



RECAPTURE THE MOON

SYLVIA THOMPSON

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By SYLVIA THOMPSON

THE HOUNDS OF SPRING
THE BATTLE OF THE HORIZONS
CHARIOT WHEELS
PORTRAIT BY CAROLINE
SUMMERS NIGHT
UNFINISHED SYMPHONY
BREAKFAST IN BED
A SILVER RATTLE
THIRD ACT IN VENICE
RECAPTURE THE MOON

RECAPTURE THE MOON

By
SYLVIA THOMPSON



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This book is dedicated to Ozzy and Freddy, and to Betty Morey, in remembrance of all the fun we had at Egremont (in spite of it); and in celebration of all the things we mean to do (because of it)

PART I

Bianca said, "When you come back, Richard . . ."

But whatever she would have said (she had had a far-off blurred vision of a house in green country) was stifled again; because, again, holding her closer in his arms, he set his grave, desperate lips on hers.

And it was better, anyway, she felt, not to have to speak; or not too much. For during a sentence the pain in her heart pushed its way up, pressed up her chest, up her throat, and, suddenly hardening the muscles of her mouth, made it impossible for her to go on speaking.

She wouldn't look at the little clock again—her new little gold-faced clock beside the bed, that his mother had sent her as a wedding present.

They sat down on the stiff green plush sofa holding hands.

How could they ever let go each other's hands? Whatever the clock said, whatever time or trains or "leave" or "France" meant, how could she lose the cool, hard, so real sense of his fingers holding hers?

But—"You must have some coffee. Let me pour you out some coffee?"

He said, "I think you look even lovelier in the morning." As if this morning, coming in, sunlit, to them through the immense lace curtains of the Grosvenor Hotel, were no worse than an innocent attendant of her loveliness.

She poured out the coffee, steadily, into both cups.

"—Like the girl in *Love in the Valley*," he said.

She knew, by now, that he took saccharine with coffee, and none with tea. She said:—

"I wish we had known each other always." They were nineteen now, and had only met a year ago, and so had wasted eighteen years.

The stiff pain came up her throat again. Turning her face away, she saw the clock.

He said, "Drink your coffee, darling."

They sat close with linked arms so that he had to hold his cup with his left hand.

“What a jolly day,” he said. “I’d hate it much more if it was raining.”

She nodded. But she knew that it couldn’t be worse. Nothing could ever be so bad as this. Nothing. Ever. She got her voice steady.

“What beastly coffee! Isn’t it?”

“Like all English coffee! But when we have our real honeymoon we’ll go to Paris and stay at the Crillon and have perfect coffee, and I’ll take you to Worth, like a proper husband, and buy you ten new frocks!”

The sun shone through the lace curtains on to his face, which looked pallid above his khaki and under its familiar khaki freckles.

Every time she looked at him she saw him with her heart. And this acute bright seeing hurt her, as if the process of emotional photography were in itself painful. She felt his brown clear eyes, black-lashed under the plump childlike eyelids; his sweet wide mouth; his square chin; the lifted nostrils in his stubby nose. She felt his smile, and the boyish whiteness of his teeth, and the funny jutting of his chin when he said “proper husband.” And because she felt so sharply, because, as he spoke, his hair curved up brown-gold from the heavy innocence of his forehead, and his look rested on her, serious and marveling, she gave a silly agonized little cry of, “But you *are* a proper husband”—and then, rattling down her cup, turned so to look and look into his face that it should fill her whole heart. She said, “You mustn’t ever be different. Darling, darling, I don’t want you ever to be different—” And he was saying that he loved her; that nothing could ever change their loving each other; saying, his eyes darkening (or was it her heart growing dark—her courage growing dark?), “Nothing can ever be lovelier than these last days. If we live for a hundred years nothing in the world will ever be more unbelievably lovely—”

She said something—his name. “Richard—Richard, my dear—” She shut her eyes. (She mustn’t cry, mustn’t cry, *mustn’t cry!*) His cheek was hard and warm against hers, and his voice thick and soft and urgent telling her that it wouldn’t be very long, it couldn’t be very long, before they were together again. He said, “Bianca, my darling,” and, “When I come back and it’s all over . . .”

She said, “I shall come on to the platform and see you into the train and then I shall go away. I shan’t wait.”

“No, my sweet, don’t wait and say good-bye.”

And then, abruptly, violently, their limbs chilled, their pulses racing, their vision dark and shivering, they caught each other close; caught and held each other.

“Bianca.”

“Richard . . .”

“Darling . . .”

“My dearest.”

Carteret Cable came out of the dining room carrying the *Times* and found his niece in the hall.

“Hello, Bianca. Good morning.” He remembered at the sight of her luggage that Violet had told him that she had invited “poor little Bianca” to stay. He saw that Harvey was going out to pay the taxi. Bianca never had change. This morning she seemed more vague than usual. Her beauty prevented his being annoyed with her. So he spoke sharply to the butler.

“Threepence will be enough tip, Harvey.”

“Very well, m’lord.”

Harvey went out to the taxi with an inward expression on his pontifical face. Carteret knew that he was giving the man sixpence all the same.

“I suppose you’ve just been seeing Richard off?” Violet had told him that too. For his wife kept him informed about other people’s lives, in which he was not spontaneously interested. But when she had told him the facts he remembered them accurately. Thus he knew that Bianca, who had married young Selwyn a week ago, had come back to London yesterday from her honeymoon; that Selwyn had gone back to France this morning; and that Bianca was to stay with them for a few days, and then go to Harrogate and join her mother. (He never thought of Bianca’s mother without a passing resentment at her impulsiveness. Although she was his wife’s sister, she was totally different in character. Violet was neither impulsive nor interested in health.)

“Have you had breakfast, Bianca?”

She took in what he said, and then answered:—

“Yes, thank you.”

“Where?”

“At the Grosvenor Hotel.”

“Were you comfortable there?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

“Well, then, you’d better go up to your room, hadn’t you?” It worried him, her standing still and not noticing that Nicholls, the parlormaid, was trying to take her little dressing bag from her. “You know the room, don’t you? I don’t think Violet’s awake yet . . .”

“Thank you.”

“I don’t know where the deuce Frany is,” he burst out, for her absent manner annoyed him. “Frany! *Frany!*”

“I believe Miss Drake has gone up to her ladyship,” said Harvey.

Carteret snapped out: “Well, then, tell her at once that Mrs. Selwyn has arrived.” He turned on his heel, crossed the hall, his quick steps alternately tapping the rugs and beating the marble, and disappeared, carrying the *Times*, into the cloakroom beyond the lift.

As he vanished Frany was coming down the staircase carrying the letter basket and accompanied, at the trailing folds of her skirt, by a Pekinese.

“I was just about to telephone up to you, miss!” said Harvey.

“Mrs. Selwyn’s room,” said Frany to Nicholls, “is Number 5. See that her luggage is taken up now.” She came down rapidly but imperturbably into the hall. “Good morning, Bianca.”

“Oh, *Frany*,” said Bianca. There was relief in merely seeing Frany as she had always been, ever since Bianca could remember: her brown, inscrutable, crooked features; her black eyes; her swept-back white-grey hair; her spotless high-collared shirt strained down over her big shoulders and stately bosom to her belted waist. She kissed the brown cheek that smelt (as it always had) of almond soap.

“A tray of coffee and fruit is being sent up to your room,” said Frany. “Alice has put a hot-water bottle on the chaise longue, and one of your aunt’s dressing gowns. When the orders are given, and an agent has been interviewed in the matter of a concert in which your aunt is interested, I will come up and see that you are comfortable! . . . Come here, Thunder!” she said to the Pekinese. “Those hydrangeas were not put there for the convenience of little dogs! . . . Your aunt,” she added, as Bianca stepped into

the lift, “will see you at luncheon. And I have asked Mademoiselle to tell Charmian to let you rest.”

Number 5, a room at the top of the house in Portland Place, had often been Bianca’s. A white-paneled, low-ceilinged room, with two windows curtained in rose-and-white chintz, a faded green Wilton carpet, and a mixed company of Louis XV furniture discarded by her aunt and Victorian pieces inherited by her uncle.

Alice was putting the brass can of hot water on the washstand. (Lord Cable disapproved of fitted basins.)

“Good morning, madam.” Alice had been in the church, in the gallery of St. George’s, and seen Miss Bianca married. “I’ll fetch your tray at once, madam.”

“Thank you, Alice.” There was an imprecise relief in Alice’s mauve-and-white print dress and her banana-yellow hair, parted in the middle under her cap. Alice was Harvey’s daughter and had entered service with the Cables when she left school.

Bianca put her hat and coat on the dressing stool. Her “going away” hat and coat. Her aunt’s dressing gown, a familiar white Roman satin one with net frills, was laid out on the bed. There seemed no sense in “lying down”; for how could lying down (that eternally prescribed panacea of older women) help?

Perhaps Frany would come up soon.

And now Alice came back with the tray, and set it on the low table beside the chaise longue, and said:—

“Shall I unfasten your dress, madam?” It was a navy-blue dress, matching the coat, and fastening at the back.

“Thank you, Alice.”

When she put on the dressing gown, its scentiness made Bianca feel that she ought to go to her aunt’s room and acknowledge her person as well as her hyacinthine fragrance. But Alice drew the blinds half down, and set all the little lace and net-covered cushions ready, and when Bianca laid her head back against them she asked, glancing respectfully at Bianca’s face and then, anxiously, at the tray, whether there was anything else she could get? Whether she couldn’t get her any cream? (For the Cables had cream, even in 1918, sent up from the Home Farm at Moon’s Green.)

“No, thank you, Alice. No cream.” (But it was upsettingly sweet to feel what Alice wanted to say by suggesting cream.)

“How’s your brother, Alice?”

“He’s still at Aldershot, thank you, miss . . . madam, I mean.”

“I’m glad.”

“Thank you, madam.”

Alice went: her print rustling, the door whispering shut.

The ceiling was cool grey in shadows; the carpet by the window lawn-green in squares of sunlight—the same sunlight that had come in through the windows of the Grosvenor Hotel an hour ago.

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in!”

It was Callendar, her aunt’s maid.

“Her ladyship wishes to know if you would care to come with her to the matinée at the Palladium this afternoon.”

“Tell her I’d like to, very much.”

“Very well, madam.” Callendar went with a tired momentary little smile. She never, as Bianca knew, “had a moment” in the mornings. For her aunt’s process of getting up had the elaboration of a levee, and the routine yet subdued panic of a fire drill.

On the tray the breakfast set, a fluted thin china with rosebuds on it, was the one she had liked best ever since she was a little girl and came to stay and to go to the pantomime with her cousins, Charmian and Peter, and was allowed the next morning to have her breakfast in her room. The little set belonged to a time when she hadn’t known Richard; and her complex moment of affection for it made him, for a second, unreal.

Frany knocked and came in, a Pekinese under one arm.

“Your lady aunt,” she said, “has decided that although Mrs. Elyot is the housekeeper, she is not the right person to stand in the queue for margarine. Harvey, she says, is too old, and Nicholls refuses. ‘Therefore,’ says your lady aunt, ‘Alice is the person to do it.’ I have pointed out certain objections. But your aunt will not listen to me.”

Bianca thought, “Richard *must* meet Frany.”

“Why *Frany*?” he’d asked. “Francis Drake . . . Frany’s short and endearing for Francis. But her real name’s Julia . . . not Francis at all.”)

“You know Aunt Violet always listens to you in the end.”

Frany never replied to even the most incidental sort of compliment. This was not because she was humble, but because she had a complete self-respect, hard won by herself from her own judgment. Therefore other people’s opinions, however pleasing or prejudiced, were irrelevant.

“It is unsuitable,” said Frany, straightening her tie before the glass, and adjusting the silver buckle of her belt, “that Alice should stand in a queue. Any sort of waiting about is demoralizing for a young girl. And there are other reasons—of health. I do not mention to your aunt that the Panel doctor forbids Alice to stand more than is necessary. Your aunt does not wish to be told that servants have guts.” Frany dealt imperturbably with language, as with facts.

“Couldn’t the Boy go?” The Boy was an odd-man: a more than sixty-year-old inhabitant of the village at Moon’s Green, who had been a beater until the War, and had then come “into the house” to replace a younger man. When the Cables came up to Portland Place, he came in the van with the first lot of flowers and vegetables.

Frany picked up Lightning, who had jumped on Bianca’s feet. “The Boy is afraid of air raids. While he is in London he does not leave the basement. I am told, by Harvey, he has bought a gas mask and that it will not fit over his beard. Your cousin Ruth also”—Frany referred to the Cables’ youngest daughter—“does not enjoy the air raids. She is therefore down at Moon’s Green with Miss Faber.”

“Oh.” Bianca wasn’t interested in her cousin Ruth, who, at fifteen, was manifestly a budding Englishwoman of the moneyed class—complacent and hard-voiced, with sharp eyes, a stupid heart, and a conventional passion for dogs.

“Peter went back to Eton a fortnight ago.”

Bianca still had a sense of her childhood solidarity with Peter, as with Charmian.

A knock at the door. Callendar again. “Excuse me, miss—forgive me, madam!—but her ladyship says, miss, did you order the motor for ten-thirty instead of eleven?”

Frany's brown features became more than usually inscrutable. Her black eyes rested on Callendar. She spoke tranquilly and incisively:—

“The motor is ordered for ten-thirty. Tell her ladyship so. Tell her also that I am coming.”

When Callendar had gone Frany said, “The last years at Moon's Green have been trying for your aunt. We have twice as many convalescents at the Lodge—and the recent ones are not always sahibs. Thus we have certain difficulties. Your aunt is nervous and worried. Exert yourself with her this afternoon.”

“Is she worried about Charmian?”

“That. And other matters. But now rest.”

Charmian came after midday. She came in on tiptoe lest her cousin might be asleep.

“Oh, Bianca darling.”

Charmian, by the rules of Portland Place and the traditions of Moon's Green, was still “in the schoolroom.” She was seventeen. She had shining bobbed hair, dark blue eyes, and a lovely nervous mouth.

She threw her long arms round Bianca.

“What *can* I do for you, Banky? Are you feeling too beastly for words?”

“It's just the first going back—” said Bianca. “Once he's there, and we can write . . .”

“Yes. That helps,” said Charmian. “That does help. And you'll probably get your first letter from him, well, the day after to-morrow?”

“Yes,” said Bianca. She touched Charmian's inky fingers. “Have you been working all morning?”

“Mm . . . Ever since I kicked over ‘Heathfield,’ Mother's had me driven like a galley slave.” Charmian pulled a cushion on to the floor. Her long limbs folded down on it like a puppy. “Oh, Bianca,” she said, “you *do* look marvelous and like the lily maid of Astolat. I cried buckets and *swimming* pools last week at the wedding. Peter and I cried together; only he just blew his nose. You *looked* like two people walking into Heaven—you and Richard— Darling, how stupid of me to talk like that now.” Her arm sprawled out across Bianca's knees. “Only, you know, it *will* be over soon! Even Father says so! And two nights ago when there were about a dozen Brass Hats dining here, and I was allowed to come down, they were *all*

saying it would be over soon.” Charmian spoke eagerly, her eyes azure, her head thrown back, her breath coming and going quickly. There was a vital and fiery innocence about her which often made Bianca wonder how her cousin would endure the future planned for her by Violet Cable: a future summed up in “making the right sort of marriage.”

“How’s Mademoiselle?” Bianca asked, perfunctorily, to escape thinking.

“She’s a darling, really. She tries to buff between Mummie and me.”

“Does she still read Thomas Aquinas when she can’t sleep?”

“More than ever. She’s worried stiff about her brother. They haven’t heard now for two months.”

“Poor thing,” said Bianca.

There was no escape from thinking.

“What are you doing this afternoon?”

“The Palladium matinée with your mother.”

“*Oh!*” Even the smallest of Charmian’s disappointments were real. “You couldn’t come and have tea in the schoolroom—when you come back?”

“I’ll try to. Anyway, I’ll come up afterwards if Aunt Violet lets me.”

“She will if she doesn’t realize that I want you.” Charmian flushed. “How beastly I am about her!”

“She is difficult.” When Bianca was away from her aunt she saw her, coolly, as a worldly woman without feelings. But in her company, she was impressed by her worldliness and made nervous by her hardness.

“Yes, but so am *I* difficult,” exclaimed Charmian. “And Mother’s so pretty.” She added—“I wish you’d seen her last night, when she and Daddy were going out.”

Violet Cable faced her own reflection, and with it, in the sense of being occasioned by it, a doubt.

The doubt was about herself.

She had never had this kind of doubt before, because she had never before questioned her own rightness. She had lived for forty-eight years in full assurance, not only of her own prettiness, cleverness, and ability, but especially of her rightness. She had been subject to none of the natural

checks to arrogance that may come with time, such as the death of those she loved, or poverty, or illness, or even a habit of combining experience with introspection. She had never been introspective. Though she had never been happy she had never felt acute unhappiness. As to her inner self, she had been chiefly concerned in relieving, by successes and pleasures, that grumbling *malaise* of the soul which attacks the egoist.

But now, in the autumn of 1918, at quarter to one on an October morning, sitting before her mirror and seeing her small face and blue-rinsed curls shaded by the new hat from Reboux, she was introspective; and she doubted.

The doubt hurt her.

But Violet Cable wasn't a coward. And she was by character persistent. So, having begun her doubt, she went on with it, in spite of its increasing discomfort, which, for the strangest moment, as she drew off her gloves, brought tears to her eyes.

She was still wondering, as Callendar came and took the gloves and her furs, whether she had been wrong (so strangely sudden, the way he came up to her before dinner, last night)—wrong about Lionel Cary twenty-five years ago?

Callendar gave her her bag.

Bianca came in.

“Good morning, Aunt Violet.”

“Good morning, Bianca.”

Violet rose, slender but stiff. Bianca kissed her.

“Richard went off this morning early, I hear.”

“Yes, Aunt Violet.”

“Luncheon is at one, and we have to leave immediately afterwards.”

In mentioning luncheon Violet Cable felt her mind grasp normality again. Her spirits grew clearer in anticipation of food. She was always hungry for luncheon, for she ate no breakfast.

Followed by Bianca, she crossed the landing and entered the lift. “How is Josephine?” she asked, as they descended slowly through the body of the house.

“Mother's enjoying her cure.”

“She always does,” said Violet. She added irritably, “She enjoys everything.”

Glancing at Bianca, and mistaking her inattention for acquiescence, she thought how tiresome it was that Josephine should have a daughter like Bianca, with so much poise, while she, Violet, should have produced Charmian.

It didn't occur to her (though this had been clear even to young Richard Selwyn's immature and emotional perceptions of his wife) that Bianca's “poise” was a defense and that she was essentially as nervous and unbalanced as Charmian was excitable and rebellious.

And of what was essential in them both, of their good and serious and sensitive qualities, Violet Cable had no understanding at all.

Once, during luncheon, Bianca was able to stop thinking about Richard and reënforce her conversation with her neighbor, Trevor Topham, an elderly novelist, by real interest.

He was a friend of Lord Cable's and Bianca had met him before, both at Portland Place and down at Moon's Green. He was stoat-faced, and full of willfully scandalous little anecdotes. (Frany referred to him as “the Eunuch.”) While the port was being handed round he said:—

“Once we've got these damned—ha!—excuse me, Lady Cable!—these—er—Huns down we ought to *grind their faces in the dust.*”

The sense of the remark was a commonplace of the moment; the metaphor hackneyed, even for a popular novelist. But what roused Bianca was the zest with which he added, “And we jolly well oughtn't to stop fighting until we've got them on their knees.”

“Hear, hear!” said Aunt Violet, peeling a peach. The grapes and peaches at Moon's Green had suffered little under the care of a lady head gardener. The heat had been maintained through secret supplies of coal sent down in one of the Cable-Bensley trucks from Staffordshire.

“True. That's the stuff to give them, Topsy! You ought to write an article on the subject in the *Mail.*”

“Of course you ought,” said Violet. “It all helps to give a lead.”

Bianca turned to him and made such a schoolgirlish remark that everyone, except Frany, thought she was trying to be amusing.

“You deserve a V.C., Mr. Topham.”

He gruffed and showed his two long front teeth.

“I don’t—er—flatter myself, Mrs. Selwyn!”

Frany caught Bianca’s eye. Frany frowned. She knew how Bianca’s temper could break through suddenly. Frany held Bianca’s look.

Bianca’s hand trembled as she took a cigarette from the American staff officer who was sitting on her right. She had talked to him through the earlier half of luncheon without realizing him at all.

Now he was lighting the cigarette for her, and asking her if she knew the Scheurers, with whom he had lately lunched, in Paris.

“Oh, yes,” said Bianca. “I’ve met him here quite often.” She added, vaguely conscious of kindness coming from this big, stubby-nosed, clear-eyed man: “Scheurers and Cables are affiliated in some way.”

The American smiled, showing white teeth in his cinnamon-colored face.

“‘Some way’ is a pretty good piece of understatement!” he remarked. Then he said with his attractive enthusiasm, “I liked them. The Madame Scheurer struck me as a sweet woman, under all her Faubourg-St.-Germain manners—And that boy of theirs impressed me *very* much! The boy that’s in the *Aviation*.”

“Louis?”

“Yes. I liked him no end. Sort of sensitive, but with plenty of guts. He was back on leave when I met him.”

Bianca was thinking about Richard. But she said:—

“I only met Louis Scheurer once. I thought him rather conceited.”

When Bianca got up to the schoolroom Charmian was leaning over the fender making toast, and Mademoiselle Houville, standing by the table in the twilight looking like Emily Brontë, was buttering it.

Bianca shook hands with her; and she, in her so elegant French, and with one of her long, clever, painful glances, hoped that Mrs. Selwyn had had a beautiful, even if so very short, sojourn in the country? Bianca thanked her. Mademoiselle Houville left the room so that the cousins might be alone together.

Charmian put another piece of bread on the toasting fork. "I hoped you'd come. This is in your honor—nice and burnt."

"So I smelt."

"How was the *matinée*?" broke out Charmian. Then— "*Don't* tell me! I know just what it was like! The stalls full of the lucky wounded being swarmed over, in the intervals, by Mother and the rest of the committee . . . and the orchestra playing 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' and 'Long Trail,' and old Fanny Tremaine making a speech at the end!"

Bianca said, "Yes, it was like that. But they enjoyed it."

"The Tommies?"

"Yes." She had looked with a new frightened interest at them, in their della Robbia blue clothes and scarlet ties, trying to see in their putty faces some reflection of what they'd seen and what Richard would see.

"Lucky fellows! . . ."

"You're burning that bit."

"Hell!"

Bianca sat on the end of the fender. Being with Charmian again made her feel worse, because she knew that if she were to break down and cry, Charmian would cry with her.

Charmian said, "Put on the light."

The light, streaming out from under the red silk shade, made the room familiar, and a little comforting. Charmian said:—

"I know it's selfish. But I *must* tell before Mademoiselle comes back. I'm in love!"

Bianca didn't say, or even think, "Again?" For though Charmian had been in love with a succession of people since she was five, each passion was real. And each time that the subject of her violent, generous, and indiscriminating love failed her, and reëntered the crowd of ordinary people, she went through the same pains of disillusion; and soon after felt again the alchemy of vision and madness of heart that presaged a new hero.

"Who is it?" said Bianca. She had an idea, from Frany's hints, that it was one of the convalescent officers quartered in the "Dower House" at Moon's Green.

"Harry Kramer."

Bianca checked an exclamation. Charmian saw her face. She flared:—

“You don’t know anything about him. You don’t know what his life has been, and . . . what sort of childhood he had!”

Bianca said:—

“But, Charmian, he’s *married!* And he’s awfully . . . old.”

Charmian’s swift defensive anger changed, as Bianca spoke, to a mystical calm which Bianca recognized as a sign that her emotion had passed the point when criticism could hope to check its course.

“I like old people, incidentally,” said Charmian. She lifted up the toasting fork and inhaled the fragrance of the toast. “And Harry’s a great artist. And it isn’t anything to do with this,—us, I mean,—if he has a wife. She’s never understood him. She’s just the worldly part of his life.”

Bianca was shaken out of her own preoccupation. She couldn’t answer Charmian. Certainly Charmian’s emotion had never been roused by “looks.” Over and over again she’d fallen in love through pity, through her romantic feeling for the underdog. But Harry Kramer! With his pouchy eyes, his fat hands, his horrid frizzy brown hair, his shiny shoes. Kramer, a second-rate pianist of forty-five with a rich wife, who got himself asked everywhere by kissing the hands of easily flattered women like Aunt Violet.

No wonder Aunt Violet was worried! “When do you see him?” she asked, moving over to the window seat where Charmian’s old doll, Sabrina, lay on a satin cushion stenciled by Ruth.

“We have to meet secretly. You see, Mother won’t have him to the house any more.”

Bianca picked up Sabrina and smoothed her hair.

Mademoiselle Houville came in, followed by a young housemaid carrying the tea and a letter for Bianca:—

HARROGATE, *Thursday*

MY DARLING CHILD:—

Just *un petit mot* to tell you that I am thinking of you and hoping that you are not too upset by Richard’s going back. It does seem a *dreadfully* short honeymoon!!! When I think of my own lovely trip with your poor father in the Italian Lakes! What different and what sad times these are! (I am not reading *any*

newspapers at *all* just now as the casualty lists upset me so, and I do want to make this little cure a thorough one.)

I am sorry you refused my invitation to come here and stay with me. But I suppose you think staying with Violet at Portland Place will be more distracting? Anyway, you know your mother is always ready to welcome you at *any* moment you should feel the need of her companionship and sympathy. Poor Richard! How tragic *he* must have felt, leaving his lovely bride *so soon*! But still, my dear, one must be philosophical and realize that everyone is in the same boat, and that yours is only one of these “war marriages.” But the seeing off is always the worst. And then you can always go home and wait for a letter! Though I must say I feel sad to think you are not settling down in the normal way into a lovely new home with all your own things. (I don’t believe you *half* looked at your presents, dear? Mrs. Barrington sent such a delightful pair of candlesticks and dear old Colonel Gates sent a crumb brush with yours and Richard’s initials engraved on a silver-plated handle, just after you left. I know you will laugh at this, but you are really lucky, as he gives most people his dreadful book on Butterflies!)

Well, dear, I don’t know what news I have to cheer you up. I have been rereading “old favorites,” as I want to keep my mind away from the War. I reread the *Man of Property* yesterday. (Poor Irene, one *is* sorry for her. That hard *brute* Soames!) And to-day I have been reading a charming life of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. She really was more “sinned against than sinning.” I brought *Mansfield Park* with me, as you and Richard urged me to. But I still cannot help feeling she (Jane Austen, I mean) is overrated. The people are so very *bornés*. How *difficult* it is to find books that are neither dull *nor* improper!

My masseuse is coming in a quarter of an hour and I am supposed to relax beforehand, so I will say *Arivederci, cara mia*. (How foolish it is, isn’t it, not to be able to say *auf Wiedersehen*, which always makes me feel quite sentimental and remember my very first “love affair.”)

Well, dear, look after yourself and have plenty of rest, and don’t let Violet *drag* you about from one smart luncheon party to another! Give my love to Richard when you write, and tell him not

to bother to write to me as I know, once he is out there, he will be kept at the grindstone.

Ever your devoted and affectionate

MOTHER

When Bianca was putting her mother's letter into her dispatch case, deciding that she might think of an answer to it to-morrow, she came across the letter which her father had written her last spring, from Bali, when she became engaged. His last letter to her.

MY DEAR BIANCA:—

I have read with pleasure your letter, following on your cablegram of February the fourth. I have looked, also with pleasure, on the photograph of your fiancé. Your mother will congratulate you on the fact that he is well born; your Aunt Violet will regret that he is not wealthy. Thus it remains for me to rejoice with you that he is beautiful in his person, to felicitate you that he has (as you tell me) *l'âme bien née*; and to join in your regrets that instead of having to wait until the advanced ages of nineteen to marry, you and Mr. Selwyn were not wedded by a kinder destiny, at the respective ages of six. You know how nothing could have pleased me better than to have given you away—a child-bride in the pearl-colored satins as by Van Dyck—to a bridegroom resembling, perhaps, the little boy of Rubens as he was painted by his papa—

But one must not have regrets, however charming their form. Greatly I wish that I could visit you both. Or that you could visit me. But in the first matter my health will not permit me to leave this sunshine. And for the second it appears that the War still continues in Europe; so that your fiancé is not therefore free to travel; nor, I suppose, to enjoy any other civilized pleasures. Indeed, I imagine that boredom must be one of the many displeasures of war.

So, meanwhile, I must send my felicitations and affection from a distance. And the enclosed check, which may serve some, I hope not too *useful*, purpose. I should like best that you'd get some *bibelot* or picture, or books, from me. But I will not coerce you. . . .

Frany was with Bianca when she got the telegram from the War Office.

It was Frany who went through it with her.

Frany managed to be there when everyone else and everything else was hideously far away and mad. Frany's queer grand truculence was there through every inch of the blackness, and close by at each new beat of horror.

Frany had her bed brought into Bianca's room to be with her at night. And when the horror was too bad, Frany's hard-knuckled sunburned hand was over hers.

Frany sat up five nights, silent and watchful. Sometimes she sat still, her black eyes enigmatic in their hollow sockets, her brown crooked features imperturbable. Sometimes she got up and made tea on her spirit lamp. Now and then she took up a book and read it; then put it down again. (It was the *Garden of Allah*.) Towards morning, when the room grew cold, she would go to the windows and draw back the curtains and say, "The sunrise is beginning." That was the only whole sentence she spoke during those nights, though she once or twice used such phrases as "Some tea?" or "Here it is" (handing a tablet of Luminal). Or, when Bianca started out of a brief sleep and then remembered, she muttered, "Now, my dear—there, my dear . . . hold on—"

When seven o'clock came Frany went to her own room and dressed and came back again looking exactly as she always did, her old white shirt impeccably clean, her eyes perhaps a little hollower than usual. "I must go down." Impersonal. No comment. What must be must be. "I shall come up when I can."

She paused at the door. Her black "London skirt" touched the ground at the back. "Later, try and go out. I'll see no one talks to you. Go to the Park. Your luncheon will be in my office. The order is given."

"Bianca is out for a walk," said Violet Cable to her sister. "She is out with Frany, but she will be back soon."

"Out for a *walk*!" exclaimed Josephine van Geldern. "Already? But, my dear Violet, he only died a week ago and it's raining."

Violet Cable rang for Harvey to remove the small woollen coats which her sister kept unpeeling and throwing right and left on to the sofas and chairs. "It is ten days," she said, "since Bianca had the telegram; and it's hardly raining at all."

“I always think Regent’s Park is so damp,” said Josephine.

“Take those coats, Harvey.” Violet Cable put a cigarette in a holder and lit it. “When we lived in Smith Square you always told us that Westminster was damp.”

“So it is. And so is Chelsea. I’m staying with poor Anne Mallaby in Cheyne Walk (as you couldn’t find room for me here), and I’m sure the house is damp. How is Bianca?”

“Marvelous,” Violet said. “Terribly brave. Frany, as usual, has been a tower of strength to us all.” She added, her sympathy for her niece fraught by a vague irritation, “I had to send Charmian away, down to the country, she was so harrowed by it all.”

Josephine sat down on the sofa and said, “It is very harrowing. *Very* harrowing.”

Harvey brought in her hot milk.

“My plan,” she said,—“*could* you bring a rather plainer biscuit?—is to take her, for Christmas, to Bath.”

“I should have thought she would be better in your own flat. I don’t know why you have that flat at all, you so seldom use it! And it must cost you at least four hundred a year.”

Josephine had the pleasure of not telling her sister what rent she paid for the flat in Campden Hill.

“Even if it did, I shouldn’t dream of staying in the place all the year round. You never do. You and Carteret are always trapesing about.”

“Trapesing! Carteret’s work obliges him to move. I go up and down from here to Moon’s Green, naturally. I have the convalescents down there and my committees up here. But if I had a restful free life, like yours, I should be glad to relax. I must say I never can understand, Josephine, how you manage to get tired.”

“My dear Violet, if I had your calm I should not be tired either. But there *is* something in being rather thin-skinned! Ah, you lucky woman, what good milk this is! Not *all* of us can have a private farm! But, as I was saying, I have only just been able to force myself to come and see Bianca at all. And you know, dear, I do sometimes think that a *very* close relative on these occasions can make things *more* painful! I almost came at once when I got Frany’s telegram, and then I thought, ‘Well, what good am I going to be to her if I *do* go this minute?’ And I knew, of course, dear, that it isn’t very easy

for you to have me to stay, and I didn't want all the bother and worry of opening the flat when I didn't know what Bianca's plans would be. And besides it did really seem to me wiser to finish my course of baths so as to be really fit to stand by Bianca when she got over the first shock and needed my companionship! What baths, too . . . years younger . . . everyone ought . . ."

Bianca came in.

When her mother said, "My darling child, my heart bleeds for you," Bianca didn't hear her. She was simply aware that her mother, sitting opposite her on the flowered sofa of the morning room, shared, with the sofa itself, and with all inanimate things, the strange quality of being, still, so exactly the same.

For her mother, like her Aunt Violet and Uncle Carteret and the new parlormaid, had, in common with the furniture, in common with the Corot in the hall, and the Whistler etchings on the stairs, this bland and frightening unawareness that Richard was dead. Her mother's voice, saying "tragedy," "shock," and "time will heal," was no more changed in her than, at this moment, her shadow thrown by the queer morning lamp upon the wall. Her mother's sentences, arranged, with instinctive taste, for sorrow, had no aroma either bitter or tender that could reach her dizzied sense; and her silence, when it came, was blankness, not understanding.

With burning stupid eyes Bianca saw that her mother was still beautiful. Her hair was still arranged in silver swerves above the pointed oval of her face. The fresh grey tulle was still doubled lightly about her neck and pinned with a horseshoe of sapphires and diamonds. Her gaze was limpid from restful sleep (*though Richard was dead*). Her complexion clear and healthy (*though Richard was killed*). Her lips pink and her hands smooth and fragrant with *Suc de Camélias* . . .

"My poor child . . . so dreadful for you . . . I know . . ."

"I'm sorry . . . and I hate to upset you, Mother. I think . . ."

She got up. She thought that she would go up, up to her room, and draw the blinds, all the blinds, because the not seeing it all so the *same*, the merciful darkening out of all this bright smooth dreadful realness, might be relief.

"I'm sorry, Mother. Don't be upset."

Frany, who had changed, might be relief again. When Charmian changed, and so came close enough to help and hold on with her, they'd sent her away.

“—I'll tell Frany to find you some Faivres Cachets . . .”

Charmian had been near in that first screaming dark, saying, “Nothing can take away how much you loved each other; nothing now, or ever, can break that you were so lovely for each other. . . .” Charmian's voice in the dark, sobbing, “Keep all of him in your heart, all the sweet and funny things.”

“. . . I'm sorry, Mother. Will you ring for . . . Frany?” Lamps going out. “I think the lamp . . .” How dark! How dark the lamp . . .

The doctors wouldn't let Bianca be alone.

She knew that they thought she would kill herself. That was stupid of them. Because the dreadfulness was, above all, in having to live on. They didn't see, Sir Henry Bates, and Dr. Renshaw, that she wasn't the kind of person who would kill herself. She wasn't brave enough, or logical enough. They didn't see that she must go on living because she was instinctive and natural; and so, like a torn-up plant, would root herself and try to grow again, on waste ground.

During what was called her rest cure, at the Home at Crowborough, when Mother and Frany were allowed brief, strained, shadowy visits, she often heard the doctors telling the nurses not to leave her alone. She didn't bother to argue. For twenty nurses in her white room with the green dado couldn't, even if she wanted them to, have broken her solitude.

Even when Matron herself came in on November 11 and told her that the War was over, Bianca couldn't make the effort to try to grope out of her dark suffocating loneliness and understand what Matron, bringing her a vase of red carnations, meant when she said, “The Armistice has been signed.” “The Armistice?” repeated Bianca in the small flat stupid voice that spoke for her. Anything made her tears begin: the housemaid dusting the room; the coal being put on the fire; the sunshine coming on to the bed in the morning; the frenzying boredom of being washed; the desperation of a sleeve turned inside out . . . So being told by the Matron that the War was over made her tears begin again.

She went on crying and crying (because the War was over?) and when the Night Sister came in and asked her why she was “crying, dear?” she couldn’t remember exactly. But it was, she thought, because “that bloody little doyley on the dressing table is all crooked under the vase of carnations!” For it was something, she remembered, to do with the vase of carnations. But what?

At the end of November Bianca wrote to her mother. The housemaid took the letter; for “Mrs. Selwyn is not being allowed to write or receive letters.” Bianca wrote that she was better but must come away. But her mother believed in Sir Henry Bates and Dr. Renshaw and didn’t answer her. She only sent her a message by Matron to tell her to rest and she would soon begin to feel better.

Bianca wrote another letter: to Frany this time. Frany wrote back that she understood, but could do nothing “against orders.” Frany respected all orders. It was her strength, and her peculiar, consciously martial, foolishness. She had been bred with the “Charge of the Light Brigade” in her brain tissue.

Bianca gave the housemaid five shillings to send a two-shilling telegram to Charmian.

There was no answer.

Two days later, at eleven A.M., when Bianca had been up for an hour and gone back to bed again, Sister came in and said, “Lady Mary Cleverley has called. As she is only passing through Crowborough, Matron has given special permission for you to see her.”

Bianca agreed, as she did to everything. She tried to remember the face belonging to the name.

The visitor was shown in. She was old, with spectacles, and rather bent, in an ostrich-feathered black hat and veils and a sealskin coat. Bianca sat up. Sister went out.

“Bianca!”

Charmian’s make-up was admirable.

“*Don’t* break down or anything again, darling, please! Just pull yourself together and *don’t* stare, sweet—it *is* me, honest, but it’s the only way. Listen, I’ve got a car! Never mind whose—yes, a young man: he’s the chauffeur; we’ve come from London in fifty minutes. Now get out, sweet.

Yes, I *know* it's like a schoolgirl story, but that's just what it is— Get out of *bed*, darling—”

Bianca stood in her nightdress, holding the brass rail of the bed. Charmian was taking off her sealskin, her hat, her veils, her glasses, her black skirt, her snow boots— “Put these on! Buck up! Quick!” Charmian was cold-creaming her face. “Quick!” She fastened her skirt round Bianca . . . the sealskin, the spectacles, the hat, the veils. “Put on the gloves. The bag and stick, too! That's it. Your nurse'll never guess until she finds *me* here!!!” Charmian, in her schoolgirl vest and navy-blue bloomers, took a flying leap into Bianca's bed. “Gosh! How many *more* hot-water bottles? Darling, you look perfect. *Don't* talk, just go! Who'll stop to notice if old Lady Mary Whatnot has changed her face a little in Mrs. Selwyn's room? *Go—now!* The car's outside the porch. Just step in. He'll whisk you to Moon's Green. . . . There's brandy in that bag! *And* smelling salts! See! And when you get to Moon's Green *you* must square Frany. (Mother's in Scotland—) *Go—bless you—go!*”

“But you—you?” muttered Bianca (somehow fantastically near laughing)—“You?—Charmian?”

Charmian primmed up her mouth.

“Ay em effraid, Miss—er—Ceeble—thet this Hom' is only for peying patients. . . .” She threw herself back on the pillows. “The chauffeur has instructions to return and fetch me! Here!”

In the car Bianca fainted. But though the chauffeur saw this he didn't stop to give her brandy until they had left Crowborough a mile away. She came round to find him sitting beside her. He was fair and anxious.

“Feel better?”

“Ye—yes.”

“Shall I go on?”

“Yes—please.”

“No more brandy?”

“No.”

“Sure?”

She said, “I'm sorry”—and then, with the detached untroubled ease of manner that comes from nausea: “I shall have to be sick.”

He helped her out of the car.

It was difficult—being sick and an old lady in a sealskin coat. He stood far off, smoking.

When he came back and helped her in, he said: “Bad luck. Must have been beastly.”

She lay back.

“Thank you,” she said.

He said, “My name’s Finch. Victor Finch.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

He got in in front and put his chauffeur’s cap on again. He drove on.

All the way to Moon’s Green she felt too ill to think or even cry. When they got there she realized that the young man chauffeur had got out, and then, as if she were watching a play that she was too sick to enjoy, she saw first Harvey, then Frany, then Uncle Carteret, come out under the portico and listen to him.

Then Frany came and helped her out; and Uncle Carteret picked her up in her sealskin coat and carried her into the house and upstairs, and she thought how strong his arms were, and that he was saying something most oddly tender and understanding, and then just as she realized it was “Bloody fools, most doctors,” she fainted again.

Mrs. van Geldern telegraphed from Hemel Hempstead and Lady Cable wrote three postcards in succession from Scotland, urging that Bianca should be sent back to the Nursing Home. Josephine van Geldern wrote, “*in confidence*,” underlined, to Frany. Violet Cable wrote to her husband. Violet wrote to Frany. Josephine wrote to Carteret as her “closest surviving male relative.”

But Carteret didn’t answer. And Frany was laconic. To Mrs. van Geldern she typed that Bianca did not wish to be moved. To Lady Cable, five words: “Mrs. Selwyn is with child.”

Violet Cable wrote a postcard to Josephine. “Considering poor Bianca’s condition I am telling Frany to keep her at Moon’s Green until *you* return to Campden Hill.” Josephine telegraphed back to Violet in Scotland from Hemel Hempstead, “Have no reason at all to suppose that Bianca is worse.” Violet, in Scotland, got the secretary where she was staying to telegraph back to Hemel Hempstead: “*Bianca is not worse but enceinte.*”

The post office at Hemel Hempstead took down “ancient” for “*enceinte*.”

Josephine, puzzled, telephoned to Frany at Moon’s Green. And to her seven consecutive questions Frany replied, “Bianca does not wish to be moved.”

Bianca stayed.

It was Carteret who insisted that his wife’s German second cousin and her baby girl should be brought over from Cologne and housed at Moon’s Green. It was he who had answered the letter that came through to his wife a fortnight after the Armistice. The letter said that Lottie and her child were in great poverty, and that her husband had been blinded and would be in hospital for another three months. It was obvious to Carteret, and upsetting to Violet, that Lottie was near starvation. Violet said, “But what will people think? After all, they fought against us.” Carteret, whose hidden grace lay in his failures to apply his general prejudices to particular cases, made all the arrangements for Lottie’s transport. But he agreed with his wife that they could not live in the house or at the Dower House with the convalescents (to whom, said Violet, Lottie and her baby would be “an insult”).

Finally Carteret leased a small furnished house for them at Ebony. He and Bianca found the house and Bianca said it was *gemütlich*, and her uncle, frowning at the German word, said it seemed a healthy situation for the child.

“How old is the child?” said Bianca.

“I’m not certain. About six months, I believe.”

Bianca said, “I remember Lottie singing the *Erkönig* when she stayed with us in Wiltshire, before the War, when she was first with Reinhardt. She was golden and plump, and I remember Father thought her like a Paris Bordone.”

“I believe she was on the stage,” said Carteret.

They were walking away from the little house towards the motor. He turned back once more to look at it. Bianca wondered what prompted him to say, “I shouldn’t mind living there myself.” She glanced at his face: the hard grey eyes, the prawn-tinted cheeks and chin that shaded into the chiseled complacent lips.

“Rather jolly,” he said to the white stucco tranquil little façade, with its four sash windows below, five above, and the fanlight over the door. Bianca wondered whether everyone secretly kept a life they might have had; as a childless woman may set apart and lock a room with toys in it, and a high fender, and a rocking-horse.

As they got into the motor he said, “Of course once I can get her money out of Germany she’ll have to pay back all these expenses.”

Moon’s Green might have been a gigantic doll’s house brought from the Netherlands by William of Orange and deposited, on his way to Westminster, on the Kentish slope that rose above the marshes on the isle of Oxney.

The steep roof, the white portico, the Madeira-red bricks, the white-framed windows of the façade flanked by symmetrical cedars, appeared both solid and fantastic. It was a “gentleman’s” mansion—serene, handsome, and prosperous. But it had also (Bianca and Charmian had seen this one winter dusk) two hooks on the west corner which, when lifted, let the façade swing back, revealing the hall with Harvey, perfectly lifelike, laying the letters out upon the lacquer chest; the drawing room containing, besides Lady Cable, playing bridge with three guests, a cocker spaniel, a chandelier, Charles II settees, and an Adam chimneypiece in proportion; the library, on the left of the hall, in which a Lord Cable in a shooting jacket was reading his favorite *Three Musketeers*, while Frany entered the other doorway, from the business room, carrying a bowl of chrysanthemums. Upstairs, you could see the stairs disappearing from the back of the hall and the banisters reappearing on the landing above; the schoolroom with Ruth at her desk, straight above her mother’s head, and Miss Faber sitting on her fender and powdering her nose with blue powder; Peter’s room littered with books and Peter cross-legged on the floor reading three of them; the mauve spare room with Alice unpacking trunks; the yellow spare room with a female guest and a maid hooking her up; the dressing room (on the west corner next to the top hook) of the King’s suite; and upstairs again Charmian’s room with three pictures, of Mozart, Keats, and Florence Nightingale, hung in a series above the bed; and Mademoiselle’s little room, where, two ceilings above Lord Cable reading the *Three Musketeers*, she was reading *Jude the Obscure*.

When Bianca and Charmian had explained to Peter (it was in the Christmas holidays of 1916) about the “doll’s house,” he had contributed the suggestion that Miss Faber, instead of being on the schoolroom fender, was

in the bathroom. (Because there was at this time a schoolroom mystery called “What does Miss Phyllis Faber do in the bathroom?”) Anyway, Peter’s part of the description began, “In the exquisitely lifelike second-floor bathroom Miss Phyllis Faber . . .”

Bianca forced herself to get up every morning, and Frany made her come for walks to the village to buy stamps or interview an underhousemaid’s mother or see how the alterations were getting on in the village hall.

They went in mackintoshes, taking the bigger dogs. It made a three-mile walk, one and a half miles each way. Once Bianca had managed to dress, she felt less sick walking than staying in. She liked the rain on her face, and keeping step with Frany’s scrunching tread dulled her nerves. There were tattered election posters all over the village and posters of Lloyd George outside the Mission Hall, and the cars and tradesmen’s carts and vans that went by, splashing mud, had red or green or yellow streamers and “VOTE FOR — —” stuck on the windscreens. Bianca asked Frany one day how she would vote.

“I shall not vote. Women were not intended to vote.”

During the election campaign the house was full of people. Bianca didn’t consciously know one from another. There were pretty women who came down in big motors, and talked hard, and large elderly men in ulsters and moustaches, and very young men from Oxford and Cambridge with motor bicycles and small sports cars, and hustling, anxious, dyspeptic little election agents of both sexes who were given the attic rooms and ate two helpings of everything and called Ruth “Miss Ruth” and bullied when they were out canvassing. Violet Cable came back from Scotland for the last week and she and Carteret spoke at meetings every night. She was wonderful with the women, and told them about the Coalition’s record and Germany being a Criminal in simple terms which they could understand. The candidate would come in from time to time for a hurried meal, or a whiskey and soda, and one of his confabulations, weighty in manner however trite in matter, with his helpers and supporters. He would stand in the hall, not pausing to take off his British warm, hat in one hand, whiskey glass in the other, while his female helpers sidled or slouched (according to their breeding) and Carteret Cable nodded and muttered inapposite “hear, hears”; and the young man from the *Kent Messenger* in bicycle clips wrote down in shorthand that Mr. — —’s election campaign was in full swing and that the hall at Moon’s

Green contained among other *objets d'art* a portrait of Lady Cable by Bellini. (He had misunderstood Boldini.)

Every day the atmosphere in the house grew more excited. More people came, more cars drove up, more meals were served to an increasing stream of fast-munching, furiously busy, incoherently thinking people. And every day the war-shocked countryside, unnerved by peace, fed with rhetoric, intoxicated with prophecies, maddened by the press, tantalized by the politicians, grew more violent in hatred, more sanctimonious in triumph, more responsive to the suggestions incessantly blared at them in print and in speech—suggestions of fear and cupidity and revenge.

On polling day Bianca drove round with Frany to fetch the voters from their cottages. Friendly people: most of them with coats not thick enough for the blue-misted rheumatic English winter; some of them cheerful and a few of them trenchant in speech. They enjoyed their ride and thanked her for it (Frany knew most of them well). It didn't seem possible to Bianca that these people, who got, on the whole, so bravely and decently through life, whose good sense and kindness were so much of England, should be, conceivably, the British Electorate clamoring to "hang the Kaiser."

She said something of the sort to Frany. They had taken the last voters home and swung in the dark off the road past the lodge and up the drive.

Frany quoted her Kipling:—

"For frantic boast and foolish word,
Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord!"

When the election was over Mademoiselle Houville went home. She had stayed until after polling day so as to keep Charmian away from the hypothetical charms of visiting politicians. She was to go to her family in Auvergne. Her brother, who had been missing, was now believed to be killed, and she wished to be with her mother for a time. She was to return to the Cables after Christmas.

Violet Cable went to London, Carteret to Brussels, and the girls were left in the country. Frany came down from London every two days. A party was expected for Christmas and two of the spare rooms were to be done up "to celebrate the peace," Violet Cable said. Frany told Bianca that she was to leave on December 16 and join her mother in London. Charmian protested that Peter wouldn't be back from Eton by then and so Bianca wouldn't see him.

Bianca didn't get "upset" any more.

The idea of the baby hadn't touched her emotionally, but automatically it had given her courage and steadied her nerves. She didn't either want or not want the baby. But she settled down to live for it. Emotionally the phrase "Richard's child" meant nothing to her. His child was unreal to her because it was something he had never thought about. Just as in the opposite sense the places he loved were so real in her heart: the places that they had been to together—the sea in Dorset, the high ground at Edgehill, the trees at Savernake. And as the poetry that he needed as a habit (just as he needed, all in the same proportion, affection and fresh air) had become part of her,—Rupert Brooke and Meredith and Philip Sidney,—so his special curiosities had become habitual in her thoughts, making her aware of birds and Karl Marx and cricket averages and Gordon Craig.

When she was alone she tried to think easily and steadily about Richard, and his life as she had shared it; unaware of a mechanism in her mind which, impersonally registering feelings, photographing impressions, automatically docketing the emotional sum of each crisis, would in another ten or twenty years have accumulated behind her thoughts, something which might be called her "character"; which would have created in her a basis for unconscious reference; an essential self, in which the poems of Meredith, the ironies of *Kapital*, the woods at Savernake, had long ceased to be Richard, whom she had loved, and become Bianca, who had loved him.

When Lottie came she was a blonde, scraggy, hollow-eyed woman of no age. She seemed to resent everybody and everything that was done for her; and the baby girl had too big a forehead and a waxy skin, and her long, tired, angry crying went on most of the day.

But the second time Bianca went to see Lottie at the little house at Ebony she found her sitting by the nursery fire with the baby (Anna) in her arms; and Bianca saw her expression before she had time to change it. It was a look of such desolation and fear that Bianca ran and knelt down beside her, saying, "Lottie, *please!*"

Lottie didn't take her hand away. She looked from the sleeping baby to Bianca.

Bianca said, "Things'll get better now, Lottie."

(Lottie's collarbones showed up in the firelight, and Bianca remembered her plump milk-white throat with its Paris Bordone russet patch of sunburn.)

Lottie's hand slackened in hers.

“—Soon your husband will be better and you'll be able,” Bianca said steadily, “to go back to him.”

“He will never see again,” said Lottie. “Yesterday I had a letter.” She snatched away her hand.

Bianca got up uncertainly.

“I'm so sorry.”

Lottie's anger flickered out. She said, “Do you remember what our own general said? ‘*So ein frischer, fröhlicher Krieg.*’”

“Oh, Lottie, I'm sorry.”

Perhaps Lottie realized Bianca suddenly: as a girl in black clothes and muddy shoes, her hair in such soft brown curls, and her very young mouth set in a perpetual obstinacy of self-control. Perhaps she remembered, abruptly, in pity, what she'd been told, and not listened to, about Bianca's husband being killed. Or, in this warm sweet room with the silver-dripping rain on the window, and in Bianca's quiet presence, she could feel, at any rate for a moment, an emotion that wasn't bitter, or lonely, or afraid; but summed itself up in the confession (made after four endlessly enduring years):—

“—*Ich bin so müde . . .* I am so tired, Bianca.”

Bianca went to London three days before Christmas. As she drove out of Victoria Station and passed the Grosvenor Hotel she realized that it was only two months since she and Richard had stayed there.

All the shops were lit up and crowded with people buying for the first Peace Christmas.

Mrs. van Geldern was waiting for her daughter in the drawing room. She held out her arms and said, “My darling child.” Bianca knew that her mother really meant to make her feel her sympathy and welcome. (She noticed that she was in mourning.) But she said:—

“Oh, Mummie, you've had new chintzes.”

“Peace chintzes,” said her mother, delighted that Bianca had noticed them at once.

Letter from Charmian Cable at Moon's Green to her cousin Bianca Selwyn in London:—

MOON'S GREEN
December 28th

Bianca darling, this letter is pretty nearly written with a nail and my blood as there has been a gigantic row and Peter and I are outlawed, ostracized, and what not, and I am shut up feeding off trays and going for walks with Miss Faber alone, and Peter has been sent to a tutor in Hampshire! It all started with the *Picture of Dorian Gray* because Father confiscated it from Peter, talking about “touching pitch,” and then they were shut in the gunroom for an hour having a row about Oscar Wilde (Peter wouldn't tell me it all, but he came out shaking like he does, and Father squinting with anger). After that Peter said nothing until we were having supper in the schoolroom on Boxing Night. Miss Faber was away and Ruth in bed with one of “her” bilious attacks, and so Peter and I were alone. Peter ate nothing and then said suddenly: “Is Callendar out?” And when I said I knew she had gone to the rustic revelings in Wittersham he said, “Do you know which is Mother's box of scarves and veils?” I did, but he looked hectic (like the time when he made the bonfire and Savonarola'd the foxes' masks and the antlers)! So at first I wouldn't tell. Then he made me and I got the whole box of Mother's chiffon scarves and when Peter said “I want seven of them” of course I guessed his sinister plot, though not exactly how he was going to do it!!! Anyway, what he did do was to get Mother's rouge and everything and make up his face and put coal dust and water on his eyelashes and lids, and put on my best pair of drawers with lace on and nothing else except the Mystic Veils over that. Then we crept downstairs and he fetched the death mask of Sir Walter Scott from the library and put it on a salver and then we went into the blue anteroom and we could hear everybody in the drawing room talking, as the men had just come in from the dining room. Then Peter said I must play the pianola, and got out the “Venus on Earth” waltz. Then (you know all the lights of the drawing room are in the anteroom) he switched out *all* the lights and I started playing wildly, and he burst into the drawing room by the firelight there and did his dance, and there was a *fearful* commotion, but he

got all his veils off and proffered Sir W. Scott's death mask to Father on the salver before anyone found the lights. And then, you can *imagine*, there was *everybody* (including Lady Bellingdon, the Sinclairs, and Ivan Benz and old Trevor Topham, and about twenty others), and Father speechless and Peter in my drawers, rouged and laughing absolutely hysterically. And me being summoned by Mother from my humble post at the pianola!!! Most of the grown-ups behaved divinely and Lady Bellingdon was *sweet* and *implored* Father to forgive us, and old Topham positively hung round Peter's neck and said he was "born to be a second Nijinsky." However, as you know Mother and Father, you can guess what they said—Mother was icy to me and said she supposed I liked the idea of being the talk of London "in this sort of way" the year before I came out! And heaven knows what Father said to Peter the morning he left for this tutor, because he got Peter to cry, and Peter went off in the car, I saw him from the window, looking as if he was going to kill himself! Mother talks about sending me to a French finishing school at Wimbledon, but I told her I should go mad and run away, and that I couldn't endure that horrible shut-in-a-nunnery feeling again— So I simply don't know *what's* going to happen. Only one person is pleased and smug and that is Ruth! Luckily she is staying with her dreary friend Betty at Midhurst. Only unluckily, also, Mademoiselle Houville being away still, I bear the full brunt of Miss Faber, who is in a queer state herself, and locks herself in her room to read letters, and starts giggling about nothing and can't stop, and is making herself two new blue silk camisoles, and embroidering sprays of heather on them.

By the way, I hear Mademoiselle is going to stay with you for New Year on her way back here.

Well, darling, what all this stuff and nonsense is leading up to is, do you think that you could wangle *any* way your idea of me coming to Switzerland—as you suggested before you went? Because I think really Mother might be glad of the idea, if you said "It won't be very amusing for her, I'm afraid." Of course Father may be the snag, but one can never tell with him. Anyway, I do beseech you to try; for you know that I long to be with *you*, even more than I long to be away from home! And that is saying a good deal!

So very, *very* much love. And you know I don't write anything except nonsense. But you know also how much I think about you? Don't you?

A hug from
CHARMIAN

Mademoiselle Houville arrived, on New Year's Eve, in time for Mrs. van Geldern to tell her that she need not change for dinner. "Any simple little dress you happen to have. What you have on would do. Bianca and I are living a very quiet life"—she dropped her voice—"as you can understand. I shall only put on a tea gown."

Mademoiselle Houville changed her dress, and Josephine wondered to Bianca afterwards that she could afford to have two afternoon dresses.

At dinner Josephine, in grey chiffon and chinchilla, asked Mademoiselle Houville questions about her visit to her family in Auvergne. Had they celebrated Christmas at all? Or had they perhaps, too, preferred to ignore it this year? How old was her mother? And was she, considering everything, in good health?

After dinner Josephine, elated by her sense of the occasion,—“I've always felt there was something romantic about New Year's Eve,”—had one of her sparkling phases of charm and prettiness; and was so engaging (pouring out the coffee herself, sipping just half a glass of brandy—and later, in the drawing room, singing Schubert and Reynaldo Hahn) that the two younger women, quiet and haunted each by her sadness, felt how ungracious they were in response to her grace, and how dully they rewarded her vivacity. But at eleven, suddenly remembering that ten was her bedtime, and that she must “avoid late hours and crowded rooms,” she broke into good-nights and rapid hopes for the New Year for them all, and then, her spirits still waltzing, hurried to her room, completely unaware how solitary her gayety had been, and calling back, “How I envy you two being able to sit up until midnight! I'm afraid I shall have to receive the New Year in bed! But I shall put on my best nightgown especially for the occasion.” And with this silvery and laughing naughtiness Josephine closed her door.

Bianca went to the piano and shut it. Mademoiselle Houville glanced at the clock.

“I shall get dressed now.”

“You're going to Mass?”

They spoke in French; the change of language was a relief.

“Yes. And it’s always crowded.”

“I’ll give you a key.”

“Thank you.”

Peter Cable put his father’s letter in the pigeonhole of his writing desk, beside the slab of Mexican chocolate and the postcard of the Opéra sent him by his mother.

His father had written again about having him coached for cricket before the summer half.

Peter felt angry but inferior. He poked the fire.

He knew what his father felt about his cricket just as clearly as if Carteret Cable, instead of maintaining on the matter a forced, rather hard-eyed optimism, had said, “In this at least you might not have disappointed me”; the “at least” implying all the occasions on which Peter, since he was five, had, by being nervously but defiantly himself, failed to be his father’s son. These occasions, such as Peter’s refusal at six to enjoy a Punch and Judy show; at eight to speak to the Archbishop of Canterbury (because he was appointed by that bad man Henry VIII); at nine to go out with the guns (and see Father and his friends “murdering away”); his scene about preferring Charlotte Yonge to Ballantyne; the times when he had ridden with hysterical courage in the hunting field, and then coming home and being sick—all these occasions had left in his father’s mind an accumulated feeling of disappointment; and in Peter’s a sense of being perversely misunderstood.

When he was fourteen his father had found him reading *The Ring and the Book*. “If you want to read poetry, read first-class stuff, like Shakespeare or Milton or—or some of Tennyson . . .”

“Why not this too?”

“Browning? He’s obscure and sentimental. And not for your age, anyway.”

After that he and Charmian read it together in the apple loft. It was the Christmas holidays of 1916. They huddled in rugs, snow down in the yard, and in the loft a freezing apple smell, and Charmian’s voice breaking on:—

“She started up, stood erect, face to face
With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
By the window all a flame with morning-red,
He the black figure, the opprobrious blur
Against all peace and joy and light and life.”

Now, putting more coal on his fire, Peter wondered, if he took trouble about his cricket in the Easter holidays, whether his father would let him go, in the summer, with the Blyths to Switzerland. He had always wanted to see snow mountains. His father had ideas about not going abroad until you were eighteen. So far the question hadn't arisen, because of the War. And before the War he was too young to want to go.

Peter wondered how this plan of Charmian going with Bianca had been worked.

He looked at his watch. They ought to be here soon. He got down his brushes, thick with hairs and dust, off the top of his bookshelf and brushed his hair carefully in front of the *gesso*-framed glass over the chimneypiece.

Peter liked in theory to look tidy. He used one of the hairbrushes to brush his tail coat. It streaked on more dust, but he didn't notice this. He looked back in the glass to straighten his tie. Above that white, slightly grubby bow and winged collar his face was small and oval, with dark opaque eyes set apart and flat under thin, wide-arched eyebrows.

He had an Elizabethan face. It looked as if it ought to surmount a ruff; the girlish nose, the sweet upper lip closing a little hesitantly on a stubborn underlip, the amber pallor of his coloring, suggested a sixteenth-century portrait on a wooden panel.

He glanced round the room and perfunctorily attempted to tidy it. He put *Richard Feverel* back in the set of Merediths, slipped the *Badminton Diary* into a drawer, and straightened the photographs of the Parthenon that hung on the wall, in a black *passee partout* frame, between a Swaine photograph of his mother in Court dress and a colored reproduction of Cézanne's "Apples."

He wished he had thought of flowers. Bianca would like flowers.

He was glad Charmian was coming with her. He felt afraid of meeting Bianca now. He remembered how beautiful she had looked at her wedding. He was afraid that now she would look different. He couldn't imagine what he would say to her. He thought she wouldn't be Bianca any more, but a tragic person moving about in a shadow.

They came into the room suddenly. And before he had time to realize and go stiff and choked with the shyness for Bianca, she kissed him. And when she drew back he saw that, though she was pale and in a shadow, she was the same person.

He was so glad of her being the same person, and, in the same second, so hurt for her, that he hugged her as if she had come back from a long journey.

“So you *do* use my coal glove,” said Charmian to Peter.

“Oh, Peter, you are *nice*,” Bianca said, so glad of his swift awkward loving her, and moved by the way his small, now so high-up face had winced. (Exactly as, when he was four and she, at nine, was learning to ride a bicycle, he’d seen her cut knee and cried out, agonized, “Call *Jesus*, Bianca! Oh, quick, *quick* call Jesus!”)

Charmian said, “Did you get my last letter with the code ending?”

He said: “Yes. But you ought to have known Ruth would tell. She always does. And you always go trusting her.” It was unlikely, he pointed out, that Ruth would want to help Charmian clothe and subsidize the village whore. And on top of the Salome row at Christmas, of course Father would be furious.

“You’re lucky Mother’s away and that it’s only Father that Ruth told. What did he say, anyway?”

Charmian’s archangel face was stern between a grey squirrel cap and collar. Her voice was angry, but not ironical.

“Father accused me of reading Galsworthy.”

They went across the bridge and down the street to Brown’s. Peter had reserved a table. He ordered two Indian teas, and knew Bianca’s preference for China. And three sausages and bacon.

Bianca said that she would rather not have sausages.

Charmian looked at her wisely and understandingly. They had decided not to tell Peter about the baby because he would feel too emotional about it. And Charmian had said, “It must be just a quiet *steadily* lovely thing for us to look forward to.” Peter could be told at the end of the summer half (when he wouldn’t have any more cricket to be upset). Charmian, taking a crumpet, knew exactly the things Peter would feel: about the danger, and the sort of sanctifying of Bianca; about Bianca being strange but still dearer and

lovelier to them; and about the baby, because of its tragedy, being like a very young creature brought by Bianca to them out of a dark wilderness—a mysteriously young thing to be fostered by them all.

“Here are the sausages,” said Peter.

Chairman often thought about the baby. . . . Secretly it was over and over again frightening to her that in the core of Bianca’s whiteness and tiredness and grief there was a Self, waiting only for months-in-time and a small unshapely body-in-space to come alive. Thinking about it made Charmian feel bits of poetry (that she never wrote); fragments about Bianca, still and in pain between a Dark Angel and a Great Light.

“Eat your sausages while they’re hot,” said Peter.

Charmian put down her crumpet. Her fingers were buttery.

Bianca asked him if he had read *Joan and Peter*. He said “Yes,” but that Wells always roused him to feeling bourgeois and like his father, and glad that he didn’t know Intellectual-People-in-the-Suburbs. He said:—

“I shouldn’t like to live in a world run by Fabian cads out of Wells’s books.”

Bianca said, “But *Joan and Peter* is a good book, about real people, getting their teeth into a real life.”

Peter said it showed how unfastidious they were to swallow it.

“Peter’s being Pomandery,” said Charmian. (Their phrase for any self-conscious manifestation of distaste.) She never would admit that Peter held his anti-democratic views seriously; or that he didn’t believe, in his paradoxical yet childishly sensitive heart, in the perfectibility of man.

Bianca said, “I’ve brought you down a book by a man called Proust which I think you *will* like!”

“Oh, *Proust!*” Peter said eagerly.

Bianca said, “It’s exciting. I like it.”

“It’s disgusting,” said Charmian. “It’s like a monkey looking on itself for fleas.”

“David Blyth,” said Peter, “says it’s simply extraordinary.”

Bianca said, “Who’s David Blyth?”

“He’s Peter’s new greatest friend,” said Charmian.

Peter colored. He spoke faster. "I'd like you to meet him, Bianca. You and he like the same books. I got to know him well in the summer, over a debate. He's awfully clever and an extremely good painter. I've got one of his sketches in my study. I'll show you afterwards."

"I'd like to meet him."

Charmian said dreamily, "I tell you what he looks like. He's like the Watts 'Sir Galahad' in the nursery bathroom."

"Not a bit," said Peter. "He's much more Greek in type."

Charmian took a doughnut. Since the Armistice she hadn't stopped wanting sweet and buttery food.

"You said in your letter that he was going to Oxford in the autumn."

"Yes," said Peter. "To the House." He became silent. Charmian said, after a pause, "How far is Oxford from here?"

Peter heard her slowly. Then he looked happier and said, "Well, not more than thirty miles, I suppose." He turned to Bianca and smiled. His smile quivered in his eyes and mouth and went out, leaving his look opaque again, and dark, and questioning.

When they came out of Brown's it was dusk and raining. As they went back to Peter's house, all three getting wet under Bianca's umbrella, Peter wanted to know how his father had consented to Charmian's going with Bianca; and Charmian said, "He's so fussed about the Peace Conference that he isn't really interested about what I do. I asked him the week-end that the *Ziegenbock* was staying and he said 'I suppose you can.'" The *Ziegenbock* was the children's name for Sir Ivan Benz, who looked like a malicious and white-bearded goat and was a partner in Cable-Bensley.

When they went up to Peter's study a boy was sitting by the fire making toast. Peter said "Oh, David," eagerly, and introduced him to Bianca.

The boy got up with the toasting fork in one hand, and said, "I'm so sorry, I'd no idea."

Peter urged him to stay, and David Blyth explained that his own fire wouldn't toast properly, and that his fag was an inexpert toaster. Blyth had a sweet but detached manner, pale green eyes and velvety aquiline features. He impressed Bianca as likable, and a good friend for Peter. Peter fetched a

portfolio and showed them one of David's water colors. It had charm and sensitive coloring.

As they sat round eating chocolate, while David made two more neat bits of toast, Peter watched him admiringly. He seemed unaware of Peter's admiration, and divided his attention quite simply between his deft toast making and his conversation with Bianca. He told her that he hoped to paint when he went with his family to the Pyrenees, at Easter. Bianca asked him if he liked traveling.

"Yes, but not with my mother." He said this in such an ingenuous way that it sounded pleasant. He added, "I want Peter to come with us. Not that it'll be much fun for him, as I shall be busy painting."

Peter said, "I know there isn't really any chance of my going. Unless," he went on, turning quickly to David, "you could enthral my mother when she comes down here."

David hung up the toasting fork, and said diffidently, "I'm sure I couldn't."

Then Peter changed the conversation to modern French authors, and made David say what he thought about Cocteau, and Proust and Valery Larbaud. What he said was always critical and sometimes amusing. Whenever he expressed a distaste the look in his green eyes was very sweet.

When he had gone and Bianca had agreed with Peter and Charmian about him, she asked how old he was.

"He'll be eighteen in June," Peter said.

Bianca remembered Richard's eighteenth birthday (the week after they first met) and the dance at his father's house at Farringdon.

She remembered the night garden and Richard's voice and the syringa and the dark grass. Richard's voice saying:—

"You should wish! It's a new moon."

And she'd said, "I have wished," and turned back towards the lighted house, wishing that he would love her.

Josephine van Geldern visited her sister Violet to protest against Charmian's accompanying Bianca to Ascona. She said that the doctors wished Bianca to have a change of air and scene and complete rest from people.

Violet, who was having her nails manicured, said, “Then why are *you* going?”

Josephine said that she needed a change of air and scene and complete rest too. Violet knew that her sister’s real fear was that Charmian would develop measles. Because ten years before she and Louis and Bianca had taken Charmian with them to Dolgelley, where Charmian had developed measles. So Violet said:—

“You *know* that Charmian won’t have measles.”

“Of *course* not! Not that one can’t have it several times. You remember poor Judge Emery.”

Violet always pretended not to.

“All the same,” said Josephine “—and it will be very dull for her.”

Violet was in no doubt that Charmian must go. “She has had a great deal too much excitement lately. The whole war atmosphere has been extremely upsetting to young girls. Even the ones who weren’t ‘out.’ Cécile Scheurer was telling me the same thing the other day in Paris. She told me that she sent their girl, Marthe, away to Switzerland to their villa near Geneva, for most of last year. She told me several extraordinary cases of young, perfectly well-brought-up girls completely *détraquées* by the air raids and the sound of guns.”

“And not enough fats, I’ve no doubt. Sir Arnold Latham was telling me only yesterday that he is convinced the lack of fats for growing children has done incalculable—he said ‘incalculable’ harm in these last years—”

“Cécile Scheurer had some *very* peculiar stories,” interrupted Violet. “Her son Louis, you know, is in the *Aviation*, or was, and— No—*not* that varnish stuff! This new idea,” she said to her sister, “is this pink *varnish*! Horrible, I think! But I’m told all the actresses do it.”

“I saw that girl Elsie Janis the other night in *Hello, America*. I thought it very amusing. I’m afraid I went secretly—with Lady Platt-Eresby, without telling Bianca. I shouldn’t like her to think me heartless.”

Violet Cable said, “Lady Platt-Eresby’s boy, Harold, is very charming, I believe. I hear he’s going into his poor father’s office on the Stock Exchange.”

“The boy was there too, the other night,” said Josephine. “His teeth stick forward—like this.”

Violet wasn't amused. The manicurist bent her head.

“When his uncle dies,” said Violet Cable, “Harold Platt-Eresby will have Fayrings.”

PART II

At three minutes to four Marthe Scheurer took off her black alpaca overall, glanced at her hands, picked up the volume of Racine, and descended from the room still known as *la Nursery* to her mother's boudoir.

Her mother was, as usual at four o'clock in the afternoon, sitting in one of the armchairs by the fire. This wood fire set on brass dogs lent a quality paradoxically English to the room, which was copied, even to the goddesses with the lyre above the door, and the gilt and marble clock on the chimneypiece, from the boudoir of Marie Antoinette at Fontainebleau.

Marthe sat down on the chair opposite her mother. They both sat upright. They were alike in the narrow oval of their faces, pale with the solid transparency of shells, in their wide-open Saxe-blue eyes and *blanc-cendré* hair. But Marthe's hair was plaited in a thick plait tied with a black velvet riband; while her mother's was coiled closely round her head and secured by pins of light tortoise shell. Their thin wrists and slight fingers were alike too. But Madame Scheurer wore rings, one a large ruby cut square.

She put aside *Le Temps*. Her eyes smiled at her daughter. Her mouth remained grave.

"It is Act III to-day?"

"Yes, Maman."

Marthe opened the volume. Just as she was about to read she lifted her head and exclaimed:—

"Oh, Maman?"

"What's the matter?"

"Maman, I have had a letter to-day, by the post of two o'clock, from my friend Charmian."

"Charmian Cable? What does she say?" There was the faintest expansion of the nostrils of Cécile Scheurer's short aquiline nose.

Marthe hesitated. She was too well trained to show embarrassment. But she chose her words.

"It's a fairly complicated situation, Maman."

“Explain it.” The softness in Madame Scheurer’s voice was for her daughter. “But you know,” she added, “that Charmian is for me the least pleasing of the Cables; and that I never wished her to be, especially, your friend.”

“Yes, Maman.” Hardly perceptible in the fabric of Marthe’s ingenuous yet polished manner there was obstinacy. “Yes, Maman. I know it.”

“Well then?” Cécile Scheurer’s left eyebrow slanted a little higher than the other. It was a trick of expression betraying, to those who knew her well, a sudden wariness—a mental *en garde*.

“You remember, Maman, the niece of Lady Cable, whose husband was so tragically killed ten days after the marriage.”

“Bianca? Naturally I remember. She married a young Selwyn, son of the General Selwyn. His mother was, I believe, a distant relation of my mother’s family in Washington.”

“Yes, Maman. Well, it seems that this poor Madame Selwyn has been ill all this winter. And now it has been arranged that she shall go to Switzerland and Lady Cable has permitted her to take Charmian with her, as a companion. They are going to Ascona, it seems.” Marthe paused. She breathed a little deeper. The very slight change in her color was like a momentary and far-off reflection of a sunset. “What Charmian asks, Maman, is that I should ask you if you would permit them to stay here, with us, for a day or two on their way through Paris.” She breathed out now.

Her mother was wearing a rope and tassel of seed pearls. She picked up the tassel and gave it an oblique glance.

“Why has not Violette Cable written to me herself in this matter?—And your father saw Lord Cable here last week—when he came over to see Lloyd George. And he also said nothing on this matter.”

“Charmian also says that she thinks that her aunt intends to telephone to you.”

“That I do not believe. Violette will not telephone.” Her tone, though mild, held irony. It implied that Violette Cable did not waste money except on herself. She dropped the pearl tassel. “In any case,” she said, “I will think about it. Now let us go on with our play.” She took a marker out of the volume on her knee.

“Où tendait ce discours qui m’a glacé d’effroi?
Phèdre, toujours en proie à sa fureur extrême,
Veut-elle s’accuser et se perdre elle-même?”

She handed Marthe the book.

“Dieu! Que dira le Roi? Quel funeste poison
L’amour a répandu sur toute sa maison. . . .”

When Marthe had finished the play, her mother read aloud to her one of La Bruyère’s *Caractères*. It seemed to Marthe that her mother read with delicately controlled pleasure the passage describing the peasants as brutes standing in the fields.

Marthe never understood her mother’s hatred of “the people.” It wasn’t simply that, with her acutely developed sense of the past, she could not “forgive them the Revolution.” Nor, even, that Cécile’s mother’s American ancestry was Southern and intensely, consciously, aristocratic. . . . Once Louis and Marthe had gone up to *la Nursery* after a luncheon when their mother had told Monsieur Théodore Plon, the Socialist Député, that “the people” were differentiated from “us” because they “had no souls,” and Louis had said, “Maman hates the proletariat because she, and we, live on their dead bodies.” And then he had added,—it was his last term at the Lycée,—“Though on that ground she ought to hate me too. Because it’s quite possible that I shall be killed, to enrich my father.” Louis had gone to the window and stood staring out up the wide Avenue towards the Bois “—My father—and Lord Cable, and all their good friends.”

At five o’clock exactly Cécile Scheurer closed the volume. Marthe stood up.

Her mother said:—

“And I, also, have something to tell you. Something that will please you.”

“Oh! Maman?”

“I have just received a telegram from Louis, from New York, to tell us that he sails to-day, and will arrive at Cherbourg on Saturday of next week.”

“Oh, *Maman!*”

Her mother smiled, but added: “It is just like Louis, that. For six weeks we have had no letter. And now he telegraphs with such affection that one would imagine he thought of nothing but his family.”

“Oh, but Maman, you know how devoted he is, above all to you!”

Cécile Scheurer’s glance rested on Louis’s photograph taken last year in his airman’s uniform.

“Yes, my dear. I know it.” She hesitated, and then formulated an impression that she had, as yet, not expressed even to her husband. “But—he is above all an artist, Louis . . . That is to say, his heart absents itself, from time to time, and becomes a part of his imagination.”

Marthe was too loyal to her idea of Louis to agree. She said with her innocent deferential severity, “He has so many interests, Maman.” All the same Marthe understood. He could be hard,—cruel sometimes,—but she didn’t like thinking so.

She went up to her mother, who kissed her on both cheeks. She was inwardly excited by the news, and when Maman said, as she spun round to go, “As to Charmian, I will think about this matter,” Marthe answered perfunctorily:—

“Thank you, Maman.”

“Miss Clark! *Miss Clark!*”

“Yes, Marthe?”

“*Miss Clark!* Maman says that Louis is coming back next week. She had a telegram this morning from him, he is sailing to-day, he arrives on Saturday next week—”

“Let’s hope he won’t be blown up by a mine,” said Miss Clark. (Pronouncing it “main.”) “They say there are a lot of explosive ‘mains’ still about in the Atlantic.”

“For goodness’ sake don’t let’s think about such a thing!” said Marthe, who had, after three years, got used to Miss Clark’s automatic pessimism, but had not lived enough among the English to realize that it was merely one of the symptoms of Miss Clark’s gentility.

Nora Clark had, to her great satisfaction, been imported by Madame as an English Lady, to be, in the mildest sense, “governess” to Marthe, who at fourteen had been deprived of her and Louis’s adored English Nannie. It had been assumed that what Marthe then needed was a Miss who could escort her to and from her classes while they were in Paris; and when they were in

Switzerland to accompany her, outside the grounds of the Villa Scheurer, along the pacific shores of Lac Léman.

Louis came back gayer and even more restless than when he went.

To Marthe he seemed even more vital, more lean, and more unhappy.

His mother found him in better spirits but too fond of “cock-tails,” a form of alcoholic stimulant which she considered barbarian, and had never seen. His father observed him with interest, read the typed collection of sketches (in English) which he had written while he was away, and remarked that “*Louis se forme—*”

Louis had long limbs and wide heavy shoulders, but moved as swiftly and lightly as a kitten. His face was lean from nerves, his chin truculent, his mouth ironical; his eyes under peaked eyebrows were sombre and slanting as an Asiatic’s. But he smiled suddenly and radiantly, like a child.

Louis’s smile made people feel warm. It lit their affections and charmed their fancy. It made them feel that he, candidly, with a touching innocent spontaneity, liked them; that he wanted them to like him—even to help him. Then his smile would blank out, and his impassive eyes and chiseled secretive lips were as unfriendly as a Buddha. A Buddha without fat; an idol without repose; remoteness without calm; mysticism without peace.

Louis brought back dance records, American slang, fifteen new shirts, a case of books about the color problem, and the habit of a fresh orchid every day for his buttonhole. He played the records to Marthe up in *la Nursery*, and made her dance with him, talking to her all the time about *zoning* and steel-and-glass architecture, and Henry Ford, and the Bowery, and low dives, and mixed populations, and Marilyn Miller, and the Theatre Guild, and shooting alligators, and burlesque shows. And he said the orchid was because what was the use of being so darned rich if you didn’t spend it? *Spend it!!!* And then he sat down at *la Nursery* piano, and when Miss Clark came in he played her his “Syncopated Cradle Song for a War Baby,” which began:—

“A Priest or Divine
May turn blood into wine,
But Scheurer and Cable
Are magically able
(The pistols they’ve sold!)
To turn blood into gold—
Slee-eep, my Little One
Sleep, my Brittle One—”

Miss Clark said “O Moosier Louee!” and stood giggling and staring at his delicate but steely-strong fingers. He was rather drunk, for he had had several cocktails mixed from the bottles (locked away from Maman) in his new wardrobe trunk. . . .

The Scheurers’ motor slowed, and sped again, through the dusk of the Champs-Élysées lit by yellow pearls.

Charmian was quiet with excitement.

“Oh, Bianca . . .” lowering her voice, lest they should fail to hear each note, each echo, of this music that was France.

And Bianca, leaning back in the Scheurers’ motor, her mind dull, her heart deadened, her body tired, reacting at the same moment to Charmian’s whisper and to the discomfort of the slipping of the Scheurers’ sable rug from her chilly knees, opened her eyes.

It was in this moment that, grasping down for the rug, glancing out of the window of the motor, breathing perhaps a little deeper and so actually tasting the air, she felt an emotion that swerved, like a small brilliant bird across the darkness of her mind, its plumage brushing a phosphorescent trail; a new emotion that sprang suddenly from an obscure and so far undiscovered place in her, that had the flare of a passion, the swiftness of an impulse. For in that second in which her hand grasped the rug and her eyes saw the February dusk of 1919 in the Champs-Élysées, she, who knew Paris, felt Paris for the first time.

The sensation, though sweet, was too swift to impress her then. And as she leaned back, pulling the rug close about her, she hardly knew what had happened to her; or why she was telling Charmian to look back . . . “Look back, Charmian, at the Place de la Concorde.”

The white house, in the Avenue du Bois, set back behind wrought-iron gates, had been built in 1904 by an Argentine, who, when the last segment of parquet had been laid in the ballroom, was recalled suddenly to Buenos Aires and death in politics.

The Philippe Scheurers had bought the house, allowing their doubts of its taste (Cécile Scheurer had felt at the time that there was distinctly too much marble and too many *salles de bain*) to give way to such considerations as perfect nurseries; the nearness to the Bois, and the garden in which Louis, who was delicate then, and had been prescribed an “open-air life,” could have his lessons.

Within its sanctuary of scrolled iron, and trees, the house had kept an over-rich whiteness—that *rastaquouère* whiteness which makes the clothes of Argentine women too smart and the teeth of their men too bright.

Charmian said, as they drove up: “It makes Portland Place seem very homespun.”

In the columned hall two Sisters of Charity were sitting on a marble bench. There was a fountain in the centre of the hall whose basin was filled with brown paper parcels.

Marthe came from behind two pillars. She wore a dark blue blouse and a petaled collar of *broderie anglaise*. She welcomed them gravely and warmly, turned to speak for a moment to the two nuns, and then led Bianca and Charmian through an inner hall to a *salon* beyond. She spoke English.

“I am so glad to see you. Maman will be here in a moment. We have been expecting you with such pleasure.”

She begged them, with a little gesture of her hand, to be seated. She asked them, in conventional phrases, but with great sweetness of manner, about their journey. She had, on their arrival, shaken hands with Bianca, accompanying this greeting with a just perceptible curtsy; and had kissed Charmian on both cheeks. Except for that, she wouldn't, by seeming in any way familiar with Charmian, make Mrs. Selwyn feel less known, and therefore, perhaps, less welcomed. She addressed herself chiefly to Bianca. She sat with her hands linked on her lap, very straight up in a chair, designed (as were its fellows and forbears) for a society that differentiated between sitting up and lying down. (Bianca, squaring her own shoulders, noticed Charmian's sprawl.)

A footman brought in a tray.

“Will you have some *porto*?”

Charmian said “yes” to everything. Sipping, she said, “I wish my French was half as good as your English, Marthe!”

“Mine isn’t nearly as good as Louis’s. He speaks also American now. Since he came from New York.”

“New York?” said Charmian. Her eagerness made Bianca remember that Harry Kramer was there, on a concert tour.

Marthe said to Bianca, “I think that you did once meet my brother Louis in England?”

“Yes,” said Bianca, and, “I hear he was an aviator?”

Madame Scheurer came in.

“You must excuse me. You must please forgive me for not being there when you arrived.”

She sat down by Bianca, having given Charmian a welcome that was exactly measured. She asked Bianca the same questions about their journey that Marthe had asked; only with more precision. And would they not have preferred tea to port? Surely?

Bianca thought that Madame Scheurer and her daughter had the same face painted, respectively, by Holbein and Botticelli.

Bianca said that they had had tea on the train.

“And the notices prayed you not to *gaspiller le pain!*” broke in Charmian.

“Really?” said Madame Scheurer, and to Bianca, “I have not been in the train for two years. For two years I have not left Paris. One could not go. These last two years Paris became an ill child, that one could not leave.” As she said this her features grew sharp and sad. “A year ago, last March, we sent Marthe and Miss Clark to Céligny.”

“Yes,” said Marthe. “Papa awoke us in the night and made us dress and go in the motor.”

“We shall never forget those weeks,” said Madame Scheurer, finger and thumb catching one of her pearl tassels. “Never. It was the 1870 of my father’s youth again. Every day one thought ‘They will be here’ and the guns never stopped. . . .” She broke off in a low quick apology to Bianca. “These things are so near still.”

“Why pretend they aren’t?” said Bianca.

“But at least *now* they are making peace! Maman, I saw Papa just now and he had seen Monsieur Clemenceau to-day and—”

“—Who was *not* too optimistic, *chérie*. My husband,” she said to Bianca, “is of the opinion of Monsieur Clemenceau that we must, at least, protect ourselves. But that, it seems, is not the opinion of Lloyd George or of *ce fou de Wilson*.”

Monsieur Scheurer came in as she spoke. A short-legged, thin man. The face clever but ugly, as if it were on the convex side of a spoon; the eyes set deep, the chin simian below the dark moustache.

He kissed Bianca’s hand. His eyelids were fringed with close fine lashes, growing straight and half an inch long. He welcomed Charmian, shaking hands with her. He began at once an admirable conversation in which he contrasted the present state of political atmosphere in London and Paris. He quoted a friend as having said that Paris was a shell-shocked city, in which it was unwise to hold a Peace Conference. He said, “It is difficult enough to build a house of cards; but to try and build it when one’s hands are trembling with fear and one’s eyes blinded with hope is idiotic.” He turned to his wife and asked her if she had read the article on Wilson in the *Figaro*.

“—On *Wilson*? I was just saying . . .”

Louis came in. His father glanced at him and went on talking. Madame Scheurer said, “Here is Mrs. Selwyn, Louis. And you already know Charmian.”

“I know them both,” he said.

He came to Bianca with his long light stride. His dark suit fitted close over his wide shoulders, his pale green orchid contrasted with his pale brown face. He didn’t smile at Bianca. He came up to her, looked at her out of his slanting eyes with a quick perfunctory curiosity, and kissed her hand. She remembered that she had disliked him when she last met him, when he came to Moon’s Green with his parents in 1916. There had been a tennis tournament in aid of the Red Cross, and they had been partners. He had played brilliantly; and lost them the finals through an unaccountable attack of temper.

He referred to this now. He said, “I wonder if you have forgiven yet my play in that tournament? Unforgivable: that bad humor . . . But we were winning. And I detest success!”

“In everything?”

“In myself.”

“Why?”

“Because it proves to me the thing that I don’t want to believe, that I should hate to believe, which is that other people are even more stupid than myself.” He added, turning away his glance, looking toward Charmian, who was sitting on the edge of an Empire sofa talking to Monsieur Scheurer—“I only like people who are superior to me not only in soul, which is easy enough, but in intelligence also.”

Bianca noticed that what he said betrayed both his conceit and his sensibility. But now she felt too tired and miserable to go on talking to him or thinking about him.

Louis went to talk to Charmian. Bianca saw her turn to him—listen—then laugh.

Madame Scheurer was speaking to her.

“I am sure you will want to rest?”

“Thank you.”

She was aware in her state of highly sensitized vagueness of Madame Scheurer’s liking for her; just as she had realized her dislike of Charmian. She could feel that for Madame Scheurer there was an elegance in her well-concealed grief and her perfectly disguised baby which contrasted with Charmian’s appearance of being a tomboyish but overdecorated angel.

For Charmian, dressed for escape (from home) in bright blue, adorned for adventure (with life) by two clandestine rows of cheap pearls, was the doll angel of the *festa*: glamorous to a child, to a peasant; touching in its symbolic glamour to an adult. Glamorous perhaps, Bianca thought, to Louis Scheurer, who was leaning over her now, lighting her a forbidden cigarette. And absurd and charming to Monsieur Scheurer, who was giving her *marrons déguisés* out of a flowered-silk box.

Marthe accompanied Bianca to her bedroom, switched on lamps, opened *armoires*, handed over keys to the *femme de chambre*, was solicitous lest she might be overtired. Wouldn’t she, perhaps, after her journey, even prefer to stay, for this evening, in her room?

Bianca was pleased by Marthe. There was a propriety in her way of moving and thinking that must be intrinsic, and not caused merely by her upbringing.

Bianca said she would come down for dinner.

Who would be there, she asked, sitting down before the glass and wondering if the *femme de chambre* could borrow her some rouge.

“Only ourselves,” Marthe said, “and Monsieur and Madame Tissot.”

“Who are they?” said Bianca.

“Monsieur Tissot is a banker, and Madame Tissot occupies herself very much with works for the poor. Louis doesn’t like them. But he is coming all the same.”

“Coming? Doesn’t Louis live here?”

“No. He has taken an apartment. Rue de Grenelle. An old house. It is very beautiful.”

Outside in the corridor a voice bleated—“Ma-a-at? *Maa-a-a-t?*”

“Ah!” said Marthe. “It’s Miss Clark. Then—” she came and took Bianca’s hand for a polite second—“then we shall meet again at dinner, madame.”

Bianca went to the writing table to write to her Aunt Violet. The inkstand was a large crystal swan whose neck swung back on a gilt hinge. There was a purple feather pen. Its long nib sputtered under the pressure of Bianca’s writing. The ink was purple too.

“We are,” she wrote illegibly, and blotted one corner of the card, “well arrived. Charmian has enjoyed her journey.”

When she had written this she noticed her odd English; and then she remembered that when she was in France before she had often found herself talking a French person’s English; just as whenever she changed from one group of people to another she found herself assimilating their thoughts. Thus, with her father, she had judged in terms of beauty and taste; with her mother had accepted the importance of health and gayety; and with Richard had thought and felt and spoken in terms of simplicity and delight.

Madame Tissot was large and in black from double chin to square-booted feet. Monsieur Tissot was dapper. They looked like provincials, and were, in fact, from Lyons; where Monsieur Tissot had been manager of a small bank, La Banque Lyons-Parisienne, until 1913, when his bank had come under the control of, among others, Sir Ivan Benz and Monsieur Scheurer. Then Monsieur Tissot had been moved to Paris.

At dinner, in the dining room newly decorated by the young painter Sert, the conversation was entirely of politics: of the Conference; of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks in Poland; of Lloyd George and the English strikes; of Sinn Fein, of Bela Kun, of the Græco-Turkish situation . . . and again, of the Conference: of the personalities of the Conference; of Clemenceau, of Venizelos, of Sonnino. Of General Plumer's telegram to the Peace Conference begging them to feed Germany and saying that the English troops could not stand the spectacle of starving German children.

Madame Tissot sighed and said it was the War.

Louis contradicted her and said it was the blockade, and that three quarters of a million deaths had been caused since the Armistice by the blockade.

Madame Tissot changed the subject by saying to Monsieur Scheurer that it was on account of Mr. Venizelos's presence in Paris that Ivan Benz had left for London. Monsieur Scheurer said, with a half smile, that Ivan Benz was no longer in London. "I saw him there days ago," said her husband. She folded her lips in righteous resignation as if, once more, he had deceived her.

Charmian confided to Louis her and Peter's name for Benz—the *Ziegenbock* (the goat). "Peter is my brother," she said.

"I forget if I saw him. Is he like you?" Louis asked.

"No."

"What a pity."

"What," Monsieur Tissot asked Bianca, "did one think in London about Lord Northcliffe?"

Bianca said that he poisoned the news reservoirs of the country. She went on to quote Keynes's remarks to her Uncle Carteret about the impossibility of Germany's paying. This topic spread like lighted petrol, round the table . . . The words "Germany, crime, ruin, devastation, revenge" mingled with the rattle of coffee cups on a silver tray.

Louis said to Madame Tissot, "What is the use of hanging the Kaiser?"

"We must have vengeance. Two pieces of sugar," she said. And Cécile Scheurer, shimmering as her portrait by Boldini, arrogant and sad as her portrait by Laszlo, said:—

"Certainly, we must have revenge."

"It seems," said Louis later, when they were all in the *salon*, "that in London they are still giving *Chu-Chin-Chow*."

Bianca said, "It has become an old English custom."

"Ah!" said Monsieur Tissot, joining their group. "Yes. I saw *Chu-Chin-Chow* when I was in London two years ago. Magnificent. I found it magnificent. What a spectacle!"

He turned to Louis. "What ravishing women!" he said; and to Charmian, "What beautiful costumes!"

"I'm not allowed to go to it," said Charmian.

"Naturally," said Madame Scheurer. "It is not at all a thing for young girls." She added, "Violette Cable took me to the *première* when I was in London three years ago."

"No," said Monsieur Scheurer, judging Bianca's features dispassionately, "not for young girls. I went last spring with Lord Cable. He had already seen it four times." He paused, relighting his cigar. "It seemed to me, in fact, a very mediocre entertainment but exactly what is demanded by a public suffering from war. . . . There has been the same effect from war nervousity here." He went on, suddenly acrid, "Let us hope that the Arts, at any rate, will recover soon."

Louis sat down at the piano and played the "Robbers' March." Then he got up, bowed to Madame Tissot and his mother in turn, and strode out of the room.

Later, when the Tissots had gone, Madame Scheurer turned to Marthe and asked her what had been the matter with Louis this evening. Marthe said quickly, "He had to meet François for supper!" François was a friend of Louis's who had been in the *Aviation* with him. Marthe glanced from her mother to her father.

"Ah, François Dubar!" Madame Scheurer turned to her husband. "He is a bad influence for Louis."

Monsieur Scheurer was examining his own face in a glass above one of the console tables. He said, smoothing his eyelashes between thumb and forefinger, "I have no fear for Louis. He is what the English call an ace."

François Dubar had no looks, no physique, no money, and no profession. His assets were his youth, a teasing wit, and a tender heart.

Louis and François Dubar had both been in the *Aviation*. But they didn't meet until they were on leave in September 1918, when they met in a small hotel off the main road between Aix-en-Provence and Toulon. The hotel was run by an impressive old lady with a knowledge of modern politics and a taste for the works of Zola. The boarders dined with the landlady and four girls of remarkable erudition and gentleness. (Louis and François didn't realize they were in a brothel.) Never, during their stay, did the girls show any signs of professional interest in them, and the day their leave was up the old lady informed them that she had heard that her son had got the *Croix de Guerre*, and as she felt that his distinction made it unsuitable for her to keep on this business ("*C'est surtout pour les officiers de la Marine, messieurs*"), she was now going to retire and buy an *appartement* for herself and her son in Arcachon.

This evening Louis found François waiting for him at the Deux Magots. He was with two Englishwomen in black sombreros who were drinking Pernod and explaining to him why the Peace Conference was going to fail. It was a man-made peace, said one of them, just as it had been a man-made war. François's big, bright-hazel eyes were wide open, and he kept on nodding and sipping his *café-crème*. He was wearing a parrot-green muffler, and his small hunched body below it and his beak-nosed, sallow, brilliant-eyed head above it made him look like some peculiar tropical bird. He got up and left the Englishwomen when Louis came in and sat down with him in their usual corner. François asked Louis why he was in a bad temper, and Louis described the dinner at his parents' house, and began a tirade against Tissot, whom he described as the tool of Ivan Benz. He said that everyone knew that Ivan Benz had done more than any other one man to bring about the War, but that Tissot was an example of the sort of financier-banker who made Benz's power possible; that it was Tissot who had bought *Le Petit Parisien* and *La Patrie* for Benz (whose then "Russian" nationality had prevented his owning French newspapers, or directing French banks), and that Tissot had been more highly "subsidized" than all the others by Krupp's to "influence" the French press at that dangerous moment in 1917 when it seemed possible that the War might come to an end. Louis commented on the fact that Madame Tissot, who spent her husband's money on her Children's Clinic at Neuilly, should accept the fact that German children were starving less than three hundred miles away. François interrupted. He said:—

"Why don't you come with me next week to Austria? I'm going there with a charming and ugly English lady to work with the Quakers. I met her in the train coming from Dieppe last week. She returns to Vienna to-morrow.

You ought to hear her description of conditions in Central Europe. She is so ugly and so nice. She is the daughter of a duke. Waiter! Another *café-crème*! Come with us?"

Louis's hands had been clasped. They fell apart and lay open on the table, showing the square palms, the hard transparent-looking tapering fingers. His features were expressionless; but François, watching, saw one thought flicker after another behind his eyes.

Then he said "I can't," and again, with an undertone of anger, "I *can't*."

François understood.

"For me," said Louis, leaning forward now on the table between them, "for me the War is finished. Over. Done with." Now he looked at François. Now his fingers closed round the stem of his glass. "You remember that time I told of, when it seemed impossible that I should get down alive, over the English lines? Well, when I did get down and the English stretcher-bearers were taking me to the dressing station, there was a moment when I realized, completely (you know how difficult it is to realize any condition with one's reason and imagination at the same time), I *realized* what I had escaped; and I had a moment of absolute horror, not of death, but at the thought that I had so nearly lost life itself which I had hardly experienced! And in that moment I had, like a shock, a sense of Life-as-it-might-be. And that shock has left a memory of *pain* which my elbow wound hasn't!" Louis hesitated. "I felt that *Life*, a fantastic mixture of violent and beautiful and curious sensations, was *what I must have*! And," he spoke slowly, elucidating his own thought, "and now, and above all in terms of whatever is beautiful and curious and exciting, *I must have it*!" He picked up his glass and put it down again. "Therefore, for me, the War is—" he made a gesture—" *Schluss!*"

"But the consequences?"

"I try to ignore them."

François stirred his coffee until it made a whirlpool in the cup. "Nobody," he said, in his sweet thick *méridional* French, "nobody will be able to do that!"

When Louis was a little boy he used to have rages that culminated in despair, tears, and, finally, an inability to sleep.

When he couldn't sleep he kept on turning over, so as not to see the face of *Barbe Bleue* with features like "*ton oncle du Plessis*" staring too close

into his. But at last, when he was too miserable, he did cry out loud, and then, through the dreadful thick dark with the Face everywhere, his Nannie came, big and solid; and her voice, her English voice, that was comfort, was close above him; and her hand, that was safety, was warm and firm on his shoulder. “Now then, Loo-iss dear . . .” He caught her wrist, he climbed his hands up her arm until he got to her shoulder, he got hold of her starched apron strap and pulled her down close to him; and when his arms were round her neck, he could whisper and not be ashamed how his voice gulped and shook—“I can’t sleep, Nannie—I c-can’t—” And then she would fetch the night light and set it on the washstand in the corner and bring her chair beside the bed and sing the English song that he liked best about *Jean Peel*, while her hand came in between the bars of his cot and held his. And when at last, when the Face had gone away and the room was safe and quiet, and even his own heart felt safe and quiet, and when sleepiness began to come up round him and over him, he said, “I wish you could sit with me every night like this, Nannie, until I’m asleep.”

And she said, “You want the moon, don’t you, Louis?”—that phrase of hers that always fascinated him.

For it was part of Nannie’s glamour that, as well as being so familiar, so good, so big, so utterly secure, she said strange things like “Someone’s walking over my grave” or “There’s an Angel in the room” or “You want the moon.”

Once he had a dream about the Angel. It was the Angel in crimson out of the Italian picture in the library at the Villa. He was on the lower terrace in the gardens. The sun had just set and he could see Mont Blanc glowing pink above all the other mountains, on the other side of the lake. He was alone, and then the Angel came along the terrace towards him with its back to the shining mountains, so that its face was dark. And the Angel said, “I give you three wishes, Loo-iss” (speaking English and in Nannie’s voice). And Louis said, without knowing why, “I want the moon.” The Angel turned so that her face (it was a woman’s face now) was lit up by the rosy sky, and she said, “Nothing is easier” (in French). And as she said this the full moon came up behind Mont Blanc and began slipping up and up the sky, which darkened as the moon moved up and up and then stood still above the cypress trees. Then the Angel held out her long hands and he saw the moon quiver and start falling and spinning down toward them until it fell into the Angel’s hands. Then the Angel said, “Here you are, Loo-iss,” in Nannie’s voice, and gave him the moon, which was a milk-white balloon, shining all over because it was wet. It was so light that he wondered how it had fallen downwards at

all; and it was slippery like *crème renversée*. Then he saw that the Angel had gone; and he was alone, on the terrace, holding the moon. And then he began to be afraid, because he knew that if he let it go it would float up into the sky and he would never get it back, and it had no string so he began calling for Nannie to bring him some. But his voice made no sound at all and this frightened him and his hands began slipping, and suddenly he was letting go and the moon drifted up out of his hands, up and up, and in the air it became silver-shining and more and more hurtlingly beautiful, and he tried to shout to it to come back again; but his voice made no sound. And he woke up.

And when Nannie was giving him sips of cold water he still kept on saying, “I want the moon back. I want the moon back.”

And Nannie said, “Bless the child” and then—“You just turn over and go to sleep, my lamb.”

Louis called for Bianca and Charmian the next morning, in an egg-blue sports car. He took them to a show of Zuloaga’s pictures. Marthe could not come, for she had a violin lesson.

Louis and Charmian were excited by the colors and perspective of the pictures. But Bianca thought that under their showiness they had the thick boring quality of Spanish things. They went on to the Louvre. On the way Louis bought some red carnations. Bianca thought it was part of his flirtation with Charmian, but as an afterthought he bought Charmian and herself each lilies of the valley. When they got to the Louvre he laid the carnations at the feet of the “Victory.” Then they went up to the Italian Primitives, but Charmian thought Bianca looked too tired to stay long. On the way out Louis stopped in front of the Carpaccio and asked Charmian if she didn’t think “*cette belle lumière dorée* was swell!” Charmian laughed at his language, which was a mixture of French, English, and American slang. He said it was the language of the future: “*C’est du polyglotte.*”

He took them to luncheon at the Crillon, where they were joined by two friends of his, a young Belgian and an American. Bianca never grasped their names. She thought that they were both rather sycophantic towards Louis, and that his having friends who were too good an audience was probably a fault in him, in spite of his assertion about liking only his “superiors” in soul.

The restaurant was filled with anonymous men in remarkable staff uniforms and well-known politicians looking older than their photographs.

Bianca saw Alan Blyth lunching with Sonnino and two French officers, and two tables off she recognized the American whom she had met at luncheon at Portland Place last October. He saw her, and got up and came over and shook hands with her, and then with Louis, and reintroduced himself as Herbert Langridge. He stayed for a few minutes to talk, but he wouldn't, in spite of Louis's lightly barbed questions, commit himself to any opinion about Wilson. Louis's Belgian friend said, "Did you see the cartoon of Wilson yesterday in *Paris-Soir*?" And Louis said, "The first time I was ever in London, my governess bought me, in Regent Street, a rubber animal that was called 'Dying Pig.' One blew him up, he was immense; and then he began, just very slowly, to deflate, with a monotonous thin sigh that grew more painful as he grew small, and in the end . . ."

Langridge gave Louis a kindly and tolerant grin:—

"I'll tell everybody you're a bright boy, Louis Scheurer. You'll go a long way!" He shook hands again all round and went off, waving a hand. Bianca saw him sit down again beside a woman in deep mourning.

"I certainly like to be a bright boy," said Louis. "Now I'm filed for reference!"

Bianca detected bravado.

"Langridge is one of our double-eagle Galahads," said the American, who, in a confused nervous way, hoped that by looking like a Pierrot his nationality would escape detection.

"Show me which is Cocteau," said Charmian. Louis showed her, and named all the other people at the table with him.

"You know *her* too?" Charmian asked.

Louis touched the hand that grasped his arm. "Know her? No—I don't *know* her. I'm in love with her."

Charmian turned to look at the woman. A waiter tried to make her realize a *soufflé*. She turned to Louis again, her translucent wonder facing his pale brown mask. She said, "Yes. If I were a man I should love a woman who wrote such poetry."

"Would you?" said his wry lips, his caressing voice. "Would you, Charmian?" While his eyes surveyed her with a transitory amusement.

She answered "Yes," thinking he heard her; grateful for his friendliness; unaware, as Bianca was for her, either of his coquetry or of his indifference.

“Louis is nice,” thought Charmian, elated by the crowd and the music and the scents in the muffled air.

“Louis is odious,” thought Bianca—as far as she could think or feel in this nightmare of too many faces and too insistent music and too fragrant, sickening flowers.

And Louis, ordering coffee, ordering liqueurs, glancing at his fingernails and explaining that over there, just coming in, was Jacques Blanche, Louis thought: “Mrs. Selwyn is unhappy. She is so unhappy that I can’t bear to look at her and see her ‘amused’ at what my friends (whom she hates anyway) are saying. She is so unhappy that I think if she doesn’t scream soon, I shall scream for her. I shall get up in this gibbering rotting smiling place and scream to the politicians and their rich sluts, to the Chiefs of Staff, and the *maître d’hôtel* bent servile like a question mark, to this whole *singerie* chattering round flares of mimosa . . .”

“A liqueur?” said Louis in his brittle manner, smiling nicely at Charmian, at Mrs. Selwyn, at his own friends.

Bianca refused.

“*Oh!*” said Charmian. “*Can* I have the lovely one that tastes of chocolate and cream?”

“Ah!” said Louis. “But of course”—and to the waiter, “*Une crème de cacao pour Mademoiselle!*”

That night Bianca and Charmian left Paris for Switzerland.

Bianca woke and saw the sun on the snow peaks. Yet the snow peaks belonged to her bad queer dream.

Charmian came in, in her pyjamas. She sat on the bed. She said:—

“I’m going to show you one of his letters. And then you’ll *see*.” She held it out.

“I’d rather not see it.” . . . A white and dark dream. People with dark faces and white clothes—as on a negative.

“Yes. I *want* you to. I can’t bear you even to *think* unjustly about him.”

Bianca took the letter. “Please read it,” Charmian said. She was wearing her sugar-pink flannel pyjamas which had shrunk and showed how thin she

was, with her bony arms and small breasts and long legs.

Bianca said, "Must I?"

"Yes, of course."

The letter was written on the notepaper of the Blackstone Hotel, Chicago.

MY DARLING GIRL: As I take up the pen I feel that I am, in a very distant sad way, taking your little hand in mine. Just as I shall feel when I lay it down once more at the end of this letter that I am letting that sweet little hand go again. But, *que voulez-vous?* Men must work (though don't you believe, my darling, that it's only the women that weep!) and, *enfin*, what else is there? But perhaps I am ungrateful. At my age it is quite a lot to expect when a young and sensitive and very beautiful girl writes to you to say, as you say in your sweet last letter, that she will be always there for him, and that there is nothing she would not do for him. All the same, old cynic that I am, I can't help asking myself just exactly what those words mean; and when I am depressed and so very, very lonely, I say to myself, "But of course her words mean no more than the little kisses that she sometimes gives to me, those kisses like little white flowers, fragrant, and fresh as lilies of the valley; she is a child still, although she seems in many ways a woman. But she does not yet understand the deepness, the beauty and excitement, of a Great Passion!" And how should you, my little darling girl? You who are shut up in that pretty cage that is called your home, and guarded by those so very kind jailers that are called your family!!!

However. Don't let me complain. Let me think to myself instead that you are happy and contented, and that I am glad really that what you have sometimes said to me is nothing more than the *Schwärmerei* that a charming flapper will have often for an elderly, perhaps a little bit famous, musician, that can play to her and sing to her now and then a song or two.

Do you remember "*Du bist wie eine Blume*" that evening? My little "*Blume*"? I think it has been written for you in advance!

I wonder if you do remember that last evening, when I sang to you . .

Bianca couldn't go on reading. But she couldn't lift her glance from the big splurging writing lest Charmian should see what she felt. So she kept staring at "*Du bist wie eine Blume*" and seeing Harry Kramer's podgy hand, his ringed cushiony damp little hand closing round a flower . . .

Charmian was lying across the foot of the bed, her head buried in her pink flannel arms; and she could only stretch her hand, saying, "*Don't* be sad, Charmian, darling!"

The letter fluttered to the carpet.

"How can't he *believe* that I love him?"

"I—of course he does, really."

"—I write every mail. Sometimes ten pages. I write every day, you see, and then put it all in one envelope . . ."

"Charmian . . ."

Celimène stood halfway between the doors and the bed.

"*Le masseur, Monsieur Louis . . .*"

Louis lay dead-still.

"*Il y a le masseur . . .*"

Louis stirred; stiffened; bounded upright on to the white bearskin, staggered naked, and blind with sleep, into the bathroom, stretched out his hand, and bent under the shower.

The icy water drenched his head and body. He stood straight again, his hair streaked down in an Apache fringe, his eyes screwed to slits.

"*Zamorr!!!*"

The negro came, seized a hot bath towel, and dried him, whistling through his teeth like a groom. In the bedroom Celimène was talking to herself and tidying the enormous canopied bed, pulling the black crepe de Chine sheets, smoothing the white satin quilt. Louis heard her; and her customary monologue about the *concierge's* wife mingled with the tangled skeins of his dreams. (*Who* was leaning over the piano?)

He put on his dressing gown and Zamorr brought a cigarette and lit it for him.

In the bedroom Celimène had looped back the pink window curtains. The sun came in. The pattern of the three iron balconies was printed three times upon the white carpet. Celimène went out and brought in the roses. She never allowed Louis to sleep with his flowers. “*C’est malsain. Ça donnera de la fièvre à monsieur.*” At ten o’clock every evening she took out his flowers and put them on the balcony of the *salon*, and Jeanne (the *femme de ménage*) changed the water, or threw them away in the morning. Louis himself always arranged them. Celimène had only two revealed anxieties for Louis: that he should not sleep with flowers at night, or miss a meal during the day.

Otherwise she showed no awareness of his nights or days. The *concierge’s* wife could learn nothing from her. And the voices on the telephone, the thin or deep or vague or angry voices, that asked if Monsieur Louis was at home—when he would be back? if he had left any message?—got, from Celimène, the invariable formula—“that Monsieur Louis had just gone out and had not said when he would return.” Celimène, graduate in the service of bachelors under forty, suspected telephone voices of being either creditors or discarded loves. For she knew that desirable visitors, such as publishers and *tantes à héritage*, announced themselves by letter; and that, in matters of love, you do not wait to receive the *coup de téléphone* of the person you desire. . . .

But if Celimène’s tendency was to seize the telephone only as a weapon of defense, Zamorr (his real name was Jesus Holowell) could hardly be restrained from using it as a receptacle for all possible information and good nature. Thus the voice which, at eleven, had been checkmated by Celimène’s wooden assertion of Louis’s absence might at eleven-fifteen (when Celimène was in her kitchen) be welcomed by the rolling full-flavored tones of Zamorr, who, beaming and nodding his head over the ivory receiver (which in his bronze hand looked as frail as a chicken bone), would, irrespective of the language in which the voice inquired, assure it that “Mistah Louis’ll be right heah . . . Yes, suh (Yes, ma’am) . . . He ain’t bin out dis morning— No, suh, he slep’ until quarter of eleven— We had a party lass night, yessuh, an’ der’s six for lunch to-day an’—yessuh, I’ll fetch Mistah Louis right away . . .”

The Swede in the white coat worked over Louis muscle by muscle. “Now turn over . . . Tank you . . . Still a leetle steefness here” (catching the knot of nerves at the back of his neck). . . . “Iss the head comfee? Yess? . . .”

Louis's mind hurt. He kept his cheek flat on the mattress and the Swede got his neck and shoulder loosened up a bit, but his mind was twisted and there was a pain of left-over anger in his diaphragm.

“Now de exssercisess, pleass— Reseest—re-seest—re-seest—”

(It was Alice last night, suddenly turning on him and saying those things, in front of everybody. A lot of filth.)

“—Reseest—re-seest!”

Not that the party hadn't been funny and fantastic. Marie in her bear's head, and the old Thoreau chasing her, and that squealing little Bengy, in ostrich feathers, dancing with Esmé Harrington; and at four in the morning Mamie and Pierre and Alice in his bed all trying at once to telephone a cable of their love to Jimmy Lothair in Chicago.

“Now re-lax—”

Louis stopped thinking about Mamie and Pierre and Alice (Mamie was doting again and her nails were dirty) and began thinking about Jimmy Lothair, and the party they'd given in New York the night before he left; and Jimmy standing on the ledge of that window sill with a glass in his hand and a drop of twenty stories into Fifty-seventh Street—

Louis's thoughts changed from flicking about in American to thinking about Jimmy Lothair in French; which marked the way in which Jimmy had really affected his feelings. For, at this epoch, one part of Louis's mind thought rapidly and forcefully in a mental dialect derived from his period in New York; while another intermittent element in him which, if he thought about it, he recognized as essential self did its thinking and feeling in his own language.

Jimmy had written a postcard since, saying the play was coming off in April and that he was going to Hollywood to make a picture with Lillian Gish. Louis supposed he needed the money. He had never seen Jimmy in a film and couldn't imagine him a flat grey figure moving dumb lips. “And once they get you in pictures,” Jimmy said, “you can stick there until your profile wears out!”

The Swede went into the bathroom and washed his hands, and took off his white coat and put it in his little valise. He bowed, ducking his head, as he went out.

Louis lit a cigarette. He wondered if it was Jimmy's radiant good humor, or his courage, the mad elated courage of a schoolboy, which gave him his

power over other human beings. Probably both. Probably the most successful charm consisted in being always pleased and never afraid. To be so, hadn't you to be, also, stupid? Jimmy's shining health and looks made his stupidity unrecognizable; and the daredevil implications even of his mediocre activities (for he drove off at golf with the same glint and grin as he dived forty feet, or went into the lions' cage, or drank off two bottles of neat gin) made it impossible to believe that he was dull! If one said to Jimmy Lothair something that he didn't intellectually understand, he turned on you his physical glamour, the glamour of a sort of cowboy-Apollo, and waited, smiling, until you smiled back.

In the theatre he had played hero after hero, lover after lover. There had never been any question as to whether he could act. He hadn't needed to since he came to New York in *Angel-Face* in 1912. At parties he sometimes did an imitation of himself in *Angel-Face*, in a tight sailor suit. Lots of his friends called him Angel Face, and some varied the anatomical description and tacked Angel on.

Louis reflected that he might write to Jimmy. But he disliked writing letters almost as much as Jimmy disliked getting them. You might as well dance a minuet with Jimmy as have a correspondence with him; it wouldn't, in his parlance, "get you anywhere."

While Louis was thinking about him, Zamorr came in, bringing coffee and two letters, both foreign.

One was a bill from his London tailor. The other, from Switzerland, was from Bianca Selwyn.

DEAR MONSIEUR SCHEURER: —

My cousin, Peter Cable, Charmian's brother, is coming out here to join us for his Easter holidays. I wonder if you would be very kind, and, as I hear your parents are now away, look after Peter for a few hours. If you are busy he might perhaps wait at your flat, as his mother doesn't want him to drift about Paris on his own. He is coming as far as Paris with a friend, arriving at 5.45 on the 22nd—and doesn't get his train for Bâle until nearly nine.

Charmian sends you her love. Thank you for entertaining us both.

Yours,
BIANCA SELWYN

Louis looked at the address: “The Grand Hotel, Ascona.”

How fantastic the English were, with their schoolboys of sixteen still in the nursery. He saw himself feeding a pink-faced young Cable, on ice-cream certainly, and listening to interminable accounts of cricket matches. Without doubt Peter Cable would be a replica of Lord Cable. Carteret Cable was, for Louis, the typical Englishman of his class: clever but not witty; important but not elegant; decisive and complacent in judgment, and in manners, like all the English, conventional but unsophisticated.

Louis got up and went to his desk and wrote out a telegram to Mrs. Selwyn saying that he would meet Peter whenever he arrived. He gave it to Zamorr. As he did so he wondered why he should bother. He supposed, as he began to dress, that he was trying to refute one of Alice’s charges of last night, her accusation that he had no sense of other people except when he wanted to “use them.”

Her drunken words had bruised him, because he believed that he had a talent for friendship. This was true—at any rate in its results.

In friendship Louis was loyal, sensitive, and, even to the manner of quitting a fellow traveler, or the greeting of his hairdresser, or the choosing of a New Year’s card for Celimène’s husband, inspired by his imagination. For by the time such a card had been chosen (a card which was to accompany an envelope containing a hundred francs) Louis would, in his imagination, have identified himself with Celimène’s husband; have acquired his taste for Marr, his dislike of dentists, his sciatica, his bristled cheeks, his Communism, his sharp stare. And with that stare (the stare of a man irritably and ignorantly combative; the stare of a disciple of a Rousseau, yet the stare too of a man who had the good sense to have loved Celimène for twenty years) Louis would have chosen a card—in color, portraying a rural scene, including house and poultry, roseate and glossy in the setting sun.

So, also, Louis’s greeting of his hairdresser (a “*Bonjour, Rouard*” that implied difference of class and equality of intellect) had been distilled by Louis from Rouard’s own atmosphere, from Rouard’s admiration for Pascal, from his dislike of England, his money snobbery (it was the “Scheurer” he loved in Louis), and his appreciation of the style of Maupassant.

And so, too, at the end of a journey, a holiday, even a walk through the streets after a party, Louis, having created a friendship in miniature, would in his leave-taking express, by a phrase or glance, how he had inhabited (and to that extent loved) the person whom he must leave.

But if his imagination made him, sometimes, loving in friendship, he was incapable of friendship in love.

In love his adventures were of the senses. And his senses were so direct in their apprehension that they demanded nothing of his imagination. His eye, seeing beauty, demanded no adjectives from his brain, no simile to persuade his awareness from pleasure to ecstasy. His hearing felt a voice, not as comparable to music, but, with delight, as a sweet speaking of words. He tasted directly, smelled acutely, touched joyously. As meat in his mouth was meat, with its own carnal savor and satisfying texture; as the smell of loam involved no echo of violins in autumn; so the feel of another body, smooth and maddening, left his mind untroubled by irrelevant images of petals, of peaches, of flames. For his delight was in sensitive flesh and bone, and his lust satisfied by lust in action. Where he saw a beautiful profile he saw, not the nose of Cleopatra, the eye of Helen, the fragrant neck of Alexander; and so dreamed himself idly the possessor of an hermaphrodite beauty whose lineaments might remain minted on his imagination. Instead he saw a profile whose beauty approximated exactly his desire for it; and which, by some suitable act of possession, the taking of a photograph, a luncheon at the Ritz, an afternoon's love-making on a divan, he could achieve—and so eliminate.

Louis stood on the platform hunching his shoulders.

He had stayed in until four, failing to write. And when he came out there was an east wind. At five he'd called on Marie de Montcontour, because she was the sort of woman he liked (tired and witty, and fifty). And she was out. As he bought a *Paris-Soir* he reflected how bored he was by young pretty women who expected one to fall on top of them, even in their motors. (Thérèse telephoning again this morning. Impossible to say to her, "You are a handsome girl, but the shape of your admirable body irritates me, and you have too many teeth.")

Marie de Montcontour might have calmed him. Sometimes she could. For she could make him see the charm, as well as the satire, of his own unimportance. She pricked their friends into an amusing pattern, as children do with pins on a pincushion; and there was his own little pin's head—a dot in a pretty curve on velvet ground. But since Marie had been out, he had returned from the Rue de Bourgogne, still carrying upon his shoulders, like a sufferer from elephantiasis, his enormous and distorting mood of egoism; and so conscious, as he crossed his own courtyard, of its hooding ugliness

that he expected Zamorr, instead of saying “Cocktails, suh?” (as he did), to ask him, in a voice deeply sounding with Fear, whether anything was “de mattah”?

As Zamorr fetched the shaker Louis had reflected that the answer to that unasked question was that nothing was the matter.

Nothing and everything. Since life, which seemed to him the most insidious of drugs, both enthralled him, and drove him mad.

He opened his *Paris-Soir*. . . .

The train came in.

A new game for him, he thought, meeting schoolchildren at termini!

The people were spilling out of the train. British Staff Officers in khaki with scarlet hatbands. Smart Englishwomen, but with long feet. Dowdy Englishwomen with still longer feet. Suave young men in bowlers carrying the *Times* and the *Daily Mail* and the *Westminster Gazette*. Shapeless women in mink coats . . . and still more Americans.

Paris was becoming American, he thought; and nothing but the growing hatred of Wilson can prevent us, with the Crillon already occupied by them, the Champs-Élysées already policed by them, the champagne factories making 100 per cent profit on them, from becoming a *succursale* of New York. (From becoming a nation which calls black coffee a *demi-tasse*, and eats ice cream twice a day.)

The notion, though superficial, irritated him. He liked America; he had a violent taste for New York. But not New York in Paris. For what he demanded of places was what he demanded of people, that they should be, to the most exaggerated degree, themselves.

He began to move up the platform, glancing among the pink Anglo-Saxon faces so little different, he thought, from the buttocks of the rosy pigs' corpses which adorn the butcher shops of English country towns.

As he moved up the platform Louis looked cursorily on at least four faces that he was never to see again. That of Major Keats-Berriman, on his way to Egypt; of Nicholas Smith, of Smith and Farley, Solicitors, on his honeymoon with Maisie, who had just left her job at the War Office; of Sir Flummery Sewell, arrived to visit his many friends who had the luck to be at the Conference; that of a young archæologist released, with one leg, from defending the Future in Mesopotamia, to resume a now three-limbed attack

on the Past in Greece. Of these four men the latter only saw Louis Scheurer, and in that moment of purely anthropological interest (“Chaldean type” was what he noted) he got an impression which he was to verify, fifteen years later, in a *Harper’s Bazaar*, in an hotel lounge in Alexandria; when the name Louis Scheurer was familiar to three big publics of America, England, and France, and his features were among the five hundred sets of features recognized, as a professional duty, by the *maîtres d’hôtel* of the world.

Suddenly a hesitant voice said with an English accent: “*Est-ce que vous êtes, par hasard, Monsieur Louis Scheurer?*” —and Louis was looking into the face of — wasn’t it the “Blue Boy”?

“I am.”

“Oh . . . I’m Peter Cable.”

“How do you do.”

—It’s terribly good of you to meet me like this. I could really have managed quite well. Only my family . . .” They moved down the platform, past the barrier, through the crowd. The boy, shoulder to shoulder with Louis, was both diffident and graceful.

When they got to Louis’s pale blue car he exclaimed in admiration. Louis drove him fast. In the Rue de Grenelle, the boy exclaimed at a shuttered *hôtel* of the seventeenth century glimpsed through a cobbled courtyard. Then he was shy again. When they got into Louis’s apartment, he said “How *absolutely* lovely!” and stood clutching his overcoat and dispatch case instead of letting Zamorr take them from him. Then he noticed Zamorr, who gave him one of his white, flashing, engaging smiles; and when Zamorr had gone out Peter said, suddenly amused, “How jolly to have a man like that!”

Louis said, “He was leaving the people I stayed with in Charleston because they were shutting up their house. I asked him if he’d come. And he wanted to.”

Peter, watching Louis Scheurer, thought he had never seen anyone so vivid, or so curious and beautiful a setting. He looked round again at the books, the pictures, the Chinese figurines, the tuberoses, the *lumieri* on the paneled walls, the Empire sofa and footstools, in tarnished gold and white. The negro came back bringing a tray of glasses and decanters and set it down on a low table. Louis said: —

“I was afraid I’d have to feed you ice cream! But I saw, at once, it wouldn’t be necessary. Light the candles, Zamorr.”

The negro lit a taper and went from the sconces on the walls to the candelabrum that stood below a dark picture—a still life of roses and a dead hare and nectarines and a guitar. Louis followed Peter’s look.

“I bought it last week. I don’t know even who it’s by. It’s French, late seventeenth century. I sold a small Monet I had there. I had the passion for Impressionists. Then a reaction against them. They aren’t decorative in a room. They’re pictures for picture galleries, or studios. I’m not sure that they aren’t just pictures for painters! Like James Joyce is a writer for writers! What do you think?”

Peter, too uncertain, too conscious of how primary his knowledge and perceptions were in such matters, was silent. But Louis, without waiting for his answer, went on talking: about Joyce, about Dorothy Richardson, about Katherine Mansfield, about the modern English novel, and its relation, if any, to the writing of a former generation—to Conrad, to Kipling and Henry James; and how Henry James compared, to his detriment, with Stendhal, who was capable of being as subtle, or more so, with that amazing simplicity of style. Pouring out a glass of port, which Peter refused, Louis got from Stendhal to Napoleon as a stylist; and from Napoleon to the question of French influence in modern Europe, and so, through another series of intellectual acrobatics, to painting again, and the work of a painter called Utrillo, and of Derain, of Marquet, and Augustus John, whose work was “*postiche*, false great-painting,” he said, although “his early drawings were good.”

Louis lay back on the Empire sofa smoking one cigarette after another and began developing the theme that the lack of talent in the world was not only because of the War (which had only covered four years) but because of the lack of Taste, and that modern America was an example of a Culture led by Art Dealers. He said that only by motoring far enough into the Italian or French countryside, and then going on up roads which wouldn’t support motors, could one find people living with beautiful things (*des belles chases*) as a matter of course; and reading the books in their libraries, even if they happened to be First Editions.

Peter sat listening. And as, in this room lit by many candles and fragrant with books and tuberose, he watched the expressions changing in Louis Scheurer’s pale brown mask, and heard his voice alternately hard-edged and musical, assertive and gentle; as he felt the play of his thought and followed

(his own wit quickening, and his own mind stirred by the sense of coming extraordinarily alive) the adventures of Louis's imagination,—the somersaults of his wit, the rapid half-defiant improvisation of his fancy,—he felt that here at last, in this room, in this man, in this talk, was a justification of the emotion which had made him fling at his father (in reply to an exasperated "I don't know what the hell you *do* want")—"I want to be civilized."

Louis was talking about Greece now. Comparing the ruins in Athens with the ruins at Pæstum. Zamorr came in and said that dinner was served. Louis said, "I went, with my father, when I was fourteen: then back to our villa in Sicily— Some day I must show you the photographs. You'll see exactly what I mean. . . ." He went on talking, impassioned by his own thought: but aware, too, that this boy opposite him, listening to him, was fascinated, intoxicated, and in some special way that he couldn't define. When he glanced at him he saw his dark eyes grave and brilliant, his cheeks flushed.

As they went into the dining room Louis said, "We mustn't forget your train." But the boy didn't seem interested. He said: "I want to go to Greece and Sicily . . . and Cyprus . . . and Constantinople. I've never been anywhere except St. Moritz."

He looked very tall and narrow and childish—waiting for Louis, his host, to sit down first. When they were seated Celimène hurried in, and whisked out again (to make sure that they were really ready for her to serve the *soupe aux poissons*). Peter said, "But I have a friend, David Blyth, who's traveled quite a lot. His family go abroad every year. He's going to be a painter—when he's been to Oxford."

"Are you going to Oxford?"

"Yes."

"To study what?"

"History."

"And then?"

Peter hesitated—"Politics, I think."

Celimène's head came round the screen.

"*Elle est bonne, la soupe?*"

"*Exquise!*"

Zamorr, standing behind Peter's chair, moved his bulk two steps to the right to hide Celimène.

Louis said, "Politics in England can be a career. Here, it's a business. . . . I see you very well as another Pitt."

He began to ask questions about English political parties, about the last election, about Lord Cable's political opinions. He asked how much influence he lost by being in the Upper House? And whether it was true that he had a brother at the War Office? And whether his sister hadn't married the Admiral Briggs who was one of the Naval Experts at the Peace Conference and had dined with the Scheurers and Ivan Benz a few days ago. Louis went on to ask whether a man called Brownlow Best, who was in some way attached to the American delegation, had been to stay at Moon's Green. Peter said yes, he had been there just before Christmas. Louis dropped the subject suddenly, and went back to politics in general. He said that there were only two real forces in politics all over the world. The people who profited by the Big Interests, and the people who were harmed by them. He said that all the Interests all over the world were interconnected, and that it was this close profitable interplay of Banking and Industrialism and Political Influence which had made the War possible. He said, just as Celimène forced her way past Zamorr to urge them to have some more of the chicken, that the Peace Conference would fail because the Interests in Oil, in Steel, in Coal, in Chemicals, were behind the scenes, determined that it should. When Celimène had gone Louis came back suddenly to the subject of Brownlow Best. He said:—

"Did he speak to you at all?"

Peter hesitated. "I don't remember. Oh yes—once."

"What did he say to you?"

"He—I remember now. He asked me if I was going into Cable's later on . . . But he talked to Charmian mostly."

"Oh yes. Your sister . . . How pretty she is."

Peter was pleased. He said:—

"She stayed in Paris on her way, didn't she?"

"Yes. Your sister. And your cousin . . . Mrs. . . .?"

"Bianca Selwyn."

"Oh yes."

Suddenly Louis remembered her face. He said—“Do you know, she’s a little like you! Her face is shaped like yours—only paler, and . . . aren’t her eyes blue?”

“No. Grey.”

Louis said, “What time’s your train?”

“Nine o’clock, or five minutes to.”

“Zamorr, what’s the time?”

“I’ll find out, suh.” He went out. They heard him: “Whad’s de tahn—*l’heure?*” He came back. “Quarter of nine, Mistah Louis!”

Louis turned to Peter.

“You won’t make it! You must resign yourself and stay the night.”

“Oh—but—”

“We’ll telephone to them—afterwards. Zamorr, coffee in the other room.” He added, exactly in the casual way in which he thought it, “I’ll motor you there. We’ll go by Geneva—and stay at our villa there on the way. It’s very beautiful, and we can distract ourselves by thinking about Madame de Staël, and Benjamin Constant—and Voltaire.” He got up, making a sign to Zamorr to bring the brandy into the next room. “Come,” he said. And as Peter, elated out of his reticence, said, “I *am* glad I missed that train,” Louis said, “*Candide?* D’you enjoy *Candide?* And the *Princesse de Babylone* . . .? Your cousin is rather like her . . . You haven’t read it? Then we’ll spend this evening reading it—Zamorr—Zamorr! . . . Telephone to Madame de Brissac and say that I can’t go to her party to-night. Tell her I’m ill . . . And *Adolphe* . . . But we’ll read *Adolphe* at Geneva. . . .”

PART III

While her maid unpacked, Josephine van Geldern went through her rites for arriving at a hotel. Having gargled, she sprayed her bedroom and bathroom with Formalin, burnt methylated spirit in the bath and wash basin, and sponged a Lysol mixture over the seat of the W.C. When she had hung mothballs in the cupboards and shaken out on the balcony the sparse rugs allotted to the linoleum floor of a *Kur*-Hotel, she transferred her energies from health to beauty. She washed her Lysol-smelling hands with Vera-Violetta soap, and then with Pâte Agniel; tapped her foot till her maid found her muslin jacket; re-did her hair in adept silver swirls; powdered her face and wiped off the powder again; changed her brooch from diamonds to sapphires; tapped her foot till her maid had found a fresh grey tulle scarf for her neck and a pair of clean wash-leather gloves. Then she went out on to the balcony and deep-breathed, raising her arms six times.

When her daughter came in she said:—

“This is wonderful air. It ought to do me all the good in the world.”

“I hope so,” said Bianca.

“It seems to be doing you good.”

Bianca said, “Peter and Louis Scheurer are arriving this morning. By car.”

“Is that the Philippe Scheurers’ boy?”

“Yes. They seem to have made friends in Paris. Louis took Peter to stay at the Scheurers’ villa, near Geneva, on the way here.”

“How delightful for Peter— My sister Violet always seems to pick the right friends for her children. How wise she was always to be careful to keep up *relations* with the Scheurers!”

Josephine added, “But Charmian doesn’t look very well. I’m afraid she isn’t going to be pretty as we all hoped last year— By the way, I see that Mrs. Edgar Lacy is staying here! I looked at the visitors’ book as soon as I arrived. You never tell me anything in your letters. And of course, I remembered at once! She used to be a neighbor of ours. Your father liked her very much, though I must say I always found her house dreadfully dark

and too full of things. But I expect you were too young to remember! Or have you been seeing something of her? I always thought her a little eccentric, out in all sorts of weathers without a hat, and *far* too much meat for a woman of her sedentary habits. I expect she has gout. But this is quite the wrong place for gout. She must go to Acqui, or Vichy—or even a good English spa—like Llandrindod Wells!”

Mrs. Lacy, widowed and considerably impoverished since the van Gelderns had known her in Wiltshire, turned out to be otherwise quite well; and on her way to Cairo. She was a fragile, elderly little woman, inconspicuous except for her lidded eyes, cloudy blue in color. She greeted Mrs. van Geldern with a birdlike reserve, but was friendly enough in explaining that she had taken an opportunity to travel, in between the death of one dog and the purchase of another. She added that the inevitable selling of her house, the ending of the War, and the demise of her husband had been added reasons for her decision to see Cairo, and, if possible, Jerusalem. It turned out that she was particularly anxious to study the methods of the fortune tellers in Cairo, as she herself dabbled in the Occult.

This conversation led to her being beseeched by Charmian to “tell her fortune.” She promised to do so.

Mrs. Lacy was in her usual corner by the standard lamp behind the tall palm trees. When she saw Bianca coming, she put down her embroidery. Bianca introduced Louis and Peter. She said, “This is Charmian’s brother.” Then Charmian came with Mrs. van Geldern, but the latter refused coffee and went away after a few minutes’ conversation with Mrs. Lacy. She had promised to play bridge with the Hungarian general and the Swedish banker and his wife.

Louis was charming with Mrs. Lacy. Bianca thought that he had a way of being rather consciously courteous to people who must bore him. Charmian went up to her room and came back with the crimson jersey she was knitting for one of the children of Central Europe. Louis ordered a brandy for himself. Bianca wouldn’t let him order one for Peter.

Soon Charmian reminded Mrs. Lacy about the fortune telling and held out her two palms.

Mrs. Lacy bent forward under the lamp. She held Charmian’s right hand. After a moment she said, “I can tell your character better than your future.

Your fate line isn't very clear." She hesitated . . . "You'll go abroad . . . I see that. . . . You've more heart than wisdom."

"Shall I marry?"

"Not yet."

"Oh!"

"Are you in such a hurry?"

"I'm in a hurry to be happy! Shall I be happy?"

Mrs. Lacy's glance lifted to Charmian's face.

"You'll always give happiness."

"What more do you see?"

"It's difficult with a very young hand. The lines alter, you know, from year to year."

"Chinese people," said Peter, "tell fortunes from the soles of your feet." But he held out his hand.

After a moment's hesitation, Mrs. Lacy raised it closer under the light. Then bent down to it. She murmured something about "very few lines." Then she said, "You're very loyal . . . Capable of great feeling— Very great feeling."

"Shall I travel?"

"Yes. Quite a lot."

"Oh, *good!*"

"But you mustn't overdo things." She spoke in an uncertain voice, as if she were searching for a sentence which her own thought couldn't define: "You mustn't go too *fast* . . . You must be—steady . . ." She dropped his hand. For a second her lidded bird-gaze stayed on his face.

Louis spread his broad palm, his long fingers.

"You?" She looked up; saw him. "Oh—yes."

Her wrinkled forefinger traced the palm of his right hand as if it were a map. "Great talent . . . The success lines are clear."

"Artistic success?"

"Yes."

“And what other sort?”

“What do you mean?”

“What shall I *be*? Apart from what I shall *do*?”

She said with what he suddenly felt was her deceiving simplicity: “Well, I suppose you will *be* whatever what you have *done* makes you.”

“Shall I be happy?”

“I can’t tell.”

“Do you see misfortune?”

“There’s something . . . When you’re about thirty.”

He said, “That’s a long way off.”

“It seems so now.”

Charmian said, “Will he marry?”

Louis glanced at her. “Romantic Charmian!”

Mrs. Lacy said, “I can’t see.” She let his hand go.

He got up and walked off, lighting a cigarette. Peter followed him.

Then Mrs. van Geldern came. Had Bianca seen her fur? She had put it down *somewhere*. Everyone began looking for it.

Louis and Peter sat up in Charmian’s room until after two o’clock talking politics.

Louis talked politics because he was French; Peter because he believed that politics was one of the interests of a gentleman; Charmian because she believed that through politics humanity might be saved.

When she asked Louis what his politics were he said, “Vaguely to the Left.”

“You mean you’re a Socialist?”

“Not exactly. But my friends are to the Left. My family are Conservatives.”

“Like ours,” said Peter. “But still I don’t see what else you can be except Conservative unless you want to see every big estate made into a garden city.”

Charmian began about slums. They argued about poverty and education and housing until Charmian threw her slipper at Peter for saying that if he had to choose between one slum baby dying or the destruction of Hampton Court he would prefer the baby to die. He picked up the slipper and said earnestly, "I didn't mean I *want* the baby to die."

Louis laughed at Charmian and put his hand on Peter's shoulder. "There have been enough babies dying and palaces destroyed without arguing hypothetical cases."

They began arguing about war; and then about "the Peace." Peter quoted Fontenelle's remark that "war was an interruption of good conversation." Then quite suddenly Louis stopped pretending that nothing mattered to him, and said that the real perpetrators of war weren't some of the politicians, but men like their respective fathers, who manufactured armaments and got rich by being linked up with all the other armament firms all over the world. He said the aliens had been killed all the time with guns made by Cable's and Scheurer's. He said Krupp in Germany was closely linked up too, and Skoda. And that his father owned three Paris newspapers (he cited which) that had been building up anti-German propaganda for years. And that the German firms had spent thousands of pounds in bribing French papers to intensify the mutual hatred by false scares so that both sides would order more guns. He cited which members of the French Government had shares in Scheurer. And he said that old Ivan Benz—

"—The goat?"

"—Yes. The *Ziegenbock*"—had founded the Paris-Lyons Bank and made Tissot the head of it, and that he had then, through Tissot, bought himself into Scheurer's in 1908 and so become a codirector with Philippe Scheurer and two important members of the French Government; just as in England Benz had for years been codirector with Lord Cable, of Cable-Bensley.

Louis walked up and down the room as he talked, lighting cigarettes and throwing them away half-smoked. He said that unless all this, and more, were exposed at the Conference (which it certainly would *not* be), the whole Peace would be *foutu* anyway. And that all the governments had better go right home and start making new guns, new air fleets, and lots of poison gas at once—instead of waiting to sign a treaty and pretend that Scheurer's and Cable's and Krupp's and Skoda were going to grow olives after this! Then he began talking again rapidly and angrily about the "old men at the Quai d'Orsay." He said every single government had come to Paris with the essential purpose of grasping what it could get. At least Clemenceau faced

that fact. But that Lloyd George was Janus, and Wilson was a magnificent moron, and the Italians a couple of brigands. He said that the only real fear underlying the Conference was that there might be less profiting out of the Peace than there had been out of the War. He said that it was like the Congress of Vienna only much more hypocritical; he quoted Wilson's remark that there was to be "no odor of Vienna."

Charmian, hugging her knees on the bed, said that at least Wilson had ideals, even if they were difficult to work.

Louis said an unworkable ideal was like bad plumbing. Better to have none; and there was less "odor."

When Lottie and her baby left the house at Ebony, and went back to Germany, it seemed a matter of course that its lease should be made over to Bianca.

That, at any rate, was Carteret Cable's notion. And his wife agreed; because it seemed to her unlikely they would let it to anyone interesting. Violet Cable preferred to be charitable to someone of her own family than outside it. All the same, when she saw Bianca's Hepplewhite chairs in the newly painted dining room, and realized how even Bianca's perfunctory redecorating brought out the charm of the little house, she couldn't help wishing that Bianca were paying rent. . . . After all, she wasn't poor. She must have quite fifteen hundred a year after her income tax had been taken off. . . . Young Selwyn had had a clear thousand a year. She had discovered that from his uncle, Hamish Selwyn. And Bianca's father, according to one of his fantastic theories, had made over the capital of six hundred a year to her when she was sixteen.

Violet Cable found her husband's excesses of generosity more annoying than his fits of temper, because their results were apt to endure.

Only Bianca's condition and all the business of Charmian's first season in London . . . her clothes, her presentation, her coming-out ball . . . prevented Violet Cable from going to have a little talk with her niece about the rent. However, the baby was expected in June. After that she would speak to Bianca.

Meanwhile, if only Charmian would take a little trouble either about Sark, or young Platt-Eresby. . . .

Paris danced.

At the Ritz, at Claridge's, at the Crillon . . . at midday . . . at *thés dansants* . . . during dinner, all evening, all night. In the *boîtes* in Montmartre, in the little "dancings" up and down the Rue Pigalle . . . in the square scrubby little room that was "Le Bœuf sur le Toit," they danced until morning.

The white lilac bloomed in the Champs-Élysées; and the glamorous gold-dusted evenings changed, as the lime trees darkened, as the shadows quivered beneath the trees and blackened and gleamed beneath the bridges (the Pont d'Iéna, the Pont de la Seine, the Pont-Neuf); the golden twilight darkened, veil by veil, to a disturbing and fragrant and jeweled night. And in the chunks of radiance under striped awnings, in the big restaurants, in the little *bistros* up on Montparnasse, in the bright-lit *cafés*—all mirrors and red plush and stained marble—from the Avenue de Wagram to the Place d'Italie, the American jazz bands, the *bal musette* orchestras, the cracked phonos, the tinkling and rheumatic pianos, played "El Relicario" . . . "Swanee" . . . "*J'en ai marre.*"

The women whose husbands and lovers and sons had returned danced through the days and nights; until they forgot the faith and love and tenderness for which they had dreadfully waited; forgot the long terror and the agonizing sweetness of relief; forgot the darkened boulevards and the rising wail of sirens and the unending sounding of guns. They swayed, dipped, turned. . . . "*J'en ai marre.*"

Dressed by Patou, by Worth, by Chanel, they danced; with pink rouge on their cheeks and their ears hidden under their hair, and their toques and ospreyed headdresses pulled down to their soft thick eyebrows—and flesh-pink stockings on their swerving dipping ankles. . . . They tangoed, dressed in little artificial satin frocks, in shiny stockings with cotton knees, wearing out their stubby shoes to the last thread of satin across the toes. . . . They fox-trotted (the marketing, the housework, the washing-up, being done), in black serge, hair crimped, their faces broad and serene, their hands smelling of Eau de Javelle; and, when the disk spun irresistibly . . . *Ça c'est une chose* . . . they danced in their checked cotton overalls, their big forearms round the brown necks of their partners.

At *thés dansants*, at *diners dansants*, the *jeunes filles* swayed a little dizzily, in their partners' arms, excited by this queer, heady, dusty fragrance. (Of the summer? The lime trees? The—Peace?) They were pale and gay and nervous and bloomily amorous, these *jeunes filles d'après guerre*. They danced (with their parents' permission) with such suitable young men as had come back from the War; and, with their parents' permission, got married to them. And the young men took them with an experienced and vehement tenderness, not only because they were innocent and gay and lovely, but because they were innocence itself—and gayety—and loveliness reclaimed; just as the white sheets in which they slept with them were not only cool and smooth, but, in their smoothness, a symbol—and therefore a reassurance—of peace.

The American jazz bands thudded and wailed. And at the Tabarin, at the Moulin Rouge, at the “dancings” in the Boulevard de Clichy, in the Place Blanche, the British and Americans, the from-all-the-corners-of-the-world's, delegates for Peace, saw the French *cancan*—black silk legs and the swirl of *froufrou* petticoats; saw the naked girls with gloves on; negresses with feathered behinds; Venuses by the undulating dozen with *cache-sexes* and top hats—and ordered more champagne, more brandy. And moved on, according to their tastes, to shuttered houses with big numbers above the doors, to addresses discreetly or nudgingly acquired, to be welcomed behind swiftly pulled portières by curving ladies with quick up-and-down glances; by boys with long eyes turned up at the corners; or by a dry-bitter fragrance in the close and darkened air.

These shutters remained closed.

But in the Bois the chestnut flowers opened in the translucent morning shadows; the swans moving out across the lake slipping, chalk-white, through the furling pallor of the mists.

Marthe stirred and woke suddenly.

Louis was standing by the bed. Shuttered light was in the room. He was in his “smoking.” She noticed the pin below the buttonhole where his orchid had been. He said:—

“Sorry to wake you, my dear. But have you got some money?”

She sat up, pushing back her plaits. “Yes, Louis.”

He said, “I spent all mine to-night. And I want to go to London. And the bank doesn't open until ten.”

“But how? At *this* hour?”

He said irritably, “Yes, by the nine o’clock.”

Marthe got out of bed and pattered across the carpet in her high-necked, puff-sleeved nightdress. She unlocked the right-hand drawer of her dressing table.

He said, “Paris exasperates me at present. London will be gayer. And there will be fewer heroes getting drunk.”

“Here is three hundred and fifty francs. It’s all I have here.”

He took it. “Thank you . . .” He added doubtfully, “I suppose I shall get to London with that. At any rate, second class. Anyway—I can get the rest from Zamorr . . . Good-bye, my dear. Be good. Be contented . . . Work well! Tell Maman I’ll telephone to her from London. . . .” He was at the door. For a second he poised on his toes and, half laughing, threw her a kiss, then, with an elaboration of stealth, crept out, closing the door after him.

Marthe looked at her watch. It was quarter past six. She got back into bed, smoothed her pillow, and fell asleep again.

The band was still playing “Swanee,” and the dancers passing and again passing the open windows of the ballroom saw that dawn was beginning, driving a long wedge of yellow light between the pewter-dark sky and the horizons of the Park.

Charmian broke away at last from her partner, and went through the dancers and out onto the balcony and saw the morning star high and bright silver.

Louis, sitting at the end of the ballroom, saw her go out and stand like a strayed *sylphide* on the balcony. He made an excuse to his aunt du Plessis, and went out too, and leaned his elbows beside her and lit a cigarette.

He said, “Is anything the matter? Or is it just that you’ve danced too long?”

She shook her head and didn’t speak. Her hair was caught back by her wreath of little white gardenias. She took off her gloves. (The dancers in the ballroom were singing “Swanee.”) She gave him her gloves and her fan and then hid her face in her hands.

He was moved, partly by her, partly by the achingly sweet and cool and mysterious first-light.

“What is it, Charmian?”

“Louis—help me!”

“How can I?”

“I’m so in love . . .”

“My dear!”

“I must go to him or I shall die.”

“Can’t you marry him?”

“He’s married.”

“I see.”

She put down her hands and folded them on the parapet. Light began to come from all over the sky. Below them in the street another motor drove away.

He said: “Can’t he divorce?”

“Still I shouldn’t be allowed to marry him.”

“. . . How long have you loved him?”

“Two years.”

“Who is it?”

“Harry Kramer.”

“. . . I see . . .”

The next day Louis went down to Eton.

Peter was startled to see him. He was shy.

Louis said—“Come and walk about.”

They walked up and down in the sun and Louis said:—

“She mustn’t see Kramer again.”

Peter said, “Nobody can stop her doing things. They can only try to. Last year she nursed Mademoiselle Houville, our French governess, with flu when the hospital nurse collapsed, although Mother forbade her.”

“She must be stopped.”

Peter glanced at Louis and wondered if he was in love with Charmian. He thought that he would be as proud if Louis married Charmian as if she were to marry the Prince of Wales. But the idea disturbed him too.

“I’m sure you could stop her,” Peter said.

“I?”

“Well. Because she’d respect *you*.”

“Respect me?” Louis became aware of Peter’s look. He caught the boy’s hand and dropped it again.

“Come and have some ice cream!”

Charmian refused to encourage Harold Platt-Eresby; and when her mother pointed out that Sark was the “best *parti*” in London Charmian quoted Peter’s comment that “Eddie Sark was positively encrusted with chorus girls.”

Violet Cable complained to Frany that Charmian frittered away her time flirting with Victor Finch.

Frany said, “You needn’t worry. Victor Finch isn’t dangerous to Charmian. He’s merely a dancing partner.” Frany didn’t add that Charmian incessantly crossed and recrossed the hall on the days the American mail came in.

Lord Cable’s little joke for that summer was the friendship between Louis Scheurer and Frany. He found it extremely paradoxical, and impossible to explain.

Violet Cable was equally surprised. But not amused. She felt that anything inexplicable happening somehow added to the difficulties of her own life. She could see no reason why Frany, so almost tiresome in her integrity, should like Louis, who was fast, neurotic, and about whom one began to hear all sorts of things.

Carteret christened them “Dignity and Decadence.”

When Frany heard this she smiled at one corner of her mouth and looked at Lord Cable with enigmatic, bright black eyes. Some inward amusement suffused her brown face. Then, as she was going out of the room on some other matter, she said, “Louis and I understand one another.”

And Louis, when Charmian teased him, said, “Frany is like a work of art. She is entirely original. She isn’t any ‘type.’ She isn’t like any other woman, or any other secretary, or any other English person in the world. She is purely ‘Frany.’ If she was a monument and tourists came, and took away as souvenirs even the smallest bits of her, even if it was only one of her eyelashes, or a scrap of handkerchief, any connoisseur of human beings would say at once, ‘Ah, of course . . . *C’est du vraie Frany.*’”

The culmination of the joke for Carteret, and for Charmian, was when Louis took Frany to Ascot.

He fetched her in the Vauxhall which he had hired while he was in London. He wore his grey top hat slightly tilted, and one of his green orchids. (Solomon’s had an order to supply him with two, every morning.) Frany was dressed in a white face-cloth coat and skirt, made for the Durbar in 1910, a black straw toque, and an Irish-lace blouse newly dipped in coffee for the occasion. (So that Louis was haunted all day by its unexpected aroma.) Louis had an ivory gold-topped cane. Frany carried a crimson parasol, and a feather boa that she had once prevented Lady Cable from sending to a village jumble sale.

When they got back in the evening, Frany had won seven pounds, and they’d finished up their day with champagne cocktails at the Hyde Park Hotel. Frany looked even more sun-bronzed than usual; and Louis was in a state of lunatic high spirits and stood in the hall at Portland Place singing “Give Me the Moonlight” with his extraordinary French-American accent to Charmian and Harvey and the Pekinese, twirling his cane like Vesta Tilley, and improvising a dance which led him spinning with incredible agility, his white spats flashing, his tails flying, up the staircase—straight into the arms of Sir Ivan Benz, who had been calling on Lady Cable in the drawing room.

“Ah!” said Benz. “Young Scheurer? What a—pleasant surprise.” He bent stiffly, like an old goat grazing, and picked up Louis’s cane, which had fallen in their impact. “How are you?”

“I beg your pardon—Sir Ivan.”

Benz turned to a man behind him. “Allow me to introduce you—Monsieur Scheurer, this is Mr. Brownlow Best.”

Louis said, out of breath, “We’ve met before!”

The other man, whose general effect was of having his expensive clothes too closely fitted, and his skin slack and soft over his features, looked at Louis blankly.

“I haven’t had that pleasure.”

Louis hesitated. One of his eyebrows peaked higher than the other. Then he held out his hand.

“How d’you do, then—”

The Treaty was signed in the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles on June 28, 1919.

Louis wrote to François, who was in Vienna, “The ‘War to end War,’ as the English called it, has been followed by a Peace to end Peace!”

Charmian leaned over the cradle.

“Oh, Bianca, he’s *so* lovely!”

Charmian wanted to cry. She shook her hair forward, so that Bianca and Peter shouldn’t see tears in her eyes.

Bianca lay back looking as if she had been painted in pale water colors against the solid linen of her pillows. She was possessed by an animal tranquillity, and watched her own thoughts with indifference, as a cat in the sun blinks at the ethereal staggerings of thistledown.

Peter said, “What’s his exact age?”

“Two weeks and three days.”

Peter stared down at the baby. Only Charmian could think that bald porcelain brow, those lashless eyelids, this little hunched, placidly bloated dwarf was “lovely”! He said:—

“I know what he’s like. He’s exactly like the old toby jug in the nursery at home!”

“Toby” became his name. Though Richard Peter van Geldern Selwyn was written in the register of the church at Moon’s Green.

The Moon’s Green War Memorial was to be unveiled by Lord Cable on the third Saturday in August. Violet Cable suggested to the Vicar, Paley Mathews, that she might also say a few words, as she thought “they would like it.”

Mathews privately deplored this idea to Frany. But Frany said:—

“She will do no harm.”

The Saturday was one of those days which, set in an English summer like a stained-glass window in a cold wall, are memorable when whole seasons in other climates are forgotten: a day beginning with a jeweled light slanting dewy shadows and moving through an arc of honey-colored hours to a night so starry and so fragrant that, in comparison, a Southern night seems tinselled and scentless.

Charmian had returned from Scotland. Peter was there, and Ruth, and Louis Scheurer, who had announced himself after a fortnight spent with the Bensleys at Frinton. Ivan Benz had arrived from his Welsh castle, and Admiral Briggs, Carteret’s brother-in-law, and a partner in Cable-Bensley.

After luncheon on the Saturday Violet offered her guests the Memorial Service much as, on Sunday, she offered them an expedition to church. “. . . Anyone who cares . . . this is Liberty Hall . . . Carteret and I, of course, *have* to go. . . .”

Sir Ivan signified that he wished to go. Charmian refused. Frany said, “Bianca telephoned this morning. She wishes to go. Could one of the motors be sent for her?”

Violet Cable said, “I consider it most unsuitable for Bianca to go along. She’s only just up, and the whole thing will make her very *émotionnée*.” She turned to Sir Ivan. “My poor niece Bianca Selwyn, who lives near here, lost her husband—so tragic—and anyway, neither of the motors can be spared, and she really could quite well afford to have one . . .” She stopped abruptly. Bianca had come into the room. She said, “Good afternoon, Aunt Violet,” and “I’d rather walk anyway.”

She looked fragile and cool.

Frany and Louis walked, with Bianca. The lanes smelled of meadowsweet that grew high on either side against the hedges. Beyond the hedges, the cornfields rose in a slow burnt-golden curve towards their own horizon; and above the corn, hidden high in the hot, drowsy blueness of the afternoon, a lark kept up his running commentary on summer and ether and the long irrational bliss of being alive.

As they approached the village, Frany put up her parasol. She said to Bianca, “You aren’t tired?”

Bianca shook her head.

Louis said, "What's that pink flower?"

"Ragged robin," said Frany.

"What a pretty name."

Their voices sounded more constrained than their silences. The cottage gardens were full of flowers. In some, the hollyhocks grew as high as the thatched eaves. Bianca said:—

"What lovely convolvulus."

Frany said, "They call it morning-glory in America."

"And with us," said Louis. "There is a blue one—of an extraordinary deep sharp blue—in the gardens at Céigny."

A motor passed them, raising the dust. They saw it slow down towards the crossroads and stop outside the churchyard. Louis saw Lord and Lady Cable get out, followed by Admiral Briggs and Peter.

They passed the Coöperative Store. There was a notice, hung crooked, in the window saying that the War Memorial would be "unveiled by the Right Honorable Baron Cable, K.C.B., C.M.G., on the afternoon of Saturday, August 15, 1919, at three o'clock."

They could see the crowd assembling on the grass slope opposite the church. At the top of the slope, the monument had a canvas curtain hung across the main block of the stone.

A figure in a cassock and surplice came out of the churchyard gate, shook hands with the Cables, and crossed the road.

Bianca said in her cool, steady voice, "I like Mathews. He christened Toby very nicely."

Now they saw the choirboys follow him, crossing to the green slope, looking like a procession of penguins.

There was the "ping" of a bicycle bell and Ruth pedaled past. She had her Sunday leghorn hat on, and her white serge coat and skirt. When she got off her bicycle, she leaned it against the churchyard wall, unstrapped her prayer book from the carrier.

A boy, in shirt sleeves and bowler hat, was hoisting a Union Jack to half-mast up the flagpole. The Boy Scouts were forming in double rank behind the Memorial. The choir flocked in front of it—beside a small wooden platform that had been set up for the service, its side rails draped in black

muslin, and a strip of red felt stretched up over the two steps which led to it. Lady Cable, in black, ascended these steps, followed by her husband and the Admiral. A phalanx of Girl Guides marched up, from, the other end of the village, carrying their colors.

Louis and Frany and Bianca joined the crowd. Nearly all the village men wore bowler hats and stiff collars which were beginning to soften in the heat. Most of the women wore dark dresses, though a few younger ones wore lighter clothes and white cotton stockings, and their hats tilted fashionably over one eye. All the little girls wore white dresses and white gloves, and their hair crimped; and the little boys had starched Eton collars over their Norfolk suits. Louis wondered what the Girl Guides were. He supposed from their clothes they must be from some sort of reformatory.

The clergyman followed the Cables up on to the platform and stood there, facing the crowds now, and raising his hand to shade his eyes from the sun. The crowd shuffled closer together up the grass slope. On the steps of the Memorial the heaped-up flowers were wilting. The roses and snapdragons and marigolds looked bruised.

Three small Boy Scouts went among the crowd handing out the printed leaflets of the special service. When they had done, the Reverend Mr. Mathews stood forward on the platform.

“I am the resurrection and the life . . .” The crowd stopped shifting and rustling their leaflets and stood still. A motor whizzed past on the road and vanished in dust. The intoned words went on. The sun beat down. *“He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow . . .”* The air seemed to thicken and grow more golden, making an amber in which the sombre tension of the crowd was caught and imprisoned. *“. . . in the morning it is green, and groweth up . . .”*

Now the ranks of penguins shifted. Then their voices led:—

“O God, our help in ages past . . .”

The crowd sang.

Frany sang too, staring before her.

Louis watched Lady Cable and Admiral Briggs singing up on the platform. Lord Cable seemed to be reading his notes.

“. . . eetern-al home” died out. Again the Reverend Mr. Mathews stood forward.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .”

A motor flashed past on the road, and was gone. A girl pushed a dusty perambulator down the other side of the road by the wall of the churchyard and halted down at the corner to stare.

“. . . neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. . . .”

In the silence that followed Lord Cable stepped forward, glancing sideways towards the boy who stood behind the Memorial holding the end of the rope. He lifted his neck once or twice higher out of his stand-up collar, gave a tug at the front of his waistcoat, rocked from his heels to his toes and back again. Then he said:—

“Ladies and Gentlemen: This isn’t an occasion when you want to hear a long speech, and I don’t intend to make one.” He cleared his throat. He looked rosy and stern, standing there in his tail coat and grey trousers, the gold hairs in his white moustache gleaming in the sun. “What I chiefly want to do is to thank all of you for helping to make it possible for us to have this—er—very beautiful and fitting Memorial in our village! When it has been unveiled you will see a list of the names of those from this village who have fallen in the recent War.” He cleared his throat. “Many of us here, as that list shows, have given our Dear Ones. And it is of them that we are thinking this afternoon.” He cleared his throat again. “They played the game for England.” His voice thickened, he squared back his shoulders, frowned, and jerking down his waistcoat with one hand went on speaking a little faster and staring straight over the heads of the crowd. “They fought and died gloriously and their memory will never fade. And also I should like to take this opportunity to mention that if any of you have by any chance not yet subscribed to the fund for the Memorial and wish to, Mrs. Wilcox at the post office will be very glad to—to add your names to the list. The idea is that if there should be any surplus, and thanks to a very sudden and very generous donation from Admiral Briggs here, I may add that there *will* be—the idea is to devote the money to providing an annex for the Hall! Also we—thought that some sort of suitable Memorial Tablet should be erected to indicate that the annex is a sort of Memorial too. And er—this seems to me a capital idea. And now let me close by a quotation.” He stopped, and extracted a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket, muttering, “Yes, here we are. . . . I like to have the exact words, although I am sure these words by a young English poet who, himself, died fighting are familiar to most of us:—

“If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed . . .”

He blew his nose.

“And now Lady Cable will say just a few words.”

He stuffed the slip of paper back in his pocket, nodded, with a stiff neck, at the crowd.

Lady Cable came down the steps of the platform and placed herself beside, but a little in advance of, the Memorial, holding her prayer book and her notes between her two hands. Keeping her head erect, and resting one foot on the lowest step of the Memorial, to Louis she appeared admirably to combine the austere stance of a chorister with the ingratiating attitude of a *diseuse*. Her competent stare took in the crowd, and glared for a moment at a little girl who had dropped her printed sheet. Then she spoke:—

“My friends. It is both an honor and a privilege to me to add a few words to those of my husband. As you all know well, both he and I have always felt a very keen interest indeed in all your lives, and—” she referred for a second to her notes—“and I think I can say that nothing has drawn us all together more closely than the shadow through which the country has passed in these last four terrible years. Probably in some ways a woman—” she glanced at her notes—“a woman in certain ways has even more of an understanding of what these last four terrible years have meant to many of us than a man can have, because I know that in so many cases ‘keeping the home fires burning’ has been a very anxious job; and thinking about those who—who might never come back again. So, and this is what I want to say, just quite informally to you. We here in Moon’s Green have done what we could. Let us, if we have had sorrowful times, remember those beautiful words which you will see carved—” she turned her head to the boy holding the rope, fixing him with a glassy and insistent stare—“carved here. We have done *what we could* to raise a *fitting Memorial* (Mr. Mathews, please tell him to be ready!)—a *fitting Memorial* to them. . . .” As she spoke these last words she seemed to be performing some rigid and terrifying act of hypnotism upon the boy, who at last jerked his rope, thus letting the canvas curtain slip down on to the wilted wreaths and flowers. As he did so she regained complacency, lifted her lorgnon, and stood looking at the inscribed block of stone.

Mr. Mathews announced, "Now we will sing Kipling's 'Recessional,' which you all have printed on your leaflets."

The penguin choir opened their mouths: —

"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line—
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine . . ."

When the "Recessional" was sung the crowd began to disperse, many of the women bending their heads so that their hat brims hid their eyes, several of the men blowing their noses. More of them filed before the Memorial and read the names, and peeked to see whom the flowers were from.

Lady Cable came down the grass slope cautiously in her high heels. She came up to Frany and Bianca and Louis.

"I think that went off all right?"

"Yes," said Frany.

"I was terribly afraid that that idiotic boy wasn't going to pull the string when I was ready. I was quite agitated."

"Nobody in the audience would have supposed so," said Louis, courteously.

"As for the Scouts," she added, peeling off one of her black kid gloves and glancing automatically at her rings, "they were out 'flat' twice. I shall have to speak to Mathews about it."

Louis said to Bianca: —

"My car has been sent from the house. Please allow me to drive you home. It is really too hot for you to walk."

She thanked him politely without seeming to hear him. Peter, who had been looking at the Memorial, strolled toward them.

"I'm driving Bianca back to her home," said Louis. "Come with us?"

On the way back Louis talked about the differences between this Vauxhall and his own Lancia.

When they drew up in front of the house at Ebony, Charmian came out. Bianca went in with her, but first thanking Louis for having brought her home.

When she'd gone in Louis said to Peter: —

“What made her insist on coming?”

Peter climbed into the front seat.

“Pride, I should think. . . . Or else a sort of feeling that she ought to be there.”

“Strange . . .” As they drove out of the gate Louis said, “Is she still very unhappy?”

“Absolutely miserable. You never knew her before. She used to be awfully gay and high-spirited.”

A little later Louis said, “What were the ‘beautiful words’ your mother referred to in her speech?”

Peter was inexpertly lighting himself a cigarette.

“Oh, just the usual . . . *Dulce et decorum*. . . .”

“Give it to me,” said Louis, “and I’ll light it for you.” He took the cigarette and put it between his lips. Peter flushed.

“. . . Only,” said Louis, “nobody ever inscribes ‘It is bitter and indecorous to die for Sir Ivan Benz—for Cable-Bensley—for Scheurer—for Krupp.’ Here you are. When you go to Oxford next year I will give myself the pleasure of presenting you with a lighter.”

Ever since they could remember, Charmian and Peter had trailed after Frany like this while she cut the flowers. She had always carried the same two baskets, the broad yellow flat one, and the long brown one shaped like a canoe and with the high handles. She had always worn, as far as they knew, this same pair of stiff, wash-leather gloves, and the same man’s Panama hat with the piece of bright green net round it knotted and hanging down her back over her white shirt. It almost seemed, thought Peter, holding the flat basket as she passed down the herbaceous border, as if she were cutting always the same snapdragons, the same dahlias—only now, so strangely, so pleasantly, Louis was there too! Louis was carrying the canoe basket with the roses in it, and it was to Louis that Frany was telling one of her stories of her expedition in 1893 up the Yukon River with her brother.

She was telling him the one about their companion whose damp gloves gave him frostbite, and Charmian was turning a poppy inside out to make a lady-with-skirts, when Violet Cable appeared, round the end of the border, carrying a telegram. She spoke to Charmian, blandly.

“Here is a telegram from Eddie Sark proposing himself for this week-end!”

Charmian said, “I suppose you asked him?”

“Not at all—I only happened to mention to him that we should be here all September.”

Charmian dropped the pink poppy and said sullenly, “I shall go over and stay with Bianca for the week-end.”

Violet Cable was suave. “You seem to forget that Bianca is in Broadstairs with your Aunt Josephine— Anyway, there’s no *question* of your going away. . . . Frany, I want Lord Sark to have Number 4. . . . He’ll be here for tea. . . .”

She turned away, smiling with vague hostility at Louis, and saying to Peter:—

“I see another parcel of books has arrived for you from Hachette’s! More ‘Literature’?”

This last comment was for Louis, who had defended Peter’s buying of *Candide* on the ground that it was “Literature.”

She went off down the pergola, to seek out Trevor Topham, who was practising diabolò, his hobby, in the “nut walk.”

Charmian was swallowing and trying not to cry. She said: “It isn’t *just* Mummie wanting to see me well married— Heaps of mothers are like that— It’s this feeling she gives me of persecuting me. . . .” She turned to Louis: “You’ve seen Eddie Sark too! He is *such a horrid* little nobody.”

“Cheer up,” said Frany, snipping some Michaelmas daisies. Peter slipped his arm in his sister’s. Louis took her other arm. “Nobody can make you marry anyone, darling!” He added, thoughtfully, the corner of his mouth curling up, “We’ll fix Sark, as they say in New York. We’ll find some way to fix him.”

“Oh, *what*, Louis?”

“No,” said Louis, firm and almost mystical, “you must just trust *me*.”

Louis dressed early, for dinner. He had told Peter to inform Eddie Sark that dinner was at eight. It was actually at eight-thirty. (He had confided in Peter; but not in Charmian.) Therefore, as he hoped, he found himself alone

with Sark before dinner, in the library, and started a conversation at once, about the set of tennis they'd all had after tea. Sark agreed that it had been quite a good set.

"Peter's quite a good player," said Louis.

"Not at all bad. A bit erratic at the net."

"Your game was excellent!"

Sark said complacently, "Ah, well— I've played a good bit with Lenglen. She's rather a friend of mine!" It was his particular "snobbishness" to know, or pretend to know, intimately, any or every kind of "professional" actors, golfers, boxers, jockeys, motor-bicycling champions.

"Ah, yes. Lenglen! What a marvel she is!—Not a beauty, but a wonderful player!"

"Yes, absolutely wonderful."

"Well," said Louis, "no woman can have everything— Charmian, for instance, is such a pretty girl, but her tennis is *very* mediocre!"

When this idea had reached Eddie Sark's mind, he agreed emphatically—and repeated twice that she was really "awfully pretty."

Louis paused and then said, "Poor Charmian!" He seemed rather to be talking to himself.

"I don't know why poor!" said Sark. "I mean—"

Louis turned and looked into Eddie's protuberant blue-grey eyes. Then he said rather quickly, and gently, "Well—money isn't everything—"

"Oh, I say, I didn't mean that! I wasn't talking about her *money*, although goodness knows she must be one of *the* little-rich-girls about just now!"

Louis continued to look gentle and rather sad. "Let's talk about something else," he said. "Tell me," he urged, his accent suddenly becoming much more French, "tell me what you *do*, Lord Sark."

"Me— Oh, well— Well, I haven't done anything since I was demobbed."

Louis nodded comprehendingly. "For those who can afford to do nothing —" he said.

"Why, what do *you* do?" demanded Sark. "I thought—"

Louis said, "It's a long story. Anyway, my father arranged things so that I must work—" he added. "I am a biologist."

"Really— You mean you study newts and breeding and all that?"

Louis nodded. Then, with a troubled, secretive expression he glanced about him, and, lowering his voice, said, "That is *why I am here!*"

Suddenly he seemed to make some resolution and came and sat down and, leaning towards Sark, said, "Don't you know really? About—poor Charmian?"

Sark looked as startled as a child hearing a ghost story. He answered in an equally low voice, "*What do you mean?*"

Still Louis seemed to hesitate, temporizing. "—Poor Lady Cable—she's always trying to get her 'married off,' you know—without the young man discovering—"

Sark's eyes bulged more than ever.

"Why?— Look here, Scheurer, I wish you'd tell me!"

There was a sound of voices outside in the hall. Quickly Louis bent even nearer to Sark, and said:—

"She's got a tail!" He added, in a low penetrating whisper, "A long tail like a monkey!"

Dinner didn't seem to "go" at all.

Violet Cable made every effort to amuse young Sark, who sat on her right, drinking one whiskey and soda after another, and answered her distressingly at random (and with, she felt, some sort of hidden hostility). To Charmian, who sat on his other side, he didn't speak at all. And Charmian, instead—for her mother noticed—of trying to distract him, kept glancing across the table at Louis and Peter, who were sitting on either side of Frany; and appeared, to Violet's acrid observation, to be in high spirits.

Old Trevor Topham, however, on Violet's left, seemed quite content to go on narrating scandals about dead duchesses, while Carteret, at his end of the table, explained to both Peter and Frany why the Coalition could not last another year. Violet heard the words—"Unionist—secession—Lloyd George—Bonar Law—Labor—Capital Levy—"

Next to her Mr. Topham was saying, "Lady Georgiana, I am afraid, has not inherited her mother's beauty—"

Louis turned to him.

“What a curious thing heredity is.”

“Yes, *indeed!*” Topham brightened, glad to find a new listener, for he had an impression that Violet Cable was being inattentive.

“Yes, indeed, Monsieur Scheurer—now Lady Georgiana, for instance, the daughter of *such* a mother—one was so disappointed, don’t you know—after all—in so many cases, the daughter will inherit the mother’s characteristics.”

“Biologically speaking,” said Louis, “one can never be certain. But, by all the rules of Mendel, *some* of the descendants will inherit—” he paused, and for a second his glance flicked across the table to Sark—“will inherit any very marked characteristics.”

Violet turned to Sark again:—

“How *interesting* all these problems are, aren’t they, Lord Sark?”

She got no more answer than a bloodshot stare, and a sort of muttering. She began to be afraid that he was drunk. And now Peter seemed to be having a coughing fit and had spilled his wine.

Violet looked at Frany. But Frany was still discussing politics with Carteret. Topham, meanwhile, was saying to Sark, “Now you come of a family of beautiful, remarkable women— Your mother—your grandmother on your father’s side—”

It was then that Eddie Sark, his always frail intelligence tossing on seas of whiskey and soda, arrived somehow at what was (at any rate for Louis and Peter) an epigram. He leaned right over his plate towards Trevor Topham, and, at the same time flirting his protuberant glance round at Violet, said thickly:—

“I don’t like women to be remarkable!”

Violet never knew why Eddie Sark left early the next morning.

Peter and Louis told Charmian why just before she had to say good-bye to him.

When they told Frany, she said it was a good thing Louis was going back to France.

Louis went back to Paris. Then on to Valescure to stay with a Pole called Nicky Zatec, who had bought his property in France the last year of the War. Nicky was twenty-eight, pallid and gross in appearance. He was alternately neurotic, lecherous, and childishly contented. (This cycle was unalterable.) He had read everything worth and not worth reading in French, German, Russian, and English. He never slept at night. He read always from ten at night until four in the morning. Louis had met him at a party in Paris at Marie de Montcontour's. He had been diverted by the contrast between Zatec's gross untidy body and his staccato brilliant sentences that went on rapping out as if his voice were a typewriter.

Nicky Zatec was amused by anyone so obviously poseur as Louis, betraying in his talk so much just thinking and sensibility.

Louis stayed three weeks with Nicky. Other people came and went. Painters mostly, who sat about drinking wine and discussing women of a Bohemian or demimondaine sort. But most of the time Nicky read. And Louis read. And Nicky's admirable chef cooked for them.

Louis became sunk in this existence of books and sun and rich food, and never bothering to dress except to change into another bathing suit, or a sarong. Moon's Green seemed unreal. And the one or two postcards that came from Peter and Charmian lay about his bedroom with its tiled floor and the palm trees outside, like the dusty souvenirs of a long-ago journey.

In October he left Nicky (installed with an Egyptian girl), and went to Céligny to join his parents and Marthe.

The villa was full of visitors and the atmosphere electric with political and economic problems. Among others Alan Blyth, David Blyth's brother, was there. He told Louis that he had a job on the Permanent Secretariat of the League of Nations now established at Geneva. He was looking for a flat in Geneva. He was very gloomy and said that the difficulties of the Peace would begin once the Treaty came into force, next January.

The villa was also overrun by a family of White Russians, to whom Madame Scheurer had lent the Orangerie (an annex to the main villa). They had all had appalling experiences in their flight from the Bolsheviki, but they were so like Chekhov characters that Louis enjoyed this, instead of being able to be sorry for them.

He told Marthe that the villa felt as if it had become a hotel at an international railway junction. Ministers, Economists, Secretaries, Journalists, from every country stopped off for a night's lodging or a luncheon; conferred; smoked; paced up and down the terraces, strayed in

cigar-chewing converse in the tall avenues of trees, or stood about the pools and fountains, arguing and declaiming. And then departed again, for Prague, or Vienna, or Paris, or Rome—or went, in one of Philip Scheurer’s white-and-maroon speedboats, across the lake to Geneva.

At the end of October Louis’s parents returned to Paris. Marthe and Miss Clark were sent to stay with “*mon oncle du Plessis*,” a retired Ambassador who lived alone on his property at La Motte Chalançon. He was considered by Madame Scheurer to provide a more suitable atmosphere for Marthe than Paris.

Louis sailed for New York early in November. There he shared an apartment with Jimmy Lothair on East Fifty-seventh Street.

Charmian came to stay with Bianca for a fortnight at Ebony while her parents went to Vichy. She was so listless that Bianca, who had sunk for weeks into an unnoticed and indifferent state, was troubled for her. And at last, against her own prejudices, she spoke to her about Kramer. Where was he? Did he still write to her?

Charmian was thirsty even to speak of him. He was still in America. He’d been, on a concert trip, to California. He wrote to her all the time. She had the letters sent *poste restante* now, to London, to the post office opposite Debenham’s, so that her mother shouldn’t intercept them. This meant she couldn’t get them except when she was in London. That was why she had these violin lessons, so that she had to go up once a week.

“But, Charmian, what can it all lead to?”

“I don’t know.”

“Mustn’t you try and face that out?”

Charmian pushed a yellow lock of hair back from her forehead.

“His wife’s divorcing him.”

“Out there? In America?”

“Yes, it’s easier there. He’s naturalized now.”

“But Charmian, *not* with any idea! . . .”

“Oh, no. She hasn’t even heard of me. I gather she wants to marry some other man. She doesn’t care about Harry’s career, or anything. Oh, God, what a mess it all is! She doesn’t want him. He needs me. He tells me that in

every letter. An artist needs someone to . . . care for him . . . to be *there*. . . . And I can't go to him. Even if I disobeyed Mummie and Daddy, I haven't the money for the fare . . . except what Mummie doles out to me through Frany every month . . . and I shan't have anything until I'm twenty-five with Grandfather's beastly will . . . although Peter gets his when he's twenty-one!"

Bianca didn't suggest that Kramer, if he wanted her, could send her the money.

"Bianca, how am I going to get *through* this next year? . . . At least, at the very worst, he's coming back next autumn. But that's a *whole year!*"

"A year isn't so long," said Bianca.

"Twelve whole months, endless weeks. . . . London again next month. Then *Cannes*. (Mummie's taken a villa there.) Then another 'Season' and Mummie saying 'a girl in her Second Season—'"

They were interrupted by Nannie bringing in the baby, newly woken from his morning sleep.

"I think he gets more lovely every day," said Charmian. Toby blinked, swathed in Shetland shawls.

"Doesn't he!" said Nannie.

"He's smiling!" said Bianca.

"So he is!" said Charmian.

Bianca held out her arms.

"Give him to me."

Nannie handed him as if he were the crown at a Coronation. Bianca held him. His brown clear eyes fringed with black lashes stared up into hers. He smiled at her.

She held him closer. He was comforting. It was like holding a hot water bottle to your soul.

During that autumn Bianca lived superficially the life of a schoolgirl suddenly emancipated and sent to live on her own in the country. She bought a bobtailed sheep dog which somehow got the name of Peggotty; she ate a great many peppermint dreams; and read a selection of books chosen simply because they would distract her mind. She would read *The Prisoner of Zenda* in a day; and spend another two days over *Vanity Fair*. Then for a

week she would read nothing but *Vogue* and the *Nursery World* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Home Chat*, to which she had been addicted for years. Then a bout of Henry James, which would last perhaps three weeks, until she found herself unable even to order a boiled egg without some circumlocution that made it impossible for her cook perfectly to apprehend what she desired. Reaction from Henry James might be the adventures of Sherlock Holmes or Kipling's short stories. Then Jane Austen. Then Tolstoy. Then a heavy bout of magazines again.

But more than anything she got through that autumn and, stage by stage, through those first two years after Richard's death by living in the country. For there she thought of him more easily, with less pain. Or with as much pain, but less bitterness; because, living alone with the days that changed summer to autumn, and autumn to winter, the idea of death seemed more natural. And there was even a day, of sun and white high clouds, when the swallows went, that an emotion, poignant and yet impersonal, made her think of early death as escape from winter.

Leaning on the paddock gate, the drifted leaves whispering at her feet, the bright still air about her tangled with the morning frost, she told herself that Richard, leaving life half discovered, and leaving her, at the beginning of love, had, at least, escaped those things that make experience ugly and age terrifying: insensitiveness of spirit; caution, self-interest, calculation; dullness after delight; irony after hope; indifference after love.

She remembered that morning in the Grosvenor Hotel, and Richard saying, "—If we live for a hundred years nothing in the world will ever be more unbelievably lovely—"

All the things he'd ever said, his looks, his light or clumsy gestures, his shy uncertainties and quick caresses, lived with her that autumn. . . .

Once, towards the end of the day, as she came homeward across a ploughed field, in the darkening soft rain, she felt him beside her; moving close, step to step, with her. And always, afterwards, she remembered those minutes of his being there across that tract of ploughed land as distinctly as she remembered the autumn smell of the air, and the far-off uneven click and rumbling of a car down the lane, and the chill of the mist against her face, and the sweetness of the rain.

Louis Scheurer to François Dubar:—

MY DEAREST FRANÇOIS:—

Good: that you are back from Vienna. (After your letter from there I couldn't sleep for two nights.) Good that you write again. Good that you have got that place at last in the Rue Visconti. It is so much you. And you will be nearer my apartment. If I ever return to it. Wherever I am seems the only real life; not because I like it, but because it is so difficult to imagine oneself in any other ambience.

Here, under the new dry régime, life is a perpetual Bacchanal. No one talks of anything but alcohol. Yesterday six men in New Jersey died of drinking "wood alcohol." Champagne is everywhere. So is money. As many people have got rich here from the War as in Europe. So the Nymphs wear jeweled heels costing ten thousand dollars each on their evening slippers. And the Satyrs pay; and only ask to pay still more. There is a Rolls-Royce factory established in Massachusetts. Schoolgirls wear ermine coats. Meanwhile everyone says Wilson will retire in March. Is he a great man? Failed? Or a mediocre man (as I used to think) who has put himself in too great and complicated a situation? I think still that he has a bombastic soul. But at least he has been *disinterested*. No other representative of any nation has dared to be. That is why his country won't support him.

At this moment I am waiting for Jimmy to get back from the theatre. He is playing in the most banal comedy imaginable. You, as an amateur of the theatre, would find it a curiosity. Jimmy plays a mechanic in a garage, always dressed in "blue jeans," who loves his mother and his fiancée equally, and cannot afford to support both of them. The solution, you may imagine, is in the death of the mother. There is a great cult here for the Mother. The people celebrate "Mother's Day." Those whose mothers are alive wear a red flower. Those whose mothers are dead wear a white flower. The popular idea of Mother is of a very old lady. Equally the popular ideal conception of a woman is of a very young girl; and of marriage as a kind of sentimental rape, after which the woman gets up and makes waffles.

I speak of the "people." A European misconception. They aren't a people; only a nation. In France we are grains of rice. Here they are confetti.

I have written a few chapters of "Doves in Aspic." But we are too gay for work. We are invited out every night. The *femmes du monde*, the "ladies" in fact, get drunk here, openly. Often they are laid in rows in the cloakroom. The young girls, too. There does exist too a kind of New York "Faubourg-St.-Germain." One may see it at what they call the Thursday Evening Club; old-fashioned jewels, stiff corsets, *tenue*, courteous old gentlemen with moustaches.

As you may imagine we don't spend all our evenings at drunk parties on Park Avenue. There are more curious and amusing things to do. When Jimmy and I look at one another in the morning light we see a mutual greyness of complexion, like two oysters. I shall go to the country for Christmas. To visit some friends in Connecticut. Each bedroom has gold bath taps and a w.c. of mother-of-pearl. But there is a beautiful park, horses to ride, and a cold air that excites your very soul.

Write to me.

I came here to escape the horror of the Peace. There is no escape. It is the Eye and Cain! Yesterday my hostess spoke to me of our Victory. "Victory, madame?"

"Why, Mr. Scheurer, over Germany! . . . And Austria!"

"Victory over German children starved slowly to death? Victory over infants in Austria born to die writhing and screaming with hunger? Victory over human beings whose humble and difficult happiness has been destroyed?"

"Why, Mr. Scheurer, of course we all know war has a turrible sahd to it. . . ." There she adds that old *cliché*, "Think what the Germans did in Belgium." I left her.

The Germans in Belgium! The British in Ireland! The Turks in Armenia! The Bolsheviks in Russia! Our troops now, in the Ruhr!

However—the Peace. Jimmy has just come in with half a dozen people. And the night begins.

Yours,

LOUIS

From Peter Cable to Louis Scheurer:—

December 22
MOON'S GREEN

MY DEAR LOUIS:—

I fear this won't reach you for Christmas, as it should. However, it will get to New York with my best wishes for 1920.

I wonder how you are faring? Thank you for your postcard of the famous sky line. It looks like one's notion of Valhalla. I'd like to see America in a way! But it's the South, Virginia and the Carolinas and the Colonial architecture there, that would interest me. And I'd like to see some of the Spanish stuff in New Mexico.

We have a large party here for Christmas. Mother is working hard over Harold Platt-Eresby and Charmian. But her efforts will be futile. Charmian is obsessed by Kramer. For once I think Mother's plan would be better. I expect Frany is writing to you, so I needn't give you news of her. She is living over at Ebony with Bianca at present as she doesn't think Bianca ought to be alone all the evenings. So Frany has got out her antique bicycle and insists on bicycling that two miles to Ebony every evening at eight o'clock and back here by eight-thirty in the morning. Mother, after fighting against the whole idea, offered to send and fetch Frany in the car. But Frany just said, "Lady Cable, I prefer my bicycle." She rides it too, like a Rajah riding an elephant. I wish you could see her.

Charmian and I and David Blyth and Charmian's *cicisbeo* Victor Finch and the younger Bensky girl had a very jolly party in London the evening before we came down here. We went to *Buzz Buzz* with Nelson Keys and Martha Thatcher in it, which is a very good show. Afterwards we went to the Piccadilly and had supper and danced, and went afterwards to Rector's. As Mother was away that night this was undiscovered.

I wish you were here. When are you coming back? I have just read *Il Fuoco* in French. Awfully exciting. But I, personally, always feel all this raging violent passion is a thing I could never feel. I expect there is something brutal left out of me. When I think about falling in love I imagine adoring a very beautiful and cultured woman, and wanting to be with her all the time. I know it is squeamish and romantic, but a lot of things about sex make me feel perfectly sick. The Latin idea of taking any stray woman as

one's mistress for the good of one's health I'm afraid brings out all my family's puritanism.

And as for the sort of Boat-Race Night "sprees" that end up by hearty drunks taking prostitutes off the London streets, well, that sort of "harmless fun" *appalls* me. And above all I wish "Love" and the "act of procreation" (as my housemaster put it) had absolutely nothing to do with each other.

Well, I don't know why I should launch into this diatribe. I feel end-of-termish.

Do write another postcard if you have a moment.

PETER

From François Dubar to Louis Scheurer:—

8, RUE VISCONTI
le 31 Décembre, 1919

DEAR LOUIS,—

Your letter gives me, at least, an impression of gayety. Here, whatever vivacity there was six months ago has been dissipated already by the increasing evidence that we have passed from the acute crises of the War to a whole series of crises following it.

Everyone talks of the arrival of Lloyd George next week. Monsieur Cambon and the Supreme Council are still discussing details of the Treaty. There is a more or less ironical feeling that it had better be enforced before the disagreements between those who framed it become more acute.

Meanwhile, I have just returned from doing some reporting in Rouen. There one sees a direct effect on ordinary transport of the late War. At this moment the whole of France suffers from a coal shortage—and at Rouen, 70,000 tons of coal are stacked on the quays and in the *péniches*; 30,000 tons are already on board barges which cannot be moved because of a lack of tugs! Not to speak of 100,000 tons already on steamers. . . . In fact, there are altogether 420,000 tons at Rouen.

Meanwhile in England the coal output is increasing. But when a German steamer was picked up the other day short of coal and towed into the English port of Grimsby, the coal heaver there refused to load her.

Viva la Guerra.

In England too one sees also a paradox of supply and demand. The Thames is full of ships loaded with meat which have been there for weeks. One of those little triumphs of bureaucracy that are ignored because the larger mismanagements of this last year have been in such colossal proportions.

You are all the time among people. Therefore you have less occasion than I have to realize these last years. Or do you, as happens to me from time to time, wake up in the night and find yourself alone with your memories of the War?

The thing which haunts me, above all, is not the necessary killing which took place, but the almost willful throwing away of human lives that last year. Thousands, in that 1918 retreat, flung into the line in a futile attempt to repair the cardinal errors of organization behind the front, which left us, French and British, without ammunition.

But at least you and I escaped the trenches. For us, in the air, there remained at least something of war in another epoch: the quality of personal adventure, personal triumph, and personal courage. . . . In fact it wasn't simply carnage.

I write to you out of a sort of solitude which has built itself around me since I returned from Rouen. For the moment, I am content with the company of Monsieur François Dubar. . . . I look out of my window at the backs of the old houses, and feel affection for each of them, and, with true friendship, do not ask what secrets are within their shutters. I admire the gardens and the blackened trees who accept with indifference this bitter cold (which I so detest). Equally when I go out into the *cafés*, I admire "the people," who accept the harshness of life which an invisible and unquestioned destiny has imposed upon them. But look how my metaphor, so prettily begun, has, in the way of metaphors, deceived my own thought! For my neighbors the trees need only wait for the spring to come to them. But the people? These creatures that I visit in my solitary expeditions, as, in the country, one passes from shrub to shrub, from one plant to another; thinking the frost had half killed this one; the wind has blown too hard on this tree when it was growing; here there was too much shade for a flower that needed sun! There is no spring for them.

As you know well, I am not a Socialist. Having been born and brought up among “the people” I know that they are only the rich without their riches. . . . Enrich them—there will be more rich people; more comfort.

But (and this is the thing all economical and political reformers forget) the problem of life is not comfort, but happiness.

Will there be more happy people when more people are comfortable? Walk through those quarters of any town in the world inhabited by comfortable people. Look into the faces of the men and women who come out of the houses. Do they *live*? Do they feel life? Have they delights and adventures of the mind? Are they gay? Are they sensitive? Are they in love?

They are, for the most part, sadder than the poor. For there is in poverty an element of perpetual danger which makes gayety more precious, and love more real.

(In passing, is it the unconscious need of that element of danger that makes the Great Bourgeoisies of the world throw themselves into war? Whose vicious power is to make their too certain life once more desirable?)

Forgive me. I send you the *belles pensées* of my attic like the English ladies who send pressed “specimens” of Alpine flowers to their friends! And which arrive to litter your bureau without giving you the least interest in my amateur explorations.

Return soon,
FRANÇOIS

Louis wrote *Doves in Aspic* that winter in New York. And finished it on board the *Berengaria*, on the way home.

He wrote in his preface that it was a collection of short stories “about Peace being Enjoyed.” He dedicated it to Ronald Firbank. He wrote well in English, using words with a foreign sensibility and skill. The stories themselves were too smart and clever and exasperated. They had a slight smart-clever success in America and in England. François translated them back into the French they would have been in in Louis’s mind. The New York, Chicago, and London reviews spangled his young reputation with phrases like “coruscatingly amusing,” “delicious and shocking irony.” The French critics commented on Monsieur Scheurer’s “witty masochism.” One

critic pointed out that though each story was well constructed, only the characters of women over fifty were convincing.

Zamorr pasted all the clippings in a book. He pasted the adverse ones upside down. Celimène said that she had always thought that M'sieur was, at bottom, *sérieux*; which meant that she approved of his making money by his writing.

It was July, two days before Toby's first birthday.

Bianca went into the nursery. Nannie was sewing.

"I'm taking Toby over to tea with Lady Cable," said Bianca. "Get him up at half-past three so that he's in a good mood by four."

"Yes'm." Nannie put down her blue sewing on the table, beside the machine. Her saint's eyes in her Dutch-doll face were black, and saw inwards. "He haven't done what he should to-day." Her customary gravity became gloom.

The gloom spread to Bianca.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh, dear." The primrose walls of the nursery deepening to fog. "But yesterday was all right?"

"Yes," Nannie conceded. "Yesterday was all right." But she added, with a forbearance more condemning than wrath, that when Mrs. Cobb cooked the semolina too quickly, it was very binding!

"Oh . . ."

The fog-colored walls grew yet darker. In their darkness Bianca beheld a Semolina Pudding, pale as an ectoplasm and lurid in its silent power of "binding."

"If . . ." said Bianca ". . . by to-night . . ." She turned from the apparition of Semolina and glanced out of the window across the bright garden to the pram, drawn up, luxurious and varnished as a barouche, under the quince tree. She forced herself to speak cheerfully. "Perhaps a little paraffin?" she suggested.

Nannie took up the blue sewing.

"—Or maybe her ladyship might let us have one or two prunes for tea." She added that she knew there were likely to be prunes already cooked, as his lordship always had prunes first thing.

“How do you know, Nannie?”

“Mr. Harvey happened to mention it one tea time.”

Bianca’s spirits revived a little.

“Well, let’s hope his lordship’s prunes will help.”

Nannie, not easily disturbed from her mood of serene and rational pessimism, said her aphorism about “everything taking twenty-four hours to pass through.”

Violet Cable was by the pool in the Japanese garden and Lionel Gary was saying to her:—

“You were right and I was wrong. You weren’t made to be a soldier’s wife.”

She couldn’t speak. Twenty-three years ago was yesterday. The water lilies were blurred.

“. . . And your life with Cable seems to have made you very happy.”

Had it made her happy? She didn’t know. She had her assumption about happiness, which was, in brief, that it was based on all the things she had had. She pierced the green turf with the ferrule of her parasol.

“. . . Perhaps it’s made me a little hard.”

He said, “Having been right always is apt to make people hard. Possibly the battle is to the hard.”

She turned her head and looked at him. “You’ve become quite a . . . philosopher.”

His smile, that wrinkled the corners of his eyes and hardly moved his lips under the moustache, was still so attractive.

“No, my dear. I’ve only observed my kind.”

“When do you go back to India?”

“Next month.”

“Next month?”

(Twenty-three years ago: “*When do you go back?*” . . . “*Next month.*” . . . “*Next month?*” . . . “*Will you come with me, Violet?*” . . .)

She put her hand on his.

“It wouldn’t have been possible.”

“Possible, dear. But not expedient.”

“Did you . . . were you very much in love with me?”

He said, shortly, “I wouldn’t go through that again.”

“But you never wrote!”

“There would have been no sense. And I wanted to forget you. I remember, several years after, picking up the *Sketch* in the house of a friend, in Simla, and seeing a photograph of you and two of your children.”

There was a rustling among the reeds. Two water fowl pushed out and swam across the pool, leaving two arrowed rifts on the water. The lily leaves rose and fell, and were still again.

“. . . When did you . . . stop caring?”

He smiled. “How feminine you are!”

“I . . . just wondered.”

He leaned back, crossing his arms, and stared out of their shade across the bright pool. He said “. . . *And after many a summer dies the swan*. Do you ever read poetry, Violet?”

Her surprise was that he did. “Very little. I really never have time for it.”

He said, “You never had, my dear,” in a tone whose gravity and irony and tenderness gave her so queer a sense of being understood, and of utterly not understanding.

Bianca came down the grass path.

“Am I too early, Aunt Violet?”

She didn’t know why her aunt kissed her and kept hold of her hand. And she wondered who Major Cary was, who walked back with them to the house, and went away in an old two-seater Wolseley before tea.

Violet was preoccupied during tea. But Charmian and Victor Finch, who had been playing tennis all the afternoon, seemed to chatter and laugh without stopping; and Peter and David Blyth (who was staying to do a picture of the house for Lord Cable) amused themselves by trying to teach Toby to beg by putting sugar on his freckled nose.

The game delighted Toby, who got up laboriously on to his unsteady feet, waited, blinking his eyelashes, for the piece of sugar, and then

collapsed backwards on to the grass, chuckling and muttering, “Oh, Toby! Oh, Toby, sugah!” But when Nannie came out she was pained at seeing the back of his smock and his knickers all green.

When Bianca was going, Charmian said she wanted to come back with her and see Toby have his bath.

Bianca saw that Victor Finch was hurt at Charmian’s leaving him, so she suggested that she might come to-morrow. But Charmian said that she couldn’t come to-morrow as she had to go to London for two days.

David Blyth escorted them both to the car. He admired the car (Bianca had just bought it) and asked if he might come over and see her sometime, while he was staying at Moon’s Green.

When they got back Nannie went to change, for a Whist Drive in the village, and Charmian helped Bianca give Toby his bath and put him to bed. He was gay in his bath; cross at coming out; and serene again when Bianca began to give him his supper.

Charmian, watching him, said, “Is he like Richard?”

“I don’t know.” Richard’s name touched that string in her heart that hadn’t yet stopped quivering and hurting her. She said, holding Toby warm and solid on her knees, lifting another spoonful to his mouth, “Sometimes he is. When he’s asleep his eyelids look like Richard’s.” She thought how Richard might have delighted in this smooth, solid, silken-haired creature; in his round head and brow, and the sweet nape of his neck above his nightgown collar, white like magnolia petals; and his shining squirrel’s eyes; and when he laughed; and teeth spaced out like small gay pearls.

When he was tucked in, the night-nursery curtains drawn, and the door left ajar, Charmian said, as they went downstairs:—

“I’m glad I came, Bianca darling. I like thinking of you—enjoying how sweet Toby is.” Then she went out into the evening garden and said, “How lovely the syringa smells!”

Bianca said, “The scent gets more as it gets dark. And comes into the whole house. Last night it woke me up.”

Charmian said, “That must be Victor’s car coming up the lane now. He said he’d fetch me.”

Bianca asked, “Why do you like him so much?”

Charmian hesitated. "He's been a very good friend to me. Especially lately. More than I can explain. He got me that page on the *Sunday Telegraph* to do."

"It is . . . *cheap* stuff, Charmian!"

"I know. But well-paid. And anyway . . . that's over now."

"Is it? I'm glad. I slightly shudder when my cook, Mrs. Cobb, brings me a kind of blotted angel-head of you, stuck in the middle of the sort of print you wrap fish in." Victor Finch called across the garden.

Charmian put her arms round Bianca and hugged her. "Darling, *don't* think about me as angel-head and fish!"

"What's the matter, Charmian?"

"Nothing."

"You're not unhappy?"

"Oh, no."

"Wait. Here's a piece of the syringa for your room to-night."

"Oh, Banky, how lovely," and "Good night. (I'm coming, Victor!) Good night, Bianca, darling. . . ."

Three days later Frany telephoned. "Your aunt has just had a radiogram from Charmian. She is on board the *Olympic*. On her way to New York. . . . Your aunt would like you to come over and see her. She wishes for company. Your uncle has gone to London to consult his solicitors. As Charmian is not yet twenty-one, he wishes to stop her marrying when she arrives."

Violet was saying for the fifth time that of course Carteret would stop Charmian's allowance, and beginning again about her having deliberately thrown away all her chances, when Alice came in, startled.

"Oh, m'lady—"

"What is it, Alice?"

"*Oh, m'lady!*"

"Alice, please speak to me if you have to."

“M’lady, I wonder if—if you’d come and see in the mauve spare room—I had to go in to open it up and—I tried to find Miss Drake, m’lady, and she isn’t *anywhere* . . .”

“Really, Alice. Surely this can wait?”

“Well, m’lady . . . only I believe it’s something to do with Miss Charmian, m’lady!”

When she’d gone they went up to the mauve spare room.

The door was open.

Bianca saw at once . . . the *bed* had gone! The immense double bed, so Edwardian—of French design, with the head and foot of white painted carving framing wickerwork. Where the bed had been, in the centre of the big square carpet, unfaded by the sun, was pinned a letter in Charmian’s handwriting. Violet darted to snatch it up. She stood reading it. She handed it to Bianca. Bianca saw how her hand was shaking.

Darling Mummie and Daddy—I am taking the bed as my only heritage, so you mustn’t mind. (Nobody on the estate helped me to get it away so you needn’t blame any of them.) I expect you will think this the maddest part of all, but when I was a little girl and you were both still sleeping in that bed, and hadn’t yet exiled it to the spare room, and Peter and I used to be taken in to say good-morning to you, I always thought then that two people who slept in that lovely bed must be absolutely happy (as well as very grand). So I suppose that really I feel it’s a kind of talisman, though a big one! Though anyway I shall be happy. (I *know* that— But you don’t think that matters so much.) And, I don’t expect to be “grand”— All the same I want it— And it will make me remember you both in the nicest years of all. And it is so white and ornate and pretty, it will be instead of having a wedding cake!

Your loving daughter,
CHARMIAN

P.S. I have ordered another bed to be sent down from Heal’s when I’ve gone.

The *Olympic* swung round and seemed to wait, resting across the river, for the slow approach of the line of docks.

Charmian pressed so hard against the rail of the Third-Class deck that she was in pain and didn't know it.

She didn't know that the heat was stifling; that her head ached from the throb of the engines; that she was sickened and hungry with excitement. Her hair hung lank from the heat; her face was white, and childishly hollowed from lack of sleep, and the bridge of her nose pink from hatless hours on deck. (She had forgotten to pack a hat.) She was so thin that even the old pink cotton frock of two summers ago, one of the few light garments it had occurred to her to bring, was loose on her, as well as short: she had belted it in with an old tie of Peter's which she'd brought from Portland Place tied round her books. And the books (three of them, the *Sonnets*, *Anna Karenina*, and Hans Andersen fairy tales) were tied up in the bandana handkerchief which she held in her left hand.

A fellow passenger, standing beside her, said something to her. But she didn't hear. The dock was getting near. She saw little daubs of serried faces and hands. Light beat up from the river. The dock was nearer now. The rows and rows of little upstaring faces. . . .

She was trembling.

She didn't know she was trembling.

She only knew she had been waiting all her life for this moment; and that her gratitude, that she should have come to it, to this very end of the known, this blinding edge of heaven, was a pain of happiness breaking her heart.

The faces were getting clearer now. She kept on raking and raking them with her stare.

Was *that* . . .? No . . . Or . . .? No. So *many* faces . . . So many people waving, smiling, beginning to shout now . . . Surely that *must* be? She leaned still harder . . . It wasn't . . .

They were docking now.

Now they were throwing up the gangways . . . She stayed still, keeping on and on staring. . . .

People began to shift and lurch and push behind her on the deck. ("*Off this way . . . off this way, please . . .*")

Still she stayed at the rail, peering down, staring back to those further faces, shifting, pallid, indistinct, in the shadow of the dock.

“This way off, please! Your landing cards ready, please!”

She kept on staring down on to the dock but began to move instinctively, buffeted in the wake of the crowd. Perhaps he was late? Perhaps the boat had docked earlier than he expected? Perhaps . . . perhaps he hadn't had her telegram?

She fumbled dizzily for her landing card. Dropped the bandana with the books in. Someone picked it up. She thanked him.

“Move along, please . . . Hurry off, please.” She found the card, bent up inside the pocket of her dress. A hand took it and she was moving down the gangplank. A crowd stood in a semicircle at the foot, kept back behind a barrier. Faces behind a barrier . . . Not his . . .

She got to the bottom, to the dock, and passed through a white gate, and was just beginning to let her fear get hold of her (that somehow he hadn't come, hadn't heard) when she saw him in the distance (half turned away from her, but she knew him)—standing far down the dock by another gangway.

He hadn't seen her.

She began to run along the dock, darting between groups of staring people, flying over baggage, bumping past porters and stewards, her sight blurred, her breath choking her, and when she was within a yard, gasping, and saw him turn and heard his “Charmian”—she checked for a second, speechless, waiting, at his next look, to throw herself into his arms—saw his expression.

He was looking at her face, her hair, her crumpled dress; and at the bundle of books; and then at her dress and her white face again. And then he said:—

“Naturally I supposed that you would come First Class!”

H. Brownlow Best to Lord Cable:—

THE NEW WILLARD HOTEL, WASH., D.C.
Sept. 2nd, 1920

SIR,—

As you may perhaps remember in connection with a certain arrangement with your firm which you and Sir Ivan Benz and I discussed last June, I happen to be here on business. This brings

me in contact with a good many people. Happening to mention your name to one, as it happens a newspaper man of high standing, he asked me if I knew anything about a rumor that your elder daughter, the Hon. Miss Charmian, was now in New York and had been secretly living unmarried with a pianist called Kramer, whom subsequently she had married. Naturally I denied the rumor, but I had an impression at the time that he did not believe me. And since then I have happened to hear much the same rumor from other quarters, and with certain additions as to the said Kramer's reputation which I prefer not to put down in a letter.

Now, sir, I wouldn't be troubling you with this if I did not think I could be of some use in the matter. It is part of my business to deal with the Press, and there are one or two simple ways of having rumors stopped. In this matter a word or two in the right quarters, and a small matter of expense, and the rumors concerning your daughter need not go any further.

Be assured, Sir, that I can and I will undertake this matter for you. One of the usual code-telegrams would reach me either here or at the official address and would avoid any possible publicity on the way.

Believe me,

Yours very truly,
H. BROWNLOW BEST

Decoded telegram from Lord Cable's solicitors, Jervis, Lane and Gearing, 6 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, to H. Brownlow Best, The New Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C.

REPLY YOUR LETTER SEPT 2ND STOP LORD CABLE
WISHES ALL PUBLICITY SUPPRESSED REGARDING
DAUGHTER'S SITUATION STOP KEEP US INFORMED OF
ANY DETAIL ABOUT KRAMER STOP LORD CABLE
EXTREMELY OBLIGED

JERVIS

Kramer, his brocade dressing gown over his shirt and trousers, kept pacing about the room waiting for Loeb, his agent, to come.

Charmian said again:—

“But Harry, it won’t be any *use*, my writing again. Father isn’t that kind of man. You see what his letter says.” The feeling of nightmare was in her again, making the familiar shapes in the hotel room seem distorted, and the drab colors too hot.

“Yes!!! That he will not pay the seducer of his daughter. That is how he writes to me. To *me*! Eh?”

“Harry, he can only *see* it in this way!” She moved to him, holding out her hands as if she were trying to break through the invisible ugliness in the air. Said, “Why don’t you have your coffee?”

“Do you think I am thinking about *coffee*? When I am in such a mood? When I have received such a letter? And to-morrow I have my concert in Philadelphia and should be thinking *only* of that!”

“I . . . know. I wish you could let me see Loeb; and you go and rest.”

“Ha! *Rest!* And, as for you to see Loeb, you will do nothing of the sort. He does not know you are married and live here with me in the hotel. I have told him you are my fiancée, that you’re staying in the Marguery.”

“But . . . why?”

Kramer threw up his arms. His face was pallid with ill-temper.

“Why? Because he will take more trouble if he thinks you have plenty of money. Do you *see*? He can make better publicity for me if he can say I am about to marry the daughter of an English Lord with plenty of cash. Which is better than that he finds you living here in this hotel of second class with me!”

“I . . . see.” She looked from his face to the clock. She got up. “Then I am to go . . . now? And hide from Loeb?”

“You had better go in the next room. Yes.”

She turned away.

“. . . And anyway you would not, in that dress, be fit to see any one of my friends. I never understand that you have brought nothing with you—except that *bed* we now must pay storage for!”

She glanced down at her frock.

“I put it on because it was cool. I . . . might go out and try and buy something more . . .” She smiled for a second. It *was* awful, and short, and

darker pink where she'd lost its own belt and tied on a white corded ribbon.

“Another *dress*? With what money, please?”

She flushed scarlet. And then in one of his flash-over changes he became pitiful. “When I am so *poor*? . . . When already I struggle to send what I have back to my mother and sisters that live half-starving. Because they are proud (we are all proud!) and will rather live starved in our castle than leave it. They accept what I send. And I do not tell them at what sacrifice often I *must* send it. An Artist should not have to make such extreme sacrifices. But I am also a man, I have a heart. I think of them, in that beautiful place where as a boy I was, and I must help them.” There were tears in his dark eyes. He turned to her, came to her. “Charmian, *meine Blume* . . . *mein Liebling*.” He came and put his arms round her. She drew a quick breath, like a sob. Then was quite still, uncertain. “. . . Do you think, *mein Herz*, that it is for myself that I must speak always of this hideous matter of money? *All*—everything that is *Artist* in me, tells me—what do such things matter? . . . That I have the two great things that are important in life, my Art . . . and the woman that I love.”

“Harry.” She put her hand with a quick but afraid touch on his shoulder. He could feel her thin body still rigid.

“. . . Only,” he went on, and now his hand slipped up her back to the nape of her neck, “only Life is not all Love and Art. It cannot be. We must live! And if an Artist can be free in this commercial world, he must purchase such a freedom.” He drew her closer to him and bent his head and kissed her neck below the ear. She felt his arms tighten, his breathing quicken, his teeth on her neck.

She shut her eyes, not thinking. (*Never* thinking.) It was she (hadn't he said so—that second day?) who was “unnatural” . . . “unloving.”

“*Liebling!* . . .” He could carry her so easily, strong for all his stocky height.

“But, Harry, you said your *agent* . . .” He locked the door of the bedroom. She knew better now than to struggle or speak. He never heard her words. The room was dusty with hot morning sunlight. The bed unmade. His clothes everywhere. The smell of him everywhere.

She got her eyes shut again, kept them shut, making herself think and *think* that she loved him, and that he needed her. . . . And that in her fear and torment and disgust she was “unloving.”

That second Christmas at Ebony was partly sad but partly sweet for Bianca; for Toby was old enough to feel his first Christmas time.

Already by the twentieth of December there was snow on the ground, and by Christmas Eve the drifts were high against the hedges, and gangs of men with picks and shovels and ploughs were working on the main road to Ashford. All day the air sparkled, and at four o'clock the sun was a hole of liquid flame in a smoky sky, and by five the stars were out and the snow glittered as it froze.

Bianca spent the afternoon in Rye doing her last-minute shopping, and having chains fixed on the wheels of the Fiat.

The town looked like the cover of a Christmas Annual; snow on the steep roofs and the shops lit up early in the narrow streets. The greengrocers were barricaded with fir trees, the butcher shops blazing with meat and marble, with a pelmet of magnificent pigs hanging upside down, holly in their eviscerated stomachs, red satin riband round their necks, and sprigs of mistletoe in their smiling lips. The poulterers' shops were correspondingly fringed with plucked turkeys like plump acrobats dangling in feather headdresses and linked by festoons of coral-gleaming sausages, and below them on the slabs lobsters were adorned with red and white and blue rosettes, chickens were impaled with flags proclaiming "Merry Xmas," and on the shelves the tinned salmon and the potted meats rested in evergreens. Santa Claus in scarlet with a cotton-wool beard was outside Boots's, mistletoe swung above the entrance to the ironmongers', and in the grocer's window a jeweled mosaic of crystallized fruits, jars of ginger, boxes of dates, prunes, and chocolate, had a central square of white cardboard on which was written in candied cherries: "The Season's Greetings."

When the car was stacked with parcels and the chains put on, Bianca drove towards home. On her way she decided to call in for tea at Moon's Green, and deposit her presents for them all.

As she drove up she thought how beautiful and romantic the house looked in the dusk; the lighted windows on the ground floor still unshuttered and shedding their yellow radiance out on to the snow.

She came in out of the cold into the atmosphere of warm wood-scented luxury and Harvey said that her ladyship was still out, but Miss Drake and the young gentlemen were in the library.

Frany, as usual, was priestess of the silver urn. Peter stood with his back to the fire. Louis lay full length along the fender stool. He was wearing a purple silk shirt and a cream-colored tie. Bianca thought how exotic he

looked in the familiar room. He stopped talking when she came into the room, lay for the fraction of a second looking up at her, and then, with one of his curious limber springs, was on his feet, taut, polite, and too exquisite.

“How are you?”

“Very well.” She sat down by Frany.

“You look very well . . .” He was surprised by her beauty, and indifferent to it in one glance. “You look like a lily that has just collided with a red rose . . .”

“You’ve a good color,” said Frany.

“It’s the frost,” said Bianca.

Louis coiled down and along the fender stool again. “I haven’t been out at all.”

Peter said, “Even Father couldn’t get him to move.”

Bianca turned to Frany.

“It was lovely in Rye. The shops looked like the little German model ones Ruth used to have. The fruit looked as if it were painted.”

“I say, who’s talking about *me*?” As Bianca spoke Ruth came in and stood, ruddy-faced and inquisitive, with her hands thrust in her pockets.

“Nobody,” said Peter.

“Well, I *distinctly* heard my name.”

Frany said, “Bianca mentioned your toy shops.”

“Mm, yes! That Fräulein brought me, I remember. I bet she was a spy!”

“You always bet that,” said Peter. “But nobody will ever lay you any odds. What’ve you been doing?”

“Oh, Lord! Beryl and I have been for a walk with Miss Faber. . . . No meet on Boxing Day if this frost goes on. Just my beastly luck. And Beryl’s got to go on Wednesday.”

Beryl, a cheerful little squirrel-faced friend with a red pigtail, came in.

“Ruth? Miss F. says tea! . . .”

“Oh, all right,” said Ruth. “Tell ’er I’m *coming*! Well, so-long, everybody. Nobody need expect any presents from *me* to-morrow, because I haven’t been able to afford any! So that’s that!” She swung away on her

heels, her shoulders hunched, her hands thrust deeper than ever into her pockets. “My new saddle took every penny of my blessed savings; and on top of that, Mathews started this Save the Children Fund ‘subscrip’ in the parish, and, of course, I *had* to stick my name down for so much. . . . Oh, *well, there* it is. . . .” She stumped off, slamming the door after her. Louis, recumbent, gazed at the door.

“She is charming, Ruth!” he said gently.

Peter said, “She’s quite a good sort, really.”

Louis raised himself on his elbow. “Now that’s something I’ve always wanted to know. What *exactly* does that mean? What is a ‘good sort’?”

Bianca took a scone and glanced at him.

“Someone, I suppose, who is likable for no *showy* reasons.”

“For no *apparent* reasons,” said Peter.

“Why then does one like them?” asked Louis. “Frany—silent and mysterious well of information that you are? . . .”

Frany looked down at him.

“One does not always like them.”

Bianca said tartly, “At least they’re usually useful people.”

“Ha?” Louis turned over slowly and lay prone, cupping his chin in his hands and looking up at Bianca. She thought that at this moment his eyes seemed as if they were looking out from inside the mask that was his face. . . . He asked, “And what, madame, is their use?”

“They—*do* something in life.”

“You think that’s essential? Doing something in life? Which may mean anything, from going every day to an office, where you sell something you never see to someone you don’t know, who won’t use it! Or it may mean, as my aunt in Paris does, embroidering without talent things without beauty. . . . Or again . . .”

Bianca cut him short.

“What I do think is ‘essential’ is to . . .” she hesitated, “to be of some sort of *use*. . . .”

Peter broke out, “You *are* being dreary, Bianca darling!” He knew she disapproved of Louis, but she needn’t put her ears back like that whenever she saw him.

“More tea, Bianca?” said Frany.

“. . . Not,” Bianca went on, “to be perfectly content to lounge through life wearing orchids and making paradoxes and rippling one’s hips!”

“Here is your cup, Bianca!” said Frany.

Louis smiled. His left eyebrow rose a little higher than the other.

“You are so deliciously un-English, Bianca!”

Peter, seeing Bianca’s expression, said, “A cigarette, Louis?”

“. . . The English habit,” said Louis, “is to say clever things in a dull way. . . . Yours is to say dull things in a clever way!”

“I’m sorry if that’s the effect. . . . I’m less aware of what . . . effect I make, perhaps, than you, Louis.”

“*Le style—c’est l’homme, Madame Bianca!* . . . Give me a lump of sugar, Frany. I adore these square, rich, English lumps of sugar.” His glance returned to Bianca. “I see that the idea of ‘style’ makes you look, once more, at my shirt!”

“It’s very—pretty!”

“Useful, too, I assure you.” He slid a look at her, and bit the sugar with his front teeth. “Without it you would see my body, which is still *crème brûlée* with the sun and idleness of my summer. . . . All the same, madame, in condemning me, you forget perhaps my Literary success?”

“I don’t.”

Then, for no reason that she could understand, Louis’s look changed. He smiled. A tide of warmth and ease seemed to flow up visibly under his skin; and suddenly his whole expression was as direct and simple as it had been dark and oblique a second before. He said, his voice dropped two tones, “It was a very mediocre book!”

Peter protested.

“Wasn’t it, Frany?” said Louis, rolling off his stool and twisting up like a released spring to a kneeling position.

“No,” said Frany.

Louis laughed. “The severe and beautiful Bianca hasn’t replied?” Kneeling before the settee, his face was on a level with hers. “Wasn’t it mediocre?”

Bianca said curtly, "I didn't read it."

(This wasn't true.) She got up.

She wanted to end talking to him. She felt that there was some kind of chemical antagonism between them. She wondered if he felt it too.

"All this disagreeing is wrong for Christmas time," said Peter, "and Mummie's been on edge all day. And look at *Ruth*! It all comes of not doing a play."

Louis sat up. "A play?"

Peter explained, "We usually do theatricals, a play or something, in the village hall on Boxing Night, don't we, Frany? During the War we did them at the Hospital instead."

"Why?" Louis asked, intensely interested.

"Oh, well . . . we always have."

"And . . . who acts?"

"All of us. And whoever's in the house. Mummie, Bianca, myself . . . sometimes neighbors too. Father doesn't act. But he prompts."

"Then why didn't you this year?"

"Oh . . . well. Sort of 'mourning' for Charmian. We didn't feel like it. Actually Father pretended that it was because he wanted a quiet Christmas, but he minds as much as we do. Charmian always played character parts."

"And who's the leading lady?"

"Bianca. Two years ago we did scenes from *Twelfth Night* and Bianca was Viola and I was Sebastian."

Louis looked from Peter to Bianca.

"You must have been altogether charming!"

"We were," said Peter.

Frany came to see Bianca on New Year's Day to bring Toby, as an encouragement to mature behavior, a child's silver spoon and fork which had been in the Drake family for three generations. With them in the stained maroon leather case was a card in Frany's neat, masculine handwriting: "*To Richard Peter van Geldern Selwyn. New Year 1921. Manners makyth Man.*"

She also brought the news that Louis was renting the Dower House (empty since the autumn of 1918 when the convalescent officers had left) for the spring.

Bianca couldn't imagine what he would do there. He was hardly, she suggested, adapted to English country life.

"Doubtless," said Frany, "he will adapt himself in his own way." She added, "Your aunt is much pleased with the rent he will pay her. She thinks now that she has misjudged his character; and lets herself hope that he will take the place on a long lease and do many necessary repairs. But he will not do so. He has other plans."

Frany then changed the subject by bringing out her black bag (it was worn leather of unknown age and always known as "Frany's black bag"). She produced an embroidery design which she had had copied from one Bianca had admired when they were at the Museum. (She had made it part of her routine that winter to make Bianca go up to London and lunch with her once every week, although she had never made any comment on Bianca's continuous solitude at Ebony.)

The first Saturday in February Hounds were to meet at Moon's Green. Carteret came down on the Friday, deeply disturbed by the news of the Mallow murder and its reprisals in Ireland; and by a letter from Peter, from Oxford, saying that he had joined the Oxford University Dramatic Society. He had also been exasperated on his way up from the station by seeing a furniture truck going up the drive that branched off, through the wood, to the Dower House. He said to Violet at dinner that he supposed young Scheurer was starting to refurnish the house. Ruth, who now dined in the evenings with her parents when they were alone, said that Louis had a rubber cushion that he stuck on the back of the bath to rest his head on. Carteret said he could almost believe it. Frany, looking across at Ruth, said:—

"How do you know, Ruth?"

"Alice saw it. That nigger Louis has showed it to her when she went over there to help Mrs. Cooper fetch his laundry."

Ruth was as truthful as she was insensitive. . . . She continued to talk:—

"D'you know, Father, when I saw Louis the other day I asked him straight out why on earth he had taken the place."

"And what did he say, I wonder."

“He said that he was always trying on new lives to see if they suited him.”

“Very witty,” said Violet.

“Typical!” said Carteret. “Typical of him. If he’d come here for any good reason! He’s a good shot, I grant that, a first-class shot. But what’s he do with himself most of the time? Doesn’t even play golf!”

Frany said, “He said he was going to start hunting soon.”

Carteret growled, “Rather late in the season to start! I offered to mount him at New Year and he refused.”

Ruth giggled. “I can’t *imagine* Louis on a horse!”

Harvey, who had gone to answer the telephone, came in.

“There’s a telephone message, m’lady, from Mr. Peter, to say that he is coming to-night by car.”

Carteret, sipping his Madeira, began a perfunctory grumble about these boys getting leave whenever they wanted it. But inwardly he was comforted at the idea of seeing his son. When he came down like this, tired and worried on Friday evenings, he was so haunted by the feeling of Charmian’s not being there. . . .

Once or twice he’d wondered if Violet missed her. But she never mentioned her. She seemed to be able to take his own words literally, that “as far as they were concerned, Charmian had ceased to exist.”

It never occurred to Carteret to question his wife on the matter. Nor would he have confided to her (since he never clearly admitted it to himself) the fact that he sent Charmian anonymously, a ten-pound note every week. He posted it in Piccadilly, registered, in one of a series of cheap blue envelopes; her name and address typed on it, by his secretary.

Peter’s explanation that he had come down for a day’s hunting absolved him from very serious protest about the O.U.D.S. Carteret merely stated at breakfast that he’d heard that the O.U.D.S. were “a queer lot”; asked what they were acting; and deplored their choice of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Why couldn’t they do *Henry V* or *The Taming of the Shrew*?

Peter, eating mushrooms and bacon and eggs, didn’t know but was in high spirits. Ruth, her little nose shining her pigtail looped up at the back under her bowler, came in to say that she was going round to the stables and

did Peter really mean to hunt Diamond to-day, because if he did she supposed she'd better take Sheba and resign herself to having her arms pulled off, etc. . . . They started one of their childish disputes, which went on until Frany, who was at the sideboard boiling Carteret's second egg its exact three and three-quarters minutes, turned round and looked at them as she looked at the Pekinese when they began fighting.

Peter, to change the subject, asked if Bianca was coming out to-day. Frany thought she was. She added:—

“Your father has bought her a horse.”

“On Frany's advice,” grumbled Carteret, opening the *Times*. “*Look at this*. . . . Nine constabulary men killed in County Limerick! . . .”

“Your egg, Lord Cable.”

“Thanks, Frany, thanks.”

By ten o'clock the sun had come through the mists, though a blue smokiness still hung round the woods and made the air smell thick and chill.

As Bianca rode up the drive, the trees were still dripping, and the lawns, sloping brilliant green up to the house, were sheened over with water. She sniffed the air. She felt her blood move faster.

Most people had already arrived; and a pattern of scarlet coats and the women's black habits shifted to and fro against the parrot-green grass and the maroon brick of the house.

By the time Bianca trotted up they had begun to move off along the drive towards Potman's Wood. Peter rode up beside Bianca. He was struck by a new vivacity in her, a swift brilliance in her smile. She looked so lovely that he exclaimed, with his British training:—

“You do look jolly in that habit!”

“Thank you.” She laughed; strength and sparkle in her voice. Several men riding near her bothered to look twice at her. One asked another, “Who's that?” . . . “That's Mrs. Selwyn.” “Oh yes! Of course. . . .” “She's only just beginning to go about at all. . . .”

Peter said, “I heard Louis was coming out, but he doesn't seem to be here.”

Bianca said, "I expect the Meet was too early for him." She added that she hadn't seen him since he had moved into the Dower House; but that rumor had it he entertained a lot of queer people there.

Peter said, "You've got this thing about 'queer,' too."

Bianca said stubbornly, "I like people to be normal."

"Funny you being like that," said Peter. He thought that in some ways the shock of Richard's being killed had made her an afraid person. Thinking this, he leaned over and patted her arm.

"I *am* pleased to see you, Bianca darling."

Their dark eyes met. Their oval faces lit up in mutual affection.

"How's Oxford?" she asked.

"Heavenly. Blissful. My life exactly."

"I'll come and see you one day."

Hounds were moving ahead up the hill now and keeping along a screen of beeches on the west side of the park. Ahead of Peter and Bianca the wife of the M.F.H. was laughing a fat laugh at something Sir Charles Billet, a K.C. with charming eyes like a bloodhound, was telling her. Just behind them Carteret was discussing Ulster Unionism with two other men.

Suddenly Billet's mare shied. In the same second Bianca's horse started and threw up its head, and she saw Peter catch up his rein, as Diamond, his eye rolled back, his nostrils quivering, plunged sideways. Within five seconds every horse in the field was shying, rearing, pulling to be off like mad. Bianca saw Ruth's Sheba gallop, ears back, straight up the hill past the pack, which had turned sideways, the dogs crouched against one another and staring towards the line of beeches and shivering and yapping and growling, their tails between their legs, their muzzles lifted. . . . She heard Peter, somewhere behind now, in the panicked press of horses, shout something at her; she felt her horse shivering and throbbing; heard Carteret swearing and roaring; heard another man's "What the devil?" . . . Then Peter's cry, "*Look, Bianca!*"

Then Carteret's "*Good God!!!*"

A hundred yards off, from between two of the beech trees, she saw an elephant, emerging without haste and without sound. On its back rode Louis, wearing a top hat, scarlet coat, white breeches, and black top boots. He seemed to be guiding it by the touch of his riding crop between its ears. As

the elephant emerged, the growling of the dogs changed to a long howl of terror; as it advanced slowly, and apparently sunk in its own thoughts, towards them, they turned and fled, and a second later had most of the field helter-skelter after them, down a hollow of the park, across a far meadow, and over a hedge beyond.

Louis, bowing a polite good-morning, continued to advance; and the remaining horses went mad. Peter, shouting out something about “Hannibal,” had turned Diamond, his flanks running with sweat, towards home.

Bianca, whose horse had gently bucked her off, sat in the grass helpless with laughter, at the feet of a speechless gulping man whose horse had somehow disappeared.

When Louis rode nearer, the man broke out, “*Sir!!!* My name is *Lethaby!* . . . I happen to be Secretary of this Hunt.”

Louis bent down forward and looked down from his great height.

“Enchanted, Mr.—Lethaby! Then perhaps you would be able to help me.”

“SIR! . . .”

Louis leaned over still more politely and said with calculated charm:—

“Mr. Lethaby? I am in search of a *fox*.”

Madame Scheurer received her son in her bedroom.

When he came running in, and kissed both her hands and then her cheek, she found him delightful; and tried not to show it.

For this letter from Lord Cable was, after all, a serious matter. She indicated the letter in her hand.

“Ah! Then you know already, Maman?”

“Lord Cable writes to your father that you have been asked to leave the neighborhood, the ‘county,’ he said, for reasons which he preferred not to detail.”

“He doesn’t tell you?”

“No.”

“Then I must?”

She hesitated, severe and disturbed, yet uncertain how to frame a condemnation of this elegant and complex young man who was her son. For there was clearly a matter of some serious solecism, some willful scandal or carelessness of appearances, which was characteristic of Louis, and therefore most difficult to censure. "Perhaps," she said, "you would rather tell your father?"

He saw what she feared, but didn't show his amusement out of respect for her gravity. But he said quickly, "It's something I can perfectly well tell you, Maman."

"Very well."

He told her. When he'd done she allowed herself to smile. "All the same," she said, "I'm afraid you have been imprudent. One never knows the effect of such stories." Louis's expression of the extent to which he didn't care was in a phrase for which he immediately apologized.

"And that poor Violette!" said Cécile Scheurer with perfectly controlled delight. "She will regret your rent!"

"No," said Louis, "on the contrary. I have sent her six months' rent (instead of the three I owe her), in banknotes, in an ivory box!"

Charmian wrote a postcard to Bianca saying that she was coming home for a holiday in July. It was the first time she had written since she went away. The address on her postcard was "Eighth Street." Bianca cabled to her telling her to come and stay. A few days later when she saw Frany she asked her if Violet and Carteret knew that Charmian was coming back. Frany said that they didn't. And that, in any case, they would ignore the fact. She added that she, herself, was arranging to fetch Charmian from Southampton and would bring her straight to Ebony. Bianca said that she was afraid from Charmian's silence, and her coming back alone, that she was unhappy. Frany said, "Doubtless her husband is busy with his concerts and cannot get away. . . . And it is natural she should wish to visit her own country."

In fact, only Frany knew, from two letters, what Charmian's life had been in the year since her elopement.

But Frany never crossed the strands of the confidences she received.

They were to remain in Toby's mind, those three figures under the tree, as a first, perhaps his first perfectly vivid, memory. The blue shirt and white

trousers; the white dress in the chair; the yellow dress and yellow hair against the tree trunk.

He went across the grass towards them. They turned their faces to him. Mummie. The Peter. And the lady with hair shining: the strange lady called Charmi-an. He went on towards them. They smiled at him. He smiled back at them. When he got near them his mother held out her arms. He pretended not to see. In pretending hard he stumbled, but righted himself.

Charmian said, "How well he walks."

He went to Charmian, looking at her.

"Charmee-an?" he said. He flumped down harder than he meant to between her and The Peter.

"Where'ss Peggitty?" he said.

"Peggotty's asleep in the house," said his mother. "She feels the heat."

"Feelss da heat?"

"Yes," said The Peter. "Because she can't take off her coat."

He repeated "can't take off her coat," bending his head forward and slewing his look round and up at The Peter. He got Peter's smile. Then he leaned still further forward until he could see round The Peter's blue shirt, and there was Mummie!

"Mummie?"

"Yes."

"Ah would like Peggitty to come out."

"Poor Peggotty's cooler in the house."

"Ah would like her."

"No. She'd rather not."

"Ah want her to come."

"No, Toby."

"Oh, yiss, Toby!"

The Peter undid his wrist watch.

"Would you like to wear my watch, Toby?"

"Oh, yiss."

The Peter strapped it on. Toby bent his cheek to it; it felt cool; it ticked. He laughed. Then, quickly:—

“Peggitty would like to hear my watch tickin’.”

“Dogs aren’t interested in watches.”

“Peggitty’ss inter-ested.”

Mummie said, “Charmian’s got something for you. Go and see.”

“See? Charmi-an?”

The ground sloped. He lumbered and caught the yellow silk shoulder. He was close to her face, looking in at her eyes. They shone: they were blue. He looked in and in to them. He chuckled. She said:—

“I’ve got a book for you, Toby.”

“A book?”

“Yes. Sit down and I’ll show it to you. Mummie says you haven’t got this one.”

“See it *quick*?”

“Sit down.”

“Oh. Yiss.”

“It’s called *The Tailor of Gloucester*.”

The book had a picture on the cover.

“Oh, mouses. Oh, *leetle mouses*!!!”

Toby opened the book. Then he paused. He turned to look up at his mother in the chair. She was sewing. She didn’t hear.

“I want Peggitty to come.” He looked at Peter. The Peter had lain back and was asleep.

He turned his look up to Charmian.

“Toby *wants* Peggitty.”

“Yes. But Peggotty doesn’t want *you*. She doesn’t want Toby.”

“Doesn’t want Toby?”

“No. But I do. And so do the mice. Now let’s read.”

“Oh.” He glanced round once more at Mummie: she was still sewing, her face bent down. The Peter was still asleep.

“Oh. Read then—Charmi-an. Read ‘once-a-pona-time.’” . . .

“‘In the time of swords and periwigs and full-skirted coats with flowered lapels—when gentlemen wore ruffles and gold-laced waistcoats of paduasoy and taffeta—there lived a Tailor in Gloucester.’” . . .

It was when Toby had been taken indoors to tea, and Peter had gone back to Moon’s Green to play tennis, that Bianca said:—

“Why do you go back?”

“Because he does really need me, in spite of everything.”

“Then why did you come away?”

“To make it possible—to go on.”

It was the only time either she or Bianca, during her whole visit, spoke of her marriage.

But when Peter and Bianca came to see her off on the *Mauretania*, and Bianca cried and Peter managed not to, Charmian said, “Write to me, won’t you?” and, “Write to me from Oxford, Peter?”

They promised to and made her promise to cable them if she wanted them to come, or needed money, or anything else. They didn’t tell her about her presents in her cabin, so that she should have them to unwrap when she’d gone. Charmian said to Peter, just when they were leaving her, “Do you think Father ever got my letters, or do you think Mummie tears them up? . . . And anyway if you can tell him I’m *grateful*, and that I . . . I shall pull through all right.”

The shouting got louder and they had to get to the gangplank.

They stood on the dock and waved to her; and the great hull of the ship was moving away without seeming to. And still when the ship was away across the sound they could see her waving her orange scarf, waving and waving . . . and her yellow hair blowing. And she looked utterly, and somehow so unjustly, desolate, like a little girl—with her yellow hair blowing—who was being sent into exile.

And when, after a long time, the ship was out of sight, Peter made Bianca come over to the Great Western Hotel; and made her sit in a corner of the Lounge, and ordered tea for them both.

Neither of them could swallow it.

And the orchestra, with palms round it, played “The Japanese Sandman.”

PART IV

The group, with Louis Scheurer at its head, which was to become a kind of Flying Squadron moving from place to place, was dubbed by someone, at some moment in its formation, the *Galère*.

But none of the group ever knew who named it so inevitably. Peter always supposed it began with one of those phrases that his mother flipped at Louis in the belief that she was speaking French. But Kalla von Lüneburg and her husband, the blond and endearing “Fritzl,” who only “joined” in 1924, maintained that they, in Berlin, had heard of the *Galère* already in 1922, which was before it became notorious enough for Violet Cable to disapprove of it. (It was in 1926, after the New York Dueling Scandal, that Violet described them as a lot of “dayclassays” and “daytraquays.”)

But, however it was named, it was originally launched by Marie de Montcontour, whose genius was half deliberately, half desultorily, to instigate movements, friendships, passions, like a child in an idle mood letting balloons go from a high window.

Nicky Zatec believed that the thing began when he met Louis at Marie’s apartment in Paris in the summer of 1919.

Louis dated the “sense of community of pleasure,” which was the salient characteristic of the *Galère*, from the supper party Marie gave in the garden of her villa at Le Pradet in June 1922, when four of the original members were there: himself, François, Nicky Zatec, and Peter.

To Peter that party of Marie de Montcontour’s was something unforgettable, exotic and disturbing beyond imagining. . . .

The hot moonlight, the black pines, the hidden swish and sounding of the sea below the terraces. . . . The long table with flowers set in an avenue of candles whose flames quivered, and were blown into pennons by a faint salt-smelling breeze. The faces and voices; the movement and glitter and flow of talk; the chance beauty of a face bent forward in the candle flames, then leaned back into hyacinthine shadows; of a shoulder and arm sharply white-edged against the moon. . . . And, beneath that sequined surface of talk, close under rippling of thought and wit and laughter, a sensuality that was in the night itself, in the air, the voices, the lightest gestures, the lifting

of a glass, the movement to light a cigarette, weighted with desire, and casual words catching an overtone of passion.

There was a movement when Peter realized that Marie was leaning and talking to him down the table, and he was looking into her eyes (or was it her soul?), which held, in terrifying concentration, the beauty that had once been in her face. . . .

What was she saying to him? . . .

“Monsieur—” She summoned him to come and sit beside her.

She said, “Van Dyck painted you!” her extraordinary voice musical with the echoes of played-out passions, and her long hands, with their quality, saintlike, of lassitude (a lassitude of caressing) . . . her voice and hands said to him (as the night and the troubled laughter, Louis’s faun mask, said to him) that he was strange in his innocence; that he didn’t know, didn’t feel, didn’t see, yet . . .

She turned to Louis, said something to him in French. Then turned again to Peter. “. . . The form of your face, which is beautiful . . . and those melancholy eyelashes.” She asked the servant behind her chair to bring some more wine. One of the women halfway down the table was singing a song of Yvonne George. Marie clapped her hands. “Another? . . . *Encore!*”

Louis, standing up, fixing an immense ostrich-feather fan on his head, did an imitation, incredible in its evocation of flashing eyes, triangular underlip, and pertly suggestive behind, of Spinelly; and then an osseous undulating “take-off” of Cora Madou singing “*Elle est grande.*”

Then Nicky Zatec, in his crystalline and explicit French, began telling one of his “Thousand and One Nights”—a series of his own adventures in the East, devised by him to please his friends, and which were as charming as they were pornographic. Peter watched him as he talked, his small eyes black with vitality in his big pallid baby face; his body, gross, almost dropsical, like some degenerated giant, leaned back in his chair; his plump hands lifted now and again from their repose on his stomach to make some small and only too explicit gesture.

As he ended an “Adventure,” Louis summoned a servant. Then the man vanished up the terraces towards the house and returned weighted with so immense a sheaf of roses that he came slowly. Louis laid them in front of Marie on the table. “They should have come before.” He added, to Peter, “They’re what I lost, on a wager!” Peter saw Louis and Marie look at each other. Their looking was in a language rich and inflected and beyond his

least comprehension. And her voice saying, “Thank you, my friend,” made even those three words mysterious, disturbing.

She bent over the roses; breathed in, her nostrils distended. Again her look lifted to Louis’s face. She said:—

“They give me . . . a very great pleasure.” Her look stayed in his, the mere impulse of a smile moved the corners of her mouth. And Louis, unmoving, said, “I have even more pleasure in giving them.”

Then Peter saw her look change, and she had taken one of the roses, and, with a slow tenderness, her fingers were tearing off its petals.

She said, “They are *too* . . . pretty.” She picked up another, her fingers so white, her rings glittering. “. . . One must know . . .” a fresh flutter of petals fell . . . “one must know—not only when to exact roses” (did she look up at Louis?) “but when to destroy them.” She took a third, a fourth, the petals heaping dark and fragrant in the satin of her lap. The talk and laughter had stopped down the whole table. . . . “There are few people, above all few women, who know the moment to destroy them. . . .” Now her fingers, hovering over half a dozen perfect, deep red, clawed off and held and crushed them slowly . . . and let them fall. . . . “The moment . . .” (her eyes were shut now; her eyelids dark, her lashes spiky black on her pallor. Now her hands reached out again above the flowers) . . . “the precise and exquisite moment,” her voice broke on a cadence that her fingers caught and abandoned, before they swooped again and seized and tore and scattered. . . .

The last storm of petals fell, the air loaded sweet and maddening with their fragrance. Peter looked at Louis.

Louis’s tears streaked his face, and he was breathing hard and unevenly.

David Blyth’s pictures seemed to be painted with a palette of Neapolitan ice—pale pinks, whites, pistachio green, raspberry red. They had the gay, deliberately stilted prettiness of striped awnings, or window boxes of geraniums.

In his picture of Moon’s Green, which he brought over to show Bianca, the house was raspberry red, the window frames vanilla-ice white, the lawn pistachio. It was a charming, faintly ironical statement about Wren and English parks. There was a quality in it which made Bianca think that Jane Austen might have painted it.

He said:—

“I should like sometime to do a sketch of your house if you’ll let me. Peter’s asked me to stay again before we go back to Oxford.”

Bianca said she would like him to.

He said, when they were having tea in the garden, that he wished he could paint her. But that his portraits never seemed to come off. He said, “You have such nice pale colors, and it’s fun your eyes being so dark and your hair much lighter.”

“Charmian says that my eyes are chocolate caramel and my hair coffee caramel.”

He smiled, thinking that he liked her; and feeling that she was physically exciting.

“How is Charmian getting on in New York?”

“Didn’t you know about her marriage?”

“Oh, yes. Peter told me. I remember now. The family don’t like him or something.”

He wasn’t interested in Charmian, although he quite liked her. He said that he was going to America when he left Oxford next year. He meant to do pictures of houses there, and that there was a chance of his working for *Vogue*, and that a German boy, Fritz von Lüneburg, who was a friend of his, was going to New York too. Bianca said:—

“Don’t people still feel too much about Germans?” She added, “I don’t myself.”

David quoted his brother Alan, who had been to Washington the year before and was now in Geneva, and who said that the feeling at present in America was against England and France; and in England against France and America. David said, “Look at the way England and France were at war for those two years after the War, backing Turkey and Greece! Look at Chanak! And Alan says that we made it quite clear at the Washington Conference that we looked on the whole parity arrangement as temporary.” He added, “Fritz von Lüneburg says that in Germany they hate the French because they always have. But that they hope somehow that *we’ll* come round and revise Versailles.”

“I rather hate the French myself,” said Bianca.

“How odd,” said David. “Because this morning Peter was saying how much he likes them.”

Bianca said, "That's only because he adores Louis Scheurer so!"

"I've only met him once last year, when he had the Dower House here. But he is amusing."

Bianca said, "Yes, amusing. But a hopeless sort of person, really." She took a cigarette and David leaned to light it for her.

He said, "Didn't Scheurer leave the neighborhood after some sort of unpleasant episode?"

"Didn't you hear?" He found her sudden chuckling laughter charming; and disturbing.

She told him why Louis had left.

He was faintly amused.

François was lying on the sofa when Zamorr came in and said, "Mistah Louis's sistah is heah, suh?" and his look stayed on François's face, puzzled, asking for a sign. François, starting up, let his notebook slip on to the parquet.

"Monsieur Louis isn't here," he said to Zamorr.

When Marthe saw François she exclaimed, a troubled exclamation. But he saw that the trouble was in her heart, and not for him. (He wondered if she'd noticed his old kid-topped boots, which he was wearing to save his good shoes.) She said:—

"Oh . . . Monsieur Dubar!" and came to him holding out her hand. Her hand was cold and she was very nervous. "How are you, Monsieur?" She glanced round. "Where's Louis?"

Zamorr lingered in the doorway. François caught his eye.

"He is not here."

Zamorr went out.

"Oh . . ." There was rain on her coat and on her cheeks and hair. She said, "When will he be here? Do you know? I wanted so much to see him!"

He felt he must seem stupid answering that he didn't know. He said that he had no idea where Louis was or when he would come.

"But he will be in before dinner?"

He couldn't stop thinking about the fair sweetness of her face and the rain on her nose and eyelashes.

"No. He won't. I know that."

"But—but Zamorr told me he had people to dine."

"Zamorr is an idiot. He never knows one day from another."

She hesitated.

"Perhaps I'll wait, for half an hour, anyway."

He couldn't prevent himself from urging her to stay for half an hour, in his company. Zamorr took her coat. She took off her hat and took out a handkerchief and wiped the rain off her face. He noticed that she didn't go to a mirror—she wasn't preoccupied with herself.

She sat down and with a little gesture asked him to be seated. He thought again of his boots; and sat down in the armchair that had its back to the candelabra, so that the boots were in shadow.

She said, "It is two years almost since I saw you. Tell me what you have been doing?"

He told her that he had been mostly in Italy.

"That must have been beautiful. I have been only once, to Rome, with my father."

They talked about Rome. He told her that he had been employed by an editor to help compile a guidebook on Italian towns. While they talked he realized that she was hiding her inward state of agitation. She asked him if he had been writing. He said only some short poems and a few newspaper articles. But that he had begun to write a play.

She asked him what it was about. He said that it was about a village such as he had been brought up in. The young girl in the play wants to become a nun, and renounces her vocation to marry the boy who is in love with her, out of pity. He is very delicate in health and therefore nervous and full of fears, but also stupid. In marrying him she will have a poor and narrow life. She doesn't even have children. Her life is only for this man whom she has never loved, but in whom there exists a necessity for her presence. . . .

"Then. . .?"

"She renounces the life of a nun as another woman would renounce her lover— She will never forget the life in the convent which she will never

have.”

Marthe leaned forward on the sofa.

“But then—in the end. Is it worth while?”

“She thinks so. For her the supreme justification of the Faith (which had made her wish to be a nun) is the fact that the same faith made her strong enough to choose a small and sordid life with this man. . . .”

“A drama of—sacrifice? Of renunciation?”

François said, “There are only two dramas—the drama of success and the drama of renunciation. The first is drama for the many. The second for an—elite.”

“And what happens in your play?”

He smiled. “My play! . . . Which doesn’t exist . . . Well, if you like, this girl achieves a spiritual success. The play itself—it’s very ‘realistic’—consists of scenes from her life with this man. Louis says, ‘It isn’t theatre.’ That I believe—”

“But what happens in the end?”

She was intent, troubled, and he realized suddenly that in some way her own problem, whatever it was, seemed to her to link up with his theme.

“In the end—she goes to visit the Mother Superior of the convent—whom she has visited in the first scene when she still believes that she is going to take vows there—before she decides that she must marry. The last scene is in a garden, as the first—the garden of the convent. She speaks of her life with the Mother Superior. It is twenty years since she saw her. But she seems still peaceful, blessed, flourishing; no more changed than the plane tree under which they are sitting.”

“And she? The girl?”

“She has changed. She has aged.”

Marthe asked, “But she’s satisfied?”

He answered, preoccupied, “The water, colored with wine, which the nuns drink. They call it *L’Abondance*—did you know that? I shall call the play ‘*L’Abondance*.’”

Marthe said, “You mean—she’s satisfied with the life that God has given her—”

He looked at her. “You understand everything, mademoiselle.”

She colored. "It is—very beautiful, your idea."

"If you think so, I will try and realize it."

"I hope so very much." She started. The double doors leading through into Louis's bedroom opened from inside. François sprang up.

"*Louis!*"

He shut the doors behind him.

François went up to Louis, speaking quickly. "You must have come in very quietly? Through your bedroom, I suppose. *Marthe has been here—waiting for you!* Both Zamorr and I had told her you were out!"

"How—stupid of him. Marthe, my darling!" He came and put his arms round her. She was touched—and yet disconcerted. Louis seemed elated and very gay. It wasn't Louis, but something indefinable in François's manner and in the way his look followed Louis that disconcerted her.

"—To think that you, my own sister, should have been waiting to see me — Why didn't you telephone, darling? So that I shouldn't make any—other engagements."

She said, "It was something—I wanted to talk to you about."

"You shall talk to me all the evening. We'll dine here—all of us. François too—and Bengy and Nicky and Armorelle."

She said quickly, "Oh no, Louis. I'd prefer to talk to you to-morrow."

"But, my darling—"

François interrupted, "I can escort mademoiselle your sister back, since you have people."

Louis slipped a hand round his shoulder. "*Nonsense*, my dear François." He whispered something in François's ear and laughed. He turned to Marthe, still laughing, and she was struck by the bright pallor of his eyes, the pupils like pinpoints. She said:—

"But I must go now, anyway, because Maman is expecting me to dine early and go with her and Papa, and Edouard d'Arès, to the Ballet."

As she said Edouard d'Arès's name François could see the alternating flashes of intuition and thought which caused Louis to break out, seizing her hands, "You'd better, my dear. You really had *much* better. I know you, darling. Believe me. And I love you, very, very much. So do what I say! Marry him, my dear. Marry his good heart, his property, his well-born

amiable features—marry his prestige, and his good sense, and his charming family (for they *are* charming!). Marry him!” He went on excitably, “Make a *good* marriage; and you will create, like a work of art, like a picture, one of those broad, noble lives, a little touching, a little sad, but so very becoming, that honest women make with good men.” (It seemed to François he was like a blind marksman hitting the centre of the target.) “I imagine exactly the noble group. You tranquil in a high uncomfortable chair: Edouard, so blond and equally uncomfortable, staring straight out with his beautiful fish-eyes over the head of the beholder! In the distance the *château*; in the foreground all your children, in white; and a greyhound.”

Marthe was half troubled, half diverted by his manner.

As François put her into the motor, which was waiting for her (he couldn't, she explained, escort her; Maman wouldn't allow it), she said:—

“My brother seems very nervous and excited?”

François said, “I think he is only a little overtired, mademoiselle. He has been sleeping badly.”

When he'd watched her motor go he walked for some distance in the rain without thinking where he was going. He found himself in the Boulevard St.-Germain. He took a bus, standing on the platform, his head hunched into his turned-up collar. He got off at the Opéra and went into the Café de la Paix for a bock. He bought a *Paris-Soir* and sat with it, still folded, on the table. Suddenly he unfolded it. What time did the Ballet begin?

When he arrived he was lucky to find that a *fauteuil* in the fourth row had been returned. (He decided that he must have a *fauteuil*, otherwise he couldn't be sure of seeing her.) The man in the *guichet* glanced at him, surprised and faintly amused at a man with his appearance paying that price for his seat.

When he got in, most of the boxes were still empty. But soon women in shimmering dresses began to come to the front of the boxes. And their heads and white necks and arms set into attitudes that made them look like figures on the dark background of a picture, the white shirt fronts and cuffs of the men, behind them, echoing their lightness.

François kept staring upward and round the circle of boxes.

At last she came. In a box almost above him.

She was in a pale rose-pink dress of taffeta; the bodice laced tight with some sort of creamy lace above; little black short gloves; a black fan; a narrow black riband slotted upward through her curls and tied in a bow. Her mother, who knew how to marry her, knew how to dress her!

She leaned a little forward, surveyed the crowd. But without any sophisticated interest. She seemed to look, not for Madame — — there, la Comtesse de — — here, but at a spectacle that interested but did not charm her.

François saw Edouard d'Arès put his chair close at the back of hers and bend forward to talk to her.

Yes. Her mother knew how to marry her. Arès had the features that had been for five hundred years in his family. (Perhaps, François conjectured, for the good reason that Nature, having coined this sort of beauty, decided to keep on reissuing it.) The face deposited, for the last thirty-five years, with Edouard d'Arès was aquiline and blond. A fine, slightly narrow brow, level fair eyebrows, thick above lidded eyes; nostrils cut high and close; a blond moustache; a sensual and kindly lower lip; a long bony curve of the chin; the lower half of the face hardly coarsened by the first thickening of flesh along the fine jaw line.

A man fitted for Louis's "noble group," who would receive a wife with the most careful courtesy, as if she were his guest; and protect her, with a sort of feudal integrity, as if she were his property. A man most fitted, by bone and character, to breed children.

The yellow lights faded below the boxes. The buzzing of talk subsided.

The Overture of *Petrouchka*. . . .

The little Italian came to the door of his shop, handed Charmian her bag of coffee beans. "Good-bye, *signorina*."

Charmian smiled at him, clutched the bag, hugged the coat round her, and set off up McDougal Street against the north wind. As she crossed Washington Square, her nose and lips stiff with cold, she thought in quick succession that she would grind the coffee before Harry came in; how much Bianca would enjoy the eighteenth-century façades of the houses on the north of the Square; how long ago it seemed since she had watched Peter and Bianca get smaller into black marks on the dock; how, lately, Harry had been gentler, less often exasperated, and sometimes, in queer little moments, affectionate, wanting her companionship, talking to her about his childhood,

asking her to go for walks with him. . . . And last night, when he'd played to her and she'd lain still, listening hour after hour, it had been almost like she'd imagined it, at the beginning. . . . And afterwards he'd come and knelt by the sofa and kissed her hand.

Yet this morning he'd been sulky, threatening to telephone to Mrs. Goldstein and tell her he wouldn't play at her party. And during luncheon he'd begun again about the foolishness of his having allowed her to choose a place like this one on Eighth Street. . . . What would people think? No elevator, inconvenient. . . . His studio on a different floor. . . . No room service, and their colored maid not there in the evenings when his friends came.

She'd said, as always, that it was because they were poor. And he'd taken the words as mockery at his recent lack of success. Then when he'd seen how that hurt her, he'd become tender and teasing, and come out with her as far as the street corner, and bought her violets.

She stopped at the tea-shop and bought a coffee cake. He liked that, hot, at the time. And then he'd tell how he'd eaten it as a child in the castle in Hungary (which she knew now didn't exist). That castle which had given her her first realization (which she clung to because it helped her to explain him) of his essential "ashamedness" which was made up of all his little secret shames. . . . His shame at being an indifferent musician (as he knew, again so secretly, that he was); his shame at being German; at being the child of a peasant; at being short in stature, middle-aged, poor. She knew all these; guessed others. Little poisoning hidden shames of things he'd done in mean or angry attempts to alleviate his primary pain of inferiority. Ashamed too, with her, of his deliberate degradations. And then hating her because he was ashamed. And tormenting her because she forgave him. . . . And then, as he'd been that day when she'd tried to leave him, so desperate at the idea of being without her.

She went into the house; up the stairs past his studio to the third floor. He wasn't in yet. She went to put logs on the fire. It had been the fireplace that had made her want these rooms. The steam heat of the hotel had made her feel choked and stale. . . . And always that smell of stale cigars. The log fire here, and the ludicrous bed from home, were two things that made her remember herself of two years before.

She carried the bag of coffee beans through to the kitchen, thinking of Harry's accusations of this morning, that she had never been in love with

him, that it had all been a *Backfisch* passion . . . a vision of herself married to an artist . . . inspiring him.

She knew now that in a way this was true. And as far as it was true he himself had played on that feeling.

But that was only half of it. . . . For it was less that she had seen a “vision of herself” than that she’d so passionately wished that a man who seemed, being an artist, so sensitive and (in a way she’d felt without understanding it) so in need of love and pity should find in her what he needed.

She took off her hat and coat, dropping them into an armchair. Was it so counter to whatever “love” was (if love was anything she’d once believed it) to want to be “needed”?

. . . Half Angel and half Bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire. . . .

She fumbled getting out the coffee machine, and tipping in the coffee beans, and rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand.

In January 1923, Toby was given a Shetland pony by Peter. Bianca “shingled” her hair. Monsieur Poincaré occupied the Ruhr. Mrs. van Geldern discovered Coué. The Cables gave a ball at Moon’s Green for Peter’s twenty-first birthday (at which Ruth became engaged to Harold Platt-Eresby). And Mr. Baldwin, in Wales, said, “*The world is sitting on an anxious seat*,” a phrase which was adapted by the Cables for family use, and caused Louis (readmitted to Moon’s Green for the ball) to write a ballade.

That spring Louis’s novel *Eugénie* (written in French) was published by the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. It was an interpretation, chiefly in thought-sequence, of a woman of sixty alone for an evening reading over the letters of her first lover.

Its success in France was immediate. The critics were excited by the quality of Louis’s style: the public startled and moved by his comprehension of the woman’s heart.

When it was translated into English, he refused to allow its translator, a female novelist, to call it “How It Was Sweet.” He asked her why she wished to. She quoted Browning, “How sad and bad and mad it was!” But the book had little success in England or, later, in America.

(Louis described the female novelist to François in one word. François, to whom England was still a legendary land in which there were no manners and no *bidets*, replied that he could believe him. He added that, in his experience, all women who wrote believed their books to be a proof of their intelligence; whereas one had only to read the books . . .)

One of François's theories was that the intellectual standard of women had declined ever since the aristocratic woman ceased to write letters and the *bourgeoisie* had begun to write books. . . .

Marthe was married to Edouard d'Arès in the Church of the Madeleine in June 1923.

She drove to the church with her father and Louis. There was a tranquil grey sky and the air was warm. The grass looked very green in the Avenue Foch: the Arc de Triomphe very dark and stolid.

Marthe held Louis's hand. She knew that Louis understood her sadness, which wasn't grief, but a sense of dedication. (She remembered the words of her uncle du Plessis: "Marriage is not, like love, an egoism for two—it is rather an abnegation for one. And in the most successful marriages that *one* is the woman.")

The traffic was blocked below the Etoile and as they waited she watched the crowds moving up and down the Champs-Élysées and noticed couples who seemed to love each other.

As they passed the gardens and she saw a group of children standing before the enchanted little theatre of Polichinelle she thought: "Is to-day *real*? Am I on my way to my wedding? (For *surely* it was yesterday afternoon that Louis and I were in that little crowd: and Nannie said, '*Come along, dears, or we won't get in our walk*'—And there were the balloons on the stall under the trees. And Louis bought one. A white one. Wasn't it yesterday afternoon?)"

The motor moved faster across the Place de la Concorde: up the Rue Royale.

"Edouard will not yet have arrived," said her father.

She glanced toward the flower stalls beside the church—the baskets of roses and violets and carnations banked high against the railings. She wondered if her old friend Mélanie was there. The flowers looked very brilliant and fresh in the sunless neutral air.

When Louis was helping her out she saw Mélanie's walnut face in the crowd waiting on either side of the red carpet. Mélanie nodded, holding her black shawl across her bosom.

Marthe smiled at Mélanie and then let her veil fall over her face, and took her father's arm. They went up the wide flight of steps. Louis followed them. Outside the church doors, between the columns, were many friends of her parents, talking and greeting one another before they went inside.

A crimson curtain was looped aside within the opened doors; and beyond it down the vast vistas of the church she saw the tall candles on the altar.

She went, a prayer flickering in her thought. . . . The prayer, which was nervous, uncertain (yet a relief in its mere thinking), was for a blessing on her new life . . . her new life that would begin here, among these pillars and amber shadows and before those clear burning flowers that were the candles.

She waited within the white shadow of her veil, half praying, half thinking. . . . That God would give her courage and wisdom—always; and gratitude. And there is Maman, how gracious, how elegant she is. And good sense; one must have good sense, the Sisters said, since, they said, the good God liked one to have “a well-poised soul.” (Will Edouard be here soon? How good he was, sending her that little brooch of his mother's this morning, and that little note.) Special wisdom, for these next weeks. That she might learn her new life; and arrive, too, at a just and loving comprehension of this man who would be her husband. (Only Louis would have foreseen last night, for her, and arranged to stay in the house; and come in to her so early this morning . . . to be with her . . . to go to *la Nursery* pantry, and make tea, and find the tin of little *biscottes*, and come back bringing it all on a tray; and sit on the bed making her sip and nibble. . . .)

Now the music— Now more people coming in— Then a face in the crowd, and her heart stopped. It couldn't be—

Her father beside her whispered, “You're trembling. Be calm, my child.”

It wasn't—it wasn't Peter— The face was Bianca Selwyn's. . . .

Now Louis, beside her, said, “Edouard has arrived.”

Mademoiselle Zaza was French-Swiss. Her whole name (Toby read it on her passport) was Zelide Anna Carrel. And her age was twenty-two.

She came when Toby was four and a half and he had kicked the placid Austrian too often, enraged because she couldn't make him obey.

Mademoiselle Zaza was pretty and a disciplinarian; and he liked her. When he was disobedient or slow at meals she punished him by putting him to bed. So he was seldom disobedient and stopped having rages. Occasionally he made himself defy Mademoiselle Zaza, just to feel his own moral muscles. But he never had the unnerving, rather frightening experience of winning.

Mademoiselle Zaza knew no English at all. So within two months Toby spoke French. He spoke it with a Swiss accent. At the same time he acquired a patriotic feeling for *Le Suisse*. He longed to pick an edelweiss off a mountain top. And to see Lac Léman. And Geneva, which Mademoiselle Zaza said was so much cleaner and more beautiful than London. And he admired Berne, where Mademoiselle Zaza came from; she had postcards of it. And a framed colored picture of the Jungfrau at sunrise.

She read him *Le Bon Petit Diable*, *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, and *Pinocchio* in French. She also read him *Heidi*, which moved him very much.

In the summer she came with him and Mummie to Kingsgate. Mummie took a little house there, just up the avenue from the cliffs. The house was one in a row of white red-roofed dolls' houses. The drawing room had chintzes with bluish-pink roses that looked real on them; and a summerhouse at the end of the garden, where he did his Froebel work in the mornings. He and Mademoiselle Zaza and Mummie bathed every day. At week-ends people came down and stayed; but only two at a time, because there was only one spare room, and a dressing room. Peter came. And a French lady whom Mademoiselle Zaza said was "*une femme très chic*," and her husband who was "*pas mal*."

Every day, after luncheon, when Toby was put to rest for an hour, Mademoiselle Zaza took her *bain de soleil*. She took it on the balcony with the Japanese bedroom screens all round her. The balcony always smelled of olive oil afterwards. Mummie said Mademoiselle Zaza was Swiss and as thorough about "browning" as about everything. Mummie was always worrying about getting her behind as brown as the rest of her; and she envied Mademoiselle Zaza, who got so brown all over by never allowing herself to get bored with every day lying so long on her tummy.

Toby said to Bianca:—

"But why do you *want* your behind brown as well?"

“Because it’s not pretty to be piebald.”

“But nobody *sees!*”

Bianca said severely, “It’s like being *good*. You ought to be good even if people *don’t* see.”

Toby said, “I don’t think it is at all the same!”

“Oh, *well,*” said Bianca. And because he looked enchanting with his linen hat flopping over his square, still baby-shaped face, she kissed him.

Louis came back from six weeks in Venice with Nicky and Bengy. Nicky had rented a house there from an American girl. Bengy had arrived to order glass for his new decorating business. He was always taking the gondola to go over to Murano to order still more glass, and leaving Nicky and Louis without it.

The evening after Louis got back to Paris, he went to visit his parents. Marthe and Edouard were still in the country. His mother told him that Marthe wrote very happy letters and that she was going to have a baby.

His father asked him questions about the real opinion in Italy of Signer Mussolini, and whether the intelligent Italian really believed the Corfu incident was justified. Louis repeated Nicky’s account of a luncheon in Rome when Mussolini was there.

Philippe Scheurer was invited to join a party of Ivan Benz’s for dinner. He rang up Benz’s secretary and arranged to take Louis with him.

Benz was waiting for them in the foyer at the Ritz in a dinner jacket, double-breasted waistcoat, and wearing a large pink carnation. Louis knew that he always ate, if possible, in public. It was one of his foibles to act as if he saw nobody, and to be conspicuous himself and seen everywhere.

The party consisted of Louis and his father, Monsieur Tissot (his moustache newly waxed), Monsieur Poincaré, and a youngish man called Chauvigny who was in the Banque de France.

The talk at dinner was entirely political. Chauvigny, who had just returned from Germany, asserted that the recent fall of Stresemann was an excellent thing as it weakened the Germans’ powers of bargaining over the debts. He agreed with Poincaré’s insistence on the importance of the Ruhr occupation. Benz, becoming loquacious as he drank his champagne, began talking about the return of Venizelos to power, and then branched back and

asserted that Venizelos had been useful to him in many ways in his early days and he'd never forgotten this. . . . Then he checked himself and began to talk of the present situation again . . . the Reparations Problem . . . the essential futility of the Washington Naval Treaties.

In the November Election of 1923, Peter, standing as Conservative candidate for East Winford, was one of the seventy-nine Conservatives returned against the Liberal Labour majority.

Peter won what was actually an extreme Labour seat by being, as one of the women voters put it, "such a gentleman."

Louis, who came over to experience an English Election, was enchanted by an *opéra bouffe* flavor in the whole campaign: Lady Cable whisking affably in and out of cottages; Frany holding impromptu meetings at the street corners; the crowd summoned by a bell borrowed from the servants' hall. Yellow was the Conservative color; and Toby Selwyn was driven about with a yellow rosette in his hat and waving a yellow flag with VOTE FOR CABLE painted on in black by Bianca. Bianca herself, in a yellow scarf and gloves, flirted conscientiously with any laborer or postman or tradesman she met, and held women's meetings in schoolrooms and chapels where she made glib and charming speeches interlarded with little anecdotes about Toby's nursery life. . . . And on Election Eve, Lord Cable, his Daimler streaming with yellow ribbons, drove from public house to public house, to point out, as he took his whiskey and soda in the bar and carefully had his joke with the barmaid, the dangers of "Local Option" . . . always ending his, apparently, informal remarks with the joke, "Between you and me, gentlemen, the real way to spell Local Option is P-R-O-H-I-B-I-T-I-O-N." . . . Meanwhile Peter himself headed this troupe of Electioneering Artistes, sublimely detached from them in mind; inspired by the conservatism of the Younger Pitt; fired by the speeches of Burke; and dedicated, in his heart, to the extermination of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Paine.

Toby clutched Frany's hand when the Lion came in growling and throwing back his head at the Lady in a pink satin skirt and a shining bodice. But the nice man on Toby's other side, called "Monsieur Scheurer," said that the Lion was perfectly tame and only *pretended* to growl at the Lady, whom he really liked very much.

The Lion got up on to a little platform and then it was funny because the Lady shook her whip at him and he answered her questions by “woofing” loudly. She asked him if he’d had a jolly Christmas and he woofed “Yes”; and she asked him if he liked his lessons and he woofed twice for “No.”

Then there were the Clowns who ran in, and there was a little one who kept falling down and getting up again and falling down *again*. “*Most peculiar, isn’t he?*” said Toby to Monsieur Scheurer between fits of helpless giggling. Monsieur Scheurer said he liked the little Clown the best. But Frany said that she didn’t like the Clowns as much as the Monkeys, who were coming next.

And the Monkeys, who were Chimpanzees, *were* funny, riding round and round on their little bicycles dressed in little suits and wearing caps and blazers like big schoolboys, and Toby laughed so much that he slipped half off his seat and Monsieur Scheurer pulled him back and then kept hold of him by the belt of his tunic. And there were the twelve performing Sea Lions who came lumbering and flipping into the ring at a tremendous speed, and barking. And the man in the top hat and green hunting coat and white trousers who was their Trainer made them all get up, kneeling on their flippers on a circle of little platforms, and then he threw them fish, and then they played ball with him, balancing a huge blue ball on their noses; and then they got fish again; and then a tiny little fat one flipped up on to a wooden platform in the middle of the ring to a row of trumpets arranged on stands and he blew “God save the King” on them, turning his flat head and soft bulgy eyes and sort of smiling at the crowd between the lines as he blew it. And then when the Band struck up a trumpeting lilting music, in cantered a huge White Horse with a most Beautiful Young Lady all in white and silver standing on his back with perfect ease and waving to the people like a princess. In the end, when there’d been the Acrobats throwing themselves in and out of trapezes so high up Toby and Frany and Monsieur Scheurer had to bend their heads right back, and one of the Waltzing and High-Stepping Ponies had made the clown spell out A HAPPY NEW YEAR (with black letters on white cards), Toby still thought he’d liked Madame Lolotte the Famous Bare-Back Rider best of all. And the Sea Lions second. And the Chimpanzees third.

All the way in the taxi to Rumpelmayer’s Toby discussed exactly which had been the best thing with Frany and Monsieur Scheurer. Monsieur Scheurer’s favorite thing of all was the Sea Lions too. But Frany said she always preferred the Chimpanzees.

“What do you do?” Toby asked Louis as they went into Rumpelmayer’s.

“I write books.”

“Oh! I like books extremely.”

“I don’t think you’d like mine.”

“Oh yes,” said Toby, very polite and earnest, “I am quite sure I should.” He added, as they sat down on the gold chairs at a table reserved by Frany, “You see I like many different sorts of books. What are your books about?”

Frany was ordering tea. She “ordered” in the manner of an Empress whose least caprice must be obeyed. This made her frightening to waiters and waitresses who didn’t know her.

“I write about—people.”

“Oh. What do they do?”

“Rather foolish things.”

“Why do they? Do they end up all right?”

“Not usually.”

Toby went on considering Louis’s face with affectionate interest. Then he said, “‘The Little Mermaid’ is your sort of story, I expect. I do *read* the end. But I don’t want to.”

“It’s almost my favorite story,” said Louis.

“But don’t you *always* wish that it was going to come right even when you know it *isn’t*?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Here are our ices,” said Frany.

When they’d taken Toby back to Portland Place and Mademoiselle Zaza had taken him upstairs, Louis said, “I didn’t know a child *could* be so charming.”

“Some can,” said Frany. “Toby can.” She added, “Toby is a sahib.”

Bianca was having her breakfast. She was in the same bedroom that she’d come back to six years ago, after she’d said good-bye to Richard. The rosebud breakfast set was still the same.

Toby came in to talk to her. She asked him how he had enjoyed the circus. He told her all about it, talking without stopping, except every few

minutes to gasp and swallow, and then talk on. Then he asked her if she had ever known of a net breaking when a Trapeze artist fell into it. Then he sat on the bed but kept sliding off the eiderdown. He said, “Isn’t Monsieur Scheurer a nice man?”

“He’s a very amusing man.”

Toby glanced at her, troubled. “Do you mean you don’t like him?”

“Oh *no!*”

But Toby insisted.

“Why don’t you?”

“I didn’t say that I didn’t.”

Toby thought, and was still troubled.

“Is he clever?”

“*Very.*”

“Is he good?”

“I—really don’t know, darling.”

“Well, he must be good or Frany wouldn’t like him.”

Bianca put down her coffee cup. Toby added:—

“I like him extremely.”

“I’m glad.”

“Are you *really* glad, Mummie?” He looked so eager that she changed her tone to a warmth which she suddenly managed to feel.

“I’m glad always when you like people, Toby. And they like you.”

“Well then, you *do* like Monsieur Scheurer?”

“Yes, darling.”

Toby nodded. And she could see that this time he was satisfied.

Bianca foresaw herself having to accept Louis among that (yearly increasing) company of heroes who stalked to and fro in Toby’s imagination, and included Napoleon, Charles the First, and Brer Rabbit. . . . Then the telephone bell rang. It was Herbert Langridge (whom her aunt always referred to as “your nice American”) to remind her that she was lunching with him.

He was leaving for Paris that afternoon to join General Dawes.

She was sorry.

She liked having him about.

It was just as incredible to Carteret Cable that a young man with a seat in Parliament, and three thousand a year of his own, should wish to go to the Byron Centenary Celebration at Missolonghi as it had been to his wife that a girl with personal beauty and Eddie Sark at her feet should have wanted to marry a pianist.

And just as Violet, taking a phrase from a generation before her, referred to Charmian as a “great grief to us,” Carteret selected for Peter the description, equally atavistic in his vocabulary, “something of an enigma to us.” It was a phrase which relieved him from worrying too much about Peter in the next three years.

Peter went to Missolonghi because Louis, Nicky Zatec, Kalla and Fritz von Lüneburg, and François and Bengy were going.

The *Galère*, blowing where it listed, was usually given its first impetus by Nicky or Louis. This expedition was initiated by Nicky, who happened to be writing a monograph on Byron’s Venetian period. At Missolonghi they met Sandy Fane, an Englishman who looked like Prince Albert and could do imitations of Queen Victoria. He had come there with the English Ambassador. Louis knew him already. Nicky and he immediately liked each other. And Bengy dogged his footsteps all day trying to amuse and interest him. It was inevitable that he should be assimilated by the *Galère*.

When the Celebration was over, they all decided to go to Prague on the way back. (They always thought of places to go on the way to or from other places.)

In Prague Sandy Fane bought quantities of glass for his house in Savoy. Louis bought another dressing gown. And Nicky seduced a very difficult Scotch girl who worked in a travel agency. The last evening in Prague they met Armorelle Ross in a night club. She was in tears, as she had just fallen out of love, a situation calculated to excite the *Galère’s* most profound sympathy.

She went on with them the next day to stay with the Lüneburgs in their castle in the Austrian Tyrol, where Kalla promised to find her a new lover.

Armorelle thought that Kalla, with her brown boy's features, white teeth, and long legs, was an enchanting and consoling person. But she felt that if she ever fell in love again it might be with Peter Cable, whom she hadn't seen since they were both five years old and went to Mrs. Wordsworth's dancing class for "under-ten" at the Portman Rooms, Baker Street.

Ruth was married to Harold Platt-Eresby in July 1924 in St. George's, Hanover Square. She wore a dress of white satin and a veil of Honiton lace lent by her aunt, Mrs. van Geldern. She carried a bouquet of Madonna lilies. The bridesmaids, the Misses Margaret and Joan Platt-Eresby (nieces of the bridegroom), wore pale blue organdie with crepe de Chine turbans to match, and the pages, Master George Platt-Eresby (nephew of the bridegroom) and Master Toby Selwyn (cousin of the bride), wore Kate Greenaway suits of pale blue crepe de Chine.

A reception was held afterwards at 71 Portland Place. . . . The house was decorated with roses and sweet peas. . . . Later the bride and bridegroom left for Frinton-on-Sea . . . a house lent by the bridegroom's mother, the Dowager Lady Platt-Eresby. The bride's going-away dress (by Reville) was a jersey coat and skirt in bois de rose, and a cape of the same. With it she wore a brown cloche hat and carried a brown lizard-skin handbag. . . .

Ruth and Harold stayed at Frinton-on-Sea for five weeks.

They played golf all the time.

When they came back to London, Ruth was pregnant.

Toby and Bianca and Mademoiselle Zaza drove down to Ebony after the wedding. Toby talked nearly all the way, although Bianca was inattentive, as the traffic was bad most of the way to Maidstone. But Toby cared even more about talking than about being listened to. He was in high spirits, glutted with strawberries, ices, and egg sandwiches, and liberated from his Kate Greenaway suit whose "babyish" frilling round the neck had filled him with resentful embarrassment. . . . Only the fact that George Platt-Eresby (who would be six in August) wore his suit with docility had prevented Toby from making a scene when they were dressing. As it was Mademoiselle Zaza had to say twice, "*Voilà Toby qui fait le bébé,*" before he would put on that little blouse and have his vest pinned down with safety pins at the neck.

But the wedding itself had excited his imagination. The solemnity of the service, the lovely delicious smell of the lilies, the vision of Cousin Ruth (usually such an annoying person who said "Hello, *Chap*") transfigured,

veiled like an Eastern Princess; and with that train, marvelously embroidered with *real* pearls and diamonds, that he and George Platt-Eresby had clutched on to until The Peter turned round from where he was standing beside Ruth and signaled to them to let go. And all the people, and the singing, and the beautiful music . . . specially the Wedding-March-by-Mendelssohn, which was somehow so glorious and exciting that when he was marching down the aisle he'd felt a bursting lump of joy inside him that made him want to cry. And then the Reception. All the rooms at Aunt Violet's London house looking quite different, and a lot of extra servants, so that it was quite funny suddenly to find that you were on a footstool you knew; or that when you looked up it was Alice saying, "Here you are, Master Toby," giving you more strawberry ice. . . .

And Harvey stood nearly at the top of the stairs and shouted everybody's name in a loud clergyman voice. . . . "Mummie, did you hear him say 'SIR CHARLES AND LADY BILLET!' . . . WA WA WA . . . WA WA WA . . . Mummie! . . . and 'The COUNTESS DOOPLESSEE . . .?'" and the butler from Gunther's—he said he was from Gunther's, Mummie—behind the booffet."

" . . . One says 'bu-ffet,' Toby!" said Mademoiselle Zaza from the back.

" . . . He said . . . Mummie, *Mummie*?"

"Yes, darling, I am listening, really . . ."

"He said I should sleep with a piece of the wedding cake under my pillow for luck, you know. He said his wife's got neuralgia very badly so he would be very glad if the wedding—I mean the Reception, finished early because he'd be able to get back to her. And there was a younger man there, *quite* a young man I should say, and he was also from Gunther's and he gave me two sandwiches at a time each time; I asked him if he liked weddings when I was behind the . . . bu-ffet with him and the other butler, and he said he did but he wasn't going to marry, himself. . . . I wonder why. I should like to myself. But someone prettier than Cousin Ruth. I wouldn't mind marrying Charmian, but then she'll be too old. Oh Mummie, *look!* There's a hawthorn bush. Oh, Mummie, *why* didn't you stop?"

"What for, Toby? Anyway it's so far back already."

"Oh Mummie, I feel there might be a gold-tailed moth caterpillar on it."

Bianca drew up. As she did so five other cars whizzed by. She and Toby got out and walked back a quarter of a mile.

"There's the hawthorn."

They searched, leaf under leaf. Just when Bianca was giving up hope and Toby was red-faced with gloom, they found one. Toby rolled it off the leaf and held it gingerly between two concave palms pressed together. . . .

“. . . And if you wouldn't *mind*, Mummie, bringing a few leaves for his food on the journey?"

When they got back to the car Mademoiselle Zaza (who accepted the study of Nature on principle, but not with pleasure) was reading the *Evening Standard*. She showed Bianca the women's page where there was a long paragraph about Ruth and a description of her trousseau.

“. . . And *look* at his *red spots*, Mamselle Zaza. . . . What shall we call him, Mummie? He ought to be called something about red . . . 'Reddy' or . . ."

"Rufus," said Bianca, letting in the clutch.

"I don't think I like Rufus *very* much . . . of course it might be something to do with *gold*. . . . Would Goldilocks be all right?"

"I suppose so."

"*Oh Mummie* . . . he's escaping . . . oh!"

Bianca slowed down. She took off her hat and laid it upside down on Toby's knee.

"Put him in there."

"Oh Mummie, how *lovely*. What a grand house for him. He looks as if he liked it . . . doesn't he? . . . What is written on the sweet little label inside? . . . R-e-b-oux. How funny."

"Reboux," said Bianca.

"I know, why not call him Reboux? . . . or *I know* . . . call him 'Redoux,' and pretend the *b*'s been written backwards."

"Darling," said Bianca, "Redoux it is!"

. . . Toby was getting a small paper package out of his trouser pocket . . . and opening it. . . . Bianca glanced sideways. She said, "Toby . . . I will *gladly* house Redoux in my only and best and newest hat . . . and you can put in one or two hawthorn leaves if you like . . . but I will *not* have him fed on crumbled remains of egg sandwiches in it . . . and anyway he won't *like* egg sandwiches."

"But Mummie?"

“No . . . Toby darling.”

“Very well. . . . Mummie?”

“Yes.”

“I think Redoux might have a wedding to-morrow. We could make him an extremely tiny wedding dress . . .”

Mademoiselle Zaza, leaning forward, said, “I see, madame, that madame your cousin has gone to Frinton for her honeymoon. Where is it, Frinton?”

“. . . and what about one of your evening hankies, Mummie, that are *so* pretty and all lace, for his wedding dress?”

Anatole France died on October 13, the day after Bianca arrived in Paris.

She lunched at the Scheurers' that day in the Avenue Foch. Louis was there and about fifteen other people. They were all talking about the death of Anatole France, and telling anecdotes about him. One of them said that Calmann-Levy, his publisher, would be rich now, as his arrangement with France had been to pay his bills while he lived, and take all posthumous royalties.

Louis sat next to Bianca at luncheon. He seemed really distressed. He said that France had tended the “sacred flame of irony.” And went on, arguing across Bianca, with a Monsieur Chauvigny, proving that the Ironic Spirit was a sign that a civilization was reaching maturity; that Germany lacked it utterly; and that it was beginning to develop in America. Chauvigny asserted that irony was a symptom of decay, since its effect was to produce a detached attitude and a decline of activity.

Bianca felt that Louis was showing his usual indifference to her opinions. But Chauvigny now began to talk to her. He asked her about her life in England, her interests, her amusements. He was attractive. She remembered Madame Scheurer telling her that he had something to do with the Banque de France. Anyway, he made her feel that she was pretty and diverting and desirable. Which Louis never did.

After luncheon, just as she was leaving, Louis came up and said that he was going too. And could he drive her anywhere?

She said she was going to a fitting at Chanel's, and then on to see Marthe and her little girl.

As Louis drove her down the Champs-Élysées he told her that he'd had a letter from Peter saying that he wasn't going to stand again at the Election, and that he was disillusioned by modern politics. Bianca said that it was a pity as Peter had been the only glamorous figure at Westminster and it had been such fun to sit in the Ladies' Gallery and see all the little maggot-like men running in and out; and then suddenly to see Peter walk in in his lovely clothes and his orchid, and lounge down into one of the Opposition Benches and lie back and tilt his silk hat over his eyes. She said, "It's the only thing I've ever seen Peter 'pose' about, and he did it so beautifully."

Louis asked her if she had heard Peter's "Maiden Speech" on Housing. She said she had; and that it had been in such good English that half the House hadn't understood him. She said, as Louis pulled up the car, "I think it's a waste, his throwing it over. I wonder why, really."

Louis helped her out.

"He says he wants to live abroad for a time." He added, taking her hand and kissing it regretfully, "I expect you disapprove—of that idea for him."

"I feel he may sink into just idling and traveling. He oughtn't to do that."

Louis said, "I see that once more we are in danger of disagreeing, madame."

And left her.

She went into Chanel's.

After her fitting she went on to Marthe's apartment, which was on the Ile St.-Louis.

When Bianca arrived her first impression was that Marthe had "grown up" and that the tranquil innocence she'd had as a girl had changed, in the two years of her marriage, to an early and exquisite maturity. She was thinner; a little paler; and so poised that Bianca felt hoydenish beside her.

Marthe embraced her. And introduced her to a woman in a black dress and white hat, the wife of the Hellenist, St. Laurent. Madame St. Laurent had topaz eyes, thick-fringed with black lashes, and such a beautiful speaking voice that her "How d'you do, madame" lingered in the room and became part of its charm, like the amaryllis and the white chrysanthemums and the chandelier.

Marthe asked Bianca about herself. Was she still living in her little house, that Louis had described, near the château of Lord Cable? How was her little boy? Louis had described him too and said he was so friendly and

sweet. How was Charmian? . . . she turned to Madame St. Laurent. “I think you told me you saw Madame . . . Kramer when you were in New York.”

Madame St. Laurent said yes, she had met Madame Kramer at the house of a Mrs. Goldstein when her husband was playing at a party there. Bianca turned to her eagerly. How had she seemed? Had she talked much to her? Did she look well? “. . . You see, madame, we were brought up so much together we’re almost like sisters. And I haven’t seen her for *three years*.”

Madame St. Laurent was interested by this sudden eagerness in Bianca, who had struck her, on coming in, as a lovely woman without enough animation.

She said that she had talked very little to Madame Kramer, who had gone away early from the party, before her husband went. But that she had seemed so young to be married to that man. There was something about her, Madame St. Laurent said, at the same time touching and a little defiant.

“She didn’t mention to you, madame, where she lived?”

“No.”

Bianca turned to Marthe. “My last two letters to her have been returned. And so have Peter’s.”

Marthe said, “How strange.” And then, quickly, “How is he . . . Peter?”

“He’s been in politics.”

“I know. It is a long time since I’ve seen him. Not since he came once to stay with Louis, the year before my wedding.”

Then the *nounou* brought in Marthe’s little girl. She had pale golden curls and a pale pink face and a pale pink dress. She sat on Marthe’s knee and gazed at Bianca with the light blue eyes of the Arès family.

Madame St. Laurent said that she reminded her of Ronsard’s “*douce, belle, amoureuse, et bienfleurende rose*.”

When Madame St. Laurent had departed Marthe spoke of her with admiration. She said she was a woman who had been unhappy with her husband but had “remade her life.” The phrase (*refaire sa vie*) made Bianca reflect that the French had good ready-coined phrases for the human conditions and crises, which English people didn’t like to admit were real, admitting that the process of “remaking one’s life,” “forming oneself,” “reestablishing oneself in society” (*se ranger*), were as usual as having the *matelassière* regularly to remake all the mattresses.

Bianca left, feeling that Marthe's life had the quality of a beautiful and traditional pattern carved in marble.

That evening she dined with Herbert Langridge at the *Tour d'Argent*. She had realized from his one or two letters during the summer that he was in love with her. But this evening when he asked her to marry him, she felt that she never could, although she liked him so much. His large protectiveness, his smile, his stubby nose, his clear mind, were all so likable. And she thought, even while he talked to her, that he would be the right man exactly for her to "remake her life" with.

But she wasn't in love with him.

He said he knew that. That he only wanted to have a chance to try and make her happy, and that he believed he could. He said, "Bianca, you've got so much charm, and so little stability. You need someone. If you don't now, you will later."

When he took her back to her hotel he made her promise that if she ever needed his help in any way she'd write to him. He gave her his address in Washington.

François was invited by Peter to come, with Louis, to spend Christmas at Moon's Green.

François sent a postcard to Nicky Zatec dated "Boxing Day," 1925. "Nothing is so easy as to be wrong about the English. The stuff of their being is paradox. For the moment I am altogether in love with a people that I have always disliked. And why? Above all because I have been watching a rehearsal of 'Scenes from *Macbeth*,' in which Lady Cable plays Lady Macbeth and Louis Macbeth. And no one laughs. And Milord Cable directs them."

The two Scenes from *Macbeth* were Violet's own idea because she had the small part of the aunt in *Eliza Comes to Stay*.

She had ordered a wig with long auburn plaits from Clarkson and had them copy the dress in the Sargent picture of Ellen Terry. She had insisted that Louis should play Macbeth, as he was broad-shouldered and less boyish-looking than Peter, and David Blyth, who was also coming for Christmas, was a bad actor.

She sent Louis his part to Paris, typed out by Frany, together with the usual list of trains down to Rye from London. (Neither she nor Frany ever accepted the fact that Louis arrived at Croydon and always motored.) When Violet heard that François had been invited by Peter she sent him a telegram to Paris: WILL YOU PLAY BUTLER IN ELIZA COMES TO STAY PLEASE WIRE

That telegram, pushed under the door by the *concierge*, “*M’sieur Dubar, il y a un télégramme,*” was, for François, the threshold of England.

At first François refused to play the butler on account of his accent. So the butler was adapted, and made into a *valet de chambre*, supposedly imported by the bachelor-hero (Peter) from France.

Louis and François arrived the day before Christmas Eve. And rehearsals went on all through Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, interrupted by other rites which Louis found equally strange and charming. The Trimming-of-the-Tree in the drawing room. The-Servants’-Presents, on Christmas morning, a ceremony in the inner hall when all the indoor staff were summoned, and Lady Cable stood by an immense Empire table on which were arranged long *gaufrette*-shaped paper parcels, and a series of envelopes . . . Frany handing her the parcels, one after another, muttering a name: Lady Cable repeating, “Mrs. Lane?” “Emily?” “Alice?” . . . and, as each of the female servants came up to her, handing her a parcel and saying, “A Merry Christmas, Mrs. Lane . . . Emily . . . Alice” . . . and they, “Thank you, m’lady, and a very Merry Christmas to you!” (These parcels, Bianca explained to Louis, contained lengths of print stuffs for working dresses, and two pair of black woolen stockings each.) The men-servants then received envelopes containing “tips.” François studied the gait of Harvey, the butler, with a view to his own performance the following night.

As for the Church-Going on Christmas morning, once in the festively decorated church, the entire party seemed to shed the solemnity with which they’d hung up stockings and bedizened the fir tree in the drawing room, and sang the psalms and hymns with uproarious zest and glowing faces, Lord Cable shouting “Hark! the herald angels sing” like a blond bull serenading Heaven, and Bianca and Peter and Ruth and Frany and Mrs. van Geldern and Lady Cable (all sables and pearls) and several others whom François hadn’t placed standing shoulder to shoulder in the pew, and chorusing “O come, all ye faithful,” with triumphant voices and celebrating eyes. And the pagan spirit which possessed them in church seemed to remain in them during luncheon, when they gorged themselves with turkey and stuffing, and flaming platefuls of plum pudding, and after that with mince pies, nuts, pineapple, tangerines, and port. . . . And when François and Louis would

have taken a siesta there were cries of “Another rehearsal!” . . . and Lady Cable whisked Louis off up to her boudoir, saying, “You must remember to be ready to come in on

“. . . Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done it.”

And François was borne off by all the others to the library, where once again he must announce, “Miss Elizabeth has come in, sir,” and Peter repeat, “What am I to do?” and Bianca come in, from behind the sofa, saying, “Here I am.”

Then, after one of those immense teas (which made François say to Louis that he began to understand the influx of English to Vichy and Aix-les-Bains), the Tree in the drawing room was lit (by Frany, who then stood sentinel beside its candles holding a wet sponge on a stick). And everyone went in and there were piles of presents. On sofas and chairs and stools. Everyone undid their parcels and kept on shouting and exclaiming and kissing and embracing, and the floor became littered with paper and scarlet ribbons, and then they all pulled crackers piled up round the foot of the Tree, and put on the paper caps and blew whistles and wound up the gramophone and began dancing to “Sunny”; and more people came in, and they, too, pulled crackers, and put caps on their heads and danced, and sang the tunes they danced to, and Harvey brought in a vast silver bowl (François stared) of flaming sultanas in brandy, and someone switched off the lights and they all started playing “Snapdragon.” And later François, dancing with a weather-beaten woman in a pink and mauve paper crown, demanded of Louis, as they passed him doing a minuet with Mrs. van Geldern, whether this was “their *carnaval*.”

The question seemed to contort Louis with laughter. But when he passed him again, he said, “No, *mon petit*, they don’t have a ‘fixed’ *carnaval*!”

Then, on (“Why *Boxing*?” François asked) Boxing Day, a few hours’ Hunting, snatched before the Dress Rehearsal, which began at two o’clock, after a meal of cold turkey and fried plum pudding, and went on until 6.30, when there was High Tea in the long paneled dining room (which was Hogarth to François every time he went into it).

Half the actors were already dressed and made up. Louis ate his meal in a shaggy wig and a kilt, and a sporran. Violet was already heavily made up and wore her wig, the auburn plaits hanging richly over her turquoise blue tweeds. The young man with the sweet mouth and hard green eyes (whom François now knew was called David Blyth) wore a white wig and white

whiskers which fell into his tea. Everyone was nervous and inclined to be cross. Bianca came in late, still “unmade up,” and Peter accused her of having taken the prompter’s copy, and they bickered and Frany calmed them. Then Lord Cable telephoned up from the Village Hall, where he and the estate electrician and Harvey had been since four o’clock to say that they had now got the lights working again but that the blue bulbs hadn’t come for the *Macbeth* moonlight. And the pretty girl who came up from the village for rehearsals kept giggling and shouting down the table at Louis, with whom she flirted all the time. (She was, François had learned, the vicar’s daughter.) She was playing the part of an actress in *Eliza* and said at frequent intervals, “I want to make myself up to look exactly like Marleen Deetrich!”

The *Macbeth* scenes went magnificently. Violet Cable made a fine figure with her amber plaits and her whitened face lifted towards the blue limelight, moaning:—

“All the perfumes of Arabia.”

And Louis said:—

“. . . Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate’s offerings . . .”

with a creditable English accent.

And *Eliza* “got” its audience from the beginning. Bianca as the plain orphan in spectacles, unwanted ward of the elegant young man (Peter), provoked delighted applause. Her metamorphosis in the third act enchanted them. François gave an adequate if bewildered performance as the *valet de chambre*; David Blyth’s side whiskers stayed on as the uncle; Violet, after her triumph as Lady Macbeth, was content to be herself, as the aunt; Carteret prompted loudly and clearly on the two occasions when he was needed; and Harvey and the electrician flooded the final moments of the play with pink light.

It was just at this final crisis when Bianca was saying, “*I don’t believe you know what you want,*” and Peter was about to reply, “*Yes . . . I do know what I want!!!*” that Bianca, waiting for Peter to seize her in his arms, caught sight of Charmian . . . standing at the end of the front row!

Peter caught her in his arms . . . the applause broke out. The curtain jerked down . . . then up again. The applause grew louder and the cast began to come on to the stage . . . the pink light switched back to yellow . . .

Bianca bowed and smiled; accepted a bunch of roses, hardly knowing what she was doing. Then she heard Peter, bowing too, exclaim. . . . And then, suddenly, there was some curious change in the quality of the applause and from the hubbub Bianca caught the phrase “. . . Miss Charmian . . . *Why*, it’s Miss Charmian.”. . . And an excited and gay old man called out, “Why ain’t we goin’ to ’ave a song from Miss Charmian?”. . . And there was a stamping follow-up of delighted, “What about one of Miss Charmian’s songs?”

The curtain dropped. Charmian had disappeared. The people began a murmuring and exclaiming of disappointment . . . “Didn’t know she was at ’ome! . . . Had an idea she was settled in America. . . . Funny, her not actin’ if she was ’ome!”

Then an eager “Oh?” as Peter came out, standing over the footlights, and announced that his sister, who had just returned unexpectedly, would give them “one of her songs.” . . . There was an outbreak of clapping and cheering as Peter retired and Bianca came down from the side of the stage and settled herself at the upright piano at the side of the hall, banked round with pots of ferns.

Then there was a twitching of the curtains. She struck two chords. Then the curtains went up, and in the centre of the stage stood Charmian dressed in a man’s grey suit (belonging to Peter in Act I of *Eliza*), a stiff collar, a bow tie, a yellow chrysanthemum in her buttonhole, her hair tucked away in a bowler hat (belonging to Harvey) . . . gloves and stick in her hand, and a burnt-cork moustache on her upper lip.

Bianca repeated the chords. The crowd gave a low roar of pleasure and scraped their chairs. They knew what to expect. . . . They clapped and shouted. . . . The old man rose to his feet and shouted, “Come on, miss!”

Charmian squared back her shoulders, stuck out one knee, twisted her stick, shot a side glance at Bianca. . . .

The crowd knew before she opened her mouth. . . . “Cow-cow,” they called . . . “*Cow-cow!!!*”

Charmian stuck out her elbows. . . .

“Oh, I *like* a ke-up of ke-ohcoa,
Ke-ohcoa! ke-ohcoa!
That’s the stuff to make you warm,
You . . . can . . . go . . . *out* . . .
In *any* old storm!
Oh, I *like* a ke-up of ke-ohcoa
Before the tea-shop shuts!
Since I’ve bin drinking ke-ohcoa they call me
One of the Ke-ohcoa . . . *Knuts!!!*”

And the crowd roared “*Oncore . . . Oncore,*” and Charmian, forward now over the footlights, her bowler tilted on one eye, her stick held out over them like a conductor’s baton . . . “*Come on* then, *all-to-gether!*”

“Oh, I *like* a ke-up . . . of ke-ohcoa . . .” shouted the crowd. “*Ke-ohcoa . . . Ke-ohcoa.*”

François, in the wings, muttered to Louis:—

“. . . But *who?* . . .”

“It’s the exiled daughter of our host.”

“But?!!” said François. . . .

Louis said, wiping the smudged mascara round his eyes:—

“One must not always try to explain things. One must try to accept them.”

And Charmian, retilting Harvey’s bowler, was shouting back to the singing, roaring crowd:—

“. . . They call me one *of* the Ke-ohcoa Knuts!”

At two o’clock the next morning, Frany came into Louis’s bedroom, and shut the door carefully, and asked him if he could possibly arrange to take Charmian over to Paris with him the next day. She said that she had sent a telegram to her French governess, Mademoiselle Houville, who now lived in Paris, and who would certainly have Charmian to stay for a while.

She proceeded to explain, tersely, sitting on the edge of Louis’s bed in her white flannel dressing gown, that after her song Charmian had fainted. That when she, Frany, and Lord Cable had got her back to the house and taken her to her own room, she began explaining that she’d got to Southampton on Christmas Eve, and been ill and had to stay there. Then this (Boxing Day) evening she’d arrived late about ten o’clock at Ebony, at

Bianca's house . . . and then hadn't been able to resist the idea of seeing the Show in the Hall.

Frany said, "I suppose she was afraid of meeting her parents. Anyway, the old man" . . . Frany so described Lord Cable when she felt approval of him ". . . the old man was quite upset by the whole thing. And when we got back he was sitting there holding her hand, and I think he felt like crying. Then—I knew it would happen—in came Lady Cable and started raging at Charmian and calling her names. The old man fairly lost his temper and asked her if she didn't see the child was ill? Well, you can imagine, when Lady Cable's in a temper, she doesn't care *who's* ill. And she's always been unkind to Charmian because she doesn't understand her. But Charmian, of course, hops up from the couch, and tells her mother she can't stay anyway, if she isn't wanted: and a regular dust-up went on for about half an hour, the old man threatening to leave with Charmian, and Peter butting in and telling his mother that he'd never understood why she had children at all. Well! *You* know them by now! Lady Cable ends up in hysterics. Peter looks fit to die with misery over the whole thing. Charmian won't stay another hour if she can help it, and Lord Cable ends by saying he washes his hands of the whole business and what do *I* think he'd better do?"

"Well?" said Louis.

Frany crossed her arms.

"First of all I got her ladyship to bed with a sleeping draught. (That red wig went to *her* head, I'm afraid.) Then I telegraphed to Houville. Then I got Lord Cable to write a check on his Paris bank for Charmian. . . . Then I sent Alice down to the kitchen and got her to cook a good underdone steak and bring up a bottle of Burgundy for Charmian and Peter." Frany jerked her head towards the door. "They're in Charmian's room now, eating it up." She added, "If you can be ready to start to get the early boat at Folkestone tomorrow . . . I want to get Charmian out of the house before her blessed parents start waking up and raising Cain again."

Louis said that he would be ready. But on condition that he, also, had a steak, *now*. Frany heaved herself off the bed.

"It shall be done. I myself will cook it for you. Rise and follow me."

As Louis was putting on his dressing gown Frany said, "What about your friend Monsieur Dubar? Would he also like a steak?"

Louis, now belted into purple silk and brushing down his hair, said that François, after his admirable performance as the *valet de chambre*, deserved

his rest.

Mademoiselle Houville lived in two little rooms, one of which overlooked the Gardens of the Luxembourg. Here she did her work, translating books and articles for a publishing firm; and here her books and pictures and pieces of furniture were arranged.

She made up the divan for Charmian in the front room. (She was accustomed to receive her mother and sister when they came to Paris, in this way.)

And in the mornings she and Charmian drank their coffee there. (Mademoiselle Houville made it in the little kitchen which even had a bath behind the *toile cirée* curtain.)

Usually they spent the mornings separately, Mademoiselle Houville doing her work, and Charmian reading, or going out to walk in the gardens. At midday they lunched at a little restaurant in the Rue de Vaugirard, and then went to see some pictures or to a museum in the afternoon. And in the evenings they talked and read, and Mademoiselle Houville worked again, and they made a little supper in the kitchen and ate it over the fire in the front room.

Twice they went to the theatre. But their quiet evenings when Mademoiselle Houville took out a book here and there, and read from it, or talked, were more than anything else a solace to Charmian: renewing her, giving her back, in the quiet lamplight and among the worn yellow books, with Paris distantly rattling in the rain outside, a sense that she had a soul; and that there still existed, in the world, an aristocracy of people whose equipoise of mind and spirit made them civilized.

It was at the end of her third week there that Charmian said:—

“I wish I could stay here always. . . . I could take two rooms of my own like this . . . and have a bath-kitchen and lots of books . . . and have Bianca and Peter to stay.”

They had cleaned away the supper, and Mademoiselle Houville had been reading aloud from the *Journal d'une Femme de Cinquante Ans*, and pausing to talk about the French *émigrés* in Philadelphia during the Revolution. When Charmian spoke, Mademoiselle Houville didn't immediately answer. Then she said, folding her hands on her book, holding her thin face at the angle that made her look so much like Emily Brontë:—

“My child. I know you very well. And you know how much I love you. . . . You have shown great confidence in me, in the things you have told me, from time to time, in these last weeks. You know how much pity I have for you, and how much sympathy.” She held out her thin hand. “You know that, Charmian?”

“Yes.”

“And that good Frany sent you to me at such a moment in your life because she understood, also, that, for me, you are a child that I desire to help, and care for. But, you are also a woman now. And although you were young when you made this marriage, in doing so you asserted that you felt yourself a woman—capable of judging for herself, and ready to take responsibilities.” She hesitated. “I *know* . . . how innocent you were. . . . I know also how brutal life itself can be to those who are young, and too confident. That I understand, my child. But, I want to ask you a question . . . more or less simple, but essential.”

She bent forward and lifted a small log from the grate and laid it on the fire.

“What?”

“Charmian, do you believe that life, for a woman, should consist in giving or in demanding?”

“. . . But, Mademoiselle, I *did* try.”

“I believe you.”

“. . . And the last months there seemed nothing, *nothing* I could do for him that helped at all. . . . And he was jealous . . . mad with jealousy . . . for no reason. He even tore up all Peter and Bianca’s letters so that I never got them. Once when a friend of Louis’s, an actor called Jimmy Lothair, came in to see me he was like a madman. He ordered him to go . . . and then . . . if he’d *loved* me I could understand.”

“But . . . he wants you to be there.”

“Yes.”

“And from what you have told me, he is not happy, or successful, or in very good health.”

“. . . I know.”

“Then . . . isn’t it for you, Charmian, to try and consider if there is some way in which, perhaps, you have failed to understand him?”

“Yes . . .”

“Believe me, my child, the problems in life which haunt you are not those which one has *failed* to solve; but those which one has *refused* to solve. . . . You always had courage, Charmian . . . and charity.” She added, “The first is the most elegant of the moral qualities; the second the most beautiful.” Her voice was, as always, distinct and measured. But Charmian, looking up, saw the tears in her eyes.

Charmian looked round the little room. The wallpaper was stained in the corner from damp. And there were too many Medici prints hung in *passé partout*. And the books were stacked untidily on the shelves. But it was shelter, tranquillity . . . civilization.

She caught her two hands. “Oh, Mademoiselle, I shall be *sad* to go.”

“I shall pray for you, my child, always. . . .”

Louis went back to New York that February to stay with Jimmy Lothair. He found Jimmy nervous and drinking too much. And realized that it was because he’d had one or two experiences that had frightened him. He’d made two pictures that hadn’t been much good. And now, back in New York, he’d been in a flop, and didn’t like the play he was rehearsing. And he had an obsession that his fan mail wasn’t what it had been.

Louis could see that his charm was “going off.” The smile was there, and the sort of daredevil swagger that was part of his mind and body. But he wasn’t so svelte . . . his movements weren’t quite so lithe. His gay noisiness at parties was forced sometimes. And he was getting through a bottle of whiskey a day, easily.

It was Louis who somehow persuaded Kramer into believing that he wanted Bianca to come and stay with them. He played on Kramer’s jealousy, making him believe that, as he was going on a provincial concert tour, he’d be wiser not to leave Charmian alone. “And Mrs. Selwyn,” Louis affirmed, “was a most suitable person.”

Bianca arrived the day that Kramer had to leave for a concert tour of Quebec, Ottawa, Montreal, Buffalo.

While he was away, Louis left Jimmy’s and came and stayed also with Charmian. He was getting irritated by Jimmy’s speaking so slowly.

Bianca slept with Charmian in the big carved bed from Moon's Green. It seemed to her like spending the night on an island of their childhood. (When the bed was in the mauve spare room Peter had had measles in it; and on wet afternoons they had acted Royal Levees in it, and the Death Scenes of Queen Elizabeth, played by Bianca, and of their hero Charles II, played by Peter, with Bianca as Nell Gwyn weeping, and Charmian as Henrietta Maria.)

In the morning Charmian woke and saw it was Bianca and lay still thinking that Harry would be back this morning, and the bitterness and jibing at her would begin all over again—unless he'd had any special success, and then he'd be gay, and make her sit by him while he played over his concert; and then he'd become sentimental, and then want to make love to her, and then the awful scenes would begin again. . . . But she couldn't. . . . If he loved her . . . if it could all have been different, from the beginning. But this elaborate, grossly thought-out prostitution. . . .

But—here was still a whole morning! A whole day before he'd be back. And Bianca was waking up. . . . And Louis was there.

Zamorr brought in their breakfasts on two trays. "And Mistah Louis wanted to know if he could have his tray brought in here to make a party?"

Louis came a few minutes later wearing his latest dressing gown, pearl-grey foulard faced with black, and a black octopus on the pocket. He sat on the end of their bed and drank his tea and told them about a dream he'd had. Like most dreams it was dull, narrated. The only curious thing was that he had dreamed about people among trees and so had Bianca. They were discussing this when Zamorr came in and said that "a Miss Prince" from the *Evening Telegram* wanted to see Mistah Louis. She said she had an appointment.

"So she had. She telephoned last night."

"Shall I say you'll be right along, suh?"

"Tell her to come in. You don't mind, darlings?"

Zamorr went.

"I know! Let's give her some copy! Move over, Bianca. Charmian, *move*, darling." Louis slipped into bed between them. "Young French Author at Breakfast! . . . Hand me my tray, Charmian darling. Bianca, *don't* laugh! Here she comes. Lift your cup, Charmian. Can I offer you some of my sugar, Bianca? Perhaps it's sweeter. Sugar *varies* so, doesn't it? . . . Ah-ha, Miss Prince, *good* morning! I hope you will forgoeve zat I am still . . . how do you

say . . . in the *intimity* of my bedroom? . . . It eez not long since I woke up. . . . Allow me to present you . . . Mademoiselle Charmianne, and Mademoiselle Bianca.”

Miss Prince, dark, neat, spry, no age, avid for a story and almost cross-eyed in her excited sense of getting one so much more startling than she’d anticipated, managed a creditable series of “Pleased to meet you’s” and whisked a notebook, a pencil, and a packet of Luckies out of her bag. . . . “It’s verry good of you, Mr. Scheurer, to find the time for me.”

“*Mais pas du tout*, Mademoiselle Prince. The pleasure is mine. There is no moment when I am not *enchanté* to see a charming woman.”

“May I *use* that, Mr. Scheurer?”

“*Use?* There is something you . . . wish to *use*, mademoiselle?”

“I only mean may I use what you said, Mr. Scheurer?” Charmian, contorted sideways, her hair flopped over her face, seemed to be looking for a hankie.

“Oh! Oh, *yes!* By all *means!* *Bien sûr.*” Putting his teacup down on his tray, he turned to Charmian. “*Qu’est-ce que tu as, ma petite, que tu ne prends pas ton café, hein?*” And in the same rapid tone he began teasing Bianca for not having put any butter on her toast . . . “*Ma chérie*, do you think it is I that will mind if you are a little fatter, *hein?* . . . Miss Prince, why is it that all ze women have ziss *manie*—mania—to be so thin?”

“You surely don’t like women to be *fat*, Mr. Scheurer?”

“Ah! No . . . but . . . a little ‘poretees’ . . . a little *plump* as you say . . . it ees verrrry nice!”

“May I use that?”

“Oh . . . Oh, *yes.* Surely.”

She wrote. Then:—

“Do you . . . always breakfast in bed, Mr. Scheurer?”

“Ah, but *no!* Not when I am *alone.*”

Miss Prince wrote rapidly.

Bianca, who had been trying to lift her cup with nonchalance, chinked it down suddenly. Louis turned to her with playful reproach. “You notty girl. You are always laughing like this at my English!”

“And . . . and are you *all* living here, Mr. Scheurer?”

“Oh, no. No! No! Ze ladies live here! I only ‘stay’! But in this matter I must ask you to be discreet! *N’est-ce pas, mademoiselle?* No names of ze ladies? No addresses? Eh?”

“That’s all right, Mr. Scheurer. You can count on me! D’you mind if I smoke, Mr. Scheurer? Thanks.”

Louis, flashing charm and almost obsequiously polite to Miss Prince, kept up at the same time a series of little playful half-amorous attentions towards Bianca and Charmian: dipping a lump of sugar in coffee and tenderly placing it between Bianca’s lips; buttering a piece of toast and making Charmian nibble at it.

“I wonder, Mr. Scheurer, do you have any special theories about life?” Miss Prince, her pencil poised, still kept on staring from one to another of the trio before her. “For instance, Mr. Scheurer, I’d like to know if you think artists should be *different*, and all that?”

Louis said, “I ’ave no theories, Miss Prince. I am just a . . . how do you say . . . a pagan. I *adore* Life! I LOVE Beauty.” He turned to Charmian and seized her glass of orange juice, and, raising it upward, shouted, “*Viva la Beauté! Vive l’Amour!*” . . . On the word *amour* the door opened and Kramer came in. He was still buttoned into his overcoat, and unshaved from a night on the train.

Within the next three minutes Kramer went mad, shuddering and shouting a guttural obscenity. Miss Prince screamed, Bianca hurled herself out of bed, flew at Kramer, and hit him in the mouth, Louis clutching her back and shaking her as if she were a fighting bitch. . . . Charmian sat rigid, absurdly clutching her breakfast tray; Zamorr loomed in the doorway, shaking his fists and baring white teeth behind Kramer’s head; and Louis’s first hysteria of laughter changed to a Gascon rage in which he reviled Kramer in two languages and finally challenged him to a duel.

Kramer, spluttering, “*Yess . . . Monsieur Scheurer! Yess, nothing will delight me more!*”

“Gee!” from Miss Prince.

“*Zamorr!*” shrieked Louis.

“To-morrow!” Kramer was repeating.

“Zamorr, don’t let the—lady go. I’m sorry, Miss Prince . . .”

“But . . .”

“I’m sorry, Miss Prince, but . . . Zamorr will care for you in—every way. Zamorr, see that Miss Prince is very comfortable in—the studio.” To Kramer, “I’m sure you would prefer to *not* stay in your home until after you have redeemed its honor! Zamorr, when you have seen that Miss Prince is comfortable, call a taxi for Monsieur Kramer! And then get Mr. Lothair on the telephone. You have a revolver, by the way, m’sieur? I thought so. Mr. Lothair will supply me. *Au revoir*, then . . . until seven o’clock . . . tomorrow? And where?”

Zamorr broke in:—

“Van Cortlandt Park, suh. That’d be a grand place, suh.”

“Zamorr is right. Unless you object, m’sieu?”

Kramer exploded into words, the first of which maintained that he didn’t care where they met. Then he went. And Charmian cried, “But Louis . . . Harry . . . you *can’t*! . . .” Bianca broke out savagely, “I’d like to get at him myself.” But Louis ignored her, sprang on to the bed, and began dancing to and fro across it, humming the “Indian Love Call.”

All the way up to Van Cortlandt Park in the raw six-thirty light Bianca, sitting between Louis and Jimmy Lothair, kept arguing, saying, “Comic opera can go *too* far! . . . Yesterday in a rage it was different. Even if *he’s* as mad as a goaded bull.” Louis took his hand off the wheel to light his fifth cigarette since they started and then accelerated again.

“I don’t believe you have ever seen a goaded bull.”

“Louis, why not stop this *now*! Mr. Lothair, can’t you *make* him?”

But Jimmy, who had a hang-over, only repeated quickly that “death was preferable to dishonor” and then smiled divinely at her. And Zamorr, sitting in the back of the coupé, wearing his new Homburg hat and spats, continued to give Louis driving directions in the blaring voice of a sergeant on parade.

When they arrived at the appointed place Kramer hadn’t come and Bianca hoped that Charmian’s mission had prevailed.

They all got out, and stamped to and fro under the trees. There was a low steely sky and the biting wind made Louis’s face look mauve between the slouched-down brim of his hat and his turned-up collar.

Zamorr followed Jimmy up and down, now and then making him turn and come back. Jimmy took out his flask; Louis refused any liquor.

It began to snow.

Louis, swinging his arms, described Kramer in a French which Bianca didn't understand, and which delighted Zamorr, to whom it was familiar.

Bianca sneezed and shivered. And she was frightened. Until now it had all seemed just another "Louis fantasia," or a Charmian "White Knightness, sliding down the poker and balancing very badly." But when Jimmy said, in a flash of perception, "Supposin' the police get hold of us," she stared at Louis.

He said, "What the hell if they do. We'll shoot them up too."

This cheered Jimmy at once. "That's it. We'll shoot the police up too. That'll be *fine!*"

As he spoke Louis exclaimed and pointed.

Far off down the path a figure was running towards them through the thick falling snow.

Charmian . . .

Bianca said afterwards that she had come so straight out of a Drury Lane melodrama that the snow turned to paper as she came. When she got near them they saw she was wearing Kramer's black opera cloak, and breathing hard. Louis shouted, "What is it?"

She stopped short of them. "He's g-gone. . . . He went . . . he . . . he ran away. . . . He was afraid. . . . He couldn't even be . . . *reckless!*"

She threw herself into Louis's arms.

"Oh, darling," said Louis, "I'm sorry. I'm desperate . . . I'm *furios*. I'm insulted."

Then he began laughing as helplessly as she was sobbing, but holding her close and placing his left hand over her head to keep off the snow. "Oh, darling . . . Oh, romantic Charmian . . . Oh, desperate and romantic me!"

"*Oh,*" muttered Charmian, "a *handkerchief?*" and Jimmy was snatching off his muffler, exclaiming, "Poor kid, poor kid! Here you are."

Somehow the sight of Louis and Charmian clasped gasping in each other's arms, the snow falling on their mauve faces, and Charmian blindly blowing her nose on Jimmy's checked muffler, made Bianca feel angry.

She said, “*Hell!* I want my breakfast. And my feet are cold.”

Louis “fixed” Miss Prince. After the first quarter of an hour she was helpless against his deliberate onslaught of charm.

Finally he took her out to luncheon, and afterwards to Cartier’s, where he ordered her a little diamond octopus copied from the one on the pocket of his dressing gown. And he gave her a signed copy of his last book, *Eugénie*.

They lay strewn about the beach, their bodies cinnamon-colored and gleaming with oil, their eyes goggled with sun glasses.

Kalla von Lüneburg continued in her honey-thick voice:—

“It iss swe-eetness that makes *me* fall in love—” (She always pronounced love “loave” and on her deepest note.) She rolled over on to her back. “It is the swe-eetness off Fritzl that makes me *loave* him so much!”

Fritzl lifted his drowsy yellow head, flung out an arm, and touched her shoulder.

“Swe-eet Kalla,” he said, and dropped his head and drowsed again.

Sandy Fane said in a fidgety tone, “*Where* has Zamorr put my mattress? Nicky, I believe you’ve taken it!—I really will not have *everybody* using my mattress.” (Sandy’s sun-bronzing mattress was designed for him by Lanvin. It was quilted, pale blue rubber one side and dark blue sandproof-satin the other. On the dark blue side his initials were embroidered in white.)

Louis called without turning his head:—

“Mr. Fane’s mattress, Zamorr?”

Zamorr rose from the shadow of a rock. “Ah don’t know, Mistah Louis. Ah didn’ see de mattress.”

“Peter’s lying on it?” said Kalla.

“*No*,” said Peter.

“Nor I,” said Nicky.

“I’ve got my own!” trilled Bengy. (His own, in pink rubber and wine satin, was copied from Sandy’s.)

Armorelle Ross stretched out a brown leg and prodded Sandy’s plump ribs with her crimson toenails.

“You know quite well you told that *unbelievable* American girl with the gilt hair who’s trying to convert you that *she* could use your silly mattress.”

Kalla murmured, “Let us go *on* talking about *loave*— And let us also *drink* something?”

Louis said, “Nine Pernods, Zamorr,” and bent his head down in his arms again.

“Yes, Mistah Louis.”

Kalla turned her charming boy’s face towards François.

“What makes *you* fall in loave?”

“Beauty,” said François. He had kept on his parrot-green bathing bonnet. He looked, with his beaked face yellowed with sun, and sun glasses on, more than ever like a hunched exotic bird.

“And you, Armorelle?”

“Anyone being an exciting shape. I don’t mind so much about features.”

“Eyes and behinds get *me*,” cried Bengy excitedly.

Armorelle said, “People ought to make up their behinds to express their personality.”

“Very engaging,” said Louis.

“I once *dreamed*—” began Bengy.

Peter threw three cushions at him one after another.

Sandy said, “Bengy *always* has those *kitchenmaid* dreams. I believe you drink ‘cocoa’ first thing, Bengy?”

“He doesn’t,” said Kalla. “I know that because that night he slept with me and sweet Fritzl he drinkt brandy an’ so-ooda!”

A voice came from Fritzl’s blond and tousled head, “*My* brandy an’ so-ooda!”

“The *only* thing that makes *me* fall in love,” said Sandy, “is someone being *absolutely* charming and *completely* indifferent to me.”

“*I* know!” said Armorelle. “That awful zero hour when you find the person you adored absolutely hopelessly is falling in love with you!”

“For me—*Temperrament!*” said Nicky. “It must be somebody that I hate and I desire at once. The moment I feel affection I care nothing.”

“Pernod, suh?”

“*Why* did you order them, Louis? *Nobody* wants any.”

Louis said, “Empty them into the sea, Zamorr.”

“Yes, suh.”

“And bring nine champagne cocktails.”

“Yes, suh.”

Armorelle came and lay beside Peter. “What’s the matter?” She spoke in an undertone.

“Nothing.”

“Something is?”

He shook his head.

“What makes *you* fall in love, Peter?”

He stared at her for a moment and then said, “Love, I suppose.”

Bengy, who had been strolling round examining other people’s bathing suits, came back and dropped to his knees in front of Louis.

“And you, Louis?”

Bengy looked like a squirrel interrogating a panther.

“Me what?”

“What’s your special aphrodisiac?”

Louis raised his head. His eyes opened for a moment. He said, with acrid gentleness:—

“Go away, Bengy dear.”

Armorelle lay looking up into Peter’s face with her grey bright eyes.

“I really *am* in love with you, Peter.”

He smiled. “Don’t be silly, Armorelle.”

Kalla rolled over. “*Ach*—there iss Armorelle *again* making loave to Peter.” She smiled first at Peter, then at Armorelle.

Louis said, “A drink, Kalla?”

She rolled over again, without a pause, on to her other side and looked at Louis. She stopped smiling. Louis met her look.

Zamorr came.

“Do stop ordering drinks, Louis,” said Armorelle.

“Sundowners,” said Louis.

“It isn’t sundown.”

“I didn’t say it was.”

Zamorr looked at his immense watch.

“It’s a quarter of four, suh.”

Louis said, “Put the tray beside me, Zamorr.” He turned to lean up on his elbow. “Armorelle—a drink, dear.”

“No, thanks.”

“Peter!”

“No, thanks.” Peter thought that Louis’s mood had been getting queerer all day. When they all bathed before luncheon he’d swum out alone to the rocks. He’d come back late for luncheon. And at luncheon he hadn’t spoken, and had eaten almost nothing. Peter’s nerves had kept on reacting all day to this electrical condition in Louis so that he already felt miserable and exhausted.

“Who will swim again?” asked Fritzl benignly.

Louis began drinking the cocktails one after another. “*Prière de ne gaspiller—*”

A man in a yellow bathrobe came along the beach.

“Hello, Scheurer!”

Louis looked up, his fourth glass in his hand.

“*Hello!— You, Best?*”

Armorelle laid her hand on Peter’s shoulder and whispered, “Who’s the canary-colored pimp?”

Louis introduced him to them all.

“The *Gräfin* and I have met before,” said Brownlow Best. He bowed.

“Yes,” said Kalla. “Was it not in Berlin two years ago?”

“Yes, *Gräfin*.”

Louis said, “Sit down, Best, and have a drink.”

He sat down, refused a drink, and began asking a series of polite questions. How long had Louis been here? Where was he staying?

Louis explained that they were all staying with Nicky Zatec at Valescure.

“And you, Best?”

“I am with Sir Ivan, at Monte Carlo. But I am here for two or three days.”

Peter saw Louis drinking his fifth and sixth glasses and going on talking to Best. Gradually their voices dropped. Best was leaning towards Louis. Peter wondered what they were talking about. Best’s look was close on Louis’s face. But it was impossible to tell from Louis’s mask, with his eyes slanted up and half closed and his underlip thrust out, the effect either of the cocktails or of Best’s conversation.

Then, as Armorelle said, “Come and swim, Peter,” and Sandy said, “Come and swim, Armorelle,” Peter saw Best lean close to Louis and whisper something—and Louis’s eyes open, wide and dark for a second, and close again.

A few minutes later Best got up. He nodded to each of them in turn. Then he said to Louis:—

“At six o’clock to-morrow then?”—and was just turning to go when he hesitated and added, “Of course, if Mr. Cable cares to come along too?” His pale glance flickered round to Peter.

Louis looked up with one of his grimacing smiles that, for the second of their duration, made him seem diabolic, evoking out of himself little pretty flashes of evil. He said:—

“I’m afraid Peter isn’t at *all* musical!”

The next night Louis came back late from his evening with Best.

He came into Peter’s room and found Armorelle and Kalla and Fritzl there. (The others had gone to Cannes.)

They had all four dined off a special *bouillabaisse* made by Nicky’s chef and were apathetic and quarrelsome with surfeit.

But Louis came in radiant and affectionate. He sat down on the bed between Kalla and Peter and began talking and asking them questions about their day, exactly as if he’d returned from a long journey. Within a few

minutes—through a few chance turns of subject, and on the ground of some episode involving Zamorr and the *maire of St.-Raphael*—he began building up, for their amusement, one of his absurd rococo edifices of fancy, ornate with hyperbole, intricate similes, richly elaborate and far-fetched metaphors, adorned with pretty and voluptuous distortions of fact, and tricks of wit, and symbols at the same time frivolous and curiously erudite.

They listened, turning towards him, their mood changing from apathy to pleasure, and from pleasure to excitement: and their physical attitudes changing as if they were wilted flowers put in fresh water.

Soon his talk, as it always did, had wakened theirs. And it was three o'clock before Louis, abruptly sleepy, began to forget his English and talk French. He got up, taking Armorelle's hand, and pulled her to the door.

“*Viens, ma petite—*”

Kalla said, “By the way, Louis, I forgot to ask you how was the musick with Herr Best?”

“*Ah? Ça?*” Louis turned his blank, faintly grimacing mask to her.

“Exquisite,” he said, “*épatante! Que j'adore la musique!* It gets into your senses like a perfume; it possesses you like a passion; it calms you—like a mother.” Without any change of expression he turned and kissed Armorelle on the lips. Armorelle said:—

“Thank you, my sweet.” She glanced at Peter. But Kalla, in her scarlet trousers and blue sweater, was standing between them.

Two days later Peter said to Louis:—

“Aren't you going to see Best again to-night?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“I couldn't help hearing you telephone.”

Louis didn't answer.

Peter said, “Let me come.”

Louis said:—

“Peter dear, you know what I feel about it.”

“But you *go!*”

“It's different for me.”

“Why?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I somehow get out of things. And if I don’t . . .”

Peter’s diffident eagerness changed to obstinacy.

“I mean to, anyway. If I can’t come with you I shall get Armorelle to take me, in Paris.”

Louis walked off to the edge of the terrace. Peter watched him standing there with his shoulders hunched up and his hands in his pockets. Then he came back, his head bent, looking at the ground. And then, still without looking at him, said, “Very well. Come this evening.” Then he suddenly looked Peter in the eyes. Peter didn’t understand his expression. But his heart beat quickly.

Louis snapped out:—

“If you must go, you go with me!” and went to pace the balustrade again; and stand with his hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunched, staring at the sea.

The hotel room was close and shuttered, lit only by the lamp on the bedside table. Colored mattresses and cushions on the tiled floor. Pale walls. A dry coffee smell in the air. Best, in a dressing gown, letting them in, locking the door when they were in, welcoming in undertones. Nicky there, lying on the floor. Peter hadn’t expected Nicky. . . . There was a lamp with a little flame on the floor beside him; and little bottles. He had a long curious pipe in his hand. Two people on the bed: two women, talking and moving, but half asleep; their eyes shining but half asleep. One of them spoke to Best. But he was saying to Louis:—

“Make yourselves at home. We started an hour ago. Not sure if you were coming.” To Peter, “So glad you changed your mind. Do make yourselves at home.”

Nicky’s big face was over the dim upward light of the flame. Louis lay down on the mattress opposite him, so that the flame was between them.

Nicky was filling the pipe, placing the little bottles back deftly on the floor. He glanced up at Peter. Smiled. Said to Louis, “Here’s our beginner.” Then to Best, “This is good stuff, Best. Better than the last.”

Louis said, “Don’t make it strong for Peter . . . very little . . .” He looked up at Peter, said, “Lie down. You needn’t smoke if you don’t want to.” Best, silent-footed, hospitable, said, low-voiced, “There you are” . . . pulled a divan next to Louis. . . . “Lie here, Cable.” . . .

Peter lay down. The two women on the bed were still talking, their arms round each other. Best went over to them. One said, in French, “I’ll have another later. It’s very strong, this time!”

Nicky was talking about some book on Russia . . . broke off . . . smiled sharply at Peter. “This is so impromptu. . . . Our amiable friend has lent his room here. . . . The real thing . . . more picturesque, more memorable. You must come in Paris where I can make you more comfortable. . . . Here, Louis, it’s ready.”

Louis bent forward, began sucking and drawing in the smoke evenly, slowly. Peter, leaning on one elbow, lay watching his profile, impassive, the eyes almost shut.

Best lay down the other side of Nicky. They were talking as Nicky refilled the pipe, the radiance from the flame dimly on their faces and bodies, their shadows huge and blooming behind them on the pale walls.

Now Louis put down the pipe, lay back, shutting his eyes. Then opened them, turning to Peter.

“Do you want to? Really?”

Nicky said, “Of *course* he does. Move, Louis; let him lie where you are.” Now Nicky was filling it again. . . . Peter waited now, Louis’s arm round his shoulder. . . . Louis saying gently to Nicky, “Not too strong, Nicky . . . not much.” One of the women behind them was laughing stupidly.

“Now,” said Nicky, precisely, “now, Peter . . . and remember draw in . . . draw *in* . . . try not to pause.” Peter took the pipe between his lips. He felt Louis’s arm on his shoulder, and saw Nicky smile gently and encouragingly, his black eyes glinting.

“. . . Draw in . . . don’t pause . . . *excellent!* . . . Now . . . lie back . . . don’t move . . . lie back . . .”

He lay back, his head on the cushions, Best saying, “How d’you like it?”

“Agreeable?” said Nicky . . . taking the pipe again . . . beginning to fill it. Peter said, “Very agreeable.” He turned his head to look at Louis. Then leaned up. . . . Louis said, “Don’t move. D’you like it?”

He lay back, his head on Louis's shoulder. "Very agreeable," he repeated. Louis was saying, "You didn't have much . . . anyway."

Peter murmured, excited, half laughing, his limbs drowsy, "*J'adore la musique. . .*"

The thing that politicians referred to that autumn as the "spirit of Locarno" had affected Bianca's imagination to the extent of prompting her to write to Lottie. She got her address from Frany. Part of this self-appointed "business" was to "keep up" with people who seemed to her to need either help or friendship. Frany informed Bianca that Lottie and the child and her blinded husband were living in a house belonging to her father, which was the only property that remained to them. She told her that during the years of inflation Lottie had kept them all by some accounting job in one of the steel works at Duisburg . . . because her husband's pension lost all value. But she believed that things were a little better now as Carteret, hearing of this, had made over some foreign shares to them.

Bianca remembered Lottie in the room which was now Toby's nursery, sitting by the fire and with the baby girl in her arms.

She wrote a short letter, telling her about the house, and the garden, and Toby, who was six months younger than her Anna must be.

She had a letter back from Lottie asking her, if she ever had time, and didn't mind very simple living, to come and stay.

Bianca, for no reason she could define, was touched by the letter and arranged to visit Lottie in February, on her way to stay with the St. Laurents in Cannes.

Lottie's house was in the serene suburbs of the noisy factory town. A little square red house whose lack of eaves made it look like a cheerful face with too little eyelash and brow to hope for beauty. Encircling it, inside a low wall, were grass, gravel paths, a swing, a summerhouse, and, usually, an Alsatian dog.

Inside the house the rooms were fresh and full of clean frilled curtains and inherited furniture of the German nineteenth century, back even to Beidermeier pieces of museum interest. But there were bulbs in pots and in window boxes in every room; and a cuckoo clock in the hall, and another in the *Kinderzimmer*, and a Dutch-doll girl of fourteen always in a fresh brown overall and always smiling, who helped Lottie in the house, took Anna to school, and guarded the house in the evenings with the Alsatian dog when

Lottie went to the clinic to be with her husband. (Lottie's husband, obsessed by his blindness, had gone through stages of melancholia to a state of apparent insanity, and it was this tragedy, hidden behind the bright gentle orderliness of Lottie's life, which seemed to Bianca later, in retrospect, to be almost a symbol of German life in those years.)

Lottie herself had, since that time at Ebony, regained an appearance of equilibrium. Her happiness in her little girl, her pride in her house, her instinctive self-imposition of routine, had given her back a certain capacity to enjoy the simple pleasures and little cherished festivities which were so essentially the heritage of her race. Neither her sadness, nor her poverty in the nightmare years of inflation, had prevented Lottie from initiating her child in the joys which were also rites and traditions; of *Weihnachtszeit* (the tree with candles, the gingerbread hearts covered with silver paper, the Christ-kind in white at the top of the tree).

And little Anna seemed the child both of this ritualized tenderness and jollity (snowmen in winter, wreaths of field flowers on your head in summer) and of another heritage, of sadness, and poverty, accepting the dumb fundamental despair that was everywhere, invisible, like a blight. For Anna's face, under its scarlet fur-trimmed cap, and between the dark plaits, had the cheekbones too clearly marked, and her lips were always pressed softly together. Her dark eyes had their inner vision of fairy stories: her cuckoo clock in her *Kinderzimmer* marked placid hours; her dolls in their *Puppenecke* absorbed her leisure. But her mind knew that the *Märchen* (fairy story) endings weren't true; that her own little room was gay and had a warm white stove, but that life outside was frightening. Her dark eyes shone and laughed! But her lips, pressed together, admitted: "Nothing is safe! One must be careful."

In the mornings Bianca helped Lottie in the house and the kitchen. At midday Anna came home and they all ate in the little red-papered dining room. Then they slept for an hour. And then, if the afternoon was fine, the three of them went for a walk through the pine woods and fields near by (for the outskirts of the town met the country). Usually Lottie would arrange a walk to some little wooden pavilion where they could stop and go in and drink *Kaffee* or *Schokolade*.

Sometimes, when Lottie had special shopping to do, or friends she wanted to meet, they took a tram and went into the town and looked at the shops on the dark clattering high street; and then had their *Kaffee* or *Schokolade* and cakes in a shop.

Once, during the ten days that Bianca stayed, some friends came in in the evening and Lottie offered them *Rheinwein* and little cakes baked by herself and sandwiches and smoked meats. They were mostly heavy-bodied people, middle-aged in their thirties: the women dressed in colored silk blouses and dark skirts; the men in suits or frock coats with their hair shaved short at the back, and gallant manners, and shy uncomfortable glances. But when they became at ease, and seemed to lay off the drab heaviness and anxiety of their daily lives, and got used to Bianca being there, one of them—a man (coloring and hitching his trouser knees)—asked her if there was still much hate (*Hass*) of Germany in England?

“Hate?” A dreadfully moving sense of how sad and beaten and diffident they were gave her halting German a new impetus to explain that *indeed* there was no hate! Hadn’t we all suffered so? And now, at least, we must believe that that was all over forever!

A gentle-faced plain woman of about forty said that there could never again be a war. Such horror. Such sorrow for all. The tears came into her little blue eyes. She said, “We have all suffered because we have had wicked rulers that made such things possible.”

And Lottie, who had been bringing in more *belegte Brötchen* from the kitchen, came and sat by Bianca and put her arm in hers. And then the men talked about the difficulties also of trade and business, but they agreed that since Locarno there was a real hope that things would get better. And if only Germany was once a League Member—!

Then Lottie suggested they should have some music. And she went to the piano, and she played and sang Schubert and Schumann, and Brahms. Then they all had more wine, and talked, and were quite gay, and went home, before twelve, in their rubber overshoes, thanking Lottie so many times, and saying their good-byes to Bianca with such warmth and friendliness, and yet with that hidden diffidence (because in their hearts they were bewildered and guilty that somehow “they” had made the War).

Marie de Montcontour herself had stayed in the North this year, but lent Louis her villa at Le Pradet, her idea and his being that he should write his new book there tranquilly. But, inevitably, since he invited Peter, he couldn’t refuse Nicky. And Sandy came, exhausted by a London Season, and a year of jealousy. And Bengy came, following Sandy. And Louis asked François because he couldn’t bear to think of him, underfed and thoughtful, in his hot studio in Paris when they were all in the South. And Armorelle came

bringing a young man called Logan whom she thought handsome. And Kalla and Fritzl came, arriving in canvas shorts and huge boots and carrying rucksacks and refusing, at first, to eat anything but *Studentenfutter* (raisins and sultanas and various bits of nut), which they brought with them in paper bags.

Inevitably the entire party became physically competitive about sunburn, and spiritually restive about love. They lay about on the terraces and on Marie's private beach, and on the yacht, and on the rocks, interminably confiding to each other the Odysseys of hearts and senses; indefatigably exploring all the paths which might lead to their finding "the One Perfect Person." Their lesser, but as constant, desire to be mahogany color was mystically associated with the greater quest. Since all of them lived (like a sect awaiting the Second Coming) in constant expectation that, if not this morning, then certainly to-night the Beloved would appear—to find them duly bronzed, fragrant, and in luxurious dressing gowns. (Sandy always traveled with his pale green sheets, since this was the color he woke up best in. And Armorelle had what she called a "bottom drawer" in her wardrobe trunk.)

But this summer Louis wanted to work. And as his desire for work gained on him his affection for them all grew less. By the second week he was working angrily at night, and they were so little real or necessary to him that he began brooding on the fact that they were there at all, and feeling tormented, and persecuted by their presence.

He was sufficiently aware in theory that his dislike of them was a thing that would pass with his phase of work to telegraph to Frany asking her if she would spend her summer holiday (which he happened to know was due now) in being hostess for him?

Frany's telegram was: "Understand. Coming."

When he got it Louis was so relieved that he went out on to the lower terrace where they were all having cocktails and was charming and friendly to them so that they all adored him again, and felt secretly uncomfortable that they'd confided to each other, in the last few days, that he was "getting impossible" and that he'd become "thoroughly spoiled."

Frany arrived, in her tussore coat and shirt and a topi. Her luggage consisted of a pigskin Gladstone bag and a sunshade strapped to a shooting stick.

As soon as she arrived she went to her room and undressed and ordered that the old Indian gauze underclothes in which she had traveled should be

burned. She then unpacked, refusing help from the *femme de chambre*, and emerged to join Louis and the others on the beach wearing a bathing costume of black alpaca with a navy-blue sailor collar and a lanyard. She also wore black silk stockings and over them her white bathing shoes laced up with white tape, and a navy-blue cotton handkerchief spotted with white tied up into a butterfly bow over her rubber cap.

Louis introduced them all to her. François she knew already.

She asked Peter to go and fetch her shooting stick, and her parasol. Frany never sat on sand, even on a rug, considering it to be “unclean.”

As Peter came back, she looked at him. When he gave her the parasol and arranged her shooting stick, she glanced at him again. Later, after she had had her swim, she said to Louis:—

“I haven’t seen Peter for some time. I don’t ask what’s the matter with him. I know.”

Louis didn’t answer at the time.

But that evening before dinner he came into her room and said, “I don’t know what to do about Peter. He began a year ago.”

“How?”

“Here in the Midi.”

“But you do. Yourself.”

“How did you know?”

“I’ve known since you began three years ago. Only you happen to be very tough.”

“I don’t often. I can always stop.”

“Then you’re very extraordinary.”

“I—am.”

“Well, Peter isn’t. Nor is his body. He’s always been delicate.”

Louis flared nervously. “He’s perfectly strong. It happens that he’s been smoking a *lot*. But, in fact, I’ve got him to promise that when we get back he’ll give up the whole thing.”

“How?”

“Disintoxication.”

“D’you think he’ll stand that?”

“How?”

“Nervously.”

“Of course.”

Frany said, “I think you ought to take him at once then, to be cured.”

“I can’t *take* him! I’m here to *work*! I’m TRYING to work! That’s why I asked you to come. I’m being driven *mad* by them all.”

“But what about Peter?”

Louis turned on her. “Why can’t he go alone? Why must I *take* him? Why can’t *you* take him?”

Frany said, “You know why. Because you can persuade him. If anyone can.”

Louis began swearing at her. . . . What had she come for? To drive him mad too? To interfere? To burden him with ridiculous responsibilities? To try to make him feel that it was *he* who had persuaded Peter to smoke?

“Who was it, then?”

“If it was anyone, except himself, it was Best.”

“That man?”

“Yes.”

She said abruptly, “I’d no idea he was involved.”

“*Involved* . . . You talk as if the whole thing was a conspiracy, a plot, a dangerous crime.”

Frany went to her Gladstone bag, which was on a chair, and took out a bottle of aspirin. Deliberately she shook out three tablets. Then she fetched a glass of water from the *cabinet de toilette*.

“Take these.”

He began swearing at her again.

“Take these, Louis.”

“I won’t.”

“Please . . . take these.”

“I see no reason.”

She put the glass in his hand.

“Take them at once.”

He took them.

Toby was going to school.

He was going to a private school at Cobham. It had been Peter’s private school. And Bianca had been again to see it. She had talked to Mr. Lennox, the headmaster, and to Mrs. Lennox, and to the nice matron. And she had arranged for Toby to come in September.

The day before he was to go, Bianca and he had a walking day, with knapsacks. Toby chose that. They started very early and took a train to Headcorn and walked back through the woods and over fresh stubble fields, and ate their luncheon of hard-boiled eggs and peaches and cold sausages (Toby chose these) sitting under an oak tree in a field just outside Chilham. Toby had brought his fishing rod and after luncheon he went down to the stream at the bottom of the field and fished, for an hour, blissfully, catching nothing. (He had forgotten to bring any bait and used a piece of sausage.)

Bianca lay on the bank and watched him. He was so intent, his bright head bent forward, his brown eyes fixed on the water. His cheeks still had a baby rosiness and roundness. It was such a lovely day; the air so fresh, the sun so warm. (He was going to school, to-morrow.)

He said, “They don’t seem to like sausage much, do they?”

“Try a piece of bread,” she suggested. “It *shows* up more.”

He nodded. “I will.”

“But in half an hour,” she said, “we must start off again.” (This time, to-morrow, he would be there.)

When they were walking back he talked about plans for next holidays, about his hunting, about “my friend Jock” (the postmistress’s little boy), who had promised to look after his rabbits in the term.

As the sun got low in the sky and he was secretly getting tired, he asked her to tell him a story. So she told him an installment of “Liony,” a legend which had gone on since he was two. He asked for more. And once or twice, towards sunset, as they were walking above the marsh towards home, he took her hand.

When they got in at last, Peggotty rose from the lawn like a huge grey affectionate chrysanthemum to greet them. The doves were sitting on the roof in the sunset, in a rouged row. Toby asked if he could stay up to dinner with her.

So they had hot baths and dined in their dressing gowns. He wore his new school jaeger one. Bianca wore her blue satin one to please him, and a blue riband in her hair. (He chose this.)

They had the candles lit on the table. And Mrs. Cobb made the chocolate *soufflé* he asked for. But when it came he couldn't finish his helping. So Bianca allowed him, "for this once," to give it to Peggotty.

But after dinner she said he must go to bed. And went up with him.

She put out the light before tucking him in, so that there was only the glow from the landing and he couldn't see her face. He asked, in the angry small voice that meant he was embarrassed, if she would mind if the door leading to her room were opened? It was usually locked as he hated to consider his bedroom being the dressing room of hers.

She unlocked it, and opened it. Then she said:—

"Sleep well," and came and kissed him quickly, only holding him in her arms for a second. And he said, "You sleep well too."

At the door she said, "Good night, darling," again. She heard him whisper, "Good night, Mummie."

At six in the morning she thought she heard him moving about. She asked:—

"Toby?"

"Y—yes."

"Toby, darling? What is it?"

He was silent. Then his voice came, choked but assertive.

"I . . . I just woke up."

She sprang out of bed. "Oh, *Toby* . . ." She ran to the doorway. He was sitting up in bed, his eyes swollen, his hands pressed over his mouth.

She said, "Darling . . ." Then, quickly, "I'll get you a glass of water. Come into my bed."

He nodded, his hands still over his mouth, but his pyjamaed body getting slowly out of bed.

When she had him propped up against her pillows and had given him the water, and a hot bottle at his feet, she managed to make him laugh by one of those time-honored jokes about Liony climbing up the chain of the plug and his Enemies “falling in.”

After breakfast she drove him over to Cobham and they got to the school just before luncheon. As they went slowly up the drive and the grey buildings came in sight between the beech trees, she said:—

“It’s only three week-ends before I’ll come and see you. We’ll take out a picnic.”

His profile, in the strange purple cap, nodded.

“I’ll write to you . . . something every day.”

He didn’t answer. A moment later he touched her arm.

“Mummie?”

“Yes.”

“. . . I think it would be better, if you don’t mind, if you didn’t write—quite every day.” He hesitated. “You see I must get used to it, mustn’t I . . . and . . .”

“Of course.” She added, “You’re quite right.”

They got out of the car and she went into the hall with him. And Mrs. Lennox came. And went again. And the place was full of little boys in purple caps with neat overcoats and faces that were expressionless and tense in the way that Toby’s was.

When she said, “I must go,” he looked up at her for one second. Then he just nodded and said:—

“I expect you’d better.”

When she got back she found David there. She had forgotten that he’d written and said he would come, because there hadn’t been anything in her mind that was real except Toby’s going.

But she said, “Oh David, how *nice* to see you,” and made him cocktails and asked him how his *Vogue* job was going, and told him matter-of-factly that she had been over to Cobham to take Toby to his school.

David looked at her with his charming unobserving glance and said, “I expect you’ll miss him, won’t you?”

And then he saw her face and at once sprang up and came to her. "Bianca, darling. I didn't realize . . . I'm so sorry, my dear." He touched her shoulder, and at his touch she began crying and she turned and threw herself into his arms.

He held her, troubled by the violence of her sobbing, and a little startled and intoxicated by this sudden holding her in his arms. He held her closer, laid his cheek against her hair, touched her forehead with his lips. He said, "Darling . . . I wish there was anything I could do." And when she couldn't speak or see for crying he said, "I can't bear you to be so unhappy," kissing her salt cheek. He felt a long sob shake her and leave her quite still in his arms. He could feel her heart beating. Her hand was cold in his. He whispered, "Bianca, darling." She didn't answer, or open her eyes. He bent and kissed her lips; and she didn't move.

There was a telephone message for Bianca from Moon's Green saying that Lady Platt-Eresby had arrived and wanted to know when she might come over and see Mrs. Selwyn. Bianca telephoned to say that she was to come any time.

Ruth came the next day for luncheon. She was in green tweed and five months gone with a baby.

Ruth ate two helpings of everything. She said, "Nothing disagrees with me at these times," and giggled. She told Bianca about her life in London, and Harold's view that Locarno had been a blunder, before she asked:—

"And now what about Peter?"

"What about him?"

"Tell me what you've heard."

"I've heard nothing. Frany saw him in the South of France."

"Ah! Was he there with Louis Scheurer?"

"Louis was the host."

"I see. And what was Peter doing?"

"Bathing, I expect, and playing tennis."

"Oh. Mother's heard one or two queer rumors."

"She likes queer rumors."

Ruth snapped, "I meant about Peter. D'you mind if I smoke? I always smoke at these times."

"A good many people seem to have been staying with Louis."

"I expect he asked a good many."

"Yes."

"I've never liked Louis."

Bianca said at once, untruthfully, that she always had.

Ruth said, "I s'pose *you're* going to start liking peculiar people now, too?" Then she reverted: "What's the latest gossip about *him*?"

"I don't know any."

"Don't be silly, dear. We all know that Louis Scheurer is surrounded with gossip! Who's he in love with now?"

"Louis doesn't fall in love."

"Whatever d'you mean?"

"He told Charmian so himself. He just doesn't. He falls, but not into *love*."

"Oh. That sounds all very subtle."

"It isn't."

"Well . . . D'you mind if I put my feet up on your sofa?"

And Ruth's brogues, in the interest of the second little Platt-Eresby, rested on a cushion of petit point.

"And what d'you hear from Charmian?"

"She's had a secretarial job in New York since she divorced Kramer."

"That's one good thing over, anyway. Poor girl, she has made a mess of her life. I wonder what she'll do now. Of course next year she gets her money from Grandpapa. I daresay she'll make a pretty poor job of spending that."

Bianca, keeping her temper, asked Ruth conversationally if she hoped that her baby was going to be a boy or a girl.

Ruth said, "Well, of course, we hope a boy. After the fiasco of a girl last time. How's Toby getting on at school?"

“Quite well.”

“Do him good, being at school,” said Ruth. “Knock any ideas out of their heads.”

When Ruth said that Bianca “liked peculiar people,” she was really defending the inherent prejudices of the sporting *bourgeoisie* of England.

In fact, as little as two years before, Bianca herself had, unthinkingly and by tradition, shared with Ruth the assumption that people belonged to three categories: the normal, the distinguished, and the “fishy”; that “one’s friends” belonged to the first two categories; and that the third category of people (which one didn’t want to know) included anyone suspected of wit, debt, or unnatural vice. (Though what, as Louis had once asked Lady Cable at dinner, is “*natural* vice?” And what, if any, are its advantages?)

Bianca was so little aware of her recent change of taste in people that she had taken the trouble to refute Ruth’s remark, as though it were an accusation.

And it was only later, soaking in her hot bath before dinner, that, reflecting on the whole matter, she decided that she wanted people to be amusing or funny or peculiar, as well as good—and that when they couldn’t be both she’d rather they were amusing.

Drying herself, she thought that if she were ever to marry again she’d rather have a man bad-amusing than simple-good. Frictioning with chypre, she decided that a man who made you laugh was more desirable than a man who made you comfortable. Dressing slowly, she thought of David; and wondered if it was because he couldn’t make her laugh that she didn’t want to marry him.

Or perhaps, really, she didn’t want to marry at all?

She put on her white velvet dressing gown, pleased by the sense that it was for herself, and not for any man.

In the library the fire leaped and crackled. Her dinner was laid on the low table by the sofa. The room smelled of wood smoke.

What she wanted out of life, she decided, eating roast pheasant, drinking Burgundy, glancing now and then at the poems of André Chénier open beside her plate,—

*O Versailles, o bois, o portiques,
Marbres vivants, berceaux antiques,—*

was to be charmed, diverted, and instructed; to enjoy an emotion one day, a conversation another; to love places intimately and with nostalgia as though they were people; and to discover new people as if they were strange lands.

She wanted these things when Toby was away.

The next morning she had a telegram from Nathalie St. Laurent announcing her arrival that afternoon, on her way to London.

Bianca met her at Croydon and brought her back to Ebony.

Nathalie said at once that the house explained all the things in Bianca that she hadn't understood—especially her respect for the past and her lack of interest in anything labeled “modern.” She said it was the house of a woman with “a serious soul and frivolous senses.”

Nathalie was an amateur of “lives.”

“How is your life, Bianca?”

“The same.”

“No romance?”

“Not—really romantic romance.”

“What about *ce beau* David you told me of? You don't love him?”

“N-no. I like love with him.”

“And he?”

“He likes love—he likes me, in his way, I suppose. And you, Nathalie?”

“I?” Nathalie lay down on the sofa, as if her long body had suddenly got tired of carrying her head. “I am—very well.”

“Does your husband still adore you?”

“Yes.”

“And you?”

“I—am in love with him.”

“Then—?” said Bianca.

“Then!” Nathalie opened her eyes—extraordinary jeweled eyes thick-fringed with black. “It sounds perfect, doesn’t it?” She looked round the room. “And it’s like being ill—all the time. One’s perpetually afraid, too—of others—of oneself growing older—”

“What do you mean?”

Nathalie said, “You have a kind of innocence not of sex, but of—the passions themselves—of the illness of passion.”

Nathalie was flittering her hands for a cigarette. She lit one. After a moment she said, “What’s the English expression? ‘The cure is worse than the disease.’”

Bianca said, “I know what you mean really. About my innocence. You see—what happened to me, nine years ago, was quite different from—a ‘grown-up passion.’ What happened to Richard and me was the beginning of a fairy story that was never, never going to end. . . . And then it did end.”

Nathalie was silent. A gust of rain drove against the windows. Bianca went on:—

“That kind of incredible loveliness can’t happen again. It was like being on snow mountains in the sun. You kept on breathing in to taste if it was real, and every breath made you more and more alive.”

“Are you still unhappy?”

“No.” Bianca leaned forward and put a log on the fire. “But when I wake up suddenly from sleep it’s always because I know that Richard’s back again. . . . And then he isn’t.”

“Will you show me his photograph?”

Bianca got up and went to the writing table. Nathalie watched her, for as she turned she had one of her moments of romantic beauty, her face blocked out in light and shadow by the upward lamplight.

Nathalie looked at the photograph of a boy in uniform with a sweet mouth and a stubby nose, and the eyes and brow of a child.

Jimmy was whimpering now and he caught hold of Charmian’s hand and started saying in a thick, truculent way: “She’ll look after me, she’s gonna take me home, she’s straight, she’s on the level. . . . She’s gonna take me back an’ give me a decent breakfast. She’s *loyal*. She ain’t like some of you!” While he went on he kept his head bent like a bullock, but backing

from the others and not looking at her. He looked deathly green and his hand was clammy, and she began drawing him back and back to the door, and somehow got him out. And out in the street the snow was blowing, and people were going to work in arctics and with their collars hunched above their ears.

When she got Jimmy into the flat at Eighth Street he was still clutching her hand. She switched on the light (and on the table was a letter from Bianca). She made him sit on the sofa and tried to unclasp his hand so that she could go and make him coffee. But he clung so that she sat down beside him, and he put his head on her shoulder and started sobbing. He smelled of whiskey and his hair was soft against her neck like a child's: and she sat still holding him hard while he sobbed loudly, on and on. At last she said, "Don't, Jimmy darling—" and gradually she got his arms off her and made him lie along the sofa, and his sobs got quieter and she went off on tiptoe into the kitchen.

When she came back he was lying in the same position, head in his arms, and daylight was coming in between the curtains. She said, "Drink this, Jimmy," and he lifted his head and saw the coffee and said, "You're a sweet girl. I s'pose you want me to vomit."

She said, "Yes, I do. Sit up." And she put one arm round his shoulders and made him drink; and then got a basin and put it on a chair beside him and left him vomiting and went to take off her crumpled frock and put on a sweater and skirt. And all the time she was cleaning her face and dabbing lotion on, she was crying but not knowing why (except because of that old feeling of life getting her by the neck and pushing her down).

And just when she had no make-up on, and tears pouring, in her looking-glass she saw Jimmy coming in. But he didn't seem to notice her face. He came to her and she turned, and staggered on to his knees beside her, saying:

—
"You got to marry me, Charmian. You certainly got to marry me, girl!"

"I know," she said.

The *Galère* was in Venice.

As Bianca passed them crossing the Piazza with the St. Laurents, François turned to Louis.

"Not bad—the little Selwyn!"

“She moves her knees smoothly when she walks,” said Bengy, “so that they don’t disturb her skirts.”

“She has charming thighs,” said Nicky—“*charming*.”

“It’s true,” said Fritzl, smiling his welcome of a pleasing thought, “they are most *ex-cellent*.”

“I think it’s her way of *looking* at you that’s so moving and attractive,” Armorelle said—“melting one moment, and yet *utterly* not caring if you were to die *on* her plate at *dinner*.”

Kalla turned to Louis. “*Is* she then so haard-boiled, that beautiful Bianca?”

Louis shrugged his shoulders. “I know her very little.”

“But Louis,” insisted Kalla, “you have known her a long time?”

“But never well.”

“*Ach*—then you should *do* so. Why *do* you not fall in loave with her, Louis? *Pour changer un peu?* . . . Or *you*, Nicky—why do not *you*? Or you, sweet To-ony?”

Tony said, rapidly biting the ends of his moustache, “My dear Kalla, you seem to think, like everybody else, that I have time for everything.”

“But, sweet To-ony, you might have time to sleep with her. Or mightn’t you, my Fritzl?” She put her arm round Fritzl’s neck. “Often I think that Fritzl resembles that poem:—

“*Jeune homme sans mélancolie*
Blond comme un soleil d’Italie
Garde bien ta belle folie—”

She leaned her brown, sweet-lipped, boyish face against Fritzl’s cheek.

Louis repeated idly, only half aware of them all— “*Ta belle folie—* When *is* that waiter coming?”

They had all three, Marthe, Louis, and Peter, been taking their siesta as usual in the cool of the east loggia.

Marthe watched Peter as he put down his book and, still reclining, turned his head to gaze down the sunlit formal vista of the gardens. There, beside the fountain, her two little girls in pink were playing, while their *Nounou* in white sat bunched on the stone seat knitting.

“It’s a *Renoir!*” said Peter.

Marthe smiled. “You see Renoirs in France just as I see, all the time, Zoffanys and—Morlands—in England.” She was thinking how thin he was, and, especially to-day, apathetic in his movements. As if his eager excited mind claimed all his physical strength.

Peter turned on her with a quick, “Oh, if one *only* saw that!”

Louis opened his eyes.

“You’ve roused Peter’s worst nostalgia. He has one supreme wish for his country—which is that its history should have come to an end in 1832. For him—as for the Duke of Wellington, wasn’t it?—the passing of the first Reform Bill was a sort of funeral!” He added, smiling at Peter: “I remember you explaining this to me in the shadow of the Pyramids! I remember you even said (and Nicky was so angry, d’you remember?) that it was a shame that the Pyramids had survived and Regent Street hadn’t! And when Nicky, pointing to the Pyramids with his fat arm, shouted in the moonlight, ‘But *look—look* at that miracle!’ and then with *immense* solemnity, ‘There is the Sarcophagus of an entire civilization’—you said, with the very English accent you had in those days, ‘Yes. But Regent Street is *infinitely* more elegant.’”

Peter smiled. “Nicky was really so angry with me on that journey because he thought I was stealing his Arab love.”

“Weren’t you?”

“You know perfectly well.”

Louis shrugged his shoulders. “In any case—poor Nicky. He’s at Biarritz at present. He and Bengy and Armorelle, I think—I had a letter from Nicky yesterday, asking me if my book was done.”

“Is it?” asked Marthe.

“No. But almost.” He stretched his arms and yawned.

“It’s all wrong. It’s bad. It’s dull— And there are too many books anyway. And everything I write is so successful with the kind of people whom I like least. Englishwomen from the ‘smart sets’ of the Provinces *still* write to me saying that they think *Doves in Aspic* is brilliant, and asking for my photograph— And since *Eugénie*—I have had at *least* ten letters from unknown women proposing rendezvous in obscure *garçonnières* in Paris.”

Marthe said, "There were some lovely chapters in *Eugénie*. But what I don't like in your books, Louis, is that one feels all the time that under the surface you are in such despair for the human race—"

Louis got up out of his chair. "I am."

Marthe looked up at him as he stood there, stretching his arms out, his mouth smiling, his eyes bright and dark and angry.

He said, "I'm as angry as God when he drowned them all. But God made one mistake, which was to save Noah." Then with one of his limber sudden movements he knelt beside her. "Darling—I don't want to hurt you. . . . *Don't* look miserable. . . . Don't look at me in such despair! Marthe, my sweet darling . . ."

Marthe shook her head. "It isn't despair—"

"It's—pity then?" Still kneeling by his sister, he turned to Peter, who, lying back, had been less aware of their talk than of the contrast in their looks: Marthe so Norman in type, Louis so Gascon and spare and lithe; Marthe so tranquil, Louis so moody—and his every gesture, as much as his voice and features, inflected by those moods.

Louis said, "Even Peter reproached me yesterday for not writing a *great* book." He sprang up and began pacing about and looking for cigarettes, looking for matches, and saying in the half-tone that always sounded as if he were keeping a wedge between his teeth:—

"I don't want to write a *great* book. I don't want even to think *one* little great thought—I don't care much about any sort of greatness—except that I want to have great, great, *GREAT FUN*—"

He turned to make a grimace like a gargoyle, first at Peter, and then at Marthe, and strode out into the sun.

That evening Marthe said to her brother:—

"What's the matter with Peter?"

"With Peter?" Louis took a cigarette out of the box on the piano.

"He looks ill."

"Do you think so?" He put the cigarette down unlit.

"He's changed very much since two years ago."

"In what way?"

“You don’t see it?”

Louis threw himself on the sofa.

“He—he’s not very strong, perhaps. He looks tired. He smokes too much.” Louis sprang up again, fetched his unlit cigarette off the piano and lit it.

“He has a bad cough.”

“Smoker’s cough.”

Marthe watched her brother walk down the room, look at himself unseeing in the dark glass between the doors, and turn to come back again. She said:—

“He ought to stop smoking then.”

“Perhaps.”

“You should make him.” She added, “You could. You have a great influence over him.”

“But—” Louis checked a conventional disclaiming. He stopped pacing and stood in front of his sister, his arms crossed, his slanting eyes black, his underlip truculent and awry.

“He loves you, Louis.”

For the space of a heartbeat he hesitated. Then he took this as, with her deliberate and lovely simplicity, she had given it to him.

“I know.”

She said, “He’s so very sensitive,” her heart pleading for all weakness that needs protection.

Louis turned on his heel, went to the window, swung back, paced to the radio, switched it on. He said:—

“Luxembourg—Brussels—Let’s try London . . .”

The Savoy Orpheans playing “My Heart Stood Still.”

Louis whistled. Stopped whistling. Danced half across the room, his arms wide. Still dancing, rapping out his words, he said, “What am I to do for Peter?” His eyebrows peaked. (Only Marthe, in the world, knew that meant near tears. That, and the hard-rapping-out voice.)

She didn’t look at him. He was near the sofa. She had seen him once pitch over into blackness on that evening at Céligny, five years ago, when

his spaniel bitch had been run over, and he'd had to shoot her. She said:—

“Probably Peter needs only good air and rest.”

She got up as the door opened at the far end of the room and Edouard came in. He came and kissed his wife's hand. He turned his agreeable handsomeness to Louis.

“What a pity you didn't come to-day. Quantities of birds and magnificent weather. I am sorry you didn't come. And at luncheon, an excellent 'picnic' organized by Madame Tissot. . . . Your father was there . . . and Lord Cable.”

Louis repeated, “Lord Cable?”

Edouard stated, “Yes, they both came this morning. It appears there has been some sort of difficulty in a business matter. They have had to dismiss a trusted agent, for disagreeable reasons.”

“What was his name?”

“I forget.”

“It wasn't Best—Brownlow Best?”

“I believe it was.”

Peter and Louis had been to see Marthe on her return from Arès.

They took a taxi at the end of the island. Louis said, “Let's go and see François. It's too early to dine.” He gave the driver an address.

“What's François doing now?”

“Articles for *Paris-Soir*. Writing a book on Surrealisme. Painting fans with indecent pictures on them that his *petite-amie* sells in the *boîtes* of Montparnasse. I wish he weren't so poor.”

They passed Notre-Dame and crossed the river.

Peter asked, “How's the novel going now?”

“Quite well. It began in French but it went better in English. So I began it again.”

“What are you going to call it?”

“*Fresco* . . . I think . . .”

“It's a nice tidy title. . . . When will it be done?”

But Louis said, “Look at that old woman’s silhouette against the bridge—how black she is, and then the bloom of the dusk behind her, and the lights along the *quais*.”

Peter saw, and thought that whenever Louis said, “Look,” there was, for him, this changing of what he “saw” to what he “felt”—an alchemy of plain vision to a poet’s emotion in perceiving. So, under the spell of Louis’s “Look, Peter,” he’d first seen the gardens at Versailles; the hands of Marie de Montcontour; the façade of Azay-le-Rideau. And the magic of such seeing was that it remained, printed clear across his heart; whereas what he’d seen “on his own” (or at any rate before he got the trick of seeing with Louis’s “Look!” in his mind) he remembered inexpertly.

Pursuing these thoughts, Peter said, as they got out of the car in the Rue Visconti:—

“When are we going to carry out our Greek plans?”

“What Greek plans? Oh yes, I remember.”

“Going to Greece with you would be so . . . awfully jolly.”

Louis colored, hesitated for a scarcely perceptible second, and then, taking Peter’s arm as they went up the staircase, said, “We’ll go next summer.”

As they got to the top of the stone staircase François, in a brown dressing gown, rushed out of his own door, like a cuckoo out of a cuckoo clock, and shouted three times, flapping his arms, “They have accepted my play.”

François Dubar to Marthe d’Arès:—

8 RUE VISCONTI
19 October 1927

DEAR PRINCESSE:—

It is already three days since you received me; and I have thought often of our conversation. Not only of its charm, which I too constantly remember—but of its subject.

I hardly dare to say to you what I felt when you asked me to come.

That you should choose me! And that I should have been present, in your thoughts, to be chosen! I still don’t believe it. For

though you have known me little, you must perceive me as I am; a sort of Punchinello—a Petrouchka whose few successes and many failures must, each, always contain an element of ridicule.

I am so little deserving of the confidence of a woman like you; *so* unaccustomed to the elegance of heart, the grace of understanding, the perfect ease of a disciplined conscience, which is your ambience.

Did I seem awkward? At first I felt so. Until you, so simply, and without any awareness of doing so, made me share your own serenity. (That serenity returns to me as I write; but only for a second, like the intense, unreal memorization of a perfume.)

But, to our subject, you can imagine how many times I have asked myself if the opinion I gave you was the right one. And each time I have, at least, come back to the same conclusion.

You remember that I cited you, more or less ironically, David and Jonathan. And you said to me that theirs was a beneficent devotion; whereas the very fact that Louis has had a destructive influence on Peter Cable proves that the whole relationship is harmful.

But I said that we could not judge whether Peter Cable was being “destroyed” or, in fact, “re-created.” One thing is certain, which is that it was a need to be remade which, from the first, caused his emotion for Louis.

Nine years ago I saw Peter Cable at Louis’s apartment in the Rue de Grenelle; a schoolboy of sixteen, shy, naïve, more instructed than cultivated, and with the sort of beauty, at the same time romantic and rare to the point of degeneracy, which would always charm Louis. Himself so romantic, and so mistrustful of all that is praised for being wholesome and normal! To such a boy Louis was inevitably a hero. He was four years older and as much more apt in questions of taste and sophistication as France is to England, and, as we know, he was himself at that moment in that phase of nervous and calculated æstheticism that was his reaction after the War. Therefore he was, for young Cable, Culture, Knowledge—the art of life itself—And over and above that, Louis had then, as he has now, his famous “charm.” As for Louis, he was attracted not only by the boy’s beauty and devotion, but certainly by quite another thing; that is—by his need!

There is, in Louis,—you yourself know it, hidden in his fantastic and conflicting nature,—a quality of tenderness; a need to protect, to love, to give happiness, which is profound and instinctive and, almost, feminine! I remember well, during December in 1918 when I was very ill with grippe and I was in the studio I had in the Montmartre, and Louis came to see me. When he realized that he could neither leave me nor find a nurse for me, he installed himself in the place and looked after me there for a week. I have never known such care. I don't suppose he ever told you about it. . . . And a curious thing is that when I was better he said to me that he felt out of work, and lost; and that he had found the nursing itself so “satisfying.” . . . Then, I remember, he said, “Let's go out and get drunk” . . . which we did.

I repeat to you, therefore, that I am sure that if Louis has led him out of the English world that his family imagined suitable for him it was because that is what Peter wanted. And the more I think of it, the more I am convinced that their friendship was inevitable; and for my part, I believe that all relations which are based upon the exchange of love and intelligence are to be respected. For such relations are essentially civilized. More than that—I believe that great love, intense devotion, the mutual passion of complex and sensitive human beings, will create perhaps the only memorial of our civilization. And I imagine that in the end, when our world has been choked by its own greed, blinded by its own stupidity, and, finally, destroyed by its own Science; when there is no language left in which to speak the words of the poets; no hearing for music; no eyes to weep for destroyed beauty, there will remain (perhaps, *Princesse*), in a modest corner of eternity, a little Temple, of exquisite, of invisible, design built to commemorate the amorous grandeurs of the human race. And over the invisible portals of this intangible architecture will be written, without words, THEY LOVED ONE ANOTHER.

. . . What foolishness! I began this letter with the intention of telling you, quite simply, that I am more than ever sure that Lord Cable's idea that *you* should persuade Louis “to see rather less of Peter” is impossible. It is also an idea that only an Englishman could conceive. For it is very English to wish to forbid what seems “unsatisfactory” without admitting its existence. Lord Cable, who “dislikes scenes,” finds it convenient to imagine that you, being a woman, will be able to solve the problem without recognizing it.

In any case I hope that you will not let yourself be involved in all this. For there is something in the letter of Lord Cable that you showed me which gives me a feeling that it is not only his fears for his son which actuate him—but some other fear, more recent and more precise.

The more I have thought of this, the more I am sure about it. For, after all, Peter has been in the *Galère* since that company of “extraverted” neurotics began! That is to say, five or six years ago. Then why does Lord Cable suddenly write this letter, and, on top of that, talk of coming to Paris?

For myself, I ought to be grateful to any matter which renders me, even for half an hour, and in a page or two of writing, your “confederate.”

Meanwhile, believe me, my dear Princesse,

Yours devotedly,

FRANÇOIS DUBAR

When the divorce was over, Charmian came back from Reno to New York. There she found three letters at the Eighth Street apartment (Louis had insisted on renting these rooms six months in advance for her so that she would be sure of a place of her own when she returned).

One letter was from Frany, advising her not to come back to England for a time, if possible, as her mother was already “at loggerheads with Peter because he was sharing an apartment in Paris with a Baron Zatec about whom she has heard no good.” And, Frany added, “the atmosphere of storm at Moon’s Green is already sufficiently severe.”

Another letter was from Louis, written from Céligny, giving her an introduction to Aurelia Brent, the actress, who was a friend of his and to whom he had suggested that Charmian might be a good secretary. He told her that Peter was now sharing an apartment on the Quai de Conti with Nicky Zatec; that Marthe had just had another baby, also a girl; that everyone talked of the impending conference at Locarno; and that he and his father had just spent two hours disputing Briand’s policy.

He added that “Miss Prince of the *Evening Telegram*” seemed to have kept faith, as not a word of the breakfast drama or the duel seemed to have reached anyone, but that he and Bianca had told Peter to make him laugh.

The third letter was a note from Jimmy Lothair, in his big scrawling backward-sloping writing, saying that he'd called up her apartment several times and would she let him know when she returned.

Charmian wrote to Aurelia Brent. And, when she'd been too long alone in the apartment (feeling so much less alive than its furniture, which seemed to have gone on living a placid staring dusty life without her), she called up Jimmy.

His voice was warm and welcoming. He came round at once to see her, calling her "darling" and bringing her Parma violets, and standing about the room in his familiar high-spirited swaggering attitudes. And when he'd got her to admit that she'd been too depressed to eat all day, he took her to the Blue Ribbon and made her eat *Wiener Schnitzel* and drink beer with him. And when she told him about Louis's letter and Aurelia Brent he said he'd take her round himself to see Aurelia, who was one of his oldest pals.

He took her after his show that evening.

And Aurelia took on Charmian at once.

Charmian liked Aurelia Brent increasingly as she knew her. Once or twice in the ensuing months she reflected that Bianca and Peter would have described her as "rather hand-thrown." She wore jade earrings in the morning, and easily lapsed into producing *Eagerheart* and *Everyman*. But on the whole her manager (who was her husband) kept her talent in the commercial theatre.

Brownlow Best came out of the offices of *Le Soir* and took a taxi to the Gare de l'Est to catch the twelve o'clock for Berlin.

Within two hours the press on both sides of the Atlantic was licking its lips; within six hours the prying, lecherous-minded public that feeds, day after day, on teasing headlines and tastily captioned paragraphs, being at this moment starved of news (since for the last weeks no demimondaine had revealed her love life; no female moron had been violated; no child had been murdered)—the great public of America, of England, of France, were avid enough for a scandal that had so much in it—Opium, Immorality, Smartness, Money—to excite their appetite.

New York got its first lick in the evening papers—read: "Famous Author Frenchman and English Aristocrat's Son Drug Addicts," while the London morning papers came out at two o'clock with "Drug Scandal. Peer's Son and Famous French Novelist Discovered in Opium Den."

On the authority of an informant whom the French police have reason to trust, but whose name is being kept secret for certain political reasons, it was stated yesterday that Louis Scheurer, son of the M. Philippe Scheurer of Scheurer & Cie, and the Hon. Peter Cable, son of Baron Cable, director of Cable-Bensley, were involved eighteen months ago in a raid made by the Marseilles Police on the *Hôtel des Pins*, a small hotel situated on an island off the Côte d'Azur between Bandol and Tamaris.

. . . According to the witness, he was staying in the hotel, having just arrived there, was uncertain of the different floors, and mistaking his floor tried the door of a room which he believed was his own. It was immediately opened from inside and he was admitted, as his identity was apparently mistaken, and found himself in a semi-darkness which he describes as "gradually revealing to him a scene of orgy impossible for him to describe."

Next day "Fresh Scheurer-Cable Revelations" headlines. "Well-known Pianist reveals Scheurer in Scandalous Scene with ex-wife in New York apartment. Chivalry prevented Exposure. Frenchman Scheurer in Bed with Wife and Another Woman, watched by Third Woman fully dressed. Duel challenge."

Henry Kramer, Pianist, interviewed yesterday at the Hotel George V where he is living with his present wife, formerly Francine Knopf of Chicago, Ill., states that a year and a half ago, on returning from a highly successful Concert Tour, he entered his apartment after a night journey from Buffalo, and went up to his wife's bedroom intending to inform her of his return. He opened the door of her room to discover his wife, who is the sister of the Hon. Peter Cable, yesterday revealed in Drug Scandal, lying in bed with Scheurer and another woman whose identity has not yet been revealed. All of them were naked, and a third woman, fully clothed and smoking a cigarette, was with them. Kramer, outraged, ordered Scheurer to quit, but the Frenchman challenged Kramer to a duel, which he accepted, but then left the United States to avoid breaking the law. Kramer, who then divorced his wife, states that it was well known that Scheurer had to do with certain powerful interests of the underworld who were associated with him in promoting the drug traffic as yesterday's revelation seemed to confirm.

Philippe Scheurer received Carteret in a small salon overlooking the gardens of the Avenue Foch.

“I hope you had a good journey.”

“Thanks. Yes. I got a special plane.”

“Excellent. There is no time to be lost. You have read the morning papers?”

Carteret sat heavily on the gilt and brocade chair. “I have. Nothing in the *Times*, of course, or the *Post* or *Telegraph*. I saw to that at once. But the other papers . . .”

Philippe Scheurer, pacing evenly, but not rapidly, up and down the Aubusson carpet, said, “You foresaw something like this. I remember you said in September at the Tissots’ that Best would be dangerous.”

Carteret said, “D’you mind if I smoke a pipe?”

“But of course.”

“. . . From what he said in that last interview,” Carteret went on, “I had an impression there’d be some sort of blackmail. Couldn’t tell what, of course. But he made it clear he had something up his sleeve.”

“He didn’t say then that he knew anything?”

“No. But I’d—er—had a slight—warning of that sort of thing from him several years ago.”

“But you had no idea what he would say?”

“Any *idea*! I should say not. Never dreamt of such a thing. Don’t know how to believe the thing now . . . if it’s even true.”

Philippe Scheurer, small, overelegant, subtle,—even obscurely amused,—stopped pacing and stood still, regarding the Englishman. He said softly:

“But of course it’s true!”

Carteret’s blue angry gaze lifted, stared, harassed, through the smoke of his pipe.

“Never supposed such a thing possible in a son of mine. I knew Peter was gallivanting round a bit, and—er—not exactly in the company I’d have chosen for him. . . . Always a bit of an enigma to us, y’ know. But *this*! . . . Drugs . . . opium. And I don’t know what else.”

“But those things exist, my friend.”

“—Well, if they do, I don’t want to think about ’em.”

“But the question at the moment, my dear Cable, is one of an extremely unpleasant scandal. The more complicated since it may at any moment involve both our sons in various other—stories.”

Carteret broke out, his teeth on his pipestem, “I’ve sent a message to Peter that he need never set foot in my house again.”

Philippe Scheurer sat down.

“That does not seem to me . . . altogether prudent.” He glanced down at his nails, examining each hand in turn, and went on: “Allow me to explain to you, my friend, what seems to me, after having reflected well, the best course to pursue. . . . To forbid your son your house is to avow to the world that you believe in his guilt. (That, in passing.) But what I have to suggest is this. As for Best—the matter is simple. He is to be bought. That is his end. For Kramer, who came to see me here, at my request, two hours ago, the same is true. He can be paid and dismissed from the scene, for a comparatively small sum.”

“But for the publicity itself, and the police, the matter is more complicated . . .”

Carteret got up. “. . . Now the *Law’s* got hold of the matter.”

“Not so fast. The Law, here, as everywhere, is not altogether disconnected from politics. . . . I have a certain influence. The present *Préfet de Police* happens to be obliged to me in connection with his appointment.”

Carteret stood, taking in Scheurer’s words less quickly than they were spoken. “When his comprehension had caught up he said:—

“. . . And the Press? The publicity? That’s gone too far now . . .?”

Scheurer folded his arms. “Even with the Press, there are means.” He added, speaking slowly, “I can think of no group of papers, either here, or in England, or in the United States, that would not be . . . sorry to be deprived of the advertising of, for instance, the Bensley Soap and Toilet Products . . . the Cable Motors . . .? And here there is also a matter of shares. Tissot and I have, as you know, a considerable capital distributed in various newspaper groups.”

After a moment Carteret said: “But the thing’s gone so far, my dear fellow. You can’t just *drop* a thing like this! An appalling scandal like this!!!

I dunno about—er—Louis, but as far as Peter’s concerned, his whole future is *ruined*. No decent man or woman’s ever going to speak to him again. And, by God, I’ve written to tell him so. He’ll be an outcast! There isn’t a single Club in London that’ll have him. Every decent house’ll be shut to him. He’ll be an *outcast* and . . . a *leper*!”

“*Tiens?*” said Philippe Scheurer.

The Press by one means and another was gagged. Kramer was easily stifled with a check and an intimation that certain records of his own habits and history existed and could, if necessary, be used against him.

But incidental echoes of the scandal lingered, haunted talk, diverted dinner tables, their eventual effect being Peter’s virtual banishment from England and the success, out of all proportion to its “popular” qualities, of Louis’s book, *Fresco*.

The book was published in France within six weeks of the scandal, and called *Fresques*, and in England and America (under the title of *Fresco*) three months after. The publishers made no direct references. But they freshened up Louis’s notoriety by such phrases as “well-known in Bohemian circles of Paris and New York.” In Paris the critics referred to him as Leader of a “New Decadence” in the hope that he would ask them to luncheon at his new apartment in the Rue de Rivoli (decorated by Bengy and photographed in *Vogue*, in *Harper’s Bazaar*).

In London they were either archly insinuating (“Mr. Scheurer has given us exactly the book we should expect” . . . “certain sensational chapters” . . . “a daring wit”) or ponderously and angrily they condemned the book as “a record of post-War frivolity and vice in every capital”; “a young Frenchman whose former two novels have already placed him as one of those dilettanti who consider novel-writing a change from a round of night clubs and gaming tables.” In New York the “blurbs” about it were: “Flaming Youth again” . . . “Study of passion, vice, despair, by Louis Scheurer.”

Anyway the book sold fifty thousand copies in France in six months. By July it had sold twenty-five thousand copies in England. And on the same date eighty thousand copies in America. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the film rights. Aurelia Brent cabled to Louis her desire that the book should be dramatized and she should play “Suzanne.”

In this riot of more or less fortuitous success and publicity it was Marie de Montcontour who remarked that the book was well constructed; Nicky

Zatec who said it was written with an admirable conciseness of style; and Frany who wrote to Louis that “she had been amused to see his photograph in the *Daily Bulletin*, but she thought it was ‘a good book all the same.’”

They had an aromatic and delicious dinner under the vine arbor, the fountain bubbling and splashing beside them and the sky the color of marigolds. A Georgian peasant, imported by the *hôte*lier, waited on them, a fresh white kerchief tied over her head. She still served David first.

They drank a bottle of Beaune, and a Grand Marnier each with their coffee. Then they walked about the garden in the suddenly cool and dusk air, the sky like grape bloom now, with curled golden feathers trailed above the horizon of black mountains.

They picked some more figs and ate them. The figs were still warm from the day. When night came, between the eating of one fig and another, they lowered their voices. They could hear the fountain in the courtyard, and the chink of Madame and the Georgian washing up behind the lit-up window.

David went in to fetch some cigarettes; and Bianca felt suddenly alone in this huge and too lovely night.

She was glad that David was coming back and that she was going to sleep with him. When she saw the glow of his cigarette coming, and then heard his steps she said, “Darling”—holding out her hand in the dark. And when he was close and put his arm round her she said, “Perhaps people want each other, more than anything, for comfort against space and endlessness.”

But he didn’t answer this, partly because he didn’t understand what she meant, and partly because he wanted her and was wondering if she would come to bed yet (and whether Madame would notice if they went up so early).

But when he’d kissed her he threw away his cigarette and said, “Darling, I want you so much.” She didn’t answer at all, but he could feel her trembling and heard her quick breathing. He put his arm round her and she came back with him into the house.

On the wooden stairs they met Madame and David said quickly:—

“Madame est un peu fatiguée après sa voyage.”

Madame Foyot burst out in staccato understanding of madame’s fatigue, and went on downstairs, calling back her wish that they would sleep well.

When they got into Bianca's room she laughed and said, "It's '*le*' voyage, darling." He said, "I don't care *which* it is." He took her hand and kissed it; and she said, "Go to your room, my sweet." He went, but with a worried look, not knowing whether she meant him to come back.

But when he came back to her door, and knocked, and came in, rather diffidently, she was in a ruffly pale blue dressing gown and her hair pushed back behind a riband, and looked very white and lovelier than he'd ever seen her.

She went to the window and looked out. But with her head turned away from him she held out her hand; and he heard her say, "Darling, you do look so absurdly sweet!"

When they were still awake but drowsy, she said, "That was heavenly, darling." His arm shifted under her shoulder and he kissed her mouth again. He said, "Are you warm enough, darling? Have you got any of the blanket?"

"Yes, thank you. Have you?"

"Yes, thank you."

"What are you smiling at, David?"

"I wasn't smiling. I was thinking what a lovely shape you are."

"So are you."

"And your skin feels like a flower."

"Oh, David, you are sweet. . . . And I love you, in lots of ways. . . ."

The heavenly sleepiness got thicker. She got her forehead pressed against his cheek. She muttered, "What a peculiar but good arrangement love-making is."

"Mm . . ." He was even sleepier.

She sighed the word "darling" instead of saying good-night.

Peter to Bianca (forwarded to her at Buis-les-Baronnies from Ebony):—

ATHENS
Sept. 17, 1928

MY DEAR BIANCA,—

Your letter consulting me about my godson's future just missed me in Taormina and has reached me here.

I suppose you realized that it would be somewhat of a red rag to me or you wouldn't have started off in that defiant manner by saying that you were going to ask my opinion, but that you weren't likely to take it. Which means that you know what I, personally, think about the value of Public Schools. But that you don't want me to influence Toby against them. Actually, you know, I wouldn't dream of it. On the other hand you are going to get my advice, because I can't resist giving it you. Firstly, I do agree that anything is better than cranky and progressive schools, and that coeducation is frouzy. Also, I agree about the Elizabethans being right to be *men* at sixteen. But I utterly disagree with your perfect *non sequitur*; which is that Public Schools are at least an "evil." And you make me *rage* when you say that, after all, there is "something rather sane" about the Public School type.

It is a curious thing—this belief in the Public School type. It appears to be a fetish that the middle-class English have imposed on their essentially middle-class Empire. And it is, naturally, a belief dear to those timid yet arrogant androgynes, the Public School Masters.

In their simple assumption that it is the Public School System that has made England a remarkable country, they do not pause to consider that English culture has become steadily less remarkable since that "system" began to evolve, a hundred years ago. The decline of taste, together with any real respect for learning, coincided with the rise of Public Schools. Burke foretold their epoch.

In fact, not a single Englishman who has in any real sense made England's real greatness has been of "the Public School type." Take them at random—Shakespeare, Johnson, Byron, Chaucer, Marlowe, Donne, Shelley, Blake; take Bacon, or Charles Fox, or Swift; or any first-rate painter or architect, Wren or Reynolds, Nash or Gainsborough—which of that magnificent company, of rakes and drunks and homosexuals, can one imagine "playing up—playing up and playing the game"!!! thinking "only of the team," "keeping a straight bat"? Who'd have written the *Sonnets* if Shakespeare had had a cold bath and gone out for a brisk walk whenever he found himself thinking about sex?

God, how I hate English Public Schools and what they “stand for.”

For, even on their ground, they’re indefensible. Their “ground” is that they don’t care about learning or taste so much as turning out quality (you see I’ve stopped carping here and am going to defeat you by being *just*). What they claim is that they turn out courage, integrity, an ability to hold on in difficulties and to be cool and reliable in a crisis.

But my contention is that all these are *English qualities*. They aren’t got at school, but grow in any class, in some awfully odd way, out of our soil and solid food and I don’t know what else. . . . Louis says both our officers *and* men had it in the War. And that the way that the English troops took the 1918 retreat was so grand and grim and cool as to be absolutely unbelievable. But it wasn’t just Public School types! It was Tommies and N.C.O.’s and officers who’d never had to take on any responsibility in their lives! Louis says that it’s English humor too, when you find yourself in the hottest bit of hell, to put up a placard with “Piccadilly Circus” on it.

Well, this is somewhat of a tirade! But you must forgive me on the grounds that I’m Toby’s godfather; and it makes me sorry to think of such a jolly little boy being put into one of those sanctimonious sausage machines! I repeat, if you must send him to Public School, then send him to Eton, which at least is not a school, but a club, where you can indulge in first-rate learning or first-rate idling, as you like. It even protected me from Father, and his attempts to make me into an English Gentleman. . . . He tells me frequently that his “whole mistake” was in not sending me to Harrow. I suspect that he thinks that was the real cause of the whole disaster,—and my “public disgrace”!!!—last spring.

When shall I see *you*? We leave here on Monday and return, coming slowly up the Adriatic coast; then Venice, where François joins us. After that there’s going to be a battle!—as Louis wants to do a Baroque Tour ending up in Würzburg with the Tiepolos, and François has planned a *gothique* travel, working northwest from Venice, through Germany, and, I believe, ending up in York Minster!!! I shall be torn between the two, wanting to see it all; and not to hurt either of their feelings. Louis has begun already here, on the steps of the Parthenon, what our Nannie used to call

“going on nohow” about Gothic. He says it’s the “architecture of bigotry”; that he prefers the Invalides to Notre-Dame and Selfridge’s to Westminster Abbey; so you see what kind of tussle I shall have. Incidentally, he wants to go on to Berlin and meet Stresemann. He thinks Germany has the only enlightened government in Europe and has an article in his head on Germany and why the Dawes Plan won’t work. His attitude about political and economic questions is curious. He keeps up a pose that they don’t interest him. But he’ll cross the map to sniff at a conference, or sit up all night to get an article written (like those three on “After Locarno” for Gringore that I translated afterwards for syndication in America). He says that isn’t interest in *la politique* but an attempt to help on the hopeless *Kampf gegen der Dummheit*. I must say I am as uncertain as Louis himself that that’s any use. He said last night at dinner that the one certain thing about the human race is that its stupidity always gets the better of its cleverness. This depressed me horribly; or else I was in a depressed state already (sight-seeing in this heat is fairly tiring). But Louis got gay later and left me about ten and went off into the picturesque slums of the town, and came in about four A.M. rather tight, covered with flea bites, and singing what he swore was a Greek song.

He has just come in. He says he kisses your hands very respectfully.

Love to Toby

Yours, PETER

There was a postscript in Louis’s writing:—

We saw your friend Madame St. Laurent in Taormina. She said she had seen you at the opera in July with orchids round your forehead instead of hair! You must have looked like a Medusa! But *orchids*! Do you remember what you said to me years ago about “orchids” and “rippling one’s hips”?

She came in, followed by David Blyth. She came and took his hand. She said, indifferently, her lips smiling:—

“Don’t we kiss each other?”

“I hope so.”

He kissed her on both cheeks; and saw David Blyth take a swift pose of complaisance. She said, “How are you, Louis darling? After the Greek adventure? And the Baroque Tour?”

He replied with a series of slick comments, proffering cigarettes, a chair, whiskey and soda.

“How are you, David? And you, of course, Bianca? When did you come to Paris?”

“Two days ago.”

“How’s Toby?”

“He’s still at his private school.” (Her words came out just too quickly and easily.)

“How are the Cables?”

She said, “They were shocked by *Fresco*.”

David Blyth began saying, “What are you writing now?”—but Louis managed to stop him by, “Is that too weak? Let me add some more whiskey! Where have you come from, David?”

“From Provence.”

(They’ve been in Provence together.)

“Painting?”

“Yes.”

(How did she like that? Interesting how she’s slightly changed. Paler, gayer; less of a “lady”; more character.)

“Very pretty, Provence. Isn’t it? Very ‘pictural.’ Have you ever been to Provence, Bianca?”

“*Never*. I long to go.”

“You should. The land is bone-white and the rivers ice-green . . . aren’t they, David? Or am I wrong?”

“I should call it a very good description,” said David.

“The Poster-Eye,” said Bianca.

(Was her voice a little sharp? How good would she and David be together?)

“When you’ve *been* there, Bianca darling, you’ll see I’m right.”

He caught her look. (Was there a flicker of amusement?)

“It’s essentially a painter’s country,” said David. “In many ways it reminds me of Spain.”

“Did that annoy you? I don’t like a place to remind me of another place. I don’t like one summer to remind me of another summer.”

“Or one love of another?” said Bianca.

“You take the words out of my mouth.”

David said, “Naturally, I don’t like one place to be *exactly* like another, but—”

“Do you do portraits?”

Bianca said, “He doesn’t do very good portraits. Is Peter still in Paris?”

“Yes. . . . He’s lurching with Marthe. She’s just come back from Arès.”

“How is he?”

Louis hesitated. “I think he found the last part of the journey rather tiring. Marthe, the most maternal of women, insists that he must have a tonic.”

Bianca said, “Well, tell him that I shall be at Ebony all the autumn. If he wants to see me . . . I’m leaving by the five o’clock.”

Louis noticed that, like all people unused to deceiving, Bianca said too much.

When she’d gone he wondered why she didn’t marry David.

Later, when Bianca was having luncheon at Fouguet’s with David, he said:—

“How clever and amusing Louis Scheurer is!”

“He produces himself very well,” said Bianca. She was irritated because Louis had made her feel that David was dull. And ashamed of herself for feeling this, and angry with David; and at the same time sentimental about David because she felt critical. She put down her knife and touched his hand. As soon as she did this, she remembered how sweet and comforting it was making love with him. And this remembering made her forget that he was dull.

François went to New York in October 1928, for the production of *Vocation*. Louis went with him, partly to escape the *Galère* in Paris, who were getting on his nerves. Partly because staying anywhere for long got on his nerves. Also, because Marthe spoke to him again about Peter's health and made him feel miserable and afraid.

He persuaded himself that if Peter came with him and François to New York he would then take him on to the coast, or to Florida for the winter. By the time they all three sailed, he'd made himself believe that they were only to be in New York "a few weeks" before going on to California to join Charmian and Jimmy Lothair at Hollywood: although he knew that he meant to stay until January. Actually he didn't know *why* he meant to stay until January. But he had said so once, to François, and the notion had become a fixed purpose. He was always making decisions out of chance impulse so as to feel that his life had some direction. What mattered to him was to feel rushed, without working, and to feel emotional without allowing himself any real feeling. He could only do this by what François called "non-stop living."

Peter dreaded every day in New York as a nervous child dreads an express train coming through a station.

Its noise shattered him. Its pace terrified him. Its relentlessness appalled him. Its clanging vitality that so excited and stimulated Louis, and made François curious, was like a nightmare round him. He felt as if he had been thrown out of civilization into a dungeon, and though he knew that this horror of the place was chiefly a vibration of his own nerves he couldn't control it. So that he would spend hours alone in their hotel suite when François and Louis were out, or at the theatre, trying to make up his mind to go out and face the streets, and then fail to go. He slept badly at night, or when he slept, exhausted, he stirred and talked in his sleep. And once he came into Louis's room and woke him saying that his dreams were making him go mad. And Louis, touched and troubled, talked to him, and calmed him as if he'd been a child, inwardly determining to take him, next day, to the country.

But they stayed in New York.

By January he couldn't bear it any longer. Even with Louis there. And he knew now that Louis wouldn't leave. For Louis was in one of his secret,

hostile, brutal states, utterly absorbed in “getting someone,” as if “they” were the legitimate prey of his sharp, and delighted, hunger.

Peter knew this. And, as always, tried not to make his knowledge real by his imagination.

One day when Louis was with him (François had been badgered into going to a public luncheon to speak about the success of his own play) Peter said that he was going back to Paris.

Louis was surprised.

“Why?”

Peter had been lying on one of the yellow hotel divans. Suddenly he sat up and began explaining his hatred of New York, his horror of everything it stood for.

He said it wasn’t even grand or impressive, “just section after section of dead cliff full of eyes.”

He said, “It’s like a mausoleum built over the spirit of civilization. Inside it a Canaletto here, a Hepplewhite chair there, an uncut edition of Montaigne, show you that once upon a time there was something which was taste—culture—whatever you like to call it. Cut a section through one of those colossal chunks of cement, maggot-ridden with ‘beings,’ and you come on an Ingres—in a maggot’s bathroom! A Gobelin tapestry, a mirror, a piece of sculpture of ravishing workmanship—which remind you that there was a time when people had a sense of Beauty as violent as their present sense of *success!*”

Louis watched him as he talked. He didn’t really take in what he said, preoccupied by a curious impression that, although Peter was in full harsh sunlight from the window, he seemed to be standing in shadow.

But the effect was so momentary that Louis forgot it, saying:—

“But why don’t you go to the country, or to Florida, or Bermuda for a week or so; and then I’ll come and join you.”

Peter looked at him. Then turned away to pick up a paper, saying curtly:

—
“You know you won’t.”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

Peter stared unseeing at the headlines. He said:—

“I think I want to go back to France . . . anyway.”

“But Peter, my dear, then I’ll come too.”

Peter started. “There’s the telephone. I expect it’s for you.” Louis went through to the bedroom.

When he came back from a long conversation he was preoccupied and seemed to have forgotten what they had been talking about.

Marthe d’Arès to Bianca Selwyn:—

17 QUAI D’ORLÉANS
January 13, 1929

MY DEAR BIANCA: A week ago I heard that Peter Cable had returned from New York, where he went in November with Louis and François Dubar, and that he was at the apartment of a Baron Zatec in the Quai de Conti. I telephoned and heard that he was ill. I went there to visit him and found him in a condition which so frightened me that I immediately sent for our doctor to come and see him.

Forgive me, since I must tell you the truth, and ask for your help.

The doctor saw Peter and then came straight to see me. Briefly, he says that Peter must go to Davos immediately. That that is his only hope. He says that although Peter denies it, he has been taking opium again, and that the effects of that, and a neurotic condition, and lack of food and sleep, must have affected his lungs, already some time ago. I spare you any more details. What remains is that he is very ill. That his parents, since the scandal of two years ago, refuse to see him, and he will not write to them. That his sister is in California, and he will not allow me to inform her, and Louis, that he must go to Davos. (Even though he himself has no idea how ill he is.)

I myself shall go with him there, to-morrow, and I can stay for a few days. Then I must return here. The doctor says that if anyone he is fond of can be with him that will help him psychologically, and therefore physically. Is it possible for you to go?

Telegram from Bianca Selwyn to Marthe d'Arès:—

LEAVING FOR DAVOS MONDAY PLEASE TELEGRAPH
THE ADDRESS BIANCA

The nurse got up when she came in. The lamp in the far corner of the room was shaded. A dark cloth scarf had been thrown over it. He was asleep.

The nurse went out. Bianca sat down on her chair by the open windows, and looked out at the snow mountains and valleys under the moon.

She tried only to think that Peter was sleeping peacefully and getting well. And that the shining mountains were lovely.

But she felt in her heart that he wasn't getting well. And the mountains made her more afraid.

Peter woke up, saying, "Louis! Louis! . . ."

He sat straight up—"Louis!" Then his dark bright stare woke; and he saw Bianca. He shivered and clutched his arms round his knees to keep himself sitting up. And then, uncertainly, he smiled at her.

"Oh! You? . . . Bianca?"

She went to him: relieved that the lamp was in the corner behind her, so that he couldn't see her face. She said:—

"Lie back, Peter darling."

He lay back. He let her arrange the sheets. He let her give him water, sip by sip. He said, hardly using his voice:—

"Wipe my forehead, Bianca. It's hot."

He shut his eyes; and then opened them wide and dark again.

"Where's Charmian?"

"She's in Hollywood—with Jimmy."

"Of course—" Now he kept his glance on her face tenderly, as though she pleased him, but vaguely too, as if he felt that somewhere in the mists of his exhaustion there was something to be puzzled about.

She got a chair and brought it close to the bed. She saw that he liked that. But he knew she didn't want him to speak. He shut his eyes.

Then, speaking again without his voice, he said, “I was dreaming—”

A nurse looked round the white screen. Her lips made “He’s asleep?”

Bianca nodded.

For the nurse, and for her too, he slept: and his inner wakefulness, the quiver of his nostrils, the deeper flush of his skin, the heart-breaking quiver of his mouth, were for his dream. . . .

He was better. The last X-ray was encouraging, the doctors said. He lay out on the balcony in the sun and they talked and laughed, and played bezique and mah jongg, and Bianca read to him when he was tired.

She read their schoolroom favorite stones; Kipling mostly—“The Maltese Cat” and the *Jungle Books*. Frany had sent these books from Moon’s Green. They read “They,” too, and “The Brushwood Boy,” though these two stories always choked them with tears. Peter said, “Of course Kipling’s just stuffed with complexes.” Bianca said, “Their complexes are what make people interesting. Why take out all your psychological innards to make a surrealiste museum for an expensive analyst?” And “All great or creative people must have had complexes which probably make a good rich poison in your system, and it’s worked off in art or activity.” Peter said he supposed Louis had a good many. Bianca said, “Almost too many,” and went back to reading the “King’s Ankus.”

That night she wrote to Marthe and to Frany telling them that the doctors were more hopeful; and that Peter himself was in better spirits.

Ten days later, as she came across the terrace in the morning from the visitor’s *annexe*, one of the doctors came out and said he wanted to speak with her for a few minutes. He was a big man in a white coat, and had a beard and *pince-nez*. He said, “I am afraid your cousin is not so well this morning.”

She looked at the *pince-nez*. Their surface reflected, in miniature, an angle of the terrace with its balustrade and the mimosa tree. “Last night, or rather this morning, at one o’clock, he had a hemorrhage.”

He went on speaking for a few minutes, his sentences pressing with soft sickening power on her comprehension, though her eyes went on seeing the mimosa in his *pince-nez* and her face and bare arms felt the marvelous chill sparkle of the morning light.

When she got to Peter's room the nurse said, "He's asleep, madame. . . . If only we can get him to sleep." . . . Bianca saw him not moving, his face turned away. The nurse came out into the corridor and said, "He has something on his mind. He kept talking last night, saying he must see someone called Louis. . . . Perhaps it's his brother? It is terribly on his mind."

Bianca said, "It isn't his brother. But it's someone he loves very much."

"Could he come?"

Bianca hesitated. (Louis here!—Louis, whose influence had made this whole unbelievable thing possible.) The nurse added:—

"I think he should come, madame, if it's possible."

Bianca said, "Where can I telephone?"

"The first floor, on the right, by the *ascenseur*."

The party went on so late in Louis's suite that Aurelia, who had been in a corner earnest in deep talk with François, getting up and going to the window, exclaimed:—

"I can feel the *dawn* coming, darlings!"

François, released, hurried over to Gloria, whom he'd been waiting to talk to all the evening, to tell her what a wonderful performance she'd given, and that he believed the success of his evening had been due to her playing the nun's little sister.

She greeted him with, "Hello, Francy," and kissed him and made room for him on the side of her that hadn't got Eddie there.

Aurelia, at the window, beckoned Louis to look out.

Louis was drunk enough not to mind her putting her arm round him. (Ordinarily, he disliked her proximity, for she smelled like that overrated English invention, smoked haddock cooked in milk.)

He agreed, "Darling, isn't it wonderful?" though he had seen this view of New York at night so many times that he couldn't feel it any more.

"Makes one feel sort of small, doesn't it?" she said.

He agreed, staring amiably down over tracks of stars. And she went on saying some more about needing to have "extensive panoramas" and then beginning to talk again about the play . . . the audience . . . critics at supper

. . . what John Anderson had said to her. . . . While someone in the room behind them—it was Allister—was playing a ukulele and singing:—

“I’ll take her back if she wants to come back,
That girl that was stolen from me. . . .”

“. . . There ought to be little white streaks of dawn any minute now!” Aurelia said.

“She’s just a child,
Didn’t mean to be wild
Fell for someone’s flatteree-e.”

“. . . Another drink?” said Gloria’s voice. . . . “Bessie was there in a box . . .” said Allister . . . “plastered,” he said, “by the time she got to see me.” . . . “Mavis and Tommy sent that jasmin and lily basket.” . . . “Sweet old George cabling all the way from Melbourne.”

“. . . I’m going out on the balcony,” said Aurelia . . . “air in my lungs . . .”

“No,” said Louis, “don’t do that, dear . . . the temperature is only twenty-four. . . . You’ll get cold, dear. . . . Besides, you might fall over and that always gives a hotel such a bad name . . . ‘Famous actress falling thirty stories.’ . . . One should always try to avoid disaster. Disaster is such bad taste . . . so extreme . . .”

Gloria said, “For heaven’s sake answer that darned telephone, Eddie.”

“*Hello?* . . . Hello? Hello?” said Eddie.

“Ah!” Aurelia breathed, “ah, my *dearrr* . . . look at that sky now!”

“Yes?” said Eddie. . . . “Yes! . . . Oh yes, . . . Louis?”

“Yes.”

“Thisiss for you . . . A call for you . . . Louis.”

DAVOS OPERATOR. *Zurich? Zurich? Service américain, s’il vous plaît.*

ZURICH OPERATOR. *Londres, voulez-vous me donner le service américain?*

LONDON OPERATOR. *Je vous le donne.*

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR (in charge of radio circuit to New York). *Service américain.*

ZURICH OPERATOR. *J’ai un appel pour New York au départ de Davos, je vous le passe. C’est au départ de Davos deux cent, virgule, cinq cent*

soixante-sept, Madame Selwyn, pour dix-neuf heures. On demande New York, Plaza 3-9521, Monsieur Louis Scheurer.

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR. *C'est pour le numéro de série vingt-deux. Je vous rappellerai.*

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR. I have a new ticket, New York. Wanted at 19 hours from Davos, Switzerland, 200567, Mrs. Selwyn, calling Plaza 3-9521, Mr. Louis Scheurer, serial double two.

NEW YORK OPERATOR. O.K., London.

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR. Will you assign serial double two, New York?

NEW YORK OPERATOR. Yes, London.

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR (to Zurich Operator). *Service américain.*

ZURICH OPERATOR. *Oui, Londres.*

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR (to Zurich Operator). *Je vous donne votre série vingt-deux.*

ZURICH OPERATOR. *Oui, je la prends. Davos? Service américain, Davos?*

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR. *C'est Madame Selwyn? Voici Monsieur Scheurer de New York.*

NEW YORK OPERATOR. Serial double two waiting, London.

LONDON RADIO OPERATOR (to New York). Ready on serial double two. Go ahead, please.

"Louis?"

"Yes."

"This is Bianca."

"Yes."

"I'm speaking from Davos."

"Davos?"

"Peter's here at Davos. He's very ill."

"Peter?"

"He's worse. . . . He had another hemorrhage yesterday. . . . He wants you. . . . He wants you to come."

Louis stayed with Peter all night.

Most of the night he lay still. But towards morning he turned his head and looked at Louis. Then he held out his hand.

Louis came beside him and put his arm under his shoulders, propping him.

“Look, Louis!”

The sunrise was beginning. Peter said:—

“Isn’t it unbelievably lovely?”

He laid his head back on Louis’s shoulder and shut his eyes. When he opened them again he said, “Louis.”

“Yes?”

“Do you remember that last day at Athens?”

“Yes.”

“. . . and Vicenza? And that morning in the gardens at Nymphenburg? Do you remember?”

“Yes.”

He was quiet now. Light was coming into the room. Louis said:—

“When we have . . . more time . . .”

Did he imagine the fingers held his harder?

Peter said: “I don’t think living’s made in time. It’s made in your heart. . . . What you keep always is what was most lovely . . . moments . . . places.”

Now the risen sun unfurled a flaming banner across the walls.

A nurse looked in and went again.

“. . . And Valescure . . . what fun that was! How gay that was. . . . And that night, do you remember . . . ages ago, at Marie’s . . . that supper in the garden?”

“Yes.”

“When she destroyed the roses?”

“Yes.”

“Louis, I . . .” He shut his eyes again.

“Rest now.”

He whispered, “You’ll stay?”

“Yes.”

Bianca woke. There still was the striped blue-and-rose wallpaper. And Peter was dying.

And Louis was there.

Louis was with him. Louis: evil and white-masked in his own terror; Louis going down that long tiled corridor to Peter’s room; Louis going past her, past the nurse, in at the door to Peter.

When he arrived, getting out of the car, his eyes black slits, the sweat on his forehead, “Is he alive?” . . . Then that one sentence, straight at her, his mouth tortured, “I could have saved him a year ago.”

So that he knew . . . felt some sort of futile hysterical remorse. Uselessly.

She turned, sickened, to hide her eyes from the light.

She lay thinking about Peter. Remembering him back through his whole life, scene after scene—with a visual clarity that was frightening in its obliteration of Time, evoking even texture, so that she saw the weave of his aertex shirt that afternoon when he was twelve years old and they were all on the raft, pushing out from under the willow branches that caught their hair so that he called, “Look out for your plaits, Bianca!” Saw him that summer when they went, with Frany and Mademoiselle, to Sheringham, racing his donkey ahead of her, his bare legs kicking in his white sand shoes, the sand pink-gold, and salt, sun, air, like heaven round them, and, just before he got to the breakwater ahead, turning to shout to her, “You’ve got a rotten donkey . . . try mine next!”

She saw him in the nursery at Moon’s Green sitting opposite her on the big floor, the sleeves of his white jersey rolled up, his cheeks red, his lips pursed on the stem of a clay pipe and the bubble getting larger and larger, the nursery window in miniature bent round its surface. . . . A garden path, beside it the high jungle of flowers (hollyhocks towering, michaelmas daisies shoulder high), and next to a swinging skirt—a tussore skirt (Frany’s dark face high above)—Peter stamping gravely, his hand in Frany’s, his face bent down to watch his new buckle shoes—the buckles square and gold, the shoes brown.

And always, from the very beginning, there was so vivid in him (and as close to her now as the aertex shirt under the willow branches) his quality of being so ready for delight, so eager to be enchanted, so grateful for each new enchantment.

This eagerness, the more endearing because it had always been constrained by a sort of courtesy to life itself, fearing to seize too much, this readiness for delight Louis had satisfied: and then destroyed.

It seemed to her now that there was only one thing that mattered: to get at Louis. To make him feel the wanton and brutal quality of his destruction. Go to him now, while he was shocked into grief, and find some way to scar his memory; that, at least, he shouldn't let himself slip again the strong tides of living that he rode so easily, so insolently—before she'd got him, and found a phrase to deepen, somehow, the scar of these hours, probing them into the tissue of his imagination so that some ache, or intermittent torment, should remain.

The nurse came.

“Madame . . .”

She knew.

“He had a hemorrhage just before six o'clock. He died an hour later. Monsieur Scheurer was with him.”

“Thank you.”

Later. “Do you wish to see him, madame?”

“Yes.”

She followed the nurse down the corridors, where orderlies in cotton coats were bearing trays to and fro, nurses sped up and down carrying thermometers and towels, doors swung, letting in a rush of moving light and glimpses of white rooms. When they got to the door of Peter's room, the nurse made a gesture to Bianca to wait, and opened the door.

As she did so Louis came out.

Bianca saw his expression.

And stepped back against the wall to let him pass.

PART V

Louis had written letters to his mother at intervals, giving her the descriptions that would please her of India, Malay, China, Japan; stressing the curious and picturesque; dealing lightly yet sharply with political trends and industrial phenomena. They might have been the travel letters of any intelligent young man. Even as he wrote, building up his concise descriptions, he was aware of how perfectly they faked his four-year Odyssey. His mother, and then his father and Marthe, would read in them that he'd seen so much. Whereas it seemed to him, as he lay in his *wagon-lit* on the way back from Marseilles to Paris, that everything he'd seen had only been an iridescence on the surface of what he'd had to feel. And when, at last, on that March morning of 1933, he went into his mother's boudoir and she held his hands and looked at him, her "Well! You have made a magnificent journey," seemed to set the final seal of unreality upon the last four years.

He had made a "magnificent journey." And the little log fire still burned on the brass dogs; and the gilt and marble clock still stood back to back with itself in the mirror on the chimneypiece (its fragile hands intimating, rather than asserting, that it was now twenty minutes to ten).

She said he was very sunburned, and "a little thin"; and she must hear, and so must his father, so much that he must still have to tell! It was all so exactly as it should be. And she would neither probe nor perceive; or if she ever perceived, she would never seem to. There had always been, for him, something mysterious in her equanimity. Even the fact that her hair remained *blanc-cendré* added to her effect of being blandly impervious to the small hostilities of fate.

He knew exactly the tone of cool pleasure in which she would say to his father, and later to her friends when they came on her *jour* (Tuesdays), that Louis had returned "sunburned and a little too thin from his magnificent voyage." And she would never be troubled by the least disagreeable suspicion that, for her sunburned and traveled son, each new journey had only been shifting the ground on which he lived the day through somehow, and lay awake at night.

He went to the Rue Visconti. The *concierge* said, "But M'sieu Dubar left here three years ago. He has a house at Versailles." She gave Louis the address. But she didn't remember him.

He drove out to Versailles. There was a wall, wrought-iron gates. A two-storied house, grey-shuttered, in a garden.

A manservant opened the door. Yes, Monsieur Dubar was at home. Whom was he to announce?

A moment later the double doors were flung open. François rushed out — "*Louis! My dear Louis!*" clasped both his hands, and stood gazing at him, up and down.

Louis looked too; and saw the same hawk eyes and beak nose. But a plumping out of face and neck and body. A tame hawk, the plumage glossy!

François seized his arm, led him into a long library, the windows on one side opening on a vista of garden. He said: —

"It is time you came back! You never wrote . . . I had no address . . . So I have just waited. You'll stay for luncheon." (He used the English word.) He said to the servant, "Monsieur Scheurer will lunch here."

Louis said, "You seem to have done more than *wait!*"

The room was furnished with "club" armchairs and sofas in dark red leather and a Turkey carpet. Looking once more at François, Louis saw that he was dressed in riding breeches and looked like a stud groom.

François said: "I won't demand any traveler's tales. Firstly they're boring to tell. Secondly, unlike the T.S.F., they are impossible for the listener to switch off. You've noticed my T.S.F. apparatus? I had it arranged like that in the left side of my desk and then I can switch it off, or change the stations with my left hand and continue to write with my right."

"I'm astonished you don't have a dictaphone on the right side."

"I do! But I use it only for giving orders to my secretary. She is a woman who displeases me physically, but is excellent at her work. Every morning before eight o'clock I record what I wish done in the day. Then when I am out riding she comes and types down my remarks."

They sat down in opposite armchairs and the servant brought whiskies and sodas.

“You have a horse then?” Louis asked.

“Two, *mon vieux!* Excellent horses! Both I bought at ‘Tattèresalle.’ Lord Cable has been all that is most amiable in helping me. I already remarked on that first occasion at Christmas that I went to Moon’s Green that he was a man of excellent judgment.”

Louis reflected that no one could discern which events were finally to shape their character. He asked if François had recently seen the Cables.

“I stayed there for a week-end in the autumn. My last play was given in London—in French—at that time.”

Louis said, “Tell me about it. Forgive me for knowing nothing.”

“It’s a very light piece. But it’s amusing. Bengy has done a ravishing *mise en scène* for it. It’s at the Edouard VII now! Didn’t you see?”

“I only arrived yesterday at Marseilles.”

“Ah! Of course. Then I must give you some tickets, or take you. Now tell me . . . how d’you find Europe? Ill enough! Isn’t it? Everywhere *crisis, depression!* How does it all strike you?”

“I only arrived . . .”

“. . . But of *course!* Of course! Well then, it’ll amuse you if I give you some of my impressions, above all since I am making Europe the ‘heroine’ of my new play that I’m in the middle of doing. . . . And after that, I must show you my little garden out there. You see I have a quantity of bulbs out already. I have them sent from a firm in Holland. . . . Ruth—Ruth Platt-Eresby, you know—gave me the address.”

“The name, monsieur?”

“Scheurer.”

“Ah. *Pardon,* monsieur. Yes, monsieur. Madame la Princesse is in the children’s room, I believe. I will tell her, monsieur.”

“I’ll come up.”

“Ah, *Louis!*” said Marthe. “Louis, my *dear.*” She came, carrying a plump blond baby on her hip.

The baby stared, its eyes growing rounder, and a fat, dark little girl stood unsteadily in the middle of the floor and stared.

Marthe turned from embracing him to say, "That's Louise! She is supposed to be like you. And you don't *even* know Solange! Poor Louis. What a nursery! Isn't it? Solange, come here." A three-year-old with red-gold plaits rode in from the next room, on a grey-skin horse. "Solange, this is your Uncle Louis." Marthe called, "Nannie? Come and take this baby. I want to go down and talk to monsieur my brother."

The English Nannie appeared, bulky and friendly in white. Marthe said, "This is the uncle of the children, Nannie."

"How d'you do, sir. I've seen your picture as a little boy, sir. The Princess showed it to me one day. We think Solange is the image of you as you were then." Then to the struggling jovial creature in Marthe's arms, "Come *here*, you Bad Boy . . . you Bundle of Mischief!"

As they went downstairs Marthe said, her arm round his shoulder:—

"I was *so* happy when Maman telephoned that you had arrived. . . . It's been such a long time. It seems so many years."

Downstairs the *salon* was the same. Flowers everywhere, the light refracted off the Seine below rippling on the ceiling.

Considering his sister, he thought that she had become a "personage"; enriched in character by her responsibilities, subtilized by the daily interaction of her sympathy and intelligence. And as they talked for the next hour, sitting and holding hands, he observed that the same right experiencing of small matters that had made her more subtle had given her a new and delicious sense of humor. She had what the Americans call an "angle" on trivial events and foibles. And could even (devout daughter, and *croyante* as she was) tell Louis that Maman severely counted the children whenever she came, always fearing yet another; since Maman believed that a woman owed her soul to the Church, but her figure to her *couturière*.

Only when he was going he said, "You never see Charmian? Or Bianca?"

"I hear nothing of Charmian. I think she has been in America. I was told Bianca is sometimes in Paris." She said, after a moment, "Did you ever get my letter? Four years ago?"

"Yes. You understood."

She said, "I understood very well." Then she said, "Another time. I can't now . . . it's too new and a little strange to have you back. I want to speak to you. But not now."

She kissed him, saying quickly, “Where are you going? Where will you live?”

He said, “To London, to-morrow. And then—I don’t know.”

Harvey said, “Good morning, sir! How are *you*, sir? We haven’t seen you for some time, sir. . . . Miss Drake,” he said, “is up in the housemaid’s pantry giving the little dogs their baths, I believe, sir. Shall I take your hat, sir? . . . No, sir. Her ladyship is away and his lordship is expected back to-night.”

Upstairs Frany held out a soapy left hand. “How are you? Excuse my costume.” (She was in black oilskins.) “Stay *still*, Greta! . . . This is Thunder’s niece . . . *Well*. Thanks for your postcards. . . . *Stay still!* Greta! . . . Hand me the soap, Louis? And the brush? The little beast’s tail feathers need a good scrubbing! Don’t stand too near or you’ll get splashed. She has a way of wriggling herself out of my hands and *then!* . . . Did you get to the Fiji Islands?”

“Yes.”

“Good spot. Isn’t it?”

“Too much *tourisme*.”

“Oh well. It’s thirty years since I went. How did you find your mother and father when you got back?”

“Thank you, in excellent health. Tell me your news.”

“Just pick up Douglas for me! He’s behind the bucket. I may as well scrub him at the same time. They keep each other company.”

Louis caught the other tea-colored little Peke and delivered him, yapping, to Frany. The two bulgy-eyed dragged little creatures stood, awash with soapsuds, staring at Frany’s imperturbable features, and meeting her black gaze with cringing appeal.

“*Our* bulletin,” Frany continued, “runs thus. Lord Cable has been in Monte Carlo with our friend Benz . . . he returns to-night. Off to Moon’s Green to-morrow. He is never still these days. He does not wish to have leisure to think. Lady Cable disports herself and her new garments also at Monte Carlo. Her sister, Mrs. van Geldern, is with her, practising a diet of grapes and fish, I understand.”

“And . . . Charmian?”

“Charmian there has been no word from, for two years. She is still married to Lothair, I suppose. At any rate, she now has her own money and cannot starve. Ruth thrives in her own fashion. Bianca (now, Douglas, *still* while I rinse you! *Still*, Greta!)—Bianca is at Ebony part of the summer. And abroad the rest of the year. She travels much. Her mother feels she will marry David Blyth. I think not. Her boy, Toby, is at Eton, and doing well.” Frany lifted a dripping Peke in each hand, and holding them wide she turned, looking like an immense fisherman displaying his catch, and ordered Louis to fetch the two bath towels warming on the fireguard in the housekeeper’s room.

The house at Céligny was empty. Louis went to stay there by himself.

The second week he was there he went into Geneva to lunch with Alan Blyth and Pierre Cot. After luncheon, when he was walking along the Quai du Montblanc head down against the wind, he saw Charmian sitting on a bench looking like a waif in a ballet, with a black clown’s hat on. She had a German newspaper on her knee and was staring at the lake.

When she saw Louis she sprang up, and seeing him lit her up so that at first he didn’t see how peaky her face looked. She wasn’t made up at all, and her eyes looked enormous, and the pointed hat hid her hair except some limp curls at the back; and her thumb came through her glove. She repeated, “Louis, I’m *glad*,” twice.

They began to walk arm in arm. He said:—

“What are you doing here?” but not liking to ask about Jimmy.

But she said, “Did you know I left Jimmy?”

“I heard.”

“I came here to have a look at the League working. I’ve been here ten days. The whole thing’s sick with hope deferred. I’ve been to it all. The Assembly, the Council—the Subcommittees on Armaments. . . . What do they *think* they’re doing here?”

“I’ve just been lunching with Cot.”

“He’s one of the few hopes! Only you French won’t back him up. And Eden being so polite all round, and trying not to notice that everybody’s obstructing, or shilly-shallying, or just plain literally *sleeping* through the sessions! And no wonder when you look at that fly-blown conservatory of a room—with no oxygen in it and inkpots and aspidistras everywhere!!! It

makes me want to scream! And the German delegates'll leave any minute. And *then* where'll we all be?" She stopped, holding his arm. "Doesn't it make *you* want to cry, Louis?"

"Yes."

They walked on. She said, "When you *think* how we all felt—after Locarno, eight years ago."

"Yes. But even Locarno was really an admission of the League's failure."

"What a lot of smashed-up hopes!" She added, "And *now*? Are MacDonald and Simon going to save the League?"

"And then rush on to Italy to betray its principles? Where are you staying?" he asked. "Come back with me anyway and stay at the villa. There's no one there."

She came.

And after dinner she sat on the big sofa hugging her knees, and went on talking too fast about governments and famines and revolutions. Then she was tired and asked him for a cigar.

He gave her one of his father's special Coronas out of the chest.

She sat hunched up smoking it, looking like a shabby little girl that had stolen in through the window. She said, "Play something!"

"I don't any more." But he went to the piano. He played a Chopin Nocturne.

When he stopped she was quiet, her head turned away. He shut the piano.

"Would some cognac be nice for you?" she said.

He put a cushion on the floor by the sofa and sat on it. He took her hand. She said suddenly:—

"Oh, Louis, some of the time since you went has been horrible."

"Where's Jimmy now?"

"In Paris."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

“Won’t he see you?”

“No.”

“How long since you’ve seen him?”

She hesitated. “Five months. But I’ve been living near him, in a small hotel. So I’ve watched him go in and out.”

“Does he *do* anything?”

“He turns down any offer he does get now. Because they’re small. He had one. A year ago. It wasn’t much.”

“Does he see any people?”

She hesitated.

“Some sort of a crowd. They — prejudice him, against me.”

“D’you want to go back to him, Charmian?”

“I can’t leave him. I can’t.”

“What do you do all day in this ‘small hotel’?”

“I go out a little. I know the people in the neighborhood.”

“What people?”

“Well — the proprietor and his wife. And the people who have the *cafés* near, and the little shops. And the other people in the hotel.”

“What are they like?”

“All right. Mostly.”

“And most of the time you watch Jimmy come in and out?”

“His place, his *appartement*, is just over the street.”

“What made you come here to Geneva?”

“I had to do something. I saw I had to make a change for a time.”

“What happened really?”

“Well, I tried to see Jimmy.”

“And he beat you up?”

She didn’t answer.

He said, “Are you going back?”

He knew she was. He said:—

“Will you do one thing for me, Charmian?”

“What?”

“Stay here for a fortnight’s rest.”

“A week.”

“A fortnight.”

“All right.”

He got himself a brandy. Then he sat down on the floor by her sofa again. She said:—

“D’you remember how *alive* Jimmy used to be? D’you remember when we were still at Eighth Street, Bianca was staying and Jimmy came on from the theatre that evening before the famous Breakfast Scene, and we had a party until four in the morning?”

“Yes.”

“He ‘got’ you too. Didn’t he, Louis? He got everyone in those days.” After a pause she said, “I don’t believe you’d know him in the street now.”

Louis said quietly, to stop her telling about Jimmy, “How’s Bianca? Have you seen her lately?”

“I see her when she’s in Paris. But she’s never anywhere for long. She has a studio in New York, a flat in Paris, two rooms in Venice, and her house at Ebony.”

“*Bianca* has?”

“Yes. She calls it chain-living.”

“It sounds extremely unlike Bianca. . . . And how does she afford it?”

Charmian said, “Oh, she paints screens and things and Bengy sells them for her. . . . I believe she’s in Venice now. We might telephone to her.”

“All right. D’you know her number?”

When they got through to Venice, Bianca was out. But Nicky Zatec, who was staying with her, answered. When he heard Louis was at Céligny he said at once that he would come the next day and bring Bianca.

When Charmian rang off, Louis said, “*Nicky! With Bianca?*”

Charmian, who was incapable of detached amusement at the shiftings of the human scene, stated that Bianca had taken on the *Galère*.

Louis had been to Geneva and back by boat. He came up from the lake preoccupied by a chance meeting with Politis, who, as the strength of the Disarmament Conference ebbed, reiterated, with reason, that after the next war there might be some possibility of peace.

He went round by the garden and in by the upper terrace through one of the French windows, and found Charmian talking to Nicky Zatec. Nicky turned round.

“Ah! The Globe Trotter!”

Nicky seemed larger than ever. He was effusive. But Louis’s pleasure in seeing him was tempered by critical surprise that Nicky’s expression should be so explicit of his character. (Did people always grow to look like themselves?)

Charmian said, “They’ve only just arrived.”

Nicky said, “I suppose there isn’t a drink? Bianca’s just putting the car away.”

As he said this Bianca came in. She was wearing a grey sweater and skirt, and a dark blue clown’s hat with a diamond elephant walking up it and clumsy dark blue leather gloves.

She came smiling—with perhaps even too much ease in the way she greeted Louis. She had heard of his “*beau voyage*” from so many people. Had he brought back a lot of films? And sometime he must tell her about the temples in China, the tea houses in Japan, and the dancing boys in Bali. She was sure that he had thought of something new to say about all the things.

He said, “But I like your elephant best.”

“It’s Babar.” She went over to Charmian and kissed her. “What *luck* your telephoning, darling. We were just getting restive and thinking of going to Tunis. Where have you come from? Where are you going?”

Louis watched her. And listened to her. She was amusing enough. But she was talking a language he didn’t associate with her; a sort of *patois* caused by imaginative accents in unexpected places, and a mind versed in the absurd or peculiar. She gave the talk so much of her own flavor that he was baffled, at first, in detecting it as the ordinary speech of the *Galère*. But

now he caught it. The nun who fell over in Parma and had eleven petticoats on . . . The slot machine crowning the Brenner Pass . . . The man in the hotel at Innsbruck who whipped the lady every night until her earrings came off . . . All this was in the taste of the *Galère*.

Nicky went out on to the terrace. Bianca said, when he'd gone, that he was in a bad mood because he had quarreled with Sandy Fane over a table that Nicky had bought from Bengy for fifteen pounds, and tried to resell to Sandy for seventeen. Sandy had been so angry at discovering this fact that he'd revenged himself by going to Nicky's apartment in the Quai de Conti while Nicky was away, bribing the *concierge* to let him in, and taking away all Nicky's first editions of Firbank. Bianca said that Nicky was so angry he'd written Sandy's name on a piece of paper and shut it in a drawer (a measure of magic which the *Galère* used in serious hatreds to destroy their enemy-of-the-moment).

From outside they heard Nicky calling her. "Bianca! . . . Come here, darling, and look at these goldfish making each other a scene."

Louis turned to Charmian.

"It's *incredible!* She isn't the same person."

"She's been twenty different people since you saw her."

As he spoke Bianca looked in from the terrace.

"Darlings, you *must* see the way the fishes are behaving."

Louis said, "Even your voice has changed." Charmian said, "Louis says you're different."

Bianca stopped in the middle of a sentence about fishes and voyeurs. The vivacity of her expression blanked out and for a moment she looked truculent. Then she began to smile again. And as they followed her out she went on stringing little remarks together to make a chain of curiously pretty nonsense.

As Bianca lay in bed that evening, not reading, she remembered Louis's comment on her being changed.

She began to think about herself. But not with the voluptuous ease of people addicted to introspection. She thought about herself incompetently, and with the irritation of a person who is unused to focusing a pair of field glasses.

How was she so “different”? She did her hair differently, of course; and had different clothes. And a more amusing life than when he’d first known her. She saw more people. Traveled. She had, by now, some sort of technique of enjoying herself.

If you didn’t enjoy life, it got you down.

After Peter died she’d found that if you only made yourself go round and round fast enough you could stop thinking, or feeling anything.

Even seeing Louis hadn’t mattered now. Because she didn’t think about him any more as the villain of Peter’s tragedy. . . . She knew now that things just “happened.” Where had she read, “Life isn’t cruel. It is indifferent”?

She snatched up a book from beside the bed. Anyway, if she was different it could only be for the better. For years she’d been absurdly naïve. She took up her cigarette case. She felt that somehow the shining surface of her existence had been rippled by Louis’s remark.

She read until the print blurred and made her drowsy.

She awoke in the dark, crying.

Sometimes another self in her awakened, like this, in tears. Sometimes because of a dream. She never remembered the dream. But the tears she found on her face and in her mouth always seemed to be appropriate for the first thing she waked to think of. And this was always sad—or poignant; or seemed so.

This night she was thinking back to her first years at Ebony, when Toby was a little boy . . . when he was a baby. And with him she saw herself in her early twenties, seeming strange in her simplicity and seriousness—and ingenuous; and because so ingenuous, and prejudiced and arrogantly sensitive, rather touching. She saw herself still immature the year that Toby had gone to school. Even then her long sick sadness for Richard had isolated but not matured her. Her tenderness for Toby had given her gravity, but not experience. The years between Richard’s death and Toby’s going to school had been a long flickering dream, in which each sensation had a quality of rareness rather than of reality; and out of which she’d awoken.

And then?

But she couldn’t tell in which year, or by what process of will, or lack of will, on her part, her way of life had begun to be modified. Then Peter dying. And her need of something that was new and strange.

So that her world that had once been so ordered and circumspect, yet with a melancholy beauty like a formal garden in November, was changed to a flowering wilderness that, like some territory of Beckford's fantasy, had been made yet more richly disordered, with tortuous paths, grottoes, dark boscaje, startling springs and hidden streams, its sweet yet humid air haunted by sounds, charms, voices. Sounds bewitching her suddenly into the darkness of a wood. Charms that drew her, against her will, but strong and sweet and then stronger, into caverns half lit, curious, and sensual. Voices that murmured from here, from there: "Come," and she went, her fancy pleased, her thoughts dancing, her heart always between dreaming and waking; went, followed, was caught—and broke loose again.

And again, waiting, poised lazily, there were new sounds, more voices. . . .

But as she went (there is no horizon . . . the little paths wind and return; the flowers are always in bloom and have no names; the willows never dry their tears) . . . as she went, and came again, the Voices that had once called her said, "She has no heart"; the Charms that had held her muttered, "She has no body"; the Sounds in shadow murmured, "She cannot fear; she is indifferent to sorrow; she is incurious, elusive—asleep."

Bianca and Nicky vanished towards North Africa or Spain or Madeira.

Louis took Charmian back to Paris because she insisted on going. She said she was always afraid when she'd left Jimmy in a place for long. She never knew what he might do. And that was why she tracked him.

She persuaded Louis to promise to see Jimmy. She went back to her sordid little hotel off the Avenue des Ternes. She refused Louis's suggestion that she should stay with Marthe. She said she didn't know Marthe. That they hadn't met since they were schoolgirls years ago, and that anyway her clothes were too shabby to stay with anyone.

Louis could have laughed and cried when she said this. There was a melodramatic shabbiness about her clothes which was revealed to him day by day, as she appeared either in a shrunken grey jersey dress with a cracked red patent belt, or in a stained mackintosh (which she wore for the journey back to Paris), or a black dress which she had bought in a sale at the Printemps and which had ten out of the eighteen little satin buttons missing down the back.

Actually he made no comment, but heard that Armorelle was working in Schiaparelli's, went to see her, and she found a suit and scarf in the *solde* which seemed to be Charmian's size. Louis took the box with him. Armorelle said, "Very strange, Louis darling. Rip van Winkle buying up old morsels for *unknown* girl friend!"

Charmian kissed him when he brought the suit. And obediently put it on. But she hardly looked in the glass. And its chief effect was to make the room with its greasy mauve and gold striped wallpaper and velvet curtains look still more squalid. She said, "When will you try and see Jimmy?" and went to the window and looked along the narrow street and said, "I know he hasn't been out yet to-day."

So Louis went across the street in the rain and into a cobbled courtyard and found Jimmy in bed in a room on the ground floor. He was still drunk from the night before and wasn't surprised to see Louis after eight years, but grumbled at him and welcomed him by turns, and demanded that he should get him a drink of water. Louis went into a sort of pantry-kitchen full of dirty dishes and scraps of food and empty bottles and Jimmy's soiled clothes lying on the floor. He rinsed out a cup and brought him the water.

Jimmy sat up and started thanking him profusely over and over again, looking livid and tousled like a comedian that had just taken off his make-up; and his breath stinking.

But when Louis began to talk about Charmian, a secret angry expression came on Jimmy's features and he seized Louis's wrist and told him that Charmian had left him for a man who'd got hold of her for her money, and that she was living with him here in Paris, and one of these days, he, Jimmy, was going to surprise them suddenly and shoot them both up. And then he started telling Louis about a big offer he'd just had from New York in a new play, but he couldn't make up his mind whether to accept it or not.

Louis left him falling asleep again and went back to Charmian and told her that it would be hopeless for her to see Jimmy, who was hardly sane. He said, "Charmian, you must cut loose from him. He isn't the same person any more."

But she said, "You can't love people less because they've been messed up by life."

He said, impatient but affectionate, "Then the whole world needs helping."

She said, half smiling, “Sometimes I go and see my old governess, Mademoiselle Houville. She still lives here, in Paris. When I said to her one day just that,—that the whole world needs helping,—she said that reformers were like the English King Canute, and made themselves ridiculous. That our business was one’s own little *coin*. I remember her words. She said, ‘*On a toujours ses pauvres.*’”

“That’s Catholic,” said Louis; “that’s how my sister Marthe feels.”

“Aren’t they right, though?”

He said, nervously, that he didn’t know. And noticed that already her Schiaparelli suit looked as if she’d been climbing trees in it.

Bianca sat alone at a little table at the Colisée under the edge of the red and white awning. All round her people were having their *apéritifs*. People she knew. People she didn’t know. They were all unreal, and equally indifferent to her.

For she was alone, enchantingly alone. Alone and intoxicated, sipping nothing more than an *orange pressée*; listening enraptured to her own heart which kept up its melting lyrical little waltz that had begun this morning, about the spring having come! There was very little else to it, the words varying only enough to include a few phrases about sunshine and lilac and love. . . . But the melody, banal as it was, alternately set her pulses racing and turned her bones to water, and had induced in her, as the day had grown hour by hour more maddeningly lovely, her yearly belief that no spring had ever been like this before.

She felt quite pale with bliss. If an ambulance had stopped by the pavement and had come to her and laid her, a victim of spring, upon a stretcher, she would have given in. Since none came she stayed sipping her *orange pressée* and wondering dreamily how she could avoid dining this evening with Chauvigny; or anyone else. For she feared the least human contact, holding her brilliant and fragile sensation of pleasure like a butterfly on a pin.

She saw Sandy and three other people she knew coming across from Fouquet’s, and bent her head so that they shouldn’t see her. She saw Nathalie St. Laurent arrive with two men; and Bengy, frolicking round the three of them. A few minutes later she had a glimpse of Marthe d’Arès driving past in an open carriage with the old Princesse, her mother-in-law, and two little girls in white sitting with their backs to the coachman. Now

Armorelle arrived a few tables off, with Markoff the dancer and an American girl with a flower-face like a marguerite and long legs like stilts. And a little later François was driven up in his black coupé. He joined Armorelle and the girl and bought them *boutonnieres* of lilies of the valley from the old woman who came past selling them.

Bianca bought herself a bunch, giving the woman ten francs (on account of the spring). At the next table the man in the grey waistcoat bought some for his *petite amie*, who cried, “*Que j’adore le muguet!*”

Bianca pinned hers on the lapel of her jacket. And the little waltz that went on inside her, as if she were a music box, took up the refrain, “*Que j’adore le muguet . . . que j’adore le printemps . . . que j’adore la vie.*”

Louis went with François, after his play, to the Bœuf.

They went downstairs, since Louis wasn’t, as François pointed out, “*en smoking.*” (As François himself was.) There were still the same people, the same waiters, the same dim lights. Or too much the same to seem different.

A young man with a pale cherub mouth was singing. He had slight beautiful gestures, a languorous waist, small eyes.

François nodded to various people. Ordered bacon and eggs. Louis thought that François’s play had been exquisite—dry yet full of flavor. And said so to François, who agreed.

“Night and Day,” sang the young man with the cherub lips.

“Night and Day
You are the one.
Only you
Beneath the Moon
And . . . under the Sun . . .”

“But there is only one thing,” François said, speaking through the singing, and the chords of the piano, “which one pursues always, and never finds—it is the person whose love satisfies your imagination but never altogether your senses . . . It is the most common of modern errors to imagine that the perfection of physical love is a base for happiness. The most that it can give you is contentment.”

“That’s already something,” said Louis.

“*Night and Da-a-a-ay,*” sang the young man.

“There is Marie de Montcontour!” exclaimed François.

Louis sprang up. Went to her. She was in black—a black hat, black tulle across her eyes and twisted round her throat.

“Louis!”

Her black-gloved hand in his. Her eyes like jewels in the tulle shadow.

“My *dear* Marie.”

It was five years since he’d seen her. She said, “And the other side of the world? It’s even more bizarre, more strange, than this?”

“*Less* bizarre,” said Louis.

Later, as they sat in a corner (and the young man sang “Brother, can you spare a dime?”), Marie asked him what he was going to do now.

He said, “A tour of the West: Europe and America, with a little notebook.”

“Ah . . . and then a book?”

“Perhaps. But not a novel.”

“What then?”

“A few notes. A collection of impressions.”

“Accusing?” she asked.

“Rather a statement. Modest enough. And which no one will read.”

“But, my dear Louis, people will read anything by you.”

He said, “If I write ‘witty novels about modern life,’ yes—as François has learned to write ‘witty comedies.’ But he needed to be rich!”

Marie considered Louis. He looked older. There was a tense but perfectly suppressed nervousness in every inflection of his voice; and his poise had the same quality of deliberately controlled unrest. She asked him:

—
“What do *you* need?”

“Nothing. Except work.”

That autumn the *Galère* went to New York because Bianca was going. Bianca went because the loveliness of the October weather at Ebony made her sad. Louis went partly because he wanted to see the Brain Trust at work;

partly to find out what an epidemic of poverty had done to the spiritual constitution of the American people.

The *Galère* had scarcely changed. Or changed, Louis thought, only in the manner in which wax flowers, once glossy and new under glass, become, in time, inexplicably wan and sordid.

Peter's death, François's accession to a prosperous and a philosophical leisure, his own secession, had left the company smaller, but unchanged. Still they longed for happiness in love. Still they sprawled, exposing their middle-aged bodies to the indifferent sun. Still, chronically romantic, deliberately gullible, they wandered through the years, exchanging old lamps for new at every opportunity; saddened by each new deception, resentful of each fresh self-betrayal; juggling with responsibilities but never carrying them; conjuring with facts but never pausing to examine them; and increasingly afflicted by their own awareness of essential failure.

In Paris they still clustered round Nicky at the Quai de Conti. And Nicky, monstrous, witty, and obscene, still embroidered for them his Thousand and One Nights. In Venice, in Bengy's *palazzo*, lotus-eating and conscientiously lascivious, they enjoyed yearly a quarrel or a love affair that made their season. In Savoy, Sandy (who, prudent with advancing years, had given up his car, but kept his chauffeur) entertained them all once a year for the "grape cure" in his vineyards.

Kalla, unchanged, still recommended passion and wore flowers in her hair and red trousers; Fritzl was still blond and still endearing; Armorelle, a little pinched in feature, her nails blacker red, her grey eyes brighter and more unappy, still longed to be adored for qualities, such as sympathy and integrity, which she did not possess.

Only Bianca's affiliation with them was new. And disconcerting. What she gave them was obvious enough: her beauty; her zest for pleasure; the waltzing quality of her friendship—so intimate, so intoxicating, yet so unreal.

But what she got from them Louis didn't make out. He asked her one day what it was. (He had come to her studio in New York on his return from a visit to Washington.)

She said, "Oh, because they're all like heraldic animals. If they have one sort of head they have another sort of body. And that's amusing. And then you never know if it's the dragon's tail or the ram's head that's going to work next."

“If you stay with them you’ll become a heraldic animal yourself.”

She laughed. “What shall I be?”

“I suggest a fish’s head, bat’s wings, and a rabbit’s hindquarters.”

“Signifying?”

“Coldness. Blind speed . . . and . . .”

“You’re odious. Now concentrate and look at my work. How d’you like the screens?”

“Not much.”

She was annoyed. “Aren’t they pretty?”

“Very.”

“Aren’t they amusing?”

“Too amusing.”

“What’s wrong, then?”

He poured himself out a Scotch and soda.

“I think it’s mediocre work for big prices.”

“I like the money. It gets me new places. And buys Toby horses.”

“You could do good work and still get the money.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t your self-important feeling about ‘good work.’”

He poured out her White Rock. “It isn’t self-importance.”

She went up to the “Tennis” screen and turned it so that its three white and green panels were towards the light. She said:—

“Well, I think this is gay and funny. So’s the bathroom screen with the Lobster Ladies.”

“You’ll end up by doing witty decorations for the *toilettes* of night clubs!”

“If I’d painted the Mona Lisa you’d say I’d given her a vulgar smirk.”

Louis was surprised.

“Nonsense, my dear.”

“Nobody else says ‘nonsense’ to me.”

“Only because you’re always with the *Galère*, who adore you.”

“I don’t care if I’m adored or not.”

“Only because you *are*! The reason you’re annoyed *now* is that I don’t say ‘lovely Bianca’ or ‘Bianca, *je te désire*’ every two minutes. And *where*, by the way, is Chauvigny?”

Her expression flashed from hostility to laughter.

“He’s leaving to-night. By the *Ile de France*.”

She began to laugh. She had, in certain moods, a quick deep excitable laugh that darkened her eyes and lit a soft flare of color under her skin. It was in this mood (and it had caught her now), when she seemed possessed by her own laughter, and her spirits sent her reason spinning, that she reminded him of Peter. Peter’s laughter used to begin like that, with that deep slightly hysterical chuckle, and then get away with him. Peter’s thin oval face and dark eyes were lit like hers, and now, when she flung herself back in a chair, her “*Oh, Louis*”—it might have been Peter’s voice.

So that he said, looking at her with an acrid tenderness, “What are you laughing at?”

“Chauvigny. He . . .”

“I could have told you exactly.”

“He thought I was going to be *une petite femme* . . .”

“I know! *Bien vicieuse!*”

“Yes . . .!”

“And instead he discovered that you’re at least mentally chaste; and so romantic at heart that every man you meet is a disappointment.”

She stopped laughing. “I wonder if you’re right . . .” when the door rattled open and Jimmy Lothair banged in, swayed to crash the door shut again, and stood with both hands in his topcoat pockets, his shoulders hunched, staring at Louis.

“So this is where y’are. I thought so! I thought as much, you great . . .! Here’s the man that stole ’er from me, you great filthy son of a bitch. I thought I should find you here. I’m not so down-an’-out I can’t get around an’ get to know things. I get to *know* things all right.”

Louis said in French to Bianca, “Please go now. Go to my apartment. Here’s the key.” He handed it to her, stretching his arm back and not taking his eyes off Jimmy. “Go at once and wait until I telephone.”

“But—”

Jimmy swayed and steadied himself by leaning back against the door. “If you ’magine talkin’ your bloody language is goin’ to be any use—”

“Take the key,” said Louis to Bianca. “And go.” Jimmy stared, then realized his move and started forward, extricating his right hand from his pocket.

Louis’s voice: “Go, Bianca.”

She moved halfway to the door. She saw the pistol, saw Jimmy’s hand raised—“First you get my woman an’ get her money. You bet she didn’ have any—starvin’—”

“Go, Bianca,” Louis said.

“I heard you were here. I heard what you said about me in 1929 over that play . . . that dam’ French play. I know it was you that kep’ me out of that theatre. ‘You tell Louis,’ I said, ‘you tell him I’m here!’ But if they didn’ come back: ‘Mr. Scheurer he don’t have anything t’ do with drunks’— With *drunks*, by God!”

Louis said, watching Jimmy’s face, watching the waving end of the revolver, “Sit down and let’s have this out, Jimmy. *Please go, Bianca.*”

“That’s right, you get that dame t’ clear out, we don’t want any dames in this business.”

“Bianca!”

She said, “I’m not going.”

Jimmy seemed to hear this, for he swung round, then leaned back looking at her face under his eyelids as if he were trying to focus her, his right arm still describing little uncertain circles in the air with the barrel of the revolver. Then he snarled out:—

“Did you say you wasn’ goin’? Our friend Louis here, he mayn’t be accustomed to bein’ obeyed, but I *am*! I certainly am—I don’t have any *dames*—”

Bianca saw Louis spring, seize Jimmy from behind, crushing an arm round his throat and grasping his right arm. She saw Jimmy turn in the same second that the revolver went off. She saw them both struggle, lurch across the studio, heard Jimmy’s cursing, heard the revolver rattle on to the floor, and saw Louis fall.

Bianca's colored maid had run out for some cream. As she came in she saw the big gentleman that she'd let in before come out of the studio, and as he got past her she saw he was drunk as anything and as he got in the elevator the elevator man looked at her with a grin, for he could see, too, that the gentleman was plastered.

WELL-KNOWN ACTOR'S SUSPECTED SUICIDE

The body of the drowned man found by the police has been identified as that of James H. Lothair, actor, aged forty-seven, of 223 East 57th Street. Suicide is suspected. A policeman passing by the docks of the Furness Line, two nights ago, saw a man walking on to the dock. It is known that Lothair, who divorced an English wife four years ago, had been out of work for some time.

Louis stayed in Bianca's studio to avoid publicity. He was badly enough wounded in the left shoulder to keep him lying up for a fortnight.

The doctor that Bianca's colored maid fetched in seemed unsurprised at finding a man shot through the shoulder. It was he who suggested that Louis (whose name he never asked for) had had an accident while shooting over the week-end, and been brought back to New York.

Bianca didn't show Louis the newspapers until his temperature was steady. Then she told him about Jimmy. The news shocked him and made him miserable. He asked her if she had let Charmian know. Bianca said she had. He said:—

"She'll be unhappy. She really loved him." He made Bianca bring him paper and a pen and wrote to Charmian.

Later that same day he said, "What a ridiculous thing. That I should have failed to shoot Charmian's first husband. And been shot up by the second one."

He was silent all that evening. She saw, too, that his shoulder was hurting him.

Only Louis's dislike of trained nurses made him endure the ministering of Bianca. He said that she couldn't make a pillow less smooth if she were inside it.

Bianca was a bad nurse. She was anxious and unmethodical. She hadn't enough force of will to control her patient, and too little gentleness to persuade him.

Her only sick-room talents were arranging flowers and making Benger's Food. Whenever she made it she boasted of its smooth consistency. But Louis disliked Benger's and protested that it wouldn't help a shoulder wound to heal. But Bianca always said, "The doctor wants you to have a light diet."

Actually a trained nurse came to Bianca's apartment twice a day and dressed his wound and what she called "fixed him up." She was a placid but coy woman, who always referred to Bianca as "Madame Scheurer," with a slightly malicious intonation, to show that she knew she wasn't. Just as she intimated by a sidelong smirk her doubt of Louis's story that he had been in a shooting accident in South Carolina.

Louis was relieved when, in response to a cable, Zamorr arrived from Paris. By the time he came Louis was well enough to be moved out of Bianca's studio, and back to the Waldorf.

But once Louis was settled there he felt that he had been ungrateful and ungracious to Bianca, and sent Zamorr down to the hotel flower shop to order red roses to be sent to her every day. But without any card enclosed.

Bianca thought that it was characteristic of Herbert Langridge to send her red roses every day anonymously, remembering that she had said to him once that they were such exciting flowers. And their coming coincided with a mood, partly of boredom, partly of resentment, that settled over her when Louis had gone. She resented his going because she had been interested and occupied and amused by his being there.

And now Nicky had gone back to Paris. Bengy was in Chicago. Armorelle was somewhere in the South with someone.

Bianca couldn't settle down to work. Her painting seemed almost as futile as Louis said it was.

She felt sorry for herself. And then Herbert's roses came, day after day. She began to think that he was curiously understanding; and at the same time touching, because he didn't make her feel she had to see him. At the end of the week (during which the studio seemed so little endurable that she longed even to have Louis back there, lying on the sofa, being preoccupied) she wrote to Herbert, saying that she was depressed in New York and thought of coming down to Washington. He called her up that evening saying that he was coming up to New York to fetch her, and had planned to take her on a little trip up to Massachusetts to stay with his mother.

As Bianca and Langridge got out of New York and up towards Westchester she said, sighing and leaning back, what a joy it was to smell country again.

He put his hand for a moment on her knee, and his comforting voice (so deep and low that it had almost a negro's tones) said, "That's what you need, Bianca. You don't want to go on staying around New York and seeing a crowd of people you don't get anything from." He added, benign and authoritative, "And a man like Louis Scheurer isn't the right friend for you, my dear." Soothed by his tones, charmed by that mixture of sweetness and obstinacy in his stubby profile, she felt that he was right. Louis "gave" her nothing. He made her feel disconcerted by life.

Langridge seemed to read her thoughts. "Scheurer's one of those disillusioned sort of men that just end by cluttering up God's good earth. I don't mean I don't like him personally. He's got so *much*! That's just the tragic part of the whole thing. I remember when I first met him as a boy, at his parents' house in the fall of 1918, I hoped great things from that boy. He seemed to me brilliant. But he got in the wrong set, the way a lot of young fellows did in those years. And those books of his were bright enough. But they didn't mean anything! They didn't carry any weight."

She listened, her mind adjusting itself to the comfortable rhythm of his sentences. How sane he was. And just, without ever being condemnatory.

"As for that group that I saw you with a few weeks ago,—Zatec and all that lot,—I don't think you should be seen around with them, my dear! They're pretty rotten, you take my word for it. I don't have to go into unpleasant details; and I wouldn't care to. But that 'Lady' Armorelle's pretty notorious, isn't she? And as for Fane, he isn't exactly the friend I'd choose for you. They're Louis Scheurer's sort, not yours."

She explained that Louis avoided them now. But Langridge, whose patterns of thought, once fixed, were unalterable, and who'd first known of the *Galère* in 1926, only repeated that they were just the crowd Louis Scheurer would run around with.

Bianca didn't protest any more. On the whole she found Langridge's uninflected judgments restful. The whole drive was like sinking into a perfectly upholstered armchair. As they got farther the air grew still clearer and colder, and the country changed to a piebald scenery of brown steep woods and rolling slopes of snow, and ranges of dark blue mountains in the distance.

They passed through villages whose white wooden houses with green or pale blue shutters stood among the trunks of vast trees, and little white churches whose spires looked as if they had been designed by Wren. Langridge talked of the countryside, and of his life there as a boy. He pointed out a lake where he and some friends had camped two summers, and a high ridge of woods where he used to go shooting.

He had just pointed out to her the sunset, beginning above the inky hills, when they left the main road to drive, climbing a lane, towards a white house with a four-pillared portico, a typical New England house of the late eighteenth century. "That's home!" he said. He added, "That's always been my home, and it's sort of thrilling to me to show it to you."

Bianca was as enchanted as he wanted her to be. And when they got in, the pine-paneled rooms were delightful, and she said so. And he beamed like a big schoolboy when he presented her to an old lady with fine features, wearing a purple cardigan, and said, "Mother, this is Mrs. Bianca Selwyn. I want you to know one another!"

Those days at the Langridge home were tranquil; and as charming to Bianca as the house in which they passed; as gracious and simple as her hostess; as profoundly reassuring as Herbert Langridge himself.

Every day he planned some pleasant expedition by car, or a hike up one of the trails through the woods, or a friendly visit to agreeable neighbors. But part of the day he always left her alone, saying that he knew she needed "to get into her own rhythm" that had been destroyed by New York.

Usually, after six-o'clock tea in the library, she sat talking with Mrs. Langridge, who would ask about Toby or about country life in England; or recount, in detail, without wit, but with a large cool humor, the lives of her various neighbors. Bianca liked her. Her outlook was sane, her disposition cheerful. Her New England puritanism was greatly modified by superb health, which made her cheerful; fond of good food, and able to digest it. Living with her and her son, Bianca was increasingly convinced that their equanimity, their white teeth and serene brows and candid eyes and general wholesomeness, were due to a state of physical grace.

And this—after Louis's nerve-ridden moods and indigestion; and the eternal tummy-aches, boils, diets, and colonic irrigations of the *Galère*—seemed most agreeable.

The last evening, when Mrs. Langridge had retired to bed and Bianca and Herbert stayed talking comfortably, he didn't force the warm undefined friendliness of the situation.

Only, when she rose to go up to her room, he took both her hands in his, and looked down into her eyes and said:—

“You know, don't you, Bianca, that whenever you're ready for me, I'll be there.”

Bianca had spent a day at Eton with Toby. When she got back to her mother's flat, where she was staying, she found a message from Victor Finch (a friend, long ago, of Charmian's) asking her to telephone to him, to say whether she could dine with him. She was glad of anything to do. And Victor was sweet and amusing. And she could drink enough to make her stop thinking about Toby.

They went to *Conversation Piece*. There they saw Frany and Louis Scheurer in a box. Bianca was surprised, as she didn't know Louis was in England. She hadn't seen him since he left her apartment in New York with Zamorr to go to the Waldorf for his convalescence.

She and Victor went to see them in the *entr'acte*. Louis said he had been in Hollywood, where M.G.M. were making a picture of François's last play. He described Hollywood in two sentences, in French. He looked bronzed and well. Frany was wearing her yellowed ermine cape and new shoulder-length white kid gloves. (One of the mystically luxurious tenets in her austere creed was that she never wore a pair of evening gloves twice.) Frany asked if Toby had gone back to Eton. Bianca said that she had motored him down in the morning. Louis, who had been talking to Victor, turned round suddenly and asked her if she would lunch with him the next day, as he was going back to Paris on the four-o'clock plane. She said she would like to very much.

After the play Victor took her to the Embassy. There they saw Louis and Frany again, three tables off. (Frany, for one of her inscrutable reasons, had been an original member.) Frany had taken off her ermine and looked regal but exiled in her old black dress.

Bianca ate oysters and drank a lot of champagne. Victor said, “You do look lovely to-night, Bianca. You always make all the other women look ordinary.”

She thought about Toby.

Victor was saying, “I wish you weren’t leaving England again so soon.”

She said, “I don’t like England in January and February.”

“Will you dance?”

They got up and packed themselves into the crowd. Victor said:—

“What a heavenly scent you’ve got on.”

They passed Frany and Louis. Victor held her closer.

Looking at women round her, smooth-haired, smooth-skinned, and, like herself, seductive, not by profession (but by habit? fashion? instinct?), she thought, “How these women exploit themselves!” And then, “Do I?”

She said to Victor, “Let’s stop. The crowd’s frightful.”

They got back to their table. Victor kept his hand on her arm. The band was playing “I’ll Follow My Secret Heart,” out of the play. She said:—

“Yes, some coffee, please.”

She glanced across at Louis. He looked back at her for a second, and went on talking to Frany.

Victor said, his words just audible on the surface of the music:—

“I’m awfully in love with you, Bianca.”

She drew back her hand.

“No, Victor. You aren’t—I really *know* you aren’t!”

He was white over his cheekbones. “Why d’you say that?”

“Oh, Victor—” She looked round as if an invisible door out of the situation might be near their table. “Well—because I *know*.”

“You mean you don’t want me to be.” He was quicker than she’d thought.

“I mean it isn’t real; it’s—exaggerated.”

He stared at her, then he said, “How odd you are. If I *feel* it’s real, then it *is*.” An inflexion in his voice was so young and startled that she exclaimed:

—
“I *am* sorry,” shamed by her own insensitiveness; and feeling guilty towards him just as she’d felt once towards Toby when she’d let the gardener uproot his sunflower.

He said, “You mean you don’t love me. Well—I didn’t even imagine you would.”

She said, troubled and unhappy, “It isn’t a question of love.”

“It is with *me*.”

“Victor dear—it’s a friendship—a flirtation—anything you *like*.”

He looked at her without speaking. Then he said, “Don’t you believe in love?”

Her immediate reaction was to take his question as a naïve confirmation of his immaturity.

She said, “I don’t think about it very much.” And then she said that she had to get up early the next morning, and would he take her home?

When he said good-night to her he said:—

“When shall I see you again?”

“Often, I expect.”

“. . . You don’t care anyway.”

She protested, kissing him without passion.

“Yes, my dear. I do care, as much as I can.”

When she was alone in her room, she went to the window and looked out at the London roofs, and the silhouettes of trees between them.

She leaned on the window sill thinking of Victor; and then of David . . . of Nicky . . . of Chauvigny; and others who’d come to her saying “I love you . . . I want you” . . . saying, blindly, “How sweet you are” . . . and then, troubled, “How strange you are.”

But she wasn’t strange. She wasn’t, in any sense that they could understand, positively “anything.” . . . She simply “wasn’t there”!

She was shut in her own indifference, which was like a glass wall that neither they nor she herself could break. Shut in. And waiting.

But for what? For whom?

That luncheon next day with Louis was somehow like children playing parties.

They made a conversation which bored them both: until they'd drunk a bottle of hock; and then their talk became more amusing. (During the first part of luncheon, Bianca came to the conclusion that she must be being shy; or that Louis was hostile; or shy himself.)

They began talking about life in America, and in Europe. Bianca said she used to like America because it felt so fantastic and abroad. But that she'd lost that feeling now. And didn't even notice the butter being in squares and her shoes never cleaned.

Louis said, "I don't think I feel abroad anywhere."

Bianca said, "I feel abroad with certain people. But never with places."

He said, "You like places. And people less? Don't you?"

She admitted this.

He said, "People used to matter to me more than anything."

"What do you like them for?"

He hesitated. "Sometimes for reasons . . . sometimes for no reasons. . . . For being gay . . . for being interesting . . . for being beautiful."

They talked desultorily about what made you most enjoy certain periods of your life. How much was climate? Health? Nervous adjustment? They got into the subject of using time: and wasting it.

Bianca said, "Of all the waste I think it's the little *gaspillages* I regret most. All the small tantalizing might-have-dones and might-have-beens."

"*How* I know! That enormous scrap basket full of thrown-away, empty opportunities. The books one didn't read, the places one didn't stop at. The person one just failed to meet. The emotion one left only half enjoyed, like a *croissant* at breakfast. . . ."

She said: "And the strawberries one didn't eat and the Mozart opera that was just too much trouble to get to, and the sunny days one stayed indoors, and the puppy one didn't buy!"

". . . The oysters one allowed to remain uneaten—or to linger in the depths of the ocean manufacturing pearls for the wives of businessmen to wear on their froglike bosoms. . . ."

She said, "D'you remember about the 'Unrighteous' in the Apocrypha who 'let no flower of the spring pass by them'?"

He seemed to be amused by this.

He said, "It's *so much* 'you' to know the Apocrypha better than the Bible!" He leaned across the table and looked into her face, as if, she thought, she were something in a museum case whose detail had arrested his attention. He said, "You have a flair for things that are a little 'phony' . . . that are off the line of tradition!" He went on, half amused, half thoughtful: "The situations in which you live yourself are never normal. And your ideas on these situations are even less normal than the situations themselves. . . . You transform sentimental situations into the cynical, almost brutal episodes; and those situations which seem to lack all possibility of sentiment you make into romantic, elusive, mystical dramas. . . . It's a kind of genius. Even with your clothes it's the same. Your dresses, your sports clothes, your hats, acquire an unexpected emphasis when you put them on. The most sophisticated evening dress acquires on you the quality, even more sophisticated than its own nature, which is informality—indifference— The most wholesome sports sweater, designed for osseous Englishwomen to play golf in, develops a faint, but disturbing accent."

For a long moment he continued to look at her. Then he looked at his watch.

He said, "It is time I left for Croydon." . . . Then, casually, "Come with me? To Paris?"

She didn't know why she said, "No. I'm going to Wiltshire to-night, to stay with Armorelle . . ." for her usual instinct was to go on doing whatever seemed amusing with the person she happened to be with.

He said, "I'm sorry," but without distinct sincerity.

When he'd left her on the hot pavement of Berkeley Street she felt deprived of his company. So she bought a gardenia from the man outside the grill-room entrance, and thought of all the people she could go to see. And decided that none of them would do.

She walked down Piccadilly feeling an indistinct, but persistent emotion, like the sort of physical appetite that desires some taste that it can't define.

She ended by going into Christie's. There she saw a lacquer cabinet that she wanted, and couldn't afford; and a de Hooch which made her decide to go to Holland the next day.

She didn't go to Holland.

She went to Majorca, where David had a house.

She hadn't seen David for two years because she had got into the habit of loving him enough to be jealous of other women, but never enough to marry him, which was what he wanted.

But the effect of that luncheon with Louis was, for no reason, to shake her out of her habitual state of enjoyment into one of vague, irritable unrest.

And the effect of unrest on her was always to make her want to feel sentimental. She could feel sentimental easily about David, partly because they had been happy together and charmed by each other so often; partly because she had a real affection for him; partly, too, because she knew that he was incapable of imposing his will on hers, or of perceiving how easily he could have tethered her by adroit use of his power over her senses. On the whole he was a person exactly suited to her emotional waywardness and essential indifference. Her safety, as far as he was concerned, was that she couldn't really love him, even when she wanted to. Simple but not frank, impressionable but not too sensitive, amorous and sybaritic, but never gay or mad or desperate, he had never been a person who could endanger her heart.

Only, from time to time, she wished that he could. And all the way, on the journey to Majorca, she deliberately remembered all the sweet and friendly times they'd had together, working up a nostalgia for him that had become real by the time she reached Barcelona.

She remembered most vividly three weeks at Buis—that August when they used to dine out of doors under the vine arbor by the fountain, and she'd had her blue-frilly dressing gown, and it was fun finding each other there in the mornings, in the white room with the flowering curtains.

She didn't sleep well on the boat. She kept waking and thinking about him. And knowing that it would be delicious when he put his arms round her and said so very little, and kissed her lips with so much charm and pleasure.

She got up very early and saw the harbor as they approached, and wondered if David would be there to meet her.

She watched Palma getting clearer through the mist, and thought of the hot coffee she would have, and a hot bath, and David kissing her, and her new pale pink velvet dressing gown; and superimposed on these anticipations she saw Louis looking at his watch and saying that he must go to Croydon, and she wondered why that whole luncheon, which had on the whole been fun, should annoy her in retrospect.

In September Armorelle had brought a husband from St. Louis back to London and implored Bianca to come with them, at any rate part of the time, on their motor trip through Europe. They were going in October through Germany to Austria.

Bianca decided that she would go as far as Munich with them, and see Lottie, who had been living there since her husband died. She and Bianca had exchanged postcards and one or two letters since Bianca's visit in 1926. Bianca had meant to go and see her several times. But her increasingly strong instinct to preserve her own gayety of mind made her avoid all possible contacts with misfortune or injustice. On the other hand, she had a respectful eye on the finger of fate, and when it seemed to point insistently at a particular place, person, or opportunity, she obeyed.

And Fate, having involved her with Armorelle as far as Luxembourg, relieved her there of her company. For in Luxembourg her husband declared that Europeans were dirty and that when he ordered sparkling Burgundy they brought it to him "flat." He was too chivalrous to add that marriage with the daughter of a lord was equally disappointing.

Bianca was sorry for him. He had a doughy face. And his plight made her think of Tom in the *Water-Babies*, when he'd put Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid's stone lollipop in his mouth. But Armorelle explained that it couldn't be long at this rate "until the alimony."

Anyway, the husband insisted on leaving Bianca their hired touring car and its imperturbable English chauffeur, as, he repeated, he "never disappointed a lady." He took Armorelle on the next train to Le Havre.

Bianca reached the frontier next day, where two polite officials examined the car papers and flipped up their right hands in a "*Heil Hitler*" of greeting and farewell. She went on through a rainy day, the Saar country hung with wet banners that, in anticipation of the plebiscite, urged and threatened people with the fact that the Saar was German. On every wall, tormented by the rain, were pictures of the *Führer*, staring out, innocently criminal (his lock of hair adapted from the coiffure Bonaparte, achieving the same effect of anticlimax as a Berlin beauty in a Paris hat).

Twice, where men were repairing the road, a banner in white and red hung above them in an archway declaring that they must "thank the *Führer* for bread and work." Bianca asked the taciturn chauffeur (whose name was Atkins, pronounced by himself "Hatkins") what he thought of one of the Hitler posters. Atkins admitted, talking out of the corner of his mouth, that he wouldn't like to be governed by a man like that himself. Three miles later

he half turned his head, stiffly, to remark that he had been in Italy last year and Mussolini didn't strike him as much better. Five miles after that he said, "Mosley ain't a menace. Went with my wife to 'ear him speak. 'That chap dictator of Hengland,' she said. 'Why, he's like a Black Beetle hollerin' through a megaphone.'"

That night she stayed in Heidelberg. She walked about the streets before dinner. She wondered if it was the rain that made her feel that everyone she met was poor, nervous, and troubled in mind. All the clothes and stuffs she saw in the shop windows looked shoddy in the bright lights; and there was a feeling of shoddiness everywhere.

But by the time they got to Nuremberg the sun was in a high blue sky and south of Augsburg they drove into a series of full-page colored illustrations of a German story book. White roads bordered with fruit trees, running over rich tranquil-looking country. Friendly villages with deep-eaved little houses whose walls seemed of mauve or yellow, pale blue or pink sugar; little white churches whose spires stuck up like witches' hats; purple-shuttered inns with garlands of flowers painted on their walls; telegraph poles on which were built miniature colored pigeon houses with eaves and shutters. In the distance the long blue ranges of the mountains. . . . To the south the dark legend-haunted forests.

Even the sunshine was the gold bloom of a fairy story. Bianca thought she had never seen so much rich peace, so much evidence of simple happiness in living. . . . Only, as Atkins drove on (committing himself only once to admiration of the fruit trees bordering their route), she perceived that in all the villages the children were drilling; men were marching in brown uniforms; schoolgirls were drilling in green meadows; little boys lay prone in rows on the ground shooting targets . . . that young men gathered in the sunshine to impale rows of sandbags with bayonets; that the old men in their round black hats and blue shirts meeting on the warm cobbles of the *Platz* outside one of the steepled churches ludicrously moved their stiff arms upward (*Guten Tag, Heil Hitler*).

At an inn in Bavaria a woman bobbed "*Grüß Gott*," corrected herself, "*Heil Hitler*," hastily, with that quick glancing over her shoulder—right, then left—that Bianca had begun to realize. In another village where the walls of the little gardens seemed unable to keep in their orchards from the cobbled streets, they stopped for petrol and to see an old woman in a shawl running into her house pursued by a group of boys and men. When she had gone in they stood outside, threw stones at her windows, and chalked up on the wall, "We want no Jews here."

As they approached Munich Bianca consulted the map and told Atkins to take a detour off the main road, across an expanse of flat land that Atkins described, as they progressed across its wastes, as “something like a marsh.” His nearest admission of a fact was always a comment that it “seemed” like itself. Thus, for him, it “seemed” to be getting cold, or dark, or late. The same caution (to be found daily, in a more erudite form, in any leader of the *Times*) made him describe a year in his own life when he’d been on the dole as “not doing so well.”

They came in sight of what looked at a distance like a walled town on the deserted flat horizon. It was the internment camp of Dachau. As they got nearer Bianca saw that the high stone walls were surmounted by barbed wire. Close to, there was a sentry in an iron helmet carrying a gun. She told Atkins to drive round the walls pretending they had lost their way. The sentry stared suspiciously. There were similar sentries at intervals round the walls. On top of the wall, among the barbed wire, was an electric cable, marked “Dangerous.”

When they came to the gates of the camp there were guards in iron helmets with expressions of unbelievable stolid brutality. Bianca caught a glimpse through the gates of some pallid men in grey overalls marching in military formation and carrying tin bowls in their hands. Atkins drove past imperturbably. But when they were at a distance from the camp he said that that place didn’t look exactly a little bit of Heaven.

Bianca went to Lottie’s apartment in Munich about five o’clock.

A girl opened the door. She had short dark curling hair like a boy’s and big eyes. It was Anna. She was grave and polite and escorted Bianca into a long, rather cluttered-up room where Lottie was sewing.

Lottie started up with an exclamation. She hadn’t expected her until Saturday. When Bianca said she had written a week before, Lottie said that of course the letter must have been stopped. They often didn’t get foreign letters until a week late, if at all. She lowered her voice, went to the door, and looked out for a moment into the hall, and then came back and said that things were particularly difficult for them just now as they had been friends with a young musician, discovered to be partly a Jew, who had recently been “taken away.”

Bianca began to say something about Dachau, but Lottie said, “Please. Be careful . . . Our maid . . . One never knows!” She whispered, “Such things have happened. So often these girls are paid . . . They tell something . . . and then come the men. . . . A friend of Anna’s, a boy of twenty,—such a

good boy, the son of my friends,—last week they took him. Yesterday he returned. They had beaten his head. And he is deaf. And he cries all the time like a child. . . . But now . . .” The hostess in Lottie reasserted itself, “now you will have a glass of wine, won’t you? Is it English tea? . . . Or perhaps a cup of chocolate?”

She told Anna to go and tell the girl there was a visitor. Then sat down with Bianca to ask her about Toby and about her life. But in the face of what Lottie didn’t admit, about her own life,—but which was only too pitifully asserted by the dark whole atmosphere of the cramped apartment, by Lottie’s own nervousness of manner, by Anna’s expression,—Bianca couldn’t speak of hers. For here her own security seemed like driving through a slum in a Rolls-Royce, her pleasures seemed vulgar, her clothes ostentatious, her carefully cared-for looks impertinent. And every glance and gesture of Anna’s that showed her oversensitive, too mature, disinherited of her own youth, made Toby’s English heritage unreal in its cheerful safeness.

While Bianca was abroad she had lent François her house in England.

In November Louis, who had just come back from Russia, went to stay with him there, and found him living a highly organized county life: hunting twice a week, dining out and playing bridge, driving to point-to-points with Lord Cable, helping Ruth Platt-Eresby organize a bazaar for the Primrose League, and shooting with Harold Platt-Eresby at week-ends.

Louis had liked the idea of staying with François here. He had supposed that he would find three weeks’ peace, in which to arrange and summarize his Russian notes, before going on to Austria. He had an impression, too, that Bianca’s house would be agreeable; remembering it full of books, and large fires and well-upholstered armchairs; for she had a masculine capacity for making herself comfortable.

The house was even more pleasant than he dimly remembered; but the incessant coming and going of people in tweeds and leather coats maddened him; and yet, since François was the object of all their bleating friendliness, amused him too.

But he himself was adamant. And when the women said, “Any day next week or the week after?” and the men (who must have forgotten the elephant) promised to bring up a special claret or port from their cellars, he still steadily refused. An attitude which only sharpened their greed for his company.

And in the evenings when François had gone out to dinner and bridge and he was left to dine by the fire, he got a sense of what a certain kind of country peacefulness might be: and in these hours, whose quiet was only broken by the shifting of a log, or the breathing of Peggotty (Bianca's sheep dog), he could imagine a life whose days were spent out of doors and whose evenings were good food, wine, and, instead of the unchosen company of fools, books, tranquil thinking; and, finally, sleep, until the good day began again.

The question of "fools" obsessed him. François said, "One must accept them." To which Louis replied that François hadn't himself when he was poor.

"Then," said François, "I was wrong. In the fashion in which all those who lack material essentials to happiness are apt to be wrong. That is to say, their point of view is vinegared by their own deprivation."

Louis pointed out that he himself had never lacked money.

"No," said François, "but you are probably poor in another fashion. You lack some essential which isn't money."

"What?"

François said that he thought it was the thing for which most people found compensations—romantic love.

Louis, annoyed, pointed out that he was the least romantic person in the world.

"Through defiance," François said. "You have all the symptoms of an unsatisfied romantic; you are ironical, restless, unhappy; by turns too kind and too indifferent; self-critical and too critical of others; obsessed by a need to be tranquil, and altogether incapable of being so; above all you have become as mistrustful of love as an old fox of a trap."

Louis said, "I notice the simile." He added, wondering as he spoke if he believed his own thoughts, "The most perfect and romantic love in the world is only a sexual urge affecting the brain."

"The best painting, the best architecture in the world, is also caused by an instinct affecting the brain."

"There must be paint . . . a stone."

"Understood! There must always be a medium."

Louis leaned down to pat Peggotty. "I shall become an Englishman and love my dog."

Louis talked to François about his plans for his book. He said that he would spend another two years collecting material. That he was doing a kind of house-to-house investigation of ordinary human lives in every Western country: noting interest, habits, values; how people lived, and why; and with how much satisfaction. The ratio of prosperity to happiness. Religious belief to happiness; sexual and social customs to happiness. The uses of youth. The effects of age in different societies. He said he was going to compile it in the manner of an English *Blue Book*—a report on evidence. That he would call it *West Again*, and that its purpose was a "*Kampf gegen der Dummheit*."

François said, "A purpose? That seems hardly 'you.'"

"The least of my ambitions," said Louis, "is to be 'me.'"

Once Louis went to London with François to a Literary Party; a form of Sociability which he found exasperating, though he tried to think of it as pleasantly naïve.

These assemblies, under the stimulus of sweet champagne and small sausages impaled on nail cleaners, where he conversed with the *Haute-Scribblerie* of England. Their members impressed Louis as halibut parading in the unaffected conviction they were salmon trout, cod roes curveting as caviare, and ox-eyed literary daisies making orchidaceous remarks. For François's custom had staled the variety of silliness to be studied in authors on show and authoresses on a kind of literary heat. These latter dressed in irreproachably British notions of the current fashion, presented themselves to every comer, at first, so it seemed to Louis, with a certain shyness, yet bright-eyed and dribbling little thoughts; then, as conversational approaches grew closer and the responses of wit more daring or more profound, with little gurgles of critical pleasure and sharp cries of satisfied vanity.

Louis, after rising from an encounter with an authoress in a monocle, was attacked by a grey-haired military-looking man carrying a cat, who talked to him about the importance of giving rein to one's lusts. Louis, accustomed by now to the incessant preoccupation of the middle-aged English with sexual problems settled by other races at sixteen, was respectful about the lusts.

“After all,” said the little man, “one must concede something to Nature!” The ginger cat shifted in his arms. Someone said to Louis, “That is Colonel Maynard, the author of *Contrary Mary*. He sold ninety thousand copies.”

“To whom?” said Louis.

His informant didn’t know. “But there,” he said, “is Laura Twigge, who wrote *Dreams Fade Quickly*, and there is Irene Threnody, who wrote *Brightness Falls from the Skies*, and there is Borealis Jenkins; she wrote *Hearts, Homes, and Horizons*.”

When Louis and François left they went to the Café Royal. But it seemed even gloomier in its fly-blown Bohemianism than usual. Louis rejected the Savoy, where they would be certain to meet all François’s Hunting Phyllidas wearing gardenias, and all the people he himself didn’t want to see; because he’d seen them so very often before in his younger life.

So they ended by going back to François’s rooms in Dover Street, still analyzing, with morbid amusement, the celebrities they had fled from.

“Intellectually,” said Louis, “England is divided into two sects. The highbrows, who are trying to use their brains; and the rest, who are trying not to.”

Now that Violet was mostly in London at Portland Place and kept Frany there, Carteret at Moon’s Green took the dogs for their walk. He went every afternoon; sometimes to the post office and back; sometimes over to Ebony and round by Bird’s Farm, followed by the old cocker, Diana, his own water spaniel Patrick, and Peter’s fox terrier.

He always walked at the same brisk pace, carrying a stick, usually staring in front of him, his eyebrows drawn a little together above his blue eyes, but sometimes darting his gaze towards a bird there, or a tree or plant, or a rabbit starting suddenly across a field.

He walked with his shoulders squared and his toes slightly turned out in their age-darkened shoes. But several people in the village had agreed with Mrs. Wrench, the postmistress, that his lordship had changed very much and got older looking since poor Mr. Peter’s death.

Perhaps that winter of ’35 was a particularly wet one. He himself realized that he felt rheumatic and that his back was stiffer when he bent down to fasten Diana’s lead before they passed a farmyard with chickens. Frany saw this on the few occasions when she came down and gave him a

rub with Elliman's embrocation. (He would allow no one else to do so, having a mistrust of anything that might be "massage.") He admitted to himself that he was "out of sorts" and therefore "a bit depressed." It didn't occur to him that there was any need to define, even in his own thoughts, the incessant sadness that was getting worse, instead of better, with years. The same code which prevented his complaining in physical pain stopped him from trying to find a narcotic to help him endure his mental unhappiness.

For his trouble, which never entirely left him, even in sleep, was simply a knowledge that he'd been wrong with his two elder children.

He was too brave a man to refute this fact, once he'd found it; and too stupid to find theories to allay it.

So he went about, not telling anyone. He would go along the road to Wittersham, thinking about both of them. About Peter. And about Charmian, who never came any more. He would sit down to dinner by himself and drink his wine, and come to some new conclusion which went to make him more certain of his wrongness. Over and over again (perhaps it was in the car on the way to a board meeting, or as he drove over to an occasional meet) he realized that all Charmian had done was to show a lot of grit from the beginning, and stick to her guns; and that Peter had chosen to "sow a few wild oats."

Perhaps it was this sense of his own inexpert understanding of human situations that had created, by a chance talk here and there, his philosophical friendship with François Dubar—whom he thought of as "the little French playwright fellow," who came down now and then to consult him about horses and stayed to talk to him about human beings. Carteret had never thought about human beings in a general way before; except to put the ones he came across in the categories he knew about. But, somehow, this business of character began to fascinate him. He took to watching people, thinking out why they did things just as he used to study birds as a boy. "Queer birds" was what he said in one of his talks with Dubar, "queer birds we are." And that started Dubar off again arguing away about the "human soul" . . . conditioning it . . . and environment and what not. But it was all so astoundingly interesting that Carteret started getting one or two books on the subject. Dubar advised him. He found them stiff, especially at first. Descartes, Spinoza, Bergson . . . moderns too. . . . Jung seemed to have some sense in him. . . . Carteret read here and there, hovering and burrowing like a persistent but rheumatic bumblebee.

He made many reflections, but few deductions. But he got a cumulative feeling that there was something, referred to as Man, and by Dubar as the “individual,” which needed to be understood.

But he never reached any clear perception that this new interest of his could be described as philosophical. For he came to it through some instinctive need; snuffing about for wisdom as a dog searches for purgative grass.

One afternoon he came in late from his walk, for he had been a longer round than usual, and when he came in, whistling the dogs after him, it was already dusk; and the façade of the house was dark, with the window shutters closed.

There had been an east wind blowing all day, and his walk hadn't warmed him up. He felt chilly and glad to get indoors. As he took off his coat, he wondered if he had better have agreed to go with Violet to Cannes next week. He hated the Riviera. But the dark bitter weather of the last few days here was getting on his mind. He went into the library slowly, oppressed with the sense of the long evening before him, preoccupied with the notion that he might, of course, telephone to the Platt-Eresbys and suggest their coming round.

As he came into the room the blaze from the big logs was so bright that he didn't realize that he had forgotten to switch on any lights. He was just turning back to the door to do this when he started; and choked out an exclamation.

Charmian was sitting on the fender stool in the firelight. She had on some sort of dark dress, and her hair was pushed back behind her ears, and her face, turned towards him, was grave, but to his startled sense most childish and lovely and unchanged. He had a strange moment of believing that he had walked in out of the hall into a vivid dream; or that the bleak afternoon, and before it so many weeks and months, had been a dream! And here was Charmian, her voice sweet and familiar in the firelight, saying:—

“I've been waiting for you . . .”

But then she got up, and stood uncertainly; and he saw, in the leap of a flame, that her face was marked with exhaustion, and her glance troubled, frightened almost.

Carteret held out his hand, because he couldn't speak.

Frany came into the drawing room at Portland Place.

“Mrs. Lothair is telephoning from Moon’s Green and wishes to know if she may come and see you—here, in London.”

Violet put down the sketch.

“I *wish* you would speak more clearly, Frany. Your speech is getting very indistinct. I’ve noticed it several times lately.”

Frany advanced six steps and repeated, “Mrs. Lothair.”

“Mrs. Lo-thair? Who’s she? I’ve never heard of her.”

“Mrs. James Lothair,” said Frany, distinctly but without emphasis.

Violet said impatiently:—

“I wish you didn’t always make mysteries.”

“No mystery,” said Frany, “but you have informed me on several occasions that you did not wish me to refer to your elder daughter in your presence by her Christian name.”

“Charmian? . . . At . . . did you say Moon’s Green?”

“I did. It appears she is now reconciled with her father. And is invited to stay there. She will, in fact, live there! I understand that she wishes to make her peace with you.”

Violet’s first slight emotional agitation, caused by surprise, was transitory. Her next feeling was anger at having been surprised in such a way.

“What an extraordinary thing to do! I can’t think . . . after all this time.” Violet hesitated, then broke out, her anger becoming defensive, “*No*. . . . I dislike scenes. I don’t want to have a scene.”

Frany began a remark. Then checked herself.

“Why should she come back now, completely *déclassée*, entirely out of touch with everybody. . . . I fail to see how it will help any of us. Of course . . . I shall see her sometime . . . but I must say I don’t feel inclined to this week—when I’m dining out (four evenings) and going to a play to-morrow. *No*. I can’t be *worried*. I can’t be *upset*! And scenes always upset me.”

This time Frany spoke:—

“That was what you said when Peter wrote to you in 1928 and asked if you would see him.”

Frany waited. Her tone, as she said this, had been impersonal—the words presented as a statement. And Violet’s features, drawn and over-powdered, but that had still a sort of pinched elegance, showed by no precise change of expression that Frany’s words had hurt, or even disturbed her imagination. Only, for a second, as she glanced up to meet Frany’s inexpressive look, there was a momentary flicker out of her attention, a quick painful blankness in her stare as if for a tentative second it had amused the gods to make her blind.

Then she said, “Very well. If you think she can be fitted in . . . tell her she can come to-morrow.”

Ten minutes later Harvey announced, “Mrs. van Geldern, m’lady,” and Josephine came in, fresh and vital in grey squirrel coat and a bunch of violets pinned to its lapel. She kissed her sister, sat down briskly on the sofa, asked if Harvey could bring her a glass of orange and lemon juice mixed, “not iced but not too warm,” and said that she had had to come as she was so worried about Bianca. She had had a letter from Bianca, from Cannes, where she was staying with “her nice French friends the St. Laurents,” saying that Herbert Langridge had arrived suddenly . . . and that she had got engaged to him for a week, and had now decided to “throw him over.”

“I will read what she says,” exclaimed Josephine. To Violet, preoccupied and irritated by the prospect of seeing Charmian, her sister seemed, as usual, luckier than herself. “At least,” she said, “Bianca hasn’t made two impossible marriages.” But Josephine read out Bianca’s letter:—

“I know you will be sorry about this. But I must tell you in case you hear of the engagement before its undoing. He *is* ‘suitable’ and all the things you want for me. But he speaks and thinks too slowly. I can change the varnish on my fingernails between one of his words and the next. . . .”

Violet said, “Idiotic,” perfunctorily.

Josephine said with vivacious anger that it all came of poor Richard having been killed like that, and it was a real mistake to marry so young, because you could never tell what the future held for you.

Harvey brought the orange and lemon juice. When he had gone out of the room Violet sighed. “Ruth is the only one of those children who has made a life for herself. I was staying there only last week. Delightful people.

And the children looking splendid and seeing a lot of the St. John children, who share Ruth's governess for lessons. And Harold has just been made a director of Cable-Bensley . . . and such an excellent host, so good-natured."

Josephine put down her glass, and wiped her lips with a lace-edged handkerchief and said:—

"Such a pity his teeth stick out."

That September Bianca took a house near Toulon at Carqueiranne, and she and Toby spent week after absurdly blissful week, bathing and sailing; and getting browner and more friendly with each other and more contented with being simply alive. Their cook Jeanne served them aromatic Provençal meals; and Jeanne's moustached and handsome husband Frédéric, who was the gardener, brought them in grapes and discoursed on life in general, and food, marriage, and women in particular. Among his observations he offered to Bianca the statement that women in the costumes now worn on the *plage* were no longer *troublantes*. These women almost naked, he said, have no mystery. His dark eyes rolled in marital approval at Jeanne returning from the *marché*, mysterious in an overall, three or four petticoats, black stockings, and a black kerchief round her head below her straw hat.

When he had gone off to water the flowers Toby said, "What's *troublante* exactly?"

"Sexually disturbing . . . exciting."

"Y-yes."

She glanced at him, realizing suddenly that her companion of these last weeks wasn't only a bronzed, deliciously intimate habit who shared her bathing and her jokes; but what the textbooks called an "adolescent."

"Would you consider," he asked suddenly in his judicial manner, "that sex appeal is what makes people fall in love with each other?"

"Sometimes."

"What is it, do you think? Sex appeal, I mean?"

She hesitated. "I suppose it's a sort of promise."

He looked at her with the intense eager interest that he'd shown at six years old over caterpillars; and then said, "Have you got it, Mummie?"

"Y-yes."

“Does it make people fall in love with you?”

“Sometimes.”

“And . . .” he hesitated. She saw him color, but he was altogether too interested now to stop. “And do you ever feel like falling in love with them —*back*, I mean? Or are you rather . . . past that sort of thing?”

“Oh *Toby*,” she said, and began to laugh, “I’m not *Elizabeth* in the Bible.”

He said, “I don’t think that’s an answer. After all she had John the Baptist.”

“I should hate to have had John the Baptist.”

He smiled, but remarked for at least the fiftieth time in his life, “Mummie, you’re *never* serious!” and went indoors to fetch *War and Peace*, which he was reading because his tutor had recommended it. He made himself read ten pages every day, before he started on a detective novel. But even when he came out again and settled himself on a deck chair Bianca realized that he was still pursuing his same train of thought.

“I suppose,” he said, “it might be a good thing if you were to . . . to settle down sometime. . . . I mean with a companionable person, of course.”

“Of course,” said Bianca, noncommittal, and surprised almost to annoyance.

Back in London her mother, resting between a morning’s golf on Wimbledon Common and an afternoon’s croquet at Ranelagh (“Exercise or Relax” was written by her on an envelope stuck in her mirror), took up the same theme.

“My dear child, it is time you settled.”

“Why should I settle, Mummie? My egg is laid, the chicken is hatched.”

“All the same, your life is *very* extraordinary. No continuity. No proper background.”

“I don’t want a background. All I need is a playground.”

“Very foolish, dear. It will end by no nice man wanting to marry you and your looks will not last forever. Do not make my mistake and go on being a widow indefinitely.”

Her mother always put labels on individuals, making them social species: “young girls,” “young married women,” “middle-aged men,” “nice men.” Bianca looked at herself with her mother’s categorical eye—and saw a “widow no longer so very young” who “must make the best of her chances.”

“Why do you laugh so, child?”

And a week later, when Kalla, on her way from Berlin to Dublin (where she had a Poet), was staying at Ebony, she caught up the same motif: —

“And now that Toby will be a man, Bianca, what do you do with yourself?”

“Just the same,” said Bianca.

“And what is ‘just the same’?”

“Just as I like. I’m still looking for exactly *the life*. I believe really the perfect life is not to have any fixed one. I think I shall give this house to Toby and go and naturalize *Balinese*, like my father did.”

“But you would not like to give up this house, would you, Bianca?”

They were in the garden.

Bianca looked at it.

“No,” she said. “It would break my heart. Perhaps just *Bali-by-the-Sea* for the holidays.”

“But, Bianca, you cannot go on so, always—such a life, of a child always on holidays.”

“N-no?” said Bianca. “Sometimes I think that too.”

“And, *sweet* Bianca,” said Kalla, rolling out her deep tones between her white teeth, “you must fall in love!”

“I can’t,” said Bianca. “And why should I?”

“Or you must live for your Arrt?”

“But I don’t *want* to, Kalla darling. Nobody can live to paint shellfish and orchids on screens and wastepaper baskets.”

“Bianca, you are sweet, but you are not se-erious!”

“Why should I be?”

Kalla bent down, put her hands on the grass, and did two cartwheels. When she was upright again she put her hands in her trouser pockets and said, "One should be at least serious about oneself."

"Least of all about oneself," said Bianca. "But I wish I could do cartwheels!"

In October she went to Dublin with Kalla, left her there, and went on to New York.

In New York she came across Armorelle in Saks's, buying silk stockings. Armorelle had divorced her St. Louis husband in the spring and was now very rich.

She told Bianca that she and Sandy Fane were engaged, and were being married in London in December. She said it was such a good idea really because Sandy had two heavenly houses now that his father was dead; and that he needed her money, and she adored the idea of having a husband like Sandy who really knew everything about Chinese porcelain, and they would never interfere with each other's lives. Bianca said, "I can't think why I didn't try and marry Sandy myself." Armorelle said, "Sweet, you aren't nearly rich enough."

Bianca returned from New York to find a letter from Germany in a handwriting she didn't know.

It was from Anna, telling that Lottie had died of pneumonia following on bronchitis. Anna's letter was terse. She added that she no longer had any reason for staying in Germany and was going to leave, with the journey money she was allowed, and try to get a job in Vienna, where she had friends.

Bianca telegraphed to her at once asking her to come and stay. Anna replied that she would come for a month. Bianca arranged for Toby to go and meet her in Paris, since she herself had to be in London for Sandy and Armorelle's wedding.

Bianca realized that this arrangement showed a curiously Edwardian notion in herself about "young girls" not crossing Paris alone. And then she remembered, the shutter of memory opening with one of its queer little clicks, that years ago she had sat in a hotel bedroom with a blue and white

spotted wallpaper in Ascona, writing to Louis Scheurer that Peter was arriving in Paris and would he meet him.

Toby went anxiously up and down the platform, but at last he saw a girl in black with no hat on and her hair cut like a boy's. (Mummie had said, "She looks like the infant Samuel in your nursery picture.") This girl looked thinner and angrier than the infant Samuel. But then Mummie always saw things looking prettier or queerer than they were so that sometimes her descriptions made them disappointing.

But Toby went up to her and asked her in a carefully prepared phrase of German if she were, by chance, Fräulein Anna?

Her pale face colored.

Yes. She was. She spoke sharply; but, close to, her angry expression seemed more like distress.

"And you? You are Herr Toby Selwyn?"

"Yes."

She put down a battered cane valise and held out her hand and said "How d'you do," in English. And then, "I am afraid my train is late."

He said, relieved, "Oh, you do speak English then."

She nodded. She was pale again. And her grey eyes were clear and very beautiful. (Not a bit soupy and smug like Samuel.) She said, "Oh yes, but not well. Where think you will my trunk be?" She seemed very nervous, but controlling it. He reassured her at once and took her cane valise. When he had ascertained that that and two rucksacks and an umbrella were all her small luggage, he led her off to find the registered baggage, saying eagerly and shyly he hoped she had had a good journey, and wasn't too tired. She shook her head and thanked him. He felt a little afraid of her because she was in black and looked sad and self-possessed and had awful little black fabric gloves on.

While they were getting her trunk through the customs he explained that he had two reservations on the afternoon aeroplane to England, and she said, "You are very kind, and so also is Frau Selwyn." She looked at him, as if she had only just realized that he was there, and began a sentence; and then stopped, coloring again. He said, a little reassured himself at seeing that she was in some embarrassment:—

“What is it?”

She shook her head. “I was only going to ask you a stupid thing.”

“What was it? I’m sure it isn’t stupid.”

She said, “*Ach*—only to ask how old you are. For the Frau Selwyn seemed to be so young.”

“I’m sixteen and a half.”

She nodded gravely. “So? . . . And I seventeen. You are still in the school?”

“Yes.”

“In London?”

“Oh no. I’m at Eton. A Public School.”

“Is that a State School?”

“No.” The porter wheeled her trunk before them. They got into their taxi. Peter looked at his watch and said they would have just time to drive straight to Le Bourget. As they drove through Paris he asked her if she knew it at all. She said no, she had never been out of Germany before.

Then she became silent and looked controlled and miserable, and Peter looked out of the window and pretended he didn’t see how she felt and wondered if he had better talk to her or leave her alone. He decided that probably she would rather he didn’t speak. He thought how desolate it must be for her to have left her country for the first time, in such unhappiness about her mother’s death, with no one left that she cared for, and no money. It made him think of the jolly traveling abroad he’d done with his own mother—the excitement of starting out, the feeling of adventure, the way she had of saying, “Now let’s take fifty pounds and see where the car goes!” Or looking at a map, or reading a book and saying, “Oh, Toby, Burgundy must be lovely; let’s go”; or “Georgia must be curious, let’s go”; or, like last year, “Toby, neither of us has been to Granada. Telephone to Cook’s at once.”

As they got near Le Bourget he said, “You don’t mind aeroplanes, do you? They don’t make you ill?”

She started. Then saw him.

“Please?”

He repeated his question.

“Oh no, thank you. I am used to them when I went sometimes to Berlin to stay.”

When they had started and were sitting opposite each other in the plane Toby had an idea and called the steward and ordered tea. And when it came she ate several pieces of buttered toast and said how good the strawberry jam was. And he was quite hungry himself as he hadn't eaten much luncheon: because he was so nervous about not getting to the station in time to meet her.

She talked a little after tea, and said that she was so pleased to be going to England because her mother had said it was such a restful place. She said, “Of course I will never love any country but Germany, neither could my mother, but,” she paused and glanced round and leaned across the table to say in an undertone, “the present government is *not* good for us. Even if it has made us the greatest nation once more. It has *cost* too much.” She checked herself, glancing round again.

Toby couldn't help smiling. There was so obviously nobody in the plane who could be a Nazi spy. He said so. But she answered, rigid and troubled, that one never knew. Better to talk of other things. They looked down and now they could see the white line of cliffs between the lead-grey sea and the coast.

As they passed over the white line she said:—

“So that is England.”

And as Toby said “Yes,” his heart jumped and sent the blood coursing warm through his body, and he felt proud that the green quilt below with its brown patches was his country. He thought he would like to show it to this German girl, and make her feel, as he did, that although there were lovely places and beautiful scenery all over the world, England was different; and better; and that its green grass and wet-fragrant woods in the autumn, and the kindness and decency of the people in it, and the friendliness of all the little villages, just did, somehow, make it the place one would always want to come back to. He remembered coming across a war poem in an old collection of poetry and he'd liked the lines about

. . . there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.

He'd wondered, as he read it, if the man who wrote it had been killed. . . . And if his father had felt like that.

Looking down now and seeing how the far-below land was darkening, and little clusters of lights beginning where the villages were, he thought that of course a war would be horrible and dreadful and something everyone must try to prevent; but that, if it came, he would want to fight for his country; and that somehow the greenness and the wet woods and lanes, and the decent people and heavenly skies and jolly villages, made up a whole which would be enormously worth dying for.

They had passed Lympe. Toby pointed westward, saying, "That's Kent. That's where we live."

The tone of his voice made her turn; and as she looked into his eager face her expression softened, and her eyes smiled at him.

Anna wanted to work. And it was Ruth's idea that she should come as nursery governess to her children, Rosamund and Bobby.

Since the Hitler dictatorship had been established, Ruth and Harold Platt-Eresby had felt less hostile to Germany. They themselves could not have explained why, except by a vague intimation that there was something sound about Hitlerism. At any rate, the nation which had consisted of "horrible Germans" when it wasn't paying Reparations appeared to her increasingly sympathetic now that it was once more a Militarist State.

Its language was consequently considered more tolerable.

Anna eagerly accepted the job and Bianca argued Ruth into paying her twenty-five shillings a week, although Ruth pointed out that the money had excessive value in marks, and could only make the girl imagine that she was a lady of leisure. And her final concession of the sum was on the condition that Anna paid her own laundry bills and would not expect to have wine or beer.

Since 1930, when Ruth and Harold had had to cut down, they had let Fayrings and leased the Dower House from Carteret, and used the Moon's Green stables. At the time Carteret had liked the plan less than Violet. But she had pointed out that Harold would improve the place, and they would also not be obliged to lend it to Carteret's sister, who was ill and had lost most of her money in 1929 in the American stock market.

Toby drove Anna over to the house (rechristened by Ruth "Moon's Lodge") the day before he went back to Eton. He was sorry when he realized that their companionship of the holidays was over. And was worried by the idea of her working for Cousin Ruth. Anna herself was surprised by how

desolate she felt at leaving him. But she didn't show her feelings and said when he took her into the drawing room that it was a pretty house (a false impression given by the Chinese wallpaper put in by Louis Scheurer for his brief tenancy ten years before).

Ruth came in briskly at the same moment that the parlormaid brought in tea.

"Well, Fräulein Anna. How d'you do. Glad to see you. Hello Toby, *another* new overcoat, I see!"

"It's two years old," said Toby. "Good-bye, Anna . . . and . . . I'll see you in Easter holidays."

"Good-bye, Toby."

"Anna won't have Easter holidays like yours, Toby, my boy."

"Good-bye, Cousin Ruth," said Toby.

When he'd gone Ruth said, "Now we'll have a quick tea and then I'll take you up to the nursery. Miss Jarrett, their last governess, left this afternoon. Sit down, won't you?"

Ruth had grown better looking in the last years. Her cheeks were a hard healthy pink and she used a lipstick. Maternity, hunting, and bridge had broadened her hips, and increased her satisfaction with her path of life.

During tea she questioned Anna about Bianca's housekeeping. Was it true that Bianca had *pâté de foie gras* sent over from Strasbourg by air? And that she allowed her servants to eat Tiptree jam? "Anyway, no Tiptree jam *here*, I'm afraid," said Ruth, brisk and amiable. She said, "And now before we go up I must just tell you about the children. You'll find Rosamund rather inclined to be sulky, I'm afraid. Bobby is more straightforward and sensible, but he seems to be getting ideas into his head lately. Their aunt, Mrs. Lothair (perhaps you've met her—she lives with my father at the other house), gave them both a lot of books at Christmas and it's been difficult to make them play a sensible game since."

"Another guv!" said Bobby drearily.

"A German one will be worse still," said Rosamund.

Miss Jarrett had gone, soppy at the last moment, kissing Bobby's chin. At any moment Mother would bring the new one up.

“Let’s do *something*,” said Rosamund. Their few bursts of intemperance or imagination were always instigated by Rosamund. Bobby waited. Miss Jarrett had left them sitting on the nursery window seat, and they were still there. Rosamund’s round pink face and blue eyes acquired a look of determination. (She was like Carteret, only with mouse-colored pigtails.) She got off the window seat.

“Take off your clothes,” she ordered. Bobby obeyed. She took off hers, and carrying them over her arm went across the landing to the bathroom, Bobby, stolid but interested, padding after her.

She ran on the bath water. It was a big bath. She filled it quite full. Then she got in and ordered Bobby to come in with her. Then she reached out for the sponges. “Now we’ll have a sponge fight,” she said, with as much elation as she could feel about anything. She threw a sponge at Bobby’s head. This made her laugh, but not too loud, because Ellen, the housemaid, was up in the attic floor above, changing to go out. Bobby took the sponge and then, his eyes crinkling up joyfully in his square, rather sad little face, began to suck it. “Oh *Bobby!*” This was *The Crime*. Even Rosamund was shocked.

“It *does* taste good.” He paused between bouts of sybaritic sucking.

Rosamund said, “I expect that’s why we’re not allowed to.”

“Try!” urged Bobby, quite carried away now, his eyes crinkled to dark delighted slits that stared at his sister over the top of the sponge.

Rosamund hesitated. As she did so, she heard her mother’s voice on the stairs; then another voice. Somehow she hadn’t thought they’d come up so soon. “Botheration,” she whispered, more frightened than she wanted Bobby to realize at the idea of Mother catching them. Bobby was climbing gingerly out of the bath, tiptoeing to the door. He pushed the bolt. Rosamund stared at him. Usually so slow to move, and cautious to think, the sponge sucking seemed to have gone to his head. Now he stood petrified, dripping. Mother’s footsteps were coming back from the nursery.

“Bobby?” she asked. “Rosamund?” impatiently.

“I’m giving myself my bath,” said Bobby, in a smug loud tone. “I thought it would be a help.”

“Oh . . . I see. Well . . . where’s Rosamund?”

“She’s gone out to see the new mare.”

Rosamund choked. Bobby was being inspired. The one thing Mother always wanted them to do was to be interested in the horses. Actually they both disliked horses, were bored by riding, and dreaded their Saturday-morning hunting in the winters. They had never dared to tell their parents this. But once when Bobby had begged not to go to meet his mother had taken him up to her room and spanked him. This scene had ended by her saying, “We shall hear you don’t like dogs next!” Goaded out of his stubborn and silent habit, Bobby had screamed that dogs were “extremely boring.” For which his mother, red-faced (and in some terrifying way beside herself), had beaten him again.

Now the suggestion that Rosamund had gone to the stables had its effect. There was a mollified “Oh” outside the door, and then, “Well, I shall leave Fräulein in the nursery.” Then more voices.

They heard Mother’s steps going down the linoleum-covered stairs, and vanish on the carpeted landing below; and new footsteps, light and quick, go towards the nursery.

Quickly Bobby unlatched the door and peeped out. With each new governess they always began by one scene of insubordination; and in the mood of elation induced by nakedness and water they were inclined to have it now.

Bobby shouted, “*Hello!*” after the lady disappearing into the nursery. She turned. She smiled. She was pretty.

“Hello,” he said. “We’re *both* in the bath.” She came. “What do you do?” she said, interested and matter-of-fact. She came to the door and smiled, but a little shyly, at Rosamund.

“We’re in the bath and we’re not allowed to,” said Rosamund, defiant.

“Do you never make a soap slide?” said the Fräulein. “You soap the back of the bath and go in turns.”

She showed them. When the water slopped over she mopped it up. Then she got paper and made boats. Then they all blew bubbles through their hands. Then they played a game in which Rosamund was one of the Lorelei and snared Bobby to a watery death.

When they were tired of these water games, she dried them and fetched their pyjamas, and took out a bag of chestnuts that she had brought with her. They roasted these at the nursery fire, and she told them, in her funny English, a long, rather sad, but lovely story about a mermaid Princess who fell in love with a human Prince.

In April the Platt-Eresby children had an Easter Egg Party. It was the culmination of a long series of activities instigated by Anna, such as their Christmas play, their carnival celebrations, and their Saturday-night fancy-dress dinners which caused Ruth to say to Bianca that if it weren't that Anna was cheaper she wouldn't keep her a week longer; and that the children were getting thoroughly spoiled.

But to Bianca and Charmian, disposed, with Toby, in a row of garden chairs to see the "Easter Dance" which had been prepared for the visitors, the occasion was a charming demonstration of the fact that Ruth would endure even her children's corruption by the most Teutonic traditions to save ten shillings a week on her governess's salary.

While they were waiting Ruth talked about the garden to François, who was staying at Moon's Green and had walked over with Carteret and Charmian. Then there was a faint twanging of strings behind the bedroom screens arranged across the grass. Then the garden boy drew back the screen; and Toby's heart missed a beat as Anna, in a white slip with a wreath of wood violets on her small dark head, appeared perched on Frany's shooting stick, plucking at a guitar. And plain absurd little Rosamund Platt-Eresby came out from behind the rhododendron wearing a wreath of primroses, and moved stiffly forward on the sward, her high uncertain voice and Anna's low sweet voice singing:—

*"Der Mai ist gekommen,
Die Bäume schlagen aus. . . ."*

and stolid little Bobby pranced out from behind the trunk of the copper beach, dressed in a blue bathing suit, and carrying a sheaf of bluebells.

Now both the children sang and, holding hands, danced with awkward pretty feet and flushed cheeks and shining eyes:—

"Der Mai ist gekommen . . ."

Anna's profile was intent on the children, her voice subdued as they sang louder.

Toby heard Bianca say, "Those children are transformed!" And his enchanted heart danced with them and his look turned again to Anna. And he thought he had never seen anyone so lovely or so good.

He didn't hear Ruth say, "Well, I only hope it won't start Rosamund thinking she can dance." Or Harold's embarrassed "Rather pretty, what?" He saw Anna get up and move, absorbed, half smiling, to stand in the centre of

the greensward and Rosamund and Bobby prancing round her, singing louder and flatter in their delight. And Charmian, next to him, said:—

“Anna looks like spring itself,” and saw his look, and caught his shy, ardent “Yes.”

Yet, looking again at Anna’s face and the ingenuous crown of violets, she saw Spring in shadow.

Then again saw how Toby was watching her, possessed by his wonder.

The sweet twanging chords quickened and beat: *Winter ade . . . Scheiden tut weh*. And the stolid little Platt-Eresbys were whirling, hands clasped, prancing like ponies, Rosamund’s wreath tipped back, Bobby’s bluebells ungirdling.

The sun, the grass, the rosy children, the sentimental German spring songs, the lyrical English garden, Anna’s young grace, and Toby’s innocent heaven (its floor so dazzling and bright gold)—were all these things to be destroyed—again?

By one of those chances that make fiction seem too probable, Bianca went to Margate one day in September to see a possible “coach” for Toby (for the following spring); spent half an hour with the old man, who took snuff and cited ducal pupils; and, having lunched at Sam Isaac’s Fried Fish Shop, came out again to find the sky overcast, a drizzle of rain, and Louis Scheurer on the pavement opposite buying prawns off a barrow.

His silhouette in grey flannels and a faded blue cotton shirt against the sands and the grey sea, and the yellow cave of clouds on the horizon, was so unexpected that she checked an exclamation of his name, and crossed the road, expecting to find the resemblance less astounding close to.

But it *was* Louis. The bag of prawns was in his hand now, and as he gave the man a shilling he was saying, in his perfect English voice, one of his American phrases:—

“Perfectly swell-looking prawns. I never saw better prawns . . .” and the prawn man, who had a black eye, the peak of his cap pulled down over it, was obviously reacting to the charm (which, for no reason called into play for the prawn merchant, had lost none of its old glamour). “Tell you what, guv’nor, if you’re partial to prawns and you come back late to-morrer afternoon I’ll let you ’ave double the quantity for tenpence. Eh? What abaht it? Make a tasty supper for you and your missus.”

“Alas!” said Louis, the outer corners of his eyebrows dropping like two seesaws, “I have no . . .” he stopped short— “Bianca! What are *you* doing in Margate?”

As he spoke the wind, which for the last three minutes had merely been idling up and down the promenade, freshening the meaty knees of shopgirls on holiday in shorts, or lifting the hairs on the intrepid chests of bathing businessmen trotting across the wet sands to the sea, suddenly curveted, gathered speed, and in the same moment that it lifted a wave of prawn smell into Bianca’s face gave her beret a push, then a tug, and spun it across the road in front of a tram that was lumbering to its stop, fifty yards on, by the Clock Tower.

“Hell!” said Bianca, shocking but exciting the prawn seller, while the wind flicked her three and only Antoine-trained curls into a spiral above her head, and Louis flung himself in front of the slowing tram, seized the beret, and brought it back, rubbing the little diamond elephant clipped on the front of it with the end of the spotted scarf that was tied round his waist.

“Well! *That* was a narrer squeak!” said the prawn seller, thrusting his hands deep into his sagging pockets and considering Louis with increasing admiration.

“I was an aviator in the last war,” said Louis. “Here, Bianca.”

“It’s no use trying to put it *on*,” said Bianca, and rolled up the beret angrily.

“Will it go in your bag?” said Louis.

It did.

“Can’t offer you no prawns, I s’pose, lady?”

“Not just now, thank you,” said Bianca. “You see, I’m only here for the day.”

“*That* don’t matter, lady, ’undreds of my customers is only ’ere from Lundin fer ther day. Takes a few back as a relish for supper when they get ’ome.”

“Where are you going?” said Louis.

“*Je vais où le vent me mène* . . . I don’t know. To the Pier, I expect.”

“So am I,” said Louis.

They turned to go together.

“I’ll come back,” said Bianca to the prawn man.

“Rightcha, lady! Good day, lady! Good day, sir!”

“. . . But *what* are you here for, Louis?”

“My book.”

“Your *book*?”

“I’m studying English conditions—at the moment. . . . I asked the man who runs the coffee stall by the Albert Bridge in Chelsea, and who is my friend, ‘Where do most English people get most happiness?’ He said, ‘At the seaside.’ I asked, ‘Which seaside?’ He said, ‘Any old seaside.’ I asked him where he went. He said once a year to Margate. So here I am.”

“But no one knows you’re in England?”

“I’m here to work.”

“Where are you staying?”

“In lodgings. The most perfectly English thing in the world. To exactly such lodgings Maman allowed my Nannie once to bring me when I was a little boy, and had been ill. . . . Only it was at Broadstairs, which is near here. . . . I have a landlady from a *Punch* of 1890 . . . her hair in a pompadour. There is always an excellent fire in the sitting room—which has a view of the beach and pink paper flowers on an overmantel. And the bath water is never hot. But the shaving water brought me in the morning is boiling. And at the same time she herself brings my tea, the color of Tokay . . . and white thick bread and butter with an indescribable rich delicious taste (that I remember also from my visit with Nannie). And the bacon and eggs are a marvel. And every morning she says, ‘Not such a bad day to-day, sir,’ or ‘I think you’ll get your dip all right to-day, sir,’ although I have never shown the least inclination to bathe in that glacial sea!”

He turned and pointed out where his “rooms” were, in the terrace of little, early Victorian houses across the bay. “Very Dickens,” he said.

She said, yes, there were whole stretches of the sea front where, sometimes when you were alone, you could hardly walk for the crinolines. And on the beach the Bathing Machines would come around a loop of Time like the cars at Brooklands.

They reached the Pier and followed in the drift of the crowd. Halfway down the Pier they could see the band playing to a semicircle of serried people in deck chairs with their collars turned up and umbrellas in readiness.

The wet wind blew splinters of music past them, but the waves swirling below, and the talk and jostling round them, made the tune itself a far-off thudding in the air.

“Come along! Come along!” shouted a shabbily dapper Jew behind a trestle table set out with coins stuck down to be caught in wooden rings. “Come on, ladies an’ gentlemen. Come an’ try. Have a try. You come in rags and you go away in Rolls-Royces. You come in . . .”

Bianca spent ninepence, throwing the little hoops. The hoops always fell a fraction of an inch wrong.

“Try again, lady?”

“Not again.”

He turned from her. “Come along, ladies and gentlemen. Come along . . . come on . . . You come in rags and you go away in Rolls-Royces.”

She followed Louis into the covered hall. He shot five cardboard cats off a wall, but the woman said the last cat hadn’t fallen in the right place, so he’d just missed getting the box of chocolates. He said, “Ski-Ball is a better game. Pure art. No prizes.”

The man at the Ski-Ball stand knew him. “Good day, sir. Good afternoon, sir.”

They both played until Bianca was discouraged and went off to find out her fortune in the Gipsy-Wheel machine. For a penny she got a verse warning her against her mother-in-law. For another penny a picture, tram-ticket size,—a cottage and a postman going in at the gate,—“A letter from your Adorer.”

Then they went to a row of machines below a notice, PARIS NIGHTS.

Louis gave her some pennies. “You look in and turn the handle.”

She turned. A caption, “The Model’s Revenge.” A lady in a camisole and corsets and her hair down, sitting on an iron bedstead. In comes a wickedly smiling man with a pointed beard, and seizes her by the shoulders. She takes a pistol out of the front of her camisole. Shoots. Blank out.

The next, “The Sultan’s Favorite.” A lady all veils, yashmak, two dark eyes. The yashmak off . . . the head veil off . . . more veils off. Revelation of corsets, chemise, suspenders. The lady in a convulsion of coyness turns her back, but looks over her shoulder, rolling her eyes. The corsets fall off. The chemise begins to slip down her back. Blank out.

“Very unwholesome,” said Bianca. “The mayor ought to do something.”

“On the contrary, I expect the mayor comes here alone at night, before retiring with the mayoress.”

“Mayors don’t sleep with mayoresses,” said Bianca. “Let’s go up to the other end of the Pier and do the try-your-strength, and the cricket and football games.”

But halfway up the Pier was a red tent. “Flea Circus. Entrance Sixpence Adults. Children Half Price.”

Inside the tent was dark and warm: a circle of light concentrated on a miniature ring on a table; over it presiding, dim and godlike, a man in a brown suit.

“Come in, come in, ladies an’ gentlemen . . . just in time to see Polly do her balancing act.”

He held out a stick the size of a match. On the end of it a loganberry-colored flea lay on its back, its legs in the air, and balanced a minute fragment of wood, keeping on moving it from leg to leg, keeping it going steadily, incessantly. “Good Polly,” he murmured honeyed approval, and set her down at last. “It takes three hundred and fifty times, putting back that bit of wood on her legs, to train her to that! Now then, Polly, back in your bed, dear.” A box as long as a thimble was padded with cotton wool. He laid her in.

“See,” he said to Bianca, “that piece of copper wire round her body. . . . They all have that. Then they can’t hop too far!”

A darker flea, addressed as “Emperor,” pulled a tiny cart three times round the ring. Then a ballet. Six smaller creatures, described as “girls,” in infinitesimal paper ballet skirts, blue, pink, yellow. . . . Their trainer applauded their activities.

“Do they practise every day?” Louis asked.

“Do they not? Reg’lar as clockwork . . . otherwise they’d forget, you see. . . . Have to keep ’em training.” He laid them finally back in their several “beds”!

“How d’you feed them?” asked Bianca.

The man rolled up his left sleeve. The inside of his arm from wrist to elbow was speckled red, and “reg’lar as clockwork every morning before I have me own breakfast,” he said.

On their way off the Pier they stopped at a shop whose dark small windows were piled high with enamel pails, celluloid "hair tidies," calendars, shell boxes, and ring stands all inscribed "A Present from Margate." They went in; and Louis bought Bianca a small hand mirror set in shells; and she bought him a little box decorated with shells and lined with red velvet. Both had on them "A Present from Margate."

They took the prawns back to Louis's lodgings, and gave them to his landlady to send up for tea. The landlady, Mrs. Peck, came up to the sitting room and laid the best lace cloth over the green plush one on the round table. The green one had green bobbles all round it.

There was a lovely glowing coal fire. The two windows draped in starched lace curtains faced out over the promenade. It had begun to rain; and the wind blew the rain against the windows and rattled them. Louis poked the fire with the inexpert hand of the Latin. Bianca took the poker from him and the flames danced up.

Mrs. Peck brought up their tea. She said, "I'll leave the kettle on the 'ob and then you won't have to ring for more 'ot water. I give the prawns a good rinse, Mr. Shorer! And is there anythink more you want?"

There couldn't have been.

They had so often been together. But it seemed to Bianca that until this afternoon, this raining, rattling, blowy, prawn-smelling afternoon, they had never met. And now they met head-on, with a crash of high spirits, with an impact of delight, that set the aquatinted Victorian panorama of Margate Harbor, outside the windows, quivering and shimmering, as if it were reflected from a magic-lantern slide into the pearled concavity of the lower sky.

They began to eat.

There were hot buttered toast and currant and plain bread and butter and potted meat (chicken and ham) and two sorts of jam (strawberry and apricot) in glass dishes, and macaroons and gingerbread and Chelsea buns and seed cake. "Mr. Shorer is very partial to macaroons," Mrs. Peck said to Bianca. "I get them from Fasham's in Cliftonville. Theirs are always fresh." Mrs. Peck went.

They sat opposite each other at the table and Bianca poured out tea; and the buttered toast and the prawns tasted so good that Louis began to feel that Bianca was the best company in the world; and Bianca felt that she would like to go on indefinitely having tea with Louis like this in a glow of

irrational gayety and agreeable surfeit, with pink paper roses on the overmantel and red silk shades on the lamps, and the kettle whistling softly to itself by the fire—and outside, the rain and the sands and the sea.

He saw her off at the station. A sudden chill. Bleary lamps.

“*Lundintrine! . . . Lundintrine!*”

She got into a carriage. She said:—

“It *has* been fun.”

“Immense fun.” (Odd English word, “fun.” What did it mean? Not just gayety. Something more intangible, but more mutual; as incalculable, as irrational in its happening, as falling in love.)

“Shall you work—to-night?” (I wish I wasn’t going . . . I wish . . .)

“Probably.” (A pity she wasn’t staying . . . amusing to have had dinner together . . .)

The guard’s whistle.

“Good-bye, Louis.”

“Good-bye, Bianca.”

The train moving out, slowly, faster. He almost said, “When shall I see you again?” Somehow didn’t. And the train was moving out, and she wasn’t looking out of the window any more.

Louis returned to Paris in October to settle down for a winter’s work.

Now that his material was collected, he could stay in one place and organize his existence for work. In default of other sensations, there was, he found, an excitement in this deliberate scientific administration of his own time-plus-energy. His *masseur* came at seven; and left him exercised by eight, when he took a hot bath, a cold shower; and then, in a dressing gown and slacks, paced about drinking his coffee, brought by Celimène, and smoking his two cigarettes, rationed to him by Zamorr. At nine he began writing. He wrote until one. At one he lunched, Celimène always slipping in from the kitchen to see if he was eating well the nourishing dishes she prepared for him. After luncheon, and two more cigarettes, he dressed, perfunctorily; was shaved by Zamorr and went out, to walk in the Tuileries for half an hour. He came back by three-thirty and slept for an hour. Then his

dressing gown again; more coffee, and work until eight, when he dined. (No meat. Half a carafe of red wine; more coffee; two more cigarettes.) Then, from nine until midnight, or later, more work.

Yet even in this rhythm there were unreckoned pauses, and interrupting moods. And in those pauses, when his thought simply failed to use his material, he found himself wondering whether this artificial and deliberate isolation for work wasn't, obscurely, a defiance of his much more real isolation in everyday life.

For it was just when he wasn't at work, as during this last summer, that he was increasingly aware of being alone. The very complexity of his sympathy and comprehension that made him so many friends made him feel alone among them; and the qualities that he loved in his friends, which were simple qualities, courage, gayety, sensibility, made him aware of tortuousness in himself. (And the incidental sorts of love which had distracted and deliciously maddened him ten years before now left him angry and embittered by the facility of the whole game.)

He felt that his life now was like going down a street alone on a raw evening when the people in the houses had put on the lights and piled up the fire; and their curtains weren't yet drawn, so that he could see in. He could see them talking, laughing and bickering, and eating inside their little glowing theatres. They were safe against the dark out of which he saw too clearly; cheerful in their denial of solitude, complacent in their jolly, rather foolish "belonging"; their lives made up of this belonging (of this cohesion of emotions and habits and possessions) as prettily and naïvely as the little box Bianca had given him that day at Margate was created by the sticking together of small shiny shells and cardboard and red velvet.

Sometimes when he felt that this notion of being "different" was becoming an obsession with him he knocked off work and spent an evening with a crowd of friends. And, for a few hours, got a reassuring sense of being *in* life again; as if the surrounding pressure of their cheerfulness and certainty solidified him.

But always, after a time, he felt himself disintegrating again in the midst of their accepted realness. Or felt that they were somehow fake.

François, who was himself working hard on a play, attributed Louis's depression to overwork, and warned him to eat lightly. (Prolonged success, and with it security, had had the effect of bringing out a strain of peasant good sense in François.)

Marie de Montcontour was the only person Louis saw that winter who understood that neither rest nor six months of light meals would cure him.

He went to see her from time to time in her same apartment in the Avenue Gabriel. She would receive him, always lying on her sofa, svelte and moulded in white lace that reached up to her chin and swirled down over her ankles, revealing her feet in slippers of emerald satin. And always it was as if the renewal of their conversation were what she had been waiting for.

Her old Paulette brought their tea herself, so as to see “M’sieu Louis” again; and set the tray on the low lacquer table beside madame, saying, “V’là M’sieu Louis again, who hasn’t changed at all!” and then, “Madame equally—she hasn’t changed,” and would start gossiping to Louis until Marie dismissed her.

Then Marie would pour out tea, as she began to talk about a book, or a character or an occasion, which had diverted her. (François had said of her once that there was “no flower, even an artificial one, in which she didn’t discover honey.”) And Louis listened, his spirit anchored for an hour or so in the familiar warmth and bric-a-brac of the room, among the velvet chairs and leopard skins and Japanese embroidered cushions and Chinese jade ornaments, and the inevitable freesia—a flower that he disliked but always associated with Marie.

She only once spoke to him about himself that winter. It was a dark February afternoon when he came in shivering and depressed, the back of his neck and shoulders aching with the dank cold, his eyes hot from working for two days in artificial light. And she was struck by his appearance, asking him if he was ill. He denied it, annoyed. He said he must try to get his old Swedish *masseur* back again, who made him sleep better.

Marie said that he was working too hard, and old Paulette waddled off to make him a “grog.” And Marie, noticing the weariness of his movements that had always been so swift and graceful, said, “Louis, you’ll wear yourself out with work.” He pulled one of the cushions off a divan and sank down cross-legged near the fire.

“Life isn’t so amusing.”

“It ought to be, at your age.”

“I’m not my age.”

She said, “That’s true also . . . but you were born so. That isn’t what is wrong now.”

When Paulette had brought the grog and gone unwillingly away, he said:

—
“No. That isn’t what’s wrong. But it’s probably the cause.”

She asked:—

“What is wrong then?”

She looked at him; the firelight lit him sitting there cross-legged and his arms crossed, his features like a red-metaled idol. He said:—

“I’m alone. Or else I’m obsessed with the idea that I’m alone.” He added, still staring long-eyed and immobile into the fire, “I used to live on people for the excitement and emotion and charm they would give me. One’s hell is made in one’s life, to measure! Mine fits me perfectly.”

“Why?”

“Now I have a sort of terror of all human intimacy.”

“And yet it’s that that you need.”

His strange glance moved from the fire to her.

“And my little Inferno,” he said, “is precisely that paradox.”

Louis broke off work at the end of March. For as spring came his writing seemed more and more irrelevant. The very early mornings began to come in and wake him with their fresh sweetness, so that he would get up, and go on to his balcony, high above the Tuileries, and see, far across the Concorde, the first sun strike the golden statues on the Pont Alexandre III. The lengthening days disturbed him with their warmth and blooming light. The evenings plucked at his nerves.

He shut his manuscripts into a drawer: told Zamorr to pack for him, and sent Charmian a telegram. Before he went he telephoned to Marie to say that he was going to England for a week. She said, “I believe you are in love with that Englishwoman.” He said, “I am never in love,” and he heard her low disturbing laughter . . . “How arrogant you are.”

At Moon’s Green he found the explanation of François’s postcard, written from there on his last visit. “Here is the New Madonna, with an Elder, and a Saint. A sort of Triptych in which one sees, on the left, the Elder holding up a glass of port in one hand and caressing a water spaniel with the

other; in the centre the Madonna clasping ten children upon her fragile knees; on the right the Saint carrying a wand of suède cerise and holding open on her knee a volume of the *Bibliothèque Rose*."

François's picture was realized by the group which Louis, arriving after tea, discovered in the library. In an armchair sat Carteret, rosy and complacent, holding, not a glass of port, but a toy aeroplane which he was about to launch across the room. Opposite him, in another armchair, sat Mademoiselle Houville. On the fender stool sat Charmian, banked up with little girls in pink smocks and little boys in blue ones.

She sprang up so that the children seemed to tumble off and from her, and Mademoiselle Houville and Carteret began picking them up and setting them on their plump legs again, as if they were the pawns in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Charmian said, "Did François tell you?"

Louis looked from her to the children and began again trying to count how many there were. He said:—

"François referred to this. But more or less in images."

"You know Mademoiselle Houville? She is the *directrice*."

"How many?" said Louis.

"Twenty. Ten boys and ten girls. Adopted. The nurseries here were so dreadfully unused."

Later in the evening, when Carteret had gone for his "last turn" in the garden, and Mademoiselle Houville had gone up to make her final round of the nurseries, Charmian told him the whole story of what had been less a deliberate project than a suddenly "good idea." How on her return, instead of having "nothing left" (for Lothair had lost all her money for her), she had found that she had Peter's money, and that her father was going to leave Moon's Green to her, and the London house to her mother. She had, quite incidentally, invited Mademoiselle Houville to stay with her, and they were discussing how she, Charmian, could now arrange her life when Anna came in to see her, and joining in said that Charmian ought to take Ruth's children and bring them up. And so, somehow, the "plan" had grown out of that chance remark of Anna's. . . . It was easy enough to adopt the children.

Louis said, "It's all so incredibly Charmian."

“Bianca says it’s just ‘highly organized Barrie.’”

Louis said a little sharply, “Bianca is always even a little deliberately beside the point. She prefers it. When she wears a rose it must be a green one.” He went on, “The truth is that you were always most capable of loving where you were most needed. You were always either a child or a mother.” He glanced at her, still, with her Madonna face and absurdly coltish limbs. “You have, perhaps, that strange English quality which makes you at the same time fantastic and practical, but never altogether grown-up.”

She nodded; and then startled him by saying, “I know. Haunting their own nurseries.”

It was the first time he had ever heard her ironical. But she changed the direction of their talk, asking him, “But you, Louis? I chatter about my ‘false family.’ Tell me what’s happening to you?”

He said, “Apparently my work. Essentially nothing. I see my friends. I avoid my enemies.”

“But the future?”

“I suppose when I have finished this book I shall wait, and then, like a reliable hen, I shall lay another.”

“Is that enough?”

“No, my dear. But that’s all.”

“But Louis. Where are you going? What are you going to make of your life? You’re still young.” . . . In her voice was exactly the gesture with which he had seen her turn to a stumbling two-year-old that had fallen and, tortoise-like, couldn’t get on to its feet again. “What do you want?” she insisted.

He answered her in the brittle voice and with an access of charm which, by making him suddenly into a stranger, had always been his defense against intimacy.

“I want, like everyone else, to be quite perfectly happy.”

Mademoiselle Houville hadn’t yet begun to undress, and was finishing a letter to her sister in the Dordogne, when there was a knock at her door.

“Come in!”

It was Bianca. Bianca was staying at Moon's Green, having lent her own house to Anna, as much to annoy Ruth as to give Anna a refuge—after Ruth had dismissed her.

“May I come in? For ten minutes?”

“But of course. Come and sit by my lovely fire.”

Bianca said, “I don't know why I should disturb you, Mademoiselle.”

“You don't disturb me. You know that.” Mademoiselle Houville glanced at her. She had been interested in her renewed meetings with Bianca, by the way in which a girl who, though lively, had been so essentially sensitive and serious had developed into a woman whose motive in living seemed to be to avoid either feeling or thinking deeply. Watching her from day to day, she had perceived both how charming and how unsatisfactory such a woman must be, to others—and surely, in the end, to herself? And a certain sparkling beguiling quality in her which came from what seemed a deliberate shallowness in her nature—as if she had deflected and widened the flow of her own life to ripple easily and swirl and tumble prettily.

The result was, in effect, so pretty, so agreeable, that at first Mademoiselle Houville herself had believed that Bianca's problems had, in contrast to most people's, grown simpler with time. Then she had perceived, not condemning, but surprised, that Bianca hadn't solved any problems, but simply eliminated them; and that she had, by some process of self-detachment, freed herself of moral, practical, or emotional problems altogether. So that she was startled when Bianca now lifted a face marked by an inner conflict, the eyes shadowed, the usual bloom of inconsequence wiped off her whole expression, and said:—

“Is Louis Scheurer in love with Charmian?”

“Louis Scheurer? . . . With Charmian? Why do you think so?” (And why should Bianca care, with that man Langridge cabling and writing to her incessantly?)

“I believe you know that she is?” Bianca said this, smiling.

“My dear child, I know nothing. That he saw her in Paris often, that I know. And that he stayed here a few weeks ago.”

“She had a letter from him to-day—this evening.”

“My dear Bianca, I don't look at Charmian's letters.”

Bianca flushed. “Nor do I . . . but I couldn’t help seeing . . . the stamp and the notepaper, and then the writing. And when she opened it, I couldn’t help seeing her expression.”

Mademoiselle Houville looked at her.

“I know nothing. But whatever Charmian has, she deserves.”

“—Only why hasn’t she told me? . . . It seems so strange.”

“Perhaps she feels that you are so much occupied with your own life.”

She replied quickly enough, “Herbert Langridge isn’t my life.”

“What is he then? Isn’t everything you do ‘your life’?”

She defended, “The things you don’t feel don’t matter.”

“You make a mistake, Bianca. It seems to me, and has seemed so to many wiser and greater than I, that everything matters. It is both one’s misfortune and perhaps one’s salvation that one cannot eliminate any of one’s acts and thoughts from the fabric of one’s existence.” She added, following her own train of thought: “And the faults one confesses remain in the fabric, even when their commission has been absolved. As I see the thing there is a perpetual process in the creation of a character, which helps either to create or to destroy. . . . And above all,” she said, “it seems to me that the things that one wishes to believe ‘don’t matter’ are the most insidious acts of self-destruction.”

“In that case,” said Bianca, with a sudden hostility, “I must be altogether destroyed.” Yet almost as she finished the sentence her expression changed, and she threw herself on her knees, saying, “I know you’re right *really*—only . . .”

Mademoiselle Houville felt her hands, chill and nervous in hers.

“What is it really, my child?”

“I . . . don’t really know.”

“Then let us talk of other things. You have heard that Ruth and her husband will now go abroad to Egypt and the children are to come here? To add to Charmian’s family?”

Next morning Mademoiselle Houville came down to find Charmian, puzzled, saying, “Bianca has gone off to Paris by early boat from Folkestone!”

Celimène's voice:—

“There is the *masseur* for m'sieu.”

Louis stirred. Turned over. Woke up.

“Tell him to wait . . .”

He had worked until three: mechanically; more under the nervous pressure created by his fear of his own inactivity than through interest in the work; which had seemed, for weeks now, stale and unprofitable.

He dragged himself out of bed.

“Zamorr!” He started taking his shower.

Zamorr came and rubbed him down: watching his face to catch the exact inflection of his mood. Celimène was tidying the bed in the next room.

“It's a beautiful day, Mistah Louis,” said Zamorr, reassuring.

Celimène said as he came back into the bedroom, “There was a lady who telephoned last night. But I said that monsieur was still in England.”

“What lady? Zamorr, tell the *masseur* he can come.”

“I didn't ask her name,” said Celimène. “It wasn't worth while since I told her that monsieur was away.”

When the *masseur* had given his quick bow and gone Louis walked about his bedroom, pausing to sip his coffee, to light another cigarette, to look at the newspaper, which was mainly preoccupied with the coming Coronation in London. It seemed a pity, since the majority of people get such pleasure out of a Coronation, not to have them regularly in every capital, instead of World Fairs and Expositions which cost as much and did less for the hotel trade.

He was pouring out his second cup of coffee and looking for grains of political news among chunks of anticipatory coronational description, when Bianca came in, wearing a crimson evening coat, and said, “I knew Celimène was lying. Give me some of that lovely smelling coffee. I've been up all night and I feel very dissipated.”

He glanced at her face.

“You look it.” He rang for Zamorr and ordered coffee for her. “Why stay out all night? Like a *débutante*.”

“Sentimentality.” She lay back on the chaise longue and put her feet up.

“How?” As she was arranging a cushion behind her head he realized that he was pleased at her being suddenly here, with him. An odd, acute sort of pleasure: that had in it a quality of relief; as though her coming in like this (unexpected and unwanted) had changed some element in the room, or in his mood, from ill to well. “How sentimentality?” he repeated.

She said, “David reappeared yesterday. He seemed so sweet . . . We dined together. And it was a lovely evening, and we drank a lot of armagnac and David kept saying we ought to get married, and I knew we oughtn’t, but I didn’t want to say so, so we stayed up and danced and motored out to Versailles for the sunrise, and at last he felt sleepy—he gets sleepy quite suddenly, so we came back and I left him at his hotel, but the Quai de Conti (I’ve taken it from Nicky now) seemed gloomy, so I came here.”

“Not very coherent. Here’s your coffee. All the same, why not marry David?”

Zamorr put the tray on a table beside her.

“. . . Because I shall probably marry Herbert Langridge.”

“What?”

“Why not?”

“That male *cow*?”

“Louis *dear*! A male cow is an ox, anyway.”

“Wrong again. Your insult is worse than mine.”

She pushed back her hair with a familiar gesture that again, simply in itself, gave him that feeling of pleasure . . . that queer sudden feeling of relief.

“I’m too sleepy anyway for these subtleties.”

He said, “Why did you telephone last night, anyway? What can I do for you?”

She shut her eyes and yawned. “I just wanted someone to play with.”

“I see. Well, I’m afraid I’m hard at work.”

She didn’t make any comment. She didn’t look at him and drank her coffee as if she had abruptly forgotten that he was in the room. Then she said, “What a pity”; and then, after another interval of detachment or sleepiness, he couldn’t make out which, she said, “And you were *such* fun at Margate!”

He said, "That is probably the virtue of Margate. The *élan* of the Pier deserts me in Paris." He added, "When David wakes up he will play with you . . . or the legitimate or *almost* legitimate Langridge."

She got up, sighed, thanked him for the coffee, and went.

When she had gone Zamorr, coming in to take the tray, said: —

"Mrs. Selwyn is certainly lookin' beautiful, Mistah Louis."

Louis didn't answer. But at luncheon Celimène came in, on a pretext of finding out if the duck pleased him, and remarked that Madame Selwyn was very much changed. He said, sharply, that she hadn't slept last night.

"*Tiens!*" said Celimène. And added, "So much the worse for her."

He had just settled to work in the afternoon when Bianca came back. She was smiling and fresh with sleep. She said that she was hiding from David and Herbert, and meant to spend the afternoon reading quietly on his sofa and not disturbing him.

He said, "Very well. If that amuses you."

She chose three books out of the shelves. He sat down at his desk, turning his back on her, deliberately focusing his mind on to his work; but an awareness of her growing on his senses as if she had been a fire lighted in a cold room.

He went on writing for nearly two hours. (It was the "English section," and his thought wrote itself into satisfactory patterns on the page.) Then, without intention, he turned round and glanced at her. The three books were lying on the floor beside her: and she was looking at him. He felt a black-out (as in a flash of danger too swift to be realized). Then, as his voice said, "I thought you were asleep," he felt his heart beating in thick syncope.

He saw her color and grow pale again.

Then she was getting up and saying she must go. Just as she was going he asked her if she wanted to come to breakfast again to-morrow morning. She answered noncommittally, putting on her veil in front of the glass and looking at her own reflection as if she had never seen her face and her hat before.

When she had gone he picked the three books up off the floor and took them to the shelves to put them back. Then he hesitated, and turning away from the shelves put them on his desk beside his manuscript; and, sitting down with the idea of working, still kept his hand on them.

That evening he went to see Marthe.

He began to talk about Bianca, indifferently but with analytical persistence. He was surprised when Marthe said that only yesterday Bianca had been to see her, after several years. She had come with Nathalie. “She is beautiful,” Marthe said, “but it is true, what Nathalie said of her . . . there is at the same time something childish . . . a sort of freshness in her expression, and an exhaustion.”

“She is both restless and asleep,” Louis said. “She is incurious as if her eyes didn’t see what other people see. . . . She is elusive, escaping the things that hold others.”

“Yes. She is asleep,” Marthe said. “But if she were to love . . .”

“She is incapable of love.”

“No one who has loved is incapable of love. On the contrary I think it is the one thing they desire always to find again . . . the thing that has an absolute value which makes everything else in life relative, comparatively inessential.”

He was silent.

“. . . And what matters in love isn’t what one gets but what one feels. Perhaps to love most completely is simply to know with one’s whole heart that the other person exists.” When she spoke again she said, “So Peter loved you.” Louis started. Looked at her. She met his look.

He said, “And so you loved him . . .”

“Yes.”

“And so, just in that, I failed.”

She said swiftly, touching his hand, “But you were . . . almost unreal all those years. . . . You saw so much, yet only half saw . . . half realized. . . . You were so brilliant—and so stupid, so gay, and so unhappy. . . . You were incapable of love . . . then.”

“Elusive? . . . incurious? . . . asleep?”

She took his hand.

“Yes. Then. But not now.”

As he got up she said with a sudden simplicity, “Sometimes one forgets that happiness is possible; that it is a natural thing, that can be found—and

kept.” She added, kissing him good-night, “Think of that, my dear. . . .”

Bianca came the next morning, too elaborately dressed and in that state of tiresome gayety which she had learned from the *Galère*: its tricks of speech being chiefly Bengy; its malice derived from Sandy Fane; its perfunctory indecencies imitations of Nicky. During the half hour in which she stayed, partly in the *salon*, then out on the balcony, then in again, she gave a long, rambling, not really amusing account of the evening before, which she had spent with Herbert Langridge at the Tabarin.

Louis said, “It will be very suitable.”

“What will?”

“Your marriage to Langridge.”

“So will yours, to Charmian.”

He stared. “What an insipid joke.”

“It isn’t.”

“My dear Bianca!”

“It would be *very* suitable.”

“But, my dear, there isn’t any question.”

She hesitated, watching him; then dismissed the matter with an abrupt, “People always say that,” and began talking very fast about Bengy’s new plan that he and she should go into partnership and go round staying with only very rich people and making them realize that if they didn’t have their whole houses redecorated she and Bengy would tell, on their visit to the next people, how appalling their taste was.

“Interior Decoration through Blackmail?” said Louis. This talk was pure Bengy and came rippling from her lips irrelevant to the expression in her eyes. She went on about Bengy’s new bed, which was two locked in one, pink sheets on one half, blue on the other, and he changed sides according to his mood and called it *le lit androgyne*. . . . This went on, Louis watching her face. Suddenly she stopped.

“I’m boring you.”

“Not at all. I am very interested.”

She said, speaking in her own voice now, in her own hesitant sweet tones, “That isn’t true. I can feel that. The truth is that you find me tiresome.

You always have . . . or, nearly always.”

He said, “Do you really believe that, Bianca?”

“I—feel it. I’ve so often felt you were hostile. . . . Not always. That was exaggerated.”

“Not nearly always . . . but you have twenty masks, and a good many of them seem to be designed by someone like Bengy. They have a sort of chic, but . . .” His tone was impersonal, nervous, a little impatient. “I prefer you unmasked.”

“Nobody in the least adult or civilized goes about ‘unmasked’ . . . and most people are infinitely better with cardboard faces painted to match their conversation.”

“Not you,” he said.

She began some light easy protest.

He said, “So many people are unconsciously fools. But you are a fool on purpose. You organize and perfect your own foolishness.” He spoke with a sort of tranquil bitterness now, not looking at her, but going to the window and looking out at the hard white sky. “You could be the most heavenly woman in the world . . . but you’re too selfish. . . . You could feel and know and understand . . . only you’re too lazy. . . . You could be perfect in friendship, if you weren’t always, all the time, either amused, or dreaming, or obsessed by some profound impulse, that I don’t understand, to *escape!* . . . Escape what? Escape feeling? Escape living?” He added, after a pause, “If you weren’t always in this sort of silly dancing flight you might have been the woman whom all men desire; the woman who doesn’t exist . . . whose possessing is an unbelievable and ultimate peace.”

Still he looked out. Paris below like a map; cold grey and white; squares of dull green.

She couldn’t speak.

He said, with the same quiet indifferent bitterness, “We might even have loved each other.”

She heard herself saying:—

“I’m sorry. I think I must go. I’m lunching.”

He said, “Don’t let me keep you.” (*She’s hurt. She’s in pain.*)

“I’m not sure what the time is.” (*I’ve never liked him.*)

“It’s half-past twelve.” (*I’m glad she’s hurt.*)

“Half-past twelve?” (*Only he’s been there . . . he’s been there, for a long time, now.*) “How long will it take me to get to Bougival?”

“About half an hour, if you’re going by car.” (*She’s going now.*)

“I shall go in a taxi.” (*But since when has he been there? Since Margate? Since the Embassy? Since Céligny?*)

“If you go in a taxi it will probably take you about forty minutes.” (*In forty minutes she’ll be ten miles away: she’s hurt; she’s angry; she’s afraid; she won’t come back.*)

“Then I shan’t be very late. I told them one o’clock.”

“Then you’ll only be ten minutes late.”

“They’ll probably be later than I.” (*He hates me. I’m going away. Once I’m away, in a taxi going to Bougival, I shall forget. And so will he. But he was there . . . even at Céligny. . . . And even in that white and blinding sun, and the hatred and shining terror spinning round us both, at Davos . . . he was there.*)

Herbert was waiting for her at Bougival.

The warmth of the spring weather had caused the proprietor of the little restaurant to set out a few of the tables on the gravel above the slope of the river. And Herbert, getting up to welcome her, looked seasonable, and rather endearingly portly, in his light flannel suit and an extraordinarily American Panama hat.

He had ordered the luncheon already, and remarked, indulgently, that he had called up to find out if she was awake yet.

She said, brusquely, that she had been out before ten, and had been shopping with a friend. Herbert had a way of assuming that she was a late riser because many of her friends were. She repeatedly told him that she breakfasted at eight whatever time she went to bed. But it was one of the facts, like her distaste for champagne, that he simply didn’t bother to believe. Thus if he ever called her up before nine and found her awake he said, “What! Awake already?” And whenever he ordered champagne and she refused it he said that he knew she was really just as moderate in her tastes as he was: and never observed that when he ordered a wine she liked she drank several glasses and laughed more, and was more affectionate.

They sat down opposite each other at the little table and he laid his hand over hers, and asked her if she'd had a successful morning shopping? He added that she looked "a little weary" (a word she hated) and that he was afraid that she wasn't taking enough care of herself.

But when he realized she was getting nervy and cross he just seized both her hands and burst into one of his long friendly chuckling laughs at her, and said, "*You'll* be all right *soon!* Wait till you've had some of your beloved garlic-sausage!" and rocked again, looking so large and sane, his white teeth and brown nose shining and a certain oaflike heartiness about his chuckle, that the little bouts of emotional pain she'd been having in the taxi all the way out from Paris began to seem unreal, and that last ten minutes with Louis lost dimension and became like a picture seen fleetingly in the corridor of a strange house.

The proprietor himself brought the *hors d'œuvre* and Herbert told him that madame liked "salamis," but he (Herbert) didn't. The proprietor, an adroit and gentle little man in a black suit and an apron, appreciated both these facts with polite smiles. His manner towards them made Bianca imagine a scientifically trained keeper attending to Monsieur the Bear and Madame his lady friend the Marmoset. But she only said, "What a French type that is!" For she knew Herbert well enough by now to realize that that sort of fancy would annoy his sense of the dignity of man. Whereas any conversation that admitted, however obliquely, the magnificence of the Human Spirit elated him; and, whether its actual matter were love or disease or arctic exploration, caused him to say, sooner or later, "An astonishing creature, Man!"

"Well, and how long are you going to stop in Paris *now?*" he asked, smilingly, but she thought, her perceptions keyed as they were, that she felt a dim but wide purposefulness behind his question.

"I don't know. Not long."

"Gone with the wind—as usual," he said. He chose out some olives for her himself, and put them on her plate. He had beautiful hands, strong and clean-looking. She had once told him that he was physically appetizing and he had started straight off on an interminable exposition of his theory that there was a "wonderful something" that got certain people attracted to each other and it was a mistake to suppose that it was a "purely physical thing"; on the other hand it was equally erroneous to suppose that the perfect relationship shouldn't contain *both* elements, and so forth; and *da capo*.

Herbert's conversation was usually a process of wrapping a fragment of truth, which had been visible to all, in layers of cotton until it was unrecognizable. Sometimes this endeared him to her (as Toby's six-year-old conjuring of "Indians" out of hazel twigs and rags used to). But at other times it had been exactly these bouts of synthetic philosophizing that had steadied her resolution not to marry him.

These two conflicting views she had of the same trait in him were typical of her attitude to him altogether. And it was her uncertainty of her own reactions to him which made her wary, as if he had been dangerous (instead of supremely safe), and subtle in her dealing with him, as if he himself had been subtle (instead of simple, sound, and only moderately shrewd).

She felt, with him, that she might at any moment let herself slip into a yawning safeness. But she also tried to get so near slipping that she wouldn't be able to save herself.

She knew that to-day she was in danger of making herself slip. She didn't want to go on thinking and feeling, as she had in the taxi. She wanted to impose Herbert's broadness and sanity on her too clear, strange remembering of Louis when she left him an hour ago. She wanted Herbert's kindly tones to boom away, drowning the brittle echoes of Louis's words (. . . *We might even have loved each other*). She wanted Herbert to proceed, stage by stage, from friendliness to sentiment, from sentiment to a comfortable tenderness, from tenderness to a protective, solemn, obscurely sensual insistence on her need of him. And these stages must go slowly, exactly as they were going now; for already he was full of grave sentiment and they were eating filet mignon. But they must go on, possibly the whole afternoon, be set at a tempo that would last the whole day (ending, perhaps, with a proposal at the Vert Galant or Larue this evening). So that between now and the proposal there couldn't be a long enough time for her to think, or feel.

Herbert Langridge was sufficiently satisfied with the situation to enjoy his breakfast. First his cornflakes and cream; then his bacon and eggs, rolls, coffee, and marmalade. They knew him by now, here at the Ritz (hadn't he been here every time he was in Paris since 1918?), and always sent up his same breakfast. The bacon was almost as good as at home.

Last evening she had as good as promised to marry him. For a wayward creature like Bianca it was certainly a big step towards a promise. "Give me until to-morrow to make up my mind and black its eyelashes." Sweet and whimsical she was! But he liked her that way, and didn't want her to be

different. That was where love came in. He could understand her because he loved her. “*Tout pardonner c’est tout comprendre.*” There was something very sweet about the way she’d waited for him last evening to kiss her good-night. Sort of childlike.

It was this childlike side of her nature perhaps that he loved most. He could imagine how she would come in this morning—perhaps in one of her little phases of stand-offishness, playing him up a little. Very feminine she was, too. Woman and child, both.

After breakfast he smoked his pipe. Then, methodically, he read his mail. Then sat down to answer each letter in order of its importance. There was one from his mother. A very sweet letter. She inquired if he had seen “that delightful Mrs. Selwyn.” There had been something very beautiful in the way the two women had taken a liking to each other. He had watched that. But made no comment to either of them, very careful not to bruise what promised to be a rare sweet flower of friendship. His ensuing thoughts brought a smile of faintly conscious tenderness to his brown face.

By the time he had finished his letters it was almost half-past eleven. She’d said she’d come soon after eleven. Again he smiled to himself. “O woman! in our hours of ease!” He got up and went to the wide mirror set in the paneling above the chimneypiece. He met his own level serious glance levelly, and seriously. He adjusted his tie. Then he went to the telephone and called down to the desk that when a visitor arrived for him she was to be shown right up. Then he went back to the glass and looked at himself.

He was still considering his own reflection when there was a knock on the door. “Yes. Come in.” He moved quickly enough to be sitting in the armchair, book in hand, when the door opened.

And Louis Scheurer came in.

Even as Langridge was jolted from an attitude of supreme receptiveness to one of rather forced cordiality, he reflected that Louis was typically dressed: svelte, perfectly tailored, suède shoes, gloves, and cane, and a green orchid in his buttonhole.

“I thought I might find Bianca here,” Louis said.

“What did you want to see her about?” he asked, courteous and benign.

“I want her to lunch with me!”

Langridge smiled with infinite, almost jocose good nature. “Sorry, my boy. I’m afraid she’s lunching with me.”

Louis asked, casual, looking at himself in the glass, “Did she say she would?”

“Well, you know I rather expect it. As she happens to be going to be my wife!” He beamed gently. “So I don’t expect her to lunch without me.”

Louis went to the glass, took the orchid out of his buttonhole, and put it in again at a slightly different angle. “Your wife, yes. But not your Siamese twin.”

Langridge smiled tolerantly. “Well, Louis. You never could consider seriously the things that matter to most of us.”

“And what are they?” asked Louis. “Forgive me, but I am forgetting my American.”

“Well,” drawled Langridge, “love, for one thing.”

“Ah yes!” said Louis. “Love.” He turned slowly from the mirror. “Well, I should have liked to show Bianca this shirt. A new sort of silk. A heavenly texture. It’s called *cul-de-fée*.”

“Very pretty,” said Langridge benevolently, his glance on the clock. “She ought to be here any minute. She said she’d be here at eleven. But . . . well, we all know what women are!”

“Some of us do,” said Louis archly, yet with a note of self-depreciation, and Langridge preened himself, gave Louis a faintly patronizing smile.

“Well. The world’s a strange place,” he said.

“And,” said Louis, “it takes, as the English say, all sorts to make a world.”

“That’s very true,” said Langridge.

“Also,” said Louis, “I sometimes ask myself if life would be so interesting if everyone were alike!”

“It certainly would not,” said Langridge.

Louis waited for him to add, “Variety is the spice of life,” which he did, thoughtfully. And glanced at the clock again.

Louis said:—

“Bianca always was desperately unreliable.”

“Yes . . . wayward,” said Langridge, smiling to himself. “But all she needs is a little direction. A very light ‘bit.’” He looked at the floor again.

Louis said, "Wouldn't it be heaven if we had a drink?"

"As you like. But it's this drinking at all hours, you know, that makes you all the way you are. . . . But just call down for what you want." Louis went to the telephone and with a little just audible giggle of diffidence ordered two champagne cocktails. Langridge ignored this and reverted to the topic of Bianca by saying that her real trouble was that she was always around with "the wrong set." For instance, that terrible *déclassée* Charmian Cable. Louis explained in a series of concise sentences that Charmian was probably the only really good human being they had either of them ever known; he said, "Her goodness makes her seem like a clown. She always falls down where other people are wary enough to stand up."

". . . *Déclassée*," repeated Langridge as if Louis hadn't spoken. He added abruptly, "Do you happen to remember a certain Miss Prince in New York?"

"Miss Prince?"

"Yes, a newspaper woman."

[. . . A door opening . . . Kramer in a too tight top coat buttoned across him . . .]

"I don't think I do," Louis said, arranging himself in an attitude on the sofa.

Langridge kept his stare intently on him. "Curious—very curious. Because she happened to describe a certain scene to me that she came in on—a very peculiar scene. And she happened to remember that there was a young Frenchman involved in—in, well I'm no prude, but . . ."

"Oh," said Louis, "*that!*" He looked at his nails.

". . . and from what she *said* there was a blonde girl in the case who couldn't have been any other than Charmian."

Louis shrugged his shoulder and looked up at Langridge from under his lashes.

"*But*," Langridge insisted, now obviously upset, "what I really *want* to know is—who was the other girl? D'you know, now and again, I've allowed myself to have the most terrible suspicions."

"I don't understand."

"That one . . . she described the other girl to me. A brunette—and English . . ." He jumped up. "If I was *ever* to believe *that*, Louis . . ."

Louis murmured, "I don't quite understand?"

"Certain things," said Langridge abruptly, out of breath from the effect of some wave of prejudice, or imagination, "certain things I can tolerate. There may be a time perhaps when a woman, deeply in love, gives herself, without fully realizing. But an . . . orgy!"

"Here are the cocktails at *last!*" said Louis.

And when the waiter had gone he asked, "Won't you have one too?" and "How *did* you come across this newspaper woman?"

"Oh—in Atlantic City."

"And is she still a newspaper woman?"

Langridge replied, rather shortly, that she wasn't.

By twelve, when Bianca still hadn't come, they telephoned to the Quai de Conti. But there was no reply.

Langridge said, "We'd better go round there. I daresay she hasn't waked up yet."

They went, in a taxi.

When they got there they rang several times.

At last the door was opened by a woman with a feather broom in her hand, who was the *femme de ménage*.

She said that madame had gone early in the morning. She had gone by a day train to the Midi; to Toulon, madame had said. When she had already gone she had come back in a great hurry because she had forgotten a little mirror, a very pretty little mirror, and when she was taking it she had said to tell Monsieur Langridge if he telephoned that she would write to him.

Whatever Langridge felt, his attitude was untroubled. He even managed his warm slow chuckle as he said:—

"We-ell. The bird's still fluttering." He looked round the high room full of filtered light. "You know, Louis, *this* isn't a place for a woman like Bianca to be in—damp, depressing. I guess she felt a sort of need of the sun suddenly."

". . . A little mirror with shells on it?" Louis asked the *femme de ménage*.

"But yes, monsieur."

“Well, Langridge. What are you going to do about it—pursue the bride? Or leave her still unravished on the *Côte d’Azur*?”

Langridge’s expression was all comprehending tender good-nature. But Louis thought he divined a hesitation (indicating what?) between his smile and his remark that he “just meant to sit and wait for her to come back to him.”

“She’ll come all right,” he added.

“Will she?”

Langridge said in a deep-throated masculine murmur, “Oh yes. She’ll come all right.”

“Well,” said Louis, “I only hope for Bianca’s sake you’re right. But you know how—‘wayward’ she is!”

Again he could just feel hesitation, a slight inflection of discomfort in, “Of course I know it, Louis.”

“Well,” Louis spoke casually, taking up his hat and gloves and cane, “if I were in your position I’d go after her. And now, my dear, I *must* go! I have my manicurist at twelve-thirty and she’s always *terrifying* if I’m late!”

Langridge didn’t answer, but he nodded good-bye, his teeth showing very white in the healthy glow of his face.

Bianca sat under the awning of the Café de la Rade and ordered a Vermouth sec and kept on telling herself how gay the harbor looked, how sparkling the sea was, how picturesque the people were, but feeling so sick with pain and longing for she didn’t know whom or what that she was quite stupid, and didn’t understand when the waiter said, “*A l’eau?*” so that he had to repeat it and she saw his black-eyed face impatient above her.

Then she remembered that she hadn’t sent a telegram to Nathalie, whom she’d meant to stay with, but who might be away. But then where? Stay here? Stay at the Hôtel du Port? If only she hadn’t let Nicky take her boat, she could have got away along the coast somewhere. But anyway she’d better, soon, go and send Herbert a telegram to say she was here. Ask him definitely to come. She could foresee exactly how he would take her in his arms; and say something infinitely beside the point but sort of beautifully reassuring; and that would be one sort of abandon and relief (and peace?).

But then he might not come at once. He wouldn't come without deliberating. Only when he did come, he'd have a plan all ready for her. Perhaps he'd take her away? Perhaps he'd take her back to America to the white wooden house and paneled rooms. And she'd be soothed and hypnotized into forgetting about the shadow in the corner of her mind where she wouldn't look; and the voice in the shadow saying over and over again, "*Might have loved . . . might have been.*" Over and over again.

The waiter's arm put down the glass of Vermouth, the little saucer, the pail of ice. Then she heard, "*Bianca.*"

She looked up. . . . The next thing her voice coherently said was:—

"But what are you doing in an orchid after all these years—" and he was laughing, saying, "There's absolutely *no* time to lose! We have lost years and years; and now there's Langridge; so come at once and don't scream or I shall ring for the butler." And, holding her arm, "Here," he said to the *garçon*, "fifty francs for Madame's bill and you are lucky to get it, for Madame is extremely wayward." And now, taking her arm, "We shall go straight to the hotel. I'm sorry to be so sudden but perhaps after all these years it is well to be sudden. This hotel, as you know, though simple, is neither modest nor clean, but *Madame* is a friend. And here we are. This way in—and never mind the palms—they have been dead for years, killed by the smell of onions."

"Madame?" he called. And here was Understanding encased in an agreeable plump personage with black eyes.

"Madame?"

"*Tiens!! Mais . . . c'est M'sieu Louis!*"

He kept Bianca's arm clutched in his while he smiled blandly.

"Madame," he said, "there is no time to lose. A *monsieur* will come here. A *monsieur américain*. He will ask for," he turned his head to indicate Bianca beside him, "for Madame here. You will say 'Yes, Madame is here. She is staying here.' And you will add that I spent last night here with Madame."

"But *M'sieu Louis!*"

"You will say," Louis repeated, distributing force and charm evenly, "that last night I spent with Madame. You understand."

The woman glanced at Bianca. Then back at Louis. She nodded. For a second there was a whiteness of her teeth, a dimple in her brown cheek.

“Perfectly, Monsieur Louis. It is understood, monsieur.”

“Now the *ascenseur*,” said Louis. “And find us a room . . . Bianca, if you speak I shall send you up in this *ascenseur* and you will stick at the top like Nicky did once in it.”

The *ascenseur*, a grey cage of clanging antiquity, mounted slowly as the sigh of an old woman. At a high floor it stopped. Madame preceded them, unlocked a room, and they passed from the dark dank landing into a room that had an immense yellow-covered bed, but was more than anything a magnificent view of the port with nothing but two looped red velvet curtains and a scrolled iron balcony by Matisse between the eye of the occupant and three French cruisers on a blue-black glittering sea.

Louis locked the door and put the key in his pocket, and at this picaresque gesture Bianca stopped being angry, and sat on the edge of the bed saying “*Darling*” helplessly, and then laughing again. Louis went to the balcony and put his head out, carefully, to look down. “Of course he can get in the back street entrance. If he takes a taxi from the station he probably will.”

“All the same,” said Bianca, “I *still* don’t understand.”

“*Darling*, don’t make the *imbécile*. Langridge comes here—to claim you. Your telegram said, ‘Awaiting you at the Hotel of the Port and of the Negotiators.’”

“*Oh*,” moaned Bianca, “my eyelashes are running.”

“He will arrive more or less a bridegroom. And will find you here—with me. Madame will convince him in two words. Nothing convinces so much as hotel evidence. The whole Nordic abuse of that excellent institution, marriage, is caused by it! Langridge, *cocu*, but nevertheless determined to behave magnificently, will come up here.”

“By that *ascenseur*!” gasped Bianca.

“If you show any sign of feeling his moral persuasion—which *can* happen to you,” said Louis, “since you aren’t, my poor child, altogether like other people . . . if, I repeat to you, you should give way to some outmoded vision of yourself as Madame Langridge, I shall cite to him an old story, which by chance I discover he has learned, of an episode in New York ten years ago—not only a blonde, but a brunette, with young French author . . .”

“*How* did he—”

“Our little friend Miss Prince wasn’t so discreet as we’d hoped. Anyway he used the word ‘orgy.’ (But I like to figure to myself Langridge in Atlantic City.)”

As he spoke there was a clang and rattle of the *ascenseur* out on the landing. Then Madame’s voice, “Yes, monsieur, number sixteen, monsieur.”

Louis went to the door and unlocked it. “Stop laughing, Bianca.”

“I can’t think of anything else to do.”

Louis opened the door.

Now that they had both worked themselves into an *opéra bouffe* situation they were startled and resentful to see that Langridge was really in a rage. He banged the door behind him, faced them both (he was still wearing his dark grey gloves from the train), and swore at Louis for ten minutes and then showed signs of wanting to fight, his eye rolling a little, his breath coming fast, his gloved hands gradually raised into a pugilistic attitude.

Louis said, edging round the bed, “I warn you I shall not fight fair. I shall throw the *pot de chambre* at you and jump out of the window. Then the police will come and it will all be in the *New York Herald* and your mother will read it.”

“*Coward!*” said Langridge.

Bianca had got on to the bed, and, like Tweedledee, wrapped an eiderdown round herself. She laid her head on her wadded knees. By now her laughter was sufficiently hysterical for Langridge to mistake it for tears. He turned to her, and his tone changed from genuine rage to a controlled and sentimentalized anger.

“Bianca? I don’t know what to say. What to *think*.”

She didn’t lift her head.

“Bianca?” He ignored Louis now. The impulse to fight seemed to have spent itself. He went and stood at the end of the bed, gazing down on the nape of Bianca’s neck. “How could you . . . knowing how I love you . . . and knowing that you love me, in your heart? It’s not possible you could have done this thing in your right mind. There must have been some—some nerve strain, that just wiped out all of your individuality. . . . Bianca?” His speech began getting hold of his imagination, and gradually soothing his vanity. “Bianca, what am I to say to you? Two days ago, when I heard that you’d gone away, I trusted you completely. It never even entered my head there

could be any reason for your going but the one you gave—that you just wanted a little time. As for Louis here—well—perhaps the less I say the better. But you, my dear. You didn't ever care for him. Why, you've said to me yourself that he was an eccentric, hopeless sort of person . . ." He paused. "Nevertheless," he said, "Bianca, my dear, perhaps I'll have to try and see the thing this way. Perhaps it's been a lesson to me . . . To us both."

Still she didn't move. Langridge, ignoring Louis, sat down on the edge of the bed and said with a sudden gentleness, "Bianca."

She raised her head, her eyelashes smudged under each eye, and her features set in an expression of precarious gravity.

Langridge was touched by the smallness and smudginess of her face. "You poor child. Why, you've been crying."

Louis said, "No she hasn't. She's been laughing."

A silence.

Then Langridge, "Is that true, Bianca?"

"I—'m afraid so . . ."

Langridge got up.

"In that case," he remarked, putting on the glove that he had taken off so as to lay his hand on her shoulder, "in that case I have nothing more to say."

He went.

"Well," said Bianca, "and now . . ." For "now," in its abrupt quiet after the delirium of Herbert's incursion, seemed utterly unreal; so that at any moment she might wake up from sitting much too hot hugged into a yellow eiderdown with Louis standing at the end of the bed, looking at her.

"Well," he said, "I am now going back to Paris . . . to finish my book. And you are coming with me. Or aren't you? I have a car, ready to take us back."

"But Louis . . ."

"On the way back we can—talk."

"Very well."

She got up. Went to the basin and washed her face. But what had happened? Had he simply had a mood—a madness—a fantasy? He said,

behind her:—

“When you let him go, Bianca, just now, was it just another mood?—another *folie*?—another fantasy?”

They went northward towards Paris.

But they were like people standing still with the country slipping past them as they talked.

France slipping past them: Aix . . . Vaison . . . Macon . . . Sens . . . Paris. . . .

Aix-en-Provence

The chiming bells. The *Moyen Age*. The avenue with the motors hooting down the green shade under the limes. *Omelette fines herbes*; flavor of garlic; coffee; the shadows of leaves on the sun-white cloth.

“It *isn't* true, Louis. But what a lovely picture . . . what an enchanting, rather upsetting game.”

“Listen, Bianca. Don't smile at me and hold my hand because the moment is such a pretty shape and lit up in every corner by the sun. *But listen to me*. I'm not going to say ‘I love you’—however much I want to. It's too pretty; too easy to say. And it's been said too often. But if this, for you, is only another holiday from life, then, after Paris, we won't see each other again.”

She said, her elation that so disquieted him bewitching her own spirits, “But when it's all so heavenly, why not be pleased?”

“Pleased . . . Heavenly?”

“What's the matter?”

“You don't really feel.”

“But Louis—I love you.”

He wanted to believe her. He said, “But am I real to you; as you are to me?”

“But of *course*.”

He said, “If I were to get up now, and go, and not come back . . . At first you'd feel lost, then sad, then puzzled. . . . But soon when people said to you, ‘Didn't you love Louis in the avenue at Aix-en-Provence, Bianca?’

you'd remember quite well that you were at Aix. But you'd say, 'Louis? Oh yes—poor Louis,' amiable and regretful, trying to remember exactly what I was like."

"How unjust you are."

Vaison

The Café de l'Univers, at night. Rickety iron tables outside on the *Place*; under trees and stars. Madame in a pink blouse, black shawl, bringing their cognacs.

"What made you begin even to like me, Bianca? Was it the flea circus? Was it the prawns? Was it the slot machines?"

"The slot machines more than anything. I couldn't love a man who wasn't fond of slot machines. They began my thinking of you as a person one could go on the Pier with."

Men in blue blouses came out of the narrow shadowy streets and sat at the neighboring tables, arguing in honey-thick voices, discussing their game of *boule*.

She said, "And you?"

He said, "It was like having a temperature for quite a long time before you think of taking it."

"You didn't like me that day at Céligny when Nicky and I came back from Venice."

"No. Not a bit. But I was surprised by you."

"And that evening, at the Embassy, when you were with Frany."

"And you with Victor Finch."

"Yes. You didn't care then."

He said, not looking at her now, but looking back into the past: "Something happened that evening . . . I looked up, and saw you dancing with Victor. You looked at me, but only for a second, as you passed. . . . It was a curious moment because it didn't feel as if it mattered, at the time. Only, afterwards I thought of it, and felt it again. . . ."

"And that next day, at luncheon . . . were we, almost, shy, at the beginning? Or did I imagine that?"

“I wasn’t shy. I was in a bad temper. I didn’t know why. But I think it was that I believed you had spent the night with Victor.”

“Poor Victor . . . I spent most of that night leaning romantically on my window sill and wondering if I should ever fall in love.”

“D’you remember, at the end of that luncheon, I suggested that you should come back to Paris with me? The idea amused you. Why didn’t you come?”

“I thought you would think I came because of you.”

“So you said you were going to stay with Armorelle in Wiltshire. But she was in Paris when I arrived.” He tasted the brandy. “It’s Marr, do you mind?”

She didn’t move. But turned her head and looked at him.

She said, “I don’t mind or know or care about anything. Except you.”

He crushed the end of his cigarette out on the saucer marked “3f.”

A cracked record inside the *café* was playing “*Parlez-moi d’Amour.*”

His profile was silhouetted against the lit interior of the *café*.

Macon

They stood about in the yard of the garage in the heat. It *had* been the carburetor. When they had taken everything else to pieces it had been the carburetor after all. Louis and the mechanic talked like two midwives. Bianca sat on a crate. She watched Louis. How could she not have loved him, before? When he moved or spoke her heart gave a little lurch and she felt faintly, deliciously seasick. When he came to say in ten minutes they could start again, she said, “Shall we be clever, I wonder, about living? So dangerous, everydayness is.”

“Isn’t that crate you’re sitting on full of splinters?”

She said: “Do let’s be careful about all the trivial things. Let’s avoid each other a lot; as if we were lovers separated by insuperable difficulties. I believe it isn’t the things you do, but the things you *don’t* do, that keep people in love. For instance, don’t let’s ever share anything that we can possibly have separately. Don’t let’s ever share a bedroom, or a telephone, or spend each other’s money, or read the envelopes of each other’s letters, or breakfast together.”

“. . . Or lunch together? Or dine together? How right you are! Let us avoid all gross mutuality! Only, from time to time, and with extreme consideration, I shall make love to you by telephone.”

Sens

She was awake.

“It’s so much too lovely.”

“This is only the beginning.”

“If we ever *stopped* loving each other.”

He said, “We shan’t. There’s too much of life already gone, and wasted.” For, at the end (this was his old bad dream again), there was a narrowing tunnel which was old age; and at the end of that not a door, or a threshold, neither a stepping out nor a passing over; but, where the tunnel ended, a sudden and sickening and impenetrable fog. He turned and took her in his arms. . . . Her quick breathing; her embrace starting to his.

And later in the grey early light and clock-ticking silence, her smile and her drowsy murmur as she fell asleep were a forgetting of fear—a defiance of mortality.

She slept.

He watched her; surprised that his mere contentment could be such a sharp emotion; troubled by an ache that no intimacy and no possession could allay. For, as he saw her with his imagination and felt her with his heart, she was his first love; and her beauty disturbed not his senses, but his soul. . . .

Toby waited in the early garden.

Last night there had been the pear blossoms bright white and the dark grass, and her face very small and pale-glowing; and she didn’t speak; and her arms were smooth and cool.

Now she came out into the morning, her grey eyes clear in her brown face, her mouth scarlet, her hands thrust in the pockets of her white slacks.

She stopped and turned to stare up at the doves on the roof of the house and said “Darling.”

He said, “I think you look even lovelier in the morning.”

“I told Lily to bring our breakfast out here . . .” She swung round, facing him, and drew in a quick breath. “Oh . . . *Toby*.”

“What is it?”

She stood, feeling the sharp sweetness of seeing him again; seeing, again, that his eyes were hazel-brown and black-lashed under plump childlike eyelids; that his chin was funnily square.

“Toby—darling.”

“You’re not crying, Anna?”

“Not outside my eyes.” She pulled a handkerchief from the pocket of her shirt.

They held hands.

“Anna, I love you so much.”

Lily came out carrying a tray and set it on the table under the quince tree.

“Breakfast is ready, Mr. Toby.”

“Thanks, Lily. What a lovely morning.”

Lily nodded “Ain’t it?” and went beaming indoors.

Toby sniffed:—

“Coffee—and bacon and eggs *and* mushrooms. *Heaven*, isn’t it? I couldn’t be more hungry.”

Anna said, “I also”—enchanted by the way Toby took off the dish cover; picked up a knife and fork; helped himself to butter.

She poured out the coffee. She knew that he took sugar with coffee, and none with tea. Toby filled his mouth with bacon and egg, saying, “*God*, what a lovely morning! D’ you *really* not like bacon and eggs? Even out of *doors*?”

“I like them at night.”

“Yes, but *I* like them all round the clock.”

She laughed at him, and then was silent. And then breathed deep because her chest felt breaking with too much happiness. She said, “I wish we had known each other always.”

Toby nodded, his eyes grave, his mouth full.

“More coffee?”

“Not yet.”

“Such *good* coffee! At home we never tasted good coffee, Mutti and me. It was always that *Ersatz Kaffee*; made of those nuts. Only on Christmas we had it real. That was *splendid*! I always took my first breakfast in Mutti’s room. And on Christmas we also—” she broke off—“Oh, *Toby*, it’s so *lovely* here, so *beautiful* . . .” She paused, looking at the house, old and tranquil and thick-grown with blossoming pear. “Isn’t it strange, too, that at the end, that dreadful winter in München, Mutti spoke so very often of this little house. She said ‘*Das ist die Rube, Anna,*’ and she described to me how that pear tree climbed outside the window of the bedroom.” She stopped speaking. When she spoke again she said, “At least how happy would she be to think of me as I am now.”

He said, “Anna—my sweetheart. . . . I *will* try to make you happy . . .”

“You won’t have to try.”

He said, “Look at me, Anna.”

“I look, *Toby*.”

“Anna, I—I want to tell you something.”

“What is it? You haven’t drunk your *schönen Kaffee*!”

“Damn my coffee. My dearest love—” She watched the sunlight coming through the leaves and dappling his hair and his white smooth brow. “It’s this—that I want you to realize that I’ve never, never loved anyone else. And I never shall. I want you to know this, my darling—because sometimes you’re such a funny creature and sort of cynical . . .”

“*Toby*, I—love you.”

He reached out and took her hand.

“Don’t just say that, Anna. Say, ‘*Toby*, I shall *always* love you!’”

She bent down her head and laid her forehead on his arm.

“That isn’t sensible . . .” Her voice was muffled. “How can we be certain—nothing is certain beforehand. *Liebling* . . .” She stayed quiet for a long moment. Then she lifted her head and looked at him again. She was pale under her tan, and her eyes were dark with the shadows that had come when she was a child, and remained to haunt her. She said:—

“Toby—*mein Liebling*. We love each other, and Life is beautiful for us now, more than it’s possible to believe! . . . That I will always love you, so I *feel*—” She put her thin brown hand to her heart. “And you, too, feel that. . . . But Toby, *mein Herz*—we have not been born into a world where sensible people like you and me should even try to look forward. For nothing is safe—not love, or beauty. We cannot say ‘always’ or even ‘tomorrow.’ We can only say ‘to-day’—But there is *one* thing certain, for us, Toby. If we were to live for a hundred years nothing can ever be more lovely than these last days.”

He shook his head. His eyes were unshadowed, his smile very gay and certain. “All the same,” he said, “I shall love you always. . . .”

Paris

Bianca said: “Shall we love each other always?”

“*Ce goût distingué pour l’éternité!* . . . I shall love you always.”

“How can you say that?”

“Because I feel it.”

She said: “But in the years, you may not feel it?”

“Then I shan’t say it.”

“Louis, you’re laughing.”

“No, my dear.”

She said: “It’s terrifying. Every minute is the edge of a precipice.”

“All happiness is the edge of a precipice.”

She said, “Do you know it’s only a week since I was here, that morning, lying on this sofa? And you stood by the window over there looking out at the Eiffel Tower and being ironical to me.”

“And you went off to lunch with Langridge at Bougival—looking so much too lovely. And the room was empty. And Zamorr, who knew better than I did what was the matter, brought me quantities of whiskey, which I didn’t want.”

“And I kept thinking about you, all day. And yet the day before—Tuesday—you hadn’t really seemed to matter. One doesn’t expect to fall in love . . . madly, like this, with a person one’s known for years.”

The light was ebbing out of the room, drawn back into the sky.

He said, “You mustn’t cry so much.”

But she said, “Let me cry. . . . I’m coming alive, after so long. . . . You’re making me alive. I haven’t cried for years, except at movies.”

Later she said, “It’s like thawing.”

In the half-dark he smiled, handing her his handkerchief. “It’s a very salt thawing.” He bent over her.

“Your voice makes me begin crying again.” She put her hand up and touched his forehead. “I can’t believe *yet* you’re here. . . . And that you love me. . . . And that I love you so much.”

He put his arm round her now; and stayed still, holding her; his quiet gradually making her quiet; and the dusk and the stillness in the room possessing them both.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Recapture the Moon* by Sylvia Thompson]