



**YESTERDAY'S
TOMORROW**

OLIVE WADSLEY

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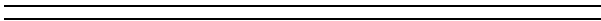
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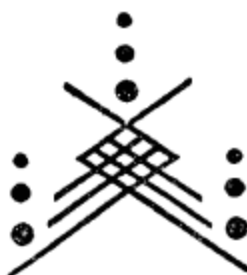
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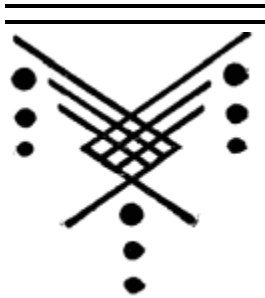




YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW

OLIVE WADSLEY

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YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW

CHAPTER I

TWO NAMELESS MEN

“I’M going to peg out,” Bill said. He said it very quietly, his glittering blue eyes fixed on Tim’s face. “And quite soon,” he added, after a pause.

“Peg out? You?” Tim shot at him; he got up from his chair beside Bill’s bed, and stood above him, looking down at him, smiling broadly. “Why, you’re better today, better colour, breathing better; and the doctor fella’ says you are better _____”

“The doctor fella’s a nice kid,” Bill broke in gently, “and I should say he’d be a world of help in a case of measles, stomach cramp, or ear-ache! But the backwash of a bad go of jungle-fever is beyond him, and the fact I’ve given myself a hypodermic, and that that accounts for all this improvement, is quite unlikely to occur to him. Tim, what’s your real name?”

The slow, hot colour flooded Tim’s face under its deep tan at that question; he stood staring out of the porthole at the blazing blue sky, the diamond-flecked sea, his eyes took on some of the burning blueness.

He said suddenly:

“Erskine of Kyle.”

Bill nodded, waited a moment, then said, rather breathlessly:

“Mine is Timeon Crane—” he put up a hand to still a flood of exclamation. “I can tell you now why I asked. You will have to carry on.”

“Carry on?” Tim echoed blankly.

“Yes. Don’t speak. I must talk. Get it over. When I suggested in Sydney a month ago that we should cut for home I knew I had inherited. I knew a day after we’d cleaned up our pile. For ten years, Tim, ever since we left Gallipoli together, I a deserter and you nearly insane from shock, I’ve lived to hear of my father’s death. You’ll find most men who are living their lives out somewhere because of a kink, have a grudge to pay off. I have. And I sailed on this boat to pay off my special grudge. My father couldn’t stick me.... I dunno why, and it doesn’t matter now. My mother died when I was born, and my father married again and had a second son. All my life I was bullied, overlooked, neglected for Malincourt. He was everything I was not—apparently. Tremendously good-looking, didn’t know the meaning of fear—popular, easy to love, and, with it all, a rotter through and through. A liar, a cheat, a braggart. I suppose something which hurt my mother spiritually before my birth may account for my wretched streak of cowardice. Tim, I have fought that cowardice all my life, but I have never beaten it. I am afraid of death now——” He gripped the hand Tim rested gently on his shoulder in both his own thin, burning ones:

“In all my life I’ve had only one friend who knew—and went on caring. You. You picked me up at Gaba Tepe and hid me with your own body, not because you cared for me then—we’d only met a couple of times—but because you instinctively do decent things, and you don’t know what fear is. All these ten years we’ve been together you have unobtrusively stood between me and all danger. Oh, I’ve known it, seen it every time. As much as it’s in me to care for

any living human being, I care for you. And I think you care for me.”

“Goo’ lor’ yes—of course, I do,” Tim muttered uncomfortably; he was beginning to believe now that old Bill was right, he was seriously ill—delirious....

“Because I think it—believe it,” Bill went on, his voice rising sharply, “I am going to ask you to do a last great thing for me. You’ll refuse at first—but I want you to think it over, just the same.”

He paused and breathed very heavily, the sweat poured off his white face.

Finally he murmured, very weakly:

“It’s this. I’ve lived to—to get even with Malincourt. I’d have got even by returning now.... Malincourt’s certain by now I’m dead—that he—he’ll have everything.... It’s odd that the strongest emotion I’ve ever felt—hatred—shouldn’t keep me going.... But it won’t. So you’ll have to do instead of me—you’ll have to be me. No—give me a little longer to talk—explain.

“As Brown and Smith we’ve lived for ten years in Burma, Queensland, Java—and the rest ... as Smith I booked on this boat.... I meant to land as Smith, and take on the title when I’d seen the lawyers. No living soul save ourselves knows who we are ... on the boat they don’t, yet. I’ve every paper here to establish my identity ... a man changes a good bit in ten years. We’re not so unlike—both fair ... both of a height ... if you shave off your moustache, it would add to the resemblance.... Malincourt and I met seldom between 1910 and 1914.... Tim, why shouldn’t you? You hadn’t meant to land in England—you told me you had no ties—that all you wanted was to stay in Paris for a bit, and then clear out again.

Whatever your reason is for not going to England, it would be non-existent if you went in as me. You——”

Tim bent over him, put a very light hand on his hot, cracked lips.

“Bill, look here ... it’s impossible. Clean out of the scheme of things....”

Bill’s face twitched, tears of disappointment and weakness gathered in his eyes, he began to shake violently, his head jerking pitifully.

As deftly as a nurse Tim got out the little hypodermic syringe, filled it, slid it into Bill’s thin arm, and then watched the anguish leave him slowly; he opened his eyes, clear now and peaceful, and half smiled at Tim, settled down into his pillows and seemed to doze.

Tim went up on deck and set off for a tramp despite the heat.

He felt excited, strung up.... Bill’s idea was mad, of course, utterly impossible—utterly.

But he thought all the same of what it would mean to be able to enter England without fear, to be able to look the world in the face, never have another second’s dread; his mind could not leave the idea, it clung to it, attaching to it many small reasons which buttressed it: his likeness to Bill, which, if it was only a likeness of build, carriage, speaking voice, a general likeness, was, nevertheless, of sufficient strength to stand a test of inspection after a ten years’ absence!

That fall he’d had when he’d been hunting in the jungle in Burma, when he had broken his leg, and broken his nose ... and lost thereby his amazing resemblance to his own family.

Even the name he had changed so casually, “Tim,” would fit in!

And his intimate knowledge of all Bill’s ways ... posted up a bit in Bill’s home life, the life he had led in town, and so forth....

Tim pulled himself up with a half bitter, half wistful laugh.

“You fool!” he said aloud to himself. “You utter fool——”

He tried to make himself think of other things, of the time he meant to spend in Paris ... where he was going solely to be near to England ... he’d settled he’d go out to Calais, and look at the cliffs from there.

He had a hunger, which was physical in a way, to go home again, to tread London streets, tramp Highland moors, listen to English people speaking English in their own homes—a hunger for the customs of his own land, the feel of its mist on his face, its sunlight, which was so divinely different from the blaze, and burn, and blare which had stood for the sunlight in the lands he had lived in during his exile.

“I could have it all,” he thought suddenly, “if I would agree.”

He couldn’t stand fighting himself any longer, he must get down to Bill and tell him definitely, brutally if it came to it, that he couldn’t think of impersonating him, perpetrating a lifelong fraud.

He would tell him at once. Get it over. He opened the door of Bill’s cabin. Bill was sitting up, his coverlet heaped with papers, photographs, newspaper cuttings.

He said to Tim in quite a strong voice:

“I daresay you are right. I shall get better. Come here and let me show you Malincourt—the place, I mean, as well as

my brother's portrait—and all these papers are the legal proof, and so on, and the cuttings are all bits of news about home, my people——”

He was like an eager boy, showing Tim every smallest snapshot, explaining in detail every item of news, talking of his friends, his people's friends.

He did not speak again of the project he had put forward...

“He was delirious,” Tim told himself. And felt a stab of disappointment, and felt as well the sting of shame.

Bill talked on, quickly, interestingly, all the hoarded thoughts of ten years were poured forth in that hour.

“I always meant to go back when I had made good,” he told Tim. “When we were working sixteen hours a day on that mine I used to think: ‘If it pans out, I can get even with Malincourt!’ And when it didn't pan out I told myself: ‘I can wait!’ I've waited and half-starved for ten years, and now my time has come—at last Malincourt thinks me dead, himself the owner of the place, name, income ...” he added sombrely: “if there is any income he has not already pledged!”

The light of fanaticism gleamed in his eyes as he broke out suddenly:

“A father's love—the love a son ought to have for his father, and from him! If it doesn't exist, can the son help it? My father hated me for my brother's sake, and he loved Malincourt. Before Malincourt could walk, I was practically shut out from any family love. I was sent to a prep. school when I was seven, and I was even sent away for the holidays. It was over a gymkhana affair I left home for good. Malincourt was seventeen then, and I was twenty-two. I think

I was born afraid, Tim—I can't remember a time when I wasn't in terror of something. I was riding in the gymkhana, and so was Malincourt, and our father was one of the judges. It was a county affair, one of the usual house party stunts, to which all the people round come, and join in. There was a high jump to do. I'd been going round rather well for me, and I was feeling quite bucked. Malincourt and I rode at the high jump together, and I felt him give a quick cut at my horse with his whip. I heard him laugh, too, and I lost my nerve—yelled out—didn't lift the horse, couldn't—and so I turned him—straight into a girl who was just going over. She was terribly hurt—and that night my father told me he hoped I should never show up again whilst he lived.

“I sailed that week for Sydney, met you a year later ... thought I'd got over my cowardice—and went off to Gallipoli with you—and—came back with you——”

And then he tumbled out of his fever-stricken mind every small incident since his childhood, clutching at Tim's hands, crying to him for comfort, pity.

The ship's doctor came in, a fresh-faced, likeable youngster just out of hospital, doing a trial trip.

He felt Bill's pulse and looked serious; took his temperature, and shook his blond head.

He went out, and Bill smiled vaguely up at Tim.

Clearly the doctor's voice came from the deck: “One of 'em's called Brown, the feller who's so ill, I think. Why?”

Then another lower voice said:

“The charge was just wirelessed.”

And then the young doctor's voice again, lowered, too, this time:

“I say—pretty grim, what? And you say his real name is _____”

There was a warning “Shish!”

Bill's eyes were on Tim's face. He said in a tiny whisper: “Erskine of Kyle.”

He caught at Tim's wrist, gripped fiercely.

“Whatever you did——”

“I didn't do it,” Tim whispered back, savagely.

“All right! I don't care! I know you for what you are. Tim—for the last time, to save me and yourself—will you do what I asked—an hour ago. Your word, quick—yes or no?”

Heavy feet sounded outside; a knock, sharp, imperative, sounded on the door.

“Yes or no?” Bill's weak, but imperative, voice repeated.

The door opened, the Captain stood there, the young doctor beside him.

“Yes,” Tim said, his lips barely moving.

The Captain began in his full, sonorous voice: “Which of you gentlemen answers to the name of Erskine of Kyle?”

“I do,” Bill said, smiling faintly.

“I am under orders to arrest you on a charge of——”

Bill had lifted his hand from under the coverlet. As the Captain gave an exclamation he shot himself.

The doctor went forward instantly, he had gone very white, and his lips shook a little as he said:

“He's dead, Captain.” He added: “He was dying, anyway, only some drug he had kept him going at all. His heart was

only doing one in five——”

The Captain turned to Tim, but Tim was on his knees, his head down on Bill’s hand.

CHAPTER II

MALINCOURT LIKES HIS LOOKS

WITH the June sunshine glinting on him, a pale pink small carnation in his buttonhole, the air of owning the world rather too patently visible on his exceedingly good-looking face, Malincourt Crane strolled down Bond-street.

He had just had a most satisfactory interview with the family lawyers, who had assured him that in a very short time he would be entitled to enter into his full inheritance.

Walking away he had decided to sell most of the land; the fact that it would ruin the new farmers on it mattered less than nothing to him; he meant to sell the lot to a building speculator, who would "run up," as he enthusiastically expressed it, "any number of 'untin' boxes."

Malincourt hoped he would, and that a nice, cheery crowd would buy them, and add to the gaiety of the hunting season. Whatever the new owners might be like, he would have the money, and that was all that mattered to him.

He had never had enough, and he had had to go to some deuced unpleasant lengths to raise a bit during the last year of his father's lifetime. Those copies of the Romney and Gainsborough he had had done had really been jolly good!

And, after all, he'd had as much right as anyone to sell the originals.

True, they hadn't been his then, but they would have been now! and the only reason Malincourt regretted them for a moment was because they had been resold at such a raking figure.

He had had to sell the Gainsborough in a deuce of a hurry; that had been a jolly near squeak, that faked telegram to a bookmaker; the blighter had threatened him most unpleasantly and made him pay up double.

However!

He had stopped to look into a jeweller's window, and now, catching sight of himself in a mirror at the back, he half smiled. Malincourt liked his own looks, he considered them a great asset.

Staring now at himself, he decided he had not aged a day in the last five years; no one would give him more than twenty-four or five, and he was thirty; he had the same unlined skin, the same clear eyes, and clean-cut lips; he felt complacently that his nickname "Beau" suited him admirably.

He walked on, pleased with himself and the world. One or two little matters he might with advantage clear up before he came into his inheritance. Get rid of Lil, for instance— anyway, he was tired to death of her, and she wasn't a patch on what she had been.

And then he might marry.

On the whole he thought he would.

A car had slid to the kerb beside him, and, as if in answer to his thought, a voice called from it:

"Beau!"

Malincourt said, laughing with pleasure:

"Diana, by all that's wonderful!"

He opened the car door.

"Wherever you're going to, my pretty maid, I'm coming with you, Miss," he said.

He sat down on the holland-covered seat beside Diana, and took her hand.

Diana removed hers very gently. She said:

“Tell Hudson the Park, will you?”

And when Malincourt had obeyed, she turned to him, and looking him straight in the eyes, said:

“I want to talk to you about selling the Court land. If you do, Beau, it’s going to finish the poor Trevors, and Blacks, and dear old Gregory. They can’t get other farms in Wiltshire—and besides, they’ve always lived there. Beau, it isn’t true, it can’t be, that you would sell those heavenly fields, that sweep of the Downs, to a jerry builder——”

Malincourt was thinking hard; he cursed whoever had told Diana of the intended sale; of all people in the world, he wanted to stand well with her. Di would be rolling in a year or so, and she was so deuced pretty, and—an added attraction—she had never been specially nice to him!

He said in a very gentle, rather grieved voice:

“Isn’t it rather rough to judge me without hearing my side?”

They were in the Park, rolling along easily, gliding in and out of the sunshine.

“I don’t want to judge you,” Diana said, rather sadly.

“Getting judged by you hurts,” Malincourt said swiftly, his eyes on Diana’s face. Jove, she was a beauty! She won, hands down!—faultless skin, perfect features—a lovely kid.... He couldn’t remember ever being specially taken with a young girl before.

And he’d been thinking of marriage, most opportunely.

He wondered what Diana would be like “awakened,” as he put it to himself.

The Lansdales were a pretty high-stepping crowd—no scandals in their family ... and they’d made great marriages, some of them. Ice and fire—wasn’t that what some man had said of Theodora Lansdale? And added: “And the little one’s like her, or I’ll eat my hat!”

Ice and fire ... pretty fetchin’ mixture!

He laid a determined hand on Diana’s; “Dido, darling, if you ask me not to, I swear I won’t sell!”

He saw her flush then, the lovely colour ran up from her white, slender throat to her brow, and she looked at him, rather appealingly, shyly.

“But it shouldn’t be just my asking——”

“But it is,” Malincourt insisted, smiling at her. “Only that!”

It was at that precise moment that a horse shot like a copper bolt from the Row, and made straight for the car.

And was pulled up within a yard of it. Whereupon its rider, his hat tilted rather over his face, because he had clutched at it to keep it on, dismounted, and came up to the car window. He was on Diana’s side, and Malincourt had a very clear view of him.

Tim had not trailed Malincourt about town for a couple of days for nothing; he said in a very casual voice, leaning forward a little:

“Ah, Malincourt! What an unconventional meeting!”

Diana exclaimed breathlessly:

“Tim!”

And Tim, who, had he been the real Timeon, might have been excused for not recognizing in this slender, wide-eyed

girl the child of ten whom he had left, Tim said, his blue eyes laughing a little, his hand out-stretched:

“My dear!”

Tim was standing beside the car, one foot on the running board, his hat in his right hand, his left, the bridle-rein still twisted about his wrist, gently caressing the quivering chestnut.

The sun shone down on both of them, on the copper-gold of the horse, on Tim’s fair, thick hair, and on his faintly smiling face.

He looked very fit, very immaculately fresh, and gay, and friendly.

Malincourt’s mouth was twitching a little, his eyelids were flickering, he had the appearance of a man who has been badly frightened, and is, as well, furiously angry.

He said, in his usual silky voice, which had, nevertheless, an undertone of sneering bitterness:

“Your horsemanship has improved, Tim!”

“Hasn’t it?” Tim agreed, smiling more broadly, and wondering what on earth was the name of the girl, and who she was, and why she had called him “Tim.”

The girl spoke next. She said, with a shy, delightful little laugh:

“Imagine your remembering me! Why, I was in pinafores when we met last!”

“I like this kit better!” Tim laughed. He felt irresponsible and happy, for no reason, and excited, for a very excellent reason.

He had met Malincourt, and Malincourt had accepted him instantly; that danger was over, and obviously, since this girl

had acclaimed him, too, he and poor old Bill must have been more alike than he had ever dared to believe.

The girl's next remark fell like a spatter of icy water over his mood of exhilaration.

“Do you know, you've changed a lot!”

Tim caught at his self-possession; said quite composedly, touching his nose:

“This has! I broke it five years ago.”

“It makes you look a bit like a Du Maurier drawing,” the girl laughed.

Malincourt observed icily:

“Compliments are flying!”

“I'll pay you one,” Tim flashed. “You look most remarkably like yourself, my dear fella'—not changed an eyelash, as far as I can see!” He paused a second, then added with a grin: “Time leaves no marks on you!”

He was enjoying himself again; he had recaptured the feeling of heady excitement, and also, he had developed a very hearty dislike of Malincourt. He had been prepared to discount Bill's hatred, to look on it rather as a species of fanaticism. A prolonged study of Malincourt's face, on which he had kept his gaze, had made him change his opinion of the value of Bill's statements concerning his younger brother, and to incline to overrate them, rather than take them as exaggerations. He sensed Malincourt's savage chagrin, his vehement dislike of himself, and felt the joy of battle rise within him on that account. Bill, his best pal, his other self for ten years, had suffered at the hands of this dark-eyed, subtle-mouthed young man. All right! He, Tim, would avenge Bill's suffering.

He was glad he disliked Malincourt so, that he could so dislike him; it made him feel more at ease with himself, gave him eagerness to get on with this new life.

Whatever Bill might, or might not, have been in his earlier life, whatever faults he had possessed, he had been Tim's friend, who had never let him down.

"He was my friend, faithful and loyal to me," Tim thought suddenly.

The girl was speaking again, touching his sunburnt hand for an instant as it rested on the car door.

"Tim, you must come to Bimbo's 21st. It's going to be at home; so even if you're not at the Court, you'll have to come down from town! Promise!"

"I swear!" Tim answered absurdly.

He lifted the small hand and pressed it, nodded to Malincourt.

"S'long!"

"You aren't at 105? Or are you?" Malincourt asked aloofly. Tim shook his head.

"The Berkeley. Old man Lennox tells me home, in the shape of 105, is at the moment, more or less of a barracks."

Malincourt shifted his position a little, he took out his cigarette case with a hand which was not quite steady.

"As you tarried so long in returning I'm afraid I've impinged on some of your—er—privileges—rights, shouldn't one say, perhaps? I—er—there seemed a likelihood you would not turn up at all, and in that case I should have been within my rights in selling some of the town house stuff _____"

“Some!” Tim echoed, and laughed blithely. “I understand that you’ve had a sort of royal sack! However, we won’t bother to discuss it now. Where are you digging? And what about dining with me tonight at the Sports Club? Eight? All right! Sorry to have given you such a nasty jar—by returning, I mean! But you should have remembered that old-fashioned tag about bad pennies!”

He had mounted, was guiding his horse with beautiful hands; with a final nod to Diana, he fitted his hat on to his head and rode off, sitting easily in his saddle, looking, with his broad shoulders and lean build, a very excellent horseman indeed.

“How wonderful—meeting him like that!” Diana cried, as the car began to glide forward. “Oh, Beau, isn’t it really marvelous? Aren’t you excited?”

Malincourt gave a funny little laugh; he had been thinking with concentrated furiousness during the past quarter of an hour ... everything was a ghastly mess ... and Tim had come back at the worst possible moment. The future was almost too involved to face—the endless explanations which would have to be given ... and Tim seemed so dreadfully different—he had changed in himself tremendously, Malincourt felt ... changed into a new being.

Gone was the old indecision, the old morbid sensitiveness, which had made him so vulnerable to attack, so easy to thwart and anger!

Malincourt felt apprehensive and baffled, and he was struggling all the while with a sort of enraged panickiness.

What on earth was he to do now?

A cold sweat had broken out on him when Tim had discussed the London house: Malincourt had almost denuded

it, sold for cash down all the best pictures, the famous and beautiful tapestries, the Louis XV ballroom suite....

He would have to account for them now ... with a shiver he returned to reality, to answer Diana's enthusiasm.

Instinct made him play for pity—instinct and the fear which possessed him.

He said in a low voice:

“It's ripping Tim getting back, and all that, of course, but it—well, it simply finishes me, Di, darling. All my plans, my—well—hopes about things that matter. Because, you see, instead of having the Court now, its income, and all that, as I believed I had, before Tim turned up, I've got nothing, and I am nobody! And I suppose, soon everyone'll let me know that they realize those interesting facts! As it is, you're simply all keyed-up about Tim's return——”

At once Diana turned to him, her face paling, her eyes like wide-open violets.

“Oh, Beau—darling—how can you? As if I could be such a beast!... Why, you know how fond I am of you!”

Malincourt seized her hand in his, his beautiful face seemed to pale, too, as he said ardently:

“Are you, Di—are you truly?”

At that moment the car swept round a corner, and they came upon a group of riders, and from it Tim detached himself, sending his horse along at a spanking rate; he saw the car, and Di freed her hand from Malincourt's to wave to him.

Then she said, a little shyly, rather nervously:

“Of course I am. And I do realize how difficult things are because of Tim's return. Poor Beau, it's all rotten for you. I

am so sorry.”

“But not sorry Tim’s come back?” Malincourt asked, with repressed anger, trying to sound bravely pathetic, to camouflage the bitter hatred against Tim which possessed him.

“One couldn’t be sorry exactly to see Tim come into his own,” Diana argued gently.

“You’ve a short memory,” Malincourt said curtly.

Then he tried to laugh, to seem his old self: this was not the way to win Diana, and, if he was to get any sort of time now, he would be forced to marry, and to marry money.

He had been planning to make the running with Diana before Tim’s cursed advent, and now there were a thousand more reasons why he should do it, and put all his will and all his power of attraction into it.

Diana was asking:

“What did you mean, Beau, by saying I’ve a short memory?”

Malincourt was ready with the right sort of remark this time.

He said, looking down, his voice rather troubled:

“That was a rotten thing to have said. Please forget I said it, Di darling. You see, to you and all the rest of the world, I daresay, Tim’s return will seem romantic, a very right, and rather exciting affair. Long lost heir comes into his own, that sort of thing! But I have to know all the real facts, haven’t I? And I can’t forget Tim’s attitude towards father. No one ever had a better father than Tim and myself. Yet Tim loathed him, and broke his heart. And it does, I think you’ll admit, seem rather rough luck on father that Tim never cared enough

about him to come back when I published the news of his illness, and appealed in every paper I could think of for him to return! He simply never gave a thought to returning then, but now, when he's ready to come, when all he has to do is to step into father's shoes, back he comes gaily without a word to me! He did that because he knew it would 'get' me. It did. I'm being deadly honest with you, and I mean to be, even if it puts you off. But you've got to know me as I am. Dido, I can't rejoice over Tim's return. And I can't believe you'll feel I ought to after what I've just told you. I owed father everything, he was my best pal, and the most generous, and fairest, and straightest man in the world. Tim ignored all that; he just got what he could out of father, and didn't care a cent about him or what happened to him.... Now he's home triumphant and secure, and I've got to take a back seat for evermore. I daresay it does sound small, but I feel as if I'd been cheated in some way, and I can't, I can't forget what father would feel."

"But Lord Crane always knew Tim must inherit," Diana suggested worriedly.

"Father thought Tim was dead," Malincourt said bitterly. "And after that ghastly hunting-field affair he—well, I think father didn't mind if he was——"

"That was before my time," Diana said gently.

"Oh, I wouldn't think of telling you. It's all over and you know how all those things get exaggerated," Malincourt said gloomily. "I daresay Tim didn't do what it was said he did. Anyway, that doesn't count today——" he leant forward and captured Diana's hand again. "What does," he said passionately, "is whether you understand and if you're a little bit sorry for me?"

“Oh, I am, I do,” Diana said fervently.

“Sure?” Malincourt persisted.

“Certain.”

He lifted her hand and kissed it, then laid it back on her knee, very gently.

“Tell the man to stop,” he said, his face still imploring as he met Diana’s eyes; “I’ll get out here.”

The car slowed up, he opened the door. In the half-light, as he leant forward, he looked amazingly handsome.

“Nothing matters really, if you keep on meaning what you said,” he half whispered, and kissed her hand again.

Then he was gone, and Diana was left, feeling half distressed, half attracted.

She thought, a little dazedly, that she had never had the faintest idea Beau cared—like that.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN FROM THIBET

“THAT’s that!” Tim’s mind sang to the rhythm of his horse’s hoofs. “I’ve met Malincourt! It’s over!”

He rode to pick up the car at the Prince of Wales’s Gate, where a groom was waiting, was driven back to the Berkeley, bathed and changed.

As he went down in the lift a man, who had got into it on the same floor, looked at him, hesitated, nodded.

Tim nodded back, wondering who on earth this hawk-faced stranger might be.

“Er—Crane——?” the stranger said.

“Yes,” Tim said cheerily, without any self-consciousness and added: “Just back. London’s altered a bit in ten years!”

He loitered behind to let the other go first, and asked the lift man:

“Who is that?”

“Mr. Clyde Foster, my lord, the great explorer.”

“Of course!” Tim exclaimed.

He caught Foster up.

“I say, where’ve you blown in from? Or haven’t you been voyaging lately? I only reached England on the 14th. I’m utterly out of everything!”

“I was with Norris in Thibet,” Foster said.

“Furthest north I’ve been in that region was to a little place above the Bramapootra, called Argong,” Tim said.

Foster’s deep-set eyes gleamed with interest.

“Oh, you know Assam?”

Tim laughed.

“After elephants, that’s all.”

They passed into a technical conversation about hunting, insensibly almost they drank together, lunched together. When they parted neither had noticed the flight of time. Foster was obliged to go, but before he left he booked Tim for a big official dinner a week later.

“You’ll sit between me and Honiton,” he said, shaking Tim’s hand hard.

Hurrying off to the Albany, where he had rooms, Foster found himself thinking about Tim. He knew Tim had spoken utter truth about all the expeditions; he had checked up certain details by things other men had told him ... hadn’t there been a rather unsavoury scandal about Crane, when he’d been a young man? If there had, it was probably half of it fake! Anyway, life had altered Crane; he, Foster, knew a man when he met one!

Tim was left feeling different, too; for a little while he had re-lived those free and wonderful days when, penniless, but with a pal, he had hacked and carved life as he had chosen.

With a big sigh he looked at his watch.

He was due at the lawyers’ again.

He must exchange the jungle for Lincoln’s Inn Fields!

He was striding across that quiet and spacious square when he was nearly run down by a car, which was being exceedingly badly driven.

He cursed the driver, a big man in tweeds, vigorously, and the man responded with abuse.

Tim knew that voice, his eyes narrowed to gleaming slits, and a wave of burning hatred so intense, he felt as if his skin were scorching, went over him.

Tim stood stockstill, glaring at the vanishing car, his face dark with passionate hatred, his hands gripped so furiously one within the other that the nails cut into the palms. He was beyond normal sensation, beyond ordinary reasoning power; if at that moment he had had a revolver on him he would have whipped it out and shot the driver of the car dead, and then have accepted the consequences of his deed gladly.

Luckily for most of us very few people can really hate; all of us can feel rage, bitter resentment, the lust for revenge, scorn, and dislike, but hatred, real hatred, is a thing of such concentration that few natures can compass it. It is a consuming passion; it consumes in the end the hater and the hated.

Tireless, undying even when it has gained its end, it is mercifully a most rare thing.

It is very seldom, moreover, that any balanced human being gives way, lets him or herself give rein to such an unbridled and overwhelming emotion; human nature is so constructed that its aim is happiness, tranquillity of spirit and that we therefore spare ourselves suffering whenever we can.

It is hard to hate, really hate; hatred, like genius, cuts you off from so much.

It had cut off Tim from all he cared about, for ten long years, the ten keenest years of his life.

He had felt his exile worth while, he had gone out to it knowing what it would mean to a great extent, and he had gone with one determination, to return to attain his end.

He had not expected to run into Blair Fordyce in London, and the suddenness of their meeting which, naturally, had been for Fordyce a casual encounter and no “meeting” at all, had thrown him off his balance.

Tim went and sat down on one of the long, green seats, and tried to light a cigarette. His hands were shaking so, the match flickered and went out before he could hold it to the cigarette.

“I’ve got to pull up,” he said in a whisper.

He let himself go slack, hands, shoulders, head, and then he gave a deep sigh, and rose to his feet again.

For the last ten years, nearly eleven, he had planned this meeting with Fordyce, and he was face to face now with a problem he had never even glimpsed in connexion with his assumed identity.

He had not returned to England as Erskine of Kyle, a man with a wrong to avenge, he had returned as Timeon Crane, a man unacquainted with Blair Fordyce! He had never grasped what his acceptance of Bill’s offer must mean, as far as his own interests were concerned.

The hatred for which he had lived had become, in a few seconds, those seconds when he had recognized Fordyce, a thing with which he no longer must concern himself.

The last ten years of his life had been wasted!

It came to that!

He could have cursed aloud, laughed, cried—he felt unstrung, almost desperate.

As if it had been yesterday he could hear Fordyce’s voice lying about him to his own father, and see the look of utter scorn, of terrible anger in his father’s face.

Half a lie—there had been, as there nearly always is, a fraction of truth in Fordyce's accusation, and Fordyce had traded on that and lied away honour, his father's faith in him, his mother's pride.

The Strand, roaring close at hand, the Law Courts bulking grey against the blue afternoon sky, faded like mists, and Tim was back, as young Erskine, as his real self, in the gaunt library of his Highland home.

He had stood as a prisoner at the bar, and Fordyce, his big, handsome face a mask of hypocrisy, had falsely accused him, and had triumphed.

Oh, of what use to go back over the years? To remember? To suffer again the shame and anguish?

The iron resolve of ten years had not been laid low; it had only been obscured for a little while, Tim discovered.

As he walked quickly across to the lawyer's office the old, arrogant tilt came back to his head, the careless hardness to his eyes.

Things had altered a bit with regard to Fordyce, but—sooner or later! Sooner or later!

CHAPTER IV

THE GOOD SORT

“I MUST have some money,” Malincourt said, moodily.

“Yvonne,” who was Mrs. Lillie Marsh in private life, walked quite normally across the floor and closed the door and locked it.

Usually “Madame Yvonne” glided with true mannequin grace, usually she spoke in a voice which was at once so dulcet and aloof that mere man quailed before it, mere woman felt ill at ease, but now she said, quickly and lovingly and anxiously, all at once:

“How much? What’s up, darling? What’s happened?”

Malincourt, tapping a cigarette upon his platinum and gold case, told her succinctly:

“Everything!”

He gave a short, mirthless laugh.

“My brother—” and he cursed Tim gently and terribly—“my brother’s come back.”

“You said he was dead,” Lil cried wildly.

“I hoped he was,” Malincourt retorted, “but my hope didn’t come off! He’s back, and he’ll come into everything, and go into everything!”

“Well, let him!” Lil declared with spirit. “You’d no reason to think other than that everything belonged to you. You put ads. in all the papers, didn’t you? You done, did—everything you could——”

“Oh, yes,” Malincourt agreed wearily, “I done—did, all I could! As you so graphically express it, I ‘put ads.’ by which

I suppose you mean advertisements, my dear, ‘in all the papers’—but I’m afraid my ‘all’ will avail me little in the eyes of my estimable brother, and the very best I can hope for, I suppose, is the abrupt stoppage of my allowance. I can’t refund, so it would be quite futile to try and make me!”

Lil had gone up to a little cupboard.

“You need a good pick-me-up, duckie,” she said, coming towards Malincourt with a whisky and soda.

“I need a bank balance,” Malincourt said, with his faint smile.

“You can have all I’ve got,” Lil told him, one hand on his thick, dark hair. “You know that.”

Malincourt caught her other hand.

He said, with quite a display of emotion for him:

“You are a good sort, Lil.”

Lil glowed.

“Love me a little bit still?” she questioned.

He drew her down and kissed her.

Lil leant her cheek to his.

“Spite of bad grammar and saying ‘ads’ and all?” she whispered, and added: “I got in the Haverton bill today, darling; that’s a hundred odd. Like it in notes?”

Malincourt kissed her quite ardently.

“I don’t know how to thank you!”

“Oh, yes, you do,” Lil laughed delightedly. “Give me a good hug and a real kiss, and buck up and be happy, and tell me it’ll all come right some day when——” She hesitated, then added: “When we’re married!”

Malincourt, looking into her eyes, raised his glass.

“Here’s to that wonderful day!” he said.

Lil’s eyes blazed a blue fire of adoration at him; she ran to get him the money, watched him hail a taxi in the street outside, with the same dazzled look. Malincourt was her life, her dream that he would marry her.

Dead straight, one-idea’d, lovely, and simple, shrewd only in her business, Lil had, so far, had very little happiness; then she had met Malincourt, two years before; he had taken a tiny interest in the business, and taken out of it every cent of the profits.

He had suggested marriage vaguely, complete secrecy very concisely, his father’s death had, naturally, “hung things up,” as Lil expressed it, but now, this afternoon, her hopes bloomed anew, lovelier, sweeter than before.

CHAPTER V

THE ORDEAL

THE same exhilaration he had felt in the morning possessed Tim again as he greeted Malincourt in the smoking-room at the Sports Club.

He had been keen on fencing as a boy, and his talk with Malincourt, he felt, rather resembled a fencing bout with the buttons off the rapiers.

There was danger, and he loved danger.

Malincourt looked pale, handsome, and indifferent to any interest.

“Buck up, young fella-me-lad!” Tim advised him, jocularly, feeling sure Malincourt hated jocularly of any sort, and specially coming from himself. “Why so pale and wan? Is it a fair lady, or what crime have you committed? Or do your past sins hang heavy on your soul?”

Malincourt stared at him blankly, and Tim laughed in his face.

“You seem—er—quite Colonial,” Malincourt murmured.

“Oh, no, merely natural!” Tim assured him. “I’ve cultivated bonhomie during my ten years’ absence! By the way,” and he purposely dropped all banter, “by the way, I imagine I shall need a good deal of that quality in the discussion I must have with you, I fear, concerning your—stewardship—shall we call it?”

“I was, you must remember, under the impression that I was dealing with the property as owner, not steward,” Malincourt said suavely.

“You may have chosen to adopt that view. It was obviously a view of great advantage to yourself,” Tim said drily, “but, nevertheless, I want an account from you of your expenditure on my behalf, and a list of things I find it very difficult to trace.”

“Certainly,” Malincourt said rather faintly.

He lifted the champagne bottle from the ice bucket and poured out a second glass, and drained it at a gulp.

Tim went on eating, and Malincourt studied him bitterly.

The ten years had made a difference! The Tim who had gone out had been a wholly different being, of abnormal sensitiveness, quick, flaring temper ... ridiculously susceptible to criticism and irony.... This man, who made requests, orders, as capable of biting irony as himself, was like a man in armour which had no flaw....

He said, as if he had read the other's thoughts:

“You are thinking I have changed? You are right, I have.”

Tim looked up, met Malincourt's gaze.

And he nodded at Malincourt, his eyes narrowed, his jaw set.

“Let's hope the change will be welcome and admired,” Malincourt suggested, crumbling his bread; he paused before he asked, with smooth insolence:

“Going to hunt?”

“Of course,” Tim answered, and added, staring hard into Malincourt's eyes: “Why not? Why shouldn't I? What do you mean?”

“Oh, nothing,” Malincourt murmured evasively. “I only wondered.”

Tim gave a snort.

“Oh! I know what you’re hinting at, harking back to! But you can cut all that out. And I should advise you”—he leant across the small table—“I should advise you, Malincourt, to keep a very civil tongue in your head when you speak to me! Now then, if you’ve finished, not dining—you haven’t eaten a thing—I propose we go back to your flat and have a financial discussion.”

Malincourt followed him out, hating him, loathing him, fearing him, and Tim strode ahead, detesting this young man who had baited and bullied Bill, made Bill’s nervous, high-strung life a torment to him, finally cut him off from his own home and his own father.

“I’ll settle your hash,” Tim thought grimly, “I’ll pay back Bill’s score all right!”

“We’ll walk if it’s not far,” he said curtly to Malincourt.

Several men hailed them both, came up to chat in the hall; walking along St. James’s-square towards the Haymarket someone waved from a car—Diana!

Tim instantly waved back, the car slowed up ahead, and a man leant from the window. Tim nodded to him at once, and said:

“H’are you, sir?” and had his hand shaken.

“Daddy would stop,” Diana explained.

Tim, still not “placing” Diana, unaware of her name, was very gay and friendly.

“Going to a show?”

Yes, they were going to a theatre, “Daddy” announced.

“Going on anywhere later?” Tim demanded of Diana.

“Embassy? Ciro’s? Gargoyle?”

“Oh, Daddy, do!” Diana begged.

Daddy, wrinkling up his face in protest and a smile at one and the same time, said he “might.”

“Gargoyle, eleven-ish,” Diana cried as the car moved off.

Tim observed, throwing out a feeler:

“Nice people!” and snapped up the name “Lansdale,” as Malincourt drawled uninterestedly:

“The Lansdales? Oh, yes!”

And suddenly, amazingly, Tim felt his rancour and animosity, his longing to avenge Bill and humiliate Malincourt, had weakened greatly.

He had known it was no use really to have this cross-examination of Malincourt. He felt pretty certain Malincourt had not a penny, and he had no means of getting back anything Malincourt had annexed; but he had meant to put him through it, to bait him, anger him, as he had baited and angered Bill.

But, after all, it would avail him nothing ... and it was a rather heavenly evening—and there was the Gargoyle to look forward to ... and, after all ... rather more importantly!... he had no right whatever to resent Malincourt’s secret sales, his big and petty thefts, his administration of the estate!

There was that point to consider!

He halted abruptly, and said, facing Malincourt:

“Look here, get out a statement, will you, and send it to me? I’ve remembered an appointment I want to keep.”

He left Malincourt for once in his life nearly unnerved, and then as little by little it came to him that there was to be no ghastly disclosure, that life was, in fact, going to go on, Malincourt’s beautiful mouth broke into a very ugly sneer.

“Funked it at the last, as usual, had he? How like Tim! He hadn’t changed so much then!”

Self-confidence came back in a flood, self-confidence, and contempt for Tim. Malincourt put up his stick at a taxi, gave the address of a private gambling club, and went off to waste Lil’s hundred.

“It’s because I haven’t seen any women for ages, women of my own sort, to speak to,” Tim decided, mooning happily about St. James’s Park thinking of Diana and loving to think of her.

His thoughts were brought up with a nasty jar when they touched, very elusively, on marriage.

Marry? He, marry—under an assumed name—living as another man?

“I’ve got to get this clear,” Tim decided.

He sat down and faced it out.

Either he must chuck this stunt, go back to oblivion, and live abroad, again, or he must assume the responsibility, the privileges and prerogatives of the position he had adopted.

Definitely, he must live Timeon Crane’s life as Timeon would have lived it, and that mode of life must have included marriage.

He set off for the Gargoyle Club under a sapphire and silver sky, and felt the blood tingling in his veins, and loved life this summer night, and felt excited at the thought of seeing Diana.

“I’m new to it all,” he told himself, smiling a little. “It goes to my head like wine—being here, in England, even playing this game.”

He went up in the big lift and entered the club, walked to the door of the dance room and looked in eagerly.

Not there yet.

He reserved one of the little tables with their glass tops through which the rose-tinted light streamed from below, and sat down to wait.

Diana had just entered, Tim had risen to greet her, when a woman, very pretty, very smart, touched his arm and said, between lips which would have been white with terror had they not been painted:

“Tim!”

Behind the pretty woman, over her blond, too waved head, Diana smiled enchantingly. Tim smiled back at her; he said to the blond woman: “One minute—if you don’t mind, I’ll just seat my guests, and then, if you’ll let me, I’ll come to your table.”

The whole episode had been so brief that Diana had scarcely noticed it, but she had noticed it enough to say to Tim, as he piloted her across the little space:

“Isn’t that Madame Yvonne, the dressmaker?”

“Whoever the radiantly fair lady is,” Tim answered, “she honours me by seeming to know me, and I don’t think I can place her at all—or couldn’t, till you told me her name!”

He excused himself to Diana:

“I’ll just go and make my apologies for seeming rather brusque.”

Madame Yvonne was sitting with a young man, who rose as Tim approached and sauntered away.

Tim stood beside the table and waited, and Madame Yvonne said, almost in a whisper:

“We can’t talk here.”

“No?” Tim questioned. He wondered what on earth this obviously very shaken little woman, who was rather overdressed, and very over-jewelled, could want from him. He had felt faintly annoyed at her theatrical “Tim,” of a few minutes earlier, and now her trembling lips, her nervous hands, and her half angry, half imploring gaze quickened that annoyance perceptibly.

“Look here,” he was beginning, when the woman broke in, speaking still in a hushed, frightened voice:

“Come and see me at my flat,” she said. “Tabor Mansions, just off Sloane-street. Ten tomorrow morning.” She gasped breathlessly and added, “Same name and telephone number, Sloane 0416.”

“Very well,” Tim said, then, after brief hesitation, he bowed and went back to the Lansdales.

He was puzzled and vaguely distressed. He tried to recall that last talk of Bill’s, that outpouring of confidence, which he now realized had been Bill’s effort for his own definite preparation for this new life. He could not recall the mention of any woman’s name.

Yet, obviously, this woman took him for Bill.

Settling himself beside Diana, looking into her exquisite young face, he decided to let all problems go hang and just enjoy himself.

“Shall we dance?” he asked, and as he guided Diana into the throng, forgot all about the unknown, fair lady.

His arm about Diana’s cool slenderness, listening to her, looking down at her silky, shingled head, feeling her hand

within his, he was conscious of his heart racing, of an exhilaration he had never known since his very early youth.

The small, crowded dancing space seemed something like Paradise, life had taken on a new wonderful glamour, every difficulty he had had to face, the endless difficulties which lay ahead of him, ceased to matter, he was existing for the moment, this moment of nearness, of happy communion.

Diana said:

“Are you going to the polo tomorrow?”

Tim had not known anything about it, but he answered eagerly: “Yes. Can I drive you down?”

It seemed Bimbo (whoever he might be!) was taking her; a further sentence informed Tim that Bimbo was a brother, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

As they walked back to their table Madame Yvonne was leaving the club. Diana said casually: “I believe Malincourt helped to finance her business.”

“Probably that’s why the lady wanted to talk to me,” Tim said lightly; he added, on the same note, “He’s an odd bloke, my young brother.”

Diana looked up at him rather shyly, then suddenly she said:

“Tim, just before you appeared like a sort of miracle in Rotten-row, I’d been asking Beau a great favour. Now, what I asked doesn’t concern him any more, because it was about the Court land. Beau’d put it up for sale, and I was begging him not to let it go, because of the tenants.” Her eyes were lifted to Tim’s, and as he gazed into hers he said quickly: “Whatever you don’t want shall not be done, Di, I promise.”

He saw Di's eyes widen, deepen in colour, her hand just touched his as she said breathlessly:

“Oh, Tim, you dear!”

He laughed with delight.

“Am I? D'you mean it?”

She nodded, and Tim put his hand on hers, hard.

“I shan't forget that,” he said very quietly.

Later, having dropped the Lansdales, he left the car and walked back to his hotel.

It was still a wonderful night, cool, starry, a night which shed loveliness on mundane things.

Tim breathed deep, walking along with his head up, his hands thrust into his pockets. Life was good ... it held promise of being more than that.

He forgot, building his dream castles, that he was a fake, that whilst Blair Fordyce walked the earth he had sworn to obtain revenge, and let no outside thing, however precious, come between himself and the fulfilment of his oath.

Tonight under the stars he thought only of Diana, of her most sweet youthfulness, her blessed lovely innocence of heart, of the fragrance of her hair, the cool touch of her hands.

Untouched, that was Diana—a being untouched by life, by any thought even of evil, of trouble, of pain.

The sort of wife a man dreamt about, a real wife, a girl to love beyond all telling....

Polo tomorrow, with her in the sunshine, something he would fix up for the evening, with any luck, anyway he'd

manage to go where Diana went—!

The thought came to him suddenly:

“And two months ago I was nobody, I was nameless, homeless....”

Diana had said he had appeared like a miracle in Rottenrow!—his life had changed miraculously, and Bill had made the miracle possible.

He went into the hotel and hunted up a peerage, and hunted out the name Lansdale, and discovered Diana’s father to be a younger son of a younger son; he had a place in Wiltshire; Tim imagined near to Malincourt: which was enormously to the good.

Putting the book away he went and stood by the open window, and lit a last cigarette.

The events of the day had been crowded, indeed!

First, his meeting with Malincourt, then the hideous rencontre with Fordyce, and yet, because he had met Diana, too, the importance of both those other meetings had paled, become almost shadowy.

From Big Ben three o’clock boomed out; it would be dawn soon. Tim turned away from the window and, yawning, began to untie his white tie.

Strolling into the sitting-room he noticed, for the first time, a letter lying on the table.

He picked it up; a woman’s handwriting, he rather guessed, and tore open the envelope.

The letter had no beginning:

“I know now you deceived me all along; first a false name, then letting me think you dead.... Heaven knows I have no

reason to be proud of being your wife, and I don't want to let it be known I am, but I mean to have my rights for our boy.”

It was signed “Lil.”

Tim had been approaching that state of wholly delightful tiredness which heralds a dreamless sleep; when he had read and re-read the letter signed “Lil” he felt wider awake than he had felt since his hunting days in Java, when sleep had meant possible death.

His shrewd brain analysed, imagined, doubted, accepted until he felt very nearly distraught!

If Bill had been married, then indeed life was going to be one dickens of a mess-up!

Already, after a very careful study of Bill's handwriting, he had signed various important documents in Bill's name; already he had been accepted by Bill's friends, by Malincourt, by—Diana Lansdale.

It was too late to back out now.

He must go through with things.

But marriage—that had never entered in his conception of the scheme of things.

Moreover, Bill had never hinted that he had a wife—let alone a son.

A son!

Tim lit cigarette after cigarette, gripped on his pipe, kept that between his teeth, and chewed on the stem.

Five o'clock—six—four hours still to go. He didn't intend to wait until ten.

Sleep was utterly out of the question. He tried to read; no book could hold his attention; he would find himself

wondering feverishly, “Had it been a secret marriage? How old was this son? What name, good heavens, what name, false name, had been given this woman?”

On every side, look with what assumption of indifference he could muster, difficulties bristled, all threatening his new life with exposure, or himself with unthinkable disgrace.

Tim could picture Malincourt’s malevolence, picture the joy he would experience in heaping ignominy on him; and, by jove, Malincourt would have the right to heap it.

Tim’s blood ran actually chill as he thought of such exposure—and of the revelation consequent upon that exposure.

It would be discovered who he really was, and then, in all fairness, his family would be right in disowning him, and Fordyce, wastrel and rotter that he was, would triumph anew.

“Not while I remain sane!” Tim said aloud grimly.

Whatever happened, he saw he must play up to this woman’s bluff, if it was bluff, and if it was not, he must, at all costs, keep her quiet, play for time.

As soon as it was light he rang his bell for the valet, kept his finger on it until, finally, a man, sleek, pale, and still blinking, came in, and said dully:

“You rang, sir?”

“For a quarter of an hour,” Tim said; “that was all.”

The valet murmured something about being sorry, and asleep.

Tim, usually the kindest of masters, cut short the stammering apology with:

“Get me some coffee, a big pot of it, and some cold food—ham, anything—as quickly as you can.”

At seven he was out in the cool, sunlit street, with a muffler about his collarless throat, and dressed in a loose, old suit, a relic of Australian days. He struck away from town and got on to the Heath and walked there for an hour, and began to feel better, then hailed an early taxi, drove back to the hotel, bathed and changed, and then set out for Tabor Mansions.

Yvonne, or Lil, or whatever her real name was, opened the door herself, and a cheery odour of coffee and bacon streamed out, and the sound of a child's laughter mingled with the shrill whistle of a canary.

Somehow those simple domestic sounds disarmed Tim, his mood of keen truculence fell from him, he found himself smiling a little at the pink and white and gold little woman who was looking up at him so distressfully, and saying to her quite normally, even apologetically:

"I'm awfully early, I know, an hour ahead of the time you said I might come, but I—I rather wanted to have it all out!"

"You'd better come in now," Lil said. She gave a deep sigh as she led the way down the hall and opened a door, out of which sunshine spilled in one big, lovely splash.

Tim followed her into a room which was full of sunshine, simply, and in which a boy was breakfasting, throwing bits of toast to a terrier, whistling to the canary, generally getting along very happily and in the usual style of boys about nine years old.

He slid off his chair as Tim entered, and held out a jammy hand with a very engaging smile.

"Nice-mannered kid!" Tim found himself thinking as he took the sticky hand and said: "Hullo!" and listened to Lil's faint, distressed murmur:

“This is Mickey.”

“Short for Michael,” Mickey said; he had a jolly little speaking voice, clear and confident.

He stood near Tim, looking up at him.

Tim met the clear-grey eyes with a feeling he could not have described; he had all he could do to keep his own gaze steady, not avoid that open, friendly glance.

Mickey had such a look of Bill, the same level brows, the same way of biting his under-lip, the same jet-black eyelashes and fair hair.

“Who are you?” Mickey asked, and Tim said:

“My name’s Crane.”

“Oh, no, is it?” Mickey cried. “Are you a relation, then, of the new Lord Crane who——”

“I believe so,” Tim said, trying to smile, and hating to lie to this kid with the clear eyes. He felt grateful to Lil for her quick:

“You run along, darling, now, or you’ll be late; you’ll be seeing Lord Crane again.”

“I hope so!” Mickey said, giving Tim another of his happy little smiles.

As the hall door slammed on him, Lil, sinking down on to a chair, said:

“That’s—that’s our son.”

She went on in the same breathless, worried way:

“I didn’t tell you. What was the use? You’d gone—we’d parted. And I never guessed till I saw you yesterday who you were. You played me a dirty trick then, Tim—and even if it’s all more than ten years ago there’s no getting away from that.

I daresay I was a bit of a spitfire, and I'll admit we never hit it, and I'll admit I did try to catch you: but I was never mean, and I never tried to play you up. You could have trusted me! I never made claims on you. I wouldn't have, even if you'd been open with me."

She was crying, in rather a pitiful way, the tears just rolling down her face; she made no effort to wipe them away.

Tim felt horribly, profoundly distressed and self-conscious, and, in some way, ashamed. He had no right, he knew, to be "in" on this scene; the impersonation of a free man was one thing, a man who, at least, was responsible to himself alone, for his mistakes and his code of life—but to take on another man's personality, his very life, and to find then that that life was bound up in two other lives, was a vastly different thing.

He touched Lil's hand very gently.

"Look here," he said humbly, "What is it you want me to do, for, of course, I'll do it."

Lil rose to her feet; she ceased to cry and became almost, it seemed, in the act of rising, a different woman.

She said levelly:

"It's Mickey we have to think of. Only him. He ought to have all the advantages your son would have. Big schools, a pony to ride, the right sort of holidays."

"He shall have 'em," Tim said briefly. He hadn't a notion how all this was to be arranged, but on one point he was perfectly clear—Bill's boy should be treated straightly, however it complicated his own life.

He asked a leading question, a question to which he longed to have the answer:

"What do you call him now—his surname, I mean?"

Lil opened her china-blue eyes to their widest extent.

“Why, Marsh, of course,” she said in a surprised voice, and added tartly: “The fake name you considered good enough for me to be married to!”

So Bill had been Tim Marsh!—well, that was one point gained, at least he knew the name Bill had used.

He had to go on with his blunt questions; they had, this woman and he, to get somewhere definite with regard to the future.

She was powdering her face; over one shoulder she asked curiously:

“Did you think I was dead?”

“I never thought at all,” Tim said, truthfully.

Lil sniffed scornfully:

“No, you wouldn’t!”

She wheeled upon him suddenly:

“You’re a poor thing an’ no mistake, Tim Marsh—Timeon Antony Rutland, Lord Crane!... You don’t care a brass farthing what happens to you s’long’s you’re left in peace, do you?”

She jerked at him wholly unexpectedly: “S’pose you never did care for me really, did you? You were a rum ’un, even at Oxford! Married me to spite a girl, and left me a few weeks later! And we’ve never met since! Then you breeze along back, a blooming lord, and I see you by chance and tell you we’ve a son, and all you say is: ‘What’ll we do?’ as bla’ as can be! No demand to see the birth certificate, no inquiry—not that that ’ud have helped you. I knew my man, and I’ve got doctor’s testimony, and all. You bet I have! but it’s all so like the feller I remember.... ‘Let things go.... Don’t worry

me.... Everything's an episode,' and you'd everlastingly funk a quarrel, a bit of chat even, meeting someone you didn't like! I dunno—I nearly loved you once, and then that bored you!”

She gave a faint laugh, pulling down her small, smart hat over her golden hair. Carelessly from the door she said:

“Well, I'm off. You can write me.” And she was gone.

CHAPTER VI

CHALLENGE TO COMBAT

“WHAT’S the use of going to Hurlingham?” Tim asked himself wretchedly.

Lil’s advent had changed everything. Gone was the sense of heady excitement which had upheld him, gone the rollicking feeling that he had a right to “do down” Malincourt, gone the knowledge that, after all, he, Tim, was a free man.

He was not a free man; he was a man at the mercy of a woman’s temper; and Tim, who had had no real love affair, was sufficiently womanwise to know what a very precarious foothold on the plane of tranquillity that menace afforded him!

The decent part of him felt glad he could look after Mickey. For Bill’s sake, he’d give his best to the boy, see he got the right outlook, right schooling, the right life altogether. If only the tie with Lil ended at that!

But it did not. Tim had a feeling that whatever Lil might say about their separate lives, about making no claim on him, he could place no reliance on this immunity. And the world would, sooner or later, draw its own conclusions.

And Diana was of the world.

Last night he had felt so happy, so thankful he had met her. Now he wished he had never seen her. The telephone went, he took off the receiver.

“Mr. David Lansdale is waiting for you, my lord.”

“Oh, ask him to come up, please,” Tim said.

Whilst he waited he tried to think what he should do—go with the Lansdales or refuse?

The door opened and a young man came in, a rather short young man with a very freckled face and very red hair. A singularly plain young man until his smile flashed out.

It flashed now, rather shyly, as he said:

“My sister is waiting in the car. H’are you? I remember you. I don’t suppose you will me—unless it’s my hair!”

And then he laughed, and Tim laughed too.

“I was out that day you had your spill,” David said, and then blushed cruelly, violently, his very eyes seemed to redden, and he mumbled: “Sorry!”

Tim, blessing his own lightning-like memory, power of linking one fact up with another, recalled the scandal of the hunting field, and thought he knew why David was so distressed.

He said cheerily:

“That’s all right. I can ride now, by the way!”

He liked young David greatly, and he had wanted, all the time, to go to the polo.

The future? Oh, hang the future!—and Lil! and Bill’s past idiocies, and all the endless worries attendant upon Bill’s actions.

Diana was sitting in a devilish-looking racing car, a little blue cap crushed down on her bright hair, a thin, vivid blue oil-skin covering up her white dress.

Tim got in beside her, and David swung himself into the driving seat, the car seemed to explode, and then shot deafeningly down Piccadilly.

Tim, thankful he had no nerves, so he assured himself, nearly sweated blood as David wound his way in and out of the crowded traffic at a rough forty miles an hour.

They seemed to reach Hurlingham in about “two ticks of a bee’s knee,” as David graphically expressed it, and Diana divested herself of the blue oil-skin, brought a hat out from some mysterious locker, and appeared like a new vision before Tim’s eyes.

“Isn’t this heavenly?” she asked him, and Tim said it was, his pulses racing again, his heart thudding.

He sat beside Diana, and looked more at her than at the polo.

They were very happy, the three of them, until during the interval, when a little crowd was streaming slowly past, all three—Diana, David, and Tim—distinctly heard a man’s voice say:

“There’s that outsider Crane! Nerve he’s got to come and look on at other men riding! About all he’s fit for!”

Tim caught a glimpse of David’s outraged, white face, of Diana’s blazing eyes before he swung round, in one violent movement, intent only on “getting” the man who had spoken so of him, spoken deliberately, as a challenge.

But even in the brief space of time between the speech and Tim’s movement other groups of pleasant strollers had passed by, and Tim realized he was trapped, for he had no least idea of the identity of the speaker, and he had no means of tracing him!

But only he knew that, and why, and he knew too, in the queer stiffening of David’s voice, as he asked him some

trivial question, in the brilliance of Diana's eyes, that to these two he seemed merely to be f—king a row.

For the first time in his life Tim knew what it meant to be branded as a coward, and, for the first time, reading his sentence in young David's frank, angry stare, he really understood the heritage Bill had left him.

Standing between the brother and sister, a head taller than David, Tim would have been thankful if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

He debated two questions grimly: Should he say to David straight out: "Who was the man who insulted me just now? I don't place him." Or should he confide in Diana, tell her point blank that he hadn't been able to identify this obvious enemy, and enlist her help?

He supposed, gloomily, lighting a cigarette, trying to seem at ease, that he was unlikely to be given a second chance of meeting his attacker; he felt certain he would not lose a chance of tracking the voice this time, but to have barged into about four separate small parties seeking his man, as he must have done in the former instance simply was not done.

He had lost precious time in realizing that he himself was being insulted, then he had lost another moment or so in accepting the fact that he was up against things and must act, and when he had longed to act it had been too late.

He prayed to all his gods the same man would pass by again, and again insult him. He scanned each face under its gleaming, regulation "topper," fair men, dark men, old men, young ones ... he thought if the same man came by he must look at him, Tim, offensively, and that would give him a line. He might then ask Diana: "Is that the feller?"

But no one took any notice of him, and the bell had just rung, and Tim was turning away when he saw, dark, aloof, and looking, despite his prosaic clothes, most romantically handsome, Malincourt. He was walking with a youngish man who had a red face, rather bloodshot, blue eyes, and the air of a bully.

Tim stared at Malincourt, waiting for him to see him. Malincourt walked on, slightly to the right, and at that instant the red-faced man spoke, and his voice was the voice of Tim's attacker.

"Got 'im," Tim muttered; he said in a low voice to David:

"Look after your sister. I've spotted my man. I must just attend to a little affair I've got on hand. See you later!"

He had gone off in long strides before David could answer, but the boy took Diana's hand and drew her back a little; polo might be top-hole, but he felt he could not miss a really good scrap, and old Tim had had a glint in his eye which promised great things!

He saw Tim touch Malincourt's shoulder, wheel him round, saw Darley, the well-known Wiltshire M.F.H., swing round too, his red face darkening, and then David saw Tim give one lightning glance round, and then, with marvellous dexterity hit Darley such a blow in the mouth that blood spouted from the cut and fell at least a yard away.

Malincourt had gone livid. Darley was spluttering, his handkerchief to his mouth, his eyes glazing, as he leant helplessly against Malincourt.

The echo of a short laugh, Tim's laugh, came to David then he turned and came walking back, flicking a bit of fluff off his sleeve, grinning a very little to himself.

David was nearly breathless with gladness, the neatness of it!—the quickness—the skill of that one deadly blow—“all but a clean knock-out!” David reflected admiringly. “What a punch! Whew!”

And no one had noticed anything. Malincourt and Darley (hulking brute David had always considered him) had been passing up to their seats and had been under cover of the stands when Tim had reached them.

Tim smiled most cheerily at David.

“Have I missed anything?” he asked.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN PAYS

“I DUNNO what I think of him,” Lil confided to her sister. “Straight I don’t, Con.”

“Con,” otherwise Mrs. Constance Wiley, the wife of the head of that most prosperous bookmaking firm, leant back against a pile of satin cushions and sniffed:

“I jolly well know what I’d feel if I discovered I was married to a lord!” she remarked with blithe causticism! “And I jolly well know what I’d do! I’d queen it, my dear! I’d be ‘my lady’ all right, and get all that was coming to me. That’s what I’d do.”

“Oh, what’s the use of talking, like that?” Lil asked wearily. “Things are bad enough as it is, but they’d be worse if I had to blossom out now as the real Lady Crane—live at the Court, act as Tim’s wife—and—all the while want only one thing—to be with his brother! It’s the most hideous mess I’ve ever heard of, Con, and that’s a fact. If I’d fallen in love with any other man on earth it wouldn’t have mattered so, but no, it had to be my husband’s one and only brother ... and none of us knew it!”

“Get Tim to let you divorce him and then marry Beau,” Con suggested.

“You get some brain-waves!” Lil said with tired scorn. “If Beau got a bit suspicious of how things really are, it ’ud be the last I’d see of him! I know Beau. And I know how he hates Tim. He’d never believe, he’s not one of the believing sort, that I hadn’t deceived him, that I hadn’t known

something, and he'd think it had all been a put up job, as like as not, to humiliate him further."

"Humiliate him!" Con sniffed. "I like that! A chap who lets a woman give him hundreds isn't over sensitive! Oh, you needn't get ratty, old girl. I'm not one to bother about other people's affairs, you'll grant me that, but it does make me mad to see you swotting away at this business, and every penny profit you get going to buy Beau Malincourt new luxuries. Besides, where's it all to end? He can't marry you now, you can't marry him, you're not free, and you say you daren't get free for fear of losing him, so what on earth is going to happen?"

Lil had been looking out of the window, and the golden glow of the sunset fell over her like a beautiful veil; as she turned slowly its soft radiance was in her eyes, and her voice was very gentle as she answered:

"Y'know, Con, these aren't such evil times! Since Beau's been down on his luck he's come to see me every day.... I don't know what I'm going to do, I can't see my way clear, but there's one thing, I'll never take a step that might lead to something which would hurt or anger him. You'll never go back on your word, Tim won't speak for his own sake ... if Mickey gets his rights—I'll be content just to go on loving ... and sometimes getting loved back again."

Con got up from the sofa, she crossed to Lil and stood beside her; she was a little taller, not so slender as Lil, but just as smart, and very, very pretty.

She nodded down at Lil's upturned, wistful face.

"What you say goes!" she said; she tried to raise a little laugh. "But you are one of the world's fools, old dear! You

get nothing out of this, you don't see a chance of getting anything, and yet you say you'll go on with it!"

"I get love," Lil whispered.

"You mean you give it," Con said shrewdly.

"Isn't that the best part?" Lil asked. "And I've had Mickey all to myself—and p'raps things'll turn out all right yet."

Con kissed her and went out to her smart car, where Bert, that prop of the old firm, was awaiting her.

He beamed on her gladly.

"How's things?"

"Not too bad—Lil's made a bit of a profit again."

"Salting it down?" Bert inquired in the vernacular, expressing in those pungent words the hope his sister-in-law would invest her hard-earned savings.

Con sniffed once more:

"Is it likely?"

Bert lit a cigar: having got it going to suit his exact and really very excellent taste he observed:

"Women beat me! Seems they must go nutty on wrong-uns! First Lil has a husband who beats it, then she takes up with a rotter like Malincourt! By the way, I heard today he's going to be married. I only hope it's true."

CHAPTER VIII

“NEEDS MUST WHEN——”

MALINCOURT had called at the hotel to learn that “his lordship had gone into residence in Belgrave Square.”

Thither Malincourt took his leisurely way accordingly, morose, entirely disgruntled, and in urgent need of petty cash.

Already men had been at work on the family house; the paint outside had been renewed, flowers—pink geraniums and ferns—were in all the window boxes, the whole place had an air of freshness, new life.

A manservant Malincourt did not know, with a rugged face and very clear eyes, extremely well-dressed, opened the door, and stood, respectfully inquiring.

Malincourt said to him brusquely:

“I am Mr. Malincourt. Where is his lordship?”

“In the ballroom, sir, interviewing the caterers, I believe.”

“You needn’t come with me,” Malincourt told him curtly. As he walked slowly up the wide staircase he thought sardonically:

“In the ballroom!—interviewing caterers!”—preparatory for a dance, probably, or some large function ... and no thought about expense ... no need to think!—whilst he was forced to consider every penny!

A wave of savage bitterness swept over him as he heard Tim’s voice, giving clear directions:

“The actual ballroom flowers will be sent up from the country, but I want you to make a bank of blue hydrangeas in front of the band, potted stuff, of course, and I want the

leaded extension to be made into a small formal garden, those clipped box trees, growing rose trees, that sort of thing, and then electric, coloured lighting, done in the French way, the lights hanging like flowers amongst the trees.”

Malincourt strolled into the huge room and leant in the doorway, unseen by Tim.

During a pause in the conversation he asked languidly:

“What’s all this?”

Tim wheeled round, nodded to him absently, and then, before speaking to him, answered a question the head caterer had put to him.

Malincourt flushed faintly: another deliberate insult, and he had swallowed it because he must get money from Tim, somehow.

Tim turned round, came up to him. He strongly disliked Malincourt, but he was aware of a desire to pay him courtesy in this house to which Malincourt had a claim and he himself none.

He said, as pleasantly as he could:

“I propose to celebrate my return, and so I am giving a dance. Good idea, don’t you think? Hope you’ll help me? On the seventeenth.”

Malincourt observed acidly:

“You seem quite capable of running the show yourself.”

Tim nodded. He said:

“Come on down and have a drink.”

Neither of them had referred to the Darley incident so far; Tim had no intention of doing so, but Malincourt said suddenly:

“I suppose you know Darley’s out for revenge? Wants you to go to Knocke, or somewhere, and really fight.”

Tim laughed shortly.

“He’ll want,” he said, carelessly. “I can do all the fighting I care about, or that he likes to take on, here in London. I don’t propose to take a trip to the Continent to smash him up when I can do it here so easily!”

Malincourt was looking at him under drooped lids. Changed! Good heavens! the Tim he had lived with for twenty years of his life might never have been!

Aloud he asked quite boldly:

“Can you let me have some money?”

Tim had been giving genuine consideration to the matter of financing Malincourt. Despite his assumption of Bill’s title, despite the fact he was hourly “growing” more and more into the rôle he had sworn to play, he had not been able to rid himself of a feeling of discomfort in handling Bill’s money as his own.

He asked Malincourt point blank:

“How much do you want?”

Malincourt gave a faint, unpleasant laugh.

“All I can get,” he said.

“You’ve drawn thousands out during the last year,” Tim said. “I have been going through the year’s expenses with the lawyers, and, by the way, I want that builder’s letter Mr. Angus tells me you have. Of course, there can be no question of selling the Court land. It’s a ghastly idea.”

Malincourt, reddening a little, said with a sneer:

“I see Dido Lansdale’s influence is really strong!”

Tim's eyes narrowed. He said bleakly:

"If you want money from me I advise you to refrain from observations like that."

Malincourt rose to his feet.

"Well, I do want money," he said angrily.

Tim's temper, never slow to quicken, blazed up.

"And you can jolly well want," he said stubbornly.

He left Malincourt still standing, his green eyes smouldering, a curious, fixed smile, the smile of sheer rage, on his face.

Late that evening, when he got in from a long tramp in Surrey, Tim sat down and wrote Malincourt a cheque.

After all——!

He did not finish the sentence, even to himself, but he reflected, walking up to his room, that he had his own fortune, and that, so far, he had not drawn on Bill's, and would do so only from the estate, and for Michael.

"I've got to get it somehow," Malincourt had told himself feverishly, walking away from Belgrave Square.

He could not face bankruptcy, and he knew that unless he could square certain accounts he was on the verge of that disgrace.

Lil had no more to give, and could borrow no more for him either.

There was only one way out! Marriage—an engagement, anyway, to a wealthy woman.

The publication of the news of his engagement would keep his creditors quiet for a bit.

He was walking down Cadogan-place and suddenly he thought of Caro Nesbit. She wasn't his "sort," far too modernly exotic, but she was enormously rich in her own right, and her old mother did not count. Caro and he had always got on ... she wasn't the type of wife Malincourt had ever intended to take; he had always, secretly, thought of Diana Lansdale, of a girl of breeding, of soul, as well as birth. He reflected cynically that beggars couldn't be choosers, and that, after all, Caro was young, lovely in a morbid sort of way, and if she was go-ahead and had a rather draggled reputation, after all he needn't stay married to her!

He was told Miss Nesbit was in, and he was shown into her small sitting-room.

He could hear Caro's hard, drawling voice. She was in a room near, speaking to her maid, apparently. Then the gramophone started, and then Caro called out:

"Oh, Beau, is that you? I won't be long. Feeling awfully the 'day after' ... went to a nigger party last night, too divine; danced with one nigger for two hours. Nearly dead now! Get a drink or something, and for heaven's sake mix me one! I'll come in in a dressing-gown in two ticks."

Malincourt called back: "Right-o!"

He walked across to a table where everything for cocktails had been placed ready, mixed a gin cocktail, and drank it.

He wandered about, listening absently to Caro's perfectly distinct abuse of her maid, her shrill accompaniment to the gramophone.

In front of a crowded shelf Malincourt stood still. A single stone diamond ring lay just at his feet, half under the edge of the rug.

He stooped and picked it up. He was about to call out to Caro and tell her what he thought of her carelessness, when, examining the stone, one of singular beauty, his whole face altered.

He had done a good many “near” things in his life, but, so far, he had never actually stolen. He told himself he had never been so pushed for money—he’d only pawn it ... get it out later ... the two hundred he’d get on it would save him ... he could gamble again, too ...

He slid the ring into his pocket.

Caro Nesbit came in doing a Charleston step, gyrating exaggeratedly, and humming the music, her eyes half closed, her very scarlet mouth a little open, she looked a little less than sane.

Malincourt, smiling at her, felt a wave of distaste envelop him; modern as he was in most things, he was a sheer throw-back in many ways, and specially in anything to do with women who were, in the least degree, allied to his own family.

He had been, until her entrance, considering Caro as a possible wife. Now, studying her with a scrutiny sharpened by that idea, he felt faintly disgusted and acutely out of tune with her.

Caro stopped in front of him, and, finishing a violent double shuffle which gave Malincourt an impression of a marionette being jerked by the wrong strings, leant forward and stroked his hair, and said, rather breathlessly:

“Well, my prune, and how’s things?”

Her eyes—beautiful if very made-up eyes (their dense blueness was circled with heavy bistre-gris, and each lash

carried its blob of sparkling blackness)—gazed at him between narrowed, white lids.

“What’s all the doings?” she cried again. “What have you been up to that makes you look so guilty?”

She began to do the same dance-step again whilst speaking, but her gaze, amused, mischievous, never left Malincourt’s face. He felt so frightened, so abominably self-conscious, that he nearly took the diamond ring from his pocket, and said, feigning severity:

“You need teaching a lesson, my child! If I’d done what I meant to, I should have taken this ring, which I found for you—and I’ll bet you haven’t even missed yet!—I should have taken it to your mother, and have told her to ask you why you never wore it, and then, when you had to ’fess up and say you couldn’t find it, return it to you! It would have served you right, but I am feeling lenient, so here you are!”

But the one moment, the quick moment when he should have made that excellent explanation, flashed past, was gone irretrievably; impossible to hesitate and then explain, hesitation ruined the credulity of others!

He said, smiling his slow smile:

“Not even to you can I tell my life’s secret history!”

“That’s a double-edged compliment,” she said carelessly, “but in case it was well meant, thank you, dear Beau, for being so considerate as to save me from having a seizure!”

She flung herself on a sofa, and lay there stretched out, long, slender, biscuit-coloured silk legs very much in evidence, long, slender, bare, white arms upflung.

Malincourt, sauntering across, standing beside the divan, wished glumly he could feel for Caro what, occasionally, he

felt for Lil.

But this girl made him feel irritable and tired.

Her ceaseless jiggling, her caustic, yet common wit, even her real, but painted, almost varnished loveliness failed to please him.

Caro, looking up, said to him softly:

“Beau, you are really too good-looking! No man has a right to be so devastating! Black hair and dark-green eyes, and the modelling of your head is better than the Greek ideal—in fact, it’s perfection! You are just right, aren’t you, Beau?” She paused, then added with a small laugh: “And I feel certain sure you are a wrong ’un, just the same!”

Malincourt tried to laugh naturally. He had another second’s hideous fear. Could Caro have seen? But no, that was impossible. He said abruptly:

“Make a place for me beside you; shift that ton-load of terrific thickness (which is nearly as vast as a hair-pin) which you call yourself, and leave an inch for me! I want to talk to you.”

Caro, looking at him under her lashes, moved her slender form to the left, and Malincourt sat down on the space she patted.

He wished profoundly that he had had a drink before calling on Caro; it would have bucked him up. He had never proposed to anyone before. His half-promises, veiled suggestions to Lil concerning the future, she had never been able to construe into a real offer of marriage, and now that he was faced with the actuality, he felt helplessly at a loss.

He said, gazing down at Caro:

“You’re a lovely thing.”

Caro laughed again. She seemed really amused, and her amusement made Malincourt feel rather a fool.

Suddenly, out of the blue, she shot at him:

“You’re trying to ask me to marry you, my love?”

“Yes.” Malincourt said blankly.

Caro leant up on one elbow.

“Well, go on,” she suggested.

It was absurd, farcical, Malincourt felt angrily, but he dare not appear ruffled. He said, not looking at Caro now, but giving her, quite consciously, the full value of his profile:

“You see, Tim’s return has altered things so. I wanted to ask you as soon as things were settled, when I’d something to offer you. Now I’ve nothing. That sounds simply idiotic, doesn’t it? But I’m so jolly miserable, I couldn’t go on never seeing you, and I—I couldn’t meet you—and not tell you. I hadn’t the least flicker of intention of asking you to marry me when I called this afternoon. I felt I had to see you, so I came ... and then—then you asked me that extraordinary question just now. And I suppose I lost my head.”

Caro was gazing at him; he felt her strong gaze and turned his head, and their eyes met. She said, in rather a husky voice:

“D’you know, Beau, I was once madly in love with you, and you led me on.... Oh! you can’t have forgotten! Since then you turned me down—flat. Like that! And I swore I’d make you pay for it, I swore I’d bring you to heel some time! More or less, I have! No, I won’t marry you, my dear! You don’t love me, and you can’t lie well enough to deceive me! So be off with you! Oh, by the way, dine here tomorrow, though, there’s a lamb.”

Malincourt, rather white, furious inwardly, had reached the door: from it he said aloofly:

“Thanks. Sorry but I can’t. I have a previous engagement.”

“Break it then,” Caro suggested coolly; “I want you to come.”

Malincourt smiled faintly.

“Even that encouragement or inducement, must go by the board, I’m afraid,” he said.

Caro got up and yawned, stretching her lithe slenderness with the grace and complete disregard for environment of a prize Persian kitten.

“Oh bunk!” she exclaimed languidly. “You come along, like a good boy.” She straightened up and looked directly at him. “I should if I were you,” she added.

Going downstairs, out in the street, Malincourt puzzled over that last sentence—was it a threat—did Caro know?

He felt sick with fear.

In the privacy of his own room he took the ring out and looked at it ... the stone was worth six or seven hundred at least.

He wouldn’t keep it, he told himself; he’d dine at the Nesbits’ the next evening, and push the dashed thing into some corner, and leave it to be found, or not! He wouldn’t keep it; he daren’t.

Not that it was really theft ... it was only borrowing the ring. He had only meant to pawn it, and redeem it when he should have the money.

Tim would have to give him some.

Anyway, though, he wouldn’t keep the ring; he hated the sight of the thing now.

He shoved it back into his pocket as the telephone bell rang.

“Yes? Oh, yes.”

It was Goldstein calling him up—the man who ran the baccarat table.

“I haven’t got it,” Malincourt told him nervously.

A moment later Goldstein had rung off, and his last words were still ringing in Malincourt’s ears as, after waiting, trying to get Goldstein again, and failing, he walked slowly across to the window:

“If I don’t get three hundred by tomorrow, first post....”

Malincourt shivered visibly, despite the warmth of the late summer afternoon.

His fingers went to his waistcoat pocket again and touched the ring.

He looked round furtively, then walked with sudden determination across the room, took his hat and stick, and went out.

CHAPTER IX

CUT

LIL had said and written to Tim: “I don’t want anyone to know about you and Mickey. I’ve my own reasons, and you owe it to me to respect them.”

Tim was quite content to do so; he sent his first contribution for Mickey in notes, as Lil had wished him to do, then, passing a cycle shop one day he suddenly thought of Mickey, of his jolly little freckled face, and went in and ordered a cycle for him.

Quite forgetting Lil’s wishes, he wrote on his card:

“Have a good time with this!”

Walking away he found himself smiling a little at the thought of Mickey’s excitement. His thoughts ran one ... ripping part of life, children—perhaps its best, one of its best, anyway ...

Down at Malincourt itself he’d give some parties for the village kids, see that they benefited in his schemes for the improvement of the village.

Tim liked, liked enormously, planning what he would do at Malincourt; partly because, in doing so, in helping Bill’s tenants, improving their lot and the estate, he felt he was evening up the count against him.

He had reasoned it out after long and rather unhappy thought.

He was committed now to a course of action which was fraudulent, however he looked at it, however the kindest and most tolerant friend might try to look at it.

“All right!” he said to himself with grim frankness. “You are a fraud, and a fake, but you became one by force of circumstance less than by choice, and, in any case, you cannot back out now, for you gave your word of honour to a man who is dead and you’d be an everlasting rotter to break it now. All you can do is live straightly, and do everything in your power to live up to the trust your friend placed in you. He would have spent his fortune on his land, and his own people—and not one penny of the money of his which you have shall be spent otherwise. He left a son, and that lad must be treated as his son, and the place nursed for him, as his father would have nursed it himself. If I stick to this, keep to my code, I think I’ve a right to get what happiness I can out of life for myself. Thank heaven, I made a big pile too.... If ever I should have the heaven-sent luck to marry a woman I love and who loves me, and we have children, I can still leave ’em wealthy ... and should it ever come to my being able to do so ... after a time we’d all clear out, when Mickey was grown up, and we’d live abroad, and he should, virtually, carry on. It’s the only way out I can think of. It’s no use feeling fearful, and it’s no use grousing against fate. I went into this business believing I’d be a free man. I’m not. Bill let me down there. And yet, in all honesty, faced as I was with arrest that night, would I have refused Bill’s request—even had I known he had been secretly married? Would I have been strong enough to? I don’t believe it.”

He tried desperately hard to be honest with himself; he tried to be fair about Malincourt; but, quite apart from poor Bill’s yearning for revenge against Malincourt, and Bill’s recital of Malincourt’s rottenness towards him, Tim hated him on his own account, hated him for his rapacity and furtiveness.

“If he’d come out into the open and let me have it from the shoulder I believe I’d give him all the money he wants,” Tim thought stormily. “But all this hinting and cavilling and reproaching! And anyway the feller’s had thousands he’d no right to. Half the pictures have been sold and copies, very good copies, but copies just the same, substituted! There’s no decent outlook about him—effeminate young blighter!”

“But I met Diana through him!” he finished by thinking.

And Diana was complicating life enormously. Tim knew now that it was pretty serious with him—he felt he should not see her, and yet, if by chance he heard she was going to a certain place he found himself turning up there, and he knew the first second Diana arrived.

But, and he felt definitely uneasy on one point, the Lansdales did not ask him to their house.

He met Terence Lansdale at the club, he played squash with David, and father and son were both pleasant, David was even rather exuberantly so—both drank with Tim, were hail-fellow-well-met with him—out. But their home they kept closed to him. Why? Tim asked himself again and again.

Once he had wondered if he were on the point of discovery, and then decided he had become hypersensitive with regard to these particular men.

Late one afternoon a game of poker was being arranged at the club and Tim and David and his father were hailed, asked to come in.

Tim nodded, he was behind Lansdale and David, and they had just agreed to play, in words.

“With Crane, we shall be five then,” Duncan had said, and at the mention of his name, it had seemed to Tim, Lansdale had made some excuse, and, linking his arm in David’s, moved off. He had nodded good-bye to Tim, but he had gone, and Tim had had a horrible intuition that he had gone because he had discovered he, Tim, was to play, too.

But, afterwards, he had told himself he had imagined the slight.

Until one evening, when he had turned into the Sports Club just before going to dine out, and had settled down with a paper, and become absorbed in studying the market. He had large holdings in mines, and some in wool, and the markets were unsteady.

His cigar gripped between his teeth, he had been genuinely oblivious of the world, until the repetition of his own name finally pierced his absorption.

Still, he went on debating the best course to pursue in the case on a certain silver mine, whether to cut his losses, or hold on. And then, Lansdale’s singularly pleasant voice, which was low, but particularly distinct, seemed to say, right in his ear:

“Unfortunately, one cannot forget that affair in my sister’s house. Crane was caught cheating—it was ghastly. I like him myself, now, he has changed enormously ... but—cut in at the same card table ... no—my dear chap....”

Tim sat through it, and he sat on, the paper hiding him, until he knew the room to be empty.

Then he rose and stood there, a very ugly look on his face.

A coward and a cheat.... Bill had been both those despicable things.

Lansdale was right—it was ghastly. It was more than that, it was a searing red-hot shame, which branded Tim's very soul.

All his life he had run dead straight, and fear was not in him. He did not know what it meant to be afraid, and he had thrown away his patrimony, disowned his sonship because his honour had been arraigned.

And now he had taken to himself for ever the character of a man who had been detected as a cheat, and whose cowardice had been exploited in open country!

An increasing bitterness against Lansdale filled him; a man of violent temper, which he had only learned to control with difficulty, he felt ice-cold with rage as he thought of Lansdale's dictum.

In that hour his resolve to make Diana love him was born. Until then he had tried to pull up, he had assured himself he might love her, but he must never let her know, never try to make her care.

After listening to Lansdale's condemnation he determined he would win Diana, whatever it cost him, if he had to tell her the truth and fly England with her.

Recklessly he decided Lil must be made to free him.

He sat down that night at home and wrote off stating he was willing to become Master of Hounds, and that he would subscribe a sum which was really more than munificent.

He knew he had only been asked as a matter of form, and he knew Lansdale was intending to act; in writing the last

nought of the thousands he offered the Hunt Committee, he knew, too, that he cut out Lansdale completely.

CHAPTER X

TWO WOMEN

TIM began to be showered with invitations, and, despite the fact that the season was nearly over, it was surprising how many mothers with marriageable daughters suddenly determined to give small impromptu parties.

Ten years, ten years, moreover, which have included the war, efface, at any rate blunt, the memory very decisively. The older generation, of course, remembered, hazily or clearly in accord with the nature of the memorizer; but the immense strain of the war, its agonizing realities, have blotted out the past immediately preceding it for most of us.

London, his world at any rate, received Tim back enthusiastically, and every day, every hour which passed, bound him closer to the vow he had sworn; its influence impregnated him more and more with the spirit of the character he had taken upon himself.

Besides, his "new" life was, in so many ways, the old life, the life upon which he had just been entering when the smash had come.

In short, he was beginning to feel happy, accustomed and usual.

It has been said it is possible to live a lie so successfully that in time the lie becomes to all visible intent and purpose the truth.

"If I keep up my end, keep the bargain about Mickey, administer the estate fairly and justly, and on the generous

side,” Tim argued with himself, “then, by Jove, I’ve a right to get what I can for myself.”

He saw Diana oftener and oftener, towards the end of July daily.

“And to think,” Diana said to him, “we go down on the 27th and you say you’ll be at Malincourt by the end of the first week in August, and then we’ll be almost neighbours! What fun!”

“Rather!” Tim agreed.

He looked at her with eyes in which the blue had a glint of steel; it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to meet her and not let her see he loved her.

He dared not tell her yet; he felt he must have some sort of clear understanding with Lil first.

He wrote to Lil, and asked her for an appointment, and Lil asked him, on the telephone, to come and see her at her business place.

Reading the address, with the heading “Yvonne,” a memory teased Tim’s brain. He pursued it, and captured it with a sudden exclamation of triumph: “Got it!”

It all came back to him, the elusive incident, Diana’s comment on his meeting with Lil at the night club.

He lit a cigar, and thought over what Diana had said: Malincourt had helped Lil ... he was certain he was right about that ... and he was equally certain that that fact could—more than that, probably would—complicate his own life.

And yet Lil had begged him to keep his supposed relationship to Mickey a secret.

“No one must know,” she had said with almost hysterical emphasis.

Why?

Tim was still puzzling over the answer to that question when he slid the two-seater up to the small black and gold door which was Lil's private entrance to "my place of business."

A maid, dressed in lilac linen and wearing a musical comedy cap and an apron of sheer muslin about a foot square, let him in.

"Madam's expecting you," she told Tim with a demure smile.

Someone else knocked just at that moment, and Tim walked down the tiny hall and into a small room.

If Lil was anxious they should not be talked about he was perfectly willing to fall in with her wishes.

The room he was in was tiny and bizarre, and was in fact, the mannequins' changing room. It had sealing-wax red walls, a ceiling papered with silver foil, and one gigantic divan upon which, at the moment, reposed a doll dressed as a pierrot, one as an apache, and one as a Venetian lady of the Renaissance.

The air was heavy with chypre and the scent of powder; beside a box of chocolates which lay on the floor there was a huge, open powder box and a big pink puff tied up with ribbons.

"This," said Tim to himself with a grin, "is no place for me!"

But, in the hall, the maid was still arguing with someone, and he had no idea where he was to be taken. He lit a

cigarette and inhaled deeply; anything to get this very exotic stink out of his nostrils!

“It’ll cling to my coat, I bet!” he thought, with whimsical disgust.

He sat down on the big cushiony divan and studied the Venetian doll, which simpered at him inanely; he hoped Lil would buck up, and as if his direct thought of her had been uttered aloud, her voice came to him.

Tim had to hear what she was saying, and he had to know she was crying; at the first sound he had risen to his feet, and now he made for the door, but Lil’s plea followed him; he could almost see the tears which shook her voice so:

“Oh, Beau, you wouldn’t—you couldn’t ... not after everything.... I love you so—I do love you so.... I’d die for you, Beau. Say it isn’t true—say it isn’t.”

And Malincourt’s voice said slowly:

“Be reasonable, darling, it will make no difference, I swear _____”

In the hall Tim called to the maid:

“Look here—I’ve got to go. I can’t wait. Tell your mistress—when she’s alone—that I’d be grateful if she would ring me up about five. Get that? Good—thanks.”

He was getting into his car when a voice called: “Hullo!” He turned and saw Mickey.

Mickey looked very smart indeed. He was in grey flannels and a cricket shirt with a turn-down collar, below which was knotted, and very excellently knotted, his new school tie.

He stood and smiled at Tim engagingly, eagerly, his white teeth showing off the brownness of his face; he looked fit, and hopeful, and inquiring.

“Going motoring?” he asked, leaning on Tim’s car. “I say, I am keen on cars, aren’t you?”

He put out a hand and tinkered with the switches and gave a little sigh.

“Come on,” Tim said. “Come for a run. I’ll teach you to drive. Just tell your mother, leave word, at least, that you are only going off a bit.”

Mickey’s answer was to climb over the side, and settle down by Tim; his whole face beamed, he seemed to exude happiness.

“You needn’t worry about Muv,” he said quickly. “She won’t! Worry—I mean I get in the way a good deal, you see. A fellow does, amongst all those girls and all—see what I mean?”

Tim, restraining a smile, stated that he grasped Mickey’s meaning.

As the car slipped through the traffic and out towards Hammersmith, Mickey allowed himself to become really conversational. Anxiety lest Tim should make some mistake, lose his grip on his nerves, had held him taut, but now the worst seemed over, and also, Mickey was bound to confess, Lord Crane really could drive. He told Tim so, generously.

“I must say,” he observed, “you can get along!”

“So will you in a brace of shakes,” Tim stated.

A cigarette between his lips, one arm about Mickey’s thin form, wriggling with ecstasy, his free hand ready to guide the wheel, Tim taught Mickey to drive.

Intent and very serious, neither of them noticed a car which passed, but Diana saw their absorbed faces, and something about them hit her consciousness sharply. She

went on looking at the back of their heads out of the small car window; both had their hats off and their fair hair gleamed in the sun. Both had fair hair, and both had black eyebrows ... a rather odd combination—they were alike—and Tim had looked—looked, well—awfully like a father.

The sunlight had gone out of the day, it seemed to Diana.

Mickey went back to tea with Tim, and when Tim saw the tea the butler had laid out he glanced at Mickey, and Mickey, with a man-of-the-world air, shrugged his shoulders.

“We be hungry men, Jevons,” Tim said, “and we could toy with the flesh of beasts and the plunder of the sea! Say some sort of sandwiches, and sardines—and a chocolate cake ... that type of stuff, eh, Mickey?”

“I think I could—er—manage a bit,” Mickey conceded.

He “managed” about half a tin of large sardines, five cups of tea, each with four lumps of sugar, and lots of cream, a pile of chicken sandwiches and half the chocolate cake, and a few niggly bits of toast well jammed, and then stated he “felt better.”

“Driving gives one an appetite,” Tim observed.

“Rather!” Mickey agreed.

Tim drove him back, and this time they went into the little hall together.

“I’ll tell Muv,” Mickey cried.

But Lil was waiting in the red room, and she dismissed Mickey with a few rather sharp words, and then, scarcely greeting Tim, said hurriedly:

“We can’t talk here. Come into my private room,” and led Tim through a door in the wall he had never noticed, and into

her special sanctum.

Tim said bluntly at once:

“I had to wait in there,” he jerked his stick in the direction of the room they had left, “this afternoon and I heard you talking. I had to hear.”

He was looking at Lil, and he reached her in a stride, and caught her as she drooped.

“It’s all right,” he said, very gently, leading her to a chair. “I had to tell you. You have nothing to be upset about.”

He stood beside her, patting her shoulder, embarrassed, rather anxious, and distressed.

“You—you’re perfectly free really,” he told her awkwardly.

Lil roused then; she gave a bitter little laugh.

“It’s not my freedom I’m worrying about!”

She rose to her feet with sudden energy and faced Tim.

“Sooner or later you’ve got to know,” she said, hardly, “so it may as well be now. Your brother’s everything to me. I didn’t want to love him; I tried not to. He’s the sort you have to, that’s all there is about it. Some men are that way, and a woman may see all the worst of ’em, know it in her heart, have to suffer because of it, and yet she can’t stop herself caring. I met Beau five years ago just after the war, and he was only a kid—I’m older than him, and I’d had him to nurse in hospital. I fell in love with him then, and he fell in love with me a bit. I didn’t know quite what I hoped; he never said in so many words we’d get married, but, woman-like, I suppose I thought it would come to it. It hasn’t, and yet I still love him as much as I did that first year when he hadn’t grown so hard or been pressed for money, when he’d had no

bad luck, and if he had a queer temper could be just as sweet other times——”

Tim interrupted her; he said, unwisely:

“Malincourt is a rotter——”

Lil’s head went back, and she almost hissed at him:

“And what are you, I’d like to know, that you can criticize him? D’you flatter yourself you’ve behaved so finely? Marrying a girl and then deserting her, and even when you came into money not letting her know? And she’s the mother of your son! You’re a nice one to talk and run others down. I don’t think, I——”

Tim broke in quietly: he said in a very level voice: “Is Malincourt going to marry you?”

“If I was free—and rich—he might,” Lil said, slowly, sullenly. “Talking’s easy enough, but you can’t put a divorce through without talk, and if Beau knew you were Mickey’s father and that I’d lied to him all this time ... that would ruin everything.”

“Who does he think you married?” Tim asked curiously.

“A man who got killed in the war,” Lil said. “I thought so, too, till you came back. I never knew you were Beau’s elder brother, and would come home, and do him out of everything.”

She looked at Tim out of tragic, beautiful eyes.

“See here, Tim, I’ve never bothered you much, have I? I had to send for you when I recognized you because of the boy. But you can’t say I’ve been a wife that’s made trouble. I don’t want to now; but—but I’ve got to have money.... A lot. If—if you’ll give it me—I’ll let you do as you think best—about divorce and all. It’s—it’s twenty thousand I want.”

There was entreaty as well as defiance in her voice.

“Twenty thousand!” Tim echoed.

“It can’t mean to you what it means to me,” Lil said doggedly.

Tim did not answer her; he was thinking of the years before Bill and he had made good, years when they had hired themselves out as miners, labourers, cowboys—and worked from dawn till dusk, slaved at their jobs, sweated, and toiled, and tramped, and once nearly starved.

Twenty thousand pounds!

And this woman wanted it to give to Malincourt; who had never done a decent job in his life, and who only needed the money now to pay off disreputable debts, and squander.

Bill’s money and his.

Bill’s he would never give; that was and should remain inviolate.

And he had no least inclination to benefit Malincourt to the tune of twenty thousand out of his own fortune!

“Let’s sit down,” he said, and then asked if he might smoke.

Looking at his cigarette he said:

“I asked you to see me today because I felt we ought to have a clearer understanding about the future. Our future. I had meant to suggest to you that we should try to obtain freedom, and I had been prepared, naturally, to give you a suitable income. A sum, such as you mention, is difficult even for a business man to obtain ... frankly, I have not got it to give, and I cannot see my way to obtain it. I would gladly, as I say, give you an income, that is one thing; a big sum to be paid in its entirety is another proposition altogether.”

“You can give it to me in two tens,” Lil said, hardly.

Tim rose. “I can’t—and I won’t, my dear,” he said, frankly. “I don’t intend to waste it on Malincourt. I’ll give you an income, the income from it, yes, but I will not give you the money in one sum.”

Lil, too, had risen, her china-blue eyes were glittering, and her small mouth was set in a line.

“You won’t?” she repeated. “All right! But I’ve got to have that money, and if I can’t get it by fair means—there’s others.”

Tim waited.

“You’d got a reason, coming here to ask me to divorce you,” Lil went on quickly, “and that reason’s Miss Lansdale! Oh, I hear a bit, Tim! Well, I’m just as anxious to stop Malincourt marrying as you are to get married to Diana Lansdale. And Malincourt’s on the verge. If you queer my pitch I queer yours. See? Do you get me? Because you’d better. I mean it.”

“Blackmail,” Tim said quietly.

“Blackmail nothing!” Lil retorted shrilly. She had lost her temper now, and there was a scarlet spot on either white cheek, and her voice had roughened, risen unpleasantly. She went on excitedly:

“I’ve kept myself and your son for ten years nearly, and I’ve done it by sheer hard work, and going straight. Lots of times I could have had a good bit of money if I’d been willing to listen to things. I wasn’t. I’d Mickey to think of—and I’m not made that way, anyhow. But Beau’s different. I’d sell my soul to marry Beau, and you bet I’d sell up anyone else, if it was a fair deal. And selling you up is. Blackmail,

indeed! When all I ask is my share, and a chance to lead my own life! Beau'll never marry me unless he gets a lot. Right or wrong, he is like that, and it's no use quibbling. Some of us, I suppose, are born lucky and get our happiness given us; but most of us, I reckon, my sort, anyway, have to pay for it, and pay dear. Now then, Tim, what's your answer?"

"You'll have to give me time," Tim said curtly.

"I'll give you a month," Lil said.

He was going without a word, or another look at her, when he felt her hand on his.

"Tim—I don't want to be a beast! I'm driven to it."

He hesitated, looking down at her elaborately curled and tinted golden hair; he was baffled and angry, but a feeling of pity mingled with his puzzlement.

Lil's voice, almost inaudible, asked him:

"Tim, do you know this Caro Nesbit?"

Tim shook his head.

"No—I haven't even heard of her."

Lil took away her hand.

"All right. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," Tim said.

CHAPTER XI

DEVIL'S WHISPER

“I SUPPOSE it's all right if I ask some people down?” Malincourt said, aloofly.

“Quite,” Tim returned, equally coldly.

He told himself he couldn't tell the fellow not to have guests in his own home! But it was annoying, just the same, and the prospect of having to endure Malincourt's company for most of August was not an alluring one.

Tim was still wholly undecided what he should do about Lil: quite apart from the largeness of the sum she required, to obtain which he would have to sell out some stock at a very bad price, the knowledge the money would go straight to Malincourt, and, from him, into various, all equally unsavoury, channels, enraged Tim.

He asked Malincourt suddenly:

“Whom are you asking down?”

“Akers, Bentley Carr, and Caro Nesbit,” Malincourt told him.

“Who's Caro Nesbit?”

“A friend of mine.”

“A special friend?” Tim persisted.

Malincourt, without answering, simply strolled from the room.

He thought cynically, as he wandered up Belgrave Square, that he could have surprised Tim not a little by saying to him: “I wish to Heaven I need never see her again!”

His amused cynicism dropped from him as he thought about Caro. He did wish with all his strength that he need never see her again, because he was afraid of her.

He had had no least intention of asking her down to Malincourt, but Caro had told him she intended to come.

“I’ve designs on you and your brother!” she assured him, grinning at him gaily.

Malincourt had been unable to redeem the ring; he had thought he would easily double the money he had obtained on it, but, instead, he had lost the lot.

And Lil had somehow got hold of the idea he was going to marry Caro.

He had said with truth: “She is the last girl I want to marry,” but he had not been able to swear with equal conviction that he never would marry her. Things were pretty hopeless with him now, and he knew that if he could not announce his engagement very quickly, or if Lil (who had made him swear to wait a few weeks) could do nothing for him, and he had little hope she could, he would be faced with bankruptcy, and even worse than that.

He sauntered in to tell Caro he would drive her down to Malincourt.

Caro welcomed him blithely:

“Still adoring me, Beau?”

He felt he hated her.

“Tim is delighted you will come to Malincourt,” he told Caro gravely.

“I want him to be delighted with me,” Caro stated frankly. “Oh, you needn’t open green eyes at me in pained amazement! Surely you grasped the fact I had a reason for

wanting to come to Malincourt, when there's Deauville beckoning, and other dives I'm partial to? You bet I'd a reason, Beau, my darling! And I'll tell it you later on. Or not! It all depends. Who else is going to be there?"

Malincourt ran over the list languidly.

"And our chaste Diana," Caro added with a little laugh.

"And our chaste Diana," Malincourt repeated gently.

"I say, is Crane keen on her?" Caro demanded; she was lighting a cigarette about six inches long from a little black enamel lighter, which had a diamond monogram on it; the flame lit up her narrow, white face with its lovely eyes and wilful mouth. "Is he?" she asked again.

"I really don't know," Malincourt said lazily.

"He goes everywhere she is," Caro commented.

Malincourt gave his faint, mirthless laugh:

"Can it be that you are keen on my estimable brother? Really, that is too amusing! I must tell him!"

Caro had gone very white, her voice was almost a whisper as she said, leaning forward a little and gazing straight into Malincourt's eyes:

"I'd be jolly careful what you told anyone about me, my dear! Ever heard of the talker being talked about? Well, that might happen to you, and you'll forgive me if I say it would prove a rather—well—odd recital, my little black lamb!"

Malincourt went on looking into blue eyes which seemed to have a tiny flame deep within them: as certainly as if Caro had said the words aloud he knew she had found out about the ring: for a second, the world seemed to go black before him, then, with a great effort, he pulled himself together.

But his usual sang-froid had deserted him, he stayed a little longer, chatted on various topics; at last he could make his adieu and go.

Outside, walking in the early summer twilight, he asked himself: What could Caro do, anyway? It was inconceivable she would show him up. If she tried that on he had a very ready answer! But why did she withhold the fact of her knowledge? To what use did she propose to put it? He didn't know; all he did know was that a woman had a "hold" on him, and just to think of that gave him a feeling of suffocation.

Oh, Heavens! If only Tim had never returned! If he had come into everything—was free from debt for once, even only for a short time, free from fear, and from the need to cavil, and make himself pleasant to people he longed to insult!

He thought: "Supposing Crane met with an accident? By Heavens, I wish he would!"

CHAPTER XII

THE YELLOW STREAK

TIM's first vision of old Malincourt had filled him with a very real, very deep contentment.

He had seen more stately homes, lovelier houses, but the "Old Court," as the place was usually called, possessed a certain definite serenity and charm which seemed to sing into the consciousness.

All Tim's "homing instincts" turned to the far North, and yet, though no environment could have been less like the Highlands than this Wiltshire village, though, in place of limitless moorland, coloured like a king's robe in purple and dim gold, there stretched only the rolling downs, and in the place of the icy, glittering mountain river a placid silver stream ran between winding, reedy banks. Tim felt a queer tenderness gather in his heart for this home to which he had no right, for this land to which his feet were alien.

Old Court was an early Elizabethan house, rambling, gabled, tinted dull orange and old rose by time. It had a maze and a formal garden, and grass terraces, which were the pride of the gardeners, and one of the shows of the county.

Tim had made no formal entry into possession, nor had he intended to do so, but his agent, a very enthusiastic young man, insisted that he owed it to his tenants.

"Must make a bit of a splash, Lord Crane," he said reproachfully. "I'll fix it all—you need not bother about a thing!"

Tim liked Eddie Keene; he was a Wiltshire man, and had a soft burr to his speech, and the clear, rain-washed skin of a man who lives out of doors.

“Eddie,” as he was always called, lived in a very jolly little house indeed, just on the edge of the Great Park, and had a very pretty wife, and a small son, aged three, and Eddie’s father, and his father’s father before him, had lived for, and off, the estate.

Eddie remembered Tim not at all, but he was quite certain that he liked the Lord Crane whom he met and equally certain that the village stories were “rot,” a lot of “bunk.”

He said so freely, and Cowley, who had owned the Court Arms as his father, and father again, had done before him, listened and said nothing.

“You don’t mean to tell me you believe all that clap-trap about his lordship being branded as a coward on the hunting field?” Eddie cried, disgustedly. “Well, before I’d listen to a lot of clap-trap——”

“Clap-trap’s one thing, an’ listening to a tale’s one thing, but seein’s another matter,” John Cowley said in his comfortable voice. “An’ things so fell out I were in on that scene you’re denyin’ so freely, Mr. Keene, though it were not exactly on the hunting field.”

“Tell me the truth of it, then,” Eddie said, hotly.

“It were this way,” Cowley said, slowly. “ ’Is lordship (who weren’t ’is lordship then, ’im and Mr. Malincourt both being boys in a manner o’ speaking) all of ’em from the big house was in the forty-acre field ’avin’ sports, a gymkhana was the word used. There was races for all of us, an’ it fell out my pony Polly won the best race of the lot—a rare goer was Polly, and pretty as a picture in them days—glossy—’er

coat fair glittered! Well, we was all there, an' it was a blowy sort of day, if I remember rightly. The gentry was all competing, too, the young gentlemen wheelin' the young ladies in barrers, and then finishin' up with ridin' in to the tape. A fine bit of fun—till the mess-up happened, and then there wasn't no more fun left in the day for nobody. It was the last race but one, and there was six ridin' in it, ladies and gentlemen all. 'Is lordship (as 'e is now) was up on a roan, a lovely looker, but a bit of a high-stepper, and one that didn't like wind, an' needed sound handlin'. The ladies had a fifty-yards start, an' the first jump was maybe a furlong ahead: then there was the bit of stream, and then a made jump with a deep take-off, and a drop—a ticklish business—but all was prime riders. I weren't so near the bad jump, but my father was, and the way he'd tell it was this: 'Is lordship and 'is brother came ridin' out together, and then Miss Clyde passed 'em in a flash, an' laughin' a bit ... she was a lovely rider an' hands like silk, her groom said. P'raps it was 'er laugh made 'is lordship lose 'is nerve, something did, anyway, and 'e seemed to turn 'is horse right into her. 'E got clear, but she was all smashed up, an' 'alf the county saw it, too.'

Eddie Keene grimaced.

"I hadn't heard the whole affair, you see," he said quietly; he stood sipping his old sherry, then he said: "But you'd give a chap a chance to live a thing down. You say he was young."

"The old lord didn't give his son much chance," John said shrewdly. "He was up and off for good next day—turned out, so I did hear."

"I can only say Lord Crane doesn't look a coward now," Eddie said cheerily.

He had liked Tim enormously, liked him at once, been overjoyed to think he was not to be under Malincourt's chilly authority, and more than delighted when Tim had told him at their first meeting that the farm lands were not to be sold. And every improvement Eddie had suggested had been listened to, discussed with interest, and in the end put into execution.

"I could swear Lord Crane was a good plucked 'un," he said to his wife, rather dispiritedly.

"And so he probably is," little Mrs. Keene said encouragingly. "After all, he was a boy then, and he's a man now, and I expect, even if he had that queer streak in him, it's gone now."

So it was to a village en fête that Tim came down, with Malincourt sulking aloofly beside him, and the old Court, its flag flying in the summer breeze, seeming to welcome him with open arms.

He had been down before, of course, for quick visits, and he had studied the place intently, and obtained a working knowledge of its ramifications, discovered, using tact and caution, the names of the servants and tenants.

He had a special greeting for Atkins, the old butler, and for Mrs. Cluer, who at seventy was still a stern disciplinarian and an excellent housekeeper.

In the big stone hall, with its carved chestnut wood ceiling, its few drooping, tattered banners, and its marvellous stained-glass window, bowls and very tall vases had been filled with roses, delphiniums, big sprays of scarlet ramblers, and the old grey place glowed with lovely colour.

"By Jove, it looks ripping," Tim said, nodding to the curtesying servants.

He had a second's pang when he thought suddenly, wholly unexpectedly, for he had trained himself so hard to forget, of Kyle, which, too, had a stone hall and a carven ceiling, and upon whose flagged floor he had the right to tread with a master's step....

Malincourt's cool, bored voice called him back:

“Er—haven't you forgotten something?”

Tim wheeled in a flash, on the defensive in an instant, wondering, puzzled, anxious.

His steel-blue eyes swept the place.

In Heaven's name, what was wrong? What had he omitted to do?

It was Atkins who enlightened him. He moved out of a patch of shadow flung from a banner, and Tim saw that he was holding a gold loving cup in both hands.

A sudden silence fell on the place, the little homely rustlings and murmurs from the staff, the noise of the men taking his stuff from the car, ceased; everyone seemed to be waiting, standing to attention.

Voicelessly Tim prayed he might make no mistake, this was one of those utterly unexpected details he had been unable to foresee and so prepare himself to meet.

Atkins came forward slowly, the gold cup held high.

And Atkins saved Tim, for when Tim had drunk in a whisper Atkins said: “Hadn't you better hand it on yourself, my lord?”

The old man's kindly, shrewd eyes moved slightly in Malincourt's direction, and that was all the sign he gave.

Tim crossed to Malincourt and offered him the cup.

“I was beginning to wonder if your aboriginal existence had blunted your memory of our quaint old custom, or whether, as a strong he-man, which you have now become, you would disdain it as effete,” Malincourt said, silkily.

Tim looked at him and laughed.

“Not—at all—likely!” he said, with emphasis, turning on his heel.

That night, when Malincourt had driven over to some house, he went into the library, and, after a search, discovered a “family” book, and pored over it.

He intended, should there be any more “quaint old customs,” to become acquainted with them in good time!

There appeared to be no special family “rite” save the offering of the loving cup upon the heir’s entry into his home, but there were several incidents in the records which interested Tim enormously. The history of at least one in every three of the Cranes had been scarred by some ugly incident; cowardice in some form or another seemed to be the curse of the family.

Poor Bill, who had paid so heavily for a taint he could neither eradicate nor conquer!

Tim’s thoughts went to Mickey.... Poor little devil! The chances were that he, too, would be tarred with the same brush.

“Not if I can help it, he won’t!” Tim decided. “I’ll teach him to ride myself, and climb—the whole bag of tricks. He shan’t be scared of anything if I can stop it.”

The long windows in the library were all open, and the scent of the tobacco plants and evening primroses came pouring in.

Tim closed the book of record and stood up. The night called him, the night, and the thought that only seven miles away Diana, too, probably was standing feeling the night wind blow soft against her face.

He went out, along the flagged terrace, with its old stone balustrade, in and out of which honeysuckle and jasmine twined, and across the two courtyards to the stables, where, for the time being, the cars were garaged, too.

He ran out the two-seater, swung himself over the side, and set off for the Manor. Lansdale, he knew, was still in town, and Diana and her brother were alone.

The man told him: "The young lady is on the terrace," and Tim, crossing a room lit by candles and old-fashioned lamps, went out into the cool dimness.

Diana's voice, surprised and very soft, called: "Tim!"

Something in her voice, or something in his own heart, swept all caution from Tim, all remembrance.

He reached Diana, touched her hair, swept her into his arms, and his mouth was on hers. He was murmuring between kisses which shook them both: "Had to be—couldn't help it!... Oh, my darling, my little love—right from the very first!"

He could feel Diana's heart beating against his arm, he could see in the starshine Diana's closed eyes; he pleaded very humbly, holding her closer still:

"Say it—say you love me!"

"I do, I do," Diana whispered back, and put out one slender hand and drew his head near, then nearer still, until his lips kissed again the eager flower of her mouth.

So cool, so heavenly cool, and sweet, and untarnished and young—and she loved him!

It was a miracle from Heaven, and Tim felt exultant and humbled to the dust at the same time.

Diana was smiling at him now, ruffling his hair a little: “I’ve always wanted to! It seemed as if it would make you mine! Being proprietary, I mean! ’Cos no one else can ruffle up your hair, can they, and tweak one ear?”

“No one in all the world could or would be let,” Tim assured her, laughing a little, stirred as he had never been stirred in all his life before.

“Tell me when you loved me first!” Diana said, her head on his shoulder, her cool slenderness all close to him.

“The second I saw you in the park, that morning,” Tim said promptly. “I saw you then for the first time, and it was just as if my heart said: ‘At last.’ ”

“You—you didn’t remember me a little bit then?” Diana murmured. “You see, that wasn’t a first time, was it? But I remembered you, and my heart said: ‘Tim!’ just like that because, now that you’ve said it and we belong for ever it doesn’t matter telling you, you were the hero of my dreams! You were, darling! I’d seen you here, and though I was so little, somehow I’d begun to love you then. Very forward, wasn’t it, but I did!”

He couldn’t speak for a moment; to have to lie to Diana in this hour.... Oh! to have been able to come to her, as she came to him, straight, true, and free to love.

He was none of those things, and shame cut at him like the lash of a whip.

“What is it?” Diana asked him, lifting his head and kissing his chin. “Don’t go away from me in your spirit! Did I—were you shocked ’cos I told you I’d loved you for ages?”

“Shocked?” Tim said; he could speak the truth then. “I was—I was simply, oh, I dunno, loveliest, but it swept me clean off my feet, your telling me. I feel so wholly unworthy of you—I am, but oh, Di, before heaven, I love you, and you are the only woman I have ever loved, or ever shall love. You do believe me, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do,” Diana said, and her voice shook a little. “And that is how I feel about you, Tim, that it’s you always, and that it’s simply everything, our love.”

They kissed, neither could draw away, the kiss seemed to bind their hearts, to touch their very souls.

From the woods a bird called faintly, the ivy rustled in a passing sigh of wind, and the stars shone down, giving a benison to love.

“It’s like drinking from the fount of eternal life in the beginning of the world to kiss you,” Tim said passionately.

Diana lay in his arms, she took his hand and pressed it hard down over her heart.

“D’you feel it beating to get to you, darling? It’s all it does beat for—you—”

He bent his head and kissed her hand, beneath which he could feel, like a bird fluttering, her heart.

“And we’ll be married and live happy ever after,” Diana murmured.

Those words closed the gates of Paradise ... and shut Tim outside.

The others were returning, there was a noise of a car driving up, of laughter and voices, then a gramophone started.

Diana lifted her head, stood up, and said, her hand still holding Tim's:

"Darling, they'll all be out here in a second."

"All right," Tim said, but he did not stir for a moment, then, with sudden vehemence, a broken exclamation of love, he caught Diana back to him.

Diana's cool fingers touched his hair, slid through it, Diana's voice, thrilled, trembling, murmured over and over again: "Darling, darling."

The music of the gramophone stopped abruptly, David shouted something, there was the sound of a rush of feet.

Tim freed Diana, stood up beside her.

"Shall I go?" he asked.

"Yes," Diana said, "because I couldn't bear to have to explain anything tonight to anyone. Tonight is ours, for ever, Tim, one hour on earth locked up in Paradise!... if we believed in reincarnation, we'd find it again in another existence! Perhaps we will! But we've lived it ... it's our secret."

She leant against him for a moment, and, weakened by the half-conscious surrender, Tim said huskily, snatching at any respite:

"Do you want us to keep our love a secret?"

"Just for a little while," Diana said with a faint sigh, "because it will never be so wholly ours after everyone knows! So we'll hide it in our hearts; you'll keep my love,

and I'll keep yours. We must tell mother and father some time, I suppose, but not just yet."

"We'll make a compact," Tim suggested, and he neither looked at her now, nor let his hand touch hers, "we'll neither of us tell our secret to anyone until the other gives permission to do so."

He felt a swine as he made the suggestion; it was his first paltriness against his love for Diana, and it made him wince with shame that, in such an hour, he should have to plan to deceive.

A voice rang out:

"Where's Dido?"

"I must go," Diana said. She lifted her face like a child, and Tim kissed her lips; he had a moment's glimpse of her which he knew he would remember till he died: he could see the outline of her face, her lovely, parted lips; and in her eyes two stars seemed reflected, little white stars of purity and faith.

Tim wanted to kneel down and worship; the years which had been fell from him and he was reborn in this hour.

Diana's tender whisper came to him:

"Good-night, my own darling!"

She was gone, her form was silhouetted against the oblong of soft light, then she had vanished within the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XIII

CAN THE PAST BE LIVED DOWN?

THE house party arrived in batches on Friday: Foster, the explorer, two other men, fine squash players, far-off relations of old Lady Hoyle, one of the five Crane sisters, each of whom, in turn, visited Old Court for a month or so.

Lady Hoyle had managed to “wangle” August and September; she was the rather poor, very jolly, widow of an Indian General, with a passion for match-making and whose only real care in life was her difficulty in keeping slim.

Tim had liked her at once, and Lady Hoyle had remarked, after looking at him very frankly:

“Well, Timeon, you have changed vastly, and, thank heaven, for the better! Though Beau must be green and livid with rage, envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness, on account of your return, I am glad you have come back! The place needs a man with a little knowledge of sub-soil and irrigation instead of an appreciation of futurist art and a genius for the saxophone!

“And,” she had added, her whole face softening, “your mother was one of my dearest friends ... an angel, if ever there was one.”

Tim had felt uncomfortable and distressed, and hastened to change the subject.

He went himself to meet Lady Hoyle, and was greeted with a hearty kiss, whilst a frenziedly-friendly wire-haired terrier struggled to reach his face as well.

Tim took Whiskey out of his mistress's arms and set him on the platform, and Soda appeared a few minutes later, released from his basket by Lady Hoyle's maid.

"Now then, are we all set?" Tim asked laughing, "because there's a squash tournament on at home, Aunt Mary, and you are to award the prizes!"

As he drove the car along the winding hedges, wild now with convolvuli and honeysuckle, he gave a big sigh of appreciation; more and more he was coming to love this southern county with its lovely friendliness of tree and meadow, its generous downs, and serene luxuriance.

Lady Hoyle patted his knee.

"I like to see you so in love with your land," she said, and then, with an exclamation: "Timeon, you have had the home farm rebuilt, surely ... and is that, can it be, a new well?"

"Right, every time!" Tim laughed.

Lady Hoyle nodded her head.

"Your grandfather wanted so much to do just what you have done, but the money wasn't there. And your father had too heavy expenses. Timeon, you did well in Australia?"

"Very," Tim said. "In fact, I did so jolly well, I mean to improve every inch of the estate that needs it! And I'm doing a bit in the village in the way of sanitation. Needs it, by Jove!"

"It all makes me very happy," Lady Hoyle said with a sigh. "I can't tell you! It's like a fairy tale. And, like a fairy tale, there must be a happy ending for you, as the reward of virtue, Timeon! 'And they lived happy ever after,' that sort of ending!"

She paused, then added:

“So far, anything doing in that line?”

“So far, I’m afraid I can’t meet you on that point,” Tim said, his thoughts flying, like a homing bird, to Diana: she had been away for a week and was to stay another at a friend’s château near Chartres; he had missed her beyond words and had come, as we all of us come at one time in our lives, to live for the arrival of the post.

Today there had been no letter and each hour had seemed two, consequently.

He asked, because he could not help it, and though he felt afraid Lady Hoyle might start that mathematical process connected with the addition of two and two, and he was most desirous of keeping the “secret”:

“I say, Aunt Mary, you know the Lansdales, of course?”

“Hector Lansdale and I used the same pram,” Lady Hoyle stated, “so I feel I can say I do, with truth!”

“A nice crowd, aren’t they?” Tim said lamely.

“Yes, very, but you didn’t bring up the subject of the Lansdales in order to tell me that,” Lady Hoyle retorted astutely.

“No,” Tim admitted; then, quietly, he added: “I like ’em all, awfully, and Lansdale and I have met a good bit in town. But by chance, very bad chance really, I overheard him discussing me, and I gathered he had a down on me.” He was driving very slowly now; looking hard at Lady Hoyle he asked point-blank:

“D’you believe one is ever allowed to live down the past or not?”

Lady Hoyle met his gaze as straightly and her full, happy face flushed uncomfortably, but she never averted her eyes.

“It takes a bit of doing,” she said, “but it can be done, I’m certain. Timeon, when I heard of your—resurrection—it really seemed like that, and I can’t think of any other way to describe it—I felt glad and sorry. Glad, for no reason connected with yourself, sorry solely because of you. Beau would have been, was being, a bad master, a bad landlord, a wastrel; so I was glad he should be turned out and I was sorry it had to be you who did it. I always thought your father was hard on you, but I thought, too, he had grounds for hardness. I suppose Hector Lansdale brought up the poker scandal, or was it the gymkhana affair? You and I needn’t mince matters, Timeon—those two things happened—nearly twelve, thirteen years ago. Time alters people’s viewpoint enormously and smooths over things, too. I know, I feel, you are different. It’s amazing—it was, I mean, because I felt it the first minute I saw you again. You—you have a different atmosphere about you, you have changed utterly. And, if I feel it, others will. Give the old folks time, my dear, that’s all they need! It’s my firm belief you’ll live down the past, and I—for one, shall try to help you do it.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT-GREAT-GREAT

It must be a very rare occurrence when everyone likes everyone else in a large house-party!

But Tim's first big party, until Caro Nesbit's advent, seemed amazingly harmonious.

True, Malincourt had sped back to town, but a son of the house can scarcely be counted as a guest, and the real guests appeared to be delightfully contented.

"Top-hole place, this," Foster said, coming in to mix himself a drink after an entire day spent in the open air, swimming in the river, sculling hard, playing tennis, playing clock golf. "Feel fine!"

Barty Windover, who was on the way to becoming a K.C., told Tim enthusiastically how much he had enjoyed poring over some of the "collections," and Lady Hoyle, large, commanding, and jolly, shepherded the Blair girls everywhere, and was the life and soul of the Flower Show, which Tim opened, rather meagrely with regard to words but very, very generously in a money way.

He went about talking with the farmers, getting on with them capitally; he broached his new irrigation scheme to old Bargate, who was reputed, so Eddie Keene had told him, to be "dead against the whole caboodle," and old Bargate so far unbent as to say, with grudging admiration:

"Well, my lord, if it's all you say it be, I hope you do put it through."

“I shall, if you back me up, Mr. Bargate,” Tim said earnestly; this drainage business was very near his heart; in Australia he had seen the enormous benefits which had come from it; he felt almost certain that, could he gain the big farmers’ coöperation, much of the land, at present only pasturage, could be made profitable.

On the night of the Flower Show there was to be a dance at Old Court, and when everyone had returned a hush reigned, broken only by muffled shrieks of laughter from various bedrooms where people were either studying their own costumes or helping a friend into his or hers.

“You, of course, Tim, will go as your great-great-great,” Lady Hoyle said decisively. “I’m told, and I believe it, that the costume is one of the finest of its kind there is. Extraordinary how well your father used to look in it, and what a marvellous fit it was, and, of course, you have his build exactly.”

Tim had planned to make a happy ass of himself, got up as a pierrot or in one of those usual “easy” costumes men hire with a sigh of relief: he listened to Lady Hoyle with a sense of dismay and hurriedly withdrew his tentative suggestion that he should make a “rag of the whole affair.”

“You can’t possibly do that, my dear boy,” Lady Hoyle said with tranquil firmness, “quite out of the question! All the people for miles round are coming, and you really couldn’t be capering about with your face all floured, and a red nose on! No, Tim, you must look your part, and I’ll come in when you’re dressed and see all the details are right.”

When, finally, attired in silver-grey satin breeches and a lawn shirt of such fine mesh it could have been drawn through a narrow bangle, Tim sat down and lit a cigarette,

one of the sudden moods which swept him sometimes, descended on him.

Dressed in the actual clothes of this long dead Crane, his jewels lying on the dressing-table, his brocade coat being handled now by Tim's valet, Tim felt ashamed.

This aping of another man's personality, a man in no way kin to him, was supremely distasteful to him.

He had shied away from the idea for that very reason, and then had been hustled into it by Lady Hoyle.

Diana, back at last, was to come to the dance, he was to live yet another lie, here, in her presence, a not very incriminating lie, but a lie just the same.

His valet's voice roused him:

"Will you try the coat on now, my lord?"

Tim got up and slid his arms into the soft sleeves, a faint, faint fragrance of sandal-wood hung about the coat, and it seemed to carry with it, for a second, the actual atmosphere of those other days.

"Now take a good look at yourself, my lord," Jakes suggested eagerly.

Tim wheeled and looked at himself in the big mirror.

He saw a very tall young man, whose face looked strangely dark beneath the whiteness of his wig, and whose eyes looked startlingly blue.

"The very image, my lord, of the picture in the long gallery," Jakes murmured.

Jakes thought his master looked a "treat"; he hurried off to tell the other servants to keep "an eye peeled for his lordship; the very spit of the old lord, you mark my words!"

Tim, left alone, lit another cigarette, threw it away; his depression would not leave him.

This life had to go on! And yet, how could it go on, now that he loved Diana? He couldn't marry her, living a lie; he would never be allowed to marry her if the truth were known.

They had not met now for ten days; it seemed ten years.

And suddenly, down on the terrace, he heard her laugh, and that small, happy sound was like a magic note banishing fear, misery, self-scorn.

Again the blood raced in Tim's veins, again his heart pounded, and he felt that indescribably mixed sensation, which is half nervousness, half wild delight, and is waked in a lover at every meeting with the beloved. He cast one last, quick glance at himself, the long mirror gave him back a flash of soft silver, from his powdered head to his grey satin shoes, with their scarlet heels and square, beautiful diamond buckles, then, his hand unconsciously resting on his rapier hilt, he ran down the wide, shallow stairs.

Diana had come over very early, David had brought her, and had just left her to join Foster, who was a great admiration of his.

For the moment the big hall was empty, and then, as Tim reached the last stair, from the octagon room Diana appeared.

Tim caught his breath at the sight of her. He stood quite still, his blue eyes deepening, his breath coming in little gasps.

He got her name out: "Diana!"

Diana came slowly towards him; she, too was wearing the dress of an ancestress, and her hair, too, was powdered; the dress was of old ivory satin, so exquisitely yellowed by age,

it looked almost palest primrose; she, too, had tiny, very high vermilion heels to her satin shoes.

She reached Tim and swept him a deep curtsy, and then she lifted her white eyelids, and her eyes gazed straight into his, and she whispered just above her breath:

“I must be kissed—darling!—darling—”

It was at that instant that Caro and Malincourt entered the big hall.

Caro’s high laugh seemed to disfigure the beauty of the place in some way, it was so utterly incongruous.

She cried gaily:

“Oh, I say, is it a rehearsal for a love scene, or what? All you two need is to kiss, and to have a movie-man here turning the camera, and you’d be made for life!”

Tim came forward unhurriedly to greet his new guest.

He had met Caro once or twice, and had coolly disliked her, the second time more than the first; he would gladly have had any other of Malincourt’s friends as his guest rather than Caro, but he had felt unable to say this when Malincourt had, as a mere matter of form, spoken to him about Caro.

“Well, you look pretty festive here!” Caro said. “A few hundred million candles seem to be as nothing to you, Tim! I must say, Tim, if you don’t mind; everyone does, don’t they? And I’m the last one to be left out in any cold!”

“I should say you yourself would make that an eternal impossibility,” Malincourt interpolated suavely; he felt tired, and he hated to look at Tim.

If he had few decent feelings, Malincourt had, in his own selfish way, loved his father, and at this moment Tim looked most disturbingly like him—like, and yet unlike—it was odd

and baffling. And Malincourt remembered so well his father wearing that same silver suit, the same diamond pins and brooches, the same wonderful lace jabot ... he felt he hated everything and every one: Caro had been a beastly nuisance all the way down, nagging at him, pin-pricking him, and he had gone to bed that morning at seven o'clock, and had lost all the night through at baccarat. By hook or by crook, he would have to get some money from Tim.

He left Caro drinking cocktail after cocktail, and went off to his own rooms and rang for his man.

“Get out the hangman’s kit,” he said listlessly.

“There’s the white satin, seventeenth century suit, sir,” the man ventured.

“You do as you’re told, and be hanged to you,” Malincourt snarled.

“Well, sir, you do look in that white——”

“Get on, or get out,” Malincourt flashed.

He stood beside the high, open window looking out at the dim loveliness of the stretching park; gardeners were stringing coloured lanterns everywhere, and now, as they were lit, the trees seemed suddenly to blossom with a thousand lovely flowers.

“This show’ll cost Tim hundreds,” Malincourt mused bitterly, “and it doesn’t matter to him what happens to anyone else, he’ll squander money left and right.”

He went downstairs to be greeted with a hoot of derisive laughter from David Lansdale, who said frankly:

“You do look a blooming blight! What on earth made you come like that?”

“Choice, and a complete disregard for your opinion,” Malincourt said acidly.

“Everyone’s I should think,” David retorted with a careless grin. He went off in search of Diana thinking what a “rum lot” the Cranes were; you couldn’t get away from it they were. There seemed a kink in ’em—old Tim had had all those funny affairs; there was a good deal said about this fella’ Beau, and none of it awfully good hearing!

Sauntering along, thinking, David was stopped by a footman with a tray of glasses. David halted, took a glass, passed on his way, still meditatively, and almost ran into Tim and Diana. Neither saw him, but David did see, very clearly, Tim’s face.

He halted in his tracks again, very much sobered up, indeed, far away, in a second, from his easy, browsing mode of thought.

He felt a bit winded, as he put it to himself.

For that ’ud never do; a match between Dido and Tim, you couldn’t get away from facts—a fella’ did a rotten thing, and it was done, and it barred him out from a good deal for ever after.

Certainly in David’s hard, chill, young opinion, Tim’s act of cowardice barred his entry into the Lansdale family—let alone that little matter of a mess-up at cards his father had told him about!

He was hailed and made to dance; he danced away and did forget for a bit; but Caro, who, too, had seen Tim’s face, was in no such casual mood.

Caro herself could not have explained why she should feel so attracted to Tim. She had only met him a few times; he

had never been what she chose to call “matey,” and yet she had felt for him what she had felt for no other man, and from the moment she had acknowledged that to herself she had determined to “get” Tim.

“I’ll marry him,” she told herself, her beautiful eyes narrowed, her scarlet lips set in a thin line.

She had told Malincourt the following day that she wanted an invitation to Old Court.

And Old Court, too, impressed her against her will. Caro had seen many lovely houses, many very large houses, but something in the spacious loveliness of Old Court pierced even her armour of carelessly unobservant, modern disregard. You had to notice certain things at Old Court, their very simplicity made you ... the austere beauty of the long gallery with its black oak floor, which age had polished so softly, the arresting loveliness of the Italian rose garden where the roses seemed to rise in wave on wave of gorgeous colour.

“He can’t be so awfully rich,” Caro thought, “and this place must take a mint to keep up. With my income, we could branch out all we wanted. A yacht, lots of horses ... and anyway, if he hadn’t a cent, I want him ...! And, by Heaven, I’ll see I get what I want!”

Now, pondering over that look of Tim’s, she began to think rather seriously about Diana Lansdale.

Jealousy did not make her underrate Diana; Caro might have wits of the gutter type, but they were very acute wits, even with regard to herself, and her appreciation of her own value and charms did not blind her to the fact that the “Lansdale click,” as she chose to call it, had an appeal of its own.

“Gentlemen may prefer sports, but they marry ladies!” she told herself cynically.

Personally, she was entirely pleased with life as she chose to run it. She had not the least desire to be sheltered as Diana was, to be modern with limitations.

She lit a very long cigarette, and bethought her of a drink, and rose, saying to herself:

“Well, she isn’t going to get him, and that’s that!”

Malincourt, a slender, dark shadow, drifted up.

“What are you talking to yourself about?” he asked idly.

Caro met his indifferent, green glance with one curiously absorbed.

“Sit down,” she said peremptorily, “and I’ll tell you. I have a plan on, Beau, my dear, and you are going to help me bring it off.”

CHAPTER XV

THE CAD

“I THINK we’ll have a fire lighted,” Lansdale said quietly.

The trim parlourmaid said: “Yessir,” and knelt down and put a match to the piled kindling and big logs, and in a little while the flames leapt up, filling the big, sunny room with the keen, pleasant tang of burning wood and the sound of brisk crackling.

Lansdale stared at the fire rather vaguely; once he thrust out a booted leg and shoved a log back into place; he had a preoccupied air, now and again his straight eyebrows met in a hard frown.

He wheeled round sharply as Diana ran in with a “Sorry, darling, I’m late!” kissed him and went to the sideboard to boil herself an egg, humming blithely.

Lansdale’s preoccupation seemed to have passed as he studied his only daughter. His gaze now was intent, questioning.

He asked suddenly:

“Where were you last night, Dido?”

“Dining at Old Court,” Diana told him.

David came in.

“Letters?”

There were none for him, and David, being in the throes of his first love affair, subsided gloomily, and began to attack a huge plate of porridge and cream.

Over a heaped spoonful his sombre gaze happened to rest on the little pile of envelopes beside his father’s plate.

He said rather indistinctly:

“Hullo! Hunt stuff? What?”

His question seemed to decide Lansdale, who left the fire and came back to the table. Standing beside it, he said briefly:

“Yes. Hunt stuff, Crane is to be Master.” As he spoke his thin, tanned face flushed darkly.

David shot at him: “What?” And Diana, two little flags of rose flying in her face, said quietly and very gently:

“Oh, Daddy!”

David went on vigorously:

“But I thought it was all settled, the whole thing, and that _____”

“It was practically settled I was to have the mastership,” Lansdale said levelly, “but apparently money can alter sport just as easily as any other matter! Crane has offered to give a thundering subscription, and, without exactly demanding a certain return, has intimated that, were he approached with a view to accepting the mastership, he would not refuse. At least, that’s what I make of Glanroyal’s letter, and I feel pretty sure I am right.”

“The fella’s a cad,” David burst out, his face scarlet, his eyes brilliant.

“Oh, I don’t think so—on this count, at any rate,” Lansdale said. “If he had not—well—chosen this method of approaching the committee I doubt very much if he would have had a look-in. He had to make a stand. And he’s made it.”

“It’s like underselling,” David said wrathfully. “The other way round, I mean—over-bidding!”

His father smiled faintly. He turned to Diana and looked at her.

Diana met his look with one as steady.

“I don’t believe,” she said, “that Tim meant to do a mean thing. It isn’t like you, Daddy, to judge a man without hearing his case.”

“Tim hasn’t got a case,” David flashed, “He’s what Father says, a cad, and he’s done a damn rotten thing.”

“I have not said that,” Lansdale interpolated.

David snorted. He waited a moment; then added:

“Any old how, he wasn’t frantically popular before, and I should think this would about finish him!”

“Finish him!” Lansdale smiled his wintry smile. “It will make him!” He lit a cigar, and then, looking up, said: “But I feel a bit done about it. Your grandfather ran hounds. I brought the pack up after the war, from a mere second-rate handful to a first-class lot; I organized everything; I got the whole thing in working order last year, and now, possibly rather weakly, I feel I’ve had a facer, and it takes a bit of getting used to.”

Gazing steadily at Diana, he said:

“If Crane had come to me and put his side frankly to me, I should, whatever I might have felt, have agreed that he had a right to get what he could. As it is, I have a sense of keen resentment, not without cause, I think.”

Diana said nothing; she felt baffled, dreadfully unhappy, and sick at heart. Very much the child of upbringing and environment, Diana had viewed life, until Tim’s advent, much as she viewed racing, swimming, riding, merely as another form of sport; sport was bred in her, she had known

the points of a horse long before she could read or write, she had ridden as soon as she could walk, gone out beside her father in a little basket affair fixed on to the back of the stout little pony.

And her few codes, standards, whatever she chose to call them, were those dealing with playing the game, never lying, never fudging, riding dead straight.

According to her father, Tim had offended against most of those codes.

It was unsporting, knowing, as he must have known, all her father had done for the Hunt, to act as he had acted.

Simply, it “wasn’t done.”

Studying her father’s keen, rather hard, face, she realized how hopeless it was to plead Tim’s cause.

Besides—could she? She didn’t know—she knew nothing of Tim’s views—she only knew that she must see Tim, hear what he had to say, get at the truth of the matter.

Lansdale was strolling from the room; at the door he halted for a moment:

“Dido,” he said. “I’d rather you didn’t go to Old Court again.”

He waited.

Diana opened her lips—closed them.

David said disgustedly:

“Good lor’, you don’t mean you want to get about with that blighter after this?”

Lansdale came back into the room; he walked up to Diana and put an arm about her. The old familiar smell of heather and good tobacco, which Diana associated for ever with her

father, with autumn mornings in the country and all the happy simplicity of life broke her down utterly.

She leant her cheek against the rough tweed coat.

“Come for a walk with me,” her father suggested gently.

Together, hand in hand, they went out into the park. There had been a silver frost in the night, and the grass was still crisp, the earth snapped sharply under foot.

“Winter’s coming,” Diana said, with a catch in her breath.

“One night’s frost changes everything,” Lansdale agreed.

Some of his words jangled in Diana’s mind: “One night ... changes everything——!”

That night when Tim had kissed her first, here, up on the terrace, had changed everything for her for ever.

She seemed to see Tim’s eager face before her, to feel his hard, strong hands holding her close, to hear his voice whispering urgently, adoringly: “Darling—my darling!”

The amethyst mist of morning swirled and drifted before her, the sun, like a flaming jewel, hung low in the dove-grey sky ... it was a morning to feel gay, to feel gorgeously fit and happy—and she had felt all that before she had heard about Tim.

Her father broke into her thoughts. He said, his hand clasping hers warmly:

“Dido, darling, I want you to give me your word you will not willingly see, or speak to, Timeon Crane again.”

In the silence which followed Lansdale’s words, Diana and he stood so still that a twig, breaking in the frost, fell audibly on to the grass.

Then, as if speech were released again by that slight sound, Lansdale said sharply:

“Dido, you do not mean—you cannot—that, already, Crane means so much to you that you find it impossible to give me your word?”

Diana lifted her eyes to his then, she looked at him through tears, but her voice was steady as she said:

“I—I do mean—just that, Father.”

Lansdale’s mouth twitched, he gave a curious impression for a moment, of a man struggling to lift himself free from some overpowering burden. Then, on the same caustic note, he said very quietly:

“You do not know the whole truth about Crane yet. I will tell it you.”

And without any attempt at emphasis, very, very levelly, quite unemotionally, he detailed such facts from Tim’s past as he himself knew to be true.

“A coward and a cheat,” he finished.

“Then,” Diana said. She had freed her hand and she stood very straight before her father, her head up, the delicate colour coming and going in her face, tears in her eyes she would not let fall.

“Then,” she repeated, and after a second’s pause rushed on: “But not now! Father, you can’t be so hard, so unfair, as to condemn a man for ever for something he once did! That isn’t justice, that isn’t sporting! What on earth would life be if all of us paid for ever, for a sin of our youth? Tim was only a boy when he lost his nerve, and though you say you do know about the cards, you admit it wasn’t proved ... so it all narrows down to this: Tim lost his nerve—and that is, admittedly, a thing which can happen to anyone, and you believe he didn’t play fair at cards. And it’s all more than ten

years ago, and he's lived it down, and you yourself have said, because I've heard you, how good he's been making down here. He's already put the place in order, he's never refused to help any of the people—he's given right and left——”

“He has indeed!” Lansdale agreed bitterly. “I have witness of that in the letter I had this morning!”

Diana caught at his hand, and drew it against her heart.

“Oh, darling, I know it's terribly hard for you, after all you've done, to have to give up in favour of Tim—and I can't understand about Tim's having acted in this way, but there must be an explanation! And—and—I am going to hurt you now, but I can't lie to you—even if there isn't an explanation, I can't give you my word not to see Tim, because I love him.”

Lansdale did not remove his hand, he could feel, beneath it, the anguished, frenzied beating of Diana's heart, and that terrified pounding seemed to him like the wings of a bird, beating and beating against a cage. He had idolized Diana's mother, and for him she lived again in Diana.

Entirely honourable, charming in a rather restricted way, even in his very true-to-type attitude towards life, Lansdale's whole love had come to centre in his children. For them he had saved, given up first one pleasure after another; the hunt had been his sole extravagance; and love for it was, too, part of his existence. For David and Diana he wanted only the best, and he had had visions of Diana marrying some happy, straight boy, and of their giving him the grand-children he so desired.

Now, a death blow to his hopes, Diana told him that she loved this man Crane, a man years older than herself, a man whose name was not unstained, a man who for ten years had

lived in another country, a man who in Lansdale's eyes was a second-rater and without honour.

He tried to quell the rising flood of bitter anger and disappointment, but his voice was full of hurt contempt, as he said a last:

“This has been going on secretly—between you and Crane—for how long?”

“A little while, a few weeks; we wanted to keep our love a secret—just, just because it—we—because it seemed only ours then——”

Lansdale's pinched face grimaced into a smile.

“Charmingly altruistic,” he said, with a savage irony. “I may take it, then, that, when a time should come that you considered this love less—er—yours and Crane's private property, you intended to share your good news! May I ask, if you had any idea when this occasion would be? Or if you intended to go on keeping your ‘secret’ indefinitely? And may I ask one other thing: Was it your idea, or Crane's, to keep this matter a secret?”

“It was our joint idea,” Diana said bravely.

Lansdale withdrew his hand; he thrust it deep into his pocket to hide its trembling; he felt utterly beside himself, and, as well, confused, desperately uncertain.

Abruptly, he wheeled away from Diana, strode off, calling to her:

“I will see you later.”

Diana wanted to run after him, and dared not. With a little shiver she noticed that clouds had blotted out the sun and that the mist was growing denser.

She, too, started to walk back to the house; she had to cross the terrace, bereft now of its jasmine and honeysuckle, and with only a tracery of twisting fronds left, through which the autumn wind was sighing.

There, in that corner, Tim had kissed her ... and the memory itself thrilled her through and through.

Give him up? Refuse to see him? Never, never, never, they belonged to one another as long as they lived.

“And when I am dead I shall love him still,” Diana told herself passionately.

CHAPTER XVI

VEILED THREATS

“If you want the money solely to give to Malincourt, I shall not give it you,” Tim said, frankly. “At any time now this afternoon I am more than willing to arrange a settlement on you, but upset all my plans, embarrass myself in order that Malincourt may gamble a little more, waste a little more—No!”

He stood in Lil’s over-furnished sitting-room, with its litter of tea things, packets of cigarettes, chocolates, its dying flowers, and faced Lil good-temperedly but firmly.

He added, unwisely:

“I don’t care how often Malincourt is sold up!”

Lil’s cheeks burnt.

“No, and he wouldn’t care how often you were shown up,” she said, with angry significance.

“Look here,” Tim said, with weary patience, “be reasonable; I’ve told you the truth, I can’t raise the money just now—even if I wanted to. I’ll allow you a decent income a month, and I’ll see to Mickey entirely. That’s fair.”

“Your sort of fair, not mine!” Lil said viciously.

Someone knocked at the door. Lil, with an exclamation of annoyance, went to it, opened it a little way, and Tim heard Caro Nesbit’s voice saying lightly: “Sorry, Madame Yvonne, but I’ve been waiting for ages, simply, and I thought perhaps _____”

Lil had gone through to a fitting room with her. Tim, awaiting her return, wondered with growing uneasiness, just

how much Caro could have heard, had heard?

Lil came back, and as she entered Tim felt a quick pity for her, she looked so harassed under her pretty make-up, so little, and so “done.”

He said quickly, quite aware he would repent his rashness:

“Look here, I can’t manage an awful lot, but here’s this to go on with—it’ll help you out, anyway.”

Lil took the cheque with a murmur, which might have meant thanks or dissent, and Tim, rather annoyed, glanced at her sharply.

She was crying, quite quietly, and rather helplessly.

“I say,” he began awkwardly.

Lil’s voice, muffled and broken, came to him from behind her handkerchief.

“You’d better get out. Go on. I’ll wait as long as I can—I mean—for the money, without bothering you. If only you hadn’t been—always—such a slacker ... and if I hadn’t met Beau.... I dessay you mean well.... All right ... good-bye.”

Mickey was waiting at Tim’s house, and Tim as he drove up to the door, saw his thin, freckled little face at the big window.

Tim waved, and Mickey waved back excitedly.

“B’ Jove, he’s like Bill!” Tim thought.

He was genuinely fond of Mickey, as he would have been fond of anything small and a bit down on its luck, but especially of a child; and poor Mickey, who had had ‘flu, and then nearly pneumonia, had grown very frail since Tim and he had driven forth so gaily in the hot summer time.

Tim had arranged to take Mickey down to Old Court, and in view of that fact Mickey and he had had a busy morning

shopping.

Malincourt, it seemed, in his two years' acquaintanceship with Lil, had neither seen Mickey, nor heard of him, and Tim anticipated no violent curiosity on Malincourt's part when, if ever, he should learn that Mickey's name was Marsh.

To Mickey, he himself was "Uncle Tim," and an old friend of Mickey's father.

Tim did not give a second's thought to Mickey's resemblance to himself; in any case he had decided Mickey must have a right upbringing, and as Bill's son, Mickey's place was in Bill's home.

They drove down to Malincourt in perfect peace. Mickey talked a lot at first, and then he grew tired, and as the shadows began to fall dozed off against Tim's shoulder, one hand gripping Tim's arm; Tim could feel him breathing quietly.

He woke him at Devizes to give him tea, and Mickey became very lively at once and ate hot sausages and buttered toast and lots of jam, and fell passionately in love with a hound puppy, a roly-poly, silky little chap with the furrowed brow of his kind, and paws like pink rubber pads, with tiny needle-like nails to them.

In Mickey's wistful face a great desire dawned.

"I s'pose—no—'course not—you wouldn't think of it——" he began, breathlessly.

Tim laughed outright.

"There's stacks of these little fellas waiting for you at home," he said.

"Oh, I say," Mickey breathed, huddling into the car again.

Tim drove off, and, accelerating, added:

“You’ll be taught to ride, Mick, and then you can hunt.”

Malincourt had left for town, he learnt when he reached Old Court, and he was not sorry.

He took Mickey over bits of the house, the long gallery, the white wing, and standing a little way off, lighting a cigarette, he looked up to see Mickey regarding the portrait of his grandfather.

The likeness between them smote Tim like a physical thing; he felt the blood surge to his head.

Mickey turned round and said in his clear, jolly little voice:

“He’s like you—this old soldier, isn’t he?”

“Is he?” Tim asked a little hoarsely.

He led Mickey away to his own rooms, which were the old day and night nursery in which, all these years Mickey should have lived. Later on he went up to see if Mickey wanted anything, and found him sound asleep. Tim stood by his bed looking down at Mickey.

He felt shame, and love, shame for that which it was now too late to undo, love for Mickey, and a burning desire to do the decent thing by him.

Downstairs, sitting in the library, his thoughts went back and back.

It was so deadly true, once you started on a thing which wasn’t on the square, there was no retreating: you had to go on.

“I am going on,” he told himself doggedly, “and I will do all I can to play fair. The boy shall have every chance.”

It never occurred to him to remember that the boy’s own father had never cared whether he had had a chance or not,

and, possibly, never would have cared.

Nor did he ponder the reason for Bill's silence about his marriage; if he had done, ferreted about for a reason, he must at last have been forced to believe Bill had kept silence lest he, Tim, should refuse to impersonate him. For a man does not "forget" he is married, and if Tim had troubled to think it out he would have known that.

He did not trouble, he did not judge Bill, and he believed in abiding by your given word. Altogether, viewing the last few months, he decided things were shaping better than he dared have hoped.

He had Mickey now, he had pacified Lil for the moment, he was setting about getting free (he had sent for his lawyer), and—he had Diana's love.

He went and opened one of the long windows and stood there, feeling the chill wind on his face, the sharp scents of the autumn blew towards him, he could just make out one star in the dim, quiet sky.

Diana—Diana!

Was that same star looking down on her, or she at it? They had "chosen" a star together, a lovely, brilliant thing, but it was not visible tonight.

Diana had said:

"You'll see it, darling, and I'll see it, and whenever we do, we'll send one another a kiss by it! The star will bring it!"

Dear, darling absurdities of love!....

Tim had never even guessed there could be such sweet things to say as those Diana said, such tender, exquisite phantasies as those she whispered to him.

He shut the window and switched off the light.

Tomorrow—only a few hours, and he'd see her.

CHAPTER XVII

DIANA'S PROPOSAL

GLANROYAL, his tough, pink face absorbed as he read out Tim's letter, gave a final snort, which might signify decision or approval, or both, laid down the sheet of paper, and said in his quick, nice voice:

“Well, gentlemen, what about it?”

Napier grunted:

“Needs must, I s'pose.”

Another man said:

“Y' can't run a pack on hopes—hounds eat a bit!”

And so on, and so forth; no man on the committee was enthusiastic about Tim's candidature, but none suggested turning him down.

It was, therefore, in this wise that Tim became M.F.H.

By a mistake all his letters had been sent up to Belgrave Square; the letter from the Hunt Committee reached him the day after his return.

Mickey and he were breakfasting together when the mail bag, Tim's own dark blue, strong leather bag, duly initialled and stamped, was brought in.

Tim let out a whoop of pleasure; then eagerly he told Mickey the good news.

Mickey came and stood beside him, one hand thrust into a jacket pocket, the other unconsciously pounding Tim's knee excitedly.

Tim caught him by his narrow little shoulders.

“Look here, young fella'-my-lad, it's on to a pony for you, this very morning! In half an hour! I'll teach you myself. You must come out for the first meet!”

They were like two children hurrying off to the stables. Perhaps if Tim had been a little less bucked with life, a shade less absorbed in Mickey's "seat," his grip on the reins, he might have noticed old Stokes' mouth fall open as he first saw Mickey, might have seen the groom's constant, eager stares as he walked the pony up and down, Mickey's face bent to his.

“Well, if 'e ain't, 'e oughter be!” was the opinion of the yard; to a man they were certain Mickey must be Tim's son.

“'Is lordship's that proud of 'im, too,” old Stokes ruminated unhappily. “The way 'e clapped me on the back when the boy trotted for the first time by 'imself. ‘Born to it,’ 'e says, as excited as could be. ‘Isn't he, Stokes?’ I'll allow the little chap seems a nice, natural rider, but, so far, it's been rocking-'orse exercise!”

And as Mickey and Tim went up through the gardens towards the house after the first lesson was over, Diana appeared on the terrace.

She, too, had been riding, had ridden over, in point of fact, and she made a little gesture with her crop as Tim waved.

In the clear, hard morning light, she had an excellent view of Tim and Mickey, and she recognized Mickey at once as the little boy she had once seen, on the way up from Ranelagh, driving with Tim in his car. Her heart, chill and unhappy already, contracted; for a second she felt as if an icy hand gripped it, and she knew the grip was the grip of fear.

Then Tim, after briefly presenting Mickey: “This is Mick. I knew his father. He's just had rather a tough time,” told

Mickey to “cut off” and get some bread and jam and a big glass of hot milk after his bath.

As Mickey vanished he took Diana’s hands.

“It’s seemed a lifetime, more, since I saw you.”

His eager eyes were on her face, his voice shook a little because he loved her so; apprehension, an odd anxiousness dawned in his gaze as he went on: “Darling, what is it? What’s up? Diana, look at me!”

Diana lifted her eyes, and Tim saw they were full of tears.

He made a quick movement towards her, checked himself, said gently:

“Darling, let’s go in.”

Hand in hand they crossed the terrace, and entered the small drawing-room. A big log fire was blazing there, and an old-fashioned square settee, covered with dim, old gold tapestry, was drawn up to the wide, open hearth.

Tim led Diana to it, caught her wholly in his arms, and sat down on the settee, holding her as if she had been a child.

His cheek to hers, his voice very tender, he asked again:

“Darling, what is it?”

Diana told him, simply, rather expressionlessly. She had passed such a wretched time since her interview with her father that she felt tired out, finished physically.

Over her bright head, with its soft, lovely hair just touching his cheek, Tim gazed at the leaping fire.

He remembered now the bitter mood which had made him write that letter to the Hunt ... it all seemed so long ago, and he had never foreseen such a result as this; he could not have done so.

He said to Diana:

“Di, what your father says about me is not true. It was because I was so incensed about this sort of statement, which I knew he made in town, that I jumped at the chance of becoming Master. It seemed to me a way to vindicate myself. You don’t believe I’m a coward, do you?”

Diana’s head shook vehemently. One of her hands was holding the lapel of his coat, the other was round his neck; her voice, a very young voice at this moment, came to Tim.

“No—no, I don’t, darling. I know—I believe it was just—just nerves——”

Tim groped for her meaning for a second, then, as it flashed upon him, he set his jaw grimly, despair flickered in his eyes.

“Be sure your sin will find you out!” he thought sombrely. Because she loved him, out of her beautiful chivalry and trust Diana had made herself believe he was not a coward, that that ten years’ old act of cowardice on Bill’s part had been due to nerves!

Almost Tim could have wept at the pity of it all.

Very quietly he said:

“I do thank you for that, darling. There’s one thing, I had to have a chance to show you your belief in me is justified.”

They kissed, but without the thrill and wonder of the day which had passed.

“Father wanted me to promise I would never see you again,” she said sadly.

“What did you say?” Tim demanded.

“I said I couldn’t.”

“And then?”

“Oh, Father wasn’t impossible, I mean he didn’t give orders, rant, rave about; he didn’t say anything for a time, and then very quietly, almost as if he were speaking of any usual thing, he said: ‘I will arrange something.’ ”

“What did he mean?” Tim questioned uneasily.

Diana shook her head.

“I don’t know.”

The hand about Tim’s neck pulled his head a little closer; Diana’s mouth was kissing one corner of his own, Diana was whispering:

“Timmie, I’ve a plan!”

Her utter trust, her faith, were making Tim feel as if his heart must break. To have to lie, in return for this flawless truth!—to have to act a part to a girl who had laid bare her soul to you!... he wished, almost, that he were dead, out of all this mire and deceit, dead even to love....

“Timmie, you aren’t listening!” Diana’s mouth was on his now, and between little kisses, Diana’s words came to him, hesitant, adoring, adorable ... and terrifying.

“Timmie—this is my plan ... it’s—it’s rather a forward sort of one!... you won’t think I am very forward—a minx—a—a hussy—isn’t that the word? But oh, darling, everything will come right if you like my plan. This is it. Marry me, Tim, now—today—tomorrow ...!”

It was at that moment that a footman knocked, came in to say that Colonel Glanroyal would like to speak to Tim.

Tim and Diana had just had time to spring apart, Tim was standing up lighting a cigarette, trying to, and Diana was rearranging her tie.

Tim was to wonder for months afterwards just what that footman's advent had meant to him; whether, had Diana and he remained undisturbed, he would have found an answer: whether, in that moment of utter closeness of heart and soul, he would have been able to lie to her or not? And, if he had told the truth, how it would have affected their lives?

But Glanroyal had followed hard on the footman's steps, his bluff hearty voice had hailed Tim cordially before Tim could answer the man, and then Glanroyal was in the room, shaking hands with Tim, kissing Diana, filling the small place with an outdoor atmosphere, the tang of wood smoke, the exuberant presence of two spaniels and a retriever, who leapt up at Diana with friendly barks.

Diana left very shortly. Tim took her to her horse, Glanroyal following. Tim had only a second in which to whisper, "Come tomorrow," and hear Diana's "Yes," and then she was gone.

"She's my godchild," Glanroyal said proudly. "And, b' jove, Crane, I don't believe I've ever seen a lovelier girl. She'll make the men's hearts dance—what?"

He cocked an inquiring eye at Tim; he, too, had heard rumours, and he had found Diana here, moreover! She might, of course, have ridden over with a message—again, she might not!

Abruptly he plunged into talk about the hunt.

He left entirely pleased with the situation, and liking Tim a great deal better than he could have believed possible. "Feller's changed a lot, and all for the better," he told himself.

He rode off towards his own small place feeling comforted and interested, and then at the east lodge he very nearly ran

down a boy, and the boy, with a frank apology, lifted very clear grey eyes to his, set between short, black lashes.

“God bless my soul!” Glanroyal said aloud.

CHAPTER XVIII

CARO AND SANDY

LANSDALE had never been a man of indolence, and he was of those rather rare people who speak only when they are quite ready to act.

On the evening of her talk with Tim he sent for Diana and told her quite coldly and very gently that he was closing the place at once, and that he and she were leaving for Kenya by the next boat. He offered no explanation, he angled for no comment.

He was in shooting kit, and he had just come in from a day's sport; he looked exactly what he was—a lover of the country, an open-air man, a man of simple, settled views.

Curiously Diana thought all those things as she looked at him, then the reticence of her heart and her training made her say, equally courteously: "The 26th?"

Lansdale nodded, waited a moment, walked off to his study.

David stormed in. He, at least, had no talent for taciturnity, the value of reticence meant nothing to him, and David was furious because all his plans were being upset.

He expressed his views on this matter to Diana with great vehemence, and in no uncertain voice, and then, since Diana said nothing, he lost his temper completely, and flung at her:

"And anyway, everyone knows that Caro Nesbit and Crane are pretty pally! Caro says quite openly that she's mad on Crane and that he's going to marry her."

Diana turned away; she said frozenly:

“Oh, don’t be silly, David,” and left him.

But that very old saying about the throwing of mud, “even if all of it does not stick, some of it does,” has a great deal of truth in it.

Diana told herself that “of course” it was all “nonsense, utter rubbish” about Tim and Caro, but the idea remained just the same, the idea that however innocent that “something” might be, there was, all the same, “something” between them.

“I’m up against it now,” Tim told himself. “What am I going to do? I’ve got to choose a path now....”

He had often glimpsed vaguely, as we all glimpse far-off, unwished things, the fact he might be forced to make a choice, but that time had always seemed in the far future—and now here he was face to face with it.

He marshalled various lines of action:

Tell Lansdale the truth? That was impossible.

Tell Diana?

If he did, would he lose her?

Marry her secretly, pay Lil to keep quiet, get a divorce somehow, get it so hushed up no one need know.... After all, he was free to marry Diana—he had a fortune, he might some day have a settled position——

He would not let his thoughts linger on that contingency; he could never bear to think much about Kyle. Kyle stood in his life for a sanctuary from which, for ever, he must be exiled. He didn’t want to think of Kyle, he never did, but he had to consider his real claims in this moment.

It was all such a hopeless tangle by now: his own wrongs, which he longed to right, he could not, because he had

foregone his birthright in the hour when he had given Bill his word, and equally, he must, for ever, shoulder the results of the actions Bill had committed, and, again, there was no redress there.

“A pretty filthy muddle I’ve made of it all!” he reflected grimly; he had, in that moment, a wild longing to cast everything to the winds, go to Diana, get her to fly with him, and, with her, forsake England for ever.

He stared with haggard eyes out at the wintry park, the leaves were swirling down in the great avenue, the lake had a leaden look, a reflection of the lowering sky. Life was at low ebb outside, and in his own heart.

Why, why had he ever entered into this pact? Why, at that crucial moment, had he been so weak?

He must see Diana the next day, must talk it out with her, and either wound her to the quick or tell her they would be married at once!

And he wanted, passionately, steadfastly, to marry her; he could imagine no more wonderful thing than to be her husband, to have before them the future, a future to be shared until death should take one or the other of them.

A car was coming up the avenue, he could see the occasional gleam of nickel, a horn sounded.

It was a big car, and rather a showy one, and obviously a very expensive one.

Tim went out into the big hall and waited.

He heard the doors opened and then he heard a voice he thought he knew and his brows drew together—“good lor’, what did Caro want here now—again! Why, she’d only left a little time before—at least, it seemed a little time.” His mind

flew back to her appearance at Lil's shop ... and the same vague apprehension swept over him.

Then a man's voice sounded and he became further mystified ... for he seemed to know the voice, it woke the queerest sensation in him....

Caro appeared, wearing a marvellous chinchilla coat and a little grey hat which had a long sealing-wax red quill in it sticking straight forward.

A tall man followed her, a big, loose-limbed giant with sandy hair, and a freckled face and a faint burr to his speech, that burr which had puzzled Tim.

Caro said, coming forward with a very charming smile:

“Tim, dear! Forgive me my trespass. I'd forgive you any! Sandy and I are going to the Holden's, and we passed here, and I had to stop. This is Sandy!”

She pulled the big man forward, and Sandy, who was called Ian Burns and who had played with young Erskine of Kyle in nursery days, been his other self at Eton, and whom Erskine had loved with a love which would never pass, Sandy, holding out a big hand, said cheerily:

“Very glad to meet you—er—Crane, hope you'll forgive this intrusion!”

Tim answered Sandy mechanically; he was conscious of a tumult of mixed feeling; fear, genuine joy at meeting again this old, best friend of all, embarrassment, and a sort of yearning eagerness to achieve the impossible, to gain for the man he was not the friendship the real man had had in such full measure.

Sandy alone had believed in Erskine. Sandy's faith had been as a rock, something to cling to whilst all the waters of

bitterness had surged over his head.

The one real reminder of that anguish of his youth had been his love for Sandy; he had often longed, out there in the wilds, in some jungle, just to write to Sandy, claim his loyalty again, and then his desire to cut himself off entirely had crushed down the longing.

But here was Sandy, a little broader, a little older, but the same Sandy, and all Tim's heart went out to him.

He found it difficult to play the pleasant, usual host; he wanted to hark back all the time, to question and listen, laugh as old friends laugh together, and he had to say to Caro: "Of course, you must stay to lunch. Awf'ly good of you to think of cheering my solitude! No, I'm all alone!"

"Cheers!" said Caro, looking up at him out of big eyes, smiling up at him with a little gamine smile, and being altogether very prettily, very warmly, friendly to him.

Tim asked Sandy guardedly:

"Your place is near Fort William, isn't it?"

Sandy said it was, and looking out of one of the mullioned windows, added with his well-remembered grin: "It 'ud seem a bit bleak, after all this——" and he waved his pipe at the expanse of rolling park, the comfortable hills, the river drifting peacefully along.

"Gowries rugged and bare," he explained, "but pretty wonderful just the same!"

"Just so wonderful, Sandy spends most of his time in London!" Caro commented, mixing cocktails diligently. "Go on, Sandy, tell the truth, and fear no one!"

Sandy observed placidly, if a trifle ambiguously:

“No one for miles, any fella’d get a bit lonesome,” and at his words Tim had a vision of purple moors, of sharp-cut peaks, black outlined against the silvery sky of the Highlands, and his whole heart ached.

Sandy stated he’d rather have a drink than a cocktail, if Tim didn’t mind, and Tim, who would have given him the house with gladness, sent for the pre-war whisky of which Sandy was pleased to approve.

“Grand stuff!” he said, his nice, uneven, white teeth showing in a wide smile.

Caro rotted and ragged, flirted with Tim, then with Sandy; she asked Tim:

“Aren’t you grateful to me for bringing along this nice Scotch collie, house-trained and guaranteed to clean up his plate?” and Tim answered:

“I’m very glad indeed Burns drove you down, and you had a brain wave, my dear!”

He couldn’t bear Sandy to go; he did all he could to prolong the visit; he got Sandy alone at last, having told Caro it was too cold for her to see the horses. Together Sandy and he sauntered to the stables, as they had sauntered a hundred times on a hundred wintry afternoons fifteen years before. And again Sandy stood, hands plunged in his pockets, his pipe hanging a bit, and said: “Oh, you beauty!” to a hunter he admired. He said it tenderly, for horses with Sandy were a life interest; he bred stock, he told Tim, as his father had done before him.

The afternoon was closing in, a bell rang somewhere, cart wheels creaked, there was the sound of a girl singing in one of the cottages, lights gleamed out in the distance.

“Have to be getting a move on,” Sandy said. So Tim and he turned their faces to the west and the big house again.

And then, out of the blue, out of the peace, crashing into it like a bomb and shattering it utterly, came Sandy’s hesitant, shy question:

“I say, you won’t mind my asking you? I mean, if you should know anything, and have given your word, maybe, to keep what you know to yourself, I’ll quite understand—you’ve only to say so—but there’s something I’ve been wanting all the time, ever since Caro told me you’d lived in South Australia and in Java ... both the places, seems so odd because—I’m digressing badly——” he had halted for a moment, and his face had looked rather pale in the waning light, and a little stirred, and then very simply, with a deep reserve in his voice, he had asked: “Crane, did you ever happen to meet a man called Erskine of Kyle when you were abroad all those years?”

To Tim, standing in the dropping twilight, that moment was one he was to remember all his life; at last he was face to face with a problem he had never foreseen, and for which, had he been able to foresee it, he must have found all preparation useless.

For there is one lie a man will refuse to tell, even under pain of torture, even when life and death hang on it, and that is the lie of friend to friend, the lie of utter unworthiness.

He stood there as a prisoner at the bar, with Sandy as judge, and to gain time, to give himself a moment to get his bearings, he repeated: “Erskine of Kyle?”

“He may have changed his name, gone under another,” Sandy said, “but he was the sort of fella’ you—you’d notice. Your kind of colouring, a bit like you, in fact ... he—he went

out because of a family row, he was foully misjudged ... no one's heard of him for years.... I just wondered ... you see," and his voice deepened suddenly, "you see, he was my friend."

Tim spoke then, he said, almost sharply:

"Yes. I did know Erskine of Kyle; I knew him well. But he's vanished now; he dropped his identity."

"What's he call himself now?" Sandy asked eagerly.

"I haven't the right to tell you," Tim answered straightly.

"Right!" Sandy agreed instantly; he waited a moment, then went on: "He's fit? Doing all right? You—no, I suppose he wouldn't want to hear."

He nodded towards the house.

"Must be getting along."

As they walked up the terrace steps he said:

"Great to hear of old Erskine. Lucky we came here. Like to thank you for your—er—well, for everything!"

He looked immense in the dusk, and his voice came out of it, warm and strong. Tim wanted to clutch at him, and say: "Sandy," and instead he had to make a decent, perfunctory answer, for he was only Timeon Crane, a chance acquaintance of Sandy Burns, and not that other half of Sandy's life, Erskine of Kyle, who had been "foully misjudged."

He ached to keep Sandy out on the terrace just a little longer, he felt when they joined Caro he would have lost him. And it might be months before he would see him again.

He did make an effort:

"Thinking of hunting anywhere round here?"

It seemed Sandy was.

“Like you to come here ... if you’d care to ... you have seen the horses.”

“That’s awf’ly decent of you,” Sandy said, rather amazed, gratitude in his voice. “Thanks very much, some week-end, perhaps.”

“I’ll let you know.”

“ ‘Browns’ ’ull find me.”

Sandy would be staying at “Browns,” where his people had stayed for generations! Marvellous hotels might go up, but Sandy would abide by an old friend!

He let out a big sigh of contentment.

“Jove, a nip in the air does make it seem like home!”

He laughed and jingled loose coins in a pocket.

Tim knew he had to let him go. They walked across the terrace to the windows, the room was visible, lit by softly-shaded lamps, a tea table gleamed beside the fire. Caro was about to pour out tea, and standing near the fireplace, one foot resting on the stone fender, was Diana, in riding kit.

“Who’s that?” Sandy asked Tim. “I say, what a stunner! She wins, hands down, doesn’t she, for beauty?”

Something in his voice, in his truthful eyes, in the quick smile of pleasure he gave as he looked, struck home to Tim.

“Come on in, and I’ll introduce you,” he said to Sandy. “It’s Miss Lansdale. Her father’s land marches with mine near Lesteven.”

CHAPTER XIX

A SURPRISE FOR DIANA

FROM without it had looked a most gay and comfy scene, the tea table, the two girls, each lovely in a very different way, the leaping fire, which was striking flashes of gold from old brass pots filled with bronze chrysanthemums, the glitter of a jewel when Caro lifted her hand with a cigarette to her mouth

...

Tim and Sandy opened the window and walked in, and in one second, as he pulled the window to behind him, Tim knew there was a sense of unrest in the air, that here was neither peace nor friendliness, and that, for some reason he could not fathom, Diana's spirit was not near to his.

He went across to her at once to greet her, he held her hand, he looked into her eyes, but he did not find her as a lover finds the beloved in one fleeting touch, one single glance.

But Sandy seemed to get on with Diana comfortably, or she with him! At any rate, Tim found himself relegated to Caro, who leant very near to him on the big sofa, and poured out tea for him, and fussed over him, and certainly smiled at him enough to make up for any number of "other" missed smiles.

Talking to Caro, listening to her, all the while Tim was really hearing Sandy's voice, Diana's enchanting laughter ... it seemed they knew "stacks" of the same people, and Tim found himself thinking unhappily, that, of course, they would.

He heard Sandy ask Diana, in a voice of baffled, hurt surprise:

“How on earth is it I’ve never met you before? Because I’ve never even seen you! If I had, I’d never have forgotten, and, besides, I’d have got to know you at once, by hook or by crook! Threatened a mutual pal with instant death if he or she hadn’t marched me up to you and said: ‘Miss Lansdale, here’s Sandy Burns dying to know you!’”

Harmless chaff, of course, Tim kept telling himself, but Diana’s voice had had a note in it which seemed to hurt his heart, because Sandy had awakened it, not himself, and she said in answer to Sandy’s eager speech:

“You know, that is a rather wonderful compliment you have just paid me!”

Sandy flashed back:

“That’s no compliment—it’s just the stark truth.”

Caro was watching Tim under preposterously long lashes, watching and smiling a funny, little, twisted smile. She told herself she hated to see him hurt, but she wanted him to be hurt, in this way, just the same! Had she not worked very subtly and very carefully to just this end before Tim’s entry with Sandy?

Diana had come in expecting to find Tim alone, and had found, instead, Caro stretched out on the sofa, a mound of cushions behind her red-gold head, a brandy and soda on a little table beside her, and about her an air of “at-homeness,” of complete ease, which had secretly infuriated Diana.

She had greeted Caro with that blithe casualness which is the hall-mark of modernity. “Oh, hullo!”

“Hullo, yourself!” Caro had responded with a gleaming smile. “Come over, too, to lighten our Timmie’s darkness a bit?”

Caro found it rather good fun “baiting” the “chaste Diana” as she nicknamed her; Caro had no real leaning towards Diana’s “set,” but, in some odd way the fact that a particular set of girls and men did not want her, did not envy her her wealth and freedom, irritated her intensely. It was Diana’s aloofness which “got her” as Caro phrased it, or rather, the fact that it was a characteristic and not a pose.

You couldn’t “get at” Diana, because what you wanted to be there, to be got at, wasn’t there at all—however much you might “kid” yourself it might be.

“Tim’s out with Sandy Burns,” Caro had volunteered, eyeing Diana’s faultlessly neat and very correct riding kit; she herself rode astride and wore soft-low-collared silk shirts, and a tie to match her eyes, and a hat which was like a Spanish matador’s and she affected to consider the rigid riding get-up as worn by Diana “Victorian.”

Victorian or not, Diana looked lovely in it, rather like a tanagra figure, as faultlessly straight and supple, and beneath the hard brim of her hat her hair shone very goldenly.

She had ridden over to tell Tim the last dictum, and to tell him, too, that she would go away with him anywhere, to the ends of the earth ... nothing would matter, could, if only they were together.

Her mood had been one of exaltation, of sheer love; she had pictured Tim’s response to her statement, and she had regained, in that vision, all the radiance and the quick, tender passion which the quarrel with her father had swept aside.

Now she had made up her mind, chosen her lot, and, as if in reward, back at flood-tide had come the rapture and the thrilling sweetness of love.

Diana had lived the moment of meeting, felt herself being taken into Tim's arms, felt Tim's cool cheek pressed to hers, felt even Tim's first kiss ... the door had opened, and she had seen Caro, been greeted by Caro, her disappointment cleverly exploited, her mood utterly clouded.

She had tried to tell herself she was being unreasonable, but she was in no frame of mind to deal out self-punishment; she had had enough unhappiness, and all she wanted was Tim's comfort, Tim's assurance, Tim's expression of love.

Caro apparently had no intention of leaving, but stayed on and on. Diana could hear Tim talking and laughing, and deliberately she played up to Sandy Burns' admiration, Sandy Burns' genuine warmth and delight in her presence. At last she had to rise and say: "I must go."

At once Tim was on his feet.

"I'll take you to your horse."

The second the door had closed on them his arms were about her, he was whispering frantically that "he'd never had an idea"—that he "cursed Caro for coming"—and that "it had been ghastly"—he was kissing her all the while, murmuring between kisses—his eyes were dark and unhappy, and he held her so closely Diana could scarcely breathe.

But her bitter disappointment, the reaction, could not be dissipated. Diana tried to respond, tried to be what Tim wanted her to be, but she could not say, as it had seemed so easy to say, riding to Tim: "Take me away!" She let Tim kiss her, she kissed him back, but time hung heavy, the glorious moment had gone, and Diana could not bring it back. Tim tried desperately to claim her all his own.

"Darling—no—don't turn away! For heaven's sake don't be cold to me! Sweetness—I couldn't help this damnable

mix-up. D’you think I didn’t curse that girl for turning up? Di—Di, my sweet, my little love, be kind to me!... You came today to talk things over.... Come with me to my study, no one will disturb us there—we can really talk....”

Diana felt a little flicker of warmth in her tired heart ... she said: “Yes, take me, I can’t stay long——” and Tim, his arm about her, hurried her along to the east wing.

To himself he was saying: “Anything—I’ll do anything she wants, and the rest of life can go hang! If I have Diana, nothing else can matter. We’ll chuck England, go to South Africa, Australia, anywhere—what’s it matter, if we’re together, where we live?”

That jealousy which Sandy’s honest, open admiration had roused, was blazing in his heart ... he had glimpsed what it would mean to see Diana loved by another man, and he was determined to claim his own—for good.

The study door was closed, it was dim in the wide gallery; Tim swept Diana up to him with sudden swift passion. This time her kisses answered his, they clung together, the kiss was dispelling heartache, disappointment, jealousy. And down the long gallery Mickey came whistling a high, clear, little whistle, the very last fox-trot, and as he whistled he danced a step or two.

Over Tim’s shoulder, Diana saw him, though Mickey did not see her, and in Tim’s arms she grew chill and very passive.

Diana disengaged herself gently and quickly; Mickey had not seen them yet, and before he passed the suit of armour which concealed them from him, Diana had walked away.

She said to Tim over one slim shoulder:

“Today very obviously isn’t my day!” and laughed a little, a low, nervous laugh, which held no amusement at all; then, with a gesture, half-wave, half-salute, she disappeared.

Mickey hailed Tim:

“I say, Miss—Miss—the girl with the long cigarette, and Mr. Sandy—someone want to go, and sent me to find you, and tell you they’d like to say good-bye.”

“All right,” Tim said shortly; he went off with Mickey, back to the sitting-room:

Caro was sitting at the piano, she played really well, and she was crooning a negro spiritual to herself, but when Tim entered she stopped playing, and twisted round. She was smiling and her gaze was fixed on Mickey as she said to Tim:

“Introduce me properly to your young friend!”

Tim gave Mickey a little push.

“Make Miss Nesbit your best bow, Mick!”

He added carelessly:

“Mickey is the son of a friend of mine, and he’s staying here because he’s had rather a tough time lately, one cold after another.”

Caro said: “Oh, too bad, Mickey!—” and then, looking up at Tim and laughing a little, went on in her rather husky, oddly attractive voice:

“How charming of you to look after your friend’s son, and how charming for you to have a pal to get about with! I suppose you two have topping times?”

“Rather!” Mickey answered eagerly. “Today—this morning—Uncle Tim taught me to ride.”

“Wonderful Uncle Tim!” Caro said.

She rose to leave and Tim and Mickey stood side by side to watch the big car start off.

“You make a very jolly picture, you two,” Caro called, snuggling down into a pony-skin motor rug which had a deep skunk hem. “Patriarchal effect about you, Tim!—ancestral hall in rear, illustrious owner, and young friend in entrance! Looks awf’ly well! Night-night, and a thousand, thousand thanks——”

Tim called “Good-night,” and Mickey waved.

They stood there till the white glare of the headlights had passed out of vision, then they walked back to the sitting-room.

It smelt of gardenias, of exotic Egyptian cigarettes, and Sandy’s honest briar.

“Let’s have a window open,” Tim said, and flung one wide.

The first star was trembling in the last pale emerald cloud of the chill sunset; he wondered miserably, aware of a day which had seemed to go so astray, if Diana would see it, and seeing it, remember? She seemed so far away, somehow.

“I dunno when I’ve liked a fella’ so much at first sight as Crane,” Sandy communed within himself. “It’s deuced odd, but he reminds me of Erskine, too.”

He wandered out of his room and into a friend’s, and, lighting a cigarette, asked:

“I say, d’you know Crane—the man who owns Old Court?”

“The new Crane, you mean? Chap who came back from the wilds a bit ago and caused Beau Malincourt to gnash his

teeth and his creditors to champ theirs? Yes, I've seen him. I hear he's a decent feller ... at any rate, that he's living things down."

"Living things down?" Sandy repeated. "What d'you mean?"

"Oh, some pre-war mess; hunting field story; let a girl in for a smash or something. And then there was a card affair."

"Crane?" Sandy exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, it was him right enough," Wickham stated carelessly; "then he vanished. And now, after ten or twelve years, he's back, and I hear he's getting very liked. He's Master, too; just been elected."

Sandy went off; he felt a sort of dull, unhappy disappointment; he had liked Crane from the instant they had met, and now to learn that he was, had been, at any rate, an outsider, cut him unexpectedly, deeply.

And, curiously, it made him feel freer with regard to Diana. He had sensed Tim's love for her, and that intuition had kept him from thinking very closely about her; now that bar had been lifted, and deliberately, he swung his mind clear of Tim, and focussed it wholly on Diana.

CHAPTER XX

THE SPECIAL “SHE”

LIL was waiting for Malincourt, and Malincourt, as usual was late.

Lil fussed a little, she could not help it; she did so want Beau to have the best of everything and everything at its best, and her housewifely soul was troubled because, though oysters do not matter, pheasant has a most distressing way of becoming very dry, and chestnut purée very hard.

Beau had suggested this dinner himself, and had said: “Let’s have it at home.”

So “at home” Lil waited in her very best teagown, which was really a lovely thing made of champagne-tinted lace and chiffon, and fastening with a huge jade pin which had sapphire points to it.

Lil had had her hair “touched up” and shingled, too, that afternoon.

She longed to hear Beau’s light, leisurely step, to listen to his murmured greeting to the maid.

Nine o’clock!—he was terribly late, and she knew she was becoming flushed, and the pheasant now would be almost mummified.

Then suddenly a car drew up, Lil darted to the window—it was a huge car ... who—who had driven him here? A man or a woman? A woman’s voice called: “Night-night.” Lil drew back from the window, the flush fading, her heart beating.

Malincourt came in unhurriedly, a bunch of violets, very lovely, divinely scented, held out to her.

“Peace offering, my dear!”

Lil took the violets, she raised distressed, half sulky eyes to Malincourt, and then, as ever, his beauty swayed her; he bent and kissed her lightly, and said: “I say, you look topping! New kit, what? Lovely colour scheme! Real jade? Hello—hello!”

He was in one of his best humours. The dried-up pheasant even received a word of praise, Lil grew happier and happier.

And after dinner, with the old cognac beside him, his cigar alight, and Lil sitting on the ruffy-tufty in front of him, he was still gay and affectionate and delightful.

Lil waited for him to “open up,” as he usually did, though on most occasions when he felt confidential his confidences too often took the form of tirades against his creditors, bitter criticism of fate for not having made him and kept him (a far more difficult achievement!) a millionaire.

Tonight, though, he seemed in an entirely different mood; indeed he was so unlike the taciturn, moody being of the last weeks that Lil ventured to ask him:

“Who was she, duckie?”

Malincourt looked at her quizzically:

“Which of ’em?”

Lil could laugh at that, too.

“The one who drove you here in the silver Rolls?”

“That special ‘she’ was business, big business, I hope,” Beau smiled. “And I am going to tell you all about it. That particular ‘she’ has put into my hands a weapon wherewith to fight my most estimable brother. I propose to turn detective, you’ll be amused to hear! There are a few details of Crane’s career I want to verify! Odd, how little one ever knows about

one's relations! But if I can prove what I believe to be true, is true, I rather fancy I can wave farewell to being dunned by creditors, having to cavil for a few pounds!"

"What—what is it you believe your brother's done?" Lil asked very low.

"I believe he's a rotten hypocrite and a fraud," Malincourt said vindictively; "and if I can get the proof I think I can, I'll get him out of the country, hound him down yet!"

Caro had said to herself:

"Men like Tim don't visit dressmakers for nothing ... and have confidential talks with them! The cream of this joke is that Yvonne is Beau's little fancy, and, of course, Tim can only have known her a few months. Obviously, Beau is all in the dark! Those ineffably conceited men are always 'had'—serves 'em right, too!"

She sent for Beau the following day, and he came to tea, looking sulky, suspicious and most immaculate.

"Manners, manners!" Caro gibed at him as he greeted her unsmilingly.

"What do you want?" Malincourt said by way of answer, and Caro had said, leaning forward and tapping his cheek with one very manicured, glittering-nailed finger: "Would you like to have a hold on Tim?"

"I thought that was your aim and ambition!" Malincourt sneered.

"It is, but I need help. And you are going to give it me. Look here, dear, darling, sunny-tempered Angel-Face—who is the little boy called Mickey something, who is the image of our Tim?"

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” Malincourt said indifferently.

“The other day I was motoring near Tetbury, and called on Tim. Of course, the chaste Diana had to be there, but—when Tim had at last managed to inveigle her out of the room, a boy strayed in, and the boy, my dear, is Tim over again! The likeness simply knocks you out! You can’t get away from it. Tim introduced him, without the flicker of an eyelash, as a friend’s son—and I tried to tell him by inflexion of the voice that I guessed the friend to be a near one! Now, like Jack the Giant Killer, I’ve a keen nose, and I smell a mystery, and all mysteries mean a hold over someone, in my opinion! I told you at the dance nearly two months ago I want Miss Lansdale removed from the sphere of influence. I want her interest in Tim not merely scotched, but finished. I cannot take a hand in this because Tim would know, and the last thing he’s ever got to think me is scheming! That ’ud never do! But it doesn’t matter what he thinks you—and I daresay he couldn’t think much worse of you than he does! So get busy, Beau, my dear, please, because time is fleeting, and I want to marry Tim in the spring-time!”

“What exactly are your orders?” Malincourt inquired insolently. “Do I tax Tim with human frailty—and upon his admittance do I say, ‘Fancy!’ to him or what? and precisely in what way is any revelation going to benefit you?”

“In this way,” Caro said, sharply. “I want to know what, who, I am up against? So I want you to find out who is this boy’s mother. I can’t go ferreting round, because Tim might find out, though I expect I’d do the job fifty per cent better and quicker than you.”

She considered Beau between narrowed lids.

“Look here, the day you get the dope on all this I’ll give you a cold thou. in notes! How’s that?”

Malincourt looked at her sardonically.

“Tim will have luck if he does marry you,” he observed. Caro’s face flamed for a second, then she laughed.

“You will have luck if I marry Tim,” she thrust back at him.

They had made up their quarrel, settled down to discussion, and finally Caro had driven Malincourt to Lil’s.

She had teased him, most unwisely, about Lil, and, to her astonishment, he had become really angry and suddenly savagely defensive.

“You don’t believe, I suppose, that any woman’s dead straight?” he had demanded. “You wouldn’t—your sort! But let me tell you this, I don’t care to have you discuss my friends—they’re too decent!”

Caro had placated him, and driven off detesting him, and now, in his mood of expansive confidence, Malincourt was telling Lil all about her.

“Does she deal with you, a Miss Nesbit?” he asked.

“Yes, Caro Nesbit, you mean? Tall, very fair. Yes. Well, it’s she who’s so keen.”

Poor little Lil gave a quick shiver, and to herself she said:

“So it’s her I have to fight, is it?”

CHAPTER XXI

“THAT BOUNDER!”

DAVID got out of the train and asked the station master: “Any news?”

“No different, Mr. David.” The man’s voice was very kindly; he hurried off to beckon to the car and David flung himself into it and told the man to drive as hard as he could.

Diana met him in the hall—a very white Diana, with lilac circles round her eyes.

“Oh, David!”

They held on to one another for a minute.

“Is it—is he?” David stammered.

“He’s terribly ill, darling.”

David sat down and held his head in his hands.

“I dunno! Seems like a ghastly nightmare. On Thursday I met father in town and he was as right as rain. We did a good bit of shopping and lunched at the Sports Club. Father didn’t even seem so depressed about you and all that mess-up. And on Friday I get a wire saying he’s awfully ill. No one even knew he had blood pressure, and what is it, anyhow?... I mean, it seems such a ghastly thing. One day you are perfectly fit and the next—the next, you’re—dying.”

His voice sank to a whisper on the last word.

He lifted his head and looked straight up into Diana’s eyes, and she knelt down by him quickly and drew his head on to her shoulder.

“He—he isn’t suffering, you know.”

David muttered something; he burrowed into Diana's shoulder and she could feel his hot cheek.

She made him eat something later, and, much later still, they went together to their father's room.

Already it was significant of great illness, as rooms do become, paying mute testimony to the sadness they enclose. Everything had gone from the dressing-table and writing desk; a nurse was sitting beside a shaded lamp; she looked up when Diana and David entered and nodded to them. Lansdale lay as if asleep, he was no longer of the world about him, his face bore the stamp of utter aloofness.

He had not spoken coherently since the day before.

David went up to the bed, and bent over him, and called to him: "Father!"—then, as fear drove into him, he lapsed into boyishness, and whispered over and over again: "Daddy—Daddy."

When he raised his head he looked at Diana imploringly: she held out a hand to him, and they tiptoed out again.

David found himself thinking, in a chill, distraught way, of countless unimportant things. No Africa—there'd be no trip there now ... that was certain ... that boulder Crane ... and they'd bought all the kit for Kenya ... p'raps the Colonial people 'ud take back the sun hats, and rifles, and all the gear.... A miracle might still happen, and Dad would buck up ... you did hear of such things. No one knew much about this beastly blood pressure business.... Why on earth hadn't someone got a cure for it? Surely science ought to have managed that....

He went up to his own room, and found old Eliza lighting the fire.

She turned a pale, tearful face to him, and then she smiled.

“Why, Mr. David, dear!—I’d no idea you’d come. The fire’ll be burnt up in a tick.”

She held a newspaper in front of it. David wanted her to stay; he began to talk to her, and old Eliza answered him; she had been with him from his short-coated days. She poured forth a stock of homely, kindly chatter, sitting back on her heels, her big print apron crackling as she smoothed it.

She seemed so cheery, so comforting, death didn’t seem anything awful to Eliza, or illness. “Why, in our family ...!”

David sensed the unfettered humanity of Eliza and her kind ... and they could talk of things, they didn’t all bottle it up, and feel so ghastly inside——

Diana’s voice called gently, anxiously:

“David—David!”

Tim heard of Lansdale’s death through Mickey, who had been told by a groom.

It was a dull November afternoon, steel-grey, with a low hanging sky and a dank coldness in the air.

Passionately eager to comfort Diana, Tim wanted to dash to the telephone and speak to her, beg her to let him ride over; then he reflected that perhaps it would be wiser were he to write and send the note by car, telling the chauffeur to wait for an answer.

But he wanted dreadfully to see her, and he had been desperately worried at receiving no answer to his letters. He understood Diana’s silence now, and the reason wrung his heart.

He sent off his note, and waited impatiently for the return of the car; he was on the steps as it slowed up before the wide

entrance.

Diana's note was very short and very pathetic:

“Darling, do come. I feel I can't write. I do need you so.—
Dido.”

Tim was turning into the drive twenty minutes later; as he stepped from the car, David came round the corner of the house. His white face flushed scarlet as he saw Tim, then at a run he reached him, and, heedless of the chauffeur, the butler, who had just appeared, he said, loudly:

“You clear out of here! You wouldn't have dared come in my father's lifetime, and I'm damned if you shall enter his house now. It's like you not to have the decency to feel that.... My father told me you were a coward, and he was right ... it 'ud take a coward to come sneaking into a man's house when he can't prevent him! But I can prevent you, and I'm master here now, and you——”

He was nearly crying, plainly on the verge of hysteria. Tim was ashen as he swung round on his heel, and the veins stood out on his hands as he clenched them one within the other to prevent himself striking David.

Over his shoulder, he said, bitingly:

“I advise you to see your doctor: you are, most obviously, wholly unstrung.”

David tried to answer; his mouth worked, his face, which had gone white again, flushed back to dull red as he met Tim's savage glance, he looked uncertainly from Tim to the chauffeur.

“Get in, you young fool,” Tim said frigidly. He took David's arm, and held it in an iron grip, propelling him to the door, where he signalled to the butler to look after him.

Then he drove home in a state of seething fury against fate, life, that past which he had never lived, but for which, he saw now, he must pay for ever.

After tea, smoking a pipe, trying to read, Tim thought he heard hoof-beats. He got up from his chair, his ears straining for another sound, old Jevons' steps going across the stone floor of the big hall.

Perhaps Jevons trod specially quietly that evening, perhaps Diana and he both spoke in very low voices. Tim had settled back in his chair, disgruntled, bitterly disappointed, out of tune with everything and everyone, when the door opened and Diana stood there.

Neither of them could speak in that moment; almost unaware he had moved, he was so overwhelmed, so filled with joy to see Diana, Tim had her close in his arms as the door was shut; he realized dimly it must have been raining as he kissed and kissed Diana, then when their storm of longing had spent itself a little, drawing Diana towards the fire, Tim saw raindrops glistening goldenly on her hair and shoulders.

He said something rather inane about it and Diana smiled a little, and said swiftly: "I had to come!"

She turned wholly to him, hiding her face against his coat, her hands gripped his shoulders tightly, and she said in a low, but very clear voice:

"Tim, I heard all David said. I wanted to cry out to you, and then I could not." She paused and half whispered: "Oh, my dear, my dear!"

"It's all right," Tim said, his cheek against her soft hair. "In a way, David had cause to say what he did. I never stopped to

think that ... to realize it was not fitting I should go to your father's house——”

“Oh, don't, don't,” Diana begged.

She lifted her face to his and tried to smile at him through tears.

“Tim, we'll be married soon, won't we? And once we belong and all the world knows it, nothing will ever be able to hurt us again. I know it, I feel it. Don't you, too?”

He had to say “Yes,” he had to live up to the faith and love in Diana's eyes.

Diana murmured, lying back at rest now in his arms: “As soon as ever we can. I must help David to wind up things, and besides ...” she tried to go on, and could not, her voice came very dimly: “Father was hard, but I did love him; it was just he didn't understand——”

Tim nodded, he went on holding her very close, he knew she was crying, and he let her cry, and by and by when he looked down, he saw she was dozing; in the firelight her face looked thinner; it was very white, and her lashes looked very dark by contrast. A great tenderness filled his heart as he went on looking down.... He thought how wonderful it would be to have the right to look after Diana, the right to comfort her, take care of her.

And he dare not even take her to her home lest her brother should make a scandal of it!

Diana stirred, sat up.

“I must go, darling. But, oh! I do feel better. Things don't seem so dreadful now—you make everything hurt less because you love me.”

She rode away into the soft, falling rain, and Tim watched her go; she had refused to let him accompany her.

In his empty sitting-room he paced up and down.

Lansdale's death, save inasmuch that it hurt Diana, he could not deplore; Lansdale had been a barrier in his path, and had been becoming daily a more serious one. Now he could take on the Hunt, his only hope of getting a fair chance to prove himself.

But Lansdale's death, on the other hand, set Diana free!

Inaction suddenly irked Tim, he looked at his wrist-watch: not so late: dash it all, he would drive up to London, see Lil, get a working arrangement going. He must do something, get something fixed up, and after hunting started he would have few free days if the weather held.

He decided to drive himself, and set off after an early dinner.

"Can't I come?" Mickey asked wistfully.

"Not a chance of it, old son!" Tim told him cheerily; he waved good-bye to Mickey with a feeling of affectionate regret, and Mickey called: "Come back soon."

"Stick to your riding," Tim shouted back: his thoughts clung to Mickey rather as he drove on, to Mickey's riding, which hadn't been a rousing success; Mickey wasn't a funk, but he was, undeniably, a nervy rider.

"Have to go very slowly with him," Tim decided. "Must be jolly careful not to put him clean off, poor little devil."

Mickey's riding brought heredity to Tim's mind, its value and its curse; he reflected grimly that, in his own case anyhow, he had inherited no special quality save an iron obstinacy.

A surge of longing swept over him as he thought of his boyhood, a longing which was an aching desire for his own land, his own home, the speech of his forbears.

It came to him, driving on through the gleaming, rainy darkness, that homesickness was like patriotism, a man never gave either his home or country two thoughts until he was up against things; he had never bothered a hoot about England until the war had come, when, from having been, as he had believed himself to be, a perfectly casual citizen, he had become a patriot of burning enthusiasms, filled with a headlong desire to shield his land and fight for her ... and the same with his home, which he had chosen to forsake: Old Court had beauty, age, comfort, but all his soul cried out for the dour stone house of his birth, with its bleak surroundings.

London hailed him by a vast orange glow which staked its claim up in the sky, and then the tramlines appeared—long, winding, silver tentacles leading him farther and farther into the vast town.

CHAPTER XXII

CARO'S RESOLVE

"TIM's in town, came last night," Malincourt said to Caro; he stared at her frankly as he told her, leaning one foot on the running board of her car, leaning an elbow on the door; the block was in Bond-street, and it was not likely to break for a little while. "So what about it?" he finished idly.

"Where's he staying?" Caro asked irrelevantly.

"At home."

"I hear Pops Lansdale is dead."

Malincourt's eyes flickered; he was thinking what awfully bad form Caro was; he had never liked Lansdale, but he resented Caro's cheap reference to him.

"So the chaste Diana will be able to go a-hunting very freely," Caro pursued, "so, my dear and peevish Beau, you'd better get down to hard tacks—and that right speedily! I should think it would be well were you to hie yourself to your native heath, and put in a bit of sharp work whilst Diana's living in enforced seclusion. Seems a good time to me. Did you—er—ask Madame Yvonne if she knew anything about Tim?"

"No," Malincourt said shortly.

"Well, I should if I were you! Yvonne knows everyone, or something about 'em, which is even more useful! Hullo, we're moving. S'long, dearie, and get on with the good work!"

She left Malincourt looking at her with open dislike, and drove straight to Belgrave Square.

She saw Tim before he saw her, and the bravado, the gamine expression in her eyes, faded utterly as she looked at him.

Tim was good to look upon; he might not have Malincourt's strange beauty of feature, but he was tall, and lean, and tanned; he looked an out-of-door man, a very pleasant type indeed.

He was pulling on a wash-leather glove when Caro swept the car round and hailed him.

"Get in! I'll drive you anywhere! You have but to command!"

"Very decent of you," Tim smiled. He felt a little self-conscious. "Fact is, I'm only going to Jermyn-street.... Thought I'd like to walk."

"Walk when you leave me!" Caro suggested, smiling at him. "Do! Come along! If you want to walk I want to talk."

Tim settled himself on the dark crimson leather cushions. It really was very kind of Caro to drive him, and she looked uncommonly smart, too.... She was pretty, he decided, but in the wrong sort of way! Too much lip-stick for a crisp, sunshiny morning, far too much powder, and that sticky stuff on the eyelashes.... Pity girls made up so terrifically, pity——

"Penny for 'em!" Caro said gaily.

Tim laughed.

"I was thinking times have changed since my young days!" he said.

"Times or people, and nice or nasty?" Caro asked shrewdly. "What made you think of changes, anyway?"

"Oh, I dunno!" Tim told her easily. "For instance, you wouldn't have been driving a six-cylinder Hispano down

Piccadilly in my young days——”

“Of course, you’re Methuselah!” Caro said, rather fractiously. “And I suppose what you really mean is that, figuratively speaking, me driving an Hispano down Piccadilly isn’t as good as a girl of your day sitting coyly behind a pair of fat horses and bowling along like a hearse!”

She hesitated a moment, and then said in a low voice, with an odd note of childishness in it:

“Tim, like me a little!”

He was dumbfounded, a little appalled, and he flushed a bit under his tan.

“Don’t we all?” he parried, trying to make a joke of it.

He felt a sort of sinking, he told himself, as he noticed, or feared he noticed, tears in those eyes which looked at him so beseechingly between their long, blackened lashes.

He added quickly, warmly:

“Of course, we’re pals, you and I.”

With a throb of very genuine relief, he said:

“Stop here, will you? Here’s my shop. It was very sweet of you to drive me. Thanks so much!”

And, with a last smile, a wave of his hat, he had gone, debonair, bare-headed still, the sun glinting on his fair hair, into the shop, and had vanished from sight.

He said: “Phew!” and fanned himself with his bowler as the door clanged to behind him; then he took a cigarette from his case and inhaled deeply; then he felt a bit better.

Caro drove on, and her face went white under its delicate rouge, as she said aloud:

“I will—I will get Tim. He’s the only man who has ever made me want to be different—made me want to—oh, to live up to things, I suppose.... And Beau can jolly well get going on his job! I know Tim’s keen on Diana Lansdale, and I know that if Beau doesn’t break that up, I’ll break him up!”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CHANCE OF HAPPINESS

LIL gave a heavy sigh, half of relief, half of depression, as she rang off after telling Tim he could come and see her that afternoon. Beau had been difficult again, life itself seemed like a threat at the moment, a threat against her happiness, her love for Beau.

She poured out her fears, her unhappiness, to Tim at once, and he listened patiently; at last he said:

“You know, there’s only the record of our marriage in another name.... I mean, if you chose to stick to your story, the story that your husband had been killed in the war, and if you married Malincourt, and went away—wherever you liked with him ... I can’t see that you would be risking very much.”

Lil was staring at him wide-eyed. After a minute, she said bitterly:

“Oh, no! Only imprisonment for bigamy! That ’ud be all, and Beau would thank me for dragging his name into a mess like that, wouldn’t he?”

Tim looked straight at her and met her angry, blue eyes.

“Who is to prove I was the man Marsh, that I am he?” he asked, deliberately.

“There’s Mickey,” Lil said shrilly.

“Don’t you believe I’ll do the straight, the right thing, by Mickey?”

She flung away to the window and stood there looking into the foggy gloom, twisting and untwisting her fingers.

“You weren’t always so careful to do the straight thing,” she said sullenly.

Tim got up and went to her.

“I am going to do the straight thing by Mickey,” he said, quietly. “In your heart, you know it.... I’ll swear it to you by all you or I hold sacred. Mickey himself is a sacred trust to me. Mickey’ll inherit the title and the place—everything that ought to be his shall be. Won’t that satisfy you?”

“You sound straight all right,” Lil murmured, dubiously; she lifted her eyes to his. “It’s like this, I’m driven—I don’t know what to do. Seems to me as if Beau’s my whole life. I’d—I’d do anything to make him happy. But I don’t know that he would marry me and clear out of London——”

“You needn’t go for good,” Tim said gently. “Go on a long cruise, stay anywhere, China, India, Australia—keep away for five years or so, and then come back. Put in a manager here, and I’ll allow you five thousand a year. Malincourt shall never know it comes from me. Lil, think it over. Take your time, and let me know. It’s the only way out for you I can think of——”

“And what’ll you get out of it all?” Lil asked him point-blank.

Tim did not lower his eyes.

“I’ve a chance of happiness,” he said slowly, “and if you take your fate in your hands, I’ll take mine.”

CHAPTER XXIV

DIANA'S QUESTION

TIM and Diana met on the day after the funeral. Diana drove over in her little two-seater. It was raining heavily, and the mist was rolling off the fields in long, dun-coloured swathes.

She looked a child in her narrow black dress, and her throat rose from it like a white flower; there were lilac shadows under her eyes, but she smiled at Tim as only a girl in love smiles, so in love that no sorrow, apart from harm to the man she loves, can really touch her.

“I had to come!” she whispered.

And Tim, so confident now that all was certain to go his way, answered eagerly:

“Of course you had. And soon you’ll come to me for good, for ever.”

Diana wanted to discuss nothing, was content to love and be loved, to talk, to drowse against Tim’s shoulder; they had tea, and then they roasted the first chestnuts, which Tim had bought in London, and carried all the way home, because he had remembered Diana had said she “adored roasting chestnuts.”

The firelight gleamed on her short curls, tagging them with gold, she lost her paleness, her look of fragility, kneeling before the fire, getting a little burnt, getting gayer every minute, more her old self.

Mickey came in and helped with the chestnuts, went out again to have a fencing lesson.

“I want him to learn all the sports there are,” Tim told Diana. “He can ride, but he’s a bit nervous, and that worries me. I suppose he’ll grow out of it, though. He’s getting to play a really jolly little game of tennis. This chap who comes out from Tetbury to teach him fencing, is a tennis pro. too. Odd mixture.”

He was leaning forward, and Diana was resting against his knee, suddenly, as he stopped speaking, she knelt up, her face was very near to Tim’s.

“Tim,” she said breathlessly, “who is Mickey, really? Who are his people? Where does he come from?”

Tim felt a second’s breathlessness himself, he knew his heart thudded a bit: he said, hoping his voice sounded ordinary, untroubled:

“He’s the son of a man I knew and—cared for, for ten years, nearly eleven. He was my partner and my pal, and he’d had rather a rotten deal. He didn’t know about his boy, didn’t know he’d had a child. I came back and I was told. This man left me his entire fortune and I’m using it, some of it at the present time, to bring up Mickey, give him the chance he should have had. That’s who Mickey is.”

Diana’s arms were about his neck; she said:

“Oh, Tim, you are a lamb—oh, Tim, I do, I do love you.”

CHAPTER XXV

SANDY BURNS ARRIVES

SANDY BURNS, though no great reader, generally managed to peruse a column on the first page of the *Times*, and the entire sporting news. It was whilst he was exercising his brain, by scanning the death notices, that he saw Lansdale's name.

He laid the paper down and stood up. He felt he had to think, and think hard. He could go to Tetbury and put up at a pub, of course, and hunt from there ... a bit "mangy" to do a thing like that, after Crane's invitation, and Crane was Master, too ... but all those things he'd been told about Crane ... he didn't know if he wanted to see him again, and yet, in a way, he did ... he liked him, liked him all at once, too—a thing he didn't often do.

On the other hand, Crane had seemed pretty keen on Miss Lansdale ... no getting away from that ... no getting away, either, from the fact that he, Sandy, was also keen. Why, he'd thought of the girl almost ceaselessly since he'd seen her...

He didn't know what to do, but he knew he wanted to do something which would give him the chance to see Diana, and as soon as possible.

He thought he would go and put in a "bit of boxing" with a young pugilist who was giving him lessons, and who very often gave him a sore jaw, and always gave him a dickens of a doing.

After a stiff bout, a Turkish bath, and a luncheon which would not have disgraced the prize-fighter himself when out of training, Sandy attacked his problem again.

He sent the club porter for an A.B.C.

Then he went home, packed, and caught the 5.10.

He found Tetbury in a whirl and got the last bed, and learnt that the meet was to be at Old Court the next day.

Sandy's face clouded: Old Court: Crane: Crane's invitation. But could he miss a day's hunting?

Then, like a flash of light in a dark place, he bethought himself of the fact that Diana wouldn't be out yet—not a chance of it! Mourning and all that—poor little thing!

All right! He'd give the hunt a miss, too, and go off and see Diana.

He told himself, almost awestruck, that the fact he could miss a day's hunting, and never care, or scarcely care, just showed how he felt about Diana.

He heard various comments about Crane that evening, on the whole favourable ones. Obviously the farmers liked him, he had given them a square deal, Sandy gathered. He felt curiously glad, somehow, when he heard Crane praised.

On every side he heard genuine grief for Lansdale, and he thrilled to some man's account of a great race Lansdale had once ridden, of other men's mention of Lansdale's grandfather, and all he had done for the hunt.... More and more Sandy knew and felt that Diana was after his own heart; a girl who came of fine, clean stock, a girl of his own sort, a fearless rider, a sport—and a winner every time! He could still see her as he had seen her that afternoon, tall, slender, boyish, yet so feminine—a girl to care for, to look up to ... a girl to make a home with, because she'd make a home. He felt he must see her at once—and glanced at his wrist-watch.

Nearly twelve! Come to think of it, hardly a suitable hour for a call!

He grinned at himself as he went upstairs to his room, and a saying of his old nurse's came through his head as he blew out the candle and plunged for bed: "Tomorrow is also a day!"

He hired a very decent beast next morning and rode off on a tour of inspection; the hotel had been astir since six o'clock and Sandy, despite his spirit of selflessness, had felt a pang of envy as the well-known sounds had reached him, the clatter of booted feet, the stamp of horses, the hissing voices of grooms; he loved every sound connected with hunting, it stirred his blood, stirred his heart, too.

It was a perfect day, clear, soft, and damp, an ideal day for scent. He sighed a bit as he eased his horse up the hill which led to the Lansdales' place, but the sigh died in his throat as he saw, just ahead of him, Diana.

He knew her instantly, despite her pulled-down hat, the upturned collar of her grey tweed coat with its pathetic arm-band of black.

He hailed her very shyly:

"Hullo—er—expect you won't—don't remember me? Sandy Burns—?"

Diana's hand was in his.

"Of course I remember you!"

They walked side by side up the hill, going slowly, and Sandy's horse, its velvety nose pushing against Sandy's shoulder now and again, followed on a very loose rein.

"So awf'ly—awf'ly sorry," Sandy stammered, going very red, and then going pale because Diana thanked him so

gently for his sympathy.

He walked to the home farm with her and carried back eggs and cream, and went in to lunch and met David.

It was during lunch he asked casually:

“How’s Crane?”

David answered him, savage contempt throbbing beneath the forced control of his voice:

“If you don’t mind, Burns, Lord Crane’s name is not mentioned in this house.”

Before Sandy had time to answer Diana said very quietly:

“Shall we have coffee in the sun-room? It is all open one side, but it’s so warm today it won’t matter, I think.”

Sandy rose at once and followed her. Diana did not speak until they had reached the big sun-room, with its orange-tinted walls, and light, gaily-painted wicker chairs and lounges.

David had stayed behind to speak to a groom who had come up; Sandy and Diana were alone for a moment.

She said, the white rose of her face faintly pink:

“David has a down on Lord Crane. I want to ask you not to discuss him with David, not to let him talk about Lord Crane at all, if you can stop him.”

Sandy was looking down at her, and something in her eyes, in her voice, too, struck through to his heart in some way, he felt for a second tremendously dashed for a reason he could not define, and, as well, apprehend.

He said at once, as cordially as he could:

“Of course I won’t.”

He had to leave some time he reflected ruefully, and after David came back, and after coffee had been served and the stable clock had struck half past three with, it seemed to him, unnecessary clearness, he rose to go.

He rode back slowly under a softly deepening sky; he had reached the edge of the woods when a car passed him. Sandy turned in his saddle. Surely it had been Crane who had been driving?

As if he had spoken Crane's name aloud, and Crane had heard, the car slowed up, stopped, and Crane came running back; he was in hunting kit and very spattered, hatless. He hailed Sandy.

“Hullo! I thought I wasn't mistaken! Took a toss and found my horse had developed a sprain, but had a marvellous run. Why weren't you out?”

He stood beside Sandy, his hand on the saddle; he had felt he simply could not go past old Sandy, that he had to stop.

They talked together, the early twilight began to fall about them in amethyst swathes of mist. Tim said suddenly:

“I say, why don't you come and dine tonight? Heape and Foster will be there. Come on! Make a fourth.”

“Aw'fly decent of you,” Sandy hesitated, then added: “Thanks, I'd like to.”

Somehow during these few minutes the vague disappointment, vaguer suspicion he had entertained about Crane, the suspicion he might be an outsider, had vanished and all his first keen liking had returned in force.

He went up to Old Court at eight o'clock feeling sure he was in for a jolly evening.

Dinner was top-hole. He decided he liked Heape, who was red-headed and Irish to a degree, and whom he had known for years, off and on, and Foster was also after his own heart.

Crane was an excellent host, unobtrusive, yet the originator of the conversation, the sort of host who makes his guests seem brilliant by reason of his own ready appreciation. Sandy liked him more and more. It was getting rather late, and the fourth rubber of bridge had just begun when the noise of a car, extremely badly driven with an abundance of hooting, broke the pleasant silence.

Tim looked up.

“Hullo,” he said. “A late visitor.” He half rose as the door opened and Malincourt stood there, swaying a little. His white face was grinning, his eyes glittered.

He lurched forward to the table, and leant on it.

“Came down,” he said, “to queer your pitch with the chaste Diana, brother Timeon ... and—and——”

Tim had him by the collar, he jerked him to his feet, and, holding him so, propelled him from the room; Malincourt gave a little cackle of laughter. He looked like a marionette, with his dangling hands and slack, twisting feet.

“Vote we clear. It’s nearly two,” Heape said to Foster and Sandy. “Come on. We’ll yell to Crane. He’s dining tomorrow at the Hoopers’ place I’m staying at, anyway.”

Tim hallooed back, came running down the wide staircase to the hall; he looked a bit white, but he was himself again.

He did not, however, ask Sandy to stay as he had meant to do.

Sandy said “good-night” rather bleakly. He was sorry for Tim, and, in a queer way he could by no means understand,

he was sorry for himself, too: he hadn't wanted to think of this man Crane save with friendship, without criticism, and here was his own brother, or half-brother rather, stirring up all the old unpleasantness.

Heape was driving Sandy into Tetbury.

"Known Crane long?" he asked.

"Met him a couple of months or so ago."

"I just saw him before the war, that was all. His brother seems a pretty poisonous fella'."

"Yes," Sandy agreed.

Heape reflected that Sandy was not exactly "chatty," but no one kept him silent for long. He began again suddenly:

"Rum thing: I met a chap, farmer sort of bloke, yesterday, who told me of a frightfully sporting thing Crane had done. Y'know he owns smelter works, something of the sort, anyway, in Lancashire; they don't pay, I've heard, but he keeps 'em going 'cos of unemployment ... patriotic stunt, very decent of him, I think. Well, this fella' told me that his young brother who's employed up there had been puttin' in an extra spell of work because of Crane going up to give the place the once-over, and it seems this lad was pretty tired. Only a youngster, anyway. Long and short of it all, the boy became faint just as Crane was inspecting his vat, or whatever it was. Crane looked up, saw the boy's face, and made one dive at him, across a vat of white-hot metal, hark you. The farmer says Crane's things were scorched to a frazzle, just in that sec.! but he saved the kid's life—he'd have toppled clean in, and it was Crane, risking doing just that, which saved him. The farmer told me the men went wild about Crane. Cheered him till the place rang, carried him about—all that sort of stuff. Shouldn't have cared to have

tackled the job myself! Leapin' over white-hot metal, all bubblin' and squeakin'! Not my line at all!"

He laughed, squaring back his flat shoulders, and Sandy said soberly:

"That took some doing!"

"I'd tell the world!" Heape answered carelessly. He added on a deeper note: "I like Crane no end. Admire him, y'know, too."

Tim went into Malincourt's rooms the next morning; he had never been there before, and now he gazed about him with sardonic eyes.

Malincourt's sitting-room led off his bedroom, and it was a long, narrow, very high room, hung with genuine Italian brocade in shades of purple, old gold and cardinal red. The ceiling was of dull silver, and was really covered with specially-treated foil; daylight was subdued by lamps, some of beaten copper, others of expensive wrought iron, a white borzoi rose from the black velvet pile carpet to greet Tim. There was only one chair, a probably priceless, genuine Renaissance piece, which had the Medici arms carved into the dimly-gilded wood.

"What a room!" Tim thought. He stared about him with disgust.... This a man's room in a country house!

With a sniff he passed on to Malincourt's bedroom, and in the doorway he halted.

If he had thought the sitting-room "odd," he could find no adjective for the room at which he was gazing. It was all gold, gold walls, ceiling, floor, and there was a tree of white lilac in a gilded pot in one corner, and a cage of love birds in

the window; the curtains, of apricot silk, were not drawn, and the electric light was full on.

Malincourt was sitting up in bed, wearing a marvellous mandarin's coat, and looking like some mediæval figure on a missal, as gaily-coloured, as bizarre, as remarkable. He was smoking a cigarette in an absurdly long, scarlet holder, and without removing it from his mouth he asked:

“To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?”

Tim walked into the room, and jerked up a blind, and opened a window.

He said, turning round:

“This place stinks!”

“If you choose to be Goth enough to consider the fragrance of white lilac, and the scent of sandal-wood dust a stink, I fear I can do little to improve your vocabulary or the power of appreciation,” Malincourt said suavely. “But perhaps you will allow me to point out that you do not come as an invited guest!”

Tim, standing squarely at the foot of the bed, which was hewn out of malachite, said very deliberately:

“Neither do you.”

Malincourt flushed, his ivory face turned faintly pink.

“Under the terms of my father's will, you are obliged to give me house-room until your marriage,” he said a little thickly.

“I imagine I am allowed, however, to offer my guest such accommodation as I choose, and to receive notice of an impending visit! Further, I do not suppose anyone would expect me to receive you in the condition in which you were last night! No, don't trouble to drawl out some wearying,

would-be witticism. You were disgustingly drunk last night and foully insolent, and I have come here this morning to tell you one thing. If ever you speak to me again as you did last night, I will thrash you publicly. I mean that.”

He turned on his heel, and went out of the room, slamming the door after him.

Malincourt listened to his retreating steps. When they had grown so faint that he knew Tim to be out of earshot, he picked up the telephone.

David answered him.

“Could I speak to Diana?” Malincourt asked.

He had to wait whilst she was fetched from the garden.

Her voice came through: “Here I am. This is Diana.”

“I want you to let me come and see you,” Malincourt said. “May I? I’ve been feeling so awfully sorry for you, Di, dear. But you know that, of course, without my saying it.”

“Of course. Do come,” Diana said. “Come to tea today.”

“Thanks, I’d love to. I’ve something I must see you about—rather important—more so to you than to me, perhaps; but I feel you ought to know.”

“It sounds very mysterious, even rather sinister!” Diana’s soft voice said.

“I wouldn’t tell you if I didn’t care for you so,” Malincourt said abruptly. He waited a moment, then added: “Till this afternoon, then, my dear. It is good to hear your voice again!”

CHAPTER XXVI

LIL LOSES A CUSTOMER

ALMOST from the moment Tim had left her, Lil had begun to see difficulties in connexion with the plan he had proposed.

Deep within her heart she was shocked at what she considered his “callousness,” and, deeper still, she knew her vanity was wounded; she had no longer even a flicker of affection for Tim—that had died long before the end of the first year of their marriage; but she had a funny little nagging sense of the rightness of things, and the fact she had been thankful Tim was dead, as she had supposed, in no way made her feel she need not expect affection from him when she had discovered he was still alive!

She had at once a grudge against Tim and a feeling of dependence towards him.

She had her “lines,” and Tim had been her husband: and nobody would ever wipe that out and, upon reflection, she thought his plan wicked.... But only after she had come to full realization that, if she suddenly produced five thousand pounds a year Beau would be certain to question her about such wealth, and “ferret about” till he got the truth out of her—part of the truth, at any rate!

On the other hand, Lil admitted to herself, there was nothing in the world she would like better than to skip out of England for ever, with Beau. She did not picture life as Elysium, or anything like that, but all she wanted was to love and serve Beau, and she thought she knew the worst of him. He was boundlessly selfish, he was irritable, and he had a vile temper when he was roused; but he was awfully

dependent on her, and when he was not harassed about money they had happy times.

Malincourt himself could not have said what bound him to Lil, and yet it was to her he always “went back”; other women might attract him, lovely women, women of his own class, very intelligent women; but, just the same, in the end he returned to Lil.

Lil, though he would never have admitted anything so banal and ordinary, meant “home” to him. Before Lil he need not pose, he could be utterly natural, he need not try to be clever, or witty, or even bored. Lil was a rest-cure to him, she thought him wonderful, she never criticized him, she never made demands, and every penny that she could scrape together she gave him and did not make him feel uncomfortable for taking it. There was a little fiction that Malincourt had put money into the firm at a crisis, and that any sums he now received were repayments of that loan; that he had already been paid at compound interest over and over again was a detail.

And then Lil understood just what food Beau liked, and she darned his socks for him so that he never felt as if he were wearing any but quite new ones.

He knew he loved her “best,” and, for him, he was gentle to her, and, more amazing fact, he respected her!

Both Lil and he took pride in that fact: it was one of the proudest things in Lil’s life, and Malincourt took virtue to himself for this achievement.

He used to think: “Hearing all I do, knowing the world as I do—it speaks pretty well for one’s self that one can believe, nowadays, that a very pretty woman who is on her own is dead straight!”

But, without knowing it, it was his trust in Lil which made him respect her; he could rely on her always; she never failed him.

Relationships in life are so amazing; the world judges uncharitably so easily, with such gusto; yet, in point of fact, so much that looks guilty is not, so many people who are labelled as “rather quick” are just good fun, and many men who are suspect morally, really—and rarely—live up (or down) to this suspicion!

Lil had seen Malincourt two years earlier, and had looked at him and thought him handsome, but “sidey,” and he had looked at her and thought her pretty, but a fool.

Within twenty-four hours (they had both been staying at a very mixed house-party) they had become friends.

Now Beau was Lil’s whole life, and she was his “stand-by,” “ ‘My steady’ as the Americans say,” he told her, smiling into her eyes.

“I think he would marry me if I’d money,” Lil had often reflected.

It was a sign of the love she felt for him, but it never occurred to her that he might marry her without money.

It certainly never occurred to Malincourt.

Lil had “tried out” the suggestion one evening when everything seemed propitious.

“Darling, if I got rich, say—well, say—if I’d five thou. a year certain, and I said to you—let’s clear out and go somewhere where we’ll be free of this old income-tax and stand a chance of getting a bit of fun for our money, what ’ud you say?”

Malincourt had been lying on the Chesterfield, smoking; he lifted his head and smiled at her:

“First, where did you get that five thou., my dear?”

Lil had felt a little chill of fear, but she had shaken it off and persisted:

“No, but really, Beau. Would you—would you come?”

Beau had teased her:

“What as?”

“You know!”

“Lil, are you proposing to me?”

She had been brave then, and said in a shaky voice:

“Yes—I am! Now it’s out.”

He had risen and sauntered over to her, and kissed her:

“You arrange for some relation you’ve never had to die and leave you the five thousand, and we’ll see about it!”

He had put her off as usual, kissed her, been sweet, and left the real question and its answer still in the air.

Lil had gleaned one fact from his remarks, though—casual as he was, hard pressed as he was, he would want to know where the money came from!

Well, in that case, Tim must settle it on him.

And then, after all, he mightn’t marry her.

Oh, wasn’t there any way round it all? Were four people to go on paying for ever, for the foolishness of two kids? Because Tim and she had only been children when they had married—he twenty, and she eighteen!

Tim had been a bit moody then, not half the character he had now.

How they'd rowed during that one year of their marriage, when she had been living in the funny little rose-covered, ear-wiggy cottage Tim had taken, which had been too hot in summer, and too cold in winter, and which he had hated, and yet not been able to move out of—he had sneaked there whenever he could, and been afraid to stay, and Lil had grown angry, and then the quarrels had begun. And all the while he had been deceiving her!

It was all so odd, looking back, for the Tim she met now seemed so utterly different. A pity he hadn't changed for the better, like this, a bit earlier! But if he had, he hadn't wanted her!

And yet he was so fond of the boy! Lil knew he would do the straight thing by him. And he was keen on that girl she'd seen him with once. He didn't seem to think anything of committing bigamy!

Men never cared what they did!

The head woman came in.

"It's that Miss Nesbit wants to see you, says she must!"

"What's wrong?" Lil asked abstractedly. She had started to do accounts and then drifted into thoughts of Malincourt. "Is it a dress or something?"

"She won't say," Miss Harker stated aggrievedly. "Just, she must see you."

"I'll come," Lil said.

She powdered her face and put up a hand to her golden shingle. Nesbit! That must be the girl who had driven Beau up that evening and who wanted him to get a hold on Tim. "She's a slippery one," Lil communed within herself, giving

a last glance in the mirror and then gliding forward on very high heels.

Caro had been asked to wait in Lil's special reception room. She was sitting, one beige silk leg flung over the other, a cigarette between her lips, reading an illustrated, when Lil entered. She did lay the paper aside, but did not remove her cigarette from her mouth, as she said, in an offhand voice:

“There you are, Madame Yvonne. I wanted to see you about a private matter, and I'll come straight to the point. In a year I suppose I spend a thou. or so here, don't I? And I pay my bills! One good turn deserves another, don't you think? I want you to tell me just how pally with Lord Crane you are!”

It is a curious thing that, if a woman has even a faint affection left for a man, though she may run him down, rail against him, defame him even, herself, the moment any other woman, or another man perhaps, either agrees with her outburst, or ventures to add his or her opinion to that which she has uttered, she is up in arms at once.

Lil had been feeling that Tim had treated her badly, that his present attitude was outrageous; she had been condemning him as selfish, mean, and without a spark of chivalry—now when Caro came to her to try and worm out something to Tim's discredit, when, without words, Caro signified that any imputation against Tim would be welcome to her, Lil felt a surge of protectiveness on Tim's behalf, rise within her heart.

She said distantly:

“Lord Crane was a friend of my husband's, Miss Nesbit, and when he heard I wasn't so well off as I'd once been, and that I was trying to get my business going, he came forward and offered to help me.”

Caro smiled: she leant forward and laid a white-gloved hand on Lil's knee:

“Dear Madame Yvonne, you don't suppose I'm such a fool I'll swallow that—like a jujube or something that slides down easily! I'll put my cards on the table. I overheard a conversation between you and Lord Crane one day. I'm afraid I listened a bit longer than I need have done, but there it is! I heard. Now, do you repeat that jolly little fairy tale you told me just now?”

Her large lovely eyes, keen as sharp steel now, were fixed on Lil's face. Lil knew that and, in her turn, braced herself to give back as good (or bad) as she was getting. In her best professional manner she returned Caro's hard gaze, whilst thoughts, surmises, disbeliefs, credulity, raced round and round in her mind.

Amazingly, out of that welter, a sort of tenderness for Tim prevailed; she might not care for him, nor he for her, but, since his return he had played the game by her. Against her better judgment Lil trusted Tim; in this moment a memory of the look which had come into his eyes when she had broken down and cried came back to Lil. Whatever Tim had done in former years, he was willing now to help her in any way he could ... and he did care for the boy.... Mickey's letters were pæans of praise of “Uncle Tim,” the life he was leading.... Was she to “do in” Mickey's chance to gratify a desire for revenge, to enable this trumpery, prying girl to get a hold over Tim?

“Not likely!” Lil told herself, with sudden, reckless scorn. Aloud she said smoothly:

“I don't know, of course, Miss Nesbit, what you overheard, or how you twisted whatever you listened to! I can't be

responsible for meanings you may have given to things, can I? Nor Lord Crane, either! I've told you the truth and you don't choose to believe it—and——"

"Would five hundred pounds help you to tell me any more—something, perhaps, which wasn't quite the same kind of—truth?" Caro broke in softly.

Lil went scarlet.

"No, it wouldn't," she said bluntly, "and I'm afraid you must excuse me, Miss Nesbit, I've a special appointment just due."

"I'm afraid you'll be missing any further special appointments with me," Caro smiled.

"I'm very sorry to hear that," Lil said purely perfunctorily, smiling too.

And though, as Caro trailed out without thinking of the courtesy of a farewell, Lil knew that with her there trailed away a very large yearly payment, she still smiled.

"Money's not everything!" she said to her head woman with a jerk of her head.

The head woman was a pessimist.

"It may not be, Madame," she agreed gloomily, "but it's one of the things no lady can do without!"

Nothing could really dash Lil's sense of satisfaction, almost of triumph. Sell Tim's peace of life to that brazen-faced hussy? For she knew she had only had to imply that she had played a rôle in Tim's life at some time for Caro Nesbit to be satisfied ... and she could have done it without Malincourt being dragged into it—done it by getting a written oath that Malincourt should never be told—there was always a safe *quid pro quo* in those sort of things! And she

could have netted a cool five hundred, and kept a good customer.

She had done none of these things; instead, she had protected Tim.

And got out of that a queer feeling, which, if it wasn't happiness, was near to it.

“Baggage!” Lil ejaculated, contemptuously. “My word, girls are coming to a nice pass nowadays, when they'll go in for blackmail to get a man—and one who doesn't want 'em, at that!”

CHAPTER XXVII

MALINCOURT'S VISIT

DIANA felt rather glad to see Malincourt; few people, young ones, anyway, had called, and time hung very heavy on her hands. Besides Beau was, after all, Tim's brother, and she must hear mention of Tim, of life at Old Court.

Malincourt brought her a sheaf of magazines, two new, excellent novels, and a big box of chocolates.

"Oh, Beau, you are a dear!" Diana said. "And it's so nice of you to come, to think of coming, I mean. Most people feel at a time like this that they must leave one alone or else come and be dispiriting! And I feel sure you could never be that!"

Hardly a propitious beginning, Malincourt felt, for what he had come to say!

He let that remark slide and talked for a little while about London, the latest shows, cheery, gay gossip about people they both knew. Amongst other details:

"Caro Nesbit has a new car. A marvel! The sort one feels one could commit murder, almost, to obtain! The sort one cannot bear to see driven by others, don't you know! I watched her careering down Piccadilly with Tim beside her, and nearly fainted with envy!"

"Oh, Tim's been in town?" Diana asked.

Malincourt could discover nothing from her voice, it was as charming, as controlled, as usual.

"Didn't you know?" he asked carelessly. "Yes, he was up for a few days, I saw him now and again, dancing at the Embassy, dining at the Berkeley. And Caro appeared to have

a new dress every few minutes, each more ravishing than the last!”

“She dresses rather marvellously,” Diana said, looking down; she was telling herself she knew she was being stupid, unreasonable, but it did hurt her that during just the week she had been so utterly, desperately miserable, Tim should have been dancing in town, should have chosen those days to go up and get about so very—well, noticeably, with Caro Nesbit.... Caro had been at Old Court too, that cold afternoon when she had ridden in....

“How is Tim?” she asked, and her voice was very flat this time.

“Oh, outrageously fit as usual, my dear! All the place is filled with guests, there are poker parties and wrestling matches and rowing matches going on—and the little boy Tim has adopted seems to occupy a lot of Tim’s time. Nice little kid, don’t you think?”

“I didn’t know Tim had adopted Mickey?”

Malincourt looked up from the study of his very excellent brown brogues, met Diana’s glance, and looked down again, palpable embarrassment in his every movement.

Diana rose, she felt a little as if she needed fresh air, and, as well, frozenly angry with Malincourt.

“We’ll have tea,” she said, ringing the bell.

Malincourt got up and crossed to her.

“Dido, I’ve offended you in some way? I feel it. I know—I’m a tactless fool—I can’t bear you to be annoyed with me. I know I’ve blundered about Tim. But it wasn’t wholly a blunder. I—look here—I’ve always loved you, held you high ... before Tim came back I told you that—I—quite simply,

Dido, I cannot and I will not stand by and see you deceived and let you be made a laughing stock!”

There is not a woman alive who can bear to receive pity, who will receive it, when she feels her love has been slighted, and not only will she refuse to be pitied, but she will hate the person who attempts to pity her.

Every fine instinct in Diana resented Malincourt’s outburst. Physically, she drew herself up and every atom of pride she possessed seemed, at that moment, to rear itself to its fullest height as well.

She laughed at Malincourt delightfully, with amazingly apparent gaiety.

“Beau, darling,” she said lightly, “I do, really I do appreciate your knightly indignation on my behalf! But it’s wasted, I’m afraid! For Tim and I really understand one another, and even when you have finished giving me, with such decorative detail, an account of Tim’s methods of passing his days, I cannot see why he should not pass them just as you say he does! Poor Tim, why have you such a down on him? It looks to me as if he needs protection more than I! Lemon or milk? D’you know, I’ve unearthed, in hunting amongst things which have been stored for ages (I’ve had to—for probate, or something) the most engaging samovar, a real Russian one, copper inlaid with silver and tiny gold trceries. Perfectly charming, and I mean to use it!”

Malincourt never laboured a point, he entered into a discussion on the subject of Russian tea, Russian restaurants, Russian sweets, and Russian music.

Even when he left he did not refer to the beginning of the afternoon, but he lifted Diana’s hand and kissed it, kissed it

once quickly, and kissing the palm, pressed it against his mouth.

“It that Russian, too?” Diana asked amusedly.

She sat down at the piano when he had gone, and began to play, but she stumbled in her playing and then stopped, and just sat at the piano, gazing into space.

Tim and Caro—Caro who was reputed to be able to “get” any man.... Tim had never mentioned having been in town—if he had, it would all have been so different! It would have been so splendid to be able to say to Malincourt: “Oh, yes, Tim told me!”

But Tim hadn’t ... and he had said: “The days have seemed endless since we met——”

They didn’t sound endless—filled with motoring and dancing and the usual London round!

A footman knocked and came in.

“Mr. Burns has called; he——”

“Please bring him up,” Diana said.

Sandy came in, smiling all over his face, and Diana gave him both her hands.

“It is nice to see you!”

“Just passing,” Sandy said a little huskily, holding on to Diana’s hands tightly. “Thought I’d risk a rebuff. ’Fraid you wouldn’t see me.... This is luck!”

“I feel that, too!” Diana smiled. She managed to get her hands free, and behind her back secretly stretched her fingers out—none seemed broken!

“And now you shall have the hottest, newest toast and tea—and what sort of jam?”

“Strawberry, please,” Sandy beamed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GREEN GOD

TIM wrote daily to Diana and in every letter he told her he was longing to see her. He did not suggest a meeting, he refrained from doing so only because it meant Diana coming to Old Court, and he felt that that suggestion must come from her.

He was very restless, he told her, and he lived in the future—“our future, Beautiful.” His letters generally ended: “God bless you.” He had felt rather self-conscious the first time he had written that, he had written it because it had expressed what he had been feeling, but on reading the words he had felt a little shy somehow. Religion—Tim’s at any rate—was a rather nebulous sort of thing; you played the game—if you didn’t you paid up and did not grouse. And you helped the under dog. But loving Diana had wakened a keener sense of faith in him; he wanted God to bless her, to take care of her. And Diana wrote it to him, too. Until one day her note was “different,” and for the life of him Tim could not say how different, in what way. It began “Darling”—and it ended just “Diana,” but others had done that, and filled his heart with joy. This note did not, it distressed him, worried him. He went straight to the telephone after reading it, and risked David answering. Luckily, a maidservant took the call.

“Yes, Miss Diana is in. What name, please?”

“Lord Crane,” Tim said.

He waited, and felt strung-up because he would hear Diana’s voice in a minute; his heart started to beat faster.

At last!

“Hullo—dar—” he was beginning, and then he stopped; the maid was telling him, “Miss Diana regretted she was engaged.”

“Thanks,” Tim said curtly, and rang off.

Definitely, he was miserable now, and anxious.

Could Diana suspect?

If she could, did, he'd be straight with her; after all, he had a decent name. If she had done what he had done, and he had found it out, or she had told him, he would have forgiven her, he assured himself.

Mickey came to ask him to ride with him.

“All right!” Tim assented.

He watched Mickey's progress in that spirit of criticism which is so unnerving for the performer; Mickey grew more and more ill at ease, his face was pale under its tan and freckles.

“For Heaven's sake, don't saw at the pony's mouth,” Tim exclaimed, irritably. “How'd you like someone to pull a string hard against the corners of your mouth?”

“'Is lordship's in a fair bait,” the groom said at dinner, “nearly swore at the little chap, and 'e was just on the verge of cryin'!”

Cook said majestically from the head of the table:

“Well, it's not often 'is lordship's put out, and you've nothing to complain of, young William Griggs, and it 'ud better beseem you to keep yourself to yourself!”

In his own rooms Tim was keeping himself to himself with a vengeance. He mooned about the library, picking a book from the shelf, shoving it back, lighting a pipe, knocking it out, lighting a cigar, throwing it away. Finally, with a

muttered exclamation, he strode from the room, out to the stables, had a horse saddled, and rode off.

He headed straight for the Lansdales' place, and at the foot of the hill, just as Sandy Burns had done, he saw Diana.

He put his horse on the grass and rode up behind her, leapt off, and had her in his arms before she could speak even.

Between desperate kisses he demanded breathlessly: "How could you? Not speak to me, I mean? What've I done? Why did you write as you did? For God's sake, be frank with me—as I am with you—I've been simply beside myself, all this cursed separation, which neither of us can help—alter—our letters are all we have. I knew, the second I'd finished reading the one you sent today, that something had happened. But what? You must tell me, we must have it out!"

Swayed by his kisses, her anger, her hurtness lulled to rest by them, Diana could not bring herself to say outright.

"Malincourt made me jealous! He told me you had been to London to see Caro Nesbit——"

She only drew Tim's head a little closer, and whispered: "Kiss me—kiss me! I do love you, darling, I do.... I didn't mean to be horrid, to hurt you. I was interviewing the lawyer this morning——"

They clung together in the gathering dusk, murmuring of their love, forgetting fear and jealousy in their reunion.

Together, Tim's arm about Diana, they walked a little way towards Tetbury.

"You mustn't come far," Tim said decidedly, "too dark for you to be out, darling."

"I could walk into Tetbury and get a car to drive me but——"
Diana said dreamily, "I will. Oh," her voice changed a note,

“I hear Caro Nesbit’s got a wonderful new car.”

“She hailed me, simply made me try it when I was in town last week,” Tim said, “the car’s rather like Caro, highly painted!”

Diana’s heart leapt; a man didn’t speak of a girl he cared about, even a little, like that——

She said, however:

“Oh, Caro’s lovely, everyone thinks so.”

“She’s all right, if you like that type,” Tim said indifferently.

Diana’s heart sang within her; she said with sudden intensity to Tim:

“Take me all tight in your arms, Tim, and really kiss me!”

CHAPTER XXIX

THE UNINVITED GUEST

MALINCOURT wrote to Caro:

“I have done what I could, and I suggest you now come down and take over your own dirty work! I feel this particular scheme needs a master-hand, and a master-brain. I make no further comment!”

Caro motored down and put up at the hotel where Sandy was in residence when he was not at Diana’s place or dining with Tim. She recognized Sandy with pleasure, and told Malincourt, who dined with her on the evening of her arrival, that she thought he might be useful.

“And what have you done?” she asked.

“I told Diana a most amazing lie, to wit, I implied Tim was keen on you, and Diana wilted!”

“You don’t know Tim isn’t,” Caro flashed angrily.

“I’ve a pretty shrewd idea,” Malincourt said maliciously. “And so have you!”

“Well, you can take me back with you to dance, and I’ll try to make Tim have more love and knowledge of me,” Caro retorted.

She looked at Beau under her lashes; hitherto, she had kept off the subject of Lil, now, in return for his dig at her, she felt like having one at him.

She said airily:

“By the way, I hear that Tim has been paying—I stress the word—attention to Yvonne!”

“You hear a great deal,” Malincourt sneered. His voice showed indifference, too, but his eyes were angry.

“Why not ask him?” Caro smiled.

“I’ll ask him in front of you,” Malincourt said, “and tell him you mentioned his name to me!”

Caro leant forward.

“One little trick like that, my dear,” she said with silky insolence, “and you will get all that’s coming to you! I believe in returning things! I have never acted on the finding’s keeping idea!”

Malincourt drove her in sullen silence to Old Court. He had told her some men were dining there, and Caro had said: “All the better!”

Actually, only Sandy, who had been dining with Tim, was there when Caro entered the room; the others had not arrived.

Tim greeted Caro pleasantly; she went and stood in front of the beautiful old fireplace, she was wearing a very daring dress of pale green, which had little back above the waist, and which was sewn with tiny diamonds all over, so that every time Caro moved her slenderness looked rather like the undulations of a snake.

Tim thought the dress out of place for a country house, and bad style, anyhow.

“Let’s dance!” Caro suggested. “Beau, stick on the ‘grammy.’ ”

She held out her arms to Tim, and they danced away together.

Malincourt, standing beside the gramophone, thought wearily: “I suppose she will get him. Hanged if I care. Only, it seems pretty ghastly to think of that bit of cheapness

wearing my mother's jewels, taking my mother's place! I wish to Heaven Tim had died on the way home—or that something would happen to him now!”

Nothing seemed likely to. Malincourt was faced with the fact that Tim was gaining ground in the county, living down the old scandals, and he was aware that a marriage between Diana and Tim would make Tim's position entirely secure.

On that count alone, he decided venomously, he would assist Caro.

A flame of jealousy used to sweep over him at odd times, and in those moments he loathed and hated Tim, and would have rejoiced to see any harm come to him; at other times he was almost indifferent to his existence save that always he cherished a grudge against him because Tim would not give him more money.

Tim had paid up his debts again, but naturally he had not been able to include the sum for the ring, for Tim had simply asked for the bills and settled them himself.

A mean, carping way of doing things, Malincourt thought bitterly.

Suddenly he recalled Caro's remark about Lil—his eyes narrowed.

Until that moment he had trusted Lil: he told himself that Caro's suggestion had been made from spite, and yet, even whilst he urged himself to believe that, suspicion grew in his heart.

Lil had had a good deal of money lately, for she had given it to him, told him several people had paid up!

He could easily trace if she had lied to him by going over the books. And he would go over them, by Heaven!

Caro called to him:

“Wind up the dash thing—it’s running down!”

Malincourt wound up the gramophone, and then, suddenly sick of everything, decided to go to his own rooms.

He slipped away, and walked along the gallery.

It was lighted tonight only by the picture lamps themselves.

Before his mother’s picture Malincourt halted. He stood there, his face uplifted, and for a moment he was free from himself; the years rolled back; he was no longer a cynical, greedy, unscrupulous young man, he was a small boy again, burying his face in that dim blue velvet gown, feeling again that slender, white hand on his head.

He went on to his rooms and sat down on the black and gold divan, and leant his elbows on his knees.

Curiously, his thoughts turned to Lil, perhaps because she had always been straight, despite all his suspicions he knew it really, and at that moment, his thoughts could not have flown to any woman who was not.

He’d better settle down with Lil, he told himself forlornly. Marry her, and be done with it. He’d always meant to marry her really ... and he could design for her—sometimes.

Caro’s voice came to him:

“Beau—where the dickens *are* you?”

Malincourt got up, and his usual mask slid over his face again.

He opened his door: “I’m here.”

“Well, come out of it.”

He walked beside her down the gallery, and suddenly, just at the end of it, before going down the stairs, he gripped her arm:

“Look here, Caro, your statement about Tim and Yvonne _____”

Caro laughed.

“Don’t you think you’d better retract it?” Malincourt finished quietly.

Caro went on laughing.

“All I say is, ask—and find out, my dear!”

“I mean to,” Malincourt said grimly.

“What you don’t mean, can’t, you, of all people, is that you’d care? You don’t mean to tell me that you’re fond of that yellow-haired little product from Brixton, or Tooting, or some place like that?” Caro cried.

She had been getting a cigarette out of her case, and now she was looking up, her face alight with laughter and mockery. Then she made a dash for the stairs and ran down them, trying to laugh still, but succeeding rather badly.

Malincourt descended after her very slowly. Caro was waiting for him at the bottom.

“Did you think of throttling me just then?” she inquired sweetly.

Malincourt looked at her with a veiled expression she could not interpret.

He said, standing close to her, speaking so low she could scarcely catch what he said: “You soil everything you touch—and every decent name ... your sort isn’t worth hanging for, on that account.”

Caro stood aghast, too amazed for the moment to answer, too stunned to feel just yet how furious she was.

And at that instant, her interest was wholly diverted.

Two men she did not know had just come, and the butler was about to announce them, when the shorter man stopped him, and went into the library. Caro, from where she stood, could see Tim; she heard the short man saying very cheerily:

“Hope you don’t mind, Crane, but I’ve brought along a friend of mine, who’s down for a day or two, before leaving for the East.... Fordyce, this is our host.”

It is the millionth chance which comes off nine times out of ten, and yet no one is ever prepared for it to happen, and most people deny that the apparently impossible can happen.

Tim would have said that the last man who was ever likely to come to Old Court would be Fordyce, that, never, under any conceivable circumstance, would he meet him, save as a bitter enemy, that no power on earth would ever induce him to offer him hospitality.

To him Fordyce stood for all meanness, rottenness, untruth, and blackguardism.

Yet, as Fordyce said jovially:

“H’are you? Hope you’ll forgive my buttin’ in in this way, but Heape vouched for it, you’d not mind!” he found himself answering with conventional courtesy. He, who had sworn that when Fordyce and he should finally meet there should be one last settlement, made a gesture of invitation, lifting a glass, waiting to hear what Fordyce would drink.

Then he became aware of Sandy standing beside him, bristling, his light grey eyes narrowed, his jaw stuck out, and

he saw Fordyce's swagger leave him, and he saw Fordyce's high-coloured face pale a little.

Sandy never spoke, he stood and stared, and the atmosphere about him was instinct with hostility.

Fordyce sheered off with a mutter of thanks for his drink, and when he was out of earshot Sandy said in a level voice to Tim:

“You looked as if you'd had a surprise when that feller Fordyce was announced. I'm only mentioning this because I think p'raps you, too, may have a grouse against him, may know something of him. I can't be civil to him, Crane, in your house or any other. I loathe and despise him, and I feel I owe you an explanation, or I wouldn't be bothering you with all this talk. Briefly, Fordyce wrecked the life of the man I loved best in the world—my only real friend. You remember I asked you about Erskine of Kyle? It was his life, his honour, that swine Fordyce ruined. Erskine was innocent, and I knew it. I was away at the time with my regiment, the worst luck I ever had. When old Kyle died he knew he'd done Erskine a ghastly wrong, but it was too late then. He couldn't be found. Never has been. Erskine was as straight as they make 'em, and he was only a kid, and mad keen on a girl he wanted to marry and wasn't allowed to. She was found drowned, and Erskine was blamed. He swore he'd cared for her faithfully and truly, and I knew he had. But his people were all against him. Fordyce, who I should think was a cad from the hour of his birth, had been keen on her too, and when his name was mentioned he went up to old Kyle and swore the girl had come to him and begged him to marry her and told him Erskine would not do the honourable thing and had threatened her. I'm very long-winded, I'm afraid. But you did

say you'd met and liked Erskine, and I don't intend Fordyce to do him harm in any man's eyes, and now that he's seen me he's quite capable of trying to blacken Erskine to you, thinking I may have told you. Manslaughter it was brought in and Erskine escaped, got clean away, and wasn't traced. The war came, you see. Anyway, to wind up, I came back at last, and I never stopped trying to find out the truth, get proof of it. I got it, in the end, but too late—Kyle was dying and Erskine couldn't be traced. But I took my proof—it was a letter from the girl to Fordyce—and I nearly killed Fordyce. It's one of the best memories I have! The war even didn't give me the same keen feeling. That's all: that's why I will never speak to Fordyce."

Tim had listened with his teeth shut on his under lip to keep it steady: he could not trust himself to look up, to meet Sandy's clear, angry eyes, the sound of the affection in his voice when he had said "my one real friend," had seemed to stab Tim's very soul. Shame, which burnt and stung him, went over and over him as he listened to Sandy's story, and the knowledge that he must listen and not cry out in answer to Sandy's championship: "I am Erskine—I am your friend," seemed to brand him a traitor and a coward.

So, at long last, Sandy had cleared him!

Tim could have put his head down and cried like a child.

And he could do nothing, he could not even join in Sandy's declaration of hate, he was like a ghost at a tourney, he could only watch the clean fighting of others, he was outside, he had placed himself outside——

Sandy's voice roused him.

"Odd!" he was saying in a queer voice, "but d'you know, just now, I s'pose it's because I've talked of him so much, I

could have sworn, looking at you, that Erskine stood beside me! There's a strong likeness, you know!"

"Yes?" Tim muttered: he knew Sandy was on the edge of discovery, he could feel it, he was certain of it: it was as if his Highland intuition was being a guide to Sandy's: unemotional, apparently hard and matter-of-fact as he was, Tim knew that there was that strange "other" side to Sandy's nature, a half-mystic Gaelic influence.

He did not look at Sandy, and he felt the intuition fading; at last Sandy gave a deep sigh and said prosaically: "I could do with a drink!"

Tim mixed him one, gave it him; he didn't know what he felt, he wanted to cry out, and brand Fordyce, he wanted to turn to Sandy, and say: "It's me. I've come back. Don't disown me."

Caro came towards him, with Fordyce. She called out:

"Oh, Tim, you do look off colour! What's up?"

"I'm all right, thanks," Tim said.

"I don't want to hand myself any bouquets for being observant, but I'd just like to say if Mr. Fordyce is a 'hoo-doo' or something I shan't be surprised. You should have seen your face when he came in, Tim, and as for Sandy's!"

Sheer devilry was making her rag Tim. Caro felt he hadn't come up to expectation, and as well, she, too, sensed hostility in the air.

She had thought she would stir things up a bit, but even she had never foreseen the result of her cheap baiting.

Tim went a step nearer Fordyce, he ignored Caro completely, and said very quietly, but very distinctly:

“You—Fordyce—get out of my house! I know your record, and your presence is an insult in any decent house, and to any honourable man or woman.”

Fordyce had gone almost purple, his eyes were bulging, he lifted his clenched fist, and instantly Sandy was there.

“Oh no!” he said, “you’ll not have the satisfaction of hitting a straight fella’. Your sort gets thrashed by that sort! Clear, d’you hear, you scum, as Crane tells you to——”

Side by side Tim and he walked Fordyce out, he retreated backwards mouthing oaths. They paced him into the hall, and Tim flung wide the door.

Then, facing Sandy, he said, “Thanks.”

“Pleasure was mine,” Sandy grinned.

No one spoke of Fordyce, the evening went on. Caro attempted some sort of lame apology. She was depressed and frightened, and she knew she had made a very bad move.

She looked at Tim’s clear-cut face, with its arrogant line of jaw, its steady, and, just now, hard eyes.

She loved him, and she hated him, she told herself passionately, and she knew she had made a fool of herself.

“I’ve gone back miles in his estimation,” she thought almost tearfully. She could have screamed with nerves, rage at herself, at Tim, and that fat-faced oaf Sandy.

Suddenly, an idea came to her, which made her smile.

She slipped into Tim’s private room, and went to the telephone.

Diana herself answered, and Caro could have laughed aloud for joy.

“Oh, Miss Lansdale, it’s only me, Caro Nesbit. Tim asked me to ring you up—oh, one minute, he’s calling.... Hang on,

will you——” Turning her head, she said, speaking to the empty room: “All right, Timmie darling—I’ll tell her——”

She spoke into the receiver again:

“Hullo!——”

Diana had rung off.

CHAPTER XXX

TIM DECIDES

TIM was in town again, this time to choose Christmas presents, and chiefly because Diana had suddenly gone to Paris without giving him any hint that she intended going.

He had felt hurt and puzzled, and up in London he debated half-a-dozen times a day whether he should fly over or not.

He had written and wired Diana and had received replies "of a sort," as he put it to himself moodily. He went up on Wednesday, and by Friday he was profoundly bored by everyone and everything, and after a Saturday morning spent in intensive shopping he suddenly felt he could bear life no longer and made up his mind definitely to fly to Paris the next morning.

The ground had been too hard for good going, the only comforting fact to Tim in connexion with his stay in town.

Sauntering down St. James's, after having bought a really marvellous saddle for Mickey, he found himself ignoring the grey, old loveliness of the Palace, its turrets cut against the pale, frosty blueness of the sky, and thinking instead of Old Court; with a funny little shock, he realized he had come to care for the place.

"Well, I suppose if I'd bought it I should have taken an increasing interest in it," he mused, "there isn't so very much difference in what I feel, and should have felt, under these circumstances. Deuced odd, though, the way one grows into accepting a position, responsibilities, however one has attained 'em! I suppose, looking at the thing squarely, I've no right at all to feel fond of another man's home, to settle down,

and become perfectly accustomed, as I have done, to answering to another man's name! I have no right to anything I profess to be, or to anything I claim as my own, and yet, I feel at peace, and I feel at home! Life's rum, all right—or I am. I'm a fake and a fraud, and yet I take my pretence life so seriously that my only interests are those bound up in that pretence. I've laid out all Bill's money to such advantage that Mickey will be a wealthy chap, when he comes into it—and come to think of it, if it hadn't been for me, for my having impersonated Bill, Mickey would never have come into his own. P'raps that's to the credit side of my account! Here's hoping, anyway! And I'll teach Mickey to take over in such a way that he'll do the name honour—I wish I'd a son, that Diana and I had—by Heavens, do I, though? What should I tell Diana, if we had? What shall I tell her—after our marriage?"

His mood of half-serious, half-whimsical meditation fell from him at that thought like an outworn garment: he had been toying with the outside facts of life, but when his mind had reached the problem of his future and Diana's, it had halted, it could go no further, before it there rose the impassable barrier of Diana's dictum. By that he must stand or fall.

It was no use his thinking he might not tell her. He knew perfectly well that, once married to Diana, if he did not tell her, his happiness would be ruined. He was not one of those who can lock away a secret and force even their memory to deny it. He could not kiss Diana and lie to her even as he kissed her.

With a sudden abrupt twist of his shoulders, he faced straight round and set off at a swinging rate for his club.

Of what use, he asked himself, with bitter frankness, to consider what he should tell Diana after marriage, when, at the moment, he had no certainty whatever, save the longing of his heart, his deep love for her, that he would ever marry her!

He had heard nothing from Lil, and he felt he could not, in this instance, look upon no news as good news.

If she was so keen on that blighter Malincourt, why the dickens didn't she take the five thousand he had offered, and clear out with him? Tim wondered irritably. He could not fathom Lil's mentality, or lack of it! She shied away from deceit in one direction and lived a life of entire deceit in another.

Women were incalculable!

He did not want to worry her, neither did he wish to be seen going to her place much; but it was time things were speeded up; he must be able to discuss marriage seriously with Diana; already he was beginning to feel that Diana's queer departure, her little, rather ordinary notes, her failure to say or write good-bye to him or give him a chance to see her might spring from a sense of woundedness because he had made no further mention of the future.

It was a good old mess, Tim reflected ruefully, all of it, and Saturday was a rotten day anyway and he felt profoundly dejected.

Even a good lunch did not cheer him, and he refused to make a fourth at bridge and went off out again.

It was freezing hard; no hunting for a day or two plainly.

He was passing a Cook's office; it was closed, it is true, but it gave Tim an idea.

He acted on that idea by leaping into a crawling taxi and ordering the man to drive all out to Belgrave Square.

He caught the four o'clock to Paris by a minute.

CHAPTER XXXI

DIANA'S PARTNER

“I AM jealous, and I can't help it, and I won't stay anywhere near Tim. I'll get away, get free—” Diana told herself, eyeing the telephone as if it had been a boa constrictor about to strike. “Oh, if this is love, all this aching, and longing, and feeling wretched, and feeling furious, I wish I'd never seen Tim! As if things hadn't been hard enough, without his being a perfect idiot in this way about a girl like Caro Nesbit——! Was it true, could it be, what father said? That Tim was an outsider really? No, it wasn't—it isn't—and I'm a fool, and frantically unreasonable—and I expect I'm run down—after everything. And, anyway, I'll accept Lady Hoyle's invitation and go to Paris. And I won't let Tim know till I'm gone, and I hope then he'll be wretched, and worry a little!”

The actual journey was a nightmare, but Paris received her with gaiety and love. Lady Hoyle simply folded her up in her warm arms, the sky looked like a sapphire bowl, and everything seemed to glow and sparkle.

In spite of herself Diana's spirits rose. Lady Hoyle's little house was charming; it had a dining-room done in severely monastic style, and, right at the top of the house, a very big living-room, a delightful place, where Lady Hoyle received nearly every evening, and where, whilst the younger set danced, the elders played bridge or made music.

Diana felt a little odd distantness with regard to Tim. Her jealousy had died down, she believed, and left her heart aloof—for the first three days.

At the end of that time she felt a desperate longing for Tim, and his letters were brief and not a bit like the usual ones he wrote.

No man seemed any good to talk to or dance with, after him, and Paris, despite its gaiety and fun, seemed duller than the country!

“I ought to have sent for Tim,” Diana told herself, “and have told him, point-blank, that it was cheap of him to ask that Nesbit girl to ring me up—because it was—cheap and heartless. I ought to have had it out with him. It’s always wiser. Now he probably feels injured because I didn’t see him to say good-bye, and no one has any right to feel injured save me!”

She rode every morning in the Bois with Jacques la Guise, and Lady Hoyle, who had a match-making complex of the most intense kind, used to watch them canter past with tears of hope in her eyes.

On Saturday night there was a big dance at the Ritz, and everyone, all the Hoyle crowd were going.

Tim descended from his room after a bath to find the ball in progress; it was too late to go and see Diana, he had decided gloomily, and he had been unable to find Diana’s number in the telephone book; altogether a wasted evening!

He leant against a jamb of the doorway and looked the crowd over, thinking for the hundredth time how very smart Frenchwomen were, but how “arranged” they always looked, as if all the while they were supremely conscious of what they were wearing and equally anxious not to let even a curl get out of place!

His indifferent gaze rested, moved. He thought he would have supper and turn in, and he was about to saunter to the

grill room when a girl in black talking with a tall young man, who was looking at her devotedly, passed quite near him.

Tim's indifference went; the girl was Diana, his Diana—and who the deuce was that cub she was dancing with, who was obviously in love with her?

“Do you know that feeling in the back of your head, a sort of ruffly feeling in your hair?” Diana was asking La Guise. “You feel as if someone were trying to make you realize their presence ... it's your subconscious self being roused, I suppose! I had it just now, awfully strongly——”

“There's a man simply glaring at you from the doorway,” Jacques said. “Perhaps it was his glare that made you feel all ‘ruffly!’ Anyway,” his young voice grew warmer, “anyway, ruffly or not, it looks divine!”

He was looking down at Diana, and he had an excellent view of the almond-white nape of her neck, from which little curls were brushed up in the newest fashion, and he felt Diana shiver suddenly.

“I say——” he was beginning, when Diana turned her head.

“I know the man in the doorway,” she said, “it's Lord Crane.”

“Do you know him well?” Jacques asked jealously.

Diana laughed, and he noticed how starry her eyes were.

“Pretty well,” she said. Jacques really could not see that there was anything to laugh at in that, but he smiled perfunctorily, out of courtesy.

They were nearing the door now, and the very tall, fair man stepped forward.

“I want to stop, please,” Diana said, and now, to Jacques’ astonishment, she looked pale: what on earth was wrong with the girl?

He guided her towards Tim, and with chill, but excellent manners, bowed, and left her.

All Tim said was: “I had to come. Where can we be alone?”

“I should think nowhere!” Diana said with trembling lips.

“Got a cloak?” Tim demanded rather curtly. “Where?”

He took Diana to the cloakroom, and waited for her. She came in a moment, wrapped in a mink coat, above the collar of which only her eyes and nose were visible.

“You won’t be cold?” Tim said.

He had told a page to get a taxi, and he lifted Diana in, gave a brief direction, jumped in himself, and took her straight into his arms.

“What made you bolt off as you did—without a word?”

“You.”

“I?”

“Yes, I was so furious at your having told Caro Nesbit to give me a message that I just left like that. I am furious still.”

“But I never mentioned your name to her.”

Diana lifted her head from his shoulder.

“But, Tim——”

“I give you my word. I haven’t the faintest idea what you mean! I never heard that she telephoned to you——”

Diana lifted her face again.

“Oh, what does it matter—now?”

Paris really was an enchanting place, Diana and Tim decided.

“Funny, I never liked it before. Used to get fed up in no time!” Tim said.

“I found it dull after a bit, too.”

Together they found it simply delightful; they drove in little two-seater Citroën taxis, which went at an insane pace, they rode in the Bois, they danced, not very much in the restaurants or at public dances because of Diana’s mourning, though, as Lady Hoyle most sensibly said: “To lead life as naturally as possible is no disrespect to anyone!” and they talked of the future incessantly.

Tim had lulled all his fears to rest; he was too happy to be doubtful, he felt sure Lil would agree to his terms; life seemed wonderful. He discussed the 19th with Lady Hoyle, he wanted Diana to hunt that day. “Nothing’s the same without you,” he told her.

They returned on the 14th, with Lady Hoyle’s unspoken blessing, and very cheery and affectionate last words; she was following in a day or two, and was to be hostess for Tim’s party.

At once Tim was engulfed in business. He had, besides his drainage scheme, a big building plan on hand; he had the Hunt affairs to go into; and he settled down at once to get his jobs done before his guests arrived.

Sandy turned up first, then Foster, then Lady Hoyle.

Lady Hoyle came upon Mickey in the gallery, and she started openly and violently.

“Who—what on earth?” she began rather shakily. Tim called Mickey, presented him, explained him, when he had

run off, to Lady Hoyle.

“Extraordinary!” she murmured, shaking her head and looking at Tim out of rather round eyes.

“You’re thinking—all sorts of things!” Tim accused her, holding her worried glance, holding her hand too. “You needn’t. I have told you the truth, my dear.”

Poor Lady Hoyle was entirely confused.

“A little misleading, don’t you think?—being so like you—a dear little boy.... Tim, so very strange—or perhaps you don’t think so.... Of course, I believe you.... How odd life is!”

Her whole face altered as Malincourt sauntered up and saluted her.

“Well, Beau, my dear! how is life treating you?”

“As scurvily as usual, but your advent has changed my gloom to pleasure, my dear!”

He kissed her hand.

“Don’t be so Continental!” Lady Hoyle said, a little sharply; she found her younger nephew very trying indeed, and today, surveying his very slight form, clad in dark grey, his black silk tie, with its pearl pin, and his very narrow black silk ankles, she felt irritated anew by what she termed his “preciousness.”

“Doing any work yet?” she inquired in her jolly voice.

“None,” Malincourt smiled.

“Going to hunt tomorrow?”

“I may.” He changed the subject suddenly: “You have just met Timeon’s protégé, I think. Wonderful likeness, isn’t there? I always wonder whether Tim is really as brave as he seems, or merely as foolish!”

“I understand he is loyal to an old friendship,” Lady Hoyle said crisply, moving away with determination, and wondering why on earth Malincourt should have the power to make her feel at once exasperated and uncomfortable. Malincourt sat down in one of the window seats and took out a letter he had received from Lil. As he read his face changed, lost its indifference, became hard and suspicious.

“You remember you said, darling, if a relative died and left me an income we’d think about things? Well, a sort of miracle has happened, but not quite that! A great friend of my husband’s that—(whom, Malincourt corrected coldly in a murmur)—I haven’t seen for years, has turned up and says he and my husband were partners and I’m to have his share.” Malincourt looked up from the letter and sneered, he felt at once furious, because Lil had chosen to think him such a fool, and as well, curiously hurt, though this he would have denied.

But he was hurt, and amazed, too.

He’d have to go up to town and see Lil about this.

He felt so wrought up that he could not remain still; he rose and paced the long gallery, lighting cigarette after cigarette, his dark eyes glittering, his mind working furiously.

So Lil thought he could be taken in like that, did she? What fools women were ... and he’d been fool enough to believe in her!

Well, that was over!

A friend of her husband’s wanted to give her an income, for old sake’s sake! That sort of thing was always happening, of course! And his was the type of mind which would accept a story like that and say, “Oh, how nice!” Was he, was he?

He began to shake with anger; never, until this hour, had he bothered to think what Lil really meant to him, now he discovered she had stood for all that really mattered.

So, all the while there had been this “friend” hiding in the background. And he, Malincourt, had believed Lil loved him really; he had trusted her implicitly—he heaped abuse on himself now for his idiocy. He told himself he’d settle her—

A gong boomed very softly—

Lunch—a meal with all those chattering fools—Lady Hoyle, Timeon—that braying ass, Foster—

Mickey appeared, he was hurrying down, but he stooped to pick up the letter Malincourt had dropped.

CHAPTER XXXII

A TRAGIC DAY

MALINCOURT had nearly every major failing, but amongst his minor virtues none could deny him charm of manner, when he chose to exercise it.

He came down to the Hunt breakfast looking amazingly handsome, and, on this occasion, behaving with extreme pleasantness. He went about amongst the less notable members of the Hunt, seeing that they were well looked after, chatting with the farmers, offering a cheery greeting to everyone.

Tim was astonished at the change in him; he had come to expect from Malincourt only surliness, bitterness, and greed; he saw him, on this soft, misty morning, a charming host, considerate, easy in manner, a son of the house bearing his part in the entertainment of the guests tactfully, and tirelessly.

Tim wondered if he had misjudged Malincourt, and his heart smote him. After all, this was Malincourt's home, and it was he who was the usurper: his eyes darkened as they rested again on Malincourt, who was greeting old Lord Haling. Malincourt's voice reached him easily: "My brother's tied up, doing his duty nobly! He'll be free in a minute," and then Malincourt looked round, saw Tim, made a small gesture with his graceful head, and stood aside for Tim to meet Lord Haling.

"Old times, eh?" Lord Haling grunted. "You've a fine day for it, Crane, and I'll say, too, that, in my opinion, you've got hounds into prime condition. Good hounds, good goin', there's nothing to beat it, heh?"

“Nothing, sir,” Tim answered.

“Saw your father take the field,” Haling continued in his gruff voice. “Seen you—when’ll I see your son, heh?”

“Give me time, sir!” Tim pleaded with a smile.

“Time! You’re thirty odd, ain’t you? Time! I’ve no patience with you post-war lads, always putting off what you ought to do, to do something you’d better not! The old days were better than the new, a man lived for his home then, and his own county.”

“I’m trying to do my bit!” Tim told him.

“I hear y’are. New irrigation scheme. Hope it answers. Yes, I’ll have another grog. I see you keep to the same old recipe, thank heaven, however modern your outlooks may be!”

They were off at last, riding out into the hazy sunshine, Mickey trotting along, his face a little pale, his hands gripping the reins; Tim had told a groom to look after him and the man was riding just behind him.

Malincourt, on a beautiful roan, was riding beside Diana. Sandy was on her other side.

Tim felt extraordinarily keyed up, this was the first important meet and he was meeting today many of those men and women who had seen the ghastliness of that accident years before: curiously enough, he realized, the hunt was beginning over practically the same ground.

He thought of Bill with a sort of irritable tenderness: of Bill’s too fervid courage in the war, and then his collapse. He guessed that what had happened at Gallipoli had happened here, too, in the hunting field; almost he could see Bill putting his horse at the stiffest fences, riding vaingloriously,

and then, in a moment of real danger losing his nerve completely.

Poor devil!

Well, he lay at peace, fathoms deep, but his transgressions and his weaknesses Tim carried still.

He thought, riding ahead, feeling what a splendid beast his hunter was, about payment in life. You did pay, by Jove, for everything.

He was paying now and would always pay for his moment of weakness when he had shirked owning up to his assumed name and had, by that silence, sold his birthright.

Did he regret it? Not altogether. Sometimes not at all—in other hours poignantly. When he was dead up against the future, when he thought of that time of confession to Diana, which must come, when he was faced with the hopeless muddle of Lil's life.

“But at least,” he argued within himself, “at least, I have tried to play fair, to right the wrongs Bill did. All that I could do I have done. And hang it all, it's a perfect morning, and by Heaven, the hounds have found!”

His horse shared his excitement, his high pleasure. Tim knew it, felt it, they flew over the ground together, bound in one exhilaration, one fierce keenness.

Up over the long grass on Beacon's mound, clear over Hook's ridge—a bad bit of broken ground on the other side of Hook's fence, by the way ... hounds were making for Berkeley's land.... Gosh! that was slippery—all he could do to hold the Clown's head up ... where was Mickey? He couldn't see him. He'd be all right—Jervis was to be trusted.

Hullo, Malincourt was well up—and Diana—bless her ... he'd edge along towards Diana—oh, this was great going—superb!

He was beside Diana, she looked like a spray of apple blossom, he thought, and he said so, his eyes holding hers.

“Wind’s whipped your cheeks to just that pink,” he told her, and added: “Darling,” with his lips, but voicelessly.

Diana smiled back radiantly.

“Oh, Tim, isn’t it good—all this?”

“Rather—and seeing you!”

The field had dwindled, the going had been terrifically swift, hounds killed just on the edge of the little wood outside Thornbury, and after a sandwich, and a drink, Tim and Diana, Sandy, Foster, and six or seven others rode on for a little way then branched left.

It was growing colder, rain was blowing up from the east, being blown across the sky by a soft, big wind.

“We’re in luck, my lord,” George, the huntsman, told Tim, “best place for a kill to get another chance!”

Tim nodded with satisfaction, his eyes on the restlessly waving sterna, the drooping, eager heads of hounds.

Philosophy was far from him in this hour; he had ridden furiously, he had had nearly two hours of gorgeous sport—and there was a chance of more; he was, for the time, alive only to the clean, hard rush of his horse, the feel of the wind stinging his face.

The pack was turning in a big circle, back on their tracks, and stragglers, rejoicing in their luck, were joining up. Tim noted Mickey, who, with face flushed and shining eyes waved to him gaily.

Tim rode over to him.

“Going fine, my lord!” Jervis said proudly, with a faint grin.

“I—I—jumped all right,” Mickey stammered.

“Good, splendid!” Tim said. “You mustn’t try anything Jervis doesn’t want you to, old chap. To jump at all is a great thing first time out. Isn’t it, Jervis?”

“It certainly is, my lord!”

“I knew you’d be pleased,” Mickey said breathlessly.

“You bet I am,” Tim said warmly: they smiled at one another.

“Ride beside me a bit,” said Tim, and there was no prouder small boy in the world than Mickey, as he trotted soberly beside Tim, holding his shoulders till they ached, in just the way Tim held his, pretending gamely that he was looking about him carelessly, the while his heart banged with nervousness, in case Buster should put his foot in a rabbit hole!

Old George’s horn flung its high, summoning notes into the air, hounds were down to their job now, streaming across the field, streaks of gold, and white, and black, followed by horses going at racing pace.

Tim was gone in a flash, with a yell to Mickey to wait for Jervis.

But Jervis wasn’t anywhere to be seen. Sandy passed Mickey, slackened, and waited for him.

“Uncle Tim wouldn’t mind this—” Mickey thought, letting his pony out to hold Sandy’s horse.

With feet well down, elbows in, knees gripping, Mickey told himself that this was life all right, he was a rider, he was

a huntsman, he was like Uncle Tim, and he wished all the world could see him, everyone he'd ever known!

He would have liked them to be standing in neat rows so that not one of them should miss a single movement of his pony's hoofs! And they'd say, with bated breath:

"That's Mickey Marsh! *Can't* he ride?"

Perhaps his hands fumbled, perhaps he jogged Buster's mouth, and perhaps Buster had had rather too good a time.

For, suddenly, utterly unexpectedly, he bolted, just as hounds turned, came down the field again, a living jostling avalanche.

Tim saw the pony had gone wild, he saw Mickey's white face, the useless, frenzied jerking of his arms, his flapping, banging legs. He cut through, riding marvellously; his voice came to Mickey's dulling ears:

"Hang on, Mick, I'm coming. Hang on."

Sandy was riding for Mickey, too, cursing himself for having forgotten him; Jervis, sweating and ashen in the face, was urging his nag on. He had believed Mickey to be safe, as Sandy had done, and he had not seen him again until just before Tim started to ride for him.

Mickey had dropped the reins, he was sagging, swaying, fainting.

"If Crane tries to lift him clear, riding at that pace, he'll go down even if he saves the boy," old Lord Haling said. "Nothin' can stop him—he'll fling the boy clear, if he gets 'im, and he'll go over his horse's head an' break his own neck."

Diana was riding down the field, her head held high, Malincourt, sitting motionless, had a white streak over his

mouth, and his black eyes looked opaque.

“If he is killed—if he is”—he was thinking, “if he’s seriously maimed—someone would have to manage the estate—by jove, yes, he’s got the boy....”

A thin cry cut the air, the pony galloped on, Mickey lay where he had fallen when, desperate with fright, he had struggled in Tim’s grip and sprung wide, shrieking with fear, and Tim lay beneath his horse, who had put his foot into a rabbit hole and gone down like a stone and then rolled over.

Lord Haling rode up beside Diana with old George in attendance.

“Kill that horse,” Haling ordered; he was off his own horse and walking stiffly to Tim.

“Dead!” he said to himself, standing above Tim, and then calling to old George: “The boy?”

George had lifted Mickey in his arms, he carried him across.

Haling put a hand up to his eyes.

“If ’e’d let—let ’is lordship save him—’e’d ’ave saved ’im,” George said heavily, “but the little lad was that afeared, he struggled, and it was ’is struggle frightened the Clown ... ’e’d such sure feet, the Clown....”

He looked down, he was crying.

Doctor Barrow had ridden up; he examined Mickey, who was laid on George’s coat on the grass. It was a very quick examination.

“Poor little chap,” Barrow said gently. “Nothing broken, no wound: sheer terror killed him....”

Tim had been lifted on to an improvised hurdle, he had been carried into the Cheadles’ farm, and placed by Lord

Haling's orders on the table.

"He's living," Diana had said, and had cried for the first time.

Malincourt and Lord Haling stood beside Doctor Barrow whilst he made his examination. Once, very faintly, Tim groaned, and Malincourt's face twitched.

He was ravaged, torn by fear lest Tim might live, though Haling had said: "He must be smashed to pieces inside.... I thought he was killed ..." and he had added: "My heaven! he did a brave thing!"

He had stared hard, and almost ferociously, at Malincourt, and his unspoken thought, which Malincourt had read in his piercing old eyes had been: "Pity it's your brother!"

"He mustn't be moved," Doctor Barrow said. "And I'll telephone at once for Sir Hector Strome. It's impossible for me to give an opinion at this juncture, and, in any case, I'm afraid there must be an operation."

In the little best parlour next door, Sandy was standing beside Diana; he was holding both her hands, but he knew she did not know it; she had leant her head against his shoulder, but he knew, too, she had never realized it had been his shoulder.

She freed herself and said, with a little shiver, in a whisper of a voice:

"Find out—oh, find out, Sandy, I can't wait any longer."

Sandy obeyed her instantly; he opened the door and went into the kitchen and his faithful eyes, a little reddened just now, interrogated Doctor Barrow.

"There's nothing to be said," Lord Haling stated suddenly, before Doctor Barrow could. "We're sending for Strome."

Doctor Barrow followed Sandy out, and Malincourt followed him. The district nurse, who had arrived, would sit beside him, and Barrow was to wait at the farm.

Sandy asked him point-blank:

“Is there any chance?”

And, as bluntly, Barrow said heavily:

“Not much.”

Malincourt went out into the fading daylight.

Not much chance!

Timeon was going to die.

And he would come into his own, at last, at last!

He stood beneath the darkening sky feeling his heart exult within him.

Old Court his, Timeon’s fortune his ... *life* his ...

By Heavens, he would live it, too!

A car from Old Court had driven up, he got into it and told the man: “Home.”

The chauffeur’s eyes flickered.

“I came up to wait, sir, in case there was anything could be fetched for his lordship—I—if there was any least thing to do, and I could do——”

“*Home,*” Malincourt shot at him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CRISIS

“GOOD thing that pasty-faced, damn unfeelin’ young cub has gone,” Lord Haling exploded. “If you ask me he’s just itching to get poor Crane’s shoes on! I hope he never does, that’s all I can say.”

He patted Diana’s hands gently:

“So you and Crane had fixed it up, eh?”

He shook his head wearily; had it really been that morning he had chaffed this poor devil about marriage? Thought of being at his wedding?

Now it might be, instead, his funeral he would attend.

He jerked out raspingly:

“You’ll have heard of Crane’s mess up out huntin’ twelve years ago? Your father I know was there. I only bring it up because whatever he did then, by Heaven, what he’s done today, has given him a clean slate!”

Diana turned wholly to him and hid her face against his shoulder.

“You cry it out,” the old voice went on, “if he gets better you’ll want to keep a brave face for him, for he’ll have a tough time.”

Doctor Barrow came back from the village, where he had been telephoning.

“Strome will be here by eight o’clock. I wonder if we could get some arrangement for light rigged up?”

“We could get the spot lights off cars—get the cars close up to the window—the flexes are very long, Sandy said

eagerly.

“We can try it,” Doctor Barrow agreed.

He went in to Tim again and moistened his lips.

Tim muttered, one word sounded distinctly:

“Mickey?”

“He’s all right,” Doctor Barrow said instantly, and some flicker of expression rested for a second on Tim’s lips, it was the shadow of a smile.

The great Sir Hector Strome was very small, very Scotch, and very kindly.

With Tim’s stablemen, Sandy, Foster, and Heape, holding their car spot lights through the windows of the kitchen he examined Tim, and then he stood beside him, considering.

“The smashed ribs we can deal with, the broken bones we can set, but there’s a clot o’ blood near the brain that’s out to beat us, Farrow—Barrow,” he said musingly, “an’ I doubt I’ll operate yet—”

Together, Strome doing the actual work, Barrow helping, Tim’s arm and ankle were set, then, all six of his friends and men lifted him from the table to a bed which had been made up in the kitchen.

“I was brought up in a room like this,” Strome said suddenly, “an’ to my mind, there’s nae room gets so warm in winter as a kitchen, or feels so cosy!”

He was to stay at Old Court. He had brought down two nurses with him, and they would take charge of Tim. Sandy drove him, Malincourt came out to welcome him, and did it with an ease and dignity for which Sandy could have struck him.

Over a late supper Strome remarked blandly to Malincourt:

“As I notice you’re not overwhelmed with grief, Mr. Malincourt, nor unduly torn with anxiety, I’d advise you to travel to London tomorrow, and see yere brother’s lawyer, for it’s likely to be a long while before he’ll be signing cheques an’ so forth.”

“I’ll drive you up, Sir Hector, if I may,” Malincourt suggested steadily. It was impossible to “get at the bounder,” Sandy decided wrathfully, staring at Malincourt with open dislike, hating everything about him from his excellently-fitting dinner jacket to the meticulous parting in his thick, black hair. “Dressing up on a night like this,” Sandy thought and became conscious, for the first time, of his own weariness, his tired muscles and the unyielding hardness of his riding boots.

He excused himself to Strome, gave Malincourt a brief “good-night,” and went up to his room.

He felt profoundly miserable: he had never known until today how greatly he had been drawn to Tim: how little even the fact Diana loved Tim had really mattered: he had felt bothered over the account of Tim’s cowardice and then—this had happened! Tim, with everything before him—Tim, loved by Diana, had deliberately risked his life and perhaps lost it—or worse than lost it if he were to become a cripple or an idiot.

Sandy buried his head in his hands and fell on his knees beside his bed.

“Give him a chance, God,” he prayed, “give him a chance!”

CHAPTER XXXIV

MICKEY'S MOTHER

LIL was glad to be returning from Paris. She had had a very good trip, she had bought some wonderful spring models, but she was never very fond of Paris, and she really longed to get home.

She could not catch the famous "Golden Arrow" train, and left, finally, by the four o'clock express.

The crossing was peculiarly choppy, and poor Lil was a bad sailor.

She sat with closed eyes in the Pullman for a time, and only roused herself at last to order some tea and toast, and, once home, after all the nuisance of the Customs at Victoria, she was more than thankful to fall into bed.

A new maid brought in her breakfast next morning, and Lil welcomed her, and chatted with her while she poured out her coffee and attacked her excellent British bacon-and-eggs.

She did not open her letters until the girl had gone, and then it was some time before she took up the paper.

A headline seemed to leap at her like so many black darts all hitting her heart, stabbing it.

"Hunting field tragedy. Death of little boy. Peer's heroism."

She got out of bed, heedless of the fact that the breakfast tray fell from it. Her voice rang through the flat:

"A car—order me a car—Ring up—Oh, I don't know—it's a country number—Old Court—"

She dressed without realizing that she did so, or what she put on. It was a cold day, but she pulled on a summer coat, and all the while she snatched up things frantically, crammed others back without looking at them, in boxes and drawers; she kept whispering Mickey's name.

“Mickey, Mickey, Muv's little baby. Muv's boy!”

She kept on remembering Mickey as a tiny chap, bathing him—teaching him to walk, to talk ... his last letter had been amongst the big pile she had had brought up on the breakfast tray—she had sorted out Mickey's letters first of all ...

“The car's here, Madam,” her maid said.

“I'm coming,” Lil said distraughtly.

Perhaps the papers were all wrong?—papers often were—perhaps Mickey hadn't been killed?—she'd find him alive—she'd never let him out of her sight again.

Mickey—Mickey!

This was a punishment because of Beau—because she let herself care more, no, not more, but care so much for Beau, that she'd thought too much about him, and too little of her own son.

He'd seemed so safe and happy with Tim—Tim was hurt, too—so the papers said, but that didn't matter now—only Mickey mattered, nothing, no one else.

The maid was saying something else, something about the telephone.... What was the use of telephoning but perhaps she'd better, there might be good news.

She went to the little room where the telephone was and lifted the receiver ... everything buzzed and seemed blurred, a man's voice seemed to be speaking, asking over and over again: “Who are you?”

“Mickey’s mother,” poor Lil kept on repeating. “Mickey’s mother——”

“Speak up, please,” the clear tones of the operator ordered.

Silence: they had rung off: he had, whoever he had been, at the other end.

Lil rose, tugging at her gloves.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said distractedly to the new maid.

“Nothing does, really. I must go. I must.”

She was in the hall, listening to the maid, not hearing a word really, and then suddenly Beau Malincourt stood before her, and he was smiling.

“Hullo!”

He sounded happy; he took her passive hands and drew her into the little room and shut the door.

“Not going to give me a kiss? What’s up, my dear?”

She looked into his handsome, smiling face; he might have been an ogre, or a stranger, a burglar ... simply, he did not count in her heart.

But to the mother side of her he counted enormously.

She clutched at his hands.

“Beau—you must know the truth—I’ve just read it—only just now—Beau, was Mickey killed?—my Mickey——”

He stared at her, his level, black brows meeting over his eyes.

“Your Mickey?”

Lil beat at him with sudden frenzy.

“My little boy, my son—and Tim’s,” she sobbed desperately.

Malincourt lifted his hands and shackled hers, holding them in an iron grip.

“Say that again,” he ordered bleakly.

Her piteous eyes could no longer see him, she was a being distraught.

“Mickey was my son—is he living or dead?” she cried.
“Answer me, answer me.”

Even when she had spoken Lil did not realize what she had told Malincourt. Her every thought now was focussed on Mickey—for the time being Malincourt, every other human being in the whole world, had ceased to matter to her.

But Malincourt’s exclamation of ferocious anger pierced even through the obsession which held her mind, she stared up into his livid face with dazed eyes, she heard his low voice: talking, talking, talking ... a veritable cascade of words tumbled about her tired ears, accusations, oaths, bitter taunts, gibes ... she put her hands up to her head and pushed quickly past Malincourt and went out to the waiting car.

Malincourt swung round on his heel, his distorted face glared at Lil, she never saw him; the car was just starting, and as if the sound of the engine being speeded up galvanized him to new life, Malincourt, hatless and coatless, sprang down the steps, wrenched open the door, and leapt in.

He leant back against the cushions, panting; a drop of blood showed on his lower lip ... even now, racing to Old Court, he could scarcely believe Lil’s statement. It seemed monstrous, it seemed like a fragment from an intolerable nightmare. Tim and Lil married—Mickey their son.... Lil, Tim’s wife—he glared at her, he could have taken her in his two hands and killed her ...

He had believed in her, he had believed if any creature on earth really loved him, this was she—and all the time she had been playing him up, deceiving him day by day, and hour by hour ... and Tim, the one man he hated more than any other, had known, too——

Deceit upon deceit—lie upon lie——!

His vanity, his strongest instinct, perhaps, suffered horribly, he was so possessed by rage that he shivered ceaselessly, his teeth chattered, he could not keep still, and moved incessantly.

Lil spoke: she said in a lifeless voice, with overwhelming weariness:

“Oh, keep quiet.”

Malincourt gave a sharp, hysterical laugh, which was merely a mirthless grimace.

He turned to her with a swift jerk:

“If Timeon dies, I’ll contest your right to inherit a cent—if he lives, by Heaven, I’ll make you both pay, and pay, and pay —”

Lil met his eyes, she shook her head faintly:

“Do you think it matters to me who lives or dies, or what you do—now my boy’s dead?”

“You must have been fond of him to hide him away as you did!” Malincourt said cruelly.

“What’s the good of talking to you, trying to make you see?” Lil cried with sudden passion. “What do you know of any love that’s unselfish—and what do you know of any remorse—?”

She made a gesture with her hand, as if to thrust away something, and then settled back in her corner and shut her

eyes; tears ran under her closed lids, and dropped down on to her breast.

The car sped on, Reading, Newbury, they were on the Devizes Road now speeding at fifty; passing through a village, the chauffeur began to slow up, he stopped the car in front of the one small hotel, and came to the door.

“I’m very sorry, Madam”—his face was twitching with pain, “but I—the fact is, I feel an attack of the fever I got in the war coming on. I daren’t drive further.”

Lil was out of the car, holding his arm, in a moment.

“It’s all right,” she said, nodding to him. “You come on in here.” Over her shoulder, to Malincourt, she added: “You can drive, can’t you? If not, I will.”

She took the chauffeur into the inn, sent for the landlady, saw the man given a glass of hot milk and brandy, and a hot-water bottle, and then went out again.

Malincourt was at the wheel, Lil seated herself beside him.

Contact with another’s trouble had broken down the wall which had seemed to encompass her about since she had read of Mickey’s death. She noticed Malincourt had no coat, and how ashen even his lips looked.

He would not stop to let her get a rug, though, and muttered something about it being “too kind of her to care” in a voice which was a sneer.

“Don’t!” Lil said. “What’s the use? Life’s bad enough as it is.”

Malincourt’s mouth twisted into the same ugly grin.

“I—suppose I’ve seemed mad to you—these last hours,” Lil began heavily. “I couldn’t help it. But—but I want you to know the truth.”

“That’s generous of you,” Malincourt gibed, “after two years of lies!”

“I’ve not lied to you two years,” Lil said, sadly. “Nor one. I believed the man I married was dead: I’d reason to. When I saw Tim suddenly I thought I was looking at his double. But it was him right enough. I suppose both of us wished we’d never met again ... we’d not had much in common when we’d married, and we’d only lived together in snatches, sort of, for a year or so, even then, and now, meeting after all this time, we’d not an interest between us. Even the boy wasn’t that at first. Then it came to me he ought to have his rights, and I sent for his father, and said so. And Tim, in a manner of speaking, was all over Mickey. Loved him right off—wanted to have him at home. Took him, finally. The reason you never saw him was because Mickey was such a delicate little chap, I kept him away as much as I could. That’s all my story, Beau—all the truth——”

“That’s your story, you mean,” Malincourt said brutally: “I suppose my brother will have as good a one?”

Lil gave a moan.

“How can you talk so, after all that’s happened—how can you treat me so—now?”

“Treat you so!” Malincourt echoed savagely. “That’s pretty good, upon my soul! I treat you badly after the filthy deal you’ve given me!”

Self-pity, like a flood, swept over him.

“I believed in you,” he said in a shaking voice. “I loved you—and all the while you were living this lie——”

“I lived no lie—I loved you, too,” Lil said brokenly, “and you know it. It was love I gave you right enough——”

“And what did you give my estimable brother?” Malincourt shot at her savagely.

Lil’s white face flushed scarlet; without thinking, conscious only of Malincourt’s bitter cruelty, of her own burning anger, she caught his arm in both her hands.

“How dare you, how dare you?” she gasped.

Malincourt looked down and laughed in her face. He was getting a bit of his own back now, giving hurt for hurt, and wound for wound.

“What do you take me for—a perfect fool?” he asked.

He had forgotten the road, forgotten he was driving even, in his lust to avenge himself. Too late, he looked up as the heavy car, doing fifty, took a corner and crashed straight down a steep, wooded incline on the left.

It fell with a thunderous noise, turning over and over, and finally came to rest just above a small lake.

Malincourt was still in his seat. Lil was flung out when the car stopped at last.

She lay where she had fallen, and consciousness came back to her very slowly.

At last she crawled painfully and very, very slowly to the car, and raised herself and peered into Malincourt’s face.

He was sitting, leaning back, and he was dead, a broken rib had pierced his heart. In the soft early afternoon light he looked curiously young, every line had faded from his face, and his mouth had a boyish sweetness.

Tenderly murmuring little words of love and courage, Lil touched his chill lips, she carried his hand to her breast to warm it, and held it there a long while.

She knew quite well that he was dead.

At intervals faintness swept over her, receded, came again; she was in great pain, and her thoughts strayed vaguely—the present faded, anguish died, her mind slid into the past, with its sweetness, its hopes and fears, its love.

She managed to reach the lake and to kneel beside it, bent above it; she saw her face mirrored and was suddenly reminded of Mickey, and with a little choking cry fell forward and slipped, unresisting, quiescent, into the cool water.

CHAPTER XXXV

AN ANXIOUS TIME

“TIM can’t see anyone,” Sandy told Caro firmly. “No, not for a second. Sorry, and all that, but I mean it.”

“He sees you,” Caro said combatively.

“He’s used to me.”

“Sandy, be a lamb—I’ll only stay a minute, I swear.”

“Swear all you like, m’dear,” Sandy responded with a grin, “but there’s nothing doing!”

Caro got back into her car as Diana slammed the door of the little two-seater in which she had just driven up.

She saw Caro and nodded.

“I suppose you’re going to be let in?” Caro asked.

Diana looked at her, quite courteously and quite aloofly, and with faint question in her eyes.

“Tim’s not out of danger yet,” she said, “no one can see him.”

Then she went on into the farmhouse, and the door shut behind her.

Sandy and she spent the days together now, waiting about the farm, taking it in turns to sit beside Tim, who, so far, had never spoken, scarcely moved.

His broken bones had set marvellously; physically he was, considering all he had suffered, getting on amazingly but he lay there like a log, inert, speechless, motionless.

Sir Hector had been down twice, and each time he had made an examination, shrugged his shoulders and gone away

with his back humped, a certain sign of disappointment or uncertainty with him.

It was nearly a month since it had all happened, since Malincourt's death.

"No great loss there," Sandy had grunted, "An' what that poor little woman who was killed with him saw in him I'll never grasp."

It had been Sandy who had carried through everything, taken upon himself the sad burdens of that first ghastly week.

"It's something to do, anyway," he said gruffly; "fills in the time."

Diana and he talked over everything. Diana had told Sandy now that she and Tim were to be married, she had said, looking straight at him: "Tim and I—Tim and I will be married just as soon as he's able to—to speak," she said. "And if he's never—quite—quite the same—we'll be married—it won't make any difference. He'll only need me more then."

"Oh, gosh!" said poor Sandy, to himself, watching the January rain pour down. "There's love for you! Makes me feel I'd not mind being smashed up to be loved like that!"

On this day of sleet and blowing wind, Diana and he settled themselves on either side of the big hearth, Diana with a book, Sandy with a pipe.

They were waiting for Sir Hector's car, and they were both on edge.

During the night Tim had tried to speak, and had, for the first time, become restless; at once Sir Hector had been telephoned to, now he was a little overdue.

“Here’s the car,” Sandy said. He got up, and went to the door.

The whole farmhouse had been taken over by Tim’s agent, and was being run by Tim’s servants.

Sir Hector came in, stamping.

“It’s the Mediterranean I should be looking at!” he said glumly. “Not these slithering roads!”

He stood over the big fire, warming his hands, glancing from Diana to Sandy under his eaves-like brows.

“Well, how is he?”

The day nurse had come in. She said in her quiet voice, with its faint Devonshire accent:

“The patient’s rather restless, sir.”

Sir Hector’s shrewd, small eyes met hers.

“I see,” he said with a sniff, and walked to Tim’s room.

He came back in about a quarter of an hour and said to Sandy:

“Get Dr. Barrow, will you? Go quickly and give him this note.”

Sandy nodded.

“Right, sir.” He looked into Sir Hector’s rather grim face. “I say ... is it today?”

“It is,” Sir Hector told him.

“Thank God,” Sandy said.

Sir Hector watched him cycle down the lane.

Thank God?

He wondered.

Standing there, looking out at the grey day, the weeping skies, he wondered whether Tim would live to curse or bless

him—whether Sandy would—Diana—?

Ah! it was her problem, really—and she was very young.

“The young forget, thank God then—in all truth,” Sir Hector thought. “If he dies, as he is now, she’ll have the romance of it always in her heart. If he lives ... and is witless she’ll have tragedy for ever in her life.”

He turned from the window with a sigh and went back to the fireplace and sat down in a rocking chair.

He was dozing when Diana came in carrying a cup of soup, some sandwiches, and a glass of whisky and soda.

Sir Hector woke and beamed on her.

“You’re the sort a man ’ud like fine to have for a relation,” he said warmly. “I’ll not be botherin’ with the soup, I think!”

Diana laughed, sat on the arm of the big chair opposite him, and talked with him, until he had finished his small lunch; then she went across to him and knelt before him with her eyes raised to his; there were two little white stars of interrogation, reflecting from the sky as she asked:

“Sir Hector, tell me the truth—all of it. Just what can be the result of the operation you mean to do this afternoon?”

“You look bonny,” Sir Hector said irrelevantly, he laid his hand for a moment against Diana’s cheek, “but your eyes have grown too big these last weeks! I’ll be truthful, I’ll tell you all I know. I’m going to operate to move the clot, and if I succeed, maybe Crane’ll be himself, altogether himself, and maybe he’ll not get his mind back.”

He added no word of pity, of further explanation; he had learnt long ago, how valueless words are in times of great sorrow or great happiness.

Diana got up.

“Whether Tim is ever again himself or not,” she said unsteadily, looking at Sir Hector, and smiling at him through tears, “he’s mine. And he always will be.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

“HE’LL DO!”

WHEN Tim opened his eyes, and for the first time for weeks consciously took in his surroundings, he said in a funny, weak voice:

“My hat! It’s snowing!”

“Yes, it is,” his nurse agreed, keeping her voice very much “down,” because she felt so pleased and proud that Tim had come through.

Tim then went to sleep. He woke some hours later, and remarked that it had grown dark, a statement with which his nurse again agreed.

Sandy and Diana and Dr. Barrow celebrated these momentous remarks as if they had been proclamations affecting the welfare of nations.

Diana was “fey,” Sir Hector said, had been “fey” ever since he had come out to her, and said, loudly and triumphantly:

“It’s a success! He’ll do!”

Tim’s first long sentence was:

“I’m trussed up like a mummy! How long have I been here?”

The nurse then called in Diana, and wished she had not, for Tim’s white face went alarmingly pink.

If his nurse was frightened, Diana was not, she went straight up to Tim, knelt down beside him, and laid her cheek against his good hand, and said:

“Darling, I love you.”

A week later she could sit on Tim's bed, and Sandy used to tiptoe in and out of the room, making every old board in the floor and wainscoting creak most hideously.

And, on the day when, at last, Tim was promoted to the sofa for an hour, the three of them had tea together.

Sandy absented himself tactfully and left them in the firelight.

Tim gave a great sigh.

"I've lived in Heaven," he said slowly, "but now I've got to hear things, darling. How is everything going on? How's Mickey?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE NEW LIFE

TIM and Diana were married by special licence just a month after the operation had been performed; they left the same afternoon for the Riviera, for Juan-les-Pins, where Tim had taken a villa.

Diana and he had a coupé to themselves on the Blue Train from Calais to Cannes, and as they sped through France, wrapped now in the amethystine haze of spring-time, Tim felt he wanted nothing save to rest, to look at Diana.

From the hour when he had been told everything he had fought himself.

Now he owned himself conquered—a captive to the happiness he could not give up.

In the beginning, when there had been a hundred obstacles between himself and the gaining of his heart's desire, he had sworn:

“I will tell Diana.”

He had not told her, he had not even tried to tell her—he had drifted on a vast tide of quiescence, content just to be alive, to be out of pain, to have Diana near.

How many of us can thrust happiness from us with our own hands? Destroy because we feel it to be right?

Tim had believed he would be strong; he had meant to be, but, holding Diana against his heart he could no more have risked her freeing herself, leaving him, than he could have hurt her physically.

In the first hours of knowledge he had told himself over and over again: “I am free!” Providence, fate, call it what he chose, had given to him with both hands.

Everything had come his way.

It seemed incredible, but it was true; there was no one, nothing now, which could come between him and Diana; he need no longer go in fear.

He had argued it all over, again and again, with himself.

If he did not carry on the title, it would die out—and, with it, the responsibilities it conferred.

No one would look after the land, the tenants—there was that side to be considered.

And he loved both, had come to love them, and was prepared to give of his best to both.

He had been prepared to do so when he had realized he was working on Mickey’s behalf ... he had wanted to give his life for Mickey—it hadn’t been his fault that he had not done so. He had been prepared to.

A man should pay, must pay, for the privileges life grants him, for the success he wins, for the deeds he does.

“Haven’t I paid?” Tim had asked himself wearily. “What would it profit anyone were I to speak out, to say: ‘I have no right to this title, to this land.’ What would happen? I should create an immense scandal, I should wreck my life and Diana’s.”

He had not told her, and now they were on their honeymoon and she was leaning lightly against him and pointing out primroses on the banks, turning her “eternity” ring of square diamonds round and round like a little child to admire it at every angle.

The maid came in with the tea basket and a quiet
“Anything else, my lady?”

Diana told her “No,” waited till the door had closed on her, then, curling a hand in Tim’s said:

“Darling, what fun! ‘My lady,’ your ladyship—your ladyship—that’s very true! And you are my lord, lord of everything for me, now and always.”

Later on Tim tucked her up in her wagon-lit, he bent above her and kissed her.

“I suppose,” he said, her hand against his lips, “I didn’t pitch out after that spill, and this isn’t by any chance, Heaven, and you an angel who will nip away any moment?”

“There will be no nipping away on my part,” Diana told him firmly. “You have got me for keeps, Tim, my lamb, and keeps it will be! Your gay and gallivanting days are over!”

She was so gay, and utterly happy, and her happiness seemed to strike at Tim’s heart.

He was up against it now. Hitherto he had not been physically strong enough to wage long battle with himself, but now he was really better; he was married to Diana, and he must decide on his course of action, once and for all.

Was he to live an untruth to her—always—or was he, at the very outset of their life together, to wound her faith in him, perhaps irreparably?

If he kept silent, he alone must bear the burden; if he shared it, would Diana leave him?

She was so young; he was sixteen years older.

The train stopped and he got out and walked on the long, quiet platform. Only a stray porter, a man who was in attendance to water the train, was about, the engine had been

shut off, it was curiously peaceful and the smell of the fields was carried by the spring wind.

A sense of the vast loneliness of life each one of us must feel at some time or another, its essential loneliness, came to Tim, and he shivered a little, despite his big coat. He had escaped that loneliness when he had married Diana, and she had linked her life to his—was he to go back, to compel her to realize that loneliness, its full power of sadness?

Deliberately, he had done a thing he knew to be wrong, and to right that wrong he must ruin another person's happiness, bring scandal upon her name.

The train began to move, he swung himself aboard and went back to the compartment. Diana was sound asleep, and she looked a child, little, very sweetly helpless, as children do look in sleep.

A tenderness, which was very near to anguish, stirred in Tim's heart.

He knelt down beside her narrow bed, and laid his cheek to hers.

Diana stirred, put up a wandering, sleepy hand, found Tim, and snuggled the hand under his chin.

"I can't tell her!" Tim thought. "I'm never going to tell her. I did my best. I'll do my best. I was given a trust by Bill. I swear to heaven, I'll live up to it. Diana and I are of clean stock; if we have children and they are like her they'll be worthy to take any title—if they're like me she'll train them. Whatever I've done, I love her truly. I love her faithfully. I'll serve her all my life. If I fail her, fail in any of those things I owe it to our happiness to hold high, I hope God will make me pay."

He knelt on, listening to Diana's breathing. At last, stretching out, he, too, went to sleep, and woke feeling horribly cramped, to find the carriage full of sunshine and to see the sea glittering in the distance.

When he could stand and move without making grimaces and feeling as if all his bones were cracking, he bent over Diana, lifted her right up. She clung to him with closed eyes, still half asleep.

Tim holds her so, one hand over her heart, his cheek against her soft, ruffled hair.

“Wake up!”

She gave a little laugh.

“I am!”

Suddenly she freed herself, to fling herself wholly into his arms and pull down his head.

“Tim—Tim, it's the first real day of our new life together!”

He tilted back her head, and with his lips on hers echoed:

“Our new life together.”

THE END

[The end of *Yesterday's Tomorrow* by Olive Wadsley]