” she said.

Before he had time to turn, she flung the gem. This struck against his shoulder and fell at his feet.

“Sorry,” said Nadège carelessly. “Where did it go?”

“I don’t know,” said the man.

Then he turned on his heel and walked out of the room. . . .

Five minutes later ‘Pony’ Bullock in some dudgeon abandoned his search for Nadège. By so doing he saved his time. The lady was seated in her long, low, slate-blue limousine, unconscious of the magic which the moon was making in the ways, shakily whispering ‘That’s that’ over and over again, with the tears running down her cheeks.

The affair did not end there.

You may break an engagement ten days before the marriage, but those that made the match will scarcely throw up their hats. More. This particular union was to be the summit of the ladder which the bride’s mother had so successfully climbed. Money being no object, such an attainment was to be suitably marked. The splendour, indeed, had already begun to blaze. . . . For this the bridegroom’s father had no use at all. The match appealed to him because it was ‘sound’. To maintain Black James as the estate required had

long been beyond his means. Now he would retire to the dower-house, and the fine, old place he had supported would come by its own. The decoration of the dower-house was almost complete. The bathrooms he had installed were in excellent taste. Black James was too big. The dower-house, on the other hand, was entirely convenient.

And so it is not surprising that the affair did not end in Charles Street, or the long limousine.

Upon learning the unsavoury news, Mrs. Lambert politely regretted that things had gone too far and that the passionate matter must take its course. When her daughter stared, she raised her elegant eyebrows and tossed her a note. This was an intimation that Royalty was graciously disposed to honour with its presence the forthcoming rite. Mrs. Lambert could hardly have made a more foolish mistake. Nadège read the note through and laid it down. Her comment would have been unpardonable, had she meant what she said. At first Mrs. Lambert was unable to speak: then she threw back to her father, who had been born in Wapping and remained a master of insult to the day of his death. This was a second error, worse than her first. Nadège heard her out. Then she left Eaton Square, never to return.

Sir John Medmenham's temper had long been as short as his purse, and Dominick broke the tidings at an unfortunate time. His father had just approved the final draught of a marriage settlement which was worth reading.

When he had spoken, the baronet rose to his feet.

"Is this irrevocable?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"Then go to the devil," roared Sir John. He slammed the table before him with the flat of his hand. "Go to the devil and tell him you're short of a home. D'you owe any money?"

"Not very much, sir."

"Send the bills to Forsyth before the end of the week."

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't dare to thank me. I'm doing it for my name."

Dominick took his leave.

There was nothing to be said or done. In time his father might relent: of this, however, he was doubtful. So was Forsyth, solicitor, recalled from the

country station by an uneasy groom. Do what the lawyer would, charm he never so wisely, Dominick Medmenham was disinherited that day.

It was nearly a year later that Nadège pawned her umbrella for half-a-crown: this in a quarter of London in which ten months before, she would have feared to set foot.

The afternoon was sultry, and, as she walked along the coarse, unfriendly road, she felt for the first time the definite stab of Fear. Other stripes she had suffered again and again: Misery, Want, Horror had all laid on: but not until now had she actually been afraid. She was not destitute—to-morrow evening she would be paid two pounds; but in ten days' time the tour would come to an end, and so far she had not succeeded in finding another job.

She had not enjoyed the life of a chorus-girl. Had she been able to obtain work in London, it would not have been so bad: but the provinces were awful. The squalor of the lodgings, the sordid purlieus which harboured the stage-doors, the sulky dreariness of the Sunday journeys' ends would have been intolerable, but for the downright bravery of her companions in woe. These laughed, cursed and laughed again, reaped where none had sown, gathered where none had strawed and, having no hope, found their present misfortune matter for jest. Tragedy being their portion, they wrung a pitiful humour from every line: the present being lean, they feasted on the fat of the future: wading in the Slough of Despond, they chanted The Frothblowers' Anthem and, their feet being too heavy, lifted their hearts instead.

Nadège was not of them and could not play their game. Her acquaintance with grief was not yet familiar enough to breed so fine a contempt. It was shame that had kept her going. If they could mock at such music, at least she could face it—somehow. She did, with an excellent grace, and, smothering her horror and disgust, earned her living for ten months, with nothing to spare. And now the tour was ending, and she had nothing in view . . . nothing. . . .

She entered a confectioner's shop and expended a shilling on a meal. Then she walked to the theatre. This was abominably hot—stifling. Her dressing-room was commanding a fried-fish shop, whose vile burnt-offerings laded the stagnant air.

As she opened the door—

“Come right in, darling,” said Mabel Legrand. “Did you see the Duke of Scratchit? He’s waiting for me down below, with a bunch of aspidistras he grew himself. That’s what smells so nice.”

A shriek of laughter greeted the inelegant jest.

“And Enid Perone’s lost her purse. There was one and threepence in it, and a letter from another man’s wife. But she’s not worrying. She thinks the chauffeur may find it, when he’s doing the car.”

“There’s the ticket for my suit-case,” said Enid ruefully. “I put it up on Tuesday, and now I can’t get it out.”

“I’ll lend you a cardboard, dear,” said Maisie Buck. “It’s really the one I keep my sables in, but, now we’re back in London, my maid’ll be getting them out. Have you all got your vouchers for Ascot?”

Nadège laughed with the rest and observed the familiar rite of undressing and making up.

As she powdered her face, a rap fell upon the door.

“Overture and beginners, please, ladies.”

There was no air in the East End that night: the house was packed and reeking: after her four changes Nadège was ready to drop.

With Depression fast upon her shoulders, she dressed more slowly than the rest. As she was leaving the dismal empty room, the storm, long overdue, broke with a crash. When she reached the stage-door, the rain was falling in sheets.

Nadège hesitated, shrinking. With no umbrella, no coat, to enter the streets seemed madness. Her rooms were two miles away, and the buses which stopped at the corner were sure to be full. A taxi stood in the shadows, but she had not the fare: besides, it was engaged, waiting for somebody else. Perhaps, if she waited a little, the downpour would cease. The trouble was that the buses would soon stop running. Nadège did not want to walk home. For one thing, she was dead beat: for another . . .

She peered out into the night: as if in reply, a squall swept up the alley, with a bellow of wrath. Again she drew back, to stand watching the spouts of water bend to the wind.

The taxi-driver stood in the doorway, hat in hand.

“May I give you a lift?” he said quietly.

It was Dominick Medmenham.

By the time they had reached her lodgings, the rain had ceased.

"I can't ask you in," said Nadège. "Perhaps you wouldn't come, if I could."

"We could sit in the taxi," said the man, "for the length of a cigarette."

Nadège re-entered the cab. . . .

"Was this chance, Dominick? Or did you seek me out?"

"It was chance, Nadège. I didn't know where to look. You've changed your name."

"I know. Why are you doing this?"

"One has to live," said the man. "And you?"

"Same here. Mother went over the line. I couldn't stay on."

"My poor lady," said Dominick.

The girl drew a sharp breath.

"I do very well," she said. "It's a lazy life, and everyone's awfully kind. Why did Sir John turn you down?"

"We had a dispute," said Medmenham. "He's getting old, you know. And, what with the gout and the times, the ice was always thin. And then, one day, I went through. I'm honestly happier—with something to do."

"So'm I," said Nadège stoutly.

There was a moment's silence.

Then—

"I'm an owner-driver," said Dominick, "and I live in Mayfair. I've a tiny flat over the garage, as tight as you please. Sometimes one of the old crowd picks me up. They're awfully nice. Stand on the pavement and talk, and, if I've driven them home, they try to make me come in. I drove Milly Bemuse and her brother a week ago. When they got out, she gave me a five-pound note. When I protested, 'Don't spoil my evening,' she said. And old Lord Hillesley was immense. When I set him down at Arthur's, he gave me my proper fare: then he asked me to park the cab and come in to lunch. But I've never seen you, Nadège. Perhaps you've been out of Town."

The girl nodded.

“Did you ever drive Mother?” she said.

“Once. But she didn’t recognize me.”

Nadège laughed.

“I can well believe that,” she said. And then, irrelevantly, “I’ll never go back.”

Dominick swallowed.

“Have you no money of your own, Nadège?”

“Not a penny. Father had nothing. But I manage all right, Dominick. Of course, I don’t dine at the Ritz, but neither do you: and I don’t—give fivers to taxis, because I used to know them in other days.”

“Oh, my dear,” said Dominick.

There was another silence. Nadège dared not trust her voice.

At length—

“I must go,” she said quietly.

At once he left the cab and handed her out.

With her fingers in his—

“You’ve been very kind,” she said gravely. “Kinder than I deserved.”

Medmenham bowed his head.

“I’ve been very fortunate,” he said. Then he looked up. “I shall be at the theatre to-morrow, to drive you home. It may be wet: and you can’t always get a taxi down in those parts.”

“Very well,” said the girl unsteadily.

She turned away abruptly, stepped across the pavement and opened the door. Medmenham saw a mean hall, lighted by a naked gas jet. Nadège passed in blindly, thrust the door to behind her and burst into tears.

The tour was over.

The curtain had fallen upon *Joss Sticks* for the last time, and the dressing-room was full of half-hearted laughter and regret.

“Opening Blackpool,” said Mabel, “on the nineteenth of June. Don’t forget, anyone. But ‘care of The Bank of England’ will always do.”

“I don’t like Blackpool,” said Enid. “I lost my washing there.”

There was a ripple of mirth. As the scene of some negligence or other, half the towns of England found no favour with Miss Perone.

“Cambridge,” said a fat, fair girl, wiping the grease from her throat. “I do hope I shan’t get entangled with one of the undergrads. What are you doing, Con?”

A woman of forty lifted a white, peaked face.

“Resting, m’dear. I’m tired. Enid, here’s the address of those rooms at Ilfracombe.”

“Auntie Ruddock’s?” said Maisie. “She’s a good sort, she is. Eighteen stone in her *bandeau*, and one long smile. I put her to bed once, an’ she never forgets a friend.”

Nadège took no part in the chatter, for she had nothing to say. Like poor Constance, she was ‘at liberty’—out of a job.

The first to be dressed, she left the room amid a flurry of affectionate goodwill.

As she came to the stairs, somebody cried her name, and there was Mabel Legrand drawing her greasy kimono about her ample limbs.

Nadège returned, wondering.

The other put her arms round her neck.

“You poor baby,” she said gently, “don’t be a fool. Go home. I don’t care what it costs—it’s cheaper than going on. I’ve no heart left, and my skin’s turned into a hide: but I’m forty-five next Tuesday, and I’ve done it for twenty years. I came from a Devonshire rectory. You wouldn’t guess that, but I did. Used to keep house for my father, an’ drive out to call. *Me.* . . .” She shook a sob from her throat. “What d’you think I’d give now to be pickin’ sweet peas in that garden and ringin’ for tea? So go home, darling. Go home—before it’s too late. Chuck your pride in the gutter: it’s putrid stuff. See where mine’s brought me—to Blackpool . . . on the nineteenth of June.”

She kissed her roughly, flicked a tear from each eye, laughed and turned back to her room.

“See you some day,” she shrilled. “So long, Nadège. Be good.”

Before Nadège could reply, the door was shut.

The girl passed down the stairs and into the street. Medmenham was there, as usual, to drive her back to her rooms.

The attention distressed Nadège. It was out of all order for Dominick to wait upon her: she could make no sort of return: what was far worse, she valued his coming as she had never valued anything before. Each of those nightly rides was charged to her most private account: she would pay for them one by one in something more pitiful than tears. How many years would pass before she could leave a stage-door without glancing up and down for a taxi which she knew would never be there? Nine, perhaps: he would have driven her nine times.

With these things in her heart, she had protested more than once; but every night the taxi had been waiting, its driver standing beside it, with his hand on the door.

So Dominick drove her from the theatre for the last time.

Arrived at her lodgings, Nadège was out of the taxi before he could leave his seat.

“Good night, Dominick,” she said, and put out her hand. “Good night and good-bye and God bless you for being so sweet.”

“Why ‘Good-bye’?” said Medmenham, holding her hand in his.

“The tour’s over. I—I open at Blackpool next week.”

“Are you travelling to-morrow?”

Nadège tried to think straight. If she said ‘Yes’, he would come to drive her to the station.

“No-o,” she said.

“Let me drive you into the country—not very far. Into the woods somewhere. I’ll bring some lunch.” The girl shook her head. The hold on her fingers tightened. “Don’t say ‘No’, Nadège. I know I’m asking a lot, but I’ve not had a soul to talk to for nearly a year.”

Nadège stared at the badge strapped to his coat. One day in heaven, and how many nights in hell?

“I’ve cost you enough,” she said slowly.

“Oh, Nadège. Between friends . . .”

Almost roughly the girl withdrew her hand.

“All right. I’ll come. Thank you.”

Medmenham lifted his cap.

“Will half-past ten be too early?”

“No, Dominick. Good night.”

When she had the door open, she turned and lifted her hand.

The man waved his cap cheerfully.

Nadège sat under a hawthorn which perfumed the air. Her fine, dark hair was free of her little felt hat; her grave, brown eyes were feasting on what they saw. This was a slice of country, smiling beneath the favour of a summer’s day—the slant of a flowery meadow, with a buxom hedgerow beyond; to the left a fresh field of young wheat, flanked by a whispering wood; to the right a cherry orchard, rising sharply to the skyline and making a long bank of blossom against the blue; and, rounding the picture, a mountain of apple-green foliage, the thick, gay coverlet of an opposing ridge, the comfortable bulwark against an unkind world.

Her colour was faint, and the droop of her beautiful mouth told its own tale. She had always been slight, but her little wrists were slimmer, and her ankles were very fine. Her slippers had been well cared for, but they were growing old. Her simple, dark-blue dress was the one she had been wearing when she left Eaton Square.

Medmenham read these messages with a full heart.

Their lunch was over, and the man was sitting beside her, a pipe between his strong teeth. For more than half an hour they had not spoken, but had sat still together, the one looking at the other, and the other gazing on the country and finding there a refreshment which she had never known.

At last the girl took a deep breath.

“D’you often do this, Dominick?”

“This is the first time, Nadège.”

“The first time? How strange. If I were in your place, I couldn’t keep away.”

“I’ve had no one to go with,” said Medmenham. “When will you be back in Town?”

“I don’t know,” said Nadège slowly.

“Won’t this tour bring you to London?”

“I—I don’t know yet. It may. I’ve not seen the list.” She got to her feet. “Those woods attract me, Dominick. D’you think we could walk to them? I’d like to see what’s lying the other side.”

“Of course. Wait a moment, while I disable the car.”

This was behind a haystack and out of the sun. Medmenham knew the value of a smart-looking cab.

A path led into the valley and, presently, over a stream by a grey oak bridge. Very soon they were climbing in the shade of the green coverlet to which they had looked.

The ridge commanded a road and a railway line. The country was handsome, but the road was busy with cars, and a train flung through the fields with a rumbling snarl. Two pale-blue char-à-bancs stormed up the dusty stretch: dogs in the manger, they held the crown of the road; from the rear of the second, two men, wearing women’s hats, derided the occupants of a following Rolls: behind the Rolls a dark-red racer was chafing and furiously employing an ear-splitting horn.

Nadège turned away.

“Why is life so beastly?” she said. “So beastly and hard and cruel? I’ve been all right: people have treated me kindly wherever I’ve gone: but I’ve seen so much ill-feeling, such—such squalor, such needless pain. I stayed in rooms once, where the husband was out of work. He cleaned my shoes and carried up my hot water and actually mended my trunk. Nobody could have been nicer. One day the police came and took him—for ‘grievous bodily harm’. His wife jeered at him from the landing, while it was going on. It appeared he’d half killed a night watchman who lived next door. Why? Because the man’s wife had boasted that, when the hot weather came, they should go to the sea.”

“I’m sorry you’ve seen such things,” said Medmenham. “Life out of joint is dreadful: and, once you’ve seen it, the slightest whiff of disorder brings it back.”

“That’s right,” said the girl. “Study Hogarth enough, and only a Constable will take the taste from your mouth. That’s why these woods and

meadows have helped me so. As for that orchard . . . Let's go back there, Dominick. I'm sorry to be so capricious, but I've—I've seen so much of Hogarth that—well, I'm glad of a change."

"My poor lady."

Nadège forced out a laugh.

"It's the contrast—that's all. I used to live so soft. But I can't complain really. I do very well."

"I'm sure of that," said Medmenham. "And the first chance you get I'm sure you'll go right away. Will you take me on as your chauffeur, when you're a star?"

"No. I think I'll build a house here and give it to you. And that would be useless. Why did Sir John turn you down?"

"We had a disagreement," said Medmenham: "and he went off the deep end."

Nadège stopped in her tracks and laid a hand on his arm.

"Tell me the truth," she said. "Was it because our engagement was broken off?"

"It was," said Medmenham. "But——"

Nadège clapped her hands to her eyes.

"I knew it," she moaned. "I knew it. Oh, Dominick, how you must hate me. How you must——"

"My dear Nadège, what has it to do with you? How can you blame yourself for the utterly reasonless whim of a man tormented with gout?"

Nadège uncovered her face and stared at the sky.

"And you wait upon me," she said. "You play the part of a servant to the woman who's smashed your life."

" 'A servant'! Because, by the police regulations, I have to sit outside and you in the cab. My dear, what nonsense. Besides, between friends . . . And now let's get back to your meadow and sit in the sun."

In silence they crossed the bridge and passed through the smiling fields.

"Needless pain," said the girl. "You see, I belong to Hogarth. I'm typical of that vile world I condemn. Those two men in the char-à-banc made me feel sick and tired: and I ought to have been by their side."

Medmenham stood still.

"I refuse," he said quietly, "to let you talk like this. We both know the facts. Because you found me exacting, you broke our engagement off. Whether I was or was not, you were wholly within your rights. More. You did the right thing, Nadège. No girl should ever marry against her will. To saddle yourself with what happened——"

"What of the woman who boasted that she should go to the sea? An idle, unkind word—see what havoc it made. You can't say she wasn't to blame. Of course she was. She couldn't foresee what would happen: but who ever can? She just did a rotten thing—and bred the most frightful misery as the result."

"But, my dear, you did right." Nadège stared. "She spoke out of careless ill-will: she wanted her neighbours to feel that she was better to do: so she put it across them—a common, but unkind act. But you were doing your duty."

"My duty?"

"Your absolute duty. I don't care how far things have gone: it's not the game to marry a man you don't love."

Nadège stood like statuary: she seemed to have stopped breathing: her eyes, which were fixed upon a hedgerow, plainly saw nothing at all.

Suddenly, without a word, she turned to continue her way.

In that moment, I think, she touched bottom: the waters of Retribution passed over her head: Dominick had spiked her last gun: she could not even turn it upon herself.

Arrived at the head of the meadow, she sat herself down.

"Tell me of yourself," she said dully. "I want to know how you live."

The man told her faithfully a cheerful, prosperous tale. His life was full and amusing. If it was also hard, he hid the fact. He made good money, would soon have paid for his cab. Foul weather was trying, but brought much grist to the mill. He had four regular clients, two of whom were old ladies that feared the streets, had twice driven Royalty and once a man to the Bank he was going to rob. His fares interested him. The comfortable ignorance with which Propriety lay back on the cushions which Scandal had but just left amused him to death. He had set down a potman, to be haled by a pompous prelate on his way to a Temperance Hall: he had taken Miss ——

to the Divorce Court and had carried the President back: a duchess had followed a bookmaker, heavy with wine. . . .

The lively account took Nadège out of herself: the pleasant peace of the landscape ministered to her soul: soon she was looking and listening with a smile on her lips: in an hour they were talking easily, remembering bygone days.

The sun was sinking, when the girl picked up her hat.

"Time, Dominick," she said, setting her hair to rights. "I shall have to be getting back."

"To your rooms? Why on earth? Let's find a small inn and ask for a country tea."

Nadège shook her head.

"I can't do that," she said slowly. "You've given me the most perfect day I've ever spent. And now I must go." She rose. "I shall never forget it—never. Or how very sweet you were. I'm very grateful."

Medmenham looked up at her face.

"Perhaps, some day, Nadège, you'll let me bring you again."

"Perhaps, some day."

Medmenham got to his feet and put out his hands. The girl put her fingers within them without a thought.

"And please don't become a great lady before your time. I mean, when I've something to offer, I'm going to ask you again. When I've four or five cabs on the streets and don't have to drive. . . . That means a good income, Nadège. I can't ask you to wait—I know that. And I daresay it's hopeless, and I know that I'm out of court. You can't post-date some statements, and that's what I've done. But, oh, Nadège, I just wanted you to know that I love you—love you far better, darling, than ever before, and God knows when I'll get a chance of telling you so again."

He kissed her hands hungrily. When he raised his head, he saw the look in her face.

"Nadège!"

She nodded.

"I love you, Dominick. I always did. I was mad, I think, that night. I'd meant to make you protest, insist on your rights. You were so gentle and

easy; I wanted to get a rise. So I played and lost, and doubled and lost again. And at last I staked all I had. . . . It was rotten and mean and senseless. But I was like that. But I'm not any more, Dominick."

The man drew her into his arms and kissed her lips. She went on wistfully.

"When I've got a job in London, I'll let you know. And then, if you still want me, dear, I'll be your wife."

Medmenham held her off and looked into her eyes.

"Do you really love me?" he said.

"Yes, Dominick."

"Then give up your tour. Give up your prospects and marry me, poor as I am. I've a tiny flat, I told you, and I can keep us both. It won't be very exciting: I'm afraid it'll be very rough. A servant's out of the question. But, if you can stick it, Nadège, you'll make my life. I need you. I've no one now. When I come in, soaked to the skin, I have to light my fire—lay it sometimes and then light it: I must have warmth. But I often go hungry to bed, because I'm too tired to set about getting a meal. I know I'm asking a lot, but——"

Nadège put her arms round his neck and burst into tears.

Not for five minutes could she control her voice. Then—

"Let's sit down," she whispered.

With his arm about her shoulders, she began to speak very low.

"I never knew that men loved women like this. I don't think they do. Of course you know that I'm broke. The moment you saw me, you knew I was down and out. I saw it in your eyes, heard it in all you said. You knew I wasn't going to Blackpool, guessed I was out of a job. Yet I might be a leading lady, the way that you've treated me. The question was how to save me—I've seen it all. How to spare my feelings, yet save me still. Your feelings didn't count. And, in the end, you ask me to do you the favour of becoming your wife. You point out how much it will help you, if I will give up my career to cook your food, lay yourself open to a standing reproach, deliberately stigmatize yourself, in order that I may anchor without hauling down my pride."

"I don't seem to have been very clever," said Dominick thoughtfully. "And in common decency I must decline the crown. Our marriage will be

one of convenience. You're sick and tired of the sordid, and I don't like living alone."

"My dear, I'm a beggar. I've fourteen shillings and sixpence, and I'm short of a job."

"And I of a housekeeper. I can't afford one. But I can run to a wife." He slid a hand into his pocket and brought out a ring. "And here's the reward of virtue. If you hadn't picked this up——"

Nadège gave a cry of delight.

"I had to, Dominick. It—it seemed so awful to leave such a stone on the floor. Why didn't you sell it?"

"Because to restore it to me, you had to stoop. That made it a document. 'I beg your pardon,' it said. And I valued that very much."

Nadège caught his hand to her heart.

"Faithful to a dream," she said.

"Perhaps," said Dominick. "But, you see, my sweet, it's come true."

It was some ten days later that Sir John Medmenham swallowed and dabbed at *The Daily Glass*.

"Have you seen this, Forsyth?"

"Your son's marriage to Miss Lambert? I have."

"What the devil does it mean?"

"If I'm to speak frankly, Sir John, I think it means this. The first match was made for them, and that's why it came to naught: but this one they made themselves."

"Bricks without straw," said Sir John. "They haven't a penny piece."

"Maybe," said Forsyth quietly. "But that sort of bricks will last. They're not easy to make, but . . ."

Sir John frowned.

"The point is what's to be done. I'm ready to let bygones be bygones, but what about that woman?" He wrinkled his nose. "Plenty of straw in that brick. Poor old Lambert. We found together at Harrow in '76."

The lawyer fingered his chin.

“I think if she’s left to herself, she’ll see the worldly wisdom of coming round.”

“What d’you mean?”

“They’ve a flat in a mews off Mount Street. I should think it’s being stormed now. They were both very popular, you know. If Mrs. Lambert stands out, she’ll be ostracized.”

Sir John sat back in his chair.

“Have you got the address?” he said. “I don’t mind being ostracized, but I’m damned if I’ll follow her lead.”

He called on his daughter-in-law on the following day.

The latter and Lady Sue Fustian were laying linoleum in the bathroom and doing it very well.

Nadège led him into the kitchen politely enough.

“Thank you very much for coming,” she said. “Dominick’s out with his cab.”

“Your father and I,” said Sir John, “were very old friends. It gives me great pleasure to know that you bear my name.”

“I’m an unprofitable daughter,” said Nadège.

“My dear, that’s largely my fault. I looked too hard at the settlements and not hard enough at your eyes. You must forgive me. And I don’t at all like Dominick’s driving a cab.”

“That’s my fault, Sir John. I broke the engagement, you know.”

“I’m afraid it was I who, er, reduced him to the ranks. At any rate, between us we upset things. Will you help me to put them right?”

“Of course I will.”

“I have to go to Vichy at the end of the week. I want you and him to come and take charge of Black James, while I’m away. If he likes to work later on, I won’t stand in the way. But I don’t like his driving a cab. The streets are dangerous.”

“You ask me to help myself to something I don’t deserve.”

“That’s a way conspirators have.” He rose to his feet. “Give him this note from me and plead my cause. And I’ll call for you to-morrow at four o’clock. We’ll walk round to ——’s and inspect the family jewels.”

Nadège took his hand in both hers.

"I let you down once," she said. "I'll never do it again."

Sir John stooped and kissed her.

"It's perfectly plain," he said, "that you and I are going to get on very well."

After a word with Lady Sue, he took his leave.

At the entrance to the mews he paused.

"Forsyth was right," he murmured. "Nothing like bricks without straw." He rubbed his nose reflectively. "Strange fellow Fate. By cutting them off, that woman and I seem to have done the right thing."

Three weeks had gone by, and Black James was basking in the sunshine, like an old hound.

On the balustrade of the terrace sat Nadège, her eyes roving luxuriously over the famous park. Its deer, its timber, its bracken, its lights and shades made her a pageant of which she would never tire. Beneath their constant ministry, her memories of Hogarth were growing dim.

The girl was happy, as only those are happy who have been given the original of their most precious dream. She clung to her husband like a child, would have fought for him like a tigress, woke of nights and wept over him out of sheer joy.

Dominick emerged from the library, letter in hand.

"From Forsyth," he said, coming across the flags.

> *. . . I have heard from Mrs. Lambert's solicitors. They say 'In the circumstances there seems to be no reason why the Deed of Settlement should not be executed in substantially the same form as that which was finally approved.' I hope you will agree with them, as I do. . . .*

"As we were," sighed Nadège. "But I owe you ten months, Dominick. I stole ten months of your life."

The man put her hand to his lips.

"You're paying me back, my darling, a hundredfold. If you remember, I wanted some of your time."

‘SERVICE’

WHEN my friend George Scarlett purchased a lease in Hay Street and took to displaying and offering second-hand cars, I confess that I feared the worst. But, when, after eighteen months, he was making two thousand a year, I owned my judgment faulty and took off my hat.

“It’s the personal touch,” said George proudly, from behind a cigar. “Never press: never argue: never make the running. If they want to get off, help them. If they like you, they’ll like the car. That’s why I won’t pay Aitken commission. If I did, he’d rush his fences sure as a gun.”

“What about the Roquefort?” said I.

The Roquefort belonged to me. She was very long and low, she was open, and she weighed just under three tons. She was extremely comfortable and handsome. Her bodywork was a dream. She had the heaviest clutch and steering of any car I have known. She did ten miles to the gallon, and, after a quarter of an hour, she would boil on a winter’s day. *Boil.* After having her engine down once and changing her radiator twice, I came to the conclusion that the car was bewitched. George had been trying to sell her for nearly three months.

“Ah,” said George. “That isn’t everyone’s car.”

“It must be someone’s,” said I.

“She’s greatly admired,” said George. “I’m quite glad to have her in the shop.”

“I’d take six hundred,” said I, “to be rid of the swine.”

George shook his head.

“It isn’t the price,” he said. “She’s—she’s overwhelming. People are frightened of her. If I offered her at less than a thousand, they’d smell a rat.”

I sighed, and we left it there. Nine months ago the Roquefort had cost me two thousand two hundred pounds.

It was nearly a week later that George rang me up.

“Listen,” said he. “You can help me. Aitken is sick of his stomach, and I’ve to go down to Surrey to look at a car. Will you take my place at Hay

Street this afternoon?"

"I'm not keen about it," said I. "What's the matter with the boy?"

"He's not a salesman," said George. "He can attend to the telephone and open the door: but he can't sell."

"But you're often both out, George. Surely the boy can be trusted to ____"

"I know," said George, "but somebody's coming this time. I made the appointment last night. A 'Miss'— Wait a minute. . . . Here we are. 'Miss Agatha Sword.' When we were up at Magdalen, her brother was up at the House. That Lowland coupé's the very thing for her. Put it in at six hundred, will you?"

"I don't half like it," said I. "And I'm sure to mess it all up. Can't you ____"

"That's a good fellow," said George. "I expect she'll want a trial run. Mind you——"

"I've not said I'll do it yet. Why don't you——"

"That's all right," said George. "Knew I could depend upon you. You'd better pose as a partner. Two o'clock sharp, laddie."

Before I could demur, he was gone.

When I rang him up ten minutes later, the line was engaged. When I rang him up half an hour later, the boy seemed pleased to inform me that George had gone out.

At five minutes to two that day I took up my command.

It was a restful business, not to say dull.

The boy sat in the office, reading the racing news. I sat on the step of the Roquefort, awaiting Miss Agatha Sword. Sometimes I strolled round the Lowland which I was to sell. This was a nice-looking coupé and was worth about half her price. I began to see how it was that George was able to make two thousand a year.

It was twenty minutes to four when a taxi drew up, to disgorge Miss Agatha Sword.

When I saw her, I was glad I had come. I think that was natural. Her physical attractions were outstanding, and she had a most charming smile. Her hair was very dark, and her eyes were grey. Her figure was slim and her

legs were above reproach. There was a hint of wilfulness about the set of her chin.

As I opened the door—

"I'm afraid I'm awfully late," she said sweetly. "Are you Mr. Scarlett?"

"I'm afraid I'm not," said I. "My name is Wrotham. George Scarlett's been called away. He was very upset about it; but his—our nagsman's gone suddenly sick, and he had to go down to Surrey, to take his place."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Did he tell you about me?"

"He said that you wanted a car."

Her eyes wandered over the Roquefort.

"He said," she said slowly, "that he had the very thing for me."

"I hope he was right," said I, moving towards the Lowland.

Still looking at the Roquefort, she followed me round.

"Now that's a nice car," said I, throwing open a door. "Last year's model. Only done four thousand miles."

Miss Sword looked into the coupé.

"There's not very much room," she said.

It was a very big coupé.

By way of answer, I revealed an occasional seat.

"What I mean is, I want it for touring. My sister and I are going to tour in France."

"Without a chauffeur?" said I.

"Oh, yes."

"Then I think this should suit you," said I. "There's plenty of room for two, and she's got a big boot."

Miss Sword stepped back and appeared to measure the car.

"She's not very long, is she?"

No one could have called her short.

"I think, perhaps, that's because of the Roquefort," said I. "She's quite abnormally long. And, standing beside the Lowland, she makes her look short."

Miss Sword regarded the Roquefort.

"I must say I like length," she murmured. And then, "I'll bet she rides well."

I returned to the Lowland.

"I don't want to bother you," said I, "but, unless you don't like coupés ——"

"Plenty of room there," continued Miss Sword. "Think of the luggage that you could put in the back. And she's got a trunk, too."

She was still regarding the Roquefort—with a curious light in her eyes.

A sudden, dreadful suspicion leaped into my mind.

For a moment I stared at her blankly. Then—

"You—you're not thinking of that?" I stammered. "I mean, you're not seriously thinking——"

"Why not?" said Miss Sword. "I prefer an open car."

"But, without a chauffeur——"

"There are two of us to manage the hood. May I try the seats?"

Feeling rather dazed, I opened the Roquefort's doors.

Miss Sword sank back on the cushions with a sigh of content.

"We could sleep in this," she said.

I swallowed desperately.

"I think that, without a chauffeur——"

"I simply love driving," said Miss Sword. "She *is* a beautiful car. What are you asking for this?"

"A—a thousand pounds," said I miserably.

"What year is she?"

"She's a last year's model. But I—she isn't everyone's car. She's awfully heavy, you know."

Miss Sword got out and stood back.

"She's one of the best-looking cars I've ever seen."

"I know, but——"

“A thousand pounds,” said Miss Sword. “Does that include everything?”

“Yes,” said I. “Except the petrol. She’s pretty heavy on that.”

“That’s natural enough,” said the lady, “with a car of this size. Can I have a trial run?”

“Of course,” said I. “You shall try and buy what you please. To be perfectly honest, I’d rather sell you the Lowland.”

Miss Sword smiled dazzlingly.

“You’re very frank,” she said. “But you shouldn’t have let me see this. There’s no comparison, is there?”

I filled up with water and petrol, and we picked our way to the Park.

The Roquefort behaved superbly.

I did not spare her, but she could do nothing wrong.

My companion was loud in her praise.

“I’m bound to tell you,” said I, “that she’s running unusually cool. As a rule, she gets very hot.”

“I don’t think that’s a fault,” said Miss Sword. “Half the cars of to-day are over-cooled.”

I drew up beneath the trees and played my last card.

“I think you should drive her,” I said.

Miss Sword shook her elegant head.

“You’re awfully kind, but really I’d rather not. I never will drive a car that isn’t mine. I did once, and ran into a tree. And that’s made me superstitious, or broken my nerve.”

“I’ll take the risk,” said I. “Besides, she’s fully insured. And you really ought to try her. She’s none too light in the steering, and you couldn’t call the clutch sweet.”

The lady laughed and refused.

“Is she for sale, Mr. Wrotham?”

“Oh, yes,” said I. “She’s for sale.”

“But you don’t want me to buy her?”

“To be honest, I don’t. You see, I don’t think she’s your car.”

“I think she’s going to be.”

I started the engine in silence.

“Where may I take you?” I said.

“Claridge’s, please,” said Miss Sword. “I take it she’s ready for the road?”

“Oh, yes,” said I. “She’s ready to drive away.”

“I don’t want her for a week. Could you ship her for me to Bordeaux?”

“Certainly,” said I.

“On Saturday next?”

“With pleasure.”

“You see,” said Miss Sword, “my sister, Brenda, and I want to start from Bordeaux. From there we’ll go South to the mountains and then, by easy stages, along to the other coast. I’ve got the route here.” She opened a smart red bag. “I wonder if you know it.”

I took the type-written slips.

BORDEAUX
48 Marmande
63 Casteljaloux
93 St. Justin
Etc.

“Yes,” said I, “I know it. It’s quite a good way.”

“We thought of starting on Thursday—to-morrow week. From Bordeaux, I mean.”

It was now the last week of July. South of Bordeaux it can be very hot in August. I wondered how the Roquefort would like the road from Marmande.

“I see,” I said abstractedly. “Just you and your sister alone. Well, if you will arrange for her papers, I can get the car there.”

“Thank you very much. Will you let me know what it costs?”

“We’ll throw the freight in,” said I. “It won’t be very much.”

“I don’t see why you should. You know, I don’t think she’s dear.”

“She isn’t—in a way,” said I. “She’s no faults but those I’ve told you. I—I rather think she’s for sale, because she got hot.”

“Probably bad driving,” said Miss Sword. “She’s cool enough now.”

This was undeniable. I began to wonder whether the car had improved.

Ten minutes later we came to the lady’s hotel.

There she gave me a cocktail and a cheque for a thousand pounds.

When we parted she came to the pavement, to see me off.

“And thank you so much, Mr. Wrotham. Nobody could have been kinder—or more indiscreet. I’m sure you’d have choked off nine people out of ten.”

“And the tenth won’t hear me,” I said.

“She’s a beauty,” said Miss Sword affectionately.

“ ‘Handsome is as handsome does!’ ” said I. “I tell you, she’s not your car.”

The lady tilted her chin.

“I think you must permit me to know my own mind.”

I took off my hat. . . .

By the time I had got back to Hay Street the Roquefort’s thermometer had risen to ‘DANGER—STEAM’.

George put in an appearance at a quarter past six.

When he had heard my story, he spoke of ‘innocent girls’ and ‘ravening wolves’.

“Yes, I knew that was coming,” said I. “My conscience is clear. The lady rushed upon her fate. I did my best to stop her, but *she would have the blasted car*.”

George raised his eyes to heaven.

“And you were at Oxford with her brother. Did you tell her that the radiator was the finest lightning geyser you knew?”

“She wouldn’t believe me.”

“And that the clutch——”

“No man,” said I, “could have done more to put her off. Even after she’d paid me——”

“That was uncalled for,” said George. “Have you got the cheque?”

“Here,” said I. “I had it made out to you.”

“Quite right,” said George, accepting the document. “You said you’d take six hundred, didn’t you?”

As soon as I could speak—

“Honour among thieves,” said I. “Indorse it to me, and I’ll give you a hundred back.”

“Certainly not,” said George. “I’ll give you a cheque for eight hundred, and then I shall be down on the deal. If you had sold the coupé——”

“What d’you want for the coupé?” said I suddenly.

“I told you,” said George. “Seven hundred.”

I tried to control my voice.

“Give me the coupé,” said I, “and a cheque for three hundred pounds, and I’ll go home.”

“You’re mad,” said George coolly.

“I believe you,” said I. “D’you know what you’d get for that coupé in Euston Road?”

George took out a cheque-book.

“Make it two-fifty,” he said. “Two hundred and fifty and the coupé. I’ve got to live.”

In a shaking voice I told him to write the cheque.

As I was leaving, he pointed to a Rheims by the kerb.

“Now that’s a good car,” he said. “You wait till I’ve washed her face.”

The car was a three-year-old. Provided her engine was good, she was worth about ninety pounds.

“I see,” I said slowly. “And if I should hear of someone who’s out of his mind . . .”

George Scarlett fingered his chin.

“To a friend of yours—four hundred.”

I drove home dazedly.

Nine o'clock of next Thursday morning found me within the Lowland, passing through St. Justin on the way to Marmande.

The sky was cloudless and the day was beginning to be extremely hot.

At thirty-five miles an hour, with screen raised and windows open, the Lowland was pleasantly cool.

I was, of course, 'after' the Roquefort.

In a sense, it was a wild-goose chase; but, even if the route had been altered, I knew the car. What I should do, when I found her, was not at all clear. The future, in fact, was depending upon Miss Agatha Sword.

I fully expected to find her between Bordeaux and Marmande. If, when we met, she was moving, I intended to turn round and follow, until she stopped. Once I had found her, it was only a matter of time. That sun . . .

I stopped at Casteljaloux and enjoyed a bottle of beer. Then I proceeded agreeably, proposing to enjoy another when I got to Marmande.

The proposal was vain.

When I had gone seven miles, I saw a large claret-coloured car by the side of the road. Its hood was up, and both sides of its bonnet were raised. Beside it stood a slight figure in a cream-coloured dress.

As I slowed to a standstill, Miss Sword gave a start of surprise.

"What ever are you doing here?"

"Business," said I shortly. "What can I do?"

She looked at me very hard.

"She does get hot," she said. "You were perfectly right."

" 'The gipsy warned me,' " said I.

Miss Sword frowned.

"I think," she said, "I think that there must be a leak. I can't find one, but we filled her up at Marmande." I looked round for her sister. "Brenda's gone back to a stream about half a mile back."

I sighed.

"I'd better go and help her," I said. "This isn't a day for walking, with or without a load."

"You're very good," said Miss Sword.

I let in the clutch.

I liked Brenda very much.

She was fifteen and full of life as an egg is of meat. She did not care what she looked like and looked extremely nice. She had a keen sense of humour and an infectious laugh.

She laughed very much at my efforts to fill the can; and, when, before my endeavours, the bank gave way, she nearly died.

We returned to Miss Sword and the Roquefort in a holiday humour.

I made two more journeys alone, before the radiator was full.

"She's still very hot," said Miss Sword.

"I know," said I. "But, if you don't exceed twenty, she ought to do seven miles. Then we can lunch and let her get really cool."

"But what about your business?"

"I count this my business," I said importantly.

We moved to Casteljaloux at a funeral pace. When we arrived the Roquefort was boiling like hell.

"What *is* the matter with it?" said Miss Sword.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Inherent vice," I said. "After lunch, as a matter of form, I'll drain the crank-case and have a look at the pump. What I don't understand is how you got as far as you did. You must have left Bordeaux very early."

Brenda began to shake with laughter.

"We started yesterday," said Miss Sword. "But we—we got held up on the road, so we slept at Marmande."

Not daring to trust my voice, I made my way into the inn. . . .

Physically, I did not enjoy that afternoon.

It was thirty miles to St. Justin, and we did it in seven hours. Of course the great heat was against us, but, after the first six miles, the Roquefort began to seethe.

“Don’t take any notice,” said I. “Put her along at fifty, and swear she’s cool.”

“You ought to be ashamed,” said Miss Sword. “A beautiful car like this. I don’t believe she’s ever been understood.”

Subduing a desire to scream, I berthed the Lowland, opened the Roquefort’s bonnet and then lay down in the grass.

“I—I didn’t mean to be rude,” said Miss Sword suddenly.

“You weren’t,” said I, sitting up.

“I was rather short: but you mustn’t abuse the car.”

“I’ll—I’ll try not to,” I said.

Miss Sword descended and took her seat by my side.

“You’re really very kind to us,” she said: “but I can’t let your business suffer because of——”

“Look here,” said I. “As soon as you’re tired of me, please tell me to go. In so many words. I want to see this thing through, and my business can wait.”

“Do you always give ‘service’ like this?”

“Not always,” said I. “Not every car requires it.”

There was a little silence.

The shade was grateful, and my companion’s profile was a sight for the gods.

I watched her lace her fingers about a slim knee.

“Didn’t you row for Oxford?” she said.

“Yes,” said I. “Rather a long time ago.”

“Twelve years,” said Miss Sword. “My brother remembers you well.”

I dared not return the compliment. Sword had been junior to me. I remembered his ways dimly: but I could not remember his face.

“That’s right,” I said. “He used to hunt with the Bicester and ride very straight.”

The girl nodded.

“Usedn’t you to live in Yorkshire?”

“I do still,” said I, “except when I’m up in Town.”

Miss Sword regarded me straitly, finger to lip.

“I don’t think you can take your—your profession very seriously,” she said.

With a shock I remembered that I was George Scarlett’s partner and a ‘motor-car man’.

“I—I’m afraid George has the brains,” I said lamely. “He’s quick as a lizard. I’ve seen him make four hundred and fifty in one afternoon.”

“You must be millionaires,” said Miss Sword.

“We don’t always do that. The same day I dropped fourteen hundred.”

My companion took a deep breath.

“I’m beginning to see,” she said, “why so much of your time is your own. What are you doing with the Lowland?”

“She’s for sale,” I said evasively. “When we can’t sell a car in London, we—we trot her out.”

“I shouldn’t have thought Marmande was a very good market.”

“You never know,” I said darkly.

Miss Sword returned to the Roquefort.

“She’s quieter now,” she said. “D’you think it’s safe to take the cap off?”

I stood up and shaded my eyes.

Some willows argued a streamlet four fields away.

I took off my coat, laid it down and picked up the can.

“There’s no immediate hurry,” I said. “I don’t expect I’ll be back under half an hour.”

A shriek of laughter from the Roquefort preceded Brenda herself.

“I’ll come with you,” she said. “I’d like to.”

“It looks a hot walk,” said I. “And supposing I don’t fall in.”

“I’ll chance that,” said Brenda, gurgling.

It was an extremely hot walk. It was also the first of many. When I was not walking, I was getting into or out of the Lowland or opening the doors of the furnace which the engine of the Roquefort became. In between these

exercises, I proved that the radiator functioned and took down the water-pump—these things against all reason, but because, unless I had done them, I should have had no peace. One cannot accept witchcraft without a fight.

We had a late tea by the way and trickled into St. Justin at nine o'clock.

As I opened the door of the Roquefort—

"You can't stay here," said I. "If you don't believe me, come and have a look at the inn."

"But what can we do?" said Miss Sword.

"Take the Lowland," said I, "and drive on to Mont-de-Marsan. That's fifteen miles. I'll look after the Roquefort. If you're not back by midday to-morrow, where shall I send your big stuff?"

"I won't hear of such a thing. We can lock her switch and her bonnet and garage her here. Then, if you'll take us on to Mont-de-Marsan . . ."

We had a most excellent dinner at half-past nine.

When Brenda retired for the night, I glanced at my watch.

"Would you like to dance?" I said. "We're an hour and a half from Biarritz, and they don't get up from table till half-past twelve."

My lady sprang to her feet.

"I'd love it," she said. "But aren't you most awfully tired?"

"The night air's revived me," said I, and got to my feet. "Will you be ready to start in half an hour?"

"You're very good to me," said Agatha Sword.

The first person I saw in the casino was Jonathan Stroud. We met in the cloak-room. To my great relief he said he was going to bed.

Jonathan and Cicely Stroud live next to me in Yorkshire and are among my best friends. But I did not want Agatha to meet them. They knew very well I was not in the motor-car trade. What was far worse, they knew all about the Roquefort.

We stood in the hall, talking, whilst I watched the ladies' cloak-room with my heart in my mouth.

If Agatha came out first, the game was up. I should have to introduce Jonathan: the delay would give Cicely time to appear on the scene—and

Cicely, desperate chatterbox, would certainly give me away. Even if Cicely came first . . .

"Tell me," said Jonathan suddenly. "How's the steam heat?"

He was referring to the Roquefort.

"I've sold her," said I shortly. "How long are you——"

"You fraudulent blackguard," said Jonathan. "You wicked——"

"Nonsense," said I. "The body alone——"

Cicely appeared and nearly put her arms round my neck.

"He's sold the blast furnace," said Jonathan. "Robbed some widow an' orphan——"

"Good for you," said Cicely. "How did you bring it off?"

She asked question after question, and I thought they would never go.

As they passed out of the doors, Agatha reappeared.

"I'm afraid I've been ages," she said.

"Not at all," said I, wiping the sweat from my face.

We had a great night, and, ere we got back to Mont-de-Marsan, the dawn was up.

Soon after midday on Friday we left St. Justin for Pau.

We got there at half-past ten—fifty-five miles in ten hours.

Of course the heat was against us—I never remember such a day. Even the Lowland got warm. As for the Roquefort . . .

Agatha was most patient.

That I was patient was nothing. It was my job.

I had begged her to take the Lowland and give me the Roquefort back. I had gone to Biarritz solely to show her what the Lowland could do. But she would not.

Hard as I strove to reverse it, her decision was what I desired. The Roquefort was my excuse for going where Agatha went. When she was through with the Roquefort—well, that was where I got off. I did not want to get off.

So, as I have said, that I was patient was nothing.

I fetched and carried water, I opened and dosed the bonnet, I dismantled the carburettors, and I swore that at Pau I would have the engine down.

Agatha watched and listened and Brenda laughed.

We lunched in a grove of chestnuts, and had tea in a blowing meadow beneath an oak.

After tea we went for a walk.

As we returned to the Roquefort, Agatha touched my arm.

"Isn't she a picture?" she said.

I pushed back my hat. Such loyalty was out of my ken.

"Oh, she looks all right," I said faintly. "Tell me when you want your cheque back?"

"She's capricious," said Agatha stoutly. "Many cars are. Besides, think of all she's been through."

"She's been through a good deal of water. I can't think of anything else."

"Nonsense," said Agatha. "This heat is abnormal."

"If you can bear it," said I, "if ever we get to Pau, I would like the engine down. Meanwhile there'll be the Lowland to run you around."

"I'd like to get her right," said Agatha. "All the same, it's the way to see the country—jogging along like this. Just look at the sun on those hills."

With an effort I controlled my voice.

"You're very philosophical," I said. "Long before now most people would have issued a writ."

Agatha took off her hat and gave her dark hair to the breeze.

"What worries me," she said, "is your business. What will Mr. Scarlett say? Perhaps you'll be able to sell the Lowland at Pau."

I swallowed before replying.

The bare thought of parting with the Lowland was disconcerting. The Lowland was our tender, our mainstay, our present help. Without the Lowland, dalliance with the Roquefort would become one long round of torment. Sisyphus and two Danaids, using a French highway . . .

At length—

"Quite likely," I said.

“How much are you asking?” said Agatha.

“Six hundred pounds,” said I.

“She knows how to move,” said my lady. “I’ll speak to that.”

“I’ve tried to make you take her,” said I.

“Don’t be silly. I’m more than content. When we’ve located the trouble . . . By the way, what does Brenda call you?”

“ ‘Bill’,” said I. “It’s simpler than ‘Mr. Wrotham’. I think she’s quite right.”

Agatha regarded the heaven.

“Shall we take the plunge?” she said.

“Yes, please, Agatha,” said I.

“Very well, Bill.”

I adjusted the Roquefort’s bonnet with meticulous care.

As I did so, Brenda appeared. Her approach was embarrassed by a goat which she held by one horn. She looked like a rosy nymph on the way to have dinner with Pan.

Agatha let out a cry.

“Brenda darling, don’t say you’ve bought this—this mascot.”

“I agree,” said I. “Supposing after a mile it begins to get hot.”

“Oh, no,” said Brenda, bubbling. “I haven’t bought him. He’s lost. We must try to find where he lives. He doesn’t smell much,” she added.

Here the goat broke away, came and gazed up into my face, turned away, as though disappointed, and seized the oilskin tobacco-pouch which I had laid on the step.

It seemed absurd not to try and get it back. . . .

After an unpleasant scene, I got half of it back.

After inspecting my share, I offered it back to the goat.

“Oh, you’ll p-p-poison him,” wailed Agatha.

Brenda was incapable of speech.

As I threw the pouch over the hedge, the goat rose upon its hind legs and took hold of my tie. . . .

“D-don’t d-drive him away,” sobbed Brenda. “I tell you, he’s l-lost.”

I explained that in France goats were left to wander and raven as much as they pleased. I said that I personally deplored the practice. I added that, while I had nothing against goats as a class, I had formed a, perhaps unaccountable, dislike for this particular goat which would go into no words which were not either blasphemous or obscene.

With that, I picked up a stone. . . .

With a long, malignant look, the goat sprang up a bank and disappeared in a wood. I had, I suppose, spoiled its game.

When the sisters were sufficiently recovered, we went on our way.

At seven I took the Lowland and ran into Pau. There I engaged the rooms and ordered a stately supper for eleven o’clock. Then I returned to the Roquefort. While I had been gone she had covered another ten miles.

“I think she’s improving,” said Agatha. “She doesn’t get so hot as she did.”

I said that I thought this was due to the cool of the day.

“Not altogether,” said my lady. “You wait till the next hill we come to.”

I waited till the next hill.

There we all waited for nearly three-quarters of an hour.

“Of course,” said Agatha, “this is an exceptional hill.”

This was quite true. All the same . . .

The next four days went by at headlong speed.

The weather was cooler, the hotel was comfortable, and the Lowland ran like a train.

Each day we drove into the mountains and lunched by the side of the road.

Agatha was perfectly charming, and the third day Brenda kissed me when I asked her to drive us home.

Meanwhile the Roquefort’s engine was taken down. It was found to be mechanically perfect in every way. It was then put together again, and by Tuesday night the car was once more ready to take the road.

Agatha was anxious to go by the Col de Fer—a very handsome and justly famous way. The top of the pass is about six thousand feet up: the gradients are extremely severe: so are the bends—a long car has to reverse continually. If the weather is at all hot . . .

I felt bound to point out that, unless the Roquefort had changed, our chances of reaching the top within twenty-four hours were so thin as to be imperceptible.

"We can but try," said Agatha. "Even if we do have to rest her, it's a perfectly lovely way. And I'd like to stay at Lally, at the foot of the pass."

"I'd love it," said Brenda. "D'you think there's a tennis-court?"

"If you're in earnest," said I, "I'll take you rooms for a month. You won't want to stay longer than that. The season ends the first of September."

"Don't be silly," said Agatha. "We shall wake up one morning to find that she's over-cooled. Have you heard from Mr. Scarlett?"

"No," said I. "When he wants me, he'll drop me a line."

"But, Bill," said Brenda, "how does he know where you are?"

"I have to report," I said boldly. "Report twice a week."

Agatha sighed.

"I do wish," she said, "I do wish you could sell the Lowland. Then, at least, all this 'service' you're giving us wouldn't be a dead loss."

"That's nothing," said I. "We want you to be satisfied."

"Isn't he sweet?" said Brenda.

Agatha took a deep breath.

"You're marvellous to your clients," she said. "Of course I shall recommend you to everyone. But I can't see how you make any money."

"We—we're not out for money," said I. "What we want is to—to keep our clients. You see, what I mean is this. If we satisfy you, next time you want a car you come back."

"But I might want a new one," said Agatha.

"That doesn't matter," said I. "We'd be very happy to advise you. We don't charge for advice."

"Don't you?" said Agatha.

“Not our clients,” I said.

“Then what’s the good of keeping them?” said Brenda.

I rose to my feet.

“My dear,” I said, “you don’t understand business. I’m not very good at it, either. But George has got it down to a fine art. If he were here, he’d be the first to tell me to see you through.”

Agatha opened her eyes.

“But doesn’t he know? I thought you reported twice a week.”

“He’s in Scotland,” I said swiftly. “Hasn’t had my letters yet.”

“So all this time he thinks you’re selling the Lowland?”

“Exhibiting her,” I corrected. “But we hadn’t really much hope.”

“But, my dear, we use her. We use her from morning to night. Who ever would dream she was for sale?”

“No one,” said I. “That’s the clever part of it. If I gave out I wanted to sell her, no one would touch her with the end of a ten-foot pole. As long as I don’t, some one will fall for her one day and come and start in to bribe me to let her go.”

“I see,” said Agatha thoughtfully. “Then you recommend staying at Lally to-morrow night?”

“It’s twenty-five miles,” said I. “If we get off early, we ought to be in by dark.”

“Perhaps she’s cured,” said Agatha. “Then you’ll be free.”

“I hope she isn’t,” said Brenda gallantly.

I took my hat and went off to the garage to see.

The Roquefort was not cured.

Four mechanics were standing about her, watching her seethe.

“She heats herself,” said the foreman, as I came up.

“Well done,” said I acidly. “Now tell me why.”

He spread out his hands.

“Who shall say?” he replied. “There are cars like this. I think it is an act of God.”

“It’s a car of France,” said I shortly.

“Without doubt,” said the foreman proudly. “She is very beautiful.”

“With English coachwork,” said I maliciously.

Then I paid the bill and drove slowly away.

We were fifteen miles from Lally, and we had just finished lunch.

The Roquefort, with the Lowland behind her, was standing by the side of the way. The former’s bonnet was open, and I was gauging the oil—as a matter of form. Agatha was screwing on the cap of the radiator, and Brenda was bestowing the can. In a word, the ritual precedent to a start was almost complete.

A car, coming from Lally, drew slowly abreast, and the pleasant American driving inquired if we needed help.

We smiled and said, “No, thank you.”

That also was part of our ritual: we had already observed it about two hundred times.

“Not at all,” said the stranger. “I take it I’m right for Pau.”

“You can’t miss it,” said I. “Fifteen miles, and turn to the right at Mass.”

“Hope I may get there,” said he, with a glance at his car.

This was an old two-seater of no known make.

“What’s the matter?” said I.

“Oh, nothing much,” said the other. “If I take a corner too sharp, the steering breaks. But I’ve plenty of string.”

He took off his hat to the girls and let in his clutch.

I returned to the Roquefort.

When I looked round again, the stranger was still abreast. He seemed to be looking at something, and I followed his gaze.

He was looking at the Lowland—with a steady, *covetous* leer.

As in a dream, I watched the man lick his lips.

Then he drew in his breath.

“But what a car,” he said quietly.

I looked at Agatha, standing out of his sight.

Her great eyes aglow with excitement, she was making me frantic signs to go in and win.

All I could see of Brenda was shaking with mirth.

"But what a car," purred the stranger. "Look at that line."

"She—she's all right," I stammered.

" 'All right'?" said the stranger. He crawled to the side of the road and got out of his car. "Talk about Traveller's Joy." He stepped in front of the Lowland and let out a squeal. "Holy snakes! It's a Lowland."

As in a dream, I watched him stamping around.

Presently he came up to me and smote me upon the back.

"I guess you'll be thinking my manners are coming on, but a friend of mine in Boston is Lowland mad. For two years now he's been proving there's only one car. An' I've come to sit at his feet. But he doesn't keep a body like this. If he could see this, he'd grow a permanent squint."

I swallowed before replying.

"They—they're quite good cars," I said. "Don't—don't let you down."

Agatha stepped to my side.

"There's nothing like them," she said. "They're guaranteed to do eighty, but this one will do eighty-five."

The American settled his glasses. These were large and tinted. In view of the brilliant sunshine, I rather envied him them.

"She's a daisy," he said. "Just look at that line."

I pulled myself together.

"She's a good stamp of car," I said. "I don't know how she'll show in the mountains, but so far I've no complaints."

Agatha laid a hand on my arm.

"Bill, you're forgetting. Don't you remember on Sunday, when we went by the Col d'Erreur?" She turned to the stranger. "I don't know whether you know the Col d'Erreur?"

The other glanced at his car.

"Backwards," he said shortly. "I had to go up in reverse."

“We did it in third,” said my lady. “Three up, too: and moving. But she never got hot.”

“I believe you,” said the other. “I believe you. There’s only one car.”

He started to walk about her, as a zealot about a statue, to view her from every point.

As he was mounting the bank, I spoke in Agatha’s ear.

“Don’t rush it,” I breathed. “For heaven’s sake don’t rush it. You’ll—you’ll put him off.”

“My dear, you’re a hopeless salesman,” she murmured back. “You must ask nine hundred and let him have it for eight.”

“May I get inside?” said the stranger. “I guess I’m abusing your kindness, but I’ve seen half a million autos, and this is my car.”

“Er, certainly,” said I. “Certainly. Of course it’s special coachwork. They—they come out pretty expensive, when——”

“Not for what they are,” said Agatha.

The stranger leaned back on the seat.

“Gosh,” he said, “but here’s comfort. I’d like to pension the fellow that made these springs.” He put out the clutch. “And what a movement. Silk upon rubber, and as firm as a ten-ton crane.”

“You—you must get one like her,” I said. “I must say she’s very useful. I’m—I’m getting quite attached to her myself.”

There was a little silence.

Stepping out of the stranger’s vision, Agatha deplored and exhorted with eyes and hands.

I winked back knowingly.

In the background, Brenda was endeavouring to stifle a paroxysm of mirth.

An idea came to me suddenly.

“Are you going to England,” I said, “by any chance?”

“Yep. In the fall.”

I could have crowed. He could have the Lowland in October and pay what he pleased.

“Well, I know a fellow,” said I, “who’s got a Lowland for sale, the spit of this. I’ll drop him a line if you like, and he’ll save her up. Scarlett, his name is, of Hay Street, in London Town.”

Agatha and Brenda were staring, as if I was out of my mind.

I smiled back confidently.

Then Agatha stepped to the window and dashed my dream.

“But you want one now, don’t you?”

The stranger bowed.

“Madam,” said he, “I want what I want when I want it—and that’s the truth. If this pretty toy was for sale . . .”

He threw up his eyes and sighed and got out of the car.

As he did so—

“*Go on*,” breathed Agatha. “My dear, I implore you—*go on*. Say you might consider an offer. Say——”

“But he won’t have the money,” I protested. “I can’t let him——”

The stranger reappeared.

“I’ve been presooming,” he said. “You’ve been out of measure civil, and, much as I’d like to, I can’t presoome any more. But if you’d lived to own a Lowland and done a thousand miles in that mother’s mistake—well, I guess I’d forgive you for coveting your ideal.”

“That’s all right,” I said warmly. “It’s been a great pleasure to——”

“Wait a moment,” said Agatha. “When you say ‘Much as you’d like to’, what do you mean?”

The American took a deep breath.

“I guess you can’t eat me,” he said, and tilted his hat. “That car’s my car. I knew it the moment I saw her. There may be other Lowlands, but I want my Lowland now. The trouble is you’re in possession.” He waited there for a moment and moistened his lips. “I don’t know who loves her the most: but I love her four thousand dollars, and I’ll come with a banker’s draft in two days’ time.”

Eight hundred pounds.

I frowned.

“Where are you staying?” I said. “It’s—it’s rather sudden, this. I mean, she’s rather useful. But give me twenty-four hours, and——”

“Don’t you think we could do it?” said Agatha, laying a hand on my arm. “After all, we’ve got the Roquefort, and, as Mr. — Mr. ——”

“S. J. Ellis,” said the stranger, bowing again.

“As Mr. Ellis likes her so much . . .”

“But she’s on a permit,” I cried. “She’s got to go back to England. I can sell her in England, but——”

“But he’s going to England,” said Agatha.

“That’s so,” said Mr. Ellis. “I’m doo to stay in Scotland in six weeks’ time.”

There was another silence.

I employed it in wondering how I should explain to the sisters why I had sought to sell in France a car which must go back to England within the year.

“Will you make it nine hundred?” said Agatha suddenly. “Four thousand five hundred dollars, or nine hundred pounds.”

Mr. Ellis fingered his chin.

I was past speaking.

Mr. Ellis threw up his head.

“I’ll see you,” he said. “Nine hundred. Would you be at Lally on Friday at twelve o’clock?”

“Yes,” said Agatha. “At the Continental Hotel.”

“Then it’s a deal?”

Agatha did not answer, and, when I looked up, I found they were looking at me.

“Very well,” I said faintly.

“Hooroosh!” screamed Mr. Ellis, and flung up his hat.

His explosion of joy was most depressing. Amid other speculation, I wondered what he would say, when he saw from her papers that the value I had set upon the Lowland was two hundred and fifty pounds. I also

wondered what Agatha would say if, out of the proceeds of the theft, I purchased another car.

She and Brenda were plainly as pleased as Punch and abetted the stranger's delirium with undisguised glee. I smiled a good deal, said 'Not at all' several times, and pictured us carrying pails up the Col de Fer, I decided to try and purchase a milkman's yoke. Then I subtracted two hundred and fifty from nine hundred and felt rather faint.

There was only one thing to be done. As soon as the money had passed, we must disappear. The moment he looked at the papers, Mr. Ellis was sure to return. Of course he had no sort of case. Still, two hundred and sixty per cent. I think even George . . . Oh, undoubtedly we must disappear. The moment the money had—— It occurred to me with a shock that, hampered by the Roquefort, no man could disappear. Deprived of her tender, she would not do thirty miles a day. As for using the Col de Fer . . .

Mr. Ellis shook hands all round and got into his car.

"Till Friday, friends," he cried, with his eyes devouring the Lowland and a grin of infatuate contentment absorbing his face.

"So long," I said gaily. "So long."

We watched him pass out of sight.

Agatha turned to me twittering.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she said.

"Marvellous," said I faintly.

She took my arm and started to stroll down the road.

"But you ought to have asked a thousand. I'm sure he'd have come right in. Mr. Scarlett——"

"I don't think so," said I. "He could buy a new one for——"

"Business is business," said Agatha. "Never mind. I'm so pleased."

I put a hand to my head.

"It's very sweet of you," said I. "And of course it's all your doing. You put the deal through."

"I know. My dear, you're quite hopeless. Mr. Scarlett would have asked a thousand and got it, too. You were all right at first. Sticky isn't the word. But you kept it up far too long. When you said you couldn't sell out of

England, I nearly died. Anyone would have thought that nothing would induce you to sell. Never mind. It gave me my chance. Now I don't feel so guilty about taking up all your time. You must cable to Mr. Scarlett and give him your news."

"Very well," said I obediently.

It was Thursday evening, and Brenda had gone to bed.

Agatha and I were walking in the curtilage of Lally's casino, listening to the roar of falling water in the valley below. Its curtilage was as wealthy as the casino was poor: the mountains and the forests and the starlight and the sweet smell of hay made up a fabulous world.

The day had not been wasted. That afternoon we had reconnoitred the pass. The Lowland had taken us up in just under an hour. On the way back I selected the various places at which a big car could possibly be berthed for the night. This, mechanically. The Roquefort would never use them. She would have four hours in which to attain the summit. And when we had wasted four hours, we would leave by some other road. When you are escaping from Justice . . .

"Did you send the cable?" said Agatha.

"No," said I. "I didn't. I'm going to write."

" 'Going to'?"

"Well," said I, "supposing he doesn't turn up?"

"Of course he'll turn up. D'you think we could possibly say that we meant a thousand?"

"No," I said shakily, "I don't. As it is . . ."

I hesitated.

"What?" said Agatha.

"I wish," said I, "you wouldn't attempt the pass. The Roquefort 'll never do it under a week."

"One full day," said Agatha stoutly.

"I'll take your figure," said I. "Call it one day. You won't call it that by sundown, but let that pass. One day. That means that to-morrow we'll have to leave her out and make our way back to Lally to spend the night."

Agatha shook her fair head.

"The thing to do is to wait till the weather's more cool. Then we'll get up at dawn one morning and do the trick. I rather like Lally," she added. "I shouldn't mind a week here at all. But you mustn't let us keep you. Now that you've sold the Lowland——"

"We can't stay here," said I. "Not after noon to-morrow. When Ellis sees her papers, the man'll go out of his mind."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

"Because he's been robbed," said I. "Done down, despoiled, eaten. In her papers that car is valued at two hundred and fifty pounds. My valuation, mark you. When he sees that, what d'you think Ellis will do?"

"Oh, my dear," said Agatha, finger to lip.

"Exactly," said I. "He'll come back. I don't say he's got a good case, but I don't think that'll stop him. It wouldn't stop me. Before he's through, they'll have heard him talking in Spain. I don't care for myself, but *you're* in it. You're in it up to the neck. He offered more than three times her value, *and you put him up*."

"Oh, Bill," said Agatha faintly.

"I think we'd better tell him," said I. "It won't be pleasant, but you can go for a walk."

"If you do, he won't give six hundred. He'll look you up and down and offer you four."

"So much the better," said I. "Then the deal will be off."

"But——"

"My dear," said I, "I don't care. I—I don't want to sell. Later, perhaps; but not now. It—it isn't convenient."

Agatha stared.

"But Mr. Scarlett——"

"Oh, damn Mr. Scarlett," said I. "This is my show. I won't sell the Lowland. And if Ellis is mad—if, knowing her value, he still wants to buy at nine hundred, he can drive me down to Pau and I'll purchase another car."

"But, I thought——"

“Don’t thwart me,” said I. “I can’t bear it. I’ve undergone a great strain. Several great strains. Without the Lowland we should never have got to Pau. The Roquefort cumbers the earth. It’s not a car. It’s a tank—a septic tank. To set out alone with that central-heating circus—why, even Ellis wouldn’t do it. The very idea’s fantastic. I’ve never understood yet how you got to Marmande. With the Lowland—yes. You’ve a car to fetch and carry and flick you home, if you’re stuck. Look at St. Justin. But without a tender . . . Agatha dear, you must see . . .”

Agatha stared straight ahead.

“Yes, I see now,” she said quietly. “I can’t think how I was so simple. So that’s why you wouldn’t offer the Lowland. That’s why, when you got your chance, you tried to choke Ellis off.” There was a deadly silence. “And that’s why, if he will have her, you’ll spend Mr. Scarlett’s money in buying another car. I’m sorry, my dear, but that’s a sort of ‘service’ I can’t accept.”

“It’s not a sort that I offer,” said I firmly. “I’m only a friend of George Scarlett’s. He had to go down to Surrey, and I—I held the fort for an afternoon. It happened that the Roquefort was mine. When I sold her to you, I dropped fourteen hundred pounds. But what worried me was that I knew that she’d let you down. So I bought the Lowland from George and made for Marmande. I—I thought you’d be glad to exchange after fifty miles. When I put the brute away at St. Justin, I never imagined you’d want to see her again. And I really took you to Biarritz to show you what the Lowland could do. When you still loved the Roquefort next day, I threw in my hand.”

Agatha stood very still.

“I’m afraid,” she said, “I have a confession to make. Cicely Stroud and I are very old friends. I found her in the cloak-room at Biarritz. And, when she heard you were with me, I—I learned quite a lot. Of course I was pretty certain, but she cleared it up.”

I stared at her open-mouthed.

Then I caught her white wrists.

“Then you knew,” I cried. “Then you’ve known. You’ve known all along.”

“What?” said Agatha.

“What sort of ‘service’ it was I was offering you.”

“I—I suppose so.”

I put my arms about her and drew her close.

“Agatha, sweetheart, I offer it always,” I said.

With a little laugh she set her arms round my neck.

When at last I remembered Mr. Ellis, Agatha took my face in her hands.

“He was with you at Oxford,” she said. “ ‘He used to hunt with the Bicester and ride very straight.’ He was also quite a good actor. I think he is still.”

“It runs in the family,” said I.

IN EVIDENCE

THE curtain finally descended upon the successful revue, and the tall, dark girl in the striking crimson coat rose to her feet. For the first time that she could remember, Alathea Harwich had gone to the play alone. More. Out of a full house there was nobody present that she knew. It was plain, however, that plenty of those present knew her. As she made her way out of the theatre, surreptitious whispers and nudges declared this fact.

She did not wait for a taxi, but left the building afoot. Two minutes later she was standing within the stage-door.

As she turned to the keeper, Miss Deodore's pert maid appeared.

"Will you come this way, my lady?"

Alathea followed her to the star's dressing-room.

Her reception was effusive.

Mona Deodore embraced her warmly, and 'Tops', the pre-eminent comedian, imprisoned her hand and drew her on to a sofa with his arm close about her waist.

Alathea submitted gracefully.

Mona pointed to a well-furnished tray.

"What'll you have, darling?"

"Nothing, thanks," said Alathea. "I've—I've sworn off drink after dinner, to please *la mère*."

"Oh, you must have something," said Mona, dropping into a chair. "I've got a new toast. 'Law and Order', darling. Wait till I get in the box. You know it's fixed for Thursday?"

Alathea nodded.

"Silence!" barked 'Tops', after the manner of an usher. "Be uncovered in court. Any more for the Lido? Which reminds me, I've got a lovely gag for Thursday night. You know where Mona——"

Here the door was opened, and the pert maid re-entered the room.

"Mr. Lemonbaum is here, madam."

“Oh, bring him in,” said Mona airily.

Alathea’s spirits sank. That she loathed the solicitor was nothing. What troubled her was that his arrival was not accidental. She knew that instinctively. He had been sent for on purpose to deal with her.

The fellow came in unpleasantly. This was hardly his fault. By the mere fact of being present, Mr. Lemonbaum committed an offence against whatever company he kept. It follows that his comings in were obnoxious. Only his goings out were unexceptionable. Someone in the City had said of him that he could very well pose for any three of the seven deadly sins.

“Nunc, nunc, Teddy dear,” cried Mona. “How’s the case?”

“Safe and sound,” said the lawyer, sucking his lips. He bowed to Alathea. “I dined with Habakkuk this evening,” he added deliberately. “He’s very confident. And we’ve got an excellent Judge. He may be trusted to tell the jury that people can’t flash out of a private drive——”

Alathea sat back.

“We were going fast,” she said.

Miss Deodore’s eyelids flickered.

“Under thirty, darling. Tops daren’t drive more than thirty with me in the car.”

There was a little silence. The lie demanded digestion.

At length—

“Speed’s very deceptive, Lady Alathea,” said the lawyer pompously. “Happily Mona had just looked at the speedometer. If you remember——”

“It’s all rather—rather hazy,” said Alathea. “It’s nearly a year since it happened, and—and—I wish you wouldn’t call me,” she added jerkily.

“Needs must, sweetheart,” said Mona carelessly. She raised her glass to her lips and took a deep draught. “Our gilded reputation’s at stake. An’ I’m not going to let a couple of old pot ferns put it over this rose. ‘The woman has been drinking, Fanny.’ You heard her say that?”

Alathea nodded.

She had heard the deliberate statement, and she had heard Miss Deodore’s reply. If the latter was to be given in evidence . . .

‘Tops’ rose to his feet and adjusted an imaginary wig.

“I think your name,” he announced, “is Ernest Topham Shoal, late organ-grinder to the First Phat Pheet and Vice-President of the Anti-Bust-Bodice and Bung-oh Society.”

There was a burst of laughter, to which Alathea mechanically subscribed.

As it died down—

“You see, Lady Alathea,” said the lawyer, “you are the only independent witness we have. Mr. Shoal was driving: the car was Mona’s car. Again, though the action has been brought against Mr. Shoal, Mona and he have been associated for so long that it would be impossible for any jury to regard her evidence in quite the same light as yours.”

“I quite see that,” said Alathea. “What bothers me is that it happened so long ago. I’m to be asked about something which isn’t fresh in my mind.”

“Nerves, darling,” said Mona. “You wait till they try to bounce you, and you’ll remember all right.”

“Do you mean to say, sir,” said ‘Tops’, “that you have the effrontery to stand there and tell the Court that, as the direct result of the collision, Miss Fanny Fennel’s bustle wasn’t shifted two inches out of the true?”

Mona and Mr. Lemonbaum paid another tribute of mirth.

“All the same,” said the lawyer comfortably, “I can appreciate Lady Alathea’s, er, misgivings. It is some time since it happened. The Law’s delays, you know.” He produced some documents. “Happily, I have her statement here. I think if we just ran through it . . .”

“My statement?” said Alathea, frowning.

“Your statement,” said the other, unfolding some type-written sheets. “It was taken down in shorthand the morning you came to my office, nearly—nearly a year ago. When your memory was fresh, Lady Alathea. I always have a shorthand-clerk present, to avoid the possibility of mistake.” He looked at Miss Deodore. “Are we likely to be disturbed? No? Well, while Lady Alathea and I go through it, I think it would be a good thing if you read through yours. And you yours, Mr. Shoal. You see, after this long interval . . .”

When, half an hour later, Alathea Harwich left the theatre, she was profoundly depressed.

It was now some eighteen months since, to the distress of her parents, she had chosen to sit at the feet of Mona Deodore. There were worse feet, certainly: but Mona, 'Tops' Shoal and their easy-going Court were of a different school to that to which the Levels belonged.

Both sides had behaved very well.

Lady Level had invited Mona to Charles Street, and Mona had made excuse. When the Levels had gone to her theatre, Mona had not 'asked them behind', but had visited them in their box when the play was done. Other such courtesies had been observed. The Levels were consistently cordial, and Mona as firmly refused to 'foul the old birds' nest. If it amuses Ally to play around on our muck-heap . . .'

It did amuse 'Ally' very much. For seven months the lady had played nowhere else.

Miss Deodore was a good sort. She was also remarkably clever, tough as you make 'em and preternaturally shrewd. She had started life in a Liverpool doss-house, and now, at thirty-five she was earning six hundred a week. Her virtues were more apparent than her faults, for all of which I think she may be forgiven, but—rub her too hard the wrong way, and she would stick at nothing to gain revenge.

The accident at Gray's Foley had opened her *protégée's* eyes.

The big Isotta coupé was hurrying home. 'Tops', who was driving, had tried to bite Mona's ear. As he succeeded, there was a splintering crash. A Rolls had curled out of a drive, and the coupé had caught and crushed it against a neighbouring wall. By a miracle no one had been hurt, but what was left of the Rolls, which had been brand-new, was scarcely worth taking up.

Shaken by the collision, fortified by three cocktails, eager to vindicate 'Tops', Miss Deodore had stepped incontinently into the ring.

Equally shaken, enraged by the destruction of her car, thrice armed because her quarrel was just, Miss Angela Fennel had spoken—with ice in her breath.

'The woman has been drinking, Fanny.'

The observation was supererogatory and would have been unpardonable, had it not been palpably true.

The scene which followed, Alathea strove to forget.

Mona had thrown back to the doss-house in which she was born: Miss Angela Fennel had listened with something of the grim detachment of a High Court Judge: Alathea had prayed for death: 'Tops', who knew Mona, was careful to hold his peace.

Mercifully, there was no audience, and after a while Alathea and 'Tops' had contrived to get Mona away. Only they, the Misses Fennel and their chauffeur had witnessed the scene.

The burden of that hot afternoon brought forth fruit.

It shattered Alathea's illusions regarding the company she kept. It involved her in a publicity, which the day before she would have welcomed, which now she loathed. It provided continuous employment for several men engaged in the motor-car trade for several weeks. And it led to the issue of a writ against Ernest Topham Shoal, actor, and a claim for special damage of two thousand five hundred pounds.

Staring out of her taxi, Alathea recalled the publicity with her underlip caught in her teeth.

And now, nearly a year later, when her wretched excursion into the limelight was being rapidly forgotten, her lapse was to be advertised, the most lurid incident of an unfortunate association was to be actually broadcast. More. The truth would be black enough, but that was not to be her portion. A pitched battle was to be fought before the world, and she was to play her part on the wrong side—*on the wrong side*.

Truth, Decency, Justice stood by Miss Fennel's shoulder: Alathea must face the four, because, come what might, she could not let her friends down . . . *her friends*.

Remembering Mr. Lemonbaum, Alathea felt rather sick.

His attentions, his courtesies, were monstrous. On the score of knowing his daughter, the man had accosted Lord Level in more than one public place. But that was nothing. To-night the fellow had shown her that he more than half suspected that she would go back on 'her friends'. Mr. Lemonbaum might be odious, but he was no fool.

Alathea felt ready to choke.

She dismissed her taxi in Bruton Street, intending to dance for an hour. Perhaps, after that, she would be able to sleep.

As she passed up the steps of a mansion, she let fall her bag. This was restored to her by a shy, fair-haired stranger who had that moment arrived.

The young man was patently nervous and seemed very glad of her smile. Alathea wrote him down for a Civil Servant who would have been happier in bed.

They passed into the hall together.

"Excuse me, but I am your hostess. May I ask who invited you here?"

The words cut through the babel, as the cry of an owl through the clamorous croaking of frogs.

Out of thirty people within earshot, Alathea looked round to see Mrs. Dellaby Low confronting the shy young man who had picked up her bag.

The latter was crimson: his honest blue eyes were big with trouble: he looked round desperately.

"I brought him," said Alathea swiftly. "I ought to have introduced him, but you know what I am." She stepped to him quickly and laid a hand on his arm. "Mr. Welwyn—Mrs. Dellaby Low. You ought to have found me, Roger, but I suppose it's my fault. Let's finish this dance, shall we?"

Mrs. Dellaby Low's features relaxed in a smile.

"I refuse to apologize," she said. "Take it out on her, Mr. Welwyn, and put it across her for me. She's made fools of us both. I'm very glad to see you, you know. Send me a note to-morrow and I'll put you down on my list."

The young man bowed in silence.

Then he took Alathea's hand and began to dance.

When the measure was finished, she led the way to two seats on a bend of the stairs.

The young man glanced up and down. Then—

"Why did you do this?" he said.

"I don't know," said Alathea. "You didn't look like a gate-crasher, and I —I guessed there was some mistake."

"I dined to-night with some people I hardly know. We were to go on and dance. There wasn't room for me in the cars, so they told me where to meet them, and I took a cab. I expect they thought it was funny to send me to the wrong house. It—it was rather, from their point of view."

“I don’t think it was funny. I think it was a rotten trick.”

“You’re not like them.”

“How do you know?”

The young man laughed. His shyness was passing away.

“You’ve given me a lot to go on,” he said. “My name is Lambourne—John Lambourne. I hope one day I’ll be able to show you that I’m grateful for what you’ve done.”

“You dance all right,” said Alathea, “but I’ve never seen you about.”

“I go out very little,” said Lambourne. “I’m at the Bar, you see, and I work pretty hard.”

“I see,” said Alathea slowly. “Do—do you know Mr. Lemonbaum?”

The other raised his eyebrows.

“I know of him. Most people do. He—he doesn’t employ me.”

Alathea nodded.

“He wouldn’t,” she said. “Never mind. I think you should go out sometimes. If you did, you wouldn’t be had, as you were to-night.”

“I’d go every night if I knew you were going to be there.”

Alathea smiled.

“I’m not always so nice,” she said. “Still, if you want to love me, I’ll play you up. Try 66 Charles Street on Monday at half-past ten. It’s a very small dance. Lady Level, my mother, ’s your hostess, and—an’ I bet you don’t come.”

The man started violently.

“Lady Level,” he said. “Then you’re Alathea Harwich. You’re . . .”

The girl looked at him keenly.

“That’s right, Mr. Lambourne,” she said. “What do you know?”

Lambourne put a hand to his head.

“I’m against you,” he said. “Against you. *Fennel* v. *Shoal*. I’ve the junior brief against you on Thursday. And I’m to cross-examine you. My leader will take the others, but I’m to attend to you.”

Alathea rose to her feet.

“So you know,” she said quietly. “You’ve had an advance copy of my, er, outlook. Well, now you see. I told you you wouldn’t come.”

The man had gone very white.

“I shall come,” he said quickly. “I mustn’t say anything else, because I’m the other side. I shall come to your home in the hope that—that you’ll play me up. But I don’t think that I shall be admitted—on Monday next.”

“Do you believe in me?”

“I’ve been paid to discredit you. I can’t return the brief, because it’s too late. I may have to——”

“I don’t care about that. Do you believe in me?”

The man took her hand and put it up to his lips. Then he took a deep breath.

“Of course, I don’t,” he said. “I’m on the other side.”

When upon Thursday evening, Alathea Harwich returned to her father’s house, her body felt as though it had been beaten with rods. This was because her innermost soul had been bruised.

She had not given evidence—yet. To-morrow morning she was to enter the box. But she had been in court.

She had seen the quiet dignity of Miss Fennel, the tremulous sincerity of her sister, the outraged devotion of the chauffeur who had served the two, boy and man, for thirty-five years.

She had heard Mr. Tristram, K.C., and, with him, John—John Lambourne, presenting their simple case in calm, restrained language and dealing with rough and smooth in the same well-mannered way.

She had also heard Mr. Habakkuk. The latter was plainly skilful. His manners, however, left much to be desired. His junior was a nephew of Mr. Lemonbaum and strikingly resembled his uncle in colour and speech.

‘Tops’ had given evidence and had made a very poor show. He had not broken down, but, when he was put to the touch, he had not ‘come off’. He had lied, but without conviction. The man had a good heart and was frankly ashamed. His patent infirmity of purpose had inflamed Miss Deodore with the spirit of Lady Macbeth.

‘Give me the daggers.’

For sheer audacity her performance must stand alone.

With an air of the most artless and childlike innocence, she left no stone unturned to glorify the defendant and bring the plaintiff and her cause into contempt. Tristram could do nothing with her. Faithfully maintaining the demeanour of a scandalized nun, she omitted no circumstance of outrage. Misrepresentation, ridicule, abuse flowed from her guileless answers with the winning simplicity of a mountain rill. Her manifest reluctance to condemn was a peculiar triumph. Counsel had repeatedly to request her to raise her voice.

The Judge, who did not go to theatres, was duly impressed and joined in the roars of laughter again and again. The jury laughed also. Later, the general public could hardly believe its eyes.

The Court had adjourned, and Alathea Harwich had slipped away.

As she drove down the Strand, the evening papers were reeking with the savoury stew.

'STAGE FAVOURITES IN THE BOX.'

None of them explained that Miss Deodore's back answers were due to the ingenuousness of a nun.

John Lambourne rose to his feet and looked up at the witness-box.

Alathea looked back.

"Were you in court yesterday, Lady Alathea?"

"Yes."

"All day?"

"Yes."

"Then you know that there is a direct conflict of evidence upon not one, but nearly every vital point?"

"Yes."

"In other words, that one side or the other is misrepresenting the facts?"

"I suppose so."

"Very well. On the day of the accident where did you lunch?"

"At a private house in the country."

“With Miss Deodore and Mr. Shoal?”

“Yes.”

“The accident happened at six?”

“Yes.”

“What time did you leave the private house?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Before tea?”

“Oh, no. It was after tea.”

As she spoke, Alathea remembered that Mona and ‘Tops’ had sworn that they had no tea.

“You did have tea, then?”

“Yes.”

“Were you offered anything instead of tea?”

“I was.”

“But you drank tea?”

“Yes.”

“What did Miss Deodore do, while you were having tea?”

“She sat with us.”

“And Mr. Shoal?”

“I think so.”

“But had no tea?”

“No.”

“Were they offered anything instead of tea?”

“I expect so. I don’t remember.”

“Did they take anything instead of tea?”

Alathea braced herself.

“No.”

“You can’t remember whether they were offered anything, but you can remember that they didn’t take anything. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“I see. Why is their abstention impressed upon your memory? Was it unusual?”

“I don’t know. I just happen to remember.”

“Didn’t it surprise you?”

“I never thought about it.”

“I see. What were you offered? A cocktail?”

“Yes.”

“Were cocktails mixed?”

“Yes.”

“And consumed?”

“Yes.”

“But not by Miss Deodore or Mr. Shoal?”

“No.”

“It was a small party. I think only six in all?”

“That’s right.”

“How many drank tea?”

“Two of us.”

“So that only two drank the cocktails?”

“Yes.”

“Were they mixed in the room?”

“Yes.”

“Who mixed them?”

“I think Mr. Shoal did.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I think he was asked to.”

“Was it his own receipt?”

“It may have been.”

“But, in spite of that, he didn’t drink one?”

“No.”

“Weren’t you pressed to have one?”

“Yes.”

“Wasn’t he? I mean, he’d made them.”

“I expect he was.”

“But he refused?”

“He didn’t drink one.”

“Nor Miss Deodore?”

“No.”

“Did you refuse because there weren’t enough to go round?”

“No. I preferred tea.”

“Are you sure there were enough to go round?”

“More than enough. I tell you, I preferred tea.”

“ ‘More than enough’, and there were six of you. Then he made seven or eight?”

Alathea moistened her lips.

“I can’t remember. I know that there were enough.”

“That would be six—at least?”

“Yes.”

“And two of you drank tea?”

“Yes.”

“And two of you drank nothing?”

“Yes.”

“There were, therefore, at least four cocktails going spare?”

“I suppose so.”

“The special cocktails which Mr. Shoal had taken the trouble to mix?”

“They may have been drunk. I don’t know.”

“Will you swear that they were *not* drunk?”

“No.”

“If they were drunk, who drank them?”

“I—I can’t remember.”

There was a moment’s silence. Then everyone in court seemed to move. Glances were exchanged. With raised eyebrows the Judge was making a note. Someone was speaking his neighbour and smiling behind his hand. Alathea could have sunk through the floor. Why on earth had she mentioned the cocktails? She had shown the truth, but not told it. She had . . .

“Now, after tea, Lady Alathea, you left in the car?”

“Yes.”

“Miss Deodore was due at the theatre at eight o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“Were you due anywhere?”

“No.”

“Where were you going?”

“I was with Miss Deodore.”

“Were you going to the theatre?”

“I can’t remember exactly, but I expect I was to be dropped.”

“At some point near your home?”

“Yes.”

“That was what usually happened upon excursions like this?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ever dine with Miss Deodore?”

“Sometimes.”

“At what hour?”

“About seven o’clock.”

“But on this occasion you were to dine at home?”

“Yes.”

“At what time do you dine—at your home?”

Alathea hesitated.

“At half-past seven,” she said.

“So that, if you were not to be late, you would have to be dropped not later than seven o’clock?”

“Thereabouts.”

“Were you expecting to be late?”

“I must have been.”

“Nearly an hour late?”

“Yes.”

“The accident occurred forty miles from London?”

“Yes.”

“If those forty miles had been covered in an hour, you would not have been late, would you?”

“No.”

“And Miss Deodore and Mr. Shoal would have had time for dinner?”

“Yes.”

“The car was quite capable of doing it, wasn’t it?”

“I should say so.”

“Have you ever known Miss Deodore miss her dinner before?”

“I think she usually went home.”

“Have you ever known her not do so?”

“I wasn’t with her all the time. Her servants could probably——”

“Have *you* ever known her not do so?”

“No.”

“Yet on this occasion, though they had had nothing since lunch, she and Mr. Shoal deliberately determined to forego their dinner and make you an hour late, rather than exceed an average of twenty miles an hour?”

“I don’t know what they determined.”

“But you knew they were driving to the theatre?”

“They hadn’t said so.”

“What? No discussion at all?”

“I—I don’t think so,” desperately.

“Then you thought that Miss Deodore was going home?”

“I don’t think I thought about it at all.”

“You took it for granted?”

“I may have.”

“But wasn’t it obvious that she couldn’t do it?”

“I don’t know. It—it all depended.”

“On what?”

“On—on the traffic we met.”

“Didn’t it depend upon what pace you went?”

“I suppose so—to some extent.”

“Almost entirely, Lady Alathea?”

“To a great extent.”

“Exactly. And is that why it never occurred to you that Miss Deodore was not going home?”

Alathea looked round helplessly.

The Judge laid down his pen.

“Listen,” he said. “Miss Deodore usually went home—to dinner, about seven o’clock. If it was clear that, so far from following this practice, unless she drove direct to the theatre, she would not be in time to take her place upon the stage, wouldn’t it have been the natural thing for somebody to say so?”

“I—I think it would, my lord.”

“If, on the other hand, you were all three well aware that the car in Mr. Shoal’s hands would bring Miss Deodore to her home by seven o’clock, there would have been no reason to say anything?”

“No, my lord.”

“Nothing *was* said?”

“No, my lord.”

The Judge sat back in his seat, and again the tell-tale rustle ran through the court. Another round was over. Alathea closed her eyes. If only she could see what was coming. Of course she should have said . . .

Lambourne was speaking.

"When did you first see the plaintiff's car?"

"Not until we were upon it."

"The instant before the smash?"

"As the smash occurred."

"How was it you didn't see it before?"

"I wasn't looking out."

"Where were you looking?"

"I think I was looking to my right."

"At what?"

"At Miss Deodore."

"And Mr. Shoal?"

"They were both on my right."

"What were they doing?"

"So far as I remember, they were laughing."

"Were they looking out?"

"Yes."

"Will you swear that?"

"Yes."

"What happened next?"

"The accident."

"As you looked round?"

"Yes."

"What made you look round?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't expect an accident?"

“Oh, no.”

“You were looking at your companions, who were laughing; as you looked round, the accident occurred?”

Alathea nodded.

“They were laughing when the accident occurred?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“They were laughing when you looked away?”

“I think so.”

“And, as you looked away, the accident occurred?”

“Yes.”

“No warning cry from Miss Deodore?”

“No.”

“No exclamation from Mr. Shoal?”

“I didn’t hear one.”

“Although they were looking out?”

“It was all over in a flash.”

“Didn’t you cry out?”

“Yes—too late.”

As she said the words, Alathea could have bitten out her tongue.

“Too late for what?”

“To be of any good.”

“What did you exclaim?”

“I think I cried out ‘Look out’.”

“Whom were you addressing?”

“No one in particular.”

“Weren’t you addressing Mr. Shoal?”

“I suppose I must have been.”

“Endeavouring to warn him?”

“He didn’t need any warning.”

"Because he was looking out?"

"Yes."

"Then, even if you had cried out before you did, it would have been futile?"

"I—I imagine so."

"Because he was looking out?"

"Yes."

"Then, what did you mean just now when you said that you cried out 'too late'? '*Too late to be of any good*'?"

There was a deadly silence.

Alathea stared straight ahead.

"You see my point, Lady Alathea?"

"I—I think so."

"If Mr. Shoal *hadn't* been looking out, your injunction would have been very appropriate, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"And, delivered a little earlier, very valuable?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't that just what you meant when you said that you cried out 'too late'?"

"No."

"Then what did you mean?"

"It—it was just an expression."

Again that movement—more pronounced this time. The Associate looked up at the ceiling and then away. There was a definite murmur. An usher cried 'Silence!' suddenly. Alathea felt cold with shame. Why on earth had she made that mistake? In the papers to-morrow—to-night . . .

"Only one more matter, Lady Alathea. After the accident you got out?"

"Yes."

"I think there was a discussion."

“Yes.”

“Did you join in it?”

“No.”

“Did you hear it?”

“Some of it.”

“Each party insisted that the other was in the wrong?”

“Yes.”

“Everybody was shaken up?”

“Naturally.”

“The Misses Fennel were imprisoned within their car?”

“Yes.”

“Do you agree that there was an unfortunate scene?”

“Yes.”

“Miss Deodore was greatly offended?”

“She had reason to be.”

“Did you try to get her away?”

“I suggested that it was no good quarrelling.”

“Effectually?”

“Not at first.”

“Why?”

“She wouldn’t listen to me.”

“Was she beside herself?”

“She was highly indignant.”

“And abusive?”

Alathea hesitated.

“I don’t think she knew what she was saying.”

“Would you say the same of Miss Fennel?”

“She seemed more collected.”

“Although she is more than twice Miss Deodore’s age?”

“She had not been insulted.”

“By a suggestion of intemperance?”

“Yes.”

“Do you attribute Miss Deodore’s behaviour to that suggestion?”

“Entirely. It made her see red.”

“Because it was untrue?”

“Of course.”

“Wasn’t her conduct equally consistent with its truth?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Wasn’t it? Quick to take offence—not knowing what she was saying—refusing to listen to her friends. Isn’t that precisely the way of someone who has been drinking?”

“I am not in a position to judge.”

“You attribute it entirely to Miss Fennel’s remark?”

“I have said so.”

“Did you hear the remark?”

“Yes.”

Lambourne looked suddenly away.

“What inspired that remark, Lady Alathea?”

“How can I say?”

“You were present: you heard the remark. Remarks like that are not made out of the blue. It wasn’t, for instance, addressed to you, was it? Why was it addressed to Miss Deodore?”

“I wasn’t taking part in the discussion.”

“But Miss Deodore was?”

“Yes.”

“What did she say immediately before that remark was made?”

“I—I can’t remember.”

“Was she insisting that the others were in the wrong?”

“Probably.”

“Furiously?”

“Heatedly.”

“Abusively?”

“I—I don’t think so. She was very upset.”

“This was before the remark was made?”

“Yes.”

“Then her excited condition was *not* entirely due to the suggestion of intemperance?”

“She had had a great shock.”

“So had Miss Fennel: but she was perfectly calm.”

“If she had been, I don’t think she would have made such a remark.”

“I suggest that Miss Fennel did no more than indicate an unpleasant truth.”

“No.”

“Which Miss Deodore proceeded to confirm.”

“No.”

“She didn’t say it of Mr. Shoal?”

“She might just as well have,” hotly.

“With equal justice?”

“With equal injustice. It was a rotten thing to say.”

“Wasn’t it a statement of fact?”

“No.”

“Then it was an irrelevant lie?”

“Yes.”

“Mere vulgar abuse?”

“That’s what it amounted to.”

“Unprovoked?”

“Yes.”

“Spoken by a lady who appeared to be collected and calm?”

“She appeared to be.”

“Weren’t you greatly surprised?”

“Yes.”

“The remark was addressed to her sister?”

“Yes.”

“ ‘The woman has been drinking, Fanny’?”

“Yes.”

“Did you hear her sister’s reply?”

“Yes.”

“ ‘They both have.’ ”

“Yes.”

“More abuse?”

“Yes.”

“This time embracing Mr. Shoal?”

“Yes.”

“No doubt about that?”

“I can see none.”

“Did Mr. Shoal show resentment?”

“I couldn’t say.”

“Where was he standing?”

“On the other side of Miss Deodore.”

“She was between you?”

“Yes.”

“Were they arm in arm?”

“No. She had hold of my arm.”

“Miss Fennel didn’t say ‘They all have’?”

"No."

"There were three of you?"

"Yes."

"And she said 'They both have'?"

"Yes."

"You knew who she meant?"

Alathea hesitated.

"I . . ."

"You could see no doubt about it a moment ago."

"I assumed that she didn't mean me."

"Why?"

Alathea stood very still. A moment ago she had been getting into her stride—putting things right, a moment ago. And now . . .

"Why?"

Before the dread monosyllable a hand crept up to her mouth. The Judge was looking—peering over his glasses in a curiously owl-like way. The jury was leaning forward. In the well of the court Mr. Lemonbaum, shining with sweat, was blowing his nose.

Lambourne sat down.

"Mr. John Lambourne."

Alathea slid across the floor.

"How d'ye do?" she said, shaking hands. She turned to Lady Level. "Mother, this is Mr. Lambourne. I think he's come because I bet him he wouldn't."

"I came because I wanted to," said Lambourne.

Lady Level smiled.

"I hope you'll believe we're glad to have you, Mr. Lambourne."

"It requires an effort, Lady Level."

"Please sit down and make it. I want to talk to you."

Alathea returned to the dance and Lambourne sat down.

"Is it your fault, Mr. Lambourne, that my daughter was on the wrong side?"

"It was my great misfortune."

"You met it uncommonly well."

"I might have spared her, Lady Level."

"If I thought you had spared her, I shouldn't be speaking to you now. How did she behave?"

"As was to be expected—superbly."

Lady Level sighed.

"It didn't read very well. That unfortunate question of drink."

"Everyone in court," said Lambourne, "could see that she had been roped in. I mean, it stood out."

"And everyone out of court associates her with a drunken frolic which developed into an indecent brawl. I asked eighty people to-night, and less than fifty have come."

"But that's absurd," cried Lambourne.

"No, it isn't," said Lady Level. "Even to-day there are some things you mustn't do. Never mind. How's Mr. Lemonbaum?"

"I don't know the gentleman," said Lambourne. "He perspired more than usual on Friday, and, when the jury found for the plaintiff, he went a still darker green."

"I'm so thankful they did," said his hostess. "At least we haven't got a miscarriage of justice upon our souls."

"You owe that to Lady Alathea. She did her best for her side, but——"

"We owe it to you, Mr. Lambourne. I don't suppose Miss Deodore will remember you in her prayers, but—well, you must see why we're grateful."

"I'm not sure that I do."

"Alathea was between the devil and the deep sea. Her sometime friends were the devil, and the deep sea was the truth. You led her into the water against her will."

"I made her very wet," said Lambourne.

“Of course. And she’ll take time to dry. But the other way she would have been scarred. I’m so glad he perspired—Mr. Lemonbaum. Of course he’s the villain of the piece.”

“Without a doubt. The action should never have been fought. He could have settled not once, but a dozen times.”

“He’s the father of lies, Mr. Lambourne. Come and have dinner on Thursday, and we’ll tear him and eat him again. My husband will assist. Besides, he wants to meet you.”

“I’d love to.”

“That’s right. You’re really a great comfort. If you knew the relief of being able to talk with freedom to someone who’s on the right side. Did she hold her head up?”

“Throughout.”

Lady Level nodded approvingly.

Six weeks had gone by, and a game of tennis was ending on the sunk court at Sillabub Hall.

The place was peaceful—had slept at the foot of the Mendips for nearly four hundred years. The Levels loved it. Lord Level himself was never really happy away. Its woods and pastures and waters, its famous lawns and box hedges, its chestnuts and copper beeches, its farms and homesteads made up a fairy-tale kingdom it was his delight to maintain. No estate in all England was better cared for. The manor-house was not big—could shelter, perhaps, ten guests. These, as a rule, were Alathea’s. The Levels’ only son had been killed in the War.

“Game, set,” said Alathea. “You’re much too good. I shan’t play you single again. Why didn’t you go to the Cheese Fair?”

“Because,” said Lambourne, “I wanted to stay with you.”

“And be played up? You’re very faithful.”

“I’m human,” said Lambourne steadily.

Alathea smiled.

“The others won’t be back for an hour. Come and sit down and tell me how lovely I am.”

“That’s very easy,” said Lambourne.

It was. Clean-limbed, straight, slender, the girl was most clearly thoroughbred. Her nose was aquiline; her brown eyes were set far apart; the delicate curve of her mouth gave a fine face real beauty.

Alathea flung out a laugh.

“John, dear, you’re hopeless. ‘The best legs in London’, and my name is mud.”

“You know it isn’t,” said Lambourne.

“I’ve had four invitations *in all*, since I went through the hoop.”

“Jealousy,” said the man. “You know that as well as I. You’re dangerous —damned dangerous. An excuse to omit you is just what the girls’ mothers want.”

“Put it that way if you like. It comes to the same thing. I am disqualified.”

“Suspended,” said Lambourne. “Suspended for a couple of months.”

“Or years,” said Alathea. “I mayn’t be down and out, but I’m certainly down. And I wouldn’t care a kick, if I didn’t know it was just. I bought it, John. I said ‘I’ll have that’ and bought it. That’s what fazes your idol.”

“I refuse to argue,” said Lambourne. “Everyone knows you’re white, so what do you care?”

“You told me once you didn’t believe in me.”

“You knew it was a lie, Alathea.”

The girl nodded thoughtfully.

“Yes. I knew it was a lie. At least, I was almost sure. But you made me uncertain in court.”

“When I cross-examined you?”

“Yes. You treated me perfectly, of course: but you were so very plainly Miss Fennel’s man.”

“I’ll wager Miss Fennel believed in you.”

“I wish I could think so. Never mind. You made me lie and then made me show I was lying. I found it hard to believe that, if you believed in me, you could do such a thing so well.”

“What you said was nothing,” said Lambourne. “I saw the truth in your eyes—like everyone else.”

“Was that why it was so easy?”

“Of course. You gave yourself away. They were very strong cocktails, weren’t they?”

“Yes.”

“And Miss Deodore drank two, and Shoal drank three?”

“Three apiece.”

“And the car was doing sixty, because they had to be home by seven o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“Neither was looking out?”

“No.”

“And both were splashed?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s what your eyes told me. They also said, ‘This is the most humiliating day of my life. I should never have been with these people. I can’t think why I was such a fool. If they win their case, it’ll be an outrage: but I *was* with them and *I will not let them down*.’ ”

“They must be very eloquent—my eyes.”

“They are.”

Alathea lay back on the turf and stared at the sky.

“But what you really love is my mouth, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“And the way I sit on a table, half off and half on?”

“Yes.”

“And you’d like to know what I mean when I talk about ‘playing you up’?”

“How did you know, Alathea?”

“Your eyes, my dear. That’s why I was uncertain in court. I searched them for adoration—and went empty away.”

“Of course. I was against you. My job was to get you unstuck. I had to pretend you were one of Miss Deodore’s crowd.”

“You did it very well, John.”

“I think I did. You see, I was ready, Alathea. I’d seen you. I knew you. That night at Mrs. Dellaby Low’s. Till then, I was fully expecting to have to deal with one of Miss Deodore’s crowd. If I hadn’t been ready, I shouldn’t have put up such a show. You’d have staggered me—knocked me out. Tristram said to me afterwards ‘You did damned well, Lambourne, but I don’t know how you had the heart’.”

“What did you say?”

“I said I hoped and believed you would understand.”

“And came to Charles Street with your heart in your mouth?”

“Yes.”

“As well as in your eyes?”

“I suppose so.”

Alathea sat up.

“John, you’re a lamb. In court you wear wolf’s clothing, and wear it devilish well. If you take my advice, you’ll wear it out of court, too. Otherwise you’ll get eaten. You got badly bitten, when they sent you to the Dellaby Lows’. If I hadn’t been by, you’d have been chewed. And now I’m biting you—deliberately letting you love me and playing you up. Those a lamb likes will always do that to-day: and those he doesn’t care for will always twist his tail. So wear your wolf’s clothing, John, and pass in the crowd.”

“I like your bites,” said Lambourne.

“Ah,” said my lady, rising. “Wait till you’re licking your wounds.”

They strolled to the house and passed through a sunlit parlour into the cool of the hall. This was dim and silent. Its great flagstones, laid with rugs, gave back no sound: its dark, oak walls rendered no light.

A splash of white on a table argued the afternoon mail.

Lambourne stooped to peer at the letters. Because of the sunshine without, the addresses were hard to read. He shut his eyes for a moment—then stooped again.

As he did so, he knew that Alathea was peering, too. She was right by his side. Her hair was brushing his shoulder; he could feel her breath on his cheek.

Something in the man snapped asunder.

In an instant, his arms were round her and her slim form was braced against his.

Cool hands held off his head.

"That'll do," said Alathea. "That's just as far as I allow wolves to go."

"And lambs?" said John shakily.

"Lambs don't do this sort of thing."

"Yes, they do. Once in their lives."

"Only once, John?"

"Only once, my darling. I want you to be my wife."

"But I've told you again and again I was playing you up."

"I don't care. I'll buy it. Turn me down or take me. I've come to the end of my rope."

Alathea put her arms round his neck.

"Wait till this has blown over—till I'm reinstated, my dear."

"Why on earth should I? I love you. What if some cur dogs snap at your precious heels?"

"I'm marked, darling. You know it."

"I don't. If you were stained, d'you think I'd care? I love you, Alathea. I loved you that night on the steps, when I picked up your bag. It broke my heart that black Friday to do you down. And—and I can't go on without you, I love you so."

He kissed her tenderly, and her hands went about his head.

"Why do you think I asked you that night if you believed in me? That night at the Dellaby Lows'? Why should I have cared whether you believed in me or not?"

"I don't know. I've often wondered."

"Because I loved you, my darling. You were so clean and honest and—and so astoundingly brave."

"Brave, Alathea, sweetheart?"

"Brave. I had just saved you—risked quite a lot to do an absolute stranger a very good turn. Then came the stranger's chance to repay his debt. And you wouldn't take it—*wouldn't smell it*, because you were pledged against me, against the pretty lady who'd saved your life. I fancy it took some courage to play that game."

John Lambourne swallowed.

"I'd taken their money, my darling. I had no choice."

Alathea laughed softly. Then she drew down his head and kissed his eyes.

Presently they returned to the letters.

There was one for Alathea from Lincoln's Inn Fields. . . .

> *The sudden death of Miss Angela Fennel occurred yesterday.*
>
> *We are instructed by Miss Fanny Fennel to enclose a copy of a Codicil which the deceased executed less than six weeks ago and to request that you will believe that the Will contains no direction which she, as sole executrix, will more whole-heartedly discharge.*

The Codicil was very simple.

> *I, Angela Fennel, of High Woods, do make and declare this to be a Codicil to my last Will, which Will bears date the seventeenth day of April 1902. I give and bequeath unto Lady Alathea Harwich of 66 Charles Street, W., whom I do not know, whom I have set eyes on but twice, whose behaviour on each of those most trying occasions commanded my unbounded admiration, the sum of five thousand pounds, which I hope she will accept, as a token of my respect and esteem.*

There was a pregnant silence.

At length—

"How—how very sweet of her," said Alathea tremulously.

"And far-seeing," said John, holding her very close. "It'll be in all the papers."

"How soon?"

“I don’t know. Not for two or three weeks, I expect. The Will must be proved.”

Alathea set her cheek against his.

“That’s right,” she said contentedly. “I don’t want it in yet.”

“Why not, darling? Why——”

“I want our engagement in first. I’d like everyone to know that John Lambourne asked me to marry him, when I was down.”

MAIDEN STAKES

An accident appeared to be inevitable.

A pile of granite blocks sprawled to one side of the way: what remained of the road was most narrow and was edged by a wall: and the three cars were converging at a speed which no brakes could control.

As somebody screamed, the driver of the low two-seater changed gear and, opening wide his throttle, fairly lifted his car out of the jaws of death.

These closed behind him with a splintering crash.

Roderick St. Loe brought the low two-seater to a standstill and slewed himself round in his seat.

After a moment—

"Running-boards and wings," he said shortly. "Nobody hurt, but the devil and all to pay. And, unless you very much want to, I don't think we'll wait. They're certain to say it's my fault."

"How can they?" said Miss Sabine, coolly regarding the jam. "They would have crashed just the same, if we'd been fifty miles off. Oh, and thank you very much for saving my life. I thought I knew something of driving, but only a past master could have won out of that."

"My dear," said St. Loe, "I did the obvious thing." He let in the clutch. "Besides, if I'm to go racing, I ought to be able to yank a car round and about."

Miss Sabine sat very still.

After a little—

"Don't—don't take up racing," she said.

The man stared through the wind-screen.

"I think I shall," he said quietly. "Ewart will take me, and, if you really get going, it's not a bad life. Showing and testing out's a poor sort of game."

"I don't agree," said Miss Sabine. "You mustn't forget that you're pretty good at your job. 'Punch' Fairfax told me that to any motoring firm you were worth five thousand a year."

"The brutal fact remains that I receive five hundred."

"And your expenses," said Miss Sabine. "And, as often as not, a car."

"If I raced—and won," said St. Loe, "I should be pampered. Very big screw, cars, South of France in the winter—and the rest. You see, I should be a human advertisement and, as such, only the very best would be good enough for me. So I think I shall. And now let's talk about you. Does your lady mother see reason?"

"On the contrary," said Miss Sabine, "she's replied with a kidney punch. I couldn't eat any breakfast."

She took a letter from her bag and read a sentence aloud.

> "*I quite hope to be able to continue the allowance I make you, but my expenses are great and, in your own interest, I would suggest that you married the Hirtschmann man: I hate to remind you that I had to marry for money.*"

It was really outrageous.

All the world knew that George Sabine's Will had been proved at nearly six hundred and fifty thousand pounds. The income of this sum had been left to Mrs. Sabine, upon whose death their only child, Gyneth, would inherit the whole. With one consent, widow and orphan had decided to live apart. Duty and taxes took their toll: but the fact remains that out of a clean fourteen thousand, Mrs. Sabine allowed her daughter one hundred and fifty a year.

"So it looks," said Gyneth, putting the letter away, "it looks as though I'd better get off. I can't quite manage George Hirtschmann, but——"

"In another moment," said St. Loe thickly, "I shall commit blasphemy. Your mother——"

"Is a first-class sweep," said Miss Sabine. "It may sound unfilial, but it's perfectly obviously true. Meanwhile, people have been very kind. Most awfully kind. But I can't live on charity for ever, and, to be perfectly honest, I don't want to go on the stage."

The car slid through Como and on to the Erba road.

"You don't ask where you're going," said St. Loe.

"You've very good taste," said Gyneth. "I'm content to leave it to you."

“I know a pub,” said St. Loe, “where the red wine flows. It’s cool and white and it has a balcony. The balcony, as they say, commands extensive views.”

“Will the balcony be crowded?” said Gyneth.

“It wasn’t on Monday,” said St. Loe. “Except for the lizards, I had it all to myself.”

“Take me there, please,” said Gyneth.

The way and the season were lovely, but Roderick wasted no time. Hanging village and vineyard, sleek meadow and chestnut wood, hastening waters and deep emerald valleys picking their delicate way into the hills—these and other beauties he passed with his eyes on the road. The man was for bigger game.

They whipped through Erba and on, past waggon and shrine and fountain and bright-eyed women, kneading their washing in the troughs, outstripping all other traffic with a steady, effortless rush. Neither of them spoke, and Roderick sat like a statue, with his firm chin tilted a little and the shadow of a smile on his lips. From time to time the girl stole a look at his face, but, if he saw her movement, he gave no sign, absorbed in the stanza of motion he had set himself to recite.

St. Loe drove with his heart. His models were the fowls of the air. A car must swoop and hover, must sail and wheel and sink, like a bird on the wing. If it could do these things, it was a good car. If not . . . It was a lot to ask; but the car that passed St. Loe would have pleased a Zoilus.

At the moment he was testing a model of which next to nobody knew. Beneath his locked bonnet lay the hopes of a famous firm. St. Loe had been ordered not to spare her and to make his report on her manners in three weeks’ time.

So they came to the inn—a shy, irregular fable of storey-posts and plaster and casements, its white walls black-lettered by the shade of a thousand leaves.

The house stood back from the road; but the space before it was empty, and the smiling hostess acknowledged that the balcony was free.

The two passed through a cool passage and out of a little door.

Then—

“Oh, my dear,” said Gyneth, and caught her breath.

Foreground there was none. One stood staring, as may stare the high gods upon this pretty document we call the world. Two thousand feet below, lay the Lake of Lecco, more blue and more resplendent than any jewel: beyond, rose up the mountains—the very hatchment of might, majesty and dominion, their immemorial heads powdered with snow: over all hung the cloudless heaven. The air was quick with sunshine: the firmament was gay: Lecco was smiling in its sleep.

The girl put a hand to her head. So much perfection bewildered, the brilliance of the spectacle dazzled, the giant miniature before her was breaking the rules of sight.

"As it was and ever shall be," said St. Loe gently.

My lady nodded, with her eyes on the topless hills. . . .

Luncheon was served—and brought them back to a more genial earth. No one could have been cheerless in such a dining-room. The spirits of the two rose with each simple course.

When the meal was over. Miss Sabine pushed back her chair and crossed her delicate legs.

"The world can go hang," she said. "Is this the spring in my blood, or the Chianti?"

"Neither," said St. Loe. "You always had a great heart. Most women would have squealed this morning, when I went over the weir. But you never so much as blinked."

"Let me be honest," said Gyneth. "My heart stood perfectly still. I even tried to say 'Stop,' but my mouth wouldn't work. Which reminds me—don't take up racing. I rather value your life."

"So do I," said St. Loe. "That's why I propose to enlarge it—turn it on to the fat of the land. Of what use is five hundred a year? Five hundred a year—I ask you. And supposing I wanted to marry . . ."

"No girl that cared would marry you if you raced."

Roderick frowned into space.

"To hear you talk," he said, "anyone would think it was dangerous."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. But—well, it's not exactly clock-golf, is it? I mean, the pace is against you. If anything should miscarry, a couple of miles a minute gives you no time."

St. Loe sighed.

"The old cry," he said. "And only this morning I showed you that a hell of a pace can save you as nothing else. My dear, the speed don't kill you. It's what the other fool does. Look at that wallah to-day. He must have seen the obstruction, and he carefully *waved me on*. An' going all out himself. But on the track there aren't any other fools."

"Nothing doing," said Miss Sabine. "You know as well as I do that it's the pace that kills. Not to-day, perhaps, or to-morrow: but the day after that. If George Hirtschmann would take up racing, I—I believe I'd marry the brute."

Roderick laughed. Then he took out tobacco and started to fill a pipe.

"Unless I race, I can't marry. If I race, no woman who loves me will take me on. Looks rather like celibacy, doesn't it?"

"I don't agree," said Miss Sabine. "But then that's natural enough. Five hundred a year and expenses—well, viewed from my standpoint, you're one of the bloated rich."

St. Loe said nothing, but a hand went up to his mouth.

The girl was honest—honestly believed what she said. Had he told her that she was living at the rate of three thousand a year, she would have found him mad. Yet that was the plain truth.

Gyneth Sabine was always popular, but under her mother's chastisement she became the rage. She was taken everywhere, given the best of everything, royally entertained. She wore Julia Challenger's dresses and Sarah Pardoner's shoes. She had more engagements in London than she could ever keep: in half the counties of England she was a valued guest. She hunted in Leicestershire, stayed with the Festivals for Ascot, kept Christmas at Red Abbey. Her hostess of the moment was the young Duchess of Padua.

That she fared so sumptuously, Gyneth owed to herself. She was certainly lovely and possessed great personal charm, but her open-hearted nature was the quality that grappled her friends. She was most natural and appreciative, coveted nothing at all and, rejoicing with such as rejoiced, wondered at the jealousy of women as at something beyond her ken. High-spirited, quick-witted and eager, she was honoured wherever she went. Crispin Willoughby once said of her, " 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.' " The *mot* was just.

"Let's talk of something else," said St. Loe. "I hear——"

“Half a moment,” said Miss Sabine. “There’s something I want to know. Why this desire for matrimony? Six months ago, at Charing, you exuded content with your lot.”

“I know,” said Roderick. He hesitated. “Since then I’ve—I’ve—I suppose I’ve been sizing things up. You know. Taking stock of life an’—an’ that sort of thing.” He picked up a piece of bread and crossed to the balustrade. “Come and consider the lizards. There aren’t any holes in their philosophy.”

Miss Sabine took a deep breath.

“Why not say that you love me?” she said. “I won’t bite you or anything, and it’s—well, it’s the talk of the town.”

“I’m mad about you,” said Roderick shakily.

“I know. I’m so awfully glad. You see, from the moment I saw you, there’s never been anyone else.”

The man stepped to her side, and she put her arms round his neck. He lifted her up and held her close to his heart.

“But, Gyneth, darling, it’s no good. We can’t possibly live an’ move on what I make: and, if you won’t let me race . . .”

“Of course we can,” said Miss Sabine. “The Larches have next to nothing, and they’ve got a little boy.”

“But they live abroad, my darling. It’s so hard to be poor in England. If I had a job abroad——”

“If you had, my dear, we should probably never have met.”

Roderick let the girl go and returned to the balustrade.

“I want you to be happy,” he said. “And I don’t think you will be happy *without a show*. I don’t think you realize what life without a show means. One servant, buses, washing: listening to a band in the Park—when all your pals are at Goodwood, or setting North: refusing invitations to join the joy-wheel at Nice—‘Roderick can’t get away’; wearing the same old——”

A warm arm stole round his neck and a sweet-smelling palm stopped his mouth.

“I shall have you, Roderick. I know I’ve had a soft time, but I’d rather share your lodgings than live at the Ritz alone.”

St. Loe’s arms were about her.

"Oh, my sweet, are you sure? Life's such a sordid business, and the main use of money to-day is to cover the sordid side. You don't have to be frightfully rich; but, if you haven't enough to cloak, to buy off sordidness—well, it touches you up, you know."

Gyneth leaned her head against his.

"I know," she said. "I've had some. But, so long as you love me, I'll never have any more. You see, my darling, I won't have to be by myself. I can be with you almost the whole of the time. When you take a car out to Monza, I can come too: when you try out a car in England, I can sit by your side: you've next to no office work, and, if you want me, we two can be together day in and day out."

"If I want you," breathed Roderick. "Oh, Gyneth!"

The girl continued excitedly.

"We won't take a flat or furnish: we'll live at some little farm. Just outside London, you know. Two rooms which we can come back to whenever we please. The people will board us, you see, and give us good simple food. And gradually we can furnish—bring home a chair we've found, or a rug, or a print. You see, with a car it's so easy: and you've nearly always a car. Winter or summer we'll have the laugh of the towns, and people with ten times our money will envy our simple fun."

"Gyneth, Gyneth," cried the man. And then, being past speaking, he kissed her eyes and her mouth, and praised God.

To my mind he had done very well. And, if in the end he brushed Uncertainty aside, I do not know who shall throw a stone at him. Because he loved her, he had sought to conjure up a picture which should open the lady's eyes: her reception of his effort had argued that her eyes had been open for six months or more—that she was all ready to wed him and had carefully counted the cost. He could have persisted, certainly—his fears were not wholly laid: but, if he was shrewd, he was human, twenty-six years of age and madly in love. After all, Gyneth was a beggar. If she lay in the bosom of Dives, she must be acutely aware of the presence of Lazarus' sores. Again, one day she would be rich: perhaps to-morrow, perhaps not for twenty years: but one day. Her ship—her galleon was in sight: her future was eventually secure. Above all, he wanted her dreadfully. . . .

Gyneth was speaking.

"I believe half the women to-day propose to the men. Otherwise they wouldn't get them. Still, I did have something to go on. Your blessed face,

that night, when I said I was going abroad. . . . But you wouldn't speak, although I did all I could."

"I hadn't the right," said Roderick.

The girl drew down his head and kissed his lips.

"I'm very lucky," she said. "Only a man in a million loves a woman like that."

A letter of some importance left Monza the following day.

May 31st.

Dear Ewart,

What shocking awful news! Simmons' loss is grievous. He knew no fear. And poor Renny. From what I gather, he'll never walk again. I always hated that race—taking a chance a minute all night long. Well, this looks as if our Spanish cake was dough. I believe we could get Melenger, but I don't think he's worth putting up. And there's no one else—unless you can get St. Loe. He's never raced, I know: but he's got a way with a car. He gave me a lift on Tuesday. He's here with a hush-hush Lapland, trying her out. I tell you, the lad can drive. Maiden's hands, and an eye like a hungry hawk. What's more, he's young. Moves first and thinks afterwards, you know. I should certainly see what's doing. I know he's sleeping in Paris on June 5th.

Yours ever,

Mac.

"Well, there you are," said Ewart, pushing aside his plate. "Thanks to this blasted night-driving, they're buryin' Simmons to-morrow, and Renny'll be on his back for a couple of months. I'm going to put up Akers, because I must: but he knows as well as I do that he's useless outside a track. He's got to see ahead five miles, before he'll put down his foot. Never mind. There's one car manned. If you want to die in the other, let me know."

Roderick St. Loe stared at his finger-bowl.

"I'd—I'd jump at it," he said slowly. "Jump with both feet. But I'm—well, I'm engaged to Gyneth Sabine, and she might stick in her toes."

Ewart's eyelids flickered. Then he lifted his glass.

"There goes a great lady," he said. "I wish you both every joy." He drank deliberately. "I imagine this means that her mother——"

"And then you're wrong," said Roderick.

"What, not a bean?" said the other.

"Not a bean," said Roderick ruefully.

There was a little silence. Then Ewart drew in his breath.

"The old Jewess," he said. "How on earth are you going to live?"

Roderick shrugged his shoulders.

"I make five hundred a year."

Ewart regarded him, blinking.

"Are you being funny?" he said.

Roderick bit his lip.

"She's content," he said shortly. "I put it all before her, and she says it's good enough."

Ewart sighed.

"If she's a good buyer," he said, "and doesn't fly too high, she ought to be able to dress on three hundred a year."

The young man winced visibly.

"I know," he said. "I know. We've had it all out. But it won't be for ever, Ewart. Mrs. Sabine——"

"Is fifty-two," said Ewart, "and full of running. I don't suppose you know it, but I was to have been George Sabine's best man. But she didn't like me a little, and so we called it off."

There was another silence. Then Roderick summoned a smile.

"You're not very hopeful," he said.

"I'm more than hopeful," said Ewart. "I'm devilish glad. I thought she was goin' to Hirtschmann, and the look of it made me sick. But, if you don't want to crash, I think I should wait a little and see if you can't climb up."

"We can't wait long," said Roderick. "Her mother's put on the screw."

"She's not without honour outside that woman's house. Gyneth Sabine is welcome wherever she goes."

"She's sick of cadging," said Roderick.

Ewart considered his wine.

"Every man," he said slowly, "must do his own sum. You say you've hammered it out, and I guess you have. How's the new car?"

St. Loe ignored the inquiry.

"You think it can't be done?"

"On the contrary," said Ewart, "I know very well that it can. You were too young for the War, but you can take it from me that it's astonishing how used one can get to what's called 'doing without.' How's the new car?"

"She's very pleasing," said Roderick absently. "One or two little things, but nothing much. I get my expenses, you know."

"Of course. Railway-fare back, after delivering a car. She can come with you, if you don't mind travelling third. Shall we go to the *Moulin Rouge*?"

"No, thanks," said St. Loe. "I'm moving early to-morrow. What—what about the Spanish Grand Prix?"

Ewart raised his eyebrows.

"It's no good discussing that, if you're not free."

"She might come round," said St. Loe. "Or—or it might be arranged somehow. What do I get?"

Ewart ordered brandy and pushed his open cigar-case across the cloth.

"I can't take you on blind," he said. "Jordan will have to vet you. There's plenty of cunning chauffeurs, but this is a different trade."

"That's understood," said St. Loe. "If Jordan passes me out, what do I get?"

Ewart lighted his cigar.

"There's a market in Spain," he said. "I've studied it for some time, and I've found what it wants. The job is to get away. Well, I'd got everything ready, but nothing done. I was waiting for the Spanish Grand Prix. I meant to win that—and let fly. From the Pyrenees to Gibraltar, *Lapage* all over the place. I think it's a sitter. The *Lapage* is the car for Spain. But she must win the Spanish Grand Prix, or I won't even start."

Roderick nodded, with his eyes on the other's face.

Ewart continued slowly.

"If I take you on, and you lose, I'll give you a thousand pounds. If you win, you can run the show—manage *Lapage* in Spain from bottom to top. On commission, of course; guaranteed, two thousand a year."

Roderick caught his breath. Then he put up a hand and covered his eyes.

The man was dazzled—blinded.

Abroad . . . his own master . . .; two thousand pounds a year.

He saw a Madrid apartment, with tall, curtained windows and the play of a great log fire on the sober walls: he saw Seville at Easter and the blue of the Mediterranean in Malaga Bay: he saw the great pile at Burgos and the long Atlantic rollers, nosing the sands of San Sebastian under the August sun. Against each one of these backgrounds he saw Gyneth—Gyneth lapped in the comfort of the stately flat, Gyneth in the sunshine of Malaga, Gyneth at San Sebastian, with her precious lips parted and the brilliant water leaping about her slim, brown legs . . .

With an effort he found his voice.

"How long will Jordan take to make up his mind?"

"I don't know," said Ewart. "Two or three days, I should think."

St. Loe thought very fast.

"Supposing I can't get leave. If Jordan doesn't like me, I don't want to lose my job."

"That's all right," said Ewart. "I can drop a line to Robson. He knows how I'm placed. But I thought you said the lady would kick."

St. Loe set his teeth.

"I never promised not to," he said: "but I think there was a sort of understanding that I wasn't to race."

"The devil there was," said Ewart. Again his eyelids flickered. "Oh, well, of course, in that case—when will you see her again?"

"Not for ten days. When the Paduas leave for London, they'll bring her along."

Ewart sighed.

"That's done it," he said shortly. "These things are impossible to write. If you could have talked it over. . . . But, you see, I must find someone, and I simply can't wait. As it is, I'm right up against Time," and, with that, he called for his bill.

Roderick stiffened.

"I'll take it on," he said.

Ewart stared.

"But——"

"I'm not going to write, or talk. I—I don't propose to tell her. We weren't to be married till August, and—and—when's the race?"

"Sunday, July twenty-nine. If you're to weigh in, you'll have to see Jordan at once."

"In three days' time," said Roderick.

Ewart nodded.

"But you'd better sleep on it," he said. "Simmons was one in a thousand, and now he's cold. And it's four hundred miles to Tipperary, and a hell of a run."

"I know what I want," said St. Loe.

Ewart wrinkled his nose.

"Can you stand the sun?" he said. "It's apt to be hot."

"Love it," said Roderick shortly. "You'll keep this quiet, won't you? And if anyone gets asking, you might give me another name."

Ewart pulled his moustache.

"She's two months to find out in," he said. "And I don't see how you can hope——"

"It's got to be done—somehow. You must help me, Ewart. Gyneth's got to know nothing, until we're through."

"In that case," said Ewart, "you'd better not mention me. I don't suppose she hears much motoring shop, but the Press has been takin' my name these last three days. Still, we're not off yet. How soon can you be back?"

"If you'll fix things up with Robson, on Friday night."

Ewart nodded. Then he rose to his feet.

"I'll tell Jordan to stand by for Saturday. Be here at ten o'clock, and I'll drive you down."

That night a letter left Paris.

June 5th.

Dear Mac,

Tell no one, but I have St. Loe. His engagement to Gyneth Sabine was rather a snag, but, provided you don't breathe a word, I think we may count her out. If you remember, we devilish near lost Simmons that very same way.

Yours,

J. E.

On the twenty-eighth of July, Miss Sabine laughed shortly and got to her exquisite feet.

"I'm sorry I came," she said.

"Oh, Gyneth."

"Well, isn't it perfectly plain that I'm in the way? We've hardly set eyes on each other since we were engaged. I don't suggest that's your fault: you've got to do as you're told. But the fact remains that, since Como, we've met four times. Four times in two months, Roderick."

"Gyneth, darling, it's been so awfully hard. It's——"

"Wait a minute. I haven't done. Three days ago we were six hundred miles apart. Then, out of the blue, came Judy Boleyn's invitation to come here with her and Adam and stay as long as I like. Here of all places—twenty-five miles from you. And, now that I'm here, you can't even stay to dinner—you 'must get back.' "

"To-morrow, Gyneth."

"What of to-morrow? I'd so looked forward to spending the day with you. And you offer to come 'after dinner' . . ."

St. Loe moistened his lips.

"Listen, my sweet. I'm up to the neck in a very important deal. I'm doing my very utmost to plant a car. I've appointments to-night and to-

morrow I dare not break."

"I wired you that I was coming."

"I know. The appointments were made."

Miss Sabine shrugged her shoulders.

"I want to be reasonable," she said. "I want to believe what you say. But I tell you frankly, Roderick, I'm not quite sure where I am. Your letters have been—well, curious. Excuse after excuse. Why? What for? I've never thrown any stones. If you were to read them through, you'd see what I mean. And now I'm out here, you confirm the impression they've made."

"What impression, Gyneth?"

"I think that you've something to hide. I think you've had something to hide ever since we became engaged."

Desperately the man stared seawards, with his nails driving into his palms.

The Atlantic was a clear sheet of quivering blue. Its million transient dimples made up a million mirrors to mock the sun. This flamed in the heaven, blurring the outline of the mountains, setting the still air dancing, lending shadow a substance that filled the eye. Beneath this fierce benevolence the grounds of the Villa Iriberri glowed with content. The bravery of the hanging gardens and the strip of yellow sand at their foot issued an invitation that smacked of the golden world.

St. Loe put a hand to his head.

Somehow he had kept his secret. For seven weeks he had managed to blindfold his lady's eyes. And now, on the eve of triumph. Fate had brought her to the gates of the Circus itself.

Had she been proposing to attend the race for the Spanish Grand Prix, she could hardly have been more conveniently lodged. The course lay thirty miles distant. San Sebastian and Biarritz were swarming. Iriberri stood upon a headland between the two.

The girl had arrived that morning, had been driven straight to the villa, had so far heard no news. Biarritz was aflame with posters, announcing the race; but an all-night journey is tiring, and Adam Boleyn, her host, had a wound of the War. That he and his wife and Gyneth would keep Sunday within their gates was almost certain. If they did, the race would be over before she knew.

For two most powerful reasons St. Loe dared not tell her the truth. In the first place, she would be furious—would charge him with breaking faith. In the second, she would be frightened to death. The race had a bad name. Between distress and indignation she would undoubtedly require him to stand aside: and when he refused, *she would make it a condition of marriage that he withdrew from the race*.

The man turned suddenly and took the girl in his arms.

"I love you so much, my darling, and I'm on the very edge of such wonderful news. It's been hatching ever since Como. And to-morrow evening, with luck, the deal will be through. And then I can tell you the story from first to last."

Gyneth took his face in her hands.

"Let me look in your eyes," she said.

For a long moment brown eyes held blue.

Then the girl shook her head.

"Not good enough," she said quietly. "There's something at the back of your heart you don't want me to know. Something you're afraid to tell me." In silence the man let her go. "I never thought you'd play me up, Roderick: but it's perfectly plain that I've come upon the scene too soon."

St. Loe stood up very straight.

"That's quite true," he said quietly. "Thirty-six hours too soon. I seem to have mucked things up. In a way it's my fault: and yet I don't know what else I could have done. The future matters so frightfully—your future, I mean. Ever since Como, I've been staring ahead. You know. Like when you're driving. My eyes have been on the future. And I simply haven't seen the present, because, compared with the future, it doesn't count." He stopped there and looked round helplessly. "Of course that's where I blundered. You rather value the present, and I was washing it out. Naturally enough, you're fed up."

"I'm not so fed up as I was a moment ago." The man started forward. "No. Stay where you are. I'm not so fed up, because you've spoken frankly—for the first time in seven weeks. But there's one thing you've got to explain. I simply hate asking you, because, if you lie, I shall know it, and I'm afraid of the truth. But it's got to be done. If we're to be married, my dear, I've got to know why I'm *de trop* . . . what 'appointment' you're

keeping to-morrow . . . why, when I got here this morning, it was thirty-six hours too soon."

The man set his teeth.

"I'll tell you to-morrow," he said.

"You won't see me to-morrow, unless you tell me to-day."

"Oh, Gyneth, trust me this once."

"It's not a question of trusting. I said I wasn't wanted, and you agreed. Thank God, you didn't argue the point. If you had, I'd have finished it then. But you didn't. You didn't lie. You frankly admitted that I had arrived *too soon*. Well, to say the least, that's a pretty straight slap in the face, and, before we go any further, I've a right to be told what you mean."

The man clapped his hands to his eyes.

"To-morrow, Gyneth. I swear it. To-morrow I'll tell you all."

When at last he looked up, he started.

The broad terrace was gay as ever: the faint crush of the rollers stole as sweetly upon his ear: but he was alone.

From the massive oak tea-table Miss Sabine's engagement ring winked at him spitefully.

Dinner that night at Iriberri was not a festive meal.

Even Toby Rage—late joint-tenant of the villa and so, as he put it, a past master of local dissipation—failed to relieve the tension which the sight of Miss Sabine's third finger had brought about.

Cicely Rage was listless: Judy Boleyn was very plainly distressed: Adam was preoccupied: Gyneth herself was painfully debonair.

Toby, who knew and liked Roderick, was ready to burst, and, since it was he that exploded the passionate mine, he may as well speak for himself.

"I give you my word, it was awful. We were about as hearty as a posse of mutes in the wind on a snowy day. I tried to keep things going, but it's very hard to be blithesome at the sign of *The Bleeding Heart*. However, I struggled on. When I'd exhausted my patter, I started on current events.

" 'Who's going racing to-morrow?' I said.

“ ‘I am,’ says Gyneth, all bright and sunny as the frost on a Christmas card.

“ ‘That’s the style,’ said I. ‘But you won’t get into the tribunes. You’ll have to watch them beat it from the side of the course.’

“ ‘Good enough for me,’ says Gyneth. ‘What’s the race of the day?’

“ ‘The Grand Prix of Spain,’ says I.

“ ‘Never heard of it,’ says she. ‘Any English horses running?’

“ ‘It’s not a horse-race,’ says I. ‘It’s cars. I tell you it’s damned exciting. Over four hundred miles, and they average over eighty all the way. They’re doing a hundred and fifty part of the time. If you’ve never——’

“ ‘One moment,’ says Gyneth, in a voice like the cut of a whip. ‘One moment. Where’s this race run?’

“I tell you I went all goose-flesh. Her face was white as paper, and her eyes seemed to be on fire.

“ ‘At San Sebastian,’ I stammered. ‘Starts at midday.’

“She just stood up and clapped her hands to her head.

“ ‘Thirty-six hours,’ she said. ‘Yes, that’d be about right. And to-morrow evening, with luck, the deal will be through. *With luck* . . . Oh, my God, and I—I sent him away.’ ”

That night a note went to San Sebastian.

It was carried by Toby Rage.

Jordan opposed its delivery, declaring that his charge was asleep.

“Don’t you believe it,” said Toby. “What’s more, if he doesn’t get it, he won’t close his eyes all night.”

“Oh, hell,” said Jordan, and led the way upstairs.

Toby Rage was perfectly right.

St. Loe was sitting by the window, with his head in his hands.

The note was extremely short.

Please give Toby my ring. I shall be there to-morrow, and I want to have it on. God speed and save you, my darling.

Ten minutes later St. Loe was sleeping like the dead.

The noise like that of a wasp sprang again into earshot.

Then a slight, pale-blue body flicked out of the village on the right, flashed to the corner with a scream, appeared to brush the stone wall and flung up the two mile stretch as a shot from a gun. At the top it hovered for an instant, and then the black road was empty, and the eyes that had chased its passage turned again to the right. Only the reek of burned spirit hung in the air.

At a point above the road by the corner Gyneth, who had been standing, sat down on the grass.

"Come back to the car," said Toby, "and sit in the shade. It won't take a minute to get there, and there's seven minutes to go before he'll be round again."

"Not yet," said Gyneth.

Another snarl, and another. Flash after flash. One car at another's heels, and then two more. Somebody's brakes shrieked. A sound as of four rockets soaring. . . . And then the comparative silence, and only the reek of burned spirit upon the air.

"He's well out of that push," said Toby.

"You go back to Judy," said Gyneth. "I'll come in a little while."

"I'll be back in five minutes," said Toby. "This sun . . ."

The heat was awful.

Every steep and shoulder of the mountains was wrapped in a shimmering haze. The meadows and orchards looked unreal. The white-walled village on the right dazzled the eye. And, if you looked over the edge of the ten-foot bank, the breath of the smooth, black road smote hot upon your face.

Forty laps, and each lap eleven miles long. Four hundred and forty miles —at eighty-five miles an hour. Five hours on end at an average speed of a mile and a half a minute . . . and under that sun . . . and over that burning road.

Gyneth glanced at her wrist-watch.

Four to five minutes now, and he would be round again. At least, he should be. Of course, if he stopped at the pits, or—or anything . . .

"In four to five minutes," said Gyneth firmly.

For the hundredth time she regarded the back of her programme and counted the strokes she had set there each time that St. Loe went by. Nineteen. Yes, that was right. Nineteen. The next would be twenty. And the next he would be more than half-way.

Another car passed; and then another, with a driver in a blue silk dust-coat, with a shade to his cap. She knew him for the last of the string. The eight had gone by. There had been thirteen, to start with: but five were gone. Stopped, or crashed, or something. Any way they were out of the race. In three minutes now—no, four: between three and four—the leading car, an Italian, would pass again. And behind him, Roderick. . . .

St. Loe had been lying second for nearly an hour.

For all his cunning, experience had told at the start, and he had been left seventh behind a formidable field. Mason, Caperletti, Detroit—men whose names ran through Europe—and, finally, the great Birot.

During the tenth lap Birot had taken the lead. This was expected. His name was on every tongue. What was not expected was that Roderick, then lying fourth, would presently pass Caperletti and then Detroit.

He had actually won second place before the girl's terrified eyes. At the bend before which she was standing, he had pulled out abreast of Detroit and the two had raced for the corner two miles away. They had flicked out of sight together, a splash of blue: and none could tell which was leading until they came round again.

After that, St. Loe and Birot had drawn away.

Gyneth recounted her strokes.

Very soon he must stop for fuel—so Toby had said. But so must Birot, and the rest. That meant some shuffling of positions, but, unless there was bungling at the pits, by the time that all had fuelled the order should be the same. Of course, if plugs had to be changed . . .

Birot, St. Loe, Detroit . . .

Two minutes to go.

Gyneth got to her feet.

As she did so, Toby came up, field-glasses in hand.

"Early yet," he said quickly.

Gyneth smiled and nodded. The man was doing his best.

Leaden-footed, the seconds went by.

Then, suddenly, the wasp-like note . . .

A blue car flicked out of the village. Birot had stopped for fuel.

St. Loe was leading—for the moment.

As the latter whipped out of sight, the Italian appeared.

Detroit was now close to Birot, with Caperletti and Akers a mile behind. The others it seemed were as good as out of the race.

"He'll stop this time," said Toby. "Do come and have something to eat."

"Not yet," said Gyneth.

The two sat down together upon the rough grass.

Half Spain seemed to be keeping holiday. The road was guarded by soldiers, and, till the race was over, no man was allowed to cross. Hereabouts the banks were high, as though the way had been channelled out of the earth: and on either side lay orchards and meadows which had been mown. These were crowded. A few cars stood in the background, and one or two in the shade of a neighbouring farm; but the people, for the most part, were humble and had come afoot from the town and the villages round. The road had been closed at eleven, but five out of six spectators had been there since nine o'clock. Toby and Gyneth could have proved this. They had selected this point at half-past eight—and none too early: it was a wonderful coign. Their neighbours were mostly young. Here and there sat a matron, and there an elderly man; but young men and maidens made up the company and turned the field-day into a festival. They danced continually to the bray of concertina and tuck of drum. From where they sat, Toby counted nine drummers, each leading a different pack. Others played ball, tossing and catching and gambolling for joy of life. Now and again they would scramble to watch the cars go by: often enough they danced—while Roderick passed. After all, there was plenty of time. The last ten laps would be the big ones. Out of their ore would be smelted the battle of the giants.

By the end of the twenty-third lap, all five had taken in fuel. Birot was leading again, and Detroit was up on St. Loe. Caperletti and Akers were a mile and a half behind.

One thing was clear.

St. Loe had lost time at the pits—or Detroit was out for blood.

"He's goin' after him," muttered Toby, beneath his breath.

He was quite right.

Next time he passed the pits St. Loe received the signal to 'let her go.'

There was no doubt about it. Birot, the great Birot, was being pushed.

He had meant to win comfortably, and now he was being pushed.

He had seen the signal made to St. Loe and had smiled in his heart. He would show them how to let a car go. And so he had—for one hundred and twenty miles. Eleven 'fastest' laps. And now he was being pushed.

The pace was truly appalling.

With Gyneth's arm fast beneath hers, Judy Boleyn was trembling like any leaf. Toby had put up his glasses, because, when he sought to use them, he could not hold them still. Gyneth was unearthly calm, and pale as death.

The three stood together at the point overlooking the corner, above the road. They did not sit down now between the passings of the cars. For one thing, the dancing had ended, and the crowd was thick about them, disputing and agreeing and cheering as Birot the Great went by.

Detroit, driving like a madman, was lying fifth. He had had to stop twice for water, and Akers and Caperletti were a mile and a half ahead. And four miles ahead of them, St. Loe was on Birot's tail.

Of the thirteen starters these five alone were left.

The surface of the road at the corner was breaking up. The cars bumped there, like the devil. Caperletti plainly disliked it. You could see him lay hold of the wheel, as he came to the bend.

"What's this lap?" said Gyneth.

"The thirty-eighth," said Toby. "When they pass next time, it'll be the last time but two."

Gyneth nodded. Her eyes never left the village that lay to the right.

After a moment—

"What's the time?" she said quietly.

"They're not quite due," said Toby, regarding his watch. "Even if they're lapping at ninety, they're not——"

The familiar waspish sound snapped the sentence in two.

An instant later a red car spurted from the village, with a blue car right on its heels.

Birot was going 'all out.'

The man was leaning forward. The dust on his great brown jaw was streaked with sweat. He seemed to be urging his engine with all his might.

St. Loe was not clean behind him, but more to the left. It was perfectly plain that, if and when he could do it, he meant to attempt to pass.

Two flaps, like those of a sail, and the two were by—St. Loe a little wide at the corner, and Birot shaving the wall. His was a rough passage, but meant no more to him than the dust on his face. The car, however, was shaken. St. Loe, going wider, gained as much as he lost.

The latter was sitting back, rock-steady as ever, with his chin tilted a little and the shadow of a smile on his lips. It was his natural pose. Gyneth or Death beside him, rain or shine, St. Loe rode like a master and gave no sign of stress.

"Faith," cried a burly Spaniard, "he might be a part of the car."

The two slid up the long rise, like cars on a cinema's screen, there to vanish like pocketed billiard-balls—balls slammed into a pocket, cheek to cheek.

The three stood staring after, their wits outrun.

The thing was incredible—monstrous. The man on whose face they had been looking was two miles off.

Gyneth put a hand to her head.

"Oh, my God," she said weakly. "He means to pass."

Toby wiped the sweat from his face.

"They'll slow him down," he said, swallowing. "They're certain to slow him down. They'll signal him from the pits."

"Of course they won't," said Gyneth. "What do they care?"

Judy Boleyn caught her breath.

"Of course he'll pass," she cried. "He's going to leave B-Birot standing and win the race. Besides, it's much safer in front."

Gyneth took the small hand in hers and held it tight.

Another snarl, and another. Caperletti went by, goggling, with Akers hard on his heels. Behind came Detroit, pelting and losing ground. The latter was plainly raging. As he passed he shouted something—it might have been '*l'eau*.'

"Only twice more," said Toby. "And Judy's right. He's goin' to put old Beetroot where he belongs. You see. Next time he'll be in front—with an open road."

The excitement was general.

Of all the multitude hardly a soul had sat down. They were talking feverishly. Prophecy was in every mouth. Such as had watches were constantly announcing the time. And all eyes were turned to the village which lay to the right.

"Are they due?" said Gyneth, at last.

"Not yet," said Toby. "I swear it. They haven't been gone——"

A sharp, sinister drone spared him the lie.

Then a red car shot into sight—with a blue, well out on its left, not a length behind.

St. Loe knew what he was doing.

Overhaul Birot he could not. The man was jealous and knew every trick of the trade. On the track St. Loe could have done it, but the fellow held him at the corners and he had not the time to do it between the bends. Unless he could outwit Birot—pass him when he did not expect it, he would never get by. And now the moment was coming—at this corner where the surface had gone. Birot had the right to the rails. Well, he could have them here—and lose half a length by bumping, where the going was rough.

Both cars were going like fury. Half the width of the road was between them, and twenty-five yards from the corner the red car was hardly clear.

As Birot thrust for the corner, St. Loe on his left turned in.

The crowd gasped, and Gyneth put a hand to her throat.

The cars were converging. Birot was driving for the corner, and Roderick was driving for Birot. The cars were converging at thirty-six yards a second—forty, perhaps. More. The corner taken, *Birot would bear to the left*. They were bound to meet—simply bound to. There was a slice of the tarmac which each must have. The laws of balance required it. Whoever tried to avoid it must overturn.

St. Loe put his foot right down.

Unaware of his danger, Birot was holding his car. This was leaping like a ram. What did that matter? Let her leap, the beauty. He had the rails.

A blue streak slid by him a foot away.

As he bore to the left, his nose was less than a yard from the other's tail.

The cars had crossed.

The roar that went up to heaven must have been heard for miles.

St. Loe heard it, and Birot—two lengths behind.

The crowds at the next corner heard it, saw the blue car leading and took it up.

Judy Boleyn was dancing: Toby Rage had a Spaniard by the arm.

"Gone away!" he screamed. "Gone away!" He pointed a shaking finger. "Look at him shifting, Pedro. He's leaving Beetroot standing, an——"

Something swayed against him, and Judy cried out.

"If I could sit down," murmured Gyneth.

But Toby picked her up and carried her back to the car.

Five hours had gone by.

The dinner at the *Maria Christina* was a thing of the past.

Ewart, the shrewd, the imperturbable, was jesting with the reporters and slapping them on the back. MacMahon, supine upon a sofa, was endeavouring to sing. Jordan, who never drank, was the worse for wear. Akers was writing home, enclosing a preposterous cheque. And the name of the winning car was on everyone's lips.

From the terrace at Iriberri Roderick smiled at the sea.

Gyneth's arms were about him and her hair was against his cheek.

“You see, Gyneth, darling, I had to. We couldn’t have lived on five hundred, and——”

“Suppose you’d been killed.”

“I’d thought of that. And that would have been far better than bringing you down. I was out of my mind at Como.”

“I think you were in love there,” said Gyneth.

“I was very selfish,” said Roderick, putting her hand to his lips.

“Who told you that? Ewart?”

Roderick swallowed.

“He didn’t put it that way, but he opened my eyes.”

With a little half-sob, half-laugh, the girl set her cheek against his.

“My simple darling,” she said. “When will you see?”

“But——”

“Perhaps you will when we’re married. Of course Ewart’s cramped my style. It’s you I want, my darling. That’s why, when I found you were racing, I nearly died. You see, I’m truly selfish. It’s a way beggars have.”

“And queens,” said St. Loe gently, holding her close to his heart.

Gyneth put up her mouth.

LETTERS PATENT

"OH, he mustn't die," said Adèle. "Don't make him die."

"Of course he must die," said Berry. "In great agony. I'll help you with that bit."

"I'm not sure I oughtn't to," said Jonah. "Besides, I rather fancy that chapel. Make a magnificent tomb."

"I won't hear of it," said my sister. "Think of the shock to Adèle."

"As a matter of fact," said I, "it's all over. I've passed the proofs."

There was an electric silence.

In a sudden burst of ambition, I had written a book. Requiring a resourceful hero, I had looked to my cousin, Jonah, to fill the rôle. This he had so much adorned that my wife, my sister and her husband had all demanded as of right to appear in 'my next.' 'All is vanity.' When, like a fool, I consented, I cut my own throat. From that time on neither plot, nor style, nor construction—least of all my life was my own. Berry's amendments alone may be imagined. They were, I suppose, at once the most comprehensive, devastating and utterly worthless ever conceived or expressed by any one man. Amid the sea of suggestion I began to labour and wallow, like a rudderless ship, and, when the others decided that the third chapter should be made the first and the first and second dissected and 'worked in' piecemeal towards the end of the book, I took the pages I had written and burned them before their eyes. This explosion of temper shocked them, and, before the winter evening was out, I had extracted the assurance that, if I started again, the subject should never be broached except by me. The next day I took the fair copy of the stuff I had burned, repaired to the library and strove to recover the course I had been proposing to steer.

Time passed, and the book took shape. Sometimes, when a chapter was finished, I would pull up the sluice of discussion, to see what they said; but the debate upon the last but one had proved so unsettling and provoked such a flurry of recrimination that I registered a definite vow to withstand all temptations to invite such vexation again. To this resolve I adhered, until the book had been printed and was beyond recall.

"You've *passed* the *proofs*?" said Berry.

Anyone would have thought from his tone that I had undertaken that he would become a monk.

"Quite right," said I, lighting a cigarette. "You have to do that, you know. Until you do, they can't start printing a book. You write 'Press' on the top, and——"

"But I haven't seen them," said Berry. "They may be all wrong. Besides, I wrote most of the book. The conception burst from my brain. I supplied all the leaven. I——"

A storm of protest arose.

As it died down—

"I should certainly have seen them," said Adèle. "The love-affair was all my idea. Besides——"

"But I figure in it," said Berry. "My fragrant personality pervades the pages. The discerning reader will——"

"I play the chief part," said Adèle. "Jonah and I——"

"By request," said I. "I'm not at all certain that I should have given way. It's a question of sympathy."

"Exactly," said my brother-in-law. "That's why I should have seen the proofs. I should have known in a moment. Have you said that my nose is aquiline?"

Jonah put in his oar.

"As juvenile lead and home-wrecker, I think I've a right to be told whether my *grande passion* is extinguished by the waters of death."

"All in good time," said I. "In three months' time a trifling outlay of seven shillings and sixpence will——"

"Do you mean to say," said Berry, "that we're not to have free copies? Do you mean to stand there and——"

"I've got to live," said I.

"No, you haven't," said Berry. "It's a work of supererogation."

"Of course you must buy it," said I. "Why shouldn't you?"

"That's right," said Berry. "Bite the hand that feeds you. Savage the bosom in which you have lain. And we have allowed you to feature our dazzling personalities. But for the magic of our— Oh, you slow belly."

“How dare you?” said Daphne. “You know that I will not have that disgusting phrase.”

“The occasion demands it,” said her husband. “When I think— Did you put in that bit I gave you about the dog?”

“No, I didn’t,” said I. “I don’t want the book to be banned.”

“I suppose you want it to be bought.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Of course where you let it right down is——”

“I know,” said I. “By not making you the *deus ex machina*.”

My brother-in-law sighed.

“Well, it does stick out, doesn’t it? Not that I care. It’s the waste of good material that breaks my heart. There I am, with nothing to do. I ask you, what more natural than that I should step in? The time produces the man. Is it likely that I should sit still and watch the bottom fall out for want of my outstretched hand? I mean, is that me?”

“Yes,” said everyone.

My brother-in-law frowned.

“At the critical moment,” he continued, “I arrive at the castle, disguised as a Belgian count with boots three sizes too big and no roof to his mouth. Very good. Bewildered by my endeavours to ask my way, the villain drops an aitch. Unobserved I put my foot on it, and, while he is absorbed in his search for the missing aspirate, I step out of my boots and secrete myself in the arc-light—archway behind his back.”

“I’ve been writing a novel,” said I. “Not the script of a travelling circus.”

“That’s right,” said Berry. “Be rude. Be offensive. Just because you’ve no sense of the dramatic——”

“Hush,” said Daphne. “If Boy——”

“I won’t hush,” said her husband. “There was a tacit understanding that, if I consented to oblige that long-nosed fabulist . . .”

Here Falcon came in with the drinks, and the apodosis was lost.

As the butler withdrew, Adèle came behind my chair and put her arms round my neck.

“Don’t leave me on the rack,” she said gently. “Remember, I’m madly in love. If Jonah were to die . . .”

I looked up into her eyes.

"It's all right," I said weakly. "He—he doesn't die."

The statement was accorded a mixed reception.

My wife and my sister applauded; Berry raised his eyes to heaven; and Jonah looked down his nose.

"Of course you've ruined it," said Berry. "Justice demands a victim. There's the ram all ready, caught by his corns—horns, and you ignore him. Besides, it's fantastic. He's an ounce of lead inside him and a cold on his chest. Does Adèle suck the wound?"

"Price seven and sixpence," said I.

With an awful look, Berry returned to his glass.

Jonah fondled his pipe.

"I suppose you know best," he said. "But I don't see the point of the chapel, if it's not to be used."

"Oh, no," said my sister. "That would have been too sad. The only thing I don't like . . ."

I left them to it, and went off to telephone.

Some two hours later, Adèle lay back on her pillows and knitted her brows.

"I do hope it goes well," she said thoughtfully.

The profits of the book, if any, were to be spent upon the purchase of a solitaire diamond ring. There are, of course, solitaires and solitaires.

"So do I," I said heartily.

"You don't think it would have been better to——"

"I'm sure it would," said I. "But it's too late now."

Adèle sighed.

"Oh, well," she said. "We must hope for the best. Only, if you can't have a really big one, it's better not to have one at all. You see what I mean, don't you, Boy?"

"Let's hope they eat it," said I. "That would mean a bracelet as well."

Three months had gone by, and the book had been on sale for nearly a week.

As I entered the dining-room—

"Two notices," said Berry. "One says, *Just the book for a hammock and a hot afternoon*; and the other's more cryptic. It says, *There is something about this book which formed a guard of honour. The best man was no more to be said.* I can't help feeling that——"

"It's scandalous," said Daphne. "Adèle and I have been right through the 'Weddings', but there's nothing at all. Can't we write and complain?"

I shook my head.

"Out of the question," I said. "Besides, it may have been biting. After all, the hammock's bad enough. Might as well call the book a sleeping-draught and have done with it."

"I think he means to be nice," said Adèle. "If I read that— By the way, there's a letter the publishers have sent on."

"From a literary agent," said I, taking it up.

It was not from a literary agent. It was—but I will let the document speak for itself.

Sir,

I read your first book and it was alright. Now for your second. Do you for one moment imagine that your public is going to stand for this sort of thing? If so, you are very much mistaken. I am only speaking for thousands when I say that I am utterly disgusted by your fatuous glorification of a so-called love-affair which must nauseate any decent-speaking man, woman or child. The whole thing is inexcusable. Thank God, I am not a writer, but, if you are so blind that you cannot realize that you cannot play fast and loose with those members of the public who in an idle moment have been so misguided as to ask for your books, then woe betide you. Some might call it impertinent of me to write thus. Far from it. I consider it my duty to expose the insult which you have gratuitously offered to the whole host of your well-wishers who I am absolutely certain will unite with me in saying 'Never again.'

Yours faithfully,
E. D. Geoffray.

P.S. The rest of the book was quite alright, but you deliberately chose to degrade this by introducing a sordid note which will surely recoil upon your own head.

After digesting this outburst, I read it aloud.

There was a startled silence.

Then—

"There you are," said Daphne. "What did I say? I never wanted you to ____"

"Nor did I," said I. "Over and over again I said it was alienating sympathy."

Jonah and Adèle exchanged an uneasy glance.

"The man's a fool," said Berry. He drained his cup. "You've got to take life as you find it."

"He's one of the public," said I. "And, as one of the public——"

"I don't imagine he's representative," said Jonah. "Personally, I think it was a very powerful bit of work. That bit where Adèle breaks down——"

"Of course," said Berry. "I always said that was dangerous."

This was untrue. More. Had I adopted my brother-in-law's interpretation of 'a suitable love-interest', I should have made myself liable to arrest.

The barefaced mis-statement provoked great indignation.

"You?" said his wife. "Why, when I wanted it out, you did nothing but rave. When Boy seemed to hesitate, you swore it would sell the book. You said it was a punch. You said——"

"Nonsense," said Berry. "I'm not going to argue, because I know it's no good, but, if my advice had been taken, that passage would have been excised."

"What you mean is," said Jonah, "it would have been converted into a supercharged imitation of an advanced French farce. Mr. Geoffray would have died of heart failure."

"I agree with Jonah," said Adèle. "I don't believe he's representative. Besides, you can't please everyone."

"If you ask me," said Berry, "the book's doomed. Never mind. Is anyone getting up? I want some more sole."

I rose, passed to the sideboard, helped myself to some omelet and returned to my place.

With an awful look, Berry got to his feet. . . .

"The thing to do," said Daphne, "is to start a counter-attack. We must ask for it at all the bookstalls. We can begin to-day at Waterloo."

"But supposing they've got it," said Berry. "Not that it's likely, but just supposing they have."

"We can look first," said my sister guardedly.

"That's right," said Adèle. "We can all go up separately and ask for it. Quite casually, you know. They'll be bound to have it to-morrow in self-defence."

"And be laying for us," said Jonah.

"Then we can say we've got it, or go down by car."

Ascot. The weather was very fine, the girls' dresses were outstanding, and Jonah had been given two very exceptional tips. We were quite expecting to enjoy ourselves to the full. Ten minutes ago our sky had been radiantly clear. It was still full of promise: only now Mr. Geoffray's letter hung upon our brilliant horizon, a cloud like a man's hand.

Waterloo Station was busy. Quite a lot of people seemed to have had the idea of going to Ascot by train.

Adèle, Jonah and I had shared a taxi; my sister and Berry were coming on in the car.

Cautiously I approached the bookstall.

My book was nowhere to be seen.

Fortified by this insult, I leaned across a plateau of papers and mentioned its name.

The assistant appeared to reflect. Then he asked me when it was published and who it was by.

With a sickly smile, I gave him my pseudonym.

He turned to a colleague, frowning, and asked if they had the book.

His colleague did not even reply.

The assistant asked me to spell the author's name.

I did so miserably. Many persons were present, impatiently waiting to be served. The assistant and I were fully five feet apart.

"D'you know the publishers, sir?"

I gave him the publishers' name and wiped the sweat from my face.

The assistant glanced over my shoulder and turned to somebody else.

"Seven and sixpence, please, sir," said a voice by my side.

I swung round to see his colleague with my book in his hand.

I paid for it dazedly.

As we passed on to the platform,

"Nothing like advertisement," said Jonah. "There were fourteen people behind you. If eight of them buy a copy, you'll be all square."

Unable to think of an answer, I comforted myself with the thought that, with any luck, Berry would go the same way.

We passed down the platform leisurely.

"I think it's the best so far," murmured Adèle. "My dress, I mean."

"Naturally," said Jonah. "America expects this day that every girl will do her duty."

Adèle is American.

As the special drew in, Berry and Daphne appeared.

The latter was laughing, and the former had my book in his hand.

"Just the thing for Ascot," he said, holding it up. "I must find a quiet nook in the Enclosure and settle down. The nuisance is I've left the hammock behind. Oh, you've got one, too, have you? How exciting. Don't peep at the end, will you?" He laughed idiotically. "Never occurred to you to stay and warn me, I suppose? No, I thought not. Perhaps you told them to keep the swine in a drawer?"

We calmed him down and took our seats in the train.

"Any way," said Adèle, bubbling, "I'm sure it must have done good."

"Nothing could have been better," said Daphne. "The people about were just the sort who buy books."

“They denied themselves this morning,” said Berry. “Not a soul in that station——”

“Only because they didn’t want to have to carry them about. By the way, what shall we do with our copies? We can’t leave them here.”

“Give them to the guard,” said Berry. “Find out if he’s got a hammock, and——”

“But we can’t do that,” said Adèle. “If we do he won’t buy one.”

Berry stifled an hysterical laugh.

“Nor—nor he will,” he said.

“We’d better destroy them,” said Jonah. “Tear them to bits. If we each take two hundred pages——”

“Certainly not,” said I. “We can’t conceal the fragments, and people who find the fragments will naturally jump to the conclusion that it’s a rotten book.”

“So it is,” said Berry. “When I think——”

“We must put them in the cloak-room,” said Daphne. “At the station, I mean.”

“That’s right,” said her husband. “Throw good money after bad. Unless you can tie them together, they’ll charge you twopence each.”

“The porters’ll read them,” said Adèle.

“So much the better,” said Jonah. “They won’t have finished by five. We call for them then, and they’ll have to buy a copy to see how it ends.”

“They can have mine for five shillings,” said Berry brokenly. “When I think——”

“That’ll do,” said everyone.

Berry put his hat on the rack, settled himself in a corner and closed his eyes.

After a little he appeared to be talking in his sleep.

Given a summer’s day, Royal Ascot may be almost too good to be true. If it were a play, the stage-management would be hailed a miracle. But it is not a play. It is an English festival, kept by the English and their friends,

with the King and Queen of England keeping it in their midst. More. It is a high festival. His Majesty is in his State.

Those who go down to the Heath in cars lose something which is of value, yet is not for sale.

A path leads out of the little country station, climbs through a hedgerow and gives to a proper hayfield, as sweet and fair and fresh as a meadow may be. Not a house, not a building is in sight. Except for the lazy hum of insects, there is no sound. Any one of those jolly haycocks might be hiding Boy Blue. And through this simple pleasance go strolling fine ladies and men. Lace and silk and satin, silver and gold: bracelets and brooches and buckles and tapestry-bags: purple and fine linen, patent-leather and grey top-hats: dainty gowns out of Paris and exquisite legs: parasols and tail-coats and eye-glasses—Fashion in all her glory making her way through a slice of a Nursery Rhyme. What stuff for old Aesop! Could he but look upon the picture, the sage would weep with delight.

Out of the peaceful meadow and into a wood, set like a pretty bulwark to save the pastoral, and so, in a moment, on to a broad highway, alive with cars and policemen and all the fuss of arrivals and settings down.

So much for the prologue. . . .

The beauty of the course and its surroundings, the rich green of the turf, the sparkle of the clean, white paintwork, the sharp shadows flung by the stands make up a setting which only some shining function could ever fill: the flowers, the fine green liveries of the servants, the brave show and promise of the Royal Box, above all, the air of expectation deck and furnish that setting to a degree of quality very seldom met with in this workaday world: and the ceaseless movement of thousands, eager, care-free, yet full-dressed and on parade, renders a Court of Honour fit for a King.

Shortly before the first race, far down the course, a glittering streak upon the green argues a cavalcade.

Very slowly the Procession takes shape.

Scarlet and gold and velvet, wigs and cockades, postilions and outriders, and the magnificent greys, down the midst of the broad, green lane at a royal pace come the King's horses and the King's men. And the King and his Queen in their carriage, with the Equerries riding beside and their Train behind. Match me that quiet progress, match me that sight in the sunshine, match me the brilliance of that moment—Tradition itself ennobled by the unceremonious perfection with which it is observed.

Then the Royal Standard is broken, and the festival is begun.

Of the racing itself, I will say nothing. My pen cannot picture the finest meeting in the world. But, if a man loves horses, an hour in the Paddock at Ascot will do his heart good. The parades, too, are incomparable. Enough that the *raison d'être* of Ascot is never overshadowed by the glory it has come to acquire.

I cannot pretend that we had what is called 'a good day'.

Had Adèle and I been wise, we should have lunched with Berry in the Marlborough's tent. But we were not wise. After the first race, we crossed the course and lunched in the tent of a Club to which I belong. As we finished our coffee, I looked at my watch.

"We ought to be going," said I, "or we shan't get across."

"Have mercy," said Adèle. "Let me have one more cigarette."

Ascot is Ascot. For the next three hours she would be unable to smoke.

Looking upon her, no man could have hardened his heart. Had she accompanied Moses to Pharaoh's throne, there would have been no plagues in Egypt.

"One quick one," said I, weakly.

Ten minutes later we were standing between two coaches about eleven paces from a gate in the rails. The coaches were three feet apart and the space between them was choked with the fashionable world. From the fact that we could not go forward I judged that the gate was shut. Because of the people behind us, we could not go back.

"Oh, Boy," murmured my wife, "what have I done?"

"Entirely my fault," said I. "I ate too much lunch."

This was true. But for my 'repeat order' of lobster salad——

"I shouldn't read it," said a voice. "It doesn't come up to his last."

The voice was feminine and came from directly behind.

Unable to move my body, I managed to screw my head round and look at Adèle. A bright, brown eye met mine expressively.

"Ah," said another voice. "That's often the way."

"It begins all right," said the first, "but——"

"They're going up," said the other. "I hear the hoofs."

We all heard them.

After a seemingly interminable interval we heard them again.

An occupant of one of the coaches was kind enough to tell us what had won the race of the day.

Ten minutes later I learned that the horse which Jonah had commended had been left at the post. Even so he ran fourth. If only . . .

When I say that, half an hour later, our second string won by a length, only to be disqualified, I think we may be forgiven for leaving before the last race.

The charm of the Epilogue, however, was irresistible. The cool grove, the shadows of the elms athwart the hayfield, the pretty argument of antique toil, came straight from Virgil. By the time we reached the station, I think we all felt refreshed.

Not until we were half-way to Town did Adèle remember with a shock that the porters at Ascot station must still be devouring my book.

Ten o'clock that evening found us at ease in the library licking our wounds.

Berry was writing a letter, Daphne was studying the papers, with a faint frown my wife was lining a delicate tapestry-bag. Jonah and I were doing mental arithmetic of which the hypothetical problems were even more depressing than those which dealt with the truth.

"Of course they were discussing it," said Daphne. "Tell us again—what exactly did they say?"

"They said," said Adèle, "they said it began splendidly."

Berry spoke over his shoulder.

"That doesn't sound like it," he said. "Mr. Geoffray——"

"By the way," said Jonah, "you'll have to answer the wallah. What are you going to say?"

"I shall ignore him," I said. "I don't think he's qualified to judge. Counting the bookstall, I'm thirty-four pounds three and sixpence down on the day. Oh, and an evening paper, three and seven."

“Ignore the man,” said my sister, “as much as you like, but you can’t ignore what he says. It’s perfectly plain that he doesn’t stand alone. Can’t you write to the publishers and get them to stop the sale?”

“That shouldn’t be difficult,” said her husband. “And they might return the money for copies already sold. I know a man who’s got one.”

“Can’t you alter the next edition?” said Adèle. “I mean, I still think it’s all right, but, after that woman at Ascot . . . Did you notice her hat?”

“I hated her voice,” said I.

“Well, her hat was worse.”

She described it to Daphne with every circumstance of contempt. The two drifted into an arraignment of the hats they had seen that day.

Jonah stepped to the fireplace and knocked out his pipe.

“A revue,” he said, “has two editions, from the second of which are omitted the less popular features of the first. Why not a book?”

“The cases are different,” said I. “You don’t print a revue. Besides, I can’t possibly re-write it.”

“Only two chapters,” said Adèle. “Possibly three.”

“It’s out of the question,” said I. “Once a book’s printed—finish. It stands or falls.”

Adèle regarded her delicate, bare right hand.

“ ‘When unadorned, adorned the most’,” I said swiftly.

My wife returned to her bag.

“That woman,” she said, “was wearing a solitaire. It was square cut and as big as a postage stamp.”

“But she was behind us,” I cried. “How could you possibly——”

“D’you mean to say you didn’t see it?” said Adèle.

Where other women’s gems are concerned, women seem to be gifted with second sight.

Berry laid down his pen.

“I think this should do,” he said. “Listen to this.”

E. D. Geoffray, Esq.

My Dear Sir,

Your kindly communication was of peculiar interest to me, and, I should, indeed, be committing that most repugnant of all sins, ingratitude, were I not to render you my most heartfelt thanks for a criticism, not only suave and searching, but in itself a literary gem. In this connection allow me to say with what triumph I hail your spelling 'alright'. Years ago, at a kindergarten, a governess had the effrontery to correct me for the use of that written word—as you will surmise, an arrogant, flat-chested woman, totally unfitted for the high office which she sought to adorn. Besides, her teeth shook. But to the point.

For me to essay to dispute your estimate of my endeavours would be indecent. With unerring instinct you have in a sentence laid bare the nakedness of the land. But, believe me, my dear Mr. Geoffray, I not only accept your masterly and, to my mind, irrefutable appreciation, but I have the honour to identify myself with every word that you write. I will go further. I regard the love-affair as the crowning insult of what I can only style an obscene libel calculated to arouse the worst instincts of all who pick it up. You know. Trunk murders, etc. We are, therefore, my dear sir, at one, for I cannot help feeling that a natural leniency induced you to write encouragingly of the less offensive parts.

What, to my mind, is so distressing, is that, as you will no doubt have observed, the Press seems not only to be totally indifferent to this glaring defect, but actually to welcome a document which you so aptly describe as inexcusable. Without one dissentient voice, the public prints have seen fit to commend this apotheosis of black-guardism in the most glowing terms. I have before me a notice urging all lovers of nature and repose to lose no time in acquiring a copy of my book. Worse. The rot has set in: and I have good reason to believe that only this morning there was an unprecedented demand for my novel by persons en route *for Ascot, where, I am told, there was horse-racing to-day.*

In these circumstances it is not easy to maintain a stiff upper lip. Indeed, but for the timely arrival of your comfortable words, I might by now have bowed to the consensus of opinion, smothered the dictates of conscience and held my peace: but, now that I know that I am not alone, now that I have before me your fearless denunciation of this outrage, my fainting convictions rise up like

giants refreshed and I am emboldened to look Press, publishers and Public in the face and cry 'Quot homines, tot sententiae', *or, as they say at the Athenæum, 'One girl's scent is another girl's sewer-gas'.*

Believe me, my dear Mr. Geoffray,
Yours very faithfully,

We all tried not to laugh.

At length—

"The idea's sound," said Jonah. "I think it should be bowdlerized and sent. You'll make a friend, and Geoffray will recommend the book."

"Of course he won't," said Daphne. "And what about all the thousands that haven't written? Just because they don't write and say so, it doesn't follow they don't dislike the book."

"Too many negatives," said Berry. "What you mean is——"

"I mean what I say," said his wife. "People won't like that love-scene."

"What does that matter?" said Berry. "They can't get their money back. That's good old Geoffray's trouble. He's soaked in seven and sixpence, and he thinks he's been done."

"They'll tell one another," said Adèle. "Think of the damage this wretched man, Geoffray, will do."

My sister laid a hand on my arm.

"If you wrote back and said 'You're quite right, and, as soon as I can, I'm going to alter the book——' "

"And did it," said Jonah.

"Couldn't you, darling?" said Adèle. "Couldn't you write to the publishers and say that, as some of the book seems to be misunderstood, you propose to alter those bits before the next edition comes out?"

"I should only get a back answer."

"Why not do it, and see what they say?"

"That's right," said Berry. "If they agree, all you've got to do is to re-write the book. And, while you're about it, if you take my advice, you'll change the title. I'll answer any letters you get."

“Be quiet,” said his wife. “Except for that one chapter, the book’s all right. Even Geoffray says so. If Boy alters that and—and just a few lines in the last . . .”

With many misgivings, I posted the following letter before I retired.

Messrs. —— and Co.
Publishers.
Dear Sirs,

To judge from the reception of my book, there seems to be a considerable consensus of opinion that the love-interest does not command sufficient sympathy. With your permission, therefore, I propose to revise this passage and to let you have the new version in time for it to appear in the second edition of the book.

Yours faithfully,
Etc.

Some eighteen hours had gone by, and the third day’s racing at Ascot was nearly done. They were, in fact, going out for the seventh race.

“Don’t you see it?” said Adèle. “That woman with the blue silk scarf and the frightening hat.”

“Which hand?” said I.

“The left. There. Now you can see it. That’s just about the size I should like.”

It seemed to me an admirable stone. Not too big. I estimated its value, roughly, at four hundred pounds.

With a sigh, I returned to my race-card.

“I—I don’t think you’ll get it,” said I.

Even without Mr. Geoffray and all his works, I could not see one of my own bearing blossoms like that.

“I refuse to give up hope,” said Adèle.

I laid down my card.

“You know what got Geoffray’s goat?”

“What?” said Adèle.

"Your coquetry—vampship. Scarlet is not in your line, and your wearing it stuck in his throat."

"Ambition is always contrary. Grimaldi's one idea was to play Richard the Third."

"But he didn't do it," said I. "His wife was wiser than I."

"My great adventure," said Adèle affectionately. "I shan't like the second edition half so well. And you must admit, Jonah is most attractive. Any woman might be forgiven for falling for him."

"You ought to have married him," said I.

A distant look came into my lady's eyes.

"I don't think so," she said slowly. "It wouldn't have worked, because—well, it's very true that saying, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'."

I returned to my card. One cannot be demonstrative in front of the Royal Box. Besides, if I was to have a bet, I must make up my mind.

Moodily, for the twentieth time, I read through the horses' names. Not one of the seventeen meant anything to me. Even Jonah had had nothing to say. The favourite would probably start at seven to four.

WARSAW
PENMANSHIP
USAGE
NEST EGG
BALADEUSE
EDGE OF FRAY . . .

For a moment I sat staring. Then, with a stifled cry, I leaped to my feet.

"For heaven's sake, Boy," breathed Adèle.

I pointed a shaking finger.

"*Look!*"

"Edge of Fray?" she murmured. "Well, what about it? I've never heard of the horse."

"But, my blessed lady," I cried, "you've heard of the man! *E. D. Geoffray.*" Adèle caught her breath. "Try and find the others an' . . ."

I left her frantically peering and almost ran to the ring.

I got two hundred pounds to ten pounds—and got it twice. Four hundred pounds to twenty against Edge of Fray. I could have got it ten times, if I had had the notes. As I was counting my silver to make up another pound, the race was begun.

Trying to look unconcerned, I hurried across the lawn.

'Blue and white check, blue cap.'

Of the others I could see nothing. Even Adèle had disappeared. . . .

By dint of standing a-tiptoe, I saw a ruck of horses sweep into the straight.

A blue roan was leading, with a chestnut lying second and going well. On their left, a big bay—*The colours of the bay's jockey were blue and white check.*

The angle at which I viewed them grew less acute. The chestnut was gaining on the roan, and the bay on them both. The whips were out now, and I saw the roan's rider call upon his mount. The latter was holding the chestnut. If the bay had made his effort . . . People were shouting in the stands, and the woman in the frightening hat obstructed my view. As I jerked my head to one side, I saw the bay shoot forward. . . .

The papers that evening said that he won by a head.

Less than half an hour had gone by.

"I won't travel with him," said Berry. "I won't demean myself by——"

"Will you get in?" said his wife.

In a thunderous silence her husband entered the coach.

As the special drew out of the station—

"My first thought was for you," I said. "The instant I saw it, I sent Adèle to find you and put you wise."

"I demand," said Berry, "I demand two hundred pounds. In my unavoidable absence, you put on ten pounds for me. I hereby ratify your action."

"Nonsense," said I. "I hadn't enough for myself. If you hadn't been drinking——"

“You hear that?” said Berry excitedly. “You hear what he says? Because I withdraw for five minutes to compose my thoughts, that venomous reptile ____”

“I must say,” said Jonah, “I think you might have seen it before.”

“You had a race-card,” said I. “Why shouldn’t you have seen it? Just because——”

“Why should we?” said Berry. “What’s E. D. Geoffray to us? But he’s *your* correspondent, your critic—the only critic you’ve got. You’ve done nothing but belch his name——”

A shriek from Adèle and Daphne brought him to book. Before they could frame a protest—

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “Regurgitate. You’ve done nothing but regurgitate his name for thirty-six hours; and the first time you see it printed, it takes you an afternoon to read it straight. Talk about writing books? You ought to have spelling lessons.”

“Too late now,” said Jonah mournfully. “Just ’ve put me right, too. How much did you have on Usage?”

“Usage?” said I. “I didn’t have anything on.”

“I don’t know why you didn’t,” said Jonah. “It was quite a good thing. Not like Edge of Fray, naturally. Still, it ran third, and I said ‘Only back it for a place.’ ”

“You didn’t say it to me,” said I. “You talk about suppressing information, but——”

My cousin regarded Berry with an accusing eye.

“I gave it to you,” he said slowly. “I gave it to you, and you promised to pass it on.”

Berry gave a start of surprise.

“You gave it to me, and I—Oh, you must be dreaming,” he said. “I have a faint recollection that you mentioned some horse, but I certainly never ____”

“Oh, you liar,” said his wife. “You rushed off to wire directly. I saw you go.”

Berry swallowed desperately.

“My dear, I——”

“So that’s where you were,” said I. “ ‘Composing your thoughts,’ were you? Instead of putting me wise, you deliberately——”

“There was no time,” said Berry. “I was down to thirty shillings. If I was to put on a tenner, I had to wire. If I’d tried to find you, I should have been too late. Surely it was better that one——”

“And you have the nerve to——”

“I acted for the best,” said Berry. “Confronted with a painful decision, I ——”

“I don’t see your trouble,” said Jonah. “You’ve won thirty pounds on Usage, and you couldn’t have won any more on Edge of Fray. On your own confession, you’d only thirty shillings to put on.”

Berry waved him away.

“It isn’t the money,” he said. “It’s the principle.”

I had telephoned to Bond Street from the course, so that, though the shop was closed, a pleasant assistant was waiting to show us some solitaire rings.

We got a very nice one for the sum of four hundred pounds.

When we re-entered the taxi, Adèle put her arms round my neck.

“Now you have made me a vampire. You’ve invested me with the order, the Order of the Dangerous Vampire, the O.D.V.”

“I’m afraid it’s not so big as the woman’s in the frightening hat.”

“My dear, it’s miles better. Hers was quite yellow. I thought it was a topaz, at first. But this . . .” She held off her slim, white hand. “You must admit it is a most lovely sight.”

“I’ve always thought so,” said I.

So we came to the house.

A letter from the publishers lay in the hall.

This was a model of courteous reassurance.

They were greatly obliged: at the same time they could not help feeling: indeed, they had every reason to anticipate: finally they begged to remain.

Reading between the lines, I was forced to the reluctant conclusion that the thought of a second edition had not so much as entered their heads.

But nothing could prick the hide of my content. That was invulnerable.

After dinner I wrote to Mr. Geoffray—a cordial, grateful letter, full of goodwill.

I said it was worth writing a book, if only to receive a letter from such a man.

So it was.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book name and author have been added to the original book cover. The resulting cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Maiden Stakes* by Cecil William Mercer (as Dornford Yates)]