Third Act in Venice

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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

Third ACT IN VENICE

Sylvia Thompson

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Dedicated to my chief creditor

"Wherever he stands, at the beginning or end of things, a man has to sacrifice his gods to his passions, or his passions to his gods."

—CONRAD

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Part I

MEDITERRANEAN

Chapter I

The *port* of Saint-Tropez, faced from the sea, has a high backcloth and a small stage. On the backcloth are painted, in the manner of Picasso, narrow pink and cream and blue-white houses on which shuttered windows are arranged like postage stamps on the pages of an album.

The smallness of this cobbled stage caused the child Josephine, returning from Beauvallon on her bicycle, to swerve, in fear of a slowing autobus, toward the edge of the *port*; to skid on some wave-splashed flagstones, and to fall against a pile of fishing nets, within two yards of Francis Radnor, who was lighting a cigarette with his back to the bright battering wind.

He heard the bicycle fall in the stones and, his head bent and the wax match still flaring, saw a pool of dark crimson spreading over a flat stone and seeping and absorbing among the cobbles. He jerked up his glance and saw the girl sitting bolt upright on the mass of nets, her face streaked by her blown black hair, her bare arms raised out of their short blue sleeves in the despair-gesture of a marionette. Then he saw the fragments of the wine bottle, the neck still intact and corked, and, among the bits of glass, a soaked red rag.

A sailor picked up her bicycle, examined it, and wheeled it up to her, saying something and patting the handlebars as though it were alive. But the girl—or child it seemed, for she was stocky and her blue dress was above her brown knees—took no notice of the man or bicycle, but threw herself on the soaked rag, and with one hand began mopping among the cobbles, while with the other she kept pushing back the curled ends of hair that the wind kept whipping forward again. The sailor laughed, leaned the bicycle against a stone post, and strolled away. The other few people in the crowd who had seen the incident had already hurried or drifted on. When the rag was dripping the child stood up, holding it away from her with a gesture of uncertainty and, Francis suspected from a stiffness in her poise, a hardly controlled despair. What was clearly in her mind was the need, if possible, to save at least as much of the wine as could be squeezed out into—but there, she hadn't got and couldn't get a thing—some sort of receptacle. And now that it was all dripping on the cobbles again, and—Francis saw her downward stare—on to her white canvas shoes—

Francis came up from behind her and said:—

"Can I help you, mademoiselle?"

For the second in which she didn't move he wondered if she were crying. Then she veered round, and as she did so the wind whipped back her hair and he saw her face: a soft square-jawed face, with eyes set flat and tilted upward like a Japanese doll's, hardly visible eyebrows, a blunt nose and a square red underlip—and a clear yellowish-brown skin with dark flecks here and there like fried butter.

She answered in a childish voice deepened by suppressed tears, and thickened by the Southern accent, that Monsieur was very kind—Francis interrupted, offering, if she would allow him, to replace the unfortunate bottle of wine. As he spoke he smiled and took the dripping cloth out of her hand, and dropped it over the edge of the *port* into the sea, where it spread out, momentarily dyeing the green water, and drifted, having regained its own greyish color, under the stern of one of the lined-up ships.

She seemed only fully to take in the meaning of his offer when he had completed it by handing her twenty francs. She took the money mechanically, and thanked him with an almost equally reflex response. But she kept her gaze on his face, and he perceived that she was startled, but in some way he couldn't understand. Whether her soft slanting eyes expressed merely childish wonder at the odd behavior of a foreigner, or whether her adolescent judgment was considering him as a person,—or even as a masculine person,—he couldn't make out. When he turned to go, with an exhortation that she should run and get her bottle of wine immediately, she again muttered her peasant-like acknowledgment of charity—her husky "*Merci, m'sieur*"—and stood there stolidly poised, her head stiff on her brown neck, her strong shoulders straining the skimpy bodice of her dress, her hips and stomach pushed forward, the calves of her legs pressed back and her feet in their *espadrilles* planted apart. One plump brown hand grasped the note it had taken from him. The other hung away from her side. Only as Francis turned right away, and as his look slipped off her face, her gaze changed, her eyes narrowed, her invisible eyebrows peaked up at the corners, the corners of her mouth stirred and her upper lip lifted suddenly from the square underlip, showing small, regular, very white teeth. She smiled. He smiled back at her. As soon as he did this she stopped smiling and resumed her peculiar baffling stare.

Josephine watched the foreigner in the cheap navy-blue cotton shirt and the expensive wrist watch stroll away across the *port*. He was going towards the "Escale." His tall figure was hidden and then visible again.

She saw him go under an awning and sit down at a table. She supposed he was an American. He was handsome like the American actors in the cinema. He had eyelids that drooped a little over his eyes when he looked at you, and his brown hair was brushed away and upward above his ears (like an actor she had seen in a film about a young scientist in Tahiti). She saw him now in the distance get up to speak to another gentleman in white, a stout gentleman, and they got up and went together inside the café, to the bar, she supposed.

Well, what a story to tell Madeleine and the others at the shop. And twenty francs! She could replace Grand'mère's bottle of wine for four francs (even though Aunt Léonie *had* sent a good wine, still Grand'mère wouldn't know) and there would be sixteen francs left. She could save ten of that and still have enough to buy herself that flask of perfume with the stained label that Monsieur Michel wouldn't sell, but wouldn't give to any of them who worked in the shop, all the same. He would certainly take six francs for it, perhaps five—perhaps even four.

She turned to examine her bicycle. It was by character already so bent and scratched that it was impossible to detect the marks, if there were any, of its recent fall. She began to wheel it past the autobus, now empty and standing, which had caused her mishap; past the car park, and along, outside the stone arcade, toward the narrow street that rose steeply from the harbor toward the piled-up houses and maze of lanes at the back of the town. Halfway up the street she stopped at a grocer's shop whose entrance was half blocked with cases of bruised and dusty-looking fruit. She bought a bottle of red wine and wrapped the change for her money in a soiled handkerchief which she put into her pocket. Madame in the shop asked after Madame Gérard; Josephine said it was her birthday. The woman guessed her age. No, Josephine said, her grandmother was only fifty-eight, but she looked more, didn't she? Ah yes, said the woman, she had had a hard life, there was no doubt of it, and Josephine, who accepted undefined past griefs and difficulties as an integral part of her grandmother (as being part of the "Grand'mère" structure, like the black shawl and the silences and the plate of onions by the bed), agreed; and added the conventional tenet about her having, all the same, more energy than many younger women—

"And your Aunt Léonie?" asked the woman, as Josephine went to the door. Had Josephine seen her lately? The woman's voice had changed, as voices do when they speak, partly with animosity, partly with respect, of a "Figure" or Personage. Josephine replied that she had been to Beauvallon only this morning.

"Ah?" The woman, coming out from behind the counter, and wiping her dirty hands on her still dirtier apron, began to cross-question the child. Josephine gave her the information she asked for, but always modified, saying that Aunt Léonie had brought with her three servants (when in fact there were five); that she had four new dresses from Chanel; that her brooch (of which Madame had heard from Madame Michel, who had shampooed Josephine's aunt the morning after her arrival from Paris) was worth 30,000 francs, and that her new chauffeur was paid 1500 francs a month. Josephine cut short a new stream of questions about the rooms and furniture of Les Cèdres by nodding, giving her sudden smile, and running out of the shop. But Madame followed her out, saying that she had heard that the Count Lützen himself would come to the villa this year. "No," said Josephine, "Monsieur le Comte is ill of the liver. He is at Vichy." (He was, as her aunt had told her that morning, ill with kidney disease at Carlsbad.)

"Mm," said Madame, pressing her lips together and glancing carefully yet absently up and down the street. "*Ah—c'est triste, la vie!*"

Josephine agreed, taking her bicycle. It was what her Aunt Léonie had said this morning as she reemerged in her dressing gown from the cellar holding the ill-fated bottle well away from regal slopes of white satin afforested with waving ostrich feathers.

Madame Gérard, standing at the sink, looked up when her granddaughter came in, and then went on scraping carrots. Josephine put the bottle down on the table of the narrow kitchen that led out of their living room.

"Aunt Léonie sent you this—for your birthday!"

Madame Gérard put down the carrot on the stained newspaper, and came over to the table. She picked up the bottle, pulled out the cork, and held it to her wide, slightly crumpled nostrils. In the shuttered light of the kitchen she looked like a tall introspective monkey dressed up as a peasant woman. A black handkerchief hid her hair, a black shawl, folded thick and high, covered her neck to the chin and made her look high-shouldered. Her long secretive lips were folded over her protuberant jaw structure. She kept them so closed because she only wore her teeth to eat and to go out of doors. Her skin was the color of a walnut, darkened on the eyelids and the lobes of the ears. If she had ever had a facial expression, she seemed to have swallowed it, and to be wearing it inwardly. Very rarely there showed in her dark eyes, rising from her inner consciousness like the beam of headlights coming over a hill, a reflection of warning of hidden emotion. Josephine, who had lived with her for fifteen years, had never seen in her any complete exposure of

feeling. When the news came, in a green envelope from New York, of the death of her son (who was Josephine's father), Grand'mère had made no comment, but read the letter several times, then folded it and put it in the little scratched tin "safety box" which she kept under her bed at nights, and under her pillow during the day.

After she had smelt the wine she put the bottle back on the table and corked it again.

"From thy Aunt Léonie?"

"Yes," said Josephine.

Grand'mère always referred to Comtesse Lützen as "thy Aunt Léonie," implying that Josephine had chosen to be related to her dead mother's sister. For Madame Gérard never disguised her memorial contempt for the woman who had married her son, failed to keep his love, and died of grippe in 1918, when her child was three months old.

"I don't wish for presents from thy Aunt Léonie. And a wine like that one I can buy for myself."

Josephine blushed. "We had better eat soon. I have to go back to Michel's this afternoon—it's Monday."

Madame Gérard uncorked the bottle again, smelt it, and put it back on the table. Then she returned to the sink and picked up the half-scraped carrot.

Josephine went into the living room. When they had arrived here, in April, she had thought it a pretty room, with its blue and black and silver striped walls, its yellow silk cushions on the sofa, and the yellow lamp shade with tassels on the corners. The room faced southeast, and the sunshine pouring into it had made it seem gay after the old ground-floor apartment at Toulon. But this morning, after her visit to her aunt's villa, the room seemed small and its air close, the furniture looked cheap, and she noticed the bulges in the walls that bent out the stripes of the wallpaper. She thought, looking at the stains on the cushions and the frayed edges of the rug, that this was not the kind of room one should live in.

She went to the window and flung open the half-closed shutters. Below her the tawny crimped roofs descended towards the *port*. She knew the view too well to enjoy it: the masts and sails of the anchored ships, the white curved pier, the stretch of sea over to Sainte-Maxime. But at this moment she felt its width and brilliance as an escape from the room behind her; and the stir of the people in the harbor below as a contradiction to her

grandmother's silence in the tanklike kitchen. This evening, after the shop closed—though now Monsieur Michel never would close until eight—with so many visitors in the town—still, this evening she wouldn't come straight back, whatever her grandmother said. She would walk about with the others, and look at the people dining outside in restaurants and see them dancing under the awnings, and hear the music and look in the American bar! And anyway, what wrong would there be if she went with Madeleine and Paulette? Naturally she wouldn't go alone with Pierre. She knew only too well what Pierre wanted, and she wasn't going to be like Anna at the hotel who had to go away in July just when the tourist season was beginning and she would have got the good tips. She could be good and yet enjoy herself. That was what Grand'mère didn't understand. And, after all, where would Aunt Léonie be now if she had listened to her parents and hadn't had the courage to run away with her first husband, the jeweler?

"*Josephine!*"

There was a sound of frying and a good smell of hot olive oil.

"Yes?"

"Lay the table."

"Yes, Grand'mère."

When she was setting the fern on the table, as she saw them do in the restaurants, her grandmother said, poking in the frying pan with a knife:—

"Why did you go to Les Cèdres this morning?"

"To do a commission for Monsieur Michel. He has a special lipstick which Aunt Léonie wants and that she cannot find anywhere else here. She has offered to buy the four that he has in the establishment for the price of three."

"Ah! Does he agree?"

"No. But he offers her four for the full price less 10 per cent."

"Ah?"

"That is why he sent me."

"And?"

"No. Aunt Léonie will not give what he asks. She said she knows from Monsieur Felix, the *notaire*, what profit Monsieur Michel makes, and that she keeps to her price. I am to give him her message this afternoon."

Josephine hesitated. Her dark tilted eyes narrowed and she giggled. “She said some things about him—”

“The plates.”

“—and about Madame Michel. She said Madame Michel has false behinds.”

“It is true. She has. . . . No spoons!”

It was, Francis reflected, one of the recurring pleasures of his meandering life to find Miss Rose Linley—as he did at this moment—perfectly poised and elegantly amused in circumstances which would have caused another woman of sixty to be, in some bright or tiresome way, vulgarly self-aware.

Rose Linley was sitting at a table with a checked tablecloth, listening to the talk of that inexpurgated edition of the female, Madame Jeanne (the proprietress of the café). Madame Jeanne’s face, surely designed, Francis thought, by Rowlandson, was bent over Miss Rose, who sat upright, the brim of her navy-blue hat a little tilted over her faintly raised fair eyebrows. Her square slim shoulders were inclined just perceptibly backward, making it clear, but never painfully clear, by this declination of her body and by a certain reservation in her amusement, that the spiritual—and possibly *actual*—garlic of the proprietress *was* (and though indeed she had sought it out) a little—at such very close quarters—overwhelming. Last time Francis had met Miss Rose was in the maddened crowd on the Place de la Concorde on the sixth of February that spring when he had come upon her on the pavement outside the Orangerie, holding up an inconspicuous lorgnon and protected from the firing of the troops by a sealskin jacket and a winged hat, fastened by a veil above the white and gold swerves of her hair. And the year before he had met her in Belgrade—in a night club.

She recognized him and shot him a look over Madame Jeanne’s shoulder. Its fleshiness might have felt the edge of the look as it passed.

“My *dear* Francis!”

Madame Jeanne retreated with that automatic leer occasioned by the meeting of any male and female under her ægis.

“My dear Miss Rose!” Francis took the blue gleam of delight, the gasped-in murmur of his name, the hand, gloved in shammy leather. “How we *do* surprise each other!” she said.

He made a dozen inquiries. (Had she changed?—he supposed she must have changed—since he was five and she wore a frilly blouse and gave him an apple—off Miss Faith's tree—saying, "I fear I am the Serpent, and our dear Faith will *not* be pleased.")

They sat down together.

"Yes. I do very well. As you see!—And Faith—yes—Faith is again a grandmother. Grrrannie!" She lightly growled the word with that sort of impishness that haunted her dignity. "Fat with years and blest, or so we like to think, by her progeny."

"And Miss Emily?" He spoke of the third in that trio named once by his father "Faith, Rose, and Irony."

"Ah—Emily." Rose Linley stripped off her glove to accept a cigarette. "Poor Emily is, I fear, as usual in August, in her detested Harrogate. I often wonder, you know, Francis, if she were to take any cure with less contempt, if it might not do her more good."

"And you?" He lit her cigarette for her, remembering his mother's defense of Rose Linley to some neighbor "in spite of her reputed smoking in her bedroom."

"What are you doing now?" he asked.

She answered on that soft quick intake of breath: "I? Well—my lot is fallen on very fair ground. The best possible ground. I am at Aix—en Provence—with my dear Leighs. They have had a house lent them for the summer (by some old creature, half mad I should say. But then I saw him only once, and then in traveling gear of a queer fashion). Anyway—" she paused, turning her bright blue long eyes toward the sea—while Francis wondered if her face, so full of wit and light, had ever been, or needed to be, beautiful.

"—Anyway," she said, "the house is, or was, Van Loo's—and there—imagine it!—we pass our perfect days. I am here in this sainted place, only to visit a foolish but good friend—an etcher, she calls herself."

As the quizzical glance veered to meet his own, Francis understood that many men must have feared her and a few madly loved her. (—And she?)

"And *you*," she demanded. "Now you must allow me all possible vulgar curiosity. Do you still wander on the face of the earth?" (Such a fair face—what more *could* one wish for!)

"I do."

"And have still no—anchorage?"

He ordered a second cocktail.

"I haven't the money. I must either be tied or travel. I can't afford both. So I've chosen the latter. As you have . . ."

She shook her head. "Oh no. Emily and I have our feet well planted in Oxford. We paddle to and fro among its lost causes. It is only now and again that I can skip off. And," she insisted, "since our last meeting? In that really too crowded square!— *Never* shall I forget the noise—only the interest of the occasion made one endure it—you stayed in Paris?"

Francis explained that he had been in America.

"For pleasure?"

"More in the hope of business."

"*Business?*" Her voice died on the words—and he remembered that in the Linley world "business" and all its connotations (trade, commerce, and so forth) caused a distaste which, though in Miss Rose's case certainly unconscious, showed itself in a hesitation, followed by a casting round for a sweeter subject. For the Linley world, derived so directly, in the case of Miss Rose's own family, from the Bath of the Regency (when Mrs. Sheridan, *née* Linley, had the taste to wish that her notable husband would not *openly* betray her with the children's governess), a world perpetuated, as Francis remembered it, in the white neighboring house that contained the Misses Faith, Rose, and Emily, accepted business only as his own mother accepted sex—as an undeniably useful, but hardly presentable "outsider."

He quickly went on to tell Miss Rose that the business to which he was conscious of having a little grossly referred was in fact the quite mentionable one of publishing. She was eager at once; for she fed on books and always carried one—it might be Edward Lear or Montaigne or Donne—in a leather holder that matched her handbag.

"You mean then—?"

He said that again it was a question of money—of his not having enough.

"But surely—?" She was delicate, but faintly surprised—and he read her comment, which was that a young man brought up as he had been would hardly lack . . .

He explained a series of losses, death duties, stupidities on his own part.

She shook her head, sighing, with one of her charming exaggerations of sorrow, that indeed they were all, nowadays, in such a very shabby boat together. . . . "The *inelegance* of one's poverty! More and more am I convinced that poverty should be a 'class' quality. Surely," she drew on again that small long-fingered glove, "surely it is even worse to impoverish the educated than to educate the poor. . . ."

"*You* say that?" he reproached her. For hadn't she told him, through the soft thudding music of that red brocade room in Belgrade, of her activities for the W.E.A.—her evening classes—

She got up, giving him a clear glance and light inconsequent laugh. "Ah well—one must, I suppose, brandish one's little torch—even if it be only to reveal what were better hidden." She held out her hand. "Far better," she murmured, and tipped from laughter into the seriousness of a farewell.

"How long do you stay here, Francis?"

"A week—perhaps more—I'm staying with a Countess Lützen." He detected in himself some curious sense of relief when Miss Rose showed no recognition of the name.

"She has a villa at Beauvallon—"

"How *pleasant*—and great and delicious luxury, I have no doubt."

"Luxury of a sort."

"But then why *not*—since you are here—" she made one of her plans. He should come over—surely he had a motor?—and visit them all at Aix. The dear Leighs . . . Of course he knew them. Hadn't Merrick Leigh painted his Aunt Daisy's portrait . . .?

Francis said that he had met *him*, but somehow never her—and that he had met the son, Benedict, in Munich last year.

"And Adria?"

"Who's she?"

"The daughter? You haven't ever seen the exquisite Adria? Ah well—if you come, as you must, why not Wednesday?—then you will see, as they say, 'all.' I'm not sure that Charlotte—Mrs. Leigh—isn't really the best of the whole bunch. *What* a woman— As someone said of her the other day, 'They don't make that sort of woman any more!' I fancy it's true." She took his hand. "Dear Francis—Wednesday then—I'll telephone to you—as to hours and directions. What's the name of your hostess?"

He said it.

"And her address?"

"Les Cèdres."

"The—Cedars?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

Rose Linley that evening described her day in Saint-Tropez to her hostess, eliciting, after some murmurs and cries of amusement, a more thoughtful:—

"Radnor? Frăncis"—she pronounced it in an unexpectedly American way—"Radnor?" She turned her head on its cushions, for she lay, after dinner, on a chaise longue.

"Such charm—" said Miss Rose. "He always had, as a child too. My unkind sister Emily always said he must grow up odious—altogether too much vitality and too little principle, she said. That there must be a falling off."

"And there hasn't been?"

Rose Linley looked out of their high window down into the garden where dusk burnished the pool and set the white flowers alight.

"Not," she said, "in charm, at any rate. His father had those looks—not what's called 'handsome'—"

("How I hate 'handsome men,'" murmured Charlotte.)

"Indeed yes—'cab' men, Emily used to call them."

Charlotte said, "I remember his father—in Washington, years ago, when I was a girl. I remember he made all our beautiful boys look like dudes. Yet he hadn't got 'good looks'—just sort of 'looks.'" She went on in her sweet quizzing tones. "Has the son got brains? The father hadn't!"

Rose Linley said, "Not so much a 'good brain' as just 'brains'— But they send up a good many flashes and rockets! He may be—as many suspect—not too 'good' a man, but there's no doubt he's good company!"

Auguste, in cotton gloves, brought in a lamp and set it upon the claw-footed table beside the couch. It was newly lit and he left it turned low. In its secretive radiance Charlotte Leigh's face had the texture of a miniature; the skin pallid, the hair like curled grey ostrich feathers, the eyes, with their fine

lids and sockets, still perfect, and, in expression, a little arrogant, as though, in observing human behavior, they had found it, however amusing, almost too desperately absurd.

"I daresay," said Charlotte, "that we all overestimate the need of cleverness. Look at Adria and Benedict. It's their only standard."

Rose Linley was fixing her cigarette in a long holder. "Surely a good standard?"

Charlotte turned her head with a restless movement towards the windows, which, even in this second-floor room, reached to the parquet. From where she lay the windows looked like doors into the night sky.

"Not necessarily a standard for good," she said, automatically—and detected, as she often did, something native, something sanctimonious and "early American," in her thoughts. "Not that I—"

She was interrupted by a voice, calling out of the garden below.

Rose Linley got up and went to the window. She peered down into a jasmine-scented darkness.

"Who is that?" said Rose. A moth flicked past her cheek into the room behind her.

Charlotte turned up the lamp and reached out for her embroidery.

"Hello—"

"Who is it?" Rose Linley asked the fragrance below her—her own words falling like small petals.

"It's me—I—Adria!"

Charlotte threaded her needle, as the moth quivered and beat hysterically in the white china shade. "Oh," she murmured—"Adria—"

Chapter II

The villa—Les Cèdres, set between the main coast road and the sea—was approached by an avenue of high palms. In front of the house was a circular space of gravel, bordered by these same tall crested palms, and centred by a marble basin out of which writhed a female statue, her knees importuned by cupids, her breasts emitting jets of water.

The villa itself was white, high, and smooth, with royal-blue shutters, and little iron balconies painted cream, so that they looked like motifs of écru lace applied on each window. The ironwork of the front door, approached by three semicircular marble steps, and flanked by stone vases of red geraniums, looked like black lace. Through its ornate mesh could be seen a vista of hall and *salon*, and a door in the further side opening on to a verandah and a view of the sea.

Francis left his Buick at the side of the drive. As he stepped into the hall, Stokes, the English butler, said:—

"There's a telegram for you, Sir Francis."

He brought it.

It was from his Aunt Daisy—"*Cannot consider your proposal Digby*."

"Any reply, Sir Francis?"

"No."

So that knocked out the Horst and Bennett scheme!

He wondered now why he had bothered to ask his aunt. Naturally the financial advantage that he had adumbrated didn't interest her. It made no difference to her if she got 2 per cent more or less—and there was no social credit to be got out of association with a firm of publishers.

As he went through the shuttered and lace-curtained *salon*, making his way, in its obscurity, between the gleaming sizes and shapes of modern Louis Quinze furniture, he rejected a notion that he'd found himself having to dismiss once or twice before. The idea of attempting his hostess's financial virtue was unthinkable—from the point of view both of his own self-respect and (here he recognized the more formidable check) of her economic principles. Even had he been able to establish for his own conscience the theory that he was using his relationship with her to a good end, he would still, he knew, find himself up against a fact—the fact that

Léonie Lützen wouldn't, certainly, jeopardize her financial integrity, or risk even the smallest sum, for the sake of any "relationship" whatever.

Out on the verandah Monsieur Paz in a pink silk shirt and white flannels was mixing cocktails in a shaker almost his own height. He flashed up his little smile, at the same time watching Francis's expression with eyes that were so curiously, in view of his Costa Rican origins, like newly roasted coffee beans. They had that glistening and opaque blackness, and made his complexion (again, perhaps, by some mysterious biological association) look like cream newly melted on *café noir*. His "Good morning, Sir Francis" rolled out of his mouth like molasses. "You been to San Tropeth?"

A large woman in a blue cotton shirt and grey flannels lurched out of a deck chair behind one of the giant cactuses planted outside the pillars of the verandah.

"Morning, Sir Francis!" Clytie Jones picked up a handful of potato crisps from the tray; they vanished into her mouth like autumn leaves into a pit.

"A cocktail, Mith Jones?"

She glanced down at Paz, rather as though he had spoken without putting up his hand first. (She always seemed to Francis like some mammoth governess, strayed, slightly *déboutonnée*,—and intoxicated by her own success,—into the lower circus of the Literary Inferno.)

"Swell!" she said. There was no reason, other than her recent lecture tour, for her Americanisms.

"Have you been working this morning?" Francis asked her.

"No. I'm somehow not in the mood."

"No Divine Inflation?"

"I find I can never work in the South. And it was the same in Tahiti. The climate does something to one."

"What kind of thing?" asked Francis blandly. "I've always wondered."

She moistened her already moist lips and stared at the sea. The wind whisked back the permanent grey waves of her hair, revealing her ears. Francis thought of pillories. She said:—

"I suppose it stirs one's senses."

"Aphrodisiac?" said Francis.

She nodded her massive but unshapely head at the horizon.

"More than that. It changes all one's values— Don't you agree with me, Monsieur Paz?"

Paz looked up at her, then at Francis, puzzled but trustful. He repeated "Aphrodisiac." He knew the word.

"You with your antecedents," she said, turning her gaze on him.

He didn't, clearly, know "antecedents."

"*Pas comprend!*" he lisped.

"Spanish blood—" said Miss Jones. As she spoke, Countess Lützen appeared, her ample but fine body moulded in a dress of Irish lace, her ankles bare and her feet shod in white sand shoes. Her face, beneath its eaves of auburn hair, had a rich pale bloom, made, so Francis felt, fine and exciting by a coarse and secret corruption of age. She smiled, disarranging a certain Chinese impassivity in her expression. Her lips curved, relishing her own mood,—which was clearly one of satisfaction,—while her glances darted, inquisitively and inscrutably, from one guest to the other.

"Well, boys!!!" she said, laying down a white organdie hat on a chair.

"Morning, Léonie," said Miss Jones.

Monsieur Paz made three steps forward and kissed her hand. "*Bonjour, Comtesse*."

She came up to Francis. "Well?—Francis!" She gave him a smile—and he took the hand, and the special look, and the scented proximity that went with it, gallantly, at their promissory value.

"You 'ad your *télégramme* all right?" she asked him.

"Yes, thank you, Léonie."

"I 'ope you were not upset?"

"No, thank you." (How did she know? Had she "steamed" the telegram, or rung up one of her cronies at the post office? She wasn't a woman who ever bothered to guess, being, in a harmless way, as unscrupulous as she was curious.)

She sat down. "*Pas de* cocktail, Paz!"—she waved it aside, and her rings flashed, splintering the sunshine. "Not for me . . . Then after I suffer with my liver . . ."

"You don't look as if you ever had a day's illness in your life, Léonie!" said Clytie Jones—who only liked delicacy in small females.

Léonie gave her back a beam of indulgence and noticed her checked socks. She had two, quite conscious, reasons for inviting Miss Jones. The first that she knew it was considered "chic" to entertain, from time to time, literary or artistic people. The second, that she got a high rate of objective amusement out of "Clytie"—which she reinvested in mimicry. She could do an imitation of "Meess Jonss talking and drinking brandy after dinner which made her friends—Mr. 'Arrison, for example—laugh until they cried. . . ." And an imitation of "La Jonss" dressing for a *bal* with the help of Léonie's own maid. . . . (Léonie had got the details from the maid—the corsets, the sock suspenders, the hidden zip fasteners.) She said mildly:—

"I 'ave always suffered with my liver. My feet and my liver . . . Otherwise I am as strong as an hox." She slid Francis a look that had nothing to do with her conversation. "*Et toi*, Paz—what 'ave you bin doing thees morning? Eh?"

He answered her strong but benign tones with a velvety little chant about his activities since eleven o'clock—the hour at which Zoë dismissed him from her room so as to have her massage. He had walked on the shore, he had taken a sun bath on the roof, he had read the "*Delly Mell*."

"And you 'ave sleep well?"

He murmured assent and gratitude.

"You *should* in that bed," said Léonie. "I paid seven hundred francs for only the mattress—seven hundred francs! I 'ad it sent 'ere from Paris. That cost me another fifty francs! Seven hundred and fifty francs in all!" Her sensuous vigilant amiability changed to animation. She turned to Francis.

"'Ow much would you say was the price of the mattress in your room? Only the mattress, mind you?"

Francis guessed. She gave a loud chuckle of derision.

"*Whaht?* Whatever do you think of me— Do you think I am a Common Woman that will put cheap mattresses in the rooms of my guests! Well, now I'll tell you, and it's a funny thing too, but that one cost me four hundred francs (and only a single one, mind you), but I paid it in dollars—seventy dollars; that was in 1915 when the dollar was worth around six francs. Mr. Kulman—my first 'usband, y' know—bought it when we were living in Noo York—on Park Avenue—" she added.

"I thought your first husband was Swedish," said Clytie Jones.

"No. My second 'usband was Swedish."

"There's something very real about Swedish people," said Miss Jones, and with an air of reclaiming a down-and-out conversation, she looked at Francis.

"'Ow do you mean real?" asked Léonie seriously, who had, in spite of her opinion of Miss Jones, a lurking faith that anyone who was a Writer must be capable, however rarely, of producing a pearl of wisdom which one might treasure, and in due time display to one's friends.

"More near to Realities," said Miss Jones— "To Soil and to Sex!"

The final word, which Miss Jones spoke as an invocation, produced on Léonie Lützen's features a perfunctory leer.

Monsieur Paz had gone indoors and switched on the panatrope. He was now visible dancing by himself on the parquet among the shadowed gilt shapes of the furniture. As he flitted, poised, and swerved, he hummed the tune.

"More 'real' in love," suggested Francis, arranging an understanding between Miss Jones and her hostess. For though Léonie as a woman might understand this latter notion, she wouldn't be likely—as a peasant (which was her breeding)—to comprehend the idea of being "unreal" about "soil."

"All men are de same in love!" said Countess Lützen, her tone of authority for Miss Jones, her bawdy quiver of the eyelid for Francis.

"Who says all men are the same?" interrupted the voice of Madame Paz, who came up from the lower garden, and emerged from behind the cactus. She wore a white swimming suit, and was slender and smooth and smiling. Her black curls were pinned up on top of her little head and a damp lock fell over her forehead above her big soft eyes. She carried a red parasol over one shoulder, and her bathing wrap on her arm. It seemed likely that a chorus of almost equally lovely small brown women would follow her from behind the cactus.

She came up to Francis, and slipped her hand through his arm and laid her cheek on his upper arm—which was where it reached to.

"Well—honey," she said.

He kissed her expectant lips. She was really delicious, he thought. He had wondered for the last three days—ever, in fact, since the arrival of the

Paz family—whether it could be his liking for little Paz which prevented his making love—except in public—to his wife. . . . Or why, since she was so attractive to him, she wasn't much more disturbingly so. It didn't seem likely that her stupidity, remarkable though it was, could produce in him so definite an inhibition. . . . Nor—he knew himself well enough for that—was his relationship with Léonie of the sort that in any way preoccupied his imagination. Indeed he had, quite consciously, on Madame Paz's arrival, reflected that she—with her obvious response to himself—would make, at the worst, a diversion, at best an escape, from his hostess.

And his inability to want—in fact his hourly increasing distaste for—the diversion he'd planned disturbed him. It was, and he recognized it, a danger signal. He was in for one of his periods of depression: for what he conceived as one of his curious, and recurring, preëxperiences of age—when the golden bowl broke, and desire failed. . . .

"I don't think all men are the same!" exclaimed Zoë Paz, standing on tiptoe for Francis to kiss her again. And, "Where is Andy?" she asked, looking anxiously round.

As she spoke he came out of the *salon*, still humming, and still dancing with small, brilliantly graceful steps. When he saw his wife he smiled, but went on humming.

"What a toon!" exclaimed his wife to her hostess. "I must say I don't know that there's any toon in the world ah like better—d'you, Sir Francis? How d'you like it, Miss Jones?" She tripped over to Clytie's chair, and leaned her exquisitely painted little ivory face above hers. "Don't you think it's grand?"

"*Swell*," said Clytie, blinking and speaking loud—and Francis was suddenly sorry for her.

"You 'ave bathed, Zoë, *ma chère*?" said Countess Lützen. She had no false shame about stating the obvious. Indeed the obvious had always been, in speech and action, her idea of truth. For she was simple; and at fifty—Francis got some amusement from observing this—she was unconscious of any possible complexity in others, except cunning. (For she herself was cunning.) But of a world of fine conscience, tortuous speeches, or tentative actions, Léonie Lützen knew nothing.

"Yes," said Zoë, "I had a grand bathe."

Chapter III

Francis left early on Wednesday, while his hostess's voice could be heard downstairs screaming at the cook, and Miss Jones patrolled the corridors clad in a white-spotted crimson dressing gown, drying her hair after her bathe, and shouting for her trousers. As he passed the door of the Paz' room he heard their morning chuckles and gasps and endearments.

He arrived in Aix before eleven.

The entrance to the house was—as Rose Linley had described it on the telephone—by a side door in a high wall; so that Francis passed from dusty pavements into a formal but shady garden. As he did so, and was, after much ringing of a rusty bell, admitted by an old man who might well, with his scythe and his stone-colored beard and garments, have been Time himself, he felt himself stepping from one epoch to another.

He heard the door shut behind him on a world which contained his bathes with Madame Paz, his tennis with Monsieur Paz, his associations, of one sort and another, with Léonie.

He followed the old man down a flagged walk beneath lime trees, and out into the garden whose pattern of paths and flower beds radiated from a circular stone pool.

The house, set on a terrace, seemed to preside over this vista—which had been clearly designed for its contemplation. The three tiers of tall windows bent a tranquil and unshuttered gaze upon a scene in which, for more than two hundred years, the principal characters—two stone cupids—had not moved at all; and where dramatic incident was limited to the sudden silent death of a rose, the dive of a goldfish, or the embraces, in the distance, of the honeysuckle and the pergola.

Francis asked the old man, in a lowered tone, if there was anyone at home. He might have mistaken the day. They might be out, or—he could as easily believe it—have slipped back again into the twentieth century.

The old man did not, it seemed, care to answer Francis's question, and, without looking at him any more, turned and went away, past the pool, and down a path to his right, which appeared to lead to a small wood.

When he had vanished Francis felt the silence thicken and sweeten round him. The sunshine was honey-colored compared to the brassy light by the sea. At this hour it filled the garden but left the façade of the house in

shadow. He sat down on a stone bench. He began to wish that his hosts had in fact gone out,—either in time or in space,—and that he might stay here, and later perhaps ask to be shown the house, whose inner elegance could hardly fail its exterior; and then—return.

The idea of returning seemed less attractive. He asked himself why he accepted Léonie's invitations. But he knew the answer. It was because if he didn't he would simply accept others, of the same sort. He needed to be, at times, in a *galère*; to have a life "below stairs." He had always needed it—and had come to reason that, since he did not like such "goings on," he should arrange for them to be as "amusing" as possible. Indeed he knew that the more gross the quality of the amusement, the pleasanter it was—so he explained to his own disquiet intelligence—to return "above stairs"; to regain the *chambre de maître*.

For he considered that if one didn't live by "standards" one must live by contrasts. And the latter was, at any rate, the shorter way to experience. You were either—that he'd explained to his father twenty years before—exclusive or inclusive; and he preferred to be the latter. The inclusive habit had grown stronger with time—though he had long doubted its virtue. These doubts of his habitual way of life coincided with his periods of depression. At such times he faced a need for a mental and ethical tidying up. He usually began the tidying. But he had never yet finished it. For he could always rely on his physical vitality to regain its hold on his imagination, prompting him to abandon the too appalling disorder of his thoughts, and take to living again (abandoning, as he did so, his worst problem, which was, precisely, what "living" should be).

Sitting here, in the setting, if not actually in the sunshine, of another century, he was aware, once more, of this problem. And, half charmed, half-exasperated, he let this house, within its high walls and trees, suggest yet another "model" for living. . . . It seemed to him that he had, locked away in his mind as in the cellars or lumber room of a museum, a whole exhibition of Models for a Gentleman's Life.

He broke off his imagining of an existence here, two hundred years ago, to tell himself that it wasn't, after all, lack of models that was his problem. Nor even—though he often bought off his self-condemnation with this notion—lack of money; for it was possible to lead a civilized life on his six hundred a year—though hardly, he pleaded with his too intelligent conscience, an elegant or spacious one.

His conscience posed, in reply, the question of moral elegance and spacious interests. . . .

He lit a cigarette. And heard a door bang within the house. A moment later a tall man came out. He wore a black overall over grey flannels. He had a long pale charming face, curiously, with its drooping moustache, like the portraits of Robert Louis Stevenson. He hurried forward, his expression charmingly alight, a long hand held out. By the time he had grasped Francis's hand he was laughing, a falsetto and yet not at all irritating laugh, and explaining that "Old Bernard" was really impossible—that he had done exactly this, before—twice.

"He thinks that when he's let people in he's done enough for them. He's always been here. We haven't. He despises us for that—and our guests still more because they've never been."

He proceeded to introduce himself, and, "As for you," he said, "we've all been waiting anxiously for you since breakfast time. I've been"—indicating his overall—"daubing about meantime—the others are about the garden—unless of course my wife went for an eleventh-hour shopping expedition! She may have done. She always has afterthoughts. . . ."

The man's charm—his warmth, the gay emphasis of his sentences, the insistence of his welcome, the sweetness of his smile—worked on Francis exactly as if he hadn't, in the second minute of his conversation, seen through it. Francis responded, as he realized those hundreds of sitters, men and women, had responded to Merrick Leigh—and therefore allowed him to paint and sell them their portraits.

". . . But you must move and sit in the shade, on their terrace—and we'll get you something to drink—you deserve a drink!" (Nectar, he implied, would just about do—and if he could, he would have offered the shade of the cedars of Lebanon.)

"What a perfect place this is," said Francis, and Merrick Leigh responded by seeming, in a flash, to see it with his guest's vision.

"You're quite right," he said, "it is . . ." Francis wondered whether it was the charm that made him suppose the man to be, beneath it, a most agreeable, if not enormously "clever," human being. . . . One was too apt to think of charm as a form of imposture, whereas it was often a high degree of social talent.

A butler in rusty black and cotton gloves brought a brass tray of *sirops*, of vermouth, of Pernod.

"What's your idea of an *apéritif*?" said Merrick Leigh, all his fingers drooping above the bottles. He said "*De la glace, Auguste!*" with a bad French accent. "He isn't ours, you know, he's part of the place," he added as the penguin-shaped old man went into the house. "He only tolerates my painting here because he knows Van Loo did, once. . . . Ah, here's my wife, and Miss Rose."

The two women were coming, as Francis himself had, from the door in the wall. Even in the shadow of the tree he distinguished Rose Linley's manner of carrying a parcel as though it were unclean. They had once confided to one another their dislike of parcels.

Beside her was a tall woman in a grey dress wearing a wide brownish straw hat. Even at a distance she made an impression of being beautiful.

As they came across the sunshine, talking, Merrick Leigh interrupted them by bringing Francis forward to deserve their sympathy and apologies. They had gone out—he exclaimed—and meanwhile that odious Old Bernard had left him in the garden. Rose Linley sighed out her amusement and contrition, while Mrs. Leigh took charge of him, capturing his admiration at a glance, and his sympathy in a sentence. They returned together to the terrace and he took the chair she indicated beside hers. And as she talked to him, her ease and sweetness curiously belying his first impression of arrogance, he wondered how Merrick Leigh's specious charm had come to be allied with her sheer quality.

For if there was a top drawer, he thought, she was out of the very middle of it. An American top drawer, moreover, which he knew to be extremely narrow and high, and cunningly locked and cunningly tempered. . . . And the visible fact that she herself was unconcerned with (though possibly not unconscious of) any vulgar values roused in Francis a sort of finer snobbery.

While she spoke to him a French professor was announced. His beard and sober dress were remarkably enlivened by white linen puttees. He seemed to have emerged from the pages of Anatole France, but was in fact from Aix University.

A few minutes later, Benedict Leigh arrived with two young men. The young men gave themselves drinks and talked about a house they had been visiting in the neighborhood which had belonged to a relative of Madame de Sévigné. One of the young men—a fair Austrian in grey flannels and a loganberry-colored shirt—said what a pity it was that Adria hadn't come. Yes, said Benedict, it was just her sort of place. And she'd have wanted to do a picture of the Orangerie.

"Has she left yet?" Benedict asked his mother.

He was really too much like her, Francis thought. The same fine strong facial bones close under the delicate skin, and her blue eyes set in carved sockets. But he had, one could see, more of her beauty than her dignity. He had graceful but hesitant gestures, and an oddly hard staccato speech.

"She meant to leave at eleven," said his mother. "But I think she's still packing." She turned once more to Francis. "My daughter has been on the verge of 'going' for three days now. But something always stops her."

"It's a neurosis," said Benedict. "She can't leave places just as she can't write letters."

"What form did this morning's inhibition take?" said the second young man, whose face Francis dimly recognized.

"No petrol," said Merrick Leigh, who had returned from the end of the terrace, leaving Rose Linley in conversation with the Anatole France professor.

"And yesterday's?" questioned the young man. He had the square face of a politician—and it was almost certainly in press photographs, in this connection, that Francis recognized him.

"Yesterday she had to finish a picture," said his mother. She added—"Go and ask her, Benedict, if she's staying for luncheon." She said to Francis, "I hope she is. I should like you to meet her."

He asked, "Where's she going to?"

"Venice."

Benedict handed his mother a spray of jasmine which he had picked off the house. "We have a flat there . . ." He turned and went indoors. His mother spoke to the Austrian young man:—

"I hear you and Benedict are following Adria next week."

"Yes, Mrs. Leigh." He had a sort of enthusiastic politeness, and his tall, fair, moustached looks were emphasized by a delightful natural swagger. Francis supposed that he was in love with the sister. The dark young man remarked, "I wish I could go too. But I've promised Adria to fly there for a week-end, later on."

"If the country can spare you, Henry? Is that it?"

As Merrick Leigh put both his hands on the young man's shoulders, Francis realized that this was Henry Evetts. He suspected that Merrick Leigh might shed a special warmth on celebrities.

Evetts laughed. "I doubt," he said with a certain rich youthful complacency, "whether I should be missed!"

Benedict came out of the house.

"She's gone." He spoke with affectionate exasperation.

"Without saying good-bye?" The young Austrian was visibly chagrined and astounded.

Auguste appeared. He had put on a creased black poplin coat and a clean pair of cotton gloves.

"*Madame est servie*."

Charlotte Leigh got up. She said:—

"Adria never says good-bye."

She smiled at Francis, but he thought she was preoccupied. "Come and have luncheon," she said.

Chapter IV

As the last customer went out, with a flushed face and curls still stiff in hairpins, Monsieur Michel called Josephine.

She was sweeping the floor of the third cubicle, but she dropped the brush quickly, for she could hear from his tone that he was angry.

He was standing behind the counter, his pince-nez glinting, holding a small parcel. Madame Michel was locking the glass cupboards in the wall, one by one, and carrying on a conversation with Paulette about the new film at the Ciné.

"I don't like Janet Gaynor," said Paulette, taking out her box of mascara.

Josephine knew the expression of Monsieur Michel's grey moustache as if it had been the mouth which it concealed.

"Thy aunt," said Monsieur Michel, "has just telephoned to me!" He paused. He turned his whole body in its white coat, to glance at his wife. But she was trying on a patent hair clip above her fringe. He turned the glint of his pince-nez on Paulette, but she was intent on her own eyelashes. "I have agreed with thy aunt," he continued, facing Josephine once more, "that I will make her a price for these *bâtons de rouge*. Not, it is understood, the price that Madame la Comtesse offered me last Saturday. But all the same, a bargain price that she will not easily find again." He laid the small parcel on the table, and Josephine saw, by its dimensions, that the four lipsticks were inside. "I am selling her three for their full price. But, since Madame la Comtesse is a good client, and also that I have always known her family and we are from the same district, I am giving her the fourth one for half its price! That is to say for ten francs only! And I myself have paid sixteen francs fifty for it!!" He handed Josephine the parcel. "Go immediately on thy bicycle and take that to thy aunt. She wishes to have it at once. I have told her that I have no one to send, and she says to me that she will not add to the price of the lipsticks the price of her petrol!"

"Very well, Monsieur Michel," said Josephine.

"*But*," said Monsieur Michel, tapping on the glass top of the counter with a comb, "I want her to know that this is the *only* time that I make her a price like that!" He turned again to his wife, but she was putting on her hat (she had, Josephine knew, a rendezvous)—and Paulette was already gone. "The only time," he repeated. And as he saw Josephine slip the parcel into her pocket he invoked, after the manner of the vanquished, a high and

invisible justice. “God knows that I have been *coiffeur* for twenty-three years, and that I am an honest man. But does Madame la Comtesse imagine to herself that one can carry on a business by giving presents!! Does she suppose, she that all the world knows has quitted her countryside to live the life of a cocotte first in Monte Carlo and then in towns equally shameful . . . (One has heard—has one not?—what she was doing in Lyons!) . . . does she imagine to herself that she can return to deprive honest people of bread . . .” He leaned over the counter, and Josephine, reasoning that at any moment he might snatch the parcel back out of the pocket of her overall, turned and ran out of the shop.

She knew that he would not follow her. She knew that he would not like to be seen running out of his shop in pursuit, however just, of his youngest employee.

She went to fetch her bicycle in the alley beside the tobacconist’s. As she did so she glanced over her shoulder and saw Madame Michel come out and cross the *port* to catch the autobus for Sainte-Maxime. She had been more agreeable to them all in the shop since the gentleman with the white felt hat had come to Sainte-Maxime. Yesterday she had even given Madeleine one of the pretty combs in colored cases.

Josephine reflected that she agreed with Paulette: one didn’t pity Monsieur Michel—he deserved it. The dirty old beast. He had even tried it on with Josephine herself—one evening when she stayed late in the shop to finish the tidying up. But she had kicked his shins and given him a blow in the chest with her fist. She knew he wouldn’t dismiss her because Madame would immediately guess why. Since then he had done her no harm, except to raise his voice when he ordered her about.

She pinned her grey overall together at the knees, and through on to her knickers—a trick in bicycling modesty that she had learned from Madeleine. She wondered if she were tidy enough to go and see Aunt Léonie, who always looked her over carefully and commented on her looks. But she couldn’t be bothered to go back home and change, or put on her hat. She took half a comb out of her pocket and combed back her hair. Then with the last tooth of the comb she perfunctorily cleaned her nails—remembering Aunt Léonie’s remark on Monday morning, about a girl with hands like hers wishing to learn manicure. Her aunt had added that if Josephine didn’t try to be a little more *soignée*, she might expect to be a *femme de ménage* for the rest of her life.

The pleasures of his day at Aix accumulated in Francis during his drive back to Beauvallon. The beauty of the house, the charm of the garden, the luncheon in the tall paneled dining room beneath a chandelier so dusty as to look like its own ghost; the desultory expedition during the hot afternoon, from room to shuttered room, examining here a tapestry, there a chair,—and taking up a book here, a fan there,—pausing while the professor shed some oblique beam of knowledge upon a picture or a chimney piece; the later ease, in the shade of lime trees, of a delicious English tea time—all this, made the more delightful by his new friendship for Mrs. Leigh and his old one for Miss Rose Linley, was distilled in his thoughts and, as he drove through the high glimmering evening, absorbed as poetry by his imagination.

When he got to the gateposts of Les Cèdres he found himself slowing the Buick. He stared up the now dusky avenue of palms. They looked peculiarly ugly. The windows of the lit-up dining room revealed through a veil of lace the figure of the butler moving round a table on which a silver epergne displayed a stack of orchids to the downward glare of an enormous chandelier. As he watched a light was switched on in a room upstairs and he saw the silhouette of Léonie's maid move across the blind.

He turned the wheel, and put his foot on the accelerator. But he did so in spite of himself. For he had a sense of being, after his day, in a state of grace. He felt clear in spirit and peaceful in mind; and his body was enchanted by this same feeling of clearness and peace.

He didn't want to go in.

He realized this as he drove up to the front door.

Josephine followed her aunt into the bedroom, where Antoinette, the maid, was laying out a shining pink dress on the immense bed. She might "wait" while her aunt dressed, "if she was good."

She sat on the edge of a small sofa. It was tightly covered with a brocade in which the roses were of pink silk and the leaves of silver thread. Josephine wondered if they were made by hand. She touched them. Her aunt walked to and fro on the pale pink thick carpeting. She even stood on the white fur rug in front of the cheval glass in her sand shoes in which she had walked on the beach.

Antoinette began to unhook the lace dress, which fastened under her arm, while Aunt Léonie swore at her, but with good nature. When the dress was off, peeled downward and stepped out of, Aunt Léonie drew a deep breath, smiling at Josephine and expanding her chest until it seemed that the

soutien-gorge, under the satin slip, must surely give way. She sat heavily down on the stool in front of the dressing table and kicked off her sand shoes.

"How my feet hurt me!" she said with a brief perfunctory gloom. Then, "So he has sent them, the lipsticks, that dirty beast Michel?"

Josephine smiled.

"He wasn't at all pleased!"

The Comtesse nodded her auburn head, and then gave her niece a grimace and a wink of pleasure. "Ah! Georges Michel!" she chuckled. She got up again and began to pull her petticoat up over her head. Antoinette came and helped her. From within the white satin chimney she began to tell a story about Monsieur Michel's boyhood. It was pornographic and to his discredit.

Josephine giggled and observed the quality of pink crêpe de Chine from which the now revealed cami-knickers were made.

Her aunt ended the story with a loud burst of laughter that spent itself in shrill gasps. She took a handkerchief off the dressing table and wiped the corners of her eyes. Then she came, still slightly gasping, towards Josephine, bent over her and kissed her warmly on the forehead.

"Thou art a good child!"

Josephine breathed her aunt's musky smell. Aunt Léonie patted her on the shoulder, and then bent again and kissed her on the cheek. Josephine stared at her aunt's bare knees with admiration. She felt that to be perfectly a woman was to be like Tante Léonie. To wear crêpe de Chine at sixty francs a *mètre* where none could see it; to laugh loud, to kick one's shoes off for a maid to pick them up, to have such large white knees . . .

"I have projects for thee, my child. I told thee, didn't I, last week, that after this summer I have arranged something for thee?"

"Yes, Tante Léonie?"

"I have discussed it with Monsieur 'Arrison."

Josephine waited, attentive, her hands in her lap. Tante Léonie put on the kimono that Antoinette brought. It was mauve lined with pink, and embroidered with white birds and pink flowers. Josephine had never yet seen Monsieur 'Arrison, the English friend of her aunt, but she adopted, automatically, Aunt Léonie's respect for his judgments.

"He says he thinks that I should send thee to an English school, for two years."

"A *school*?"

"Yes, my child. Do not imagine that because I have allowed thee to leave the Sisters in Toulon that thou wilt have no more school! For this summer I arrange with Madame Michel to send thee there—because it pleases me to have thee near, and at the same time it is better that thou shouldst work than waste time."

"But Aunt Léonie, why do you wish me to go to *England*?" Josephine had risen to her feet. She was agitated; uncertain whether to be pleased—by the flattering prospect of so much education—or frightened by the strangeness of this particular plan.

Her aunt chucked her under the chin.

"I shall be very much in England myself. I have now taken an *appartement* in London—and I wish to have thee near me. Monsieur 'Arrison has told me of a school at Margate, at the seaside, which is very good, and not too expensive."

Aunt Léonie padded off to the *cabinet de toilette*. She came out rubbing a yellow cream into the smooth pallor of her face. Josephine sat down again on the sofa.

"Well. How do you like the project?"

"What will become of Grand'mère?"

"She will have a little room somewhere for herself in London."

"But perhaps she will not want to come!"

Aunt Léonie padded once more to the *cabinet de toilette*, reappeared with a bottle of lotion and a piece of cotton wool.

"Thy grandmother will go wherever she is paid for!" she said with meaning and complacency. She threw the piece of cotton wool into the waste-paper basket, which was painted silver and tied with a pink bow. "I will speak to her." She went to the dressing table now, and leaned close to the glass, examining the skin beneath her eyes. As she did so there was a sound of someone crossing the landing, outside the door, and a man's voice. She called out, without taking her face away from its reflection, "It is Francis?—Antoinette!—Go and see if it is Sir Francis who has returned."

Antoinette opened the door, and Josephine, with a stammer of her heartbeats, recognized her foreigner of Monday morning.

Aunt Léonie, pulling her kimono about her, bustled to the door and took his arm and made him come in. For a moment, while he answered her inquiry as to whether he had returned, he didn't see Josephine.

When he did he broke into English.

"By Jove—*What* a surprise!"

Josephine sprang to her feet. He smiled. When he smiled he ceased to be tall and grand, and became radiant, and she moved towards him as a child moves toward a lighted Christmas tree.

He held out his hand.

Aunt Léonie was throwing out little exclamation marks of bewilderment.

Josephine hesitated, her cheeks flushed. What would he say? How should she stop him?

She took his hand; and then, rather dazedly remembering her convent manners, curtsied, and realized, as she did so, that this caused him some sort of definite but benign amusement.

But he was saying already to Aunt Léonie: "Your niece? But to imagine that I have already—" he hesitated, glanced back at Josephine—"had the honor of meeting her—wasn't it on Monday? . . ."

Josephine broke in, "Monsieur was very kind to me. I fell with my bicycle and hurt myself, a little, not much, it was nothing, it is already healed—but Monsieur was very kind; he picked up my bicycle."

"Yes," he said. "I was afraid that your niece had hurt herself— But no harm had been done."

Josephine tried to give him her gratitude in a look. He asked her:—

"There was no harm done? Was there?"

She caught the bright blue hesitant beam of his understanding. She felt warm. She clasped her hands in front of her. She smiled.

"No, m'sieur."

She stopped smiling out of decorum and stood on her other foot.

"Why did one not tell me?" asked Léonie. She seemed displeased. Her displeasure and the way in which she took the gentleman's arm gave

Josephine an obscure feeling of satisfaction. This same feeling prompted her, as her aunt was leading the gentleman back to the door and making some arrangement with him and touching his shoulders with her fingers, to say to him, quite easily and loudly and not at all as if she were in grand surroundings:—

"Well! *Au revoir, m'sieur!*"

He turned. He was handsome, Josephine thought! Or rather, it wasn't that, it was rather that he had something—but of course, as Madeleine said—he had "sex appeal."

"*Au revoir, Mademoiselle Josephine*."

Aunt Léonie said:—

"Do not stand fidgeting like that, my child, upon my white bearskin. I do not buy myself bearskins for children to wear out with trampling upon them!"

Josephine lay watching her grandmother's invariable process of undressing. By the light of the one electric light bulb, which hung unshaded from the ceiling of their narrow bedroom, she watched the old woman, with cramped deliberate gestures, take off her shawl, her black sateen blouse, her black skirt and petticoat with their inward pockets whose depths and mysteries only Grand'mère herself knew. She watched her strip off each stocking and lay it on the black pile of clothes that now covered the brown cane trunk—in which the rest of her garments were stored in camphor.

When Grand'mère had wound the clock, then she would speak to her. Then, perhaps, she might listen. For she did not answer if one spoke to her during any of her activities, and only pretended she didn't hear.

When she was in her thick yellowish chemise and had taken down her two thin plaits and knotted them through each other at the back of her skull, she went to the window to make sure the shutters were secure and the window itself bolted. Then, shuffling across the small space of boarded floor, she locked the door and brought the key back to put it, with her iron box, under her bed.

"Grand'mère?"

The old woman opened the drawer of the *table de nuit* between the beds and got out one of her peppermints. She screwed up the bag, put it back, and closed the drawer.

"Grand'mère?"

She moved away towards the washstand in the corner, sucking. The tin jug and basin were never used for washing (which was done at the kitchen sink). But Grand'mère used the jug for soaked dried fruits, such as apricots or prunes, and looked at them at night, before she retired, as though they had been favorite goldfishes.

Josephine sat up in bed. It creaked.

"I saw Aunt Léonie this morning."

Grand'mère's bed rasped and creaked as she got into it. She changed her peppermint to the other cheek.

"What did she give thee?"

"Nothing."

Madame Gérard turned her simian cinnamon-colored mask to her granddaughter. Her eyes, in the shadowed sockets, expressed a very remote contempt.

"But," said Josephine, "she has a new project for me. She told me of it, to-night. We will not go back to Toulon—because I shall go to school in England!"

There was a long pause. Josephine's momentary enthusiasm evaporated in the dryness of her grandmother's silence.

"To school?"

"Yes, Grand'mère."

"In—England?"

"Yes, Grand'mère."

Madame Gérard lay back in bed. Her face, on the flat pillow, looked like a press photograph of a prematurely born baby. Her gnarled arm stretched out sideways, and her dark adept thumb touched the brass switch on the wall, and turned out the light.

"Grand'mère?". . .

It was nine o'clock before the party at Les Cèdres sat down to dine under the fierce and glittering rays of the famous chandelier, given to Léonie by an

ex-monarch who had sought an at any rate temporary shelter in her bosom, in an unfashionable spa in 1919.

Léonie herself, in pink lamé, had made them late. She had had a quarrel with the chef, whom she had discovered—that was what her story, to them all, came to—basting the finest capons with indifference! Indeed, as though she, Léonie, had not especially ordered them (and paid well for them too, as one could well imagine!). And she had shown the chef what it is to baste properly—the filthy fellow.

After this scene she had returned, to hurry them all into the dining room, where she sat down, with her back to her husband's portrait,—the usually pale bloom of her features flushed to the color of her dress,—and begun to enlarge on her culinary views.

Francis had often heard these views. They were her idea of table talk. She interlarded them with rhetorical attacks on despicable methods of cooking, with intimate gossip about ex-cooks,—or chefs,—and with voluptuous memories of a fine *plat*, a noble roast, an exquisite soup. Gazing round, her eyes melting, her lips faintly shining, she would recount some profound gastronomic experience, or acknowledge a friend's talent for marketing, or brood, words gradually failing her, on the cookery of her childhood days, when her mother, who was from the Franche-Comté, and knew (*but* she knew!) how to cook . . .

It was her mother whom she invoked this evening. "But *she* could roast a chicken— What she would have *said* to go in and see what *I* have just seen this evening—that filthy beast of a man— *Baste!!!* . . . Well, 'ow do you like the soup, eh, Paz?"

"Eh? Pardon, Comtesse?" Paz wore a white waistcoat, a soft shirt, a white orchid. He sat next to Madame the *cousine* from Aiguesmortes, who frizzed her hair and wore red satin with red silk fringes. Her husband, whose face seemed to boast incessantly of its dark moustaches, wore, on his lapel, the green riband of the Mérite Agricole. He answered his cousin.

"Thou hast made the soup, Léonie?"

"Yes," said Léonie. Her lips curled and wreathed in a smile at Clytie Jones. "What d'you think off it, Clytie?"

"It's *grand* soup," said Clytie, fixing her gaze morosely on the *décolletage* of Madame Paz. Miss Jones's white waistcoat "sat" less well than that of Monsieur Paz. To Francis's interested gaze it seemed to ride rather than to sit.

"And thou, *mon petit*?" Léonie turned to him. She leaned closer. She began to tell him about different qualities of butter. Every now and then she put her fingers on his wrist. When the champagne was poured out she made him touch glasses. "To thy health . . . But as for the butter that they use in many houses, in England also—my mother was right—one must cook with good butter. Often I ask myself if my poor sister would have died if she had been truly well nourished."

"Your sister?"

"Yes. She who was the mother of the little one that you saw this evening in my bedroom upstairs."

"Oh—yes."

The champagne was making Léonie's slanting brown eyes look larger and her mouth flaccid.

"Josephine?"

"Yes—poor little thing." She shook her head. "I am everything for her. She lives with her grandmother, but I pay for them. I would have had her with me—but I have travel so much these last years, and now 'Arrison doesn't want to have a child in the house—" She dipped her forefinger in the mayonnaise on the side of her plate (they had been eating *langoustes*). The sauce hid the ruby-colored nail. She licked it off.

"How is Harrison?" asked Francis.

"He is well. He comes next week. He is at present in England." She caught her cousin's boot-button stare and said, "We speak of my friend 'Arrison."

The cousin nodded while the butler poured his third glass of champagne. (He had said to his wife, who had objected, on moral grounds, to coming, "One eats well at Léonie's and there is always champagne.")

Madame Paz interrupted in her North American English (she had been at school near Philadelphia):—

"*Harrison?* 'R' you talking about Teddy Harrison? Why, I knew Teddy Harrison, in Paris."

Léonie shook her head so that her coral and pearl earrings swung.

"It is n' Teddy, it's Edwin. Edwin Ewart 'Arrison, 'is name is." She leaned back, smiled, veering her eyes at Francis, and tucked her table napkin into her corsage.

Paz lisped archly: "He is the 'flirt' of Léonie!"

Léonie sidled in her chair and threw Paz a kiss on two fingers.

"Thou art my flirt, my little one—eh?" She rested her other hand heavily on Francis's knee. The butler served the capons. "*Les v'là*," she muttered to Francis; and then in English, which she always used with him, as her language of endearment, "Is 'e my boy friend, that little—Paz, or is it you, eh, Francis?" She added, in the same thick bubbling undertone, a rapid and scandalous anecdote of her first acquaintance with Paz. She broke off, and gazing across the table, with a suddenly melting smile, she breathed: "But 'e 'as done well for himself, Paz— She is rich, yer know, *cette chère* Zoë." She turned and bawled at the footman, "Go and switch on the radio in the 'all!" And then, again softly to Francis, without moving her hand off his knee, "You like *bouillabaisse*, eh? To-morrow I will order *bouillabaisse*."

Francis was making responsive gestures. He was drunk enough now not to be bored, as he had been at the beginning of dinner.

Madame Paz slipped her right ankle round his left. But he was afraid that Léonie might discover she had a rival, the possible results of which discovery deprived the situation of its humor. Fortunately, by the time the *bombe* came in, Paz had got up and come to share his wife's chair with her.

Léonie giggled gently:—

"Aren't they a pair of love birds, those two?"—which, it seemed to Francis, they almost too embarrassingly were—eating the green ice cream off the same spoon. He saw the face of the Aiguesmortes female cousin. She had rigidly drunk nothing throughout dinner and looked like a lemon at a strawberry feast. Her husband, to Francis's surprise, was getting on—if not "off"—with Clytie Jones. He was trying to hold her large hand and she wasn't being unwilling. Francis wondered if he ought to warn him. The situation seemed, somehow, exaggeratedly irregular. He didn't like to think of "Madame Aiguesmortes" finding one of Clytie's pearl studs in her husband's pocket to-morrow morning.

"Well, Francis," Léonie muttered, "the *bombe* is good—*hein*?"

He put his arm round her shoulders. He looked closely into her eyes and laughed.

"Damn good." He laughed again, and she began to laugh too, quivering and gasping, and weeping out of the corners of her eyes.

"Damn good," she repeated. "Eh—eh, you are a funnyboy, ain't you!"

“Am I?”

“Ain’t you?— Eh—” Her hot musky laughter kept quivering up into his head, and in the pouring glaring light he could see the little dark hairs on her eyelids, above the lashes themselves.

Part II

LONDON

Chapter I

Francis Radnor continued to travel. He spent a year in China, returned through America, found his old flat to let in Paris, spent a few months there, and made a brief trip to England, where he visited his sister, remarried to a City-going Fascist named Brent. After that he amused himself by making a slow tour through countries where his brother-in-law's political creed, or its equivalent, was, to use his sister's phrase, "really making a clean sweep." He went, after two months in Germany, to Rome. After eight months in Rome, he wrote to his sister. "I was once conducted round an asylum with a friend who was the doctor there. For the first hour, if I had not known, *I shouldn't have noticed that I was among lunatics*."

He spent the spring in Greece.

This customary and leisurely flight, from himself, went on for three years. Then a telegram from his sister reached him in Cairo, telling him that his Aunt Daisy had died. Another telegram followed saying that she had left him and his sister each twenty thousand pounds, and the immense remainder of her fortune to charities.

Francis read the second telegram twice, and telephoned to book an air passage to Croydon. He then canceled an arrangement to accompany an American archæological expedition to Luxor and arranged to spend a last evening with the amusing Rumanian woman.

She was a beautiful woman, her varying experience distilled to a certain wisdom. She sympathized with his "good news" and accepted his imminent going away.

But she was sorry. She had, rather poignantly, wanted him. And she kept a sense of his vital evasive quality for several days after he had gone. And long after, the dress that she wore that last evening made her remember him; and envisage his way of looking up suddenly at her, under his eyelids, and revealing in that look what seemed to her the two most definite traits in his character—his gayety, which made him so companionable, and the profound unrest, which made him so difficult to befriend. To want him had been only too easy. But to love him, she had decided (which in the beginning would be, somehow, even easier, for she felt in him some quite desperate need of protection), would be, in the long run, too dangerous. It would be an endless expense of spirit. And it seemed to her that only a very young and subtle and constant woman would dare to try. The perfect woman that she imagined for

him would have to be both a brothel and a sanctuary. (And he was more likely to find first one kind of refuge, and then the other.)

As for Francis, he only remembered her—but this he did several times—by their final conversation.

Her, "Shall you go on traveling?"

"No, I shall become a publisher, I hope. And then settle down."

"With yourself?"

"With my increased income."

"You'll marry?"

"Perhaps."

"You shouldn't. Whomever you marry will have too many husbands."

He'd wondered if that last remark were prompted by ordinary chagrin at being left. But she wasn't ordinary. (In that week she'd been lovely and interesting.) But her notion that he shouldn't marry made him remember that he'd often, in theory, wanted to.

And now, in practice, so he reflected as the aeroplane passed over the Channel, he was able to. He had often charmed his own imagination by foreseeing his marriage, rather as a series of Conversation Pieces—representing a domesticity never failing in elegance.

But he had never—he realized that suddenly now, as they passed over the coast of Kent—conceived marriage as even possibly based on an overwhelming passion. Partly because his intelligence mistrusted, in theory, such a basis; partly because he had never himself, since he became properly adult, felt such an emotion. He saw that such passions did impel his friends to the most irrational respectability, causing them to "settle down" on volcanoes, and even to beget children in an attempt to substantiate mutual desire.

But he couldn't, himself, persuade his mind by his senses. Once, at the age of twenty-three, he had been so physically in love that he had considered it impossible that he should ever leave the girl. (She was a Sicilian.) But even then he had recognized the causes of his emotion, and seen the girl's real limitations. And when she went off with an American student he had been sick on and off for two days, and ill for a year. But he had never allowed himself, consciously, to regret her going. In any discussion about love, he would use this "affair" as his one reference for the state of "being in

love." But he was aware that even that episode, exquisite and destroying though it was, hadn't been what his friends, or his poets, meant by love. Sometimes he felt a kind of pride in his honesty—which made him incapable of pretending a great passion out of a small one. Sometimes he wondered if it weren't a lack in himself which had kept him romantically "innocent." He saw that by this power of self-delusion his friends "got" something that he didn't. They got a thing that he quite consciously, and almost constantly, wanted. But it seemed to him that they got it in a small way, and by means of small mental dishonesties (about their feelings, and their loves). And he wanted it only in the largest possible way—and honestly; or not at all.

It was with a particular reflection, arising out of this general theory of his, that he landed on English soil. "The chances of my falling in love," he told himself, "aren't affected by my having twenty thousand pounds more or less. But everything else—stability—charm—children—"

He declared his Egyptian cigarettes at the customs.

This declaration gave him a pleasant feeling of extravagance.

Chapter II

Early in May, when Francis had been in London two months, he remembered that one of the "treats" he had been keeping in store for himself was a renewal of his friendship with Charlotte Leigh.

He had had, on his first arrival, so much to do, in the way of business and domestic arrangements,—establishing first of all his long-deferred connections with Horst and Bennett, the New York publishers, and secondly furnishing his rooms in the Temple,—that he had only begun, with the summer, to figure in any social life at all.

But Mrs. Leigh was one of the first on his deferred visiting list; and he chose his afternoon to visit her as he chose the flowers that he sent beforehand, with careful reference to the picture of her that he had carried about in his mind ever since their talk in Aix three years ago.

The flowers were Gloire de Dijon roses and white carnations. The afternoon, Sunday. For he had heard that she was one of the few considerable London people who didn't, as a matter of course, indulge in week-ends in the country.

"Week-ends," Miss Rose had once said to him, and with a lift of her faintly gleaming eyebrows—"those brief vulgar rustications! . . ."

He left the Bath Club after a prolonged and rather exacerbating luncheon with his sister Stella and his brother-in-law. They had, throughout, discussed politics with that peculiarly British ignorance which shows itself in the confident repetition of class prejudices. His brother-in-law, a kindly man who since the war had retained the title of Colonel, decried, over his pressed beef and claret, the idleness of the unemployed, the dangers of Bolshevism, the immorality of the League of Nations, and—with an assumption of landed interest—the dangers of lowering the price of milk. When his mouth was full, and he was helping himself to Gorgonzola, his wife paraphrased his remarks. Francis thought that his sister had been less dreary when she was married to her golfer. The "golf-patois" accorded with her type. (She was a tall "tweed" woman, given to wearing black satin and pink tulle at night.)

It was only "by a fluke"—Colonel Brent informed him—that they were "in town." "Never could stick town myself on a Sunday!!!" He gave Francis this information with emphasis. Like all mediocre persons he took a pride in what he believed to be his idiosyncrasies.

"An aunt of Lionel's from Cumberland is in London," said his wife. "She specially wants to be taken sight-seeing, and she can't to-morrow as she's going to her dentist."

"A *tante à héritage*?" asked Francis.

"*Yes*," said his sister quickly, shutting him up; for her husband didn't like French—which he considered (in his own father's phrase) a "poodle's language."

"What shall you take her to see?"

Colonel Brent ordered himself a second glass of port. "We thought we'd better take the old girl to the National Gallery and be done with it," he said.

"Does she care about pictures?" asked Francis.

His brother-in-law looked momentarily blank. His sister said:—

"Well—we thought she'd find them less tiring than going to Ranelagh."

In due course, when Colonel Brent had smoked out his cigar, they departed, to "pick up" the aunt at Brown's Hotel. Francis resisted an impulse to follow them, unasked, to Trafalgar Square, and track their steps round the Gallery.

Instead he set out to walk to Regent's Park. He had Mrs. Leigh's note in his pocket, and reread it, pausing at the corner of Grafton Street to make sure of the address—which was 18 Cumberland Terrace—and then to reread her phrases, which were so attractively conventional in form and impulsive in content. ". . . How really delightful to hear of you again! . . . I shall be in all Sunday afternoon. . . . Come as early as possible, and we can have a long talk. . . . I shall be able to thank you properly for the beautiful flowers. . . . I saw our mutual Rose the other day in Oxford, and we talked about you. She had heard you were back. . . ."

He strolled up a shuttered Bond Street remembering the Leighs' party, that day in that garden with the circular stone pool. . . . Rose Linley and the professor, the son, the young Austrian with the blond moustache. . . . Then Les Cèdres . . . Madame Paz . . . Léonie Lützen (he'd heard she was in London now) . . . Léonie getting up at four in the morning and going to close the shutters . . . her silhouette against the green sky. The sky over the skyline above Central Park. . . . The radiant winter midday in New York. . . . The flash of a street corner in Santa Fe. The hands of the man showing him that blue silk in Peking. . . . The girl at Innsbruck. . . .

When he saw outwardly again he was in Regent's Park, walking into an aquatint, in which cream-stuccoed terraces were screened by finely traced and tinted trees, and topped by an egg-blue sky: in the foreground, on the pavement, an old lady, carrying a parasol like a spider's web, led a Yorkshire terrier so small that it looked like an oyster overgrown by its own beard. As he passed the old lady and glanced (this was one of his "games") to try to detect what her youth had been (he played the game inversely, too, visually forecasting age from youth), he wondered if she were a neighbor of the Leighs'. For he could imagine in this quarter of "Nash's London," among those high façades with their columns and architraves, a certain rather grand, though intimate, sense of "neighborhood."

It amused him somehow to think of Mrs. Leigh as one of "Nash's Londoners." She would walk out very well into any of its aquatinted aspects, carrying her shoulders lightly and her head high—and appreciating the "prospects" in which Nature had been made so charmingly to subserve Art.

By the time he was on the Leighs' doorstep he was ready to see a footman in powder and plush breeches, and was vaguely surprised when the door was opened by a grave young man in a white coat and dark blue trousers, who answered him, as to whether Mrs. Leigh was at home, in obsequious English with a Swiss accent.

Francis followed him upstairs.

She rose at once when he came in, breaking off a conversation with a girl in a yellow dress. And at once, in their first sentences even, there was that easy intimacy that he'd felt with her three years ago. She introduced him to the girl, and to an older woman whom he then recognized as an actress he'd always admired.

"—And you know Benedict already!"

Benedict held out his hand for Francis to take it, and said that he was pleased to see him again, with a certain amount of manner. He spoke as if he were tired, but keeping himself up, from conscience, to his own social standards. The actress was about to go, and Benedict took her downstairs, and returned to talk to the girl—who struck Francis, at a second guess, as being altogether too young and too pretty and too nicely dressed, and too apt to use the words "absolutely" and "marvelously" without knowing their meaning. Her desire to attract Benedict, however, left Mrs. Leigh free to talk to Francis. And she began at once, after she had thanked him for the flowers, to ask him about his travels and the circumstances of his return.

It was one of Francis's notions that people should be seen, as far as possible, in their right settings. And when he met people casually, he often amused himself by guessing what, exactly, their special setting would be.

Mrs. Leigh's "scene" was as he guessed it would be—a sympathetic mixing of some fine pieces of Hepplewhite furniture with several late eighteenth-century American pieces, whose forms were lightened by French workmanship (as in the tallboy between the windows); the comfort of the whole being well undertaken by Edwardian upholstery and Persian rugs. He commented, later in their conversation, on the charm of the room, and its outlook, between the columns of the portico on the Park. She told him that she had chosen the house, but that her husband, whose taste, at present at any rate, was all for "modern stuff," had a studio in Chelsea.

"—An appalling barn of a place," Benedict broke in.

His mother said, "It's what Adria calls the Late Surgical Style—all white and nickel."

"And there he paints the Great Ladies of London?"

"Yes," said Benedict. "Even the model throne's like a vivisection slab.—A strange thing, you know," he went on, turning to Francis, "Father went straight from a penchant for brasses and pewter and warming pans to this fearful modernism.—Fortunately for his income he hasn't been able to alter his style of painting."

"How would you describe his style?" Francis couldn't prevent himself from asking this with a betrayal of amusement.

"I *adored* the picture he did of *Adria*," said the girl.

Benedict said, "How would you describe it, Mother? Photographic?"

Charlotte Leigh said, "I never attempt to. One can leave that to the critics." She gave them all a quick elusive smile whose coolness made them realize that they had been led back and up on to the plane of good taste. Francis said quickly:—

"Is your daughter in London now?" asking the question urgently. For here was one of the occasions when he found himself betraying his own standards of behavior. And so making clear, to himself, and probably to other people, where the flaw was.

For it was his conviction that, as far as man had a soul, it showed itself in the larger and smaller operations of his taste. And, at the same time, that this soul itself was the result of an infinite series of tastes or selections—not

the least important being biological (since it seemed to him, for instance, that a taste for beauty was bred; and that a man had his father's, as well as his own, intelligence to thank for his powers of discrimination). For tastes, spiritual and æsthetic, were, after all, no more than exercised sensibilities—and these were in the grain to begin with. From this theory he had worked out his most intimate and oversensitive conviction that his own lacks came from defects in his breeding. And, had he been asked the direct question, he would have admitted to a belief that had he been the son of a Duke, instead of a prosperous country gentleman, he would never have had to bother about the "appearances" of character.

The subject of Adria Leigh was a rapid readjustment. But he was certain that his hostess noticed it. If she did, then her only impulse was to reassure.

"Oh yes," she said, "Adria's in London. But I didn't know you knew her."

"I don't. But oddly enough I've heard about her so much since I came back." He turned to Benedict.

"She's unique in her way," said Benedict.

"Are you talking about Adria?" said the girl. "Of course I think she's *ab*solutely marvelous."

"I long to meet her," said Francis to her mother.

Charlotte Leigh said brightly:—

"I'm afraid you've heard too much about her. But you *will* meet her, because she's coming here specially to meet *you*."

"How nice. But why?"

Mrs. Leigh laughed. "I think Rose Linley told her you were the publisher to go to about some illustrations of a book that she's done. . . ."

"But Rose knows less than nothing of my publishing merits. And it's quite a new firm over here."

Charlotte got up to say good-bye to the girl, who was putting on her gloves.

"Oh," she said, "Rose always knows what's going on. She 'flairs' things."

As she spoke Adria Leigh came in, passing the girl at the door. "Hullo, Minx—are you off?"

"*Yes*—isn't it *too* silly?"

"See you at Letty's to-morrow?"

"*Yes*."

"Good."

The girl vanished, and Adria came and shook hands with Francis. She was bareheaded and moved lightly, and her eyes and skin had a kind of glimmering brilliance. But she struck him at once as a woman and not a girl; so that all the qualities of youth which she visibly had, of grace, of texture, of expression, seemed to be customary in her, giving her the extreme ease of a person who has always been rich in whatever currency she needed.

"I believe I'd left for Venice the day you came to Aix," she said.

"I think you locked your bag as I entered the house."

She smiled, and looked straight into his eyes, without coquetry but with interest.

Her mother went to the tea table and sat down behind the tray.

"Wasn't that the journey when you changed motors by mistake at Florence?"

"Yes. But in Tuscany all cars are grey—at least they are in August."

Francis said, "I thought there was no more dust in Italy now?"

She said, "Certainly most of it's in the public eye."

He laughed, and took the chair by Mrs. Leigh. Adria went up to a looking-glass, and turned away again.

She was quite unlike her mother, he thought, except in figure, in the fine poise of her shoulder, her small waist—and in the lovely shape of her neck and head. She had her father's oddly exotic coloring, his warm brown pallor, and his dark eyes. Her hair grew, like his, up and away in curls above her ears, making her chin look smaller full face than it proved to be in profile. Her bright lips had, in repose, a sweet but troubled uncertainty; they seemed to hesitate between the animal sensibility of her nostrils and the willful line of the whole jaw. When she smiled her teeth looked very white and her complexion darker. She had more "looks" than Francis had expected, but less attraction. Or rather—he decided this as she came and sat down between him and her mother—she didn't attract him, just because, it seemed to him, she couldn't help assuming, in the mere way in which she pulled off

her gloves, that she was charming. She leaned back (just too "naturally," he thought) and exclaimed that she was tired of British films.

He liked her voice better than her personality. She asked him if he'd seen the film she'd just been to. He said that he had. He knew the man who'd made it. "So do I," she said. "But that makes it worse—its being so bad."

She let her glimmering look stay in his after she had spoken. It was her father's trick. Mrs. Leigh took his cup from him and filled it again. It struck him that that was exactly what the daughter wouldn't have done; not, at any rate, in this particular way, putting so much ease, and consideration, into a common feminine gesture. She said:—

"Was it *so* bad, Adria?"

"*Oh*," said Adria, "but *monstrous*."

"Isn't he making another film now, about the Children's Crusade?" Francis asked.

She smiled straight at him, and then said in a vague manner that had nothing to do with the smile, and was as dull as the smile was gay:—

"I believe so." Then, with a complete change of voice, "But I want to ask you about something specially. I came specially to get here in time. . . . I thought you might be gone, but I kept praying that Mother would keep you."

"Your mother's difficulty is ever to get rid of me!"

"Oh yes, she *is* an angel, isn't she?" She held out her hand and touched her mother's. And Francis thought that the girl had, perhaps that was it, *too* natural a charm. One felt it too easily. It was like being in the front row of the stalls.

"What is it you want to ask me?"

"Well—it's pure self-interest—I want to illustrate a book that you're going to publish. Am I being 'embarrassingly direct'?"

"Of course not," he said. But she did seem to him, compared to her mother, lacking in reserve—or reserves.

"It's a book you accepted the other day—by a friend of mine—the 'History of Baths,' and he says it wants illustrating—"

"Of course." The book—he had reread the manuscript on Friday—was amusing enough, witty enough—and, as far as it went, scholarly.

"But," he smiled, "*can* you?—Do you 'illustrate'?"

"Adria draws rather like people do planchette," said Mrs. Leigh. "A pencil does peculiar and delightful things as soon as it gets into her hand—Not," she added, "that I think planchette delightful."

Adria broke in, "You won't imagine that I'm being *too* 'pushing'? It really *is* that Denis wants me to do them—but you'll have to come and see my drawings first, and give your real opinion—"

Francis remembered the author now—a young man with a candid expression and sparse, malicious sentences. He began to praise the book, and Benedict, who had now returned, said that he had always thought there ought to be a history of ablutions, and had urged the said Denis—whom he described as one of Adria's "suite"—to start by doing this monograph.

Francis listened while Adria explained the kind of illustrations—perhaps half a dozen—that she thought might accord with the character of the book. He suggested that she should let him see her "stuff" as soon as possible. Benedict said it would make a good "Christmas present book"—but that, indeed, Francis had better see his sister's drawings.

"Are they here?" Francis asked her.

"Oh no, in my house," said Adria.

"You don't live here—?"

Mrs. Leigh explained, glancing from one to the other of her children with the strangest air, that seemed to Francis half melancholy and half amusement.

"Adria has a house—in Chesterfield Street—and Benedict lives at home."

"But I thought," said Francis to Benedict, "that you lived in Venice?"

The young man hesitated, and as his thought changed into speech, his expression, of an odd profound passivity, changed to that air of great politeness which Francis had noticed in him before.

"Venice is my—*boudoir*—in the most literal sense of the word!"

The politeness—and that, too, Francis had noticed before—was just perceptibly inflected by irony. But it was an irony that seemed to have been induced by the young man's consciousness of a lack in his own vivacity; as if he had said to himself, "There is a kind of vitality in converse that people demand—and since I can't give them exactly that, I can, at any rate, give

them a kind of bitterness." (A bitterness, as Francis detected it, so faint that it seemed as much like the dregs of strength as the surface of weakness.)

"It's where he goes *not* to see people," said his sister. "At least, not to see most people." She gave her brother a glance and laughed.

"But you go too?" asked Francis.

"Oh yes," said Benedict. "She goes there to do the opposite thing. She goes there to be gay."

She gave him one of her smiles, and this time he couldn't help admitting to himself that they were attractive. Her features—that was how he put it to himself—"lit up well."

"Venice is such a lovely place to be gay in," she said.

Mrs. Leigh said:—

"I never can feel 'gay' there. I always feel that it's too much like dancing on the grave of the past." She got up and rang the bell, and the white-coated Swiss came in to clear away the tea.

Adria began putting on her gloves. "I'd rather people danced on my grave than wept on it," she said.

"Oh—*no*," Benedict hesitated. "I want a permanent cypress and visitors coming in crape with chrysanthemums. Don't you agree, Sir Francis?"

Francis said, "I've often thought about what sort of elegance I'd like best, in my obsequies— As a matter of fact—" he had risen to go now, and he turned to his hostess—"I don't believe one could beat a Venetian funeral."

Adria got up too.

"In a black Barge with a tall silver Angel!" she said. She added, laughing, "That would be too entrancing!"

Chapter III

Count Lützen had died, leaving his wife to enjoy—but not to squander—his fortune. His investments were added to those of her former husbands, but in the hands of Messrs. Richepins, her lawyers in Toulon. She wore black (the veil she used again from her former *deuils*) for a year. She spent the first part of her time at Vichy, where she took the cure, as she always did during her mourning. The second six months she spent in England near Henley, in the manor house of her lover, Edwin Harrison.

When Francis got a letter from her, written on mauve paper with a faint silver stripe, and forwarded by his Club, she had returned to London. She had heard—the sloping purple writing explained—that he was in London too, and that he was now an "Editor."

The letter smelt of sweet-pea scent.

He went to see her, as she suggested, the next evening, at her flat in Weymouth Street. He was admitted by the same English butler that she'd had at Beauvallon, and was shown into a room furnished in exactly the same style as the *salon* at Les Cèdres. He waited, walking up and down and smoking. He glanced at himself once or twice in the various ornate and gold-framed mirrors, looking as if he had strayed out of Meredith into Maupassant. The notion led him to reflect that, whatever his surface might be (and he knew that his "appearance" danger was to be just too much groomed, too little "careless," so that he was sometimes in danger of looking like an *hôtelier's* notion of an English "milord"), he was neither suave nor gallant in character. As far as he knew himself (and he didn't really much care to), he had come to the conclusion that his preoccupation with his appearance—both physical and mental—was an instinctive attempt to hide, even from himself, qualities that his judgment condemned and his apathy accepted.

Precisely the qualities that brought him into the Lützen world . . .

"Ah—*mon petit François*."

She was heavier, louder, more blooming in texture and more musky in smell than he remembered. She embraced him, then held his hands again, then embraced him again, kissing him on both cheeks.

"Ah—*well—You're* not a bit changed, are you?—You got a nice tan, though, 'aven't you? Fancy that I 'ear from 'Jonss' that you are 'ere!!! Why didn' you tell me, eh?"

She seemed to have got into a habit of talking English. And he had the impression that her spirits and temper had improved.

"I didn't know you were in London!"

"Of course— Well—I'll tell you—but first you must 'ave a drink—" She turned to the table loaded with bottles, but went on talking, so that he had soon heard the details of her husband's last illness, his funeral, her "cure," her recent time in England— "But you'll see 'Arrison. 'E is 'aving a bath. I 'ave been cleaning 'is nails. I always clean 'is nails in 'is bath; it is easier; if not 'e forgets, the filthy pig, isn't he? When we are in London, 'e's with me, and in the country, I stay with 'im, but now 'e's working ever so hard and so it's better to stop in town—"

She was explaining that Harrison was one of the proprietors of a well-known and luxurious grocery and "interior decorating" firm, when the gold and white door was burst open and a bulldog rushed in followed by a stout solid man in a silk dressing gown patterned with galloping pink horses. He wore red slippers, carried a fly whisk, and had very bright black eyes. The complexion of his firm plump face was a dark brown-pink that reminded Francis of the wild-duck paste to be bought in his shop.

Léonie introduced him.

"Howdidoo. Pleased to meet you," said Harrison. "Leeony's often talked about you." He shook hands, changing over the fly whisk, before he did so, to his left hand. Then he sat down in one of the stiff little chairs and whistled at the dog. "Come here, Stanley!—Give me a cocktail, Lee?"

She gurgled, "All right! You!—" and brought him a glass, standing over him in her long white wrapper like an immensely benign and lecherous Fate.

"Thanks, dear." He kept her left hand in his on his shoulder.

"Well, Radnor! Here's mud in your eye!"

Francis returned the toast.

"Come on, Lee; or are you on the wagon, for a change? . . ."

She giggled. "I've 'ad one already, you ole fool."

"See how she treats me, don't you, Radnor!—Well—what's your fancy for—?"

Léonie gave him a slap and threw a look at Francis.

"You *waste* your money! I never put anything on the Derby. Nobody ever wins."

"One of the horses always does," said Francis.

He knew she would like this. She gave a loud husky chuckle.

"*There* you are, 'Arrison. I told you 'e was a clever boy, didn' I?"

Harrison laughed.

"Pretty good! Pretty good!" His black-eyed look (a wide-awake "urchin" look in those prosperity-fed features) stayed on Francis. "Weren't you staying at her place, The Cedars, a year or two ago, just before I came down there? (About the time this little girl and I were getting to know each other!)"

"Yes."

"Jolly place! . . . Though I must say if I go to that part of the world I prefer 'Monte'!"

"Ye-es!" Léonie managed, to Francis miraculously, to sit down in the same small chair with Harrison. He concluded she must be being sustained by his mere magnetic attraction. "An' you know, you bad boy—what 'appened in Monte Carlo last year—when I send you with Josephine to the Casino!"

"She had a spot of beginner's luck. *I* didn't!"

Léonie poured Francis out another cocktail. She said, smiling, "I send this man 'ere to the Casino with my niece,—I 'ave a niece called Josephine,—and 'e take her in and teach 'er 'ow to play *chemin-de-fer*! . . ."

"Josephine didn't need much teaching. She took to it like a duck to water!" He added, "Josephine doesn't need much *teaching* at anything! Like her aunt!"

He spoke to her in a doting, slightly tyrannical tone which she answered by a kind of sugary connubial silliness. She came and stood behind him and slipped an arm round his neck and stroked his cheek so that her rings flashed and gleamed.

"Go on, you old pig!" she murmured.

"I believe I remember you had a niece Josephine," Francis said. "Didn't she come to the villa once at Beauvallon?"

"*Yes, yes!*" nodded Léonie, made vague by her gentleman friend's proximity.

Then Francis remembered.

"Of *course*—I remember—" He saw a solid girl in blue sitting on a heap of fishing nets.

"She's working at Pierre's," said Harrison. "She's a manicurist there."

"At Pierre's here—in London?"

"Yes. In Dover Street."

Léonie added proudly, "She's doing very well, and if the receptionist there weren't a low bitch of a woman she would be making better money, she tell me."

Francis was amused at the notion of the very peasant-like niece as anything so sophisticated as a manicurist.

"Would you like to see 'er?—You should see 'er again," said Léonie. (Her quite obvious pleasure in her niece showed him how completely her *béguin* for himself was over.)

"I doubt if I should know her again if I saw her," he said.

"Well—she has changed a bit," said Léonie, complacently. "And she is still very young. She is only nineteen."

"Well, she tells all her boy friends that she's twenty-two—and I'm bound to admit the girl looks it. She's a smart girl! Like her aunt!!!"

"Well—talk of the devil—and you see—"

The girl who walked in wore a black satin close-fitting dress, a white hat with a little veil, and a white bag and gloves, and a gardenia pinned at the high neck of her dress against her brown skin.

The butler announced:—

"Miss Gérard!"

At the end of half an hour Francis had decided that Comtesse Lützen's niece was now as remote from "childhood" as three years ago she had been essentially, solidly childish.

She had reminded him, while her aunt had a long telephone conversation in French about an abdominal operation, about the bottle of wine, and this

made him remember her quite clearly. But he had forgotten that he'd seen her again one evening at the villa, in her aunt's bedroom.

"I thought you was awfully good-looking," she said, in over-pronounced but scarcely foreign English that she'd learned, she explained to him, at her school at Westgate. But whether she really remembered his "looks" or, for her own flirtatious purposes, pretended to, he certainly couldn't, if he'd met her in the street, have remembered hers. She had been changed, he perceived, not only by a rapid Southern ripening, but by a make-up whose exotic emphasis seemed to be prompted by the same causes that had made her so quickly and disturbingly mature. The slant of her eyes was continued by dark blue marks at the inward corners, and her eyebrows were shaped and penciled to look like antennæ. Her hair showed in a fringe below her little white hat, and its blackness, and the loganberry red of her lipstick,—putting a bow on the short upper lip, and exaggerating the square lower lip,—brought out the mat golden color in her skin.

At her aunt's suggestion, and at Harrison's exhortations "to take our Jo home to her Grannie," Francis offered to drive her home.

In the taxi while she talked away in her husky voice, but with her glance straying perpetually from him out of the taxi window, and then once more back to his face, he noticed the color of her skin again. It was, in very contrast to her eyelash make-up and her vulgar black satin and misplaced gardenia, so naturally rich and glowing, and in texture close and firm and sweet, like a fruit. Sitting so close to her he found she had the smell of a fruit and the warmth of an animal.

As the taxi turned from Oxford Street into Park Lane she put her hand on his arm and said:—

"Would you please take me to Verrey's? I am supposed to be there at half past six and it's now a quarter past seven."

"You don't want to go home, then?"

She gave one of her slow husky giggles, keeping her hand on his.

"What do you *think*? It would be pretty damn slow if I was to go home right away after I work so hard all day—" She let her look stay in his, and smiled and showed her white teeth. "D'you think I look like a girl that never goes out to have a bit of fun?"

"Of course you don't." He took her hand in his. He could feel her warmth through her kid glove.

"Well, I am glad you don't. I thought per'aps I look like a girl that nobody will want to take about, eh?"

He asked, as a matter of course, when she would allow him to take her out.

At this she giggled again, but watching him with her bright dark slanting eyes; and then withdrew her right hand, saying:—

"Well, you don't waste much time, do you? Supposin' I don't want to come out with you, eh?"

"Then I shall be heartbroken."

"Oh ho! Hearrt—brroken!! Eh! You notty boy."

She was fidgeting with her freed hand in her bag. "*Well*—I'll give you my phone number! Shall I?" She held up the card.

He snatched it.

"Thank you."

"Oh—you are not veree polite! To take it like that? Are you?" She leaned back in the corner of the taxi, and showed him her profile, her teeth biting her lower lip.

He took his cue.

"Are you cross with me?"

"*Foorious!*"

"All the same I've got the card and I shall ring you up."

"What'll happen eef I don't answer?"

"Then I shall just come and sit on your doorstep."

She giggled a lot at this and let him hold her hand again.

"Per'aps I'll send Grand'mère to tell you to run away."

"I shan't let myself be frightened by your grandmother— Does she live with you?"

She was serious. "Yes. We have a flat. She does the *ménage*. Ah ha!—Here we are, boys—" The taxi drew up.

Francis got out and helped her out. "Well, then you phone?" she said.

"I shall. Perhaps we could have luncheon one day."

“No, no. In the day I am busy and I never know when that sow of a woman lets me off.”

“Dine then.”

“That’s right—”

“I shall look forward to it.”

“Orlright.” She nodded, turned away, and glanced back over her shoulder to call out, “Bye, bye.”

Chapter IV

Francis put Josephine Gérard's card away in his collar box, and under the stress of work at the office, and the chance of "poking about" for a set of chairs for his dining room, he forgot her.

A week later, when he returned to dress, his servant, Lynne, told him that a lady had rung up, but had left no name. He was going out again to dine with a rival publisher at the Garrick Club, and on to a First Night, and asked, inattentively, if she had left her telephone number.

"No, sir. But it sounded like a foreign lady, sir." Lynne was a natural detective, and already, in his three months with Francis, had managed to throw a lurid light on the activities of the "evening postman," the milkman, and even (though with perfect outward respect) on Francis's doctor, who visited him during his flu, shortly after his return from Egypt.

Francis wondered if it were Baroness Michels, a friend of his Paris days, now in London. But she would of course leave her name and a message; or Léonie—or—of course, the niece.

He said, "If she rings up again ask for her name. *Always* ask for the name," he added irritably.

"Yes, sir. But not all *wish* to give their names."

"Possibly," said Francis, "but they must be asked for."

The next day he had to go, on business, to Berlin. He left Lynne with a map of the dining room to show how the furniture should be distributed (he had found the chairs) and instructions not to let his sister, Mrs. Brent, stay the night. For Stella and her husband had been once. They had come in spite of Francis's protest that he wasn't "moved in," Colonel Brent protesting that he didn't mind camping and was "used to staying under canvas," and his sister "dossing," as she chose to phrase it, in the library—her torso on his William and Mary sofa, and her preponderating lower half on a couple of kitchen chairs ameliorated by his fur coat.

When he got back from Berlin he found a letter from Adria Leigh asking him to luncheon on the following Thursday. He liked the notion of going. He felt it might help to get his Berlin impressions out of his system.

In retrospect he decided that he had rather liked her. After all, a girl as attractive and run after as that had a right to be a little *poseuse*. He had

noticed a photograph of her in *Harper's Bazaar* that a woman next to him was reading in the aeroplane.

He couldn't help wondering, on Thursday, as he sat alone at luncheon with her, whether women, like places, weren't advertisable into beauty—and telling himself that the looks which he saw in Adria Leigh to-day (and which his judgment had more or less denied her a fortnight before) weren't really the result of a "beauty prestige" given her, in his mind, by one glimpse of a page in *Harper's Bazaar*.

She faced him across a small circular table. And she was lovely.

She wore a white dress which gave her the easiest possible kind of sophistication; making her informal by its cut, and luxurious by its pallor.

The luncheon, cooked, she told him, by an Austrian, and served by a Chinaman, was good; the hock remarkable. Her talk responded so well to his, coming and going at what seemed to him the least pressure of his mind, that by the time they went upstairs to the drawing-room for their coffee, he knew exactly how swiftly her interest would turn with his change of subject, and her amusement quicken in time with his wit.

They sat talking over their coffee in the little pale green paneled room, pleasantly cooled by the sun blinds outside, and he began, by her description of a place here, a person there, an incident of a vivid kind, to see her life as if he were scraping a fresco; to discover, by the placing of two or three figures, how many more of their noble and richly colored kind there must be; to perceive the character in the details which came to view—and to get, at the same time, a feeling of the whole scene. For though much of it was still obscured, his fancy had "scraped" enough, by the late afternoon, to enjoy the freedom of the design, the elegance in the forms, and a soft radiant quality in the light. He couldn't tell yet, he decided, how "good" her life was—intrinsically, but he was sure by his talk with her that it was both interesting and, from a snob point of view, successful. She could see, pretty well, whom she liked, and go where she liked. And he was able to find evidences of this as much in the inflections of her manner as in a chance remark, such as that which revealed to him that she stayed in houses that he merely visited.

When she showed him her drawings, and what she presented with an amused diffidence as her "watercolor paintings," he saw in them the same qualities that he had already perceived in her character—and therefore in her life. For they showed taste and wit, in their subjects, and a certain fine, though he thought not very profound, sensibility in their execution. The

drawing itself was good; well above a standard of "facility." Her color was used tentatively, rather to suggest an emotion about the color in use than to provoke a direct æsthetic response to its real shade. The subjects were diverse: a group of olive trees; a view in St. James's Park ("St. James's Park is *too* pretty," she said); the façade of a baroque church, a fountain and cypress trees; an avenue of beeches in winter; a pale Spanish town on a dark hill; a canal in Venice—but they were all clearly perceived from her special, fastidious, and highly "trained" point of view. They were the work, however "slight" (and they made an impression of being "thrown off," rather than created), of a person who was not only sensitive and accomplished, but, in the fullest sense of that tiresome word, "cultured"—in the sense, he decided, of having been "grown" with care and intention.

When she asked him, after they had strewn the drawing-room with the pictures, if he thought she would "do" as an illustrator for Denis Eldon's book he said that her drawings would be exactly right.

She said, "I thought you'd think so. Denis and I have a way of being exactly right together."

"How odd. I can't imagine you together." It seemed unlikely that if she could be so right with himself she could be just as right with a young man of Denis Eldon's sort.

When he went she promised to lunch with him the following week, that he might examine sketches which she would make, meanwhile, for her illustration of the book. . . .

She came to the doorstep and stood on the step under the striped awning to say good-bye.

He said, "I don't believe you'll have time to prepare those sketches by Monday."

"D'you think I live *such* a hectic life?"

"I believe you're incessantly surrounded by people. On your own showing you're dining and lunching out every day in the next ten days except Monday."

She gave him one of her charming half-smiling glances.

"I'm much more alone than you think—"

He hesitated before he answered, and then said to her, without perfectly understanding his own thought:—

"Perhaps you're alone in the wrong kind of way."

He held out his hand to say good-bye. But for a moment she didn't move, and he saw that she faintly colored. Then she took his hand.

"Perhaps. Good-bye."

Charlotte Leigh called in Chesterfield Street on her way back from a sale of work at the American Embassy. She found Adria in that state of elation which always followed on her "discovery" of someone. For people had a way of glowing on her, and bringing out the pigmentation of her character. If Adria was left long alone, and this Charlotte felt was where she most differed from herself, she became curiously inanimate, visibly suffering a kind of etiolation which deprived her eyes of expression, and her voice of its peculiarly lovely tones.

Charlotte guessed at once, from the drawings lying about on sofas and chairs, that the visitor had been Francis Radnor.

"I'm stealing your young man," Adria explained, and added laughingly, "I meant you to know—at once."

Charlotte sat in front of the glass in her daughter's bedroom. She powdered her face, and then wiped it with her handkerchief.

"*How* hot that room was. Thousands of us buying things we don't want, to give away next Christmas to people who won't want them either—" (She pronounced it "eether.") "He *is* amusing, certainly. And I like him."

She said this in the tone of a Personage establishing a precedent for others. She always gave any opinion which might be considered unorthodox in this manner. (Its effect being to shame her conventional hearers for their lack of her tolerance, but slightly to humiliate those who needed the protection of her opinion.)

Adria changed her white shoes for red ones, and then changed back into white.

"I think he's *heavenly* and amusing. He says just what one thinks before one's finished thinking it."

Her mother smiled. "He does do that. But I wouldn't describe him as exactly heavenly."

"D'you mean there's a bit of hell about him?"

"Really, Adria, I hate your words."

"I know, darling. So do I really— But you know what's *really* attractive about him is that he's awfully 'understanding.' (I hate *that* word, too.)"

Charlotte Leigh combed up the coil of her hair and put her hat on again. It was the black hat which Benedict had described as "Schiaparelli's epigram on Gainsborough."

"D'you mean he's sympathetic—or just a flirt?"

Adria laughed. "*Both*, I should say."

She took up a scent spray. "I don't know why, Mother, but he's just divinely likable."

"Another of your 'swans,' my dear?"

"A wildish one, I gather." She sprayed the scent around her neck.

Her mother said, "I don't mind wild swans—but they mostly turn out to be wild geese."

"You don't think that about Francis Radnor?"

"No, darling. I told you, I *like* him."

"But you don't trust him?—Or what is it?"

Charlotte Leigh rose from the dressing table and prepared to come downstairs.

"I don't think I'd trust any man unless I was in love with him— And then I'd be especially careful not to."

Chapter V

Francis had meant to join Benedict's party for the Derby. But in the first week of June there was a pressure of business at Bedford Square (owing to Gerald Horst's absence in New York) and Francis decided that he couldn't get away. The weather had become suddenly hot and by the end of the week Francis felt nervous and tired.

A friend who was to have dined with him on Friday telephoned to the office to say he was ill. Francis was relieved. He went at six o'clock to cool himself by a swim at the Bath Club, and decided to dine at home afterwards and enjoy the considerable talent of his new cook.

By the time he got back to the Temple he was hot and enervated again.

When he had put on an open shirt and a pair of flannels, cursed Lynne for half a dozen reasons, and had a double whiskey and soda, he felt rather less exasperated. But he was still nervous. He lay on the sofa in the library smoking, and glancing in turn at the books on the low table beside him. He wondered how Lynne would react if he were to summon him to fan him for an hour. He rang for him, instead, to bring some more ice, and to put off dinner until nine. He felt he couldn't eat until the air got cooler. He began looking through a book of Chinese drawings, exquisite and pornographic, which he had brought back last year. . . . In one of the pictures the face of a girl reminded him of Léonie Lützen's niece—Josephine. The eyes and mouth were the same. He imagined that her body, too, in similar position, would look like the drawing.

After a few minutes he got off the sofa, and went into his bedroom and got her card out of his collar box, and brought it back.

"Miss Josephine Gérard."

The address in the corner was "12b Cleeve Mansions, Suffolk Road, W.14." He remembered her telling him that she lived near Olympia.

He took up the receiver and asked for the telephone number.

There was no reply.

He paced up and down the room. . . . In a way her very obviousness had attracted him. And that skin, and those ugly fingers with dark red polish on the nails.

He tried the number again.

This time she answered. When she understood who was speaking she giggled a good deal—and explained that she had only just come in, and Grand'mère was afraid to answer the telephone. He asked her if she was free and would dine with him. Or was it too late to ask her? She hesitated, and then said that it was rather late . . . but that perhaps she might. . . . He suggested that they should meet at Rule's at half past nine, and after some more husky coyness she agreed.

He rang for Lynne, ordered off dinner, and went to his room to put on a suit.

She kept him waiting, as he expected. At five minutes to ten she arrived in a purple crêpe de Chine dress with white frilling around the neck and wrists, and a wide mauve hat. She came toward him, holding out her hand and saying, "*Am* I late? . . . I don't know *how* I am so late—" talking loudly as if she were trying to make an impression on some of the people round her.

She sat down next to him, in their corner, on the red velvet bench, dropping into her thick Provençal French to explain that someone had telephoned to her just when she was coming away, and wanted her to go out with them, but that she had said no, not this evening, since she had already promised a "*beau monsieur*" to take supper with him. "You see," she went on, once more in the English she had learned from the girls in her Westgate boarding school, "I said I was 'stepping out' with a '*beau monsieur*'!"

He touched her elbow.

"I'm very flattered!—What'll you have?"

She knew at once. Bacon and eggs and a double gin with ginger ale. Francis ordered pressed beef and salad. She glanced at the waiter from under the brim of her hat, and said to Francis before he was quite out of hearing, "What a good-looking boy! Isn' he?"

"You seem to like all sorts of looks."

Her dark red upper lip lifted, her teeth showed, her slanting eyes narrowed, and she smiled.

"Why shouldn' I, eh?" And then, "What sort of pretty women do you fancy?"

He said, his hand on her smooth bare elbow, "Well—I like a woman to have brown eyes—"

"Yes?"

"And a small nose—"

"Mm?"

"—And I don't like a white skin!"

"*Brunette alors?*"

"Yes! And she must have nice red lips—"

"Yes! Not thin lips like English girls, eh?"

"Certainly not—and she mustn't be big—she must be small—but not thin—"

"*Bien potelée*, eh?" She leaned back, slipping her glance from his and down her own body. "*Et saine? Eh?*"

He said, his glance following hers and his fingers moving and tightening round her elbow, "Yes. I like a woman to look physically strong."

She gave a quick low husky laugh, quite different from her "giggling." Their looks met again.

"*Eh—encore?*" she asked.

He withdrew his look suddenly, and let go her elbow.

The waiter brought her drink.

"You don't have anything to drink."

"I had several, at home."

"Oh—where ees your home?"

"I live at the Temple."

"What a queer name! Where is it?"

"It's near the Strand. There are some old squares there."

"You have a house, then?"

"No. Chambers—rooms."

"I see." She drank half her glass and then said, "What do you do for servants?"

"I have a man, and a cook."

"A woman cook?"

"Yes."

"Does she cook well?"

"Very."

"Then you have two servants altogether?"

"Yes."

"What do you do with yourself all the day?"

She got a small paper fan out of her bag.

"I've got a job."

"A *job*? But Tante Léonie told me you are a baron."

"Not a baron. A baron-et!"

"That means less, eh?"

He said, "Considerably less."

"Why do you laugh?"

"Nothing— But anyway, my being a baron wouldn't prevent my having a job."

"*You* 'ave a job?"

"Certainly. I'm a publisher. An *éditeur*," he added.

"Oh! My aunt didn' tell me that!"

The waiter brought her bacon and eggs.

"—But you have got to work?"

"I like to— And it all helps."

"You make good money then, with being an editor?"

"Not yet. But I hope to."

She began to eat.

"And how do you like *your* work?" he asked.

The way that she grasped her knife and fork, like a peasant, contrasted oddly with her ruby nails and the "emerald" ring on her stumpy little finger.

"My work? Well, it isn' so bad. They give you pretty good tips there usually, except the bloody-mean ones."

"What do they give you?" When she munched, her nostrils moved with her lips.

"A shilling mostly. They ought to, too, when they pay four and sixpence for their manicoor! I never could imagine at first when I got there people would pay such a price; but the whole tariff there is the same, and I don' know what they pay for, I'm sure, except for snobbery or something. But then—all the same, we do get the mos' chic clientele in London—" She put another forkful into her mouth. "Certainly it is chic, there's no doubt about that. There is a lot of bitches among them, you bet, and when they talk together sometimes you hear such things!"

She added, with sanctimonious emphasis, "You bet I could tell you some things, what some of those Society women say to each other!!!" She giggled, put down her fork, and said, "You know I had a *cliente*; las' week she say to a lady friend that Betty—she works at Pierre also, ever such a nice girl—well, anyways, that Betty was giving a manicoor to, an' this lady say to the other, *say*, mind you, that she has a new 'young man' that's 'lovely to sleep with'—did you ever hear such filthy talk? Eh?"

"Well—sometimes."

She tossed her head up.

"Why do yer laugh?"

"Not at you, my dear."

"Only at that lady that talks so filthy, eh? But I don't think it *is* a joke—you notty boy—there is nothing to laugh about when people say such things."

She took up her knife and fork and finished eating.

"You—wouldn't?"

"I? What d'you think about me—that I am a beastly-minded girl—I hope you don't!!!" She made as if to edge away from him, so that he caught her arm to pull her back, saying:—

"Of course I don't—" And then, "Will you have another drink?"

"Do you want to make me tipsy, my dear boy? Well—I will—one, only one more, do you see? *Eh, mon petit?*" She came back close beside him and went talking on, half in French, half in English. He could feel how warm she was, and he kept on smelling the queer fruity aroma that was mixed with her "chypry" scent, and every time she moved, to pick up her glass, or take out a

cigarette, or shift the ash tray in front of them, he felt the vibration of each of her movements run through his bones and into the pit of his stomach; and soon he stopped seeing with his eyes, and began to feel her looks in his nerves and in his body, the texture of her skin choking him in his throat, and the shape of her mouth making his head hot and aching, and her neck, the shape of her thighs under her tight dress, making him feel sickish—and her ugly hands making his own hands shake stupidly. And when he suggested they should go and he should drive her home and she got up close beside him, and she looked up to say something (about it's being a "long way" to her flat), he saw that she knew and he knew it was all right, but the waiter sent him half mad waiting for change, and he felt they would never get out into the street and find the car. . . .

He found the car and did the starting up and she got in beside him, but not touching him (he didn't know or care why, but he guessed it was from experience), and anyway it was only five minutes at night to Olympia straight along the Hammersmith Road.

"You must tell me the way," he said, and he could feel her through the rush of air and the space between them, and he heard her voice and her rough laughter.

They drew up outside some typical Mansions of the West London sort, bay windows, brick with cement copings, and the inside a stone staircase up to the flat, with Lincrusta half dado below and chipped red-brown paint everywhere else, and a smell of damp and dishcloths and stale frying.

She put her latchkey into the door of No. 5 on the first floor and they went into a narrow hall that led through a bead curtain into a sort of dining-sitting room, with a table in the middle under the light, and a sofa with a fur rug covering it. She threw her hat down on the sofa and looked in one of the looking-glasses, and as she raised her arms to touch her hair, the gesture, which was like defining a vase upwards, caught and curved and twisted his desire for her; and suddenly, as her hands met on a curl above her forehead, he pitched forward to get his arms round her, and get hold of her, hardly hearing her first nonsense, and little gasps and cries. . . .

Chapter VI

It was Miss Rose's "project," couched in a letter of late eighteenth-century English to her friend Charlotte Leigh, that Charlotte and Adria should bring "that rare creature, Francis Radnor," to Oxford.

Her further elaboration of this "plan" was that they should all agree to the pressing invitation of Alan Grey—"your sweet nephew and now my dearest friend"—to "take luncheon with him in his rooms at Christ Church."

Charlotte telephoned to Francis, and they agreed on the day and details of the expedition. Mrs. Leigh suggested the next Saturday, and Francis offered to drive them. He asked if her husband was coming, but she said he was too busily engaged in painting a *nouveau riche* Frenchwoman. She asked Francis how he'd liked Adria's sketches for the book, and said she'd heard from Benedict of their party at the Embassy the other night.

Half an hour later Francis rang up Josephine—to say that he was prevented from taking her down to Henley on Saturday. She sounded angry at first, and then, suddenly, reasonable and effusive. "Naturally—if he couldn't— But then?"

"I'll ring you up."

"Oh— Why don't you arrange a day, *mon petit*—otherwise ye know I won't have a free evening?"

He said, "I can't make any definite arrangements—I'm extremely busy — But I'll telephone—"

She interrupted the finality of his sentence.

"*Tu m'aime encore?*"

"Of *course*."

Her voice developed another tone.

"*C'était bien—l'autre soir?*"

"*Oui, ma chérie*." He tried not to sound irritable.

"*Alors, tu va m'téléphoner?*"

"*Mais sûrement*."

"Well then, so long, eh?"

"Good-bye."

"*Au'voir. . . .*"

Mrs. Leigh could not come to Oxford after all, on account of a function, which she had forgotten about, but which—as a "Daughter of the American Revolution"—she was bound in conscience, if not in honor, to attend.

So that only Francis, Adria, and Miss Rose Linley arrived at Christ Church, to be greeted at the top of a dark narrow staircase in Tom Quad by Alan Grey, a young man with charming looks and even more charming, if slightly breathless, manners, who said:—

"Oh Miss Linley— Oh, Adria darling—" smiling and a little flushed, and "Oh—how d'you do," to Francis, a little respectfully. "*Won't* you sit down?" he said. "Please—"

The sunlight poured in through high-up windows, lighting the dark paneling, the ugly sofa, the down-at-heels armchairs, the bright "art satin" cushions, the lovely spinet, and the table, spread with a coarse white cloth and Georgian silver.

"Alan, what lovely rooms!" said Adria, and the young man—handing round cocktails, saying to Miss Rose, "You don't, *do* you? How silly of me," and to Francis, "There's a dash of absinthe in them, I *hope* you don't mind"—glanced round and said, with all the pride of his transient, but still so new and exciting ownership: "Well—they are jolly, aren't they?" And then, giving himself a cocktail, "How do you like my Van Gogh print? It's that marvelous German process, you know. . . ." And then, as Francis got up, duly to admire the "Sunflowers" above the invitation cards, cricket programmes, notices of political club dinners, cigarette holders, and green glass candlesticks on the chimney piece, their owner said, catching the eye of his venerable "scout," that "luncheon was ready and he did hope they didn't mind his not having asked anyone else—as the two men he'd hoped to get, and who were really worth while their meeting, one being President of the Union and the other Gerald Collins, whose poetry of course they'd heard of, hadn't been able to come. . . ."

He put Miss Linley on his right, Adria on his left, Francis opposite in a chair which he described as Charles II: "Rather jolly, isn't it? I bought it last week. . . ." To Francis it seemed only too clearly like the bust of Napoleon on the sideboard, one of those erroneous and oddly poignant assertions of "Taste" made by youth (in the same way that a motor car was a demonstration of Ownership, a girl an affirmation of Love, a journey an expression of Travel) . . .

Miss Linley joined with Francis in properly liking the chair. (So wide, thought Francis, is this conspiracy to keep youth from any sharp taste of experience, to save them from knowing "fakes," to allow them to believe that chairs that seem old are new, and that love, which seems new, is old and brittle.)

But Adria admired the flowers. Her cousin flushed.

"*Do* you like them? I arranged them myself. I was trying to get a sort of Dutch flower picture effect—I got the flowers from an old woman who has a garden by Magdalen Bridge."

The sunshine fell on the flowers, the cloth, the salmon mayonnaise, the crested plates—burnishing the jug filled high and gold with hock-cup, so that the green chips of cucumber and stagnant strawberries looked like bright fishes, among the leaves of borage.

The scout, white-haired and in a dusty black coat, moved behind them; and while they discussed "Subjects"—the Theatre, Books, Politics (instigated deferentially but eagerly by their host)—he, the scout, served them with roast chicken, with bread sauce, with new potatoes and green peas and gravy, and, in due time, with meringues and cream and strawberries—serving their talk and their laughter as, in his time (which held more summer terms in Oxford, more luncheons in June, than he could count), he had served so much gay talk, and exactly such easy and absurd laughter, with salmon, with roast chicken and green peas, with meringues, and cream, and strawberries. . . .

And it was Francis's awareness of this (remembering just such luncheons that he'd given himself, in Magdalen, fifteen years ago) that made him say to Adria, after luncheon, when they were drinking their bad coffee and smoking gold-tipped cigarettes, that he believed that, were the University itself to be destroyed, and the whole of European civilization come (as was likely enough) to its imminent end—that still, in those desolate places which had once been Colleges, would be seen, in June (and every June until the earth itself was frozen), the figures of college scouts, in their tail coats and worn black boots, serving salmon mayonnaise to the lower air; handing meringues, with a faintly lost yet unfailingly deferential expression, to a circle of toadstools, in a wood that was once Tom Quad; or serving coffee and liqueurs—in the lush field that once was Magdalen—to passing butterflies.

"*No*—I don't like your picture," said Adria; and he saw that he had hurt her imagination.

Miss Rose said, "Will the jungle come in so soon?"

He said, "Isn't it halfway in already? It's at our very door again, it's in our education, in our press, in our politics—"

"But *then*," said their host, "surely, Sir Francis,—and I do absolutely agree with you,—isn't it our business to keep it *out*?" . . .

Francis hesitated.

"One gets away"—he offered what he felt was a kind of excuse—"from that kind of thinking." He added, "Fifteen or sixteen years ago one thought more vividly, and rather in your way."

"Oh, but surely things *weren't* so bad then?"

Miss Rose exclaimed, "My dear Alan, they were bad enough! '*The* war'—as we then liked to call it—was scarcely over!"

Adria said, "I remember we had real butter again at school."

"But you do think, Sir Francis," argued his host, "that things are *worse* now?"

"Infinitely. Not a free country left! And armament makers waiting in a ring—to warm their hands by the blaze of Europe."

Adria smiled. "I like that picture."

Her young cousin turned on her, with a sort of incredulous candor. "How *can* you say that, Adria?"

She said, "Alan darling, you're *too* serious. It can't be good for you."

"But," his look, his candor, turned to Francis, "one *can't* be too serious about these things. Look what's happened from people—the *right* people—not being serious enough."

He stood looking from one to the other of them, from his adored cousin to his dear Miss Linley, and from her to Francis, his charming brow, his nervous underlip, his nursery skin, giving him, in the face of what they stood for, a sort of gallant childish integrity. For, in a general way, they were, or had been, his "right people"; their "rightness" now made unrecognizable to his innocence by the inevitable erosion of innumerable facts and interests. He didn't see that they—Francis, and Adria Leigh, and even Rose Linley—were the "people" who should have been so effectively and thoroughly serious—since he was clearly incapable of imagining any of them as fifteen years younger! He saw them—that was clear enough from his admiring

glances, his lovely manners, his innumerable sweet considerations—as older people of an immense subtlety and "amusingness."

He was entranced by the subtlety, and applauded the "amusingness." And if Francis had said, "You mean that 'we' ought to have been 'serious,'" he would have caused the most immediate vivid protestation and confusion. But what he said was:—

"Who are the right people?"

Adria broke in, "If you allow Alan to discuss that we shall be here until the leaves of Francis's jungle cover us up!"

Miss Rose said, drawing on a pair of her impeccable gloves, which was always her signal for departure, "Let us go out and at least enjoy the penultimate sunshine! . . . My parasol, dear Alan?"

They went out into Tom Quad and through into "Peck," and Adria said she wanted to see the Library again. They all went up, and walked up and down enjoying the grandeur of the place, and the fragrance of print and leather that hung, like incense, in the high dusty air.

When they came out again, they had a revulsion of gayety and Adria insisted that they should go on the river, and they went out of Faire Gate, to the High—Miss Rose with Alan, Francis with Adria, and on down to Magdalen Bridge. There Alan, having made it impetuously and unconsciously clear to Francis that he would not dream of letting so old and honored a guest "do the work," proceeded to punt them slowly, with the labored expertness of a novice, up the river. They passed under the shadows of the willows, and out into the sun beside steep bright banks, and over the dark water in the shadows again; and then again onto a shining stretch of water, where the dancing light kept throwing up discs of radiance, and catching them and throwing them up again into the air. And Miss Rose said, "This is indeed heaven"—which was so often her phrase (and as often true, since heaven had kept its habit of lying about her, for the delectation of her blue bright glance, since her infancy).

Later, driving back beside Francis, through the deep green landscape (that had been pale green under a bluer sky in the morning), Adria echoed Rose Linley's words:—

"It *has* been a heavenly day—"

He turned for a second to glance at her, and saw that her face was changed,—by some inner or outward light, he couldn't make out which,—so

that, in that second, she was painted for him upon the flying fields with the kind of beauty that women's faces have in memory.

He faced the road again. He said, "It's been the best day I've had for years." After a minute she said, "If only one could distill one's lovely days and put them in little bottles, and put drops of them on a handkerchief—"

"—On the bad days?"

"Yes."

He smiled and looked at her again. And now she was charming and rather lovely with her hair blown back.

She said, "How does the car feel now?" (The engine had been knocking in the morning.)

As she spoke, and they slowed to swing round a corner, the same noise started again, like a piece of tin clanking. He made a grimace.

"Not too good. And she's pretty hot already."

"What's the oil pressure?"

He laughed. "What an expert question, from you." He looked. "Below twenty."

"When, my dear Francis, did you last put in oil?"

The sound had stopped. She added, "You certainly haven't to-day!"

He couldn't remember.

She said, "We ought to get some as soon as possible."

The clanking under the bonnet started again.

"It's those fools at the garage," he said. "—But I suppose I ought to remember—it's probably my essential disapproval of the motor car that makes me forget." He drew up at a filling station.

"Why don't you ask the man what's wrong?" she asked.

He paid for the oil.

"I hate knowing what's wrong, if I can avoid it. Even *I* know enough to know we shall get to London all right. . . . But rather slowly, and noisily—"

She said she didn't mind any noise except people blowing their noses.

When they got back to London Francis drove the Terraplane into Burton Mews Garage, where the mechanic, an old friend of Francis's, was to have a

look at its "trouble." ("Sounds to me as if one of the big ends must have gone anyway, sir.") Then, at Adria's suggestion, they went to the Ritz to have a cocktail.

In Berkeley Street they met little Gervase Lloyd, in a grey top hat, his beard brown and *soigné*, wearing a white carnation and looking, as Adria said when they'd left him, "like one of Podrecca's marionettes dressed for a 1900 Ascot!" He greeted them with an exclamation of surprise (inflected with both pleasure and curiosity) and said in his tones that were like a range of bells:—

"To think I should have known both of you for *years*" (on a high note) "and never have known that you know each other!!! To think that Francis and I should have been at *Eton*" (high note) "together—and that I should have danced with Adria when she was *eighteen*—and never, you know, somehow—connected you!!!" And having visibly decided that "they" would make a theme for his next piece of innocuous bell-like gossip, he was "on" to his "subject"—of which the little chimes of gossip were only the surface evidence, and which was much more clearly indicated by his sustained attempts (to which Nature had given no countenance) to look like Edward VII—the subject which he referred to in his dreadfully playful moments as his "Teddyism."

"My *dear* lady," he exclaimed, laying his gloved hand on Adria's arm, "yesterday—just *imagine* it—what do you think I found in an *antiquaire's*? . . . I won't tell you which! One of my *special antiquaires*."

Adria, avoiding Francis's eye, said she couldn't imagine.

"*Why*, my dear lady—nothing more, or less, than an absolutely *perfect* nineteen hundred and five—at least I'm pretty sure it's five—or it might even, of *course*, be *provincial*, of the winter of 1906, sealskin jacket!!!"

"How divine!" said Adria.

"*Yes—yes indeed*," rang out little Gervase, "even the lining of the sleeves is perfect! I am having a man come to photograph it this afternoon! When I've had the photographs done,—and if they are successful of course,—I'll *show* them to you! . . . I'll *write* to you,—that's it, I'll write to you *both*,—and you shall come and have luncheon with me at Cadogan Square and see them!"

"And the original, I hope," said Francis.

"—Eh—what?" asked Gervase, like all "specialists" insensitive to "outside" thought, and blinking with his small bright thin-lidded eyes (that

could never, for one fractional second, suggest the pouched and regal gaze of Edward VII).

"The jacket itself," Francis explained.

"Oh, yes! Dear me *yes*! And, er—all sorts of other things I shall show you as well— It's a long time since you came—wasn't it with dear Lady Quenton?—to see my collection, Adria. I seem to remember it *was* with Lady Quenton."

"I think it was," said Adria.

But when—after another dozen sentences of reminiscences, ending by a peal of silvery assignations—Gervase Lloyd had finally gone on his springing way to "Grosvenor Square, my dear lady, to see poor *dear* Mrs. Addiscombe," Adria remarked that it had indeed been with Lady Quenton that she had visited Gervase's collection! And that that lady, whose pride it was to preserve in the midst of the shambles of London Society a certain standard of intolerance, had been asked by Gervase, "flushed," as Adria put it, "with his Collecting Feeling," whether she would like to present him, or rather the collection, with—he had heard about them from her daughter Mary—the pair of golden slippers worn by her for the Coronation in 1902, and "if *possible*, my dear Lady Quenton, the—er—stockings that were worn *with* them?"

They went into the Ritz exchanging anecdotes of "little Gervase," Francis describing his alleged call upon Mrs. Langtry—giving even the anecdotes connected with his tour across France in 1925 in a 1906 Darraq motor car.

They found a corner of the lounge where it seemed possible to Francis that their table might not be incessantly interrupted by Adria's friends,—women who all looked alike, or young men who looked even more alike,—who all used the same perfunctory passion of address and the same hysterical emphasis of the commonplace (saying, as the woman at the Savoy had said the other night, "Darling *beloved* sweetheart, *have* you, for *God's* sake, seen my *bloody* little handbag anywhere?"—holding Adria's hand for hours while they looked at someone right the other side of the room). In fact, in the last weeks, during which time he'd been out with her a good many times, it had become a kind of luxury for him to have her even for half an hour, to himself. And, though he was aware how much this luxury value of her company attracted both the eclectic and the snob in him, he had come lately (like a woman who "marries into" fine jewels, and then grows to feel

their intrinsic beauty) to want her talk and her looks and her clothes—but more than anything, her responsiveness—for himself.

While they had their cocktails they continued to exchange nonsense, first about Gervase, then about his sister Taffy, who, Adria affirmed, was so "sex starved" that she often slept under her own bed in case there might be a man there!

Francis was telling his story about Taffy's alligator when he caught sight of Léonie Lützen and Harrison. They had just come in and were standing on the steps. He pulled his chair round, so that his back was turned to them and they couldn't see him. As he did so Adria said, "Do forgive my interrupting, but *the* most lovely sort of 'Mrs. Trapes' woman has just come in with the best Laurel or Hardy (I *never* remember which is which) that ever happened. You *must* look. She's got the sort of eye that whisks good girls off to Buenos Aires in no time at all!"

Francis said, laughing:—

"I daren't look round after that. She might be one of my aunts and that would be too embarrassing for you!"

"I don't think so, my dear— And you've *missed* her. And she really was a collection piece!—And, oh heavens, it's later than I thought—I know it must be because there's Henry Evetts dressed and looking for me—and I promised to meet him here 'dressed' myself at eight—and haven't even got home yet. I must explain to him. . . . Why didn't you tell me it was so late?"

Francis got up with her, laughing at her because she was, he said, so really fantastically unaware how often she was late. And Henry Evetts, coming up wearing his most brilliant smile, and an almost Disraelian buttonhole, joined in Francis's accusation, but exacted her immediate company at dinner in the clothes she had on, as he had to be back at the House before nine.

Adria came back to Francis, after she had said good-bye, to ask him if he would come the next Monday to the box she'd been lent, at the Opera.

When he accepted, taking her hand again for a moment, she said quickly and softly, "I *am* pleased you can come. . . . I've asked Rose Linley—as well, and Benedict might make us four—"

He said, "Thank you, I'd love to come—"

He added, "To-day has been quite enchanting, Adria."

She hesitated. And then smiled—and turned away again.

On Wednesday evening he telephoned to Josephine and went to see her. The flat was more dreadful than he'd remembered, divans, fur rugs, bad French furniture, "pillow dolls," and in the bedroom a gilded canvas wallpaper covered all over with paper fans stuck, in patterns, with drawing pins. The bed itself was in an alcove, and Josephine had draped purple velvet curtains over the front of the alcove. She made him notice and admire this. The pillows had some embroidered lace round them, and one of them had "Léonie" embroidered over the corner. Josephine was dressed to receive him in a mauve silk *peignoir* with mauve marabou all round. . . .

He caught sight of the grandmother as he went out, for the kitchen door was open. She was standing by the white enameled gas stove, in a black shawl, and looked like a drawing by Goya superimposed on an advertisement of the Ideal Home Exhibition.

As Josephine was helping him with his coat in the dank-smelling little hall, behind the bead curtain, she suggested that instead of his coming to her on Saturday, as he'd suggested, he should take her away for a week-end trip in his car. She said she would like to go to Broadstairs, which, she said, was more "select" than Margate. She told him that when she was at school at Westgate they used sometimes to go by bus to Broadstairs on half-holidays, and that she had often thought how she would like to go there to the Grand Hotel.

He promised to take her.

Chapter VII

There was, on Monday afternoon, a train up from Broadstairs at 5.25. While Francis was packing, Josephine came and stood in the doorway between her bedroom and his. She said, "I shall be lonesome without you to-night, *mon petit*."

He put his toothbrushes in their case. He glanced at his traveling clock. It was already five and twenty past four; and her sentimentality annoyed him.

"Nonsense. Have a good dinner and go to bed early."

"It will be sad to dine without you."

He put in his sponge bag.

"Don't be silly, dear."

She pouted.

"You don' care that you go?"

He looked up, exasperated. She was still in her black chiffon nightdress.

"But I shall *see* you in London in a day or two! Don't be *absurd*." He added, "You're only staying on here because you told me you wanted a change. You could have come up *with* me! Don't be so unreasonable."

"Why—do you *have* to go?"

"I told you. I'm going to the Opera."

"Ha! Very snobby! Eh?" She came in and sat down on the bed. He snapped:—

"Don't sit on my shirt. I've got to put it on in a minute."

She got off it and sat on the eiderdown and said, a little sulkily:—

"You do seem in a great hurry all of a sudden, don' you?"

"Naturally. I've got to catch a train." He got his pyjamas out of a drawer and put them in the suitcase, and she made a joke about his not having worn them much which made him want to throw her back into her own room. She saw his expression and said:—

"Well, I don't think you're a very nice boy."

He glanced at the clock again, and didn't answer.

She said, still watching him:—

"I like that silk dressing gown of yours; it's ever so smart."

He packed his hair tonic. He could feel her look moving up and down his body. He took his note case off the table beside his bed.

"By the way, I've settled everything until to-morrow afternoon. But I'll leave you something in case you want to stay on—"

She looked up at him. Her hair was still untidy, and the mascara was smudged here and there round her eyes. She said shortly, "Didn' you enjoy yerself—this afternoon?"

He fidgeted out a pound note, and then another. "Of course I did."

She put out her hand and caught hold of the tie of his dressing gown.

"I bet this is real silk—isn't it?"

"Here's two pounds, my dear."

"Why d'yer *have* to go? Eh?"

She laid her left hand on his thigh.

"Because—I *must*."

"You—*must*—eh?"

He said, "Yes—of course. I *told* you so!"

"You have to—*mon petit*?"

"—Yes."

"I don't think you have to. . . ."

Adria, leaning forward to take in the familiar grandiosities of the scene, leaning on the red plush, over the gilded lights flowering beneath the boxes, and getting her impression of the crowd in the stalls below, and the remote sounds of the orchestra tuning up (sounds like the matches lit here and there to identify the position of each "piece" and rocket before a display of fireworks), breathing in the vast yet so queerly pinchbeck splendor of it all, mixed with the scent of her own gardenias, said to Miss Linley:—

"Benedict and Francis are coming sometime during the first act." She added, "Francis hates to dine early. He prefers supper afterwards," as if she

were revealing to Miss Rose one of the more remarkable evidences of his taste.

Miss Rose, holding up her lorgnon, murmured, "And where do we sup?"

"With Benedict—somewhere. He always has the feeling about 'what to eat,' on which occasion."

"Ah," exclaimed Miss Rose, "I observe my sweet niece and her husband!" She examined a box opposite. "—And some worthy man with them—" She leaned a little forward without bending her waist. "No other, I suspect, than our Prime Minister— Such are my dear niece's flights! . . . And I daresay her bad dressing doesn't signify in those circles!"

Adria saw her Aunt Marion come into the box next to them. And there, down in the stalls, wearing an immense Malmaison carnation, was Gervase, and with him his beloved Errington-Smiths. . . .

"As for *your* dress, Adria," said Miss Rose, "I have never seen you look better!—That exquisite silver. . . ." The gleam of her look rested for a moment on Adria's face. "What it *is* to have such looks—" She picked up her programme. "I do wonder you aren't thrice married, my dear— To think that we should all flock still to hear Verdi— My good sister Emily (she was *most* hurt to have missed you at Oxford!) says Verdi is stuff for barrel organs —"

"I wonder," said Adria, smiling, thinking that if Toulouse-Lautrec had painted a duchess she would have looked like Rose Linley, "that neither of us is married. . .!" Opening her fan, she wondered how soon Francis and Benedict would come.

The door was opened at the back of the box and Henry Evetts came in. He said hurriedly, "Can I come round in the second *entr'acte*? I've got to get back for a division now—and then I'm coming back here. *Wonderful* to hear this! Isn't it?" He hurried out again.

"That's a handsome creature," said Miss Rose.

"Yes," said Adria. The lights were going down, and as the Overture began her glance moved to the glowing horizon of the footlights and became focused there. Their glow blurred with the music and seemed, like some distillation of glamour, to be drawn up by her gaze into her heart, where it changed again, into a slow sweet influence in her veins. And she thought: "This—for no reason, by no premeditation, is 'happiness.' This moment, this evening—Verdi's music is made by Orpheus, and the boxes are filled with Great Beauties (Miss Rose's niece, opposite, in purple, is Giovanna

Tornabuoni; and in those boxes off is the Prima-Vera herself; and Nefertiti is in the second row of the stalls); this moment the scent of gardenias (growing stronger) is Wilde's notion of asphodel, and the roof of Covent Garden is a dome of many-colored glass, and London outside is Babylon in its best days, Babylon on a hot night in the height of the Babylonian season. (And even dressing this evening, lifting this bottle and that, slipping into silk, into silver, was like a waltz. . . .)"

The door at the back of the box opened and shut quietly.

She didn't see him.

A second later she felt a hand on the back of her chair, then, close to her, a whisper—"Adria"—and then something light dropped on her lap, onto her fan. She looked down.

The curtain went up.

"For you," said Benedict.

She read it in the brilliance from the proscenium.

After a pause she said in a low voice:—

"Francis can't come, after all. He's missed his train."

She handed Benedict the telegram and turned her attention to the stage.

Chapter VIII

"Something that was right has gone wrong," thought Adria, waiting for him in the Bath Club, with her *Country Life* on her knees and her glance on each of the doors in turn. (For she was early; and he was late.) Something has happened to the sort of round shining rightness that there was at Oxford ten days ago, that held that whole day at Oxford inside its clearness, like those crystal balls that contain, in miniature, the Piazza at Venice or Saint Anthony of Padua. But if you shake the crystal, she thought, then there's a snowstorm. Perhaps that was why—that the crystal had been shaken— And if so, who'd shaken it? Or what?

When he'd telephoned, yesterday evening, to ask her to meet him to-day for luncheon, his voice was different. And his apologies had sounded forced —uneasy. Or hadn't they? Had she imagined his constraint on the telephone yesterday, just as she'd imagined his look of pleasure when she came out of the house, that morning, to go to Oxford? And his disappointment last week when she couldn't dine with him? How easily and stupidly she might let herself think that he was—charmed by her, interested in her—just because so many other men had been easily charmed, and immediately interested. She thought (taking out her pocket mirror again and her lipstick again), "Even if *he* is so 'different,' because he's vivid where they've been flat, and quick where they've been slow, and evasive where they've been deadly honest,—and honest as they've been smug and hypocritical; if he's different, for me, there's no reason why *I* should seem different to him. . . . And even if I want to be with him, for what he knows, and what he understands, does he want to be with me for anything more satisfying than my being"—that's what he'd said, kissing her hand—"too charming?"

She put away the little glass. And wasn't that, exactly that, why all the others had wanted to be with her?

This "charm" of hers, which was the positive quality that had made "the others" love her, adore her, want to marry her, was a negative quality for Francis Radnor. He saw through it. He saw that she was ordinary and rather alone. And that her only charm was a kind of riches that had never brought her what she really wanted; that had, perhaps, prevented her ever really knowing what she wanted.

This "seeing through her" explained his voice yesterday, perhaps. Even if he'd enjoyed the day at Oxford (and all their meetings and comings and goings in the last weeks), he might, just as easily,—for he was moody,—feel

bored by their next meeting. The changes weren't in her, but in him. His sweetness to her, his friendliness, his flashes of emotion (as when he'd kissed her hand in Curzon Street), she saw it all now, were in the climate of his character. She was part of the landscape that he saw one day with delight and another with indifference. And wasn't it—she glanced at the door, and turned two pages of *Country Life*—this flickering of his nature, between indifference and delight, vigor and sensitiveness, fineness and (at moments which hadn't escaped her) vulgarity of spirit—wasn't it this perpetual paradox that made her wait for him, like this, feeling nervous for the first time in her life—and uncertain what she would say, as her "first remark"?

Francis wondered, as he dismissed the typist and got up from his desk, why, of all places, he'd chosen the Bath Club.

He rang for his secretary.

"I shan't be back before 3.30, Miss Ray."

"Very well, Sir Francis."

"When Mrs. Egmont comes, if I'm not back, give her tea and keep her amused. But don't give her the Lapsang—she wants another advance and I don't want her to think we can afford it. Incidentally we can't—"

"Yes, Sir Francis."

"And tell Mr. Horst that I can go to-morrow to Aylesbury, after all."

"Very well."

"And tell Horace to call me a taxi—I'm late already— And I want it open—"

"The taxi, you mean?"

"What else?"

In the taxi he decided he ought to have asked her somewhere that was not merely more amusing, but more festive. For in the last twenty-four hours,—and especially since he'd telephoned to her,—the idea of seeing her again had made him feel alternately sentimental and festive.

He was aware that it was sentimentality and consciously allowed himself its sweet insidious luxury. On his return from Broadstairs he had opened her note telling him the number of the box at the Opera; and he had kept the note beside his bed last night and put it away this morning with the

programme of the ball (in aid of he couldn't think what) that they'd been to at the end of May at Claridge's. But the sentimentality—which he partly cultivated for its own pleasure—was somehow, he felt, redeemed by his real feeling of anticipation. He felt that he wanted to order quantities of rich rare food that neither of them could eat, in ornate and costly surroundings that neither of them would look at. The reputable *décor* of the Bath Club, enriched by nothing more ornate than the skulls of Elks (or, as Adria herself had suggested, by the skulls of original Members), and its wholesome range of food, hardly responded to his fancy.

Perhaps he'd have done better to ask her to his chambers. Sentimentally he could see her there, set in "his" surroundings. (He could make a better setting for her, he thought, than she did for herself.) Festively he could, at least, have sent Lynne out to Covent Garden to buy innumerable roses, and ordered the cook to excel, and even exceed herself.

For, in harmony with his fleeting pictures, he foresaw Adria herself—at one moment lovely and quiescent, with something of Monday evening's chagrin left in her look to give it the tang of unhappiness that it lacked (he recognized a sadism here), and at another moment gay and sweet and fantastic, as she knew how to be.

As he came in she put down *Country Life* and looked up.

"Well, Francis! How *are* you?"

"I'm afraid I'm late."

His expectancy of her had been so intense in quality, and so vivid in detail, that now, when he sat down beside her and saw her again, face to face, she seemed like a bad copy of his picture of her. He said:—

"Well— How are you?" seeing her so strangely lacking the emphases he'd specifically expected—and oddly showing, as he took her in, characteristics that he hadn't remembered at all.

She said something immediately, about his having missed the Opera on Monday night. And as she spoke, it not only struck him that her voice was harder than he remembered, but that her whole aspect—her clothes, her gestures, her way of glancing at him—was sophisticated, whereas his picture had made her, though poised in manner, extraordinarily vivid and natural. When she looked at him, making several more remarks of an intelligent but perfunctory sort about the Opera,—the singing, the conductor, the way it had

been given in Paris the year before,—it seemed to him that her appearance was so much less lovely than he'd imagined.

She wasn't lovely. And she wasn't graceful. She wasn't even elegant. She wasn't conceivably as he'd thought of her last night, the woman who, by a change in her voice, or a movement of her hand, could be so extraordinarily moving.

She was simply chic, and amusing and self-assured. And physically disturbing. And the recognition of this last quality in her made him sum up all his other reactions in a sudden feeling of dislike.

"Rose Linley was so disappointed too that you didn't come—"

"So was I, my dear." He thought that probably she'd seen on the telegram where he'd sent it from, so he said: "I missed the only afternoon train up from Broadstairs. You remember," he smiled, "the sick state of the car—"

"Oh yes. And I always miss trains myself. They never *will* wait."

He said, "I have an elderly aunt who lives there. She always keeps her clocks wrong on purpose—but she never tells one whether she's in a fast mood or a slow one—and her guests have to guess." (This was true about his Aunt Janet, who lived at Selsea.)

She laughed at this. She said, with a quick renewed flicker of her charm: —

"We used to go to Broadstairs when we were children. We spent a whole winter there once, when Mother was in love, and only wanted to see us at week-ends."

"Was she?" He hadn't, somehow, in his notion of Charlotte Leigh's life, seen her "involved" in any way, in anything. He had imagined her "loved," but never, perhaps because of the distinct element of irony in her, as loving.

"Yes," said Adria, "dreadfully in love with a mad bad darling of a man whom she still adores. They still write to each other. He lives on a lovely island in the tropics."

"Did he love her?"

"Yes. In a way—I remember sort of understanding about it, even at the time. (I was about eleven when it started.) I knew that she was in the middle of a sort of bad exciting storm—"

"What happened?"

"Oh—well—I think she saw pretty soon that he was too mad and bad altogether. . . . I don't mean she'd have run away ever—people didn't, in our world—or not Mother's kind of person. But I think she would have had him as her lover (and later her great friend; only, of course, because she was so in love). If only he hadn't been so dreadful to her."

"How was he dreadful?"

She took out a cigarette and he lit it for her.

"Oh—not in any cruel way, on purpose. He did adore her. But he was one of those queer people who *can't* be 'right'—I mean in all the little ways as well—and even if they love someone they do horrid little shabby things to them—like borrowing money and not paying them back, and bringing slightly *louche* people to the house, and getting their tickets for Ascot paid—and so on. You know—sort of profiting by the other person's loving them, but without really meaning to."

It was the first time that he had heard her make an analysis of feelings or motives, and he was surprised by her lucidity. He said:—

"I know exactly— And the effect in the long run is just as bad—is worse, perhaps, than doing the obviously dreadful things." He added, flicking a crumb off the tablecloth, "Like physically betraying the friend."

She hesitated. "Worse, really. Because it would make you feel more hopeless about them."

He took her up.

"You mean you think that—just betraying someone—for—for a night—doesn't matter?"

She hesitated, meeting his deliberately casual gaze with a sort of troubled candor.

She said, "I think it matters *less*, because it probably means the person who does that kind of betraying—especially if it's the man—is less hopeless. But of course I don't mean it—it wouldn't hurt as much—" she added after a pause—"probably more. Because, after all, the little mean things don't involve another person—and probably you have the sort of pleasure of spoiling the person you love—" She was thoughtful, but she was, he could see that, also perfectly theoretical. She was showing intelligence and not intuition, or feeling. She was again,—and the feeling of faint hostility he'd had at the beginning of luncheon revived,—again simply knowing her world.

After a pause, and more as though for the sake of talking, he said:—

"I always wonder why your mother married your father."

"—Oh," said Adria, "just his looks and his obvious charm. They were awfully young." She added, "He's not really as—as unreal as his manner makes people think. But of course Ben says that he's affected even when he's alone!"

She looked at her watch.

"I must go. I've got a crowd of things to do this afternoon. I've got to go to a shop in Dover Street to give Ben my advice about a piece of jade."

He got up with her. He said, though he hadn't meant to:—

"I'll go as far as that with you."

"How nice." The ease and openness of her pleasure annoyed him. And as they went out into Berkeley Street, and up Hay Hill, he was exasperated by her talk, which seemed, though her voice was pitched too low for his perfect understanding of all the words, to be merely "chatter." Anyway, he thought of her to himself as tiresomely "chattering."

"—And, *what* a bore," she exclaimed as they passed Pierre's, "I must get a manicure this afternoon! And Pierre's always keep you waiting—that's why I usually get them to send to the house, though Mother says it's gross extravagance."

He said, "A friend of mine, a nice old Frenchwoman, has a niece who's a manicurist there."

"Oh—I wonder what her name is? D'you know?"

"Josephine."

Adria shook her head.

"No. I've never had her. I usually have Celia or Betty." She added, as they paused before the antique shop at the corner, "I'll ask for—Josephine, is it? And if I can't get her this afternoon, I'll have them send her to me at home."

"Do," he said. And they shook hands and he left her.

Chapter IX

"*La manicura po venire, signorina?*"

"*Si*, Emilia. Tell her to come up at once."

Adria was resting on the sofa in her bedroom. She put down *Le Rouge et le Noir*, wondering whether Julien's kind of neurasthenic pride in the least explained Francis's moods. Was Francis really, essentially, romantic? she wondered, as Emilia showed in the manicurist (a squat but attractive little thing, with black almond-shaped eyes and wide cheekbones).

"Good evening. You are Josephine, aren't you?"

"Yes, mademoiselle." Her manner was respectful, and her movements efficient, as she put her case on the little table that Emilia had made ready beside the sofa.

"I'm glad you were able to come. I rang them up rather late this afternoon."

"Miss Kerr changed another appointment for me. May I fetch some hot water from the bathroom?" She took off her hat, put it with her gloves on a chair in the corner, and took up her metal bowl.

"It's through that door."

Adria glanced after her, amused by the genteel, yet twanging sounds of her English, and the vulgarity which something in her character or body gave to her really quite plain black dress. She wondered what the aunt, who was Francis's friend, could be like. (Undoubtedly an inhabitant of what he'd once referred to as his "life below the salt"!)

The girl came back, put down the bowl filled with soapy water, put on her white overall, and sat down on the low chair.

"Do you like them shorter—or jus' trimmed?"

"A little shorter."

"Very well."

Adria said, "Would you mind fetching me a towel to put over my dressing gown. Emilia forgot—"

"Certainly, mademoiselle!" She went to the bathroom with short high-heeled steps.

"I took one of the thicker ones out of the shelf in the corner. Is that all right?"

"Quite."

The girl spread the towel over the satin and the edge of the sofa, and sat down again.

"You do not like them pointed?"

"No."

Adria said, "Did you bring my special enamel? I reminded Miss Kerr."

"Yes, mademoiselle. It's here." She touched the top of a bottle with her own stumpy garnet-tipped forefinger.

A breeze came in through the windows, stirring the white muslin frills of the curtains. The day had been fresh and clear, after a week of thunderstorms. Adria thought how pleasant the week-end at the Brutons' would be. And then wished that Francis had been invited too. . . . She must get him to meet them.

"Who is it usually does your nails, mademoiselle?"

"Betty, as a rule." Adria added, "As a matter of fact I asked for you because a friend of mine, who knows an aunt of yours, told me that you were working at Pierre's."

The girl stopped filing the left thumbnail for a moment and looked up.

"Who is it?"

"I don't think he knows you personally. His name's Radnor."

The girl looked down again, and as she did so she dropped the file, and, flushing red, pushed back the chair to bend down to look for it.

"There it is," said Adria, "under the table. *Look*—"

The girl picked it up, and, muttering "I'm sorry," and still flushed and not looking up, pulled in her chair again, and put back the cushion on her knee.

"I'm *ever* so sorry," she muttered again.

Adria was touched by the girl's shame at her lapse from efficiency.

"It doesn't matter. It's lucky to drop things." She smiled. But the girl, who was filing quickly again, didn't look up or respond.

After a pause Adria said:—

"Is your aunt a Frenchwoman?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Emilia brought in a small box from Schiaparelli's—Adria told her to undo it. It was the scarf she had ordered to refute Francis's accusation that she never wore any yellow. Emilia put it away on the shelf, and then began laying out Adria's underclothes for the evening.

"Do you like London?"

"Yes, mademoiselle." The girl glanced for a moment at Emilia and then pushed the basin nearer to Adria.

"Please, will you dip your other hand?"

Emilia asked Adria, in Italian, what dress she would wear. She was going to a first night with her mother.

"The new black—"

"*La nera, signorina?*"

"Si, Emilia!" Adria knew that Emilia hated her to wear black, just as every autumn she tried to prevent her having chrysanthemums, the "flowers of the dead," in the house.

"You don' know my aunt?" asked the girl, redipping the orange stick in the red grease.

"No, I'm afraid I don't know her. But this friend of mine just happened to mention—about you, a few days ago— Did you train here?"

"Your hand, please?—No— Well, I begin to learn in France several years ago. But at Pierre' they make you do their own method."

"D'you think it's a particularly good one?"

"It's not for me to say, mademoiselle."

A slightly sulky little thing, thought Adria, but certainly knows her job. She didn't bother to talk to her any more. She lay back, feeling a little sleepy after the long afternoon shopping and seeing pictures.

"You like the varnish all over or the tips white?"

The girl's voice twanged in her ear sharply, almost unpleasantly.

"—Oh—no—thank you. Not all over, I mean." She glanced at the girl's forehead and saw a glister of perspiration below the fringe and thought how dreadfully easily the lower classes felt the heat.

But the nails were perfectly done, and when the girl was packing her little bag, Adria gave her a shilling and said she would ask for her again next week.

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

The girl took up her hat and gloves, and put them on quickly and modestly without looking in the glass.

Josephine came out of Chesterfield Street and took a taxi straight to the Temple.

When Francis got back from Bedford Square, Lynne, even more "ramrod" than usual in his stance, said, "There's a young lady waiting to see you, Sir Francis."

"What's her name? How often have I told you—"

"I did ask 'er name, Sir Francis. But it's a French name—Mademoiselle —"

"Thank you, Lynne."

"I stayed in there with 'er, Sir Francis."

"No need to do that."

"Well, I don't know, if you'll excuse me, Sir Francis—"

"Bring in the whiskey and soda at once."

"Very good, Sir Francis."

Josephine was standing over by the window with her back turned to him.

If he had had his eyes shut he could have felt her as an alien influence in the book-scented air.

She pretended not to hear him and stayed by the window.

"Josephine!"

She spun round and he saw that she was shaking, her eyes narrowed, her lower jaw thrust forward. She snarled:—

"Well—so you have come back—Eh?"

"Naturally. This is where I live. But what are *you* doing here? What d'you mean by coming here?"

"Whado I *mean*? Eh?"

"Yes. I never asked you to come here."

"Oh no! *I* know that well enough! You bet I do! Certainly you wouldn' ask *me* here. It's society girls that you like to ask *here*, isn't it?"

"You paint a—a very dashing picture."

"Don't you be sarcastic with me! See!"

He came forward into the middle of the room, took a cigarette, and held out the box to her. "Don't be silly, Josephine." He was surprised by his own sense of her vulgarity. For she appeared to him here, in this room, among the books and paneled walls, in such remarkably bad taste that he was more preoccupied by explaining his own "choosing" of her than by accounting for her being here at all (having come, without warning, and in a state of hysterical rage, to visit him).

"Silly—eh? I don' want your filthy cigarettes. You can send them to your lady friend that you're so *keen* on that you send *me—me*, eh!—that's the most dirty cheek of it—to send me to do her a manicoor!"

"Oh—" he said.

"—That's how you think I am, nothing at all but a common manicoorist, isn' it?"

He said, amiably:—

"But you *are* a manicurist, my dear."

"*Yes! Go on!* Of course—" she snarled, smiling and speaking slowly with her dangerous eyes on his face. "I am to go to the house of the rich society girl that you *love* so much! You tell her she is to ask for a little common girl that you happen to know that is a manicoorist—at Pierre'—"

"As a matter of fact I didn't tell her I knew you!"

She screamed: "*No!* I knew it too. You didn'! You were *assshamed* to! Eh! You pretend you didn' know me and you tell her a rotten untrue story that you know my aunt!"

"I—do know your aunt." He was slightly exasperated. It hadn't occurred to him, by some quite ordinary lack of calculation, that Josephine would ever know how Adria had come to ask for her. Stupid of him. He

remembered now; he'd mentioned her to Adria, last Wednesday, after that rather uncomfortable luncheon at the Bath Club, when (somehow, by one of those twisting processes of self-exculpation) he'd come, expecting the sight of Adria not only to absolve his conscience (about Broadstairs and the Opera) but to still it, by her charm, into a delicious oblivion. And when she failed to do this, and instead of being soothing proved to be herself unexpectedly and tiresomely disturbing, he'd,—that was what the situation had come to,—he'd blamed her, and intimated his sense of her guilt by indifference. It was part of his indifference, he supposed, which had made him mention Josephine.

"But you pretend to her you don' know *me*! *Me!* An' if you was to meet me in the street when you are with her—Miss Leigh—you would not recognize me either! I bet you wouldn'. An' you are very proud to go with her to the Opera—aren't you! Do yer think I don' know now why you was so *anxious* not to miss your train that time?—But you don' take *me* to the Opera? Do you? Certainly you don't— And not to really smart restaurants too, but always places where you will not *meet* anybody! *Eh?*"

He said, "You're one kind of woman. And she's another."

"What d'yer mean by that, eh? Why is there such a difference, I'd like to know!—*Yes*—I do know, of course, darn well, what yer mean—it's that she is a 'lady'—a *snob*, eh?—that you can go to grand places with, but with me it is different, *isn'* it? You are jolly glad for *certain things* to go with me. Aren't you? *You bet you are, you filthy*— An' you think *une femme du monde* like that isn' *low* enough, eh, for such things—you wouldn' like to do with her some of the things we do, eh?—*Well*, I tell you one thing," she hurled herself suddenly at him, but he caught her wrists, "you dirty filthy beast, I tell you one thing, it is that they aren't so different than you think, *ces femmes du monde*, and not she either, you *bet* she isn'.—An' you think she's so 'pure,' don't you, an' all that, but I can tell you if you was to try you wouldn' find such a *big difference*— No, you wouldn'!"

"Please be quiet."

"*Quiet!* Eh! Like her! You'd like me to be ladylike, wouldn' you. You needn' hold my wrists any more. I'm not going to hurt you. I can behave like a 'society lady' when I want to—" She made a swift snarling retreat and then dropped, crouching down, on the sofa.

"*I* seen 'er bedroom—an' 'er dressing room, an' all that! An' what d'you think she goes covering herself with all those perfumes that's everywhere in her bottles, and wearing cami-knickers with lace all over of them to show

off what she shouldn't"—she made a gesture—"and getting herself up in 'er bedroom as if she wasn' no better than the most common woman what I wouldn' speak to! *No* I wouldn'!—if she isn' no better than such a woman —"

"Will you go, Josephine—"

"Go! Eh!— Well, you needn' think Miss Leigh is any good because I tell you she's as worse as any filthy bitch! See!" She sprang up again. "An' I seen something *else*, too!"

He got her by the shoulders.

"Get out of here at once—d'you hear? If you don't get out this minute I'll throw you out! D'you understand?"

She struggled and kicked at his shins. "*You*—Eh—Wha' d'you mean you'll throw me *out*? You think that's very fine but I tell you men isn' allowed to throw ladies out, see—the police don't allow it! See!" He'd got her fast now and started pushing her towards the door.

"*Yes*," she screamed, "yes, you think you can jus' treat me any way, don't you?". . .

As he got her to the door it was opened from outside and Lynne, without a word, took her free arm, and then with a sudden wrench got her from Francis, marched her, screaming, across the hall, and pushed her out, through the front door, on to the stairs outside, and above her snarls of "spy —filthy beast of a servant," Francis heard Lynne's voice outside the front door.

"Look 'ere. There's a perliceman down in the square. You better not let *him* hear you screaming!"

Francis went back into the library.

A moment later Lynne came in.

"Your bath is ready, sir."

Chapter X

If Josephine was out of his life now (an absence which he felt, as the nerves feel a sudden ceasing of noise, and the body a subsidence of fever, with an exquisite and increasingly positive relief), the effect of her "scene" remained in his mind.

And phrases that she'd used, though he deliberately forgot the actual words, worked like a slow subtle perversity in his imagination, so that he began at moments to think of Adria, not as Josephine's opposite (setting charm against lewdness, distinction against ignorance—dignity against degradation), but as her substitute.

His vision elaborated a hundred implications of Josephine's images—that were like caricatures on the wall of a back street. Deliberately ignoring the caricatures, his senses felt their effect.

He got to a state when, in his Puritanism, he accused himself of having got rid of Josephine only to degrade Adria—whom he admired and loved—to her level. Then his intelligence threw out notions of "level" and "degradation" and set him thinking (moving, as he so easily did, from thinking to feeling) that since he admired and loved Adria he had the sanctions of romance, religion, and biology, to desire her.

What he worked out, after more than a week of intermittent thinking and feeling, and a good deal of nervous agitation, was that he did (with a sort of naturalness and intensity that frightened the libertine-puritan in him) both love and desire her. And that Josephine's words had, at any rate in his sane moments (which were the moments in his own interest that he meant to act upon), the effect of stripping Adria of her prestige and charm and making him feel her simply as a woman, and therefore, in the measure of this "disillusion," accessible.

He didn't go to see Adria for a fortnight. And during that time she didn't write to him, or telephone to him.

Josephine telephoned several times, but Lynne had orders to say that he was out. Once she came to the house, but Lynne sent her away. (His version—to Francis—of a scene in which Josephine had spared him no word in her vocabulary was that he "had told the French young lady you wasn't at home, Sir Francis.") But his description of her to the cook was as vivid as Josephine's own. He had added that she was "a dangerous customer"—and,

showing the cook the place on his ankle where Josephine had kicked him in her attempts to get in, remarked that she was "the kind that wouldn't stop at nothing."

Finally Francis got his secretary at Horst and Bennett's to ring up Chesterfield Street and ask for Adria. The secretary, Miss Ray, brought in a message that Miss Leigh was not in town, but was expected back the next day. The same afternoon Mrs. Leigh telephoned to him and asked him to come down to Wrens, their small summer house in Gloucestershire, for the next week-end, which was Bank Holiday. She said that Adria was coming, before she went up to Scotland.

He wrote to Adria that evening. He said:—

> I've wanted to write to you ever since our last luncheon together. Please forgive me if I seemed a bore that day. I was depressed.
>
> Not having seen you for a fortnight makes me feel that something must have gone wrong. But I hear we are to have our Bank Holiday together, and so I feel more cheerful. I have just read, in the *Evening Standard*, that you are at the Brutons'. But as I already knew this, *and* have private information of your speedy return, the news doesn't depress me as much as it otherwise might. London is horridly hot, and I suppose if I was really unselfish I would urge you to stay out of it. Will you ring me up when you get back? I shall begin to have the feeling about "things being wrong" again, if you don't—
>
> Yours,
>
> FRANCIS

He found an answer from her the next evening.

> 12, CHESTERFIELD STREET
> MAYFAIR
>
> MY DEAR FRANCIS,—
>
> Alas, I only get back here for ten minutes—to change my "yachting" cap for a "mob" one and off to the country to some darling creatures in Devonshire. *But* we *shall* meet, as you say—for The Holiday. Wrens is heavenly. You'll adore it. I never see how the parents can bear to live anywhere else, but I suppose

they'd burst out of it except in summer when they *can*— I *must* go. Even Emilia, who never knows the time, is *mentioning* it!

Yours,

A.

P.S. Don't have the feeling about wrongness. Because that's what makes things wrong! (Isn't it?)

He went down to Wrens on the Friday afternoon, and found the house, as Mrs. Leigh had described it, "two hundred yards behind a screen of elm trees," and Mrs. Leigh in the garden. Her husband, in a cowboy's hat, was painting a *plein air* which included the Charles II south façade of the house, a visitor in a chair in a blue dress, and too many pigeons. He sprang up immediately on his long legs, waving his paintbrush in welcome. He insisted on taking Francis at once to his room, which faced the western view—"the Constable view, I call it," said Merrick Leigh. When they went downstairs Benedict came in carrying a bunch of roses. He said, "Adria's somewhere in the garden deep in talk with Colin."

"You know Colin Verney," said Charlotte Leigh to Francis.

He at once imagined Adria walking beside yet another of her "young men," and the picture disturbed him; yet pleasantly accentuated for him his sense of possession. (For he knew how easily he could go out, and walk the other side of her and make her turn to him and speak to him.)

Benedict went out with his father.

"No. I don't know him," he said. (He saw how her look would light to his, and her words answer his thoughts—)

"Well, you'd better go and find them both and tell them that tea is ready. Adria's been telling him all about you."

He went out, as he was told, amused at the notion of her tantalizing another young man with her interest in him. But as he passed between the box hedges, and down a further rose garden, he became afraid of seeing her, and had an impulse to hide behind a tree or one of the pergolas, and see her pass. The notion was absurd enough to rid him of the nervousness that had caused it; and, with one of his twists of mood, he recaptured his elation (that was partly hope, partly serenity) of last week: summing up his attitude in a conscious stating to himself that, since he loved her and wanted her,—and since she was so clearly ready for him, so enchantingly apt to him, and so

beautifully and disturbingly responsive,—there was nothing now (was there?) between him and a sort of identification of dignity and pleasure. (An identification of the two things that he'd, so far, so signally failed in.)

He saw her now.

She was coming toward him, across a space of lawn—not with any of her "young men," but with one who was certainly past middle age and who wore a panama hat, and carried a walking stick. When they were within fifty yards of him he got an impression of the two of them—the delightful-looking old man, and the woman beside him (whom he knew was Adria)—having something in common, which made them seem—that was how he felt it—as if they were walking towards him out of the same book (and that it wasn't—he got his first small sharp sense of this at once—the same book as the one that he was in—). She broke away at once from her companion to come forward towards him, saying:—

"How *heavenly* to see you, my dear— How *lovely* that you could come —" with a simplicity that took no trouble at all to hide the emotion that underlay her delight. And with the same simplicity, and yet with nothing naïve in it, for her manner (that was, partly, what made for him such an effect of charm) kept its overtones of sophistication, she turned to the old man as he came up to them and said, "This is Francis—whom I've been telling you about."

They shook hands. Francis thought he had never seen nobility and humor, gentleness and malice, so well expressed in one person. He looked like a very beautiful Cardinal, with the eyes of a poet and the mouth of a satirist.

"She's been telling me so much about you that I shall hardly be able to see you for myself!" The voice was courteous.

"I hope she's been kind about me—" Francis said, thinking that there must be very little that those dark green bright eyes didn't see.

"She was," said the old man. "But then you know—'being kind' is what she does too well! She has always—indeed since the days when she was in her pram on this lawn—been so 'kind' that I've tried to warn her against the habit! One can be too much so! I'm always combating the notion that it's possible to be perfectly kind and perfectly truthful—I mean, of course," he bent in his formal way to Francis, "in the way of *thinking* truthfully!"

Adria broke in, "You abuse the position of a godfather—Colin!" She slipped her arm in his and the three of them, Francis on her other side,

moved back in the direction of the house. "He thinks that I 'lack discrimination'!" she said. "He's so often told me—that the great danger is that I like everybody."

"I said that you 'tolerated' everybody."

Francis laughed. "I do hope," he challenged them, stopping to light a cigarette and looking up at them in turn under his eyelids, "that *this* wasn't part of the conversation about me?"

The old man interrupted him.

"My *dear* sir—indeed no"—the agate-dark eyes met his own again. "Indeed no," he repeated. "What we were in conversation about when you came in sight was your publishing enterprise— I have 'passed that way,' myself, and the matter extremely interests me—"

The question that followed caught and gained Francis's attention. But when they passed from the subject to the discussion of a particular novel (which Verney and Adria had both liked, but which had bored him) he was troubled again by the perception that had flashed on him in the first moment —that Adria (as once before, but in a different sense) wasn't what he expected, but was made up of qualities brought out for him distinctly by her association with her godfather, with whom he found her sharing (quite implicitly and unconsciously) a fine and customary way of thinking, moving with him in an habitual and established rhythm—which Francis could only define as their "being on the same plane."

And just as that day at the Bath Club he had come with a complicated and glamorous expectation, and found her altogether too "near the ground," so now—when he'd come with an assurance in his thoughts of her that she was, at any rate, near enough his own ground—he found her (or felt that he found her, for he knew his nerves were playing tricks with his mind) in another world altogether. He was aware of her, as she strolled between them, as disconcertingly more lovely, sweeter in tone, and finer in manner than he'd expected (or wanted to expect); and, in contrast to the sense he'd cherished since Josephine's "scene," he found her so visibly and immensely "good"—his sense of her "goodness" including her obvious sweetness, and sincerity, with the "quality" that Verney so clearly had, and had brought out so clearly in her—the positive absence of any possible "shabbiness."

She wasn't (nor was Verney—and Charlotte herself belonged to that world) ever, at any moment, or in any way, "second rate."

He'd known it always. But now he felt it. And feeling it made him afraid of her, when he'd come most wanting to be, and meaning to be, equal and at ease with her.

This obscure fear grew in him during their conversation, as they all three found themselves, by some sort of transition from the novel, discussing "ghosts." Verney described writing to a friend whom he hadn't seen or written to for years, and how, as he was writing, the friend walked into his room and then vanished again; and he heard later that the friend had died the morning he began the letter to him. And Adria said that she couldn't believe in ghosts—that Benedict saw one often in the Palazzo in Venice—but she never could. Verney was trenchant on the subject. "Indeed he saw them often. It was his Scotch blood, he supposed. He didn't think there was such a line of demarcation between living and dying."

"Yes," said Adria, "but you couldn't get away from the fact that the person simply 'wasn't there.'"

He smiled. He said, "Wait till I die, Adria dear, and you'll meet me all the time—" He questioned, "And you, Sir Francis? What do *you* think?"

Francis enlarged on his notion, which was simply that ghosts were evidence of the much talked of "bends in time."

But their courteous eagerness in listening increased his sense of their "entertaining" him in "their" world.

"I shall accompany your mother and Benedict to church," said Colin Verney.

Adria put the Sunday *Times* on the grass beside her chair.

"—I understand," her godfather went on, buttoning a grey glove, "that the Danish groom is harnessing the pony at this moment, and your father's —is it Danish too—?"

"No—Finnish—"

"Finnish chauffeur cannot get your Italian motor car to start!"

She broke in, catching hold of his hand, "Colin darling, he's so *awfully* strange. He came down here specially to see me, and he's avoided being alone with me ever since he arrived."

He stood by her, keeping her hand in his.

"—How do you explain it, my dear Adria?"

"I can't *imagine*."

"But it's your business to."

"—To what?"

"To imagine." He added, "I'm afraid I can't help you. You see—I don't know him. I don't know his 'case,' so to speak."

"But why should he be a case at all? And what should I imagine?"

Verney hesitated.

"Well—to begin with, that he is in love with you!"

"But, my *dear*," she emphasized, with the ease in such matters of a woman who has always had men in love with her, "he's been *behaving* like falling in love with me for two months."

"But may not have been. The real shock is sometimes severe!" He added, "He looks strained. There's your mother waiting for me. . . . By the way, I did not tell you, did I, how much I like him? But I wonder if you could manage—"

"—Manage?"

He went, buttoning his other glove— "Well—I said don't *think*—imagine—" He hurried to join Charlotte and Benedict, both dressed in pale grey, leaving Adria under the cedar tree.

She watched the three of them disappear round the corner of the house. A few minutes later she saw Francis coming across the lawn from the direction of the woods. He came without looking at her, then looked up, and then came and sat on the garden bench beside her, exactly as if he were on the stage and knew his "moves" exactly.

"Have you been for a walk?"

She said this, aware that it was for the sake of conversation.

He said, as if he hadn't heard her, staring out from their shade over the lawn to the high trees, "How depressing to be going back to London tomorrow."

She answered perfunctorily, watching him and thinking how much more he looked like a traditional idea of an elegant Englishman than any of their contemporaries. He might, she thought, with that slight air of dandyism, those ironical eyelids and candid brow, have been drawn by Du Maurier.

(She could see him, indeed, being received, with his moustache newly trimmed, by the Duchess of Towers.)

"Shall you stay down here?" he asked.

She said no, that she was going back to London on Wednesday.

He said, "I've got a dreadfully busy fortnight before me. It looks as if I shan't have time to see anyone."

She took this lightly, but with an odd twinge in her nerves.

"Not even me?"

He said hurriedly, "I wish I could—but perhaps later, when this rush is over."

She heard the flatness in her own voice when she said, "I'd no idea publishing had such hectic bouts."

"Oh yes—like everything else, you know—"

She adjusted the pages of the Sunday *Times* until she got all the corners meeting exactly. As she was doing this he said, with constraint:—

"You won't let these sort of absences affect our friendship? Will you—Adria?"

She read a heading in the centre page without taking in its meaning.

"—My dear, of course not. Why should I?"

"That's all right."

(WHERE IS EUROPE HEADING FOR? she read.)

She heard him say:—

"You make a great difference to my life, you know, Adria. I've very much—wanted to tell you so—" He added, when she didn't speak, "You've made this summer very delightful for me. . . . You and your mother," he added, picking up a cedar cone and dusting it with his handkerchief.

"Thank you," she said in a silly voice, so as to say something.

He said, examining the cone:—

"I wonder if you've realized what a difference you *have* made to me. . . . You see," he hurried on, "your own life is so full and so gay—and I don't suppose you realize in the least what your friendship means to me. . . . It's—become something I feel I can rely on."

"I'm so glad," she said, trying not to sound either silly or formal—and, at the sight of her father coming out of the house, springing up and saying:—

"Father dear, you promised to do that sketch of Francis before he goes back to London."

It was Monday evening, when he found himself alone with Charlotte Leigh in the garden, that he said:—

"I must talk to you—because you know already."

The others had gone, as Merrick Leigh had put it, to "drink the dregs of the sunset" from the slow rise of ground beyond the wood.

"I shouldn't dare to say I 'know.' But I—look on—with my eyes open." She laid her hand for a moment on his arm. "If we're going to talk—Francis dear—let me begin by being horribly frank—and saying that I like you—indeed I rather love you—but I don't approve of you at all."

He saw that she had needed a certain courage to begin like this; partly because she did, he knew that, extremely like him, and also because he was staying in her house. So that he tried to take this in the way that would make her feel that he wanted frankness; and that even "disapproval" gave him the best possible sort of start.

"You can't disapprove of me nearly as much as I disapprove of myself!"

She laughed. "Good. Then we're faster friends than ever!"

He set his leisurely pace beside hers.

"Conspirators even," he said.

"Conspirators against *you*?"

"Exactly!"

She paused. "Your—your own trouble?—In this matter? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"The matter being— Don't let's be too subtle or we may find I'm discussing kings and you're discussing cabbages!"

She put her arm in his and this comforted him. He said:—

"I came down here—meaning to ask Adria to marry me."

"So I thought— And when you do ask her she will certainly accept you."

"You do think then that she's in love with me."

Charlotte Leigh paused and picked herself a yellow rose that looked pink under the flaming sky. She picked another and put it in his buttonhole.

"You've changed her. That's the proof. She's—more in love with you than she knows herself—"

They moved on, the path damp and fragrant under their feet. "That," she went on, looking before her, "is, in a way, what frightens me."

"Because of me?"

"Because of you—whom we—both disapprove of so."

"You mean if I do ask her to marry me—and—I do marry her—"

She took him up. "She won't have an easy time? *Will* she?"

"That's why I haven't said anything."

"But you meant to— And you came down here thinking you'd got your romance all planned out—and then—" she hesitated. He met her slow deep look. "And then, to use a vulgar phrase, she 'fairly knocked you out'?"

"Exactly— She's too good for me."

She shook her head. "No, my dear boy. That isn't true. Adria's not too 'good' for anyone. She's sweet and darling and—unusual—but she's not a paragon. But it *is* possible that you're too bad for her—"

He took his arm out of hers and stopped and faced her.

"How exactly," he asked her with a seriousness that curiously frightened himself, "do you think I'm bad?"

She hesitated. "I've put it wrong. I don't 'think' that you're 'bad'—it isn't a question of what you do—"

"—You mean my sex life?"

"My dear Francis, *spare* me that idiotic phrase!— No, I don't mean that at all—what I mean is that I'm simply afraid that you're weak."

"You mean that's worse than bad."

"It's worse—for Adria."

"Badness can be cured? And weakness can't?"

"I'd hate to be so—definite. . . . But I'd simply rather my daughter married a strong character than a weak one!"

"Strong characters can be equally harmful."

She laughed at this. "Don't I *know* that!" Then she said, "On the other hand you won't make Adria happy now—by giving her up—"

He glanced at her profile to read her meaning. She understood and said, "That's only an opinion. Not a prejudice."

He said, "I'm afraid about the whole thing now."

"Afraid of yourself?"

"Yes. Of the self we disapprove of. And—for her—" He said, as they turned at the end of the herbaceous border, "If she *didn't* care, you know, then I would risk it."

"If *one* of you didn't care, then there wouldn't be any risk of her being let down?"

"Yes."

"But you know if Adria didn't care she wouldn't marry you— You know," she went on, "I rather believe you don't really know *yet* how—natural she is. It puzzles people—just because her life itself is so sophisticated. And when people say that it's strange that she hasn't married, the truth is too simple for them. She hasn't married simply because she hasn't been in love; it's puzzled even her sometimes."

"I believe that's part of the thing that—frightens me. That she's, in that way, so essentially simple."

Charlotte glanced at him and thought how curiously attractive was his complexity.

"It isn't," she added, feeling oddly that she owed him this, "it isn't that she hasn't had—I think—experience— But to put it simply, she's never 'minded'. That's—the change in her."

"And now—if she minds, I'm to make it worse." (He heard her "How *lovely* that you've come.") "Whatever I do, I'm to make it worse."

"No. . . . But leave her—for a time—then you can decide."

"You're advising me to go away—and make my 'choice.'"

"It's curious," she spoke her parenthesis of thought, "how strongly *you* feel that there is one.—But yes. If you insist on my advising you (which

won't do the least good, you know), I do advise you that—to make your—decision."

He turned his head and looked at her with a searching nervous glance. "Between good and bad—" His tone slightly mocked her (for they had argued on "conduct" before).

"Oh *no, I* never said that— It's hardly even so simple as that—" She said, "Most of one's decisions seem to be between what's finer—and coarser. Isn't that, after all, a large part of one's claim to being civilized—"

He said sharply, "And to marry Adria would be—coarse."

She pointed out, "It's you who've been afraid of that. It might not be fine. . . . The—differences are apt to be nice."

He interrupted suddenly:—

"You don't give me the remotest chance, do you, of making her happy?"

She met his look of suddenly dreadful unhappiness.

"My dear Francis, of course I do—if you give it to yourself."

He said, "Nothing else matters to me now. Nothing and no one else could ever conceivably matter."

Charlotte said, as they came in sight of the house again:—

"So often it's the things that *don't* matter that let one down."

(So there was, as she had supposed, some woman. Moreover his notion about Adria's "goodness" made her suppose that the other woman was of the, more or less, professional class. She watched him as he went forward to the others who had returned from "the sunset.")

The problem, Charlotte reflected, was stale enough. And indeed, a problem more of her generation than her daughter's (almost of the Pinero type!). But what struck her was that this hidden and extreme sensitiveness made him "go down" before a situation which a man of duller feeling would have taken in his confident stride.

To have a fine conscience and a weak will was, she made out, to be, like so many sympathetic characters,—from Hamlet to Peter Rabbit,—a stalemate in your own character; to be a poor hero—and an uncomfortable villain. . . .

That night he woke out of a restless sleep. He lay watching the moonlit country through the open window. He wondered if Adria slept. He would have liked to think that she was awake too.

As he lay, looking out, there was a sound behind him, and a creak of his door. For a long second he let himself believe that it was Adria (remembering inconsequently what Benedict had said about her sleeping badly), and as he turned his head the door opened.

But it swung open and there was no one there. Then he remembered that the catch was worn, and got out of bed, his heart thudding, to shut it again. He looked out on to the landing. There was moonlight on the boards, and the grandfather clock in the corner was ticking loudly.

He shut the door. As he was getting into bed it creaked, slipped its latch, and swung open again. This time he fixed it with a wedge of note paper.

It was a long time before he could sleep again, after this, and when he did he dreamed that the door opened and Adria came in. She was still wearing her white evening dress, and carrying some yellow roses. She came up to him, and put the flowers down on the bed, and put her arms round him. And he put his head on her shoulder and said, "I'm so *afraid*. I'm so *horribly afraid*." And she held him, and said nothing, and he thought perhaps she couldn't answer because she was afraid too; so he asked her, "Are you afraid, Adria?"—and still she didn't answer. And so he lifted his head from her shoulder, because he wanted to look at her and feel safe; and as he did so, and looked up, he saw that it was Josephine's face, smiling, her upper lip lifted and her teeth glinting, and felt that it was Josephine's arms—not holding him safe any more, but clutching his arms, his shoulder, his waist. . . .

He woke up.

Outside the moon was lower, and an owl flew across the stars.

Josephine lay face down on her aunt's chaise longue in her aunt's boudoir at Weymouth Street.

"If thou telephone to him all the time thou art a fool!" said Léonie to her niece. "—And there is no sense in crying. That is no use at all. Thou sayest he will not see thee?—There are only two reasons that a man will not see a woman. Either he does not desire her, or he is afraid of desiring her. From what thou hast told me—there is no question that he does not desire thee. Then it is that he is afraid."

Josephine spoke in a stifled voice without moving and without lifting her head.

"Perhaps he no longer loves me."

Her aunt got up and walked wearily across to the table, where she poured herself out a whiskey and lemonade.

"I do not imagine that he loves thee." She dropped in three lumps of ice. "He did not say it? Did he?"

"—No. But—"

"I said that he desires thee. A man does not behave with a woman as he with thee if he does not desire her! Eh?"

She gave her prostrate niece a sort of chuckling sidelong tribute. "Therefore it is," she went on, more slowly and judicially, "that he is afraid."

Josephine lifted her smudged, stained little face. "Why should he be afraid? Of what is he afraid?"

Léonie gulped her drink and put down the glass.

"For worldly reasons. Naturally!" She paused. "I have seen him, and not long ago, at the Ritz with a woman who was very smart. She had a diamond brooch that must have cost, at least, 50,000 francs. Without doubt she isn't the only one. . . ."

"She was pretty?"

"That I did not see. But she was very well dressed. Very smart. And young."

Josephine sat up.

"She was *dark*?"

"Yes."

"What did she wear?"

"A beige dress with white *et ceteras*."

Josephine screamed, "Then it was her—it *was* her!"

"But who?"

"Miss Leigh!"

"But who is she then?"

"It's the woman that he *sent* to me, that he had the cheek to send to *me*, at Pierre', that I should do her manicoor! Imagine that?"

She began screaming again, and threw herself once more on her face, on the quilt.

Her aunt, after a moment, said slowly:—

"What a fool thou art! Dost thou imagine that he would risk that she discovers *he* knows thee, if he *loved* this girl?"

Josephine stopped screaming and sobbing, and turned her head to her.

"What did you say?"

Léonie repeated what she had said.

Josephine stared between her swollen eyelids. Her aunt went on as if she didn't hear her. "On the other hand, thou art very stupid to imagine that he will be pleased if thou try to enter his flat when he has not asked thee!"

"But I wanted to see him—"

"Yes, yes. But, I have already told thee, thou shouldst not be so stupid. My child—he is afraid to see thee, even though he wants thee."

"But I *love* him."

"Don't be stupid. . . . That is nothing to do with it. What I tell thee is that if thou telephone to him all the time thou wilt only make him more afraid. First of all, neglect him. Let him think that thou hast forgotten him. . . . My God, how hot it is this afternoon! . . ."

"But I *love* him. . . . I am ill that I do not see him—"

"—Behave you as if thou had never met him."

"But—"

"Then—if he has a strong taste for thee, it will begin again. Thou canst count on that. That is Nature. First he will think of thee, and soon the telephone will ring."

"But I don't know *when* that will happen. It's so uncertain—"

"Don't be a fool!—From what thou hast told me he will not easily find another, at least in London, so much to his taste!!! *Then*, when he comes back to thee, then thou must work hard to keep him. . . ." She sat heavily down on the stool. "Listen—*ma petite*. I have the impression that there are one or two things—"

Josephine was sitting up now, rubbing the black below her eyes with her soaked handkerchief. Her aunt concluded, "Once he has thee 'under his skin' thou art safe—thou canst keep him." She paused, and scrutinizing her niece's face said, "Thou canst even marry him! Eh?"

Josephine muttered, a sob racking her again, "There's no question of that. And anyway, I love him and it is enough for me to have him with me."

Her aunt slipped off her *peignoir*, and mopped herself under the arms with her lace handkerchief.

"Don't be so stupid. If thou canst have him, it would be very stupid not to marry him. I have told thee, he has £1800 a year, and if his sister dies without children there is another six hundred a year to come to him— And also thou will be Lady Radnor."

Chapter XI

The only positive conclusion that Francis had come to by Friday was that, though the office hours forcibly preoccupied him during the day, he couldn't, for another day, keep up his programme (that had seemed so easy when he left Wrens early on Tuesday morning) of being alone and thinking.

He had his definite want, which was Adria. And his definite fear—which was of letting himself go to see her, simply because he so much wanted to. In theory he'd given himself a fortnight. And at the end of this fortnight he would, by this same theory, have made up his mind.

On Friday morning Léonie Lützen rang him up while he was still at breakfast and asked him if he would motor down that afternoon with her to Walcot Manor (the country house she shared with Harrison) and spend the week-end there. And when she had assured him that no one else (he was insistent on this point) would be there, except Clytie Jones, he accepted—at any rate for the one night. For he was glad of any sort of change, and even the amusement to be got out of the almost forgotten Miss Jones.

He called at Weymouth Street and found Léonie waiting in the pale blue Daimler. He got in beside her and she held his hand and called him *mon très cher François*. She was dressed in white as usual, but wore, in anticipation, a country hat of biscuit straw with marguerites on it. She told him that they must stop, on their way, to pick up Clytie Jones at her shop in George Street, where, she explained, poor Miss Jones now sold lamps and lamp shades and "all sorts of things for presents."

They found Clytie—more vivacious and more consciously impressive, Francis thought, since her exodus out of Literature into Commerce—dressed in a violet tussore smock over her grey flannels, smoking a pipe at the door of her shop like any good burgher.

Léonie got out, and they followed Clytie inside, where, among lamps and boxes painted with flowers and waste-paper baskets plastered with maps, a thin young woman with blonde curls and pince-nez was doing accounts at a desk made out of a disused Gothic pulpit. Above her head, among the models of ships, pewter mugs, brass soup ladles, and glass bottles in straw casing,—which hung from the exposed beams of the ceiling,—swung a blue parrot of immense size, whom Clytie, looking up, addressed as "Barbara dear."

The blonde in the pulpit looked up and said:—

"Renfrews have sent again for the red bellows to copy, dear."

Clytie scratched her head (which, since Francis last saw it at Beauvallon, had grown greyer and been curled up tightly so that it looked like Persian lamb).

"I'm sure you put it away somewhere, darling."

"No, dear, I'm sure *you* had it last, to show to Mrs. Kelpie."

Léonie said, looking round:—

"I am not surprised you lose things, Clytie, with such disorder. You have not even the prices marked on everything."

Clytie waved her hand in what was meant to be a careless gesture.

"We don't fix all our prices, dear. You see we're a *gallery*, not a shop."

"Galleries 'ave their prices fixed just as well—"

"—Not a *shop*," repeated Miss Jones, putting down her pipe on the stomach of a supine brass figure. "Did you see, Léonie dear," she boomed, "I've changed the name outside from Jones to the 'Jones Gallery.'"

"Yes," said Léonie, "but I don' think that will make you more profit. Now that it is the *crise*, people think when they go in a 'gallery' it is *luxe*. But when it is still really a shop they can tell themselves it's only 'shopping'! Eh?"

"You haven't seen my *scents*," said Miss Jones, turning to a set of square black glass sprays with white labels on a tray made of a chessboard. "They're my latest *invention*," she purred gently. She picked up a bottle and took out the stopper. "Each one is called after one of Proust's novels. This one is 'Albertine Disparue'—" She held it out to Léonie, who sniffed it and said, "*Ça sent le camphre!*"

"This is *another* good one," continued Clytie—"À l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleur." She sprayed the air. There was a strong smell of lavender water.

"I think we must be going off," interrupted Léonie. "Are you ready?"

Clytie took Francis's handkerchief and sprayed it with "Sodome et Gomorrhe."

"Did you pack my *bag*, darling?" she said to the blonde without looking round.

"Yes, dear. It's ready by the door. Shall I go out and ask the chauffeur to fetch it?"

"*Yes*," said Léonie, "and be quick about it or we'll never be off."

Francis thought his handkerchief smelt like the violet cachous he used to buy when he was at prep school (the winter that they all had stilts).

"I'll just get my smock off," growled Clytie, and disappeared behind a screen decorated with "The Cries of London." When she came out again she was wearing a double-breasted white linen dustcoat and a white felt hat.

In reconditioning Walcot Manor, it had been Edwin Harrison's pleasure to combine the quaintness of Merrie England with the comforts of "boom" America.

Outside, the house made him imagine a zebra overgrown with roses. Inside, each lattice window had its window seat upholstered with pneumatic cushions; each ceiling had its "great beam"; each room its inglenook, fitted with a radio, its open fireplace with electrically burning logs, its bookshelves filled with the backs of old books, opening to reveal enameled cocktail cupboards. The narrow staircase proved to be of the "moving" sort; so that the guest had only to stand still, rising past a series of sporting prints on one side and old maps on the other, to find himself on the bedroom floor, where each door bore in brass Gothic lettering the name of an Elizabethan "hero."

Francis was shown into "Sir Philip Sidney," whose portrait—"by a pupil of Holbein," said his host—hung above the chimney piece. The "Arcadia" lay on the writing table, and when opened contained cigarettes.

Harrison turned from a modest display of the lighting (from inside bunches of glass Tudor roses fixed in the corners) to open an invisible door in the linen-fold paneling into the bathroom, where the plainness of the bath itself was redeemed by a barrel above which swung a stuffed falcon on a ring.

On their way back to the stairs they met Miss Jones coming out of "Christopher Marlowe."

She said, "Eddie, you ought to have one of my ships on the window sill."

"If I want ships I can make 'em myself," he said. And as Clytie preceded them on the downward staircase he muttered, "Thinks she knows all about it—the old he-cow!"

When they got downstairs they went into an immense "oak room" like the smoking room of the *Mauretania*, with ogive windows on one side, and an open fireplace big enough to roast an ox in. Above the fireplace was a particularly immense beam, on which was carved the first verse of "Auld Lang Syne." As Harrison was offering cigars, Léonie came in and said that Francis was wanted on the telephone.

Harrison said, "Will you take it here? Or where will you take it?"

But Léonie said:—

"I expect it's one of 'is lady friends!" She winked. "You better speak in the snuggery, not in 'ere, eh, 'Arrison?"

Harrison conducted him to a small overcarpeted room that smelt of whiskey.

It was Lynne speaking. He said:—

"Miss Leigh has just rung up, Sir Francis, to say that if you was free to-morrow could you motor down with her to Mr. Denis Eldon's for the day. She said if she didn't hear from you she would know you was engaged."

He said, "Thank you, Lynne. I'll let her know."

As he went back to join the others he decided to go up by an early morning train and join Adria. The idea of seeing her again jolted his nerves, so that he felt he would rather telephone to her later, when he'd had a drink.

He was glad when Harrison suggested they should have a cocktail at once, out on the verandah. Clytie said:—

"Get me some rye whiskey and I'll make you a mint julep."

While they were out there and Harrison was talking about the prospects of a General Election in the autumn, and praising Winston Churchill, Francis heard emphatic but indistinct sounds of Léonie telephoning inside the room behind him.

"—Give me a decent *navy*," said Edwin Harrison, "and a *strong air force* —"

"What about a rapid bathe before dinner?" growled Clytie, bored by politics. "What do *you* say, Leeonie?"

Léonie, who had just brought out a novel and parasol, said she would rather rest. But Francis and Harrison let themselves be slapped on the

shoulders and encouraged to "take a dip," and went out with her to the pool, where she retired into the log hut for Women, and they into the one for Men.

They had a long bathe and lay on the grass afterwards. Then there was a chime of bells from the house to indicate that it was time to dress for dinner.

When they got in Léonie was in the hall.

She said, "Who do you think've come down unexpected for the week-end!!! *Josephine!* She've just arrived. I 'ave sent 'er up to 'er room." She turned to Francis. "You 'ave met her, 'aven't you?"

"I met her once at your flat," said Francis.

"She is tired, the poor little thing. I 'ave said to her to-night she must rest and take her dinner in bed—I have put her in the 'Earl of Lesterre.'"

"Mm," grunted Harrison. "She's going up in the world, isn't she? Last time she came down—with that actor fellow—you put her up in 'Drake.'"

When they all went up after dinner, to visit Josephine, Clytie was rather drunk and kept telling Léonie that whenever she was tired of Harrison she was to come to her and tell her all about it, and there would always be a bed and grilled steak for her somehow; and as they all jostled up the narrow moving staircase Harrison took his cigar out of his mouth and said, "If that he-cow doesn't stop this rot I'll have her shut up"; and this made Léonie shake and shout with laughter, and as they went along the corridor to the "Earl of Leicester" she put one arm round Francis's neck and one round Harrison, and so they pushed somehow into the room where Josephine was sitting up in the big four-poster bed, wearing the nightgown with the black lace, and Léonie lurched them all three to sit down on the bed; and there they sat panting and laughing. Clytie strode slowly about the hot room that smelt of Josephine's chypre and was lit through red porcelain shades, examining everything—the red curtains, the chest studded with nails, and the Earl of Leicester's coat of arms on the high back of a leather chair, and muttering, "Pretty good—*not* so good—rather faked—the chest is old, the studs are new". . . and Harrison watched her out of the corners of his beady eyes and every now and then took out his cigar and contradicted her. While Léonie smiled:—

"You 'ad a good dinner, my child? You feel better, eh?"

Josephine got her hand on Francis's wrist under his cuff with her thumb against the artery.

"—Oh yes, it was awfully good. I don't feel at all tired any more, but I worked so hard this week." She giggled. "What a party on one bed. I don't call it proper, eh!" Francis saw that she was rather drunk too, he saw her knees draw up under the light blanket, and he moved nearer to her to make more room for Léonie. The cigar smoke was making the air heavier still, and Harrison switched on the radio which was in the red lacquer chest. And Clytie, half lying down beside Josephine, her elbow on the next pillow, said, "That lacquer chest's too late for the room!"

"Better late than never," said Harrison and came back to get his arm round Léonie again; and the radio was playing "Blue Moon." And Léonie, who never really lost her sort of cunning, however drunk, said to him, "Come on, my cabbage—we will go and take Clytie away." She got up and came round to the other side of the bed and got hold of Clyde's arm, which she must have gripped through the white duck sleeve, because Clytie called out, "Oh, I *say*."

"Come on, my dear, we'll go and have a drink in the snuggery."

"I'm going ter *bed*," said Harrison, but Léonie said, "We're all coming. Francis can say 'Good-night, sweetie,' to Josephine and we shall all come"—and she got Clytie upright beside her and dragged her out, kissing her hand back to Francis and her niece, and they went out of the room and got the door shut after them. But Francis didn't see them shut the door, and Josephine's other arm pushed out from under his sudden weight and switched the lights off—and the radio kept on playing "Blue Moon.". . .

Josephine pushed through the bead curtain so that the strands of beads swung out and went on clicking and swinging. She flung her hat down on the table and went to the glass, singing and pushing her hands up through her curls.

Grand'mère was sitting on the edge of the divan mending one of her stockings. She looked up for a moment when her granddaughter came in, and then went on darning.

"—What a lovely evening, Grand'mère, eh?"

"I have not been out since thou hast been away. Yesterday it was raining. To-day I have not observed the streets."

"What! Thou hast not been out in this lovely weather? But thou shouldst go. After a bad day like yesterday thou shouldst go! . . . The sun will cure thy rheumatism."

"How was it at thy Aunt Léonie's?"

"It was wonderful!"

"Did she give thee anything?"

"No—she was not there all the time."

"Thou wast alone then?"

"No. . . . The English baron that I have spoken to thee of was there."

Grand'mère rethreaded her needle with black wool. When she had done this she asked:—

"He is rich?"

"Oh—yes! He is nice, and he loves me madly." She turned and bent down and seized her grandmother by her stiff thin shoulders. "And I madly love him, Grand'mère."

Grand'mère sat still waiting for the embrace to finish. Then she looked up, and her black eyes fixed themselves for a moment on her granddaughter's face. Then she said in her French that was so dry in tone and so blurred in enunciation: "Do not imagine that he will marry thee. I have seen him, when he has come here. Also, thou art not clever, like thy Aunt Léonie." She bent over her darning again. Then she added, but without looking up: "And if thou lovest him then thou art still more of a fool than I thought. . . ."

"Thou art an old idiot. Thou speakest of things thou dost not understand."

Grand'mère added, as if she hadn't noticed this flash of temper:—

"Be content if he pays thee well."

"He does not pay me at all! What dost thou *think*—eh?"

"Then thou art still more of a fool than I thought— Go and see if the potatoes are yet baked. I have only baked two. I did not expect thee."

Josephine, waiting outside on the landing, heard Miss Leigh's voice answering the Italian maid: "Yes, tell her to come in at once."

She was sitting on the stool in front of her dressing table. She said, "Good afternoon, Josephine." She had a different *peignoir* from the blue satin she had worn last time. It was less becoming. And she looked paler.

She said: "I'm afraid I shall have to hurry you rather, as I have to go out at six o'clock."

"Very well, mademoiselle."

As she unpacked the case and set out the implements she wondered what Miss Leigh, sitting here in her smart pink *peignoir* and so pleased with herself, with so many flowers in the bedroom and that green and brown orchid that must have cost at least six shillings in a vase on her table, would say if she knew that her manicurist was just back from a week-end with the man that Miss Leigh fancied (didn't she!) was in love with her!

She went and filled the bowl in the bathroom. As she turned the hot tap she examined the bottles on the shelf. There were two more since last time —a new eye lotion (whatever did she want with so much eye lotion?) and a bottle of medicine, and a new piece of soap which smelled of *verveine*.

When she went back into the bedroom Miss Leigh was looking into the glass, but she didn't seem to see herself. She had a *distrait* manner. (Perhaps that meant that she already knew that her Sir Francis didn't love her! And that she couldn't hope to be Lady Radnor any more!)

She sat down and Miss Leigh put her left hand on the cushion. She had thin hands like the Madonnas in awful old pictures.

"No shorter, please."

"Very well, mademoiselle." She had a proud way of speaking, but she needn't be proud all the same, because with all her servants (that Chinaman downstairs was a flirt—that was sure, and they said that Chinamen knew all sorts of strange fashions of love)—with all her servants, and that room halfway upstairs full of books for endlessly reading—she didn't know what —

"Please dip that hand."—Well, she had better be pleased that her thighs were not as thin as her arms. Josephine could see very well, with her *peignoir* open and nothing on but her slip under it, how she was made.

"Did you go away for the Bank Holiday?" she asked.

For a minute Josephine thought she meant this last week-end, and imagined that perhaps, after all,—and therefore her look of being a bit upset, —she had found out already. But then she realized that Bank Holiday was the week-end before—when she and Grand'mère had made the charabanc excursion.

"Yes, mademoiselle. I went away with my grandmother for a trip."

"Where did you go?"

"To—a place—I don't remember what is its name. . . . Yes, it was to Virginia Water. But we came back the same day. It was very pretty." She picked up the orange stick and twisted the cotton wool round it. After a moment Miss Leigh said:—

"It was lovely weather," and then she asked, "Do you like the country?"

"I like better the seaside."

Miss Leigh said:—

"But the English seaside must seem awfully dreary after living on the Riviera!"

Josephine thought, "How *stupid* the way they talk, all these women."

"Oh no. I think some of the places is all right, if they aren't common. . . ." She unscrewed a lid. "I think Broadstairs is very select. . . . Now the other hand, please!"

She dried the light slim fingers.

After a minute Miss Leigh said:—

"Do you often go to Broadstairs?"

"I was there in June for a week-end." (Whatever would she say if she knew!)

She went on shaping the cuticle. When she was doing the middle finger Miss Leigh said in her conceited voice:—

"Did you motor down? It's rather a nice drive, you know."

"No." (She could almost have sniggered out loud.) "The friend that took me couldn't take his car because there was something wrong with it and so we went by train, but we went in the Pullman. First class."

"How . . . *tiresome* cars are, aren't they? What was wrong with it?"

"He called it a big end gone wrong, but I don' understand cars. . . . Did I hurt you, mademoiselle? I am so sorry." (She thought, "I am glad if I did.")

"No, no. That nail's a little sore—tender or something. I got a rose thorn in last week."

Josephine was relieved that she was quiet after this, because she hated her voice more than anything. But she wasn't coming again; no, she would tell Miss Kerr that she wasn't. Someone else could come.

When she had finished the varnishing she warned:—

"Be careful not to touch anything until they're dry, won't you, mademoiselle?"

After a moment Miss Leigh said, "Oh, yes."

Josephine packed up the case. She put on her hat and gloves while Miss Leigh, looking *distraite* and arrogant, sat holding her hands up with her fingers spread out.

Josephine hesitated. "—Good evening, mademoiselle."

She stood waiting.

At the last Miss Leigh troubled to take some notice of her speaking, and without looking at her got up, and went and opened a drawer in the dressing table, where Josephine could hear there was some loose money.

She took out two shillings and gave them to her, and said "Good evening," but didn't trouble herself even to smile—she was a stuck-up bitch. . . .

"Miss Leigh is here," said his secretary.

Francis got up from his desk table. He had been trying to write to her.

"Show her in at once."

"Very well, Sir Francis."

She came in saying, rather quickly, that she'd come to discuss some changes in the illustrations of Denis's "Bath book." Then she said:—

"What a lovely office!"

"Yes, isn't it?"

"What lovely books!"

"Yes. Aren't they? Do sit down. Won't you have a cigarette?"

But she went on standing, and looking round and saying, "What a beastly day . . ." and "I meant to come yesterday . . ." and "Did you have a lovely week-end?" in her voice that had, always, the power to disturb his nerves.

As she said "week-end" some cadence in it hurt him so much that he turned away from her and went over to the bookshelves. He said:—

"No—it wasn't very lovely."

"Where was it?"

"Near Henley."

"I stayed near there last year in a house with a dining room that hasn't been refurnished since 1810."

"Who with?" He flicked over some pages.

"Some friends of Benedict's. We ate peaches off the wall and all made portraits of each other in verse."

He imagined her picking off peaches, and sprawling about on lawns with a lot of people he didn't know. He said:—

"Well—really it was very pleasant. Only yesterday the weather was so bad."

She said: "I don't mind rain in the country. It makes a special world, all dripping and cool and scented, and one comes in feeling heavenly."

He put the book back again and moved down the shelves, and took out another. He noticed that it was *The Enormous Room*.

He couldn't turn round and look at her.

"I didn't feel at all heavenly, as Lynne forgot to pack a second pair of shoes. Have you read this?"

She answered after a pause:—

"Read what, Francis?"

"This book of Cummings's—*The Enormous Room*."

She said "No" in a whisper.

Still he couldn't look round.

"It's rather good. You ought to. I like his prose, though his poetry doesn't give me any real pleasure. The whole business of getting effects in verse by visual tricks of print always annoys me—but I daresay it's purely prejudice—or just not being able to understand."

He heard his own voice.

He put the volume back, very carefully, and pressed his hand along the backs of the Prousts to get them even. He heard her say:—

"Why didn't you take me?"

He swung round, and then said perfunctorily, as if he hadn't understood: —

" 'Take you,' my dear?"

"Yes." She was looking at him. But her look that, as a rule, betrayed her by its play and quiver and change of light, making her emotions, for his taste, almost too visible and accessible, at this moment gave away nothing. Nor did her tone. She was simply a pretty woman in a black dress looking at him seriously.

"You're hardly the kind of person one simply 'takes' anywhere, my dear —" His "line" was to laugh off the seriousness. "Apart from the fact that you then were rushing from one engagement to another, and one place to another, on your own. To my certain knowledge you haven't paused in a giddy round of week-ends and visits here and there and everywhere, since the beginning of July."

Her expression didn't change. He wondered if she'd even heard him. When he paused she repeated: —

"Why didn't you take me?" And then there was a dark nervous flash across her gravity and she added "—*Instead?*"

"What d'you mean?"

"Simply that I would have liked to be with you instead of— Mademoiselle Gérard."

He went to the window and looked out through the rain. He felt sick and blank. Then he tried to tell himself that she was "making a scene," because he wanted to feel angry with her, instead of afraid of himself. He got out: —

"What an extraordinary statement!"

He heard the overemphasis in his "extraordinary." He became acutely aware of her physical stillness.

"Why is it extraordinary? If you really love me, it oughtn't to be."

"But you know *exactly* what I feel about you."

"I know what you've said. . . ."

She said this with a kind of subtlety that was new in her.

He turned round, to exclaim: —

"Adria! —My dear—"

She spoke, this time with the grave rightness of speech as peculiarly hers as her manner of wearing a flower or a brooch:—

"I believe that you love me. I believe that I'm important to you, and that you want to be with me. . . ."

He broke in:—

"Of *course* you know that; we've talked of it, and our whole relationship is *based* on that—" He stopped short, his half-exasperated, half-desiring vehemence checked by the way her face, as she turned suddenly towards him, and therefore to the bluish transparent light of the rain, had one of its moments of fortuitous and extraordinary beauty. He said: "You know that I love you—more than I want to."

The change in his tone shook her. She stepped back and put her hand on the chimney piece.

"—If you loved me, enough, you wouldn't want to keep me separate."

"But don't you see—that that's *why*—" He added, more to himself, "I *have* to . . . whatever I lose by it. I *owe* it to you."

"Why? I don't see why."

"I want to spare you."

She took that in. First the word, and then, in a long glance, some of its implications.

"But I don't want to be spared," she said. "I want to be loved."

"You know that I love you already."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"It wouldn't do—darling."

"For you?" she asked.

"That's very unfair. . . . For *you*." He began pacing up and down the room. "It's too much of a risk. I haven't any decent or conceivable right to you."

She said, "You've got me, already."

"Don't you see that I'm irresponsible, and—selfish, and—" he paused, and stood, as it were, before the façade of her extraordinary stillness, "and that I'm fundamentally, hopelessly weak?"

"Yes, I do—see that."

"You say 'yes' calmly like that, but I don't believe you realize a bit—I mean realize *all* the implications. . . . You can't of course. . . . You can't be expected to." He threw himself down on the sofa and stared at the window, and broke out again: "What you can't possibly realize is that I'm—I can't think of any other word—I'm rather rotten—"

She said, "I do realize."

He sprang up off the sofa again. "No—my darling—you don't, you can't. You only realize in theory. You're civilized and worldly, and subtle and tolerant, and so you accept—certain things. Your mind and character and your—breeding teach you to accept them. But if you really understood, with your imagination, you couldn't." He added, aloud but to himself, "You couldn't—possibly."

"I have used my imagination."

"Don't let's *talk* about it any more."

"But I've tried to use it to understand, *not* to accept."

He said brutally, "And what have you managed to understand?"

He didn't look at her.

"More than you do—yourself."

He snapped out: "No, no, no—that's just romantic. Don't say impossible things!"

He thought he felt her flinch, but after a second, when she spoke, her voice was quite steady.

"It's you who are romantic," she said.

"I?" He stared.

"You accept," she went on (and suddenly he saw how beautifully she stood, her head framed by the dark mirror)—"you accept the situation—*our* situation—instead of trying to understand. . . . And then you make 'pictures' out of what you accept, to make it all seem better . . . or more justifiable." She paused. "And 'Sacred and Profane Love' isn't even original!"

He was startled. The mere "cleverness" of this showed him, suddenly, how their unplayed drama of the last two months had enriched and sensitized the very texture of her thoughts. "Besides," she added, "it's rather 'old world' for men to refuse to make love to a woman because they 'respect' her too much!"

He was driven back into the clutches of his fear; and snapped out again that it was impossible. Then he found himself facing her closely and saying:—

"If you were my mistress I should hate you."

"Why?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"Because you don't want to 'profane'—what's 'sacred'?"

"Exactly."

He realized that her sudden whiteness was caused by anger.

"You think that love is one thing, and," she hesitated, "and applied eroticism another?"

"You put it very well."

She said, "I'm trying to understand your point of view."

"But you *don't*. And you aren't really trying to."

He flung himself on the sofa again, and got out his cigarette case. He lit three matches in succession. When she spoke again she was calmer, but her voice shook:—

"There's only one thing that I don't understand."

"What's that?"

"I don't know whether you're really up against a theory, or—a fact."

"A fact in myself— Of course my case isn't everybody's—luckily for them."

"I don't mean that. I mean a fact in—your life."

He said deliberately:—

"You mean Josephine?" As he said her name the idea of her had never been so tedious.

"Yes."

He began to give way, inch by inch, to his desire to "hurt" her. He said, watching her face: "Josephine's just a variation of the fact. . . . There have been others—naturally. And there will be others."

"Naturally." Her voice was quite steady again.

His anger ebbed suddenly, leaving him empty. He wanted sickeningly to cry. He said, "There are certain final values—certain things one doesn't do."

She waited, watching his face.

He said, "Three weeks ago when I came down to Wrens I meant to marry you— I had a nice comforting silly theory that you would save me. You were so exactly everything I wanted."

"And—what's happened?"

"Before that I *thought* I was in love with you. Then I fell in love with you." He said, "Darling—it sounds hopelessly romantic—but I love you, and so I don't want to destroy you."

"You might do that anyway."

He sat down at his desk and took up a paper knife and put its edge against his thumb.

"When I came away from Wrens ten days ago (when I'd realized what I really felt about you), I had a sort of mad notion of—well, probation. Getting my 'self' straight, and then, after a year, asking you to marry me. But then—" He put his head on his arm so as not to see her any more.

"Then it all became too actual—and complex again. And within two days things happened which showed me *how* impossible. . . ."

He heard her say, "Anything's possible."

He didn't answer.

After a minute she said:—

"This all seems so unreal."

He got up. He said rapidly: "Let's go from here. I'll drive you back. And after that—let's not see each other and think things over."

She followed him downstairs and out into the square. It was still raining, but there was a taxi passing, and Francis hailed it, and they got in.

As they went down to Tottenham Court Road he said:—

"If I live another forty years I shall go on knowing that I was right—about this."

They passed Tottenham Court Road Tube. She said:—

"If you're right I would rather die to-morrow."

He looked at her and saw that she was crying.

He leaned forward—he stopped the taxi, and got out.

Chapter XII

After a week he wrote to Adria saying, as the sum of all the letters he'd written and destroyed, that there was only one thing that mattered to him now. Which was that they should go on being friends. Its banality, as he read it over, struck him as oddly in contrast with the feelings of loss and bewilderment which prompted it.

He got an answer from her three days later.

12, Chesterfield Street
Mayfair

Dear Francis,—

I don't think we *can* meet again: just now anyway. So I have decided to go away to Venice on Saturday.

Adria

On Saturday morning he rang up the house and Emilia told him that she was leaving by the two o'clock train. He asked if she could speak to him, but Emilia came back to the telephone to say that she was out.

He spent the morning walking about the Park. The grass was worn and mustardy, under the sultry sun; and here and there in the long walk beside Rotten Row the leaves had begun to fall. He saw the children cantering past on their ponies, and heard the people sitting on the benches, talking to one another, or reading; as if this day were like any other. Towards one o'clock the children left the Row, and some of the people moved from their benches and walked on home, while others, who were poor or unconventional, got out little packages of food and began to eat. It seemed inconceivable that they would still be here this afternoon, sitting in these same attitudes of rest or resignation, when Adria's train had gone.

Her Chinese servant said she was at luncheon, and Francis pushed past him and went in.

She was in a brown dress and hat. He noticed the tray with her coffee in front of her.

She stood up when he came in. The Chinaman shut the door after him.

She said at once:—

"Why have you come?"

"I've come to say good-bye."

"I thought we'd said it."

"I wanted to see you again; before you go."

"Why?"

"—I didn't want to think of your train going off without having seen you again."

"How—absurd." Her voice was as dry as paper.

"Are you going straight through to Venice?"

"Yes." She poured herself out another cup of coffee.

"When do you get there?" He stood behind the empty chair opposite her and put his hands on the back of it.

"At 1.50 to-morrow."

"Benedict's there already?"

"Yes."

"Who else?"

"Henry Evetts— I don't know who else."

"What'll you do there?"

"Lido—bathing—anything."

"I brought you a book—for the journey." He handed her the book he'd bought earlier in the morning. She took it, and, without looking at him, she said:—

"How lovely— How sweet of you."

"You said the other day you hadn't got a copy."

It was the *Princesse de Clèves*.

"I shall read it in my narrow sleeper!"

She put it down on the table between them, next to some crumbs.

He felt as if the lead that had been pushing through his veins all day were getting so heavy that his heart couldn't beat any more.

"Is Emilia going with you?"

"Oh yes, of course. It's her native city."

"Romantic to be born in Venice."

"Yes."

"She isn't at all a Venetian type."

"No."

"When do you leave for the station?"

"In about ten minutes now. Emilia's there already with the *grands bagages*."

He picked up the salt spoon.

"Well—I hope you'll have a comfortable journey."

"Thank you."

She lifted her coffee cup and put it down again. Then she looked at him without any meaning at all and said:—

"It was very nice of you to come, and bring me the lovely book. Now I really must go up and get my things."

"Can I—may I drive you to the station?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

"But Adria—"

She said, "Please make it easy. I—asked you not to come."

"I couldn't help it."

"One can always 'help' things." Then she said, standing by the door, holding the handle, in a tone of the most formal departure:—

"I've enjoyed a great deal of it . . ."

"Of *what*?"

"Of—our—our—love affair—" Her hand slipped off the door handle, and she said again with her politeness, "I should like to think that you'd enjoyed it too."

He cut her short. "I *can't* let you go."

She said in so brittle a voice that he couldn't make out if she was angry or in pain:—

"You're making me go."

"Because you won't be friends with me."

She cut in sharply:—

"Why do you *twist* things so?"

He accepted this and said for her:—

"Because we love each other then?"

"Yes."

She came a step across the small but immense distance between them, and he suddenly realized her features, physically.

"Are you *ill*, darling?"

"Not at all."

"What's the matter then?"

"Nothing. I haven't been sleeping very well."

"Because of all—this."

She hesitated. "I—don't like being 'renounced,'" and then she said, in a tone that was like a flame blowing out: "I wish—you'd stop renouncing—darling—"

She was near him now.

He said, not touching her:—

"If I were ever to—behave badly."

"It would still be *you*—behaving badly."

"But if I were to hurt you, my darling."

"It would be you—who hurt me."

"You make it too *easy* for me."

She said with a sort of shivering laugh: "—You—always talk of me as if I were an obstacle—instead of a woman." She was breathing quickly, as if she'd been running. "Why shouldn't it be easy for both of us?"

"I don't see what I can possibly give you—"

She hesitated, and then she held out her hand and took his. "You make me alive," she said.

She said, smiling and trying to stop herself crying, "Shall we *both* go to Venice then?"

"Darling—you've missed the train."

"Yes—but I often do. Emilia knows. She always goes with the luggage without me."

"Why don't we go to-morrow? We might fly."

She said, keeping her arm close round his neck and her cheek against his, "Is there such a hurry?"

"I want to be in Venice with you."

"Darling—don't make me *cry* again."

"—If only we can get seats at the last minute."

She said, "I'm always sick in aeroplanes. D'you mind?"

"Not if you don't."

"I only mind at the time. . . . But it might be rather—disillusioning."

He put his hand on her forehead and looked into her eyes.

He said, "I have no illusions any more—"

Part III

VENICE

Chapter I

To arrive in Venice from the air is to land (as one may begin any great "scene") on a platitude; to find oneself in Croydon, in Le Bourget, in Cologne—on one of those tonsured bits of earth that testify to passing swallows, man's "conquest of the air."

Adria said, as they followed the other passengers across the baked grass towards a line of hangars and concrete buildings, that this arrival in Venice was like being handed the moon in a paper bag.

They filed into the customs. While they were waiting he said, "Well—you weren't sick."

"*Only* because I haven't wanted to eat since yesterday. . . ." She added, "Curious . . . being in love."

"Curiouser and curiouser!—I couldn't sleep at all last night."

She said, "Oh, I took some of my stuff to make me; otherwise I should have looked plain as well as hollow to-day."

"Like an umbrella stand," he suggested.

"I hate them. Don't you? Don't let's ever have one. . . ."

The customs officer began examining her luggage. While he was doing this she said, "Benedict's very *précieux* about it. He always gets out at Mestre, as if the railways and the bridge didn't exist, and has the gondola meet him there, and is rowed in across the lagoons."

They followed their luggage out of the customs house to the launch. It occurred to him to ask her, while they were waiting to get in, why she was so appropriately called "Adria."

She said, "Father chose the name. He was in a 'historical phase' when I was born. . . . There was a queen who had a daughter called Adria. She had a difficult life, and then went to live in Asolo—" She smiled and said as he took her hand to help her into the launch, "I suppose I was sort of foredoomed to go to Venice."

He said, "I like the word 'predestined' better."

She put her arm through his. The launch moved off, down the cement-lined channel and under a bridge and out on to an immense plain of blue water whose sheen was bounded by dim stretches of island, and broken here and there by boats with pomegranate-colored sails, and small black barges

drifting indifferently in an element that might, by its absence of any definitive horizon, be either sky or sea.

The *moto-scaffo* turned southward.

She smiled. "You'd rather, for instance, that I said I was predestined to marry you."

"*Much* rather! But I'd still rather believe that you were going to of your own free will."

She glanced up, struck by his change of voice when he said, hardly a minute later:—

"You are going to—darling. Aren't you?"

She hesitated, feeling one of his changes of mood.

"What—a strange question!"

He said,—he was still looking towards the islands,—"What incredible blueness," as if he hadn't heard her. Then he said, "You mustn't mind my asking you that. You see the fact that everything's gone so right, since yesterday, makes me stop every now and then and feel that I must be wrong about it all, somehow!"

They were turning westward now over a space of water polished pale green.

"Or," he went on, "that I must have made some sort of mistake, or be mad or something—"

She said, "Yesterday was earth—and to-day is heaven."

But as she spoke they leaned forward, forgetting even each other.

For there was Venice—set like a diadem of colored pearls on the tranquil splendor of the lagoons. . . .

They dined alone (for Benedict was in Padua, and his guests—so a scribbled note announced—were out for the evening).

They dined in the vast stuccoed dining room, its green and white and rose pale, far away from the central radiance of the candles.

The gondolier—Romeo—moved behind them in his white coat, his shoes silent on the marble floor.

Their words hovered in the candlelight and then flitted and vanished upwards toward the high-shadowed cornices of the room.

But they spoke very little. For they had felt so much happiness in the last few hours that they were tired; as if they had been too much in the sun.

To Francis the whole place was still unreal. The high eighteenth-century rooms, with their painted ceilings and terrazzo floors, each room different in character from the next, yet one leading out of the other like variations on the same theme, had too much beauty to be immediately accepted. He let his sense of them grow in him, moving to and fro after dinner, while Adria still lay on the sofa in the candlelight—moving under the *chinoiserie* ceiling in the green room, and then, through the open doors, into the smaller room hung with elegiacal pictures of small ruins and large flowers, and with a mild rioting of goddesses and cupids on the ceiling. . . .

The windows were all open, and outside the moonlight blanched the balustrades of the balconies.

He went out on to one of the balconies. Adria got up and came and stood beside him. A gondola passed in the narrow canal below them, went under the bridge and glided out on to the glimmering water the other side. A barge followed, its black bulk moving slowly. Every now and then people passed diagonally across the *campo* opposite, coming towards the little bridge or going past it to the narrow *calle* beside the Church of the Carmini, which stood on the far side of the square.

Adria said, "Even if there were never another evening after this evening —or another minute after this one—"

Her low tones echoed over the water below them. She turned her head and looked at him. Her face looked smaller in the moonlight, and her eyes darker and wider open. "Even," she said strangely, "if you were to change now, and not love me any more, I should have known what it was like—" she hesitated, and took the phrase that figured, so often and with so little effect, in her currency of speech, but, in the tone in which she said it now, had an effect of poetry—"to feel most heavenly!"

Chapter II

Francis was woken the next morning by the bells of the Carmini Church opposite, and the splash and jolting of barges in the canal below.

He lay watching the sky and the sunlight on the pigeons, and on the halos of the stone saints on the church. But he was too happy and nervous to lie still, and rang for his breakfast, which was brought to him by Emilia's sister, Elisabatta.

He got up and dressed and went out, leaving a message for Adria, who was still sleeping, that he would come back towards midday.

He didn't want to see her yet. He wanted to be alone with his sense of her, and in this morning adventure only to have her with him invisibly. To feel her—as he went now over the bridges, now through narrow *calli*, and now out into the superb and shining grandeur of the Piazza—as part of that disquiet and too exquisite passion that Venice, creating by her excess of beauty an appetite for surfeit, awakens and never satisfies.

He crossed the Piazza slowly. The air was so bright that the wings of the pigeons flashed gold in it, and the gold rays on the clock tower, and the gold on the mosaic of San Marco, seemed rather a deposit of the air than a flash, a gleam, a brilliance, seen through it. And as he went across the Piazzetta, San Marco seemed the "gorgeous east" itself, held in memorial captivity by the Doges' Palace; itself so Venetian a symbol, in rose and white marble, of frivolity and power (and having an air, it always seemed to Francis, of indifferently awaiting eternity in a coronet of marble lace).

He moved slowly to the edge of the Molo, and then on, and up on to the Ponte della Paglia, where he stood while people passed behind him, to and fro over the bridge. He stood leaning on the balustrade, oppressed, in the face of this familiar yet unbelievable loveliness, by a mixed sense of finding and losing; of looking into the eyes of Venice for the first and last time.

The place held and escaped him; too sweet and too strange in its embrace.

Caught and cheated by the Venice that was in his eyes, in his nerves, in his blood, he saw a Narcissus town, eternally bent over the reflections of its own beauty in the water.

And, like Narcissus, haunted by Echo. . . .

For as each palace, each stained façade of marble, each carving, each pillar, each weathered block of porphyry, had its image in the water, so each sound, from the midday cannon, and the thudding and tinkling of *vaporetti* in the Grand Canal, to the plash of an oar by a silent *fondamento* or the cry of a gondolier round the hidden turn of a *rio*, had its own echo. . . .

He had a fancy that the whole place was an assumption of solidity, built by seeming blocks of marble, century by seeming century, in perverse imitation of the vision under the water. . . .

When he got in he found Adria and Benedict and Henry Evetts in the green room with the *chinoiserie* ceiling. The shutters were already closed so that when he first came in he didn't recognize the girl with a riband round her hair who was talking to Denis Eldon in the corner.

"You know Minx," said Benedict.

"I didn't know you were staying?"

"*Yes*," said Minx, "I was staying with the Drages, but I packed and left *without* a word yesterday, the beds are *so* bad that one really can't stay more than three days—at least, I *never* manage to."

"I tried last year," said Denis.

"I gather from Linnet and Tessa that they mean to hang on until after the Regatta," said Adria. She added, "*Must* you have a cocktail before we go, Minx? We shall miss the twelve-o'clock launch if you do—"

"*Unlike* Linnet, Tessa 'hangs' so gracefully," said Benedict, "that it's almost a pleasure to watch her. *Unlike* the rest of the Pleasure Seekers—who spoil it by having bad consciences all the time, and rushing out and buying poor Mrs. Drage secondhand tuberoses whenever they feel they've been specially horrid."

"Poor Mrs. Drage!" said Harry Evetts. "Countess Frascati tells me that she and her husband never see each other during the Lido season at all because they take the 'scenes' with their guests, and their guests' guests, in turns."

Benedict said, "Here's your cocktail, Minx . . . the gondola in five minutes, Romeo."

Romeo set down the tray.

"*Benissimo, signor. . . .*"

"The Pleasure Seekers rang *me* up half an hour ago," said Benedict, "to find out if we were using our gondola. . . . I described to Linnet (it's always Linnet who begins the asking) all the different uses we were putting it to. I spared her nothing."

"She *tried* to get Federigo from me yesterday on the Lido," complained Minx. "*You* know, she came and lay all round him. But she had *no* luck. She isn't his type at all."

"I didn't think he had a type," said Harry Evetts. He had a special liking for royalty; but even he found the young man whom Benedict always referred to as "Minx's Boiled Prince" unattractive.

"Of course," Minx complained as they went downstairs into the courtyard, "I know she *only* wants to use his launch, but still, Linnet wouldn't stop at that—"

When they were getting out of the gondola at the Danieli Hotel, Benedict said to Adria:—

"They're waiting for us in the launch—bear me out when I say that there isn't enough luncheon for *any* of them, and that we've got people already!"

"They" all shouted, "*Darling Adria, darling Ben, darling Henry*"—and made room for them. Francis knew Linnet already, and the other four by name or sight. They, Beryl and Tessa,—and Micky and George,—all had very young voices and were charming. Considering them, as the *moto-scaffo* shot over the lagoons towards the Lido, he reconsidered Adria's plea for them—which was that if the poor Drages didn't have "them,"—have at least the privilege of their pleasing bronzed looks and their charming voices occupying her "dreadful *palazzo*,"—she might have ugly people who hadn't even got the kind of name she could boast about afterwards.

But Linnet he didn't like. Her manner was overconfiding and she had the slightly defiant brilliance of a successful burglar. She was older than the others and didn't really seem to belong to them. But they, like nice, but naughty children in the presence of a "nasty child," seemed alternately bored and impressed by her. She got Henry Evetts to pay for her ticket by not having change.

"Isn't it maddening," began Tessa, fixing her lovely brown eyes on Adria, "poor darling Mrs. Drage can't send any luncheon out for us to-day because the cook left this morning—"

"—Simply because of our *absolutely* silly joke yesterday," sighed Beryl, laying her head on Micky's (her husband's) shoulder.

"I think it was a great *mistake*," said Linnet, keeping her arm tightly in Denis Eldon's.

Francis asked them what they'd done.

"*Well*, you see," said Tessa, "if you'd *seen* what the spaghetti was *like* yesterday! So we plaited it, darlings, beautifully really, and tied the ends with pieces of wool we pulled out of our bathing suits. . . ."

"—And put the plaits back into the thermos thing," said Micky.

"Heavenly it was," said George, "because then, afterwards, that lovely cockatoo woman, the German one, asked us all to luncheon at the Excelsior Hotel—"

"Why don't you try Harry's Bar to-day?" said Benedict. "I'm afraid we're full up."

"Harry's Bar is fearfully *remote*," said George. "What's that quotation—I know, 'Far from the madding crowd.'" He smiled and wrinkled up his nose in the sun.

"Divine fool George is," said Tessa (his wife). "Have you got a cigarette, Micky? *Or* George?"

The launch was moving slowly up the channel behind that vast adaptation of a crematorium, the Excelsior.

They fumbled.

Francis produced his case, and they each took a cigarette eagerly, laughing, in an endearing chime.

"*How* nice of you."

"How *sweet* of you."

"You are a *perfect* man."

"You really are an *angel*."

The Lido "scene," which was new to Francis, had for him the effect of a chef's "creation": *a tour de force* in colored marzipans, tinted icings, and spun sugar, and animated flower-bright figures (the rows of little *capanne* with their awnings of blue and white sugar calling specially for admiration). He saw it arranged, by the genius of an Invisible Head Waiter, against a background, which gave such verisimilitude to the yellow marzipan beach lapped by its waves of spun sugar, of pale blue satin sky. . . .

On their way to their own *capanna* Henry Evetts stopped to talk to a group of people under one of the awnings, and Minx, with a cry of "There's Federigo," joined a group which included a recognizable German film actor and two youths in white shorts and strawberry-pink *maillots* who Adria said were known as the Prince's "Mädchen in Uniform."

In most of the groups in the sun in front of the awnings people were rubbing oil into their own, or each other's limbs, thus using gestures which emphasized the effect they made, with their brown limbs and bright little clothes and perched little caps, of being, in the most convenient of semitropical surroundings, the most accomplished kind of apes. And as they chattered and ran with swinging arms and slightly bent knees to and fro over the beach and swung on the trapezes provided for them, no link appeared to be missing.

A remark Francis made, to this effect, appealed to Benedict. "I know," he said—"it's quite frightening. They make me dream at nights that I'm swinging by my tail."

"You're both too odious," said Adria. "Anyone can see 'apes' if they look for them."

"Adria sees angels where we see apes," said Benedict.

She looked at them both and laughed, and then said with that air that she occasionally had of being a very nice, sane, superior little girl:—

"Not at all, Ben. I just see people like ourselves."

As they came out of the sea she said, "Henry is bringing the Howards to luncheon. But I expect there's enough. Ben does the ordering and he's usually fairly provident."

As she spoke she was standing beside him with her brown profile against the sky; and he thought how tiresome it was that these people, whoever they were (and he suspected with a faint irritation that they were, in his sister's odious phrase, "somebody"), were coming to luncheon. And that it was sufficiently trying having Henry Evetts about, tacitly setting his buoyancy and persistence and prestige against what he chose to imply was Adria's inconsequent attachment to Francis. But that anyway, after luncheon, they'd drift away, and he and Adria would manage to be together.

"Who are the Howards?" he asked perfunctorily, as they went in to dress.

"Oh, just chaps— His mother's a cousin of father's. . . ." She added, "They won't stay long afterwards," as if she'd heard him thinking.

Romeo had laid the table for five under the blue and white awning, and Henry Evetts was already in a dry bathing suit and entertaining the Howards. Adria hurried in to dress, and reappeared in a costume like that of the *bagnini*—white shorts and a cherry-red shirt. While she was dressing Henry Evetts had introduced Francis, and he took an immediate dislike to Howard, a large effeminate Guardsman, and to his wife, a dark small woman with large eyes, in a white swimming suit.

At luncheon Howard was unexpectedly amusing, and Francis liked him by the time they went, though the wife was even more worldly and indifferent and tiresome than he'd expected. Henry Evetts went off with them, coming back after a moment to whisper something in Adria's ear. She was lying stretched out on one of the mattresses, and he kissed her lightly before he went off, and when he'd gone and they were alone Francis said:—

"I suppose you always kiss Henry Evetts—"

But she laughed and said, "Darling, *yes*, at least twice a week."

He came and lay down beside her in the hot tide of light, and her eyes looked golden and translucent. He began to realize her again and said:—

"You're too lovely. I shall have to stop looking at you."

And she said, "Let's shut our eyes or we shall feel worse. This is no place for 'in lovers.'"

But he took her hand, kissed it, and put it down again. Romeo was packing the baskets. On his left the Countess Frascati and her daughter were oiling themselves, and on the other side of Adria were three young men, very similar in feature, but varying in color from milk chocolate to butterscotch.

"*No* place," he murmured. After a while he said, "Darling, I wish there was no one else on this damned beach—"

"So do I—really—"

"Do you—really?"

She laid her hand on his shoulder. When she took her hand away he could feel where her fingers had been on his skin.

"Don't."

She said, “I’m sorry.”

A minute later she said:—

“I didn’t know you felt as much as that about me—”

He didn’t look at her.

“Nor did I— Perhaps it’s a bore.” He heard her laugh oddly, under her breath. “For you?” she asked.

“No, sweet. For you.”

She was silent. Then he heard her say, “Look at me—darling—”

He turned his head and looked into her eyes, and she said with a slow breaking cadence he’d never heard:—

“Didn’t you know that I wanted you?”

“No, my dear.”

“Only I was so in love with you that I didn’t realize myself for a long time.”

“When did you know?”

She hesitated. “That—last night you stayed—at Wrens—”

Romeo was standing above them, a basket in each hand, asking what time they wanted the gondola to meet them in Venice.

“—Oh—oh—well— *Alle cinque*,” she said.

“*Benissimo, signorina*.”

He went, his bulk miraculously vanishing into the crevice between two *capanne*.

She said, “I woke up that night and wondered if you were awake. And then—” She hesitated and said, “Darling, look at me—it makes things embarrassing if you don’t look when I say them—”

Her eyes were golden and wide open.

“—I lay in my room, which is only two stupid walls off from yours, thinking that the most heavenly thing in the world would be, darling,—look at me,—to make love to you—”

“*That* night?” He remembered his own waking. “How strange,” he said. He remembered his dream. She asked suddenly, “What’s the matter?”

He lay down, under the heat, burying his head in his arms. She saw that something had happened in his thoughts to hurt him; and he heard her say, "Lie still, my sweet," as if he had a physical pain and she were nursing it.

"I need never have left you—then?" He didn't look up.

"You need never have left me. I—belonged to you from that first time you lunched with me—at Chesterfield Street—and you told me that I was 'alone in the wrong way.'"

"Did I?" He didn't remember. He went back in his mind, saying, "That night—and after that—our first conversation about friendship—"

"*Your* conversation—my dear!"

"I know."

"—What a *divine* color you are, Sir Francis!"

It was Minx's voice. She came and lay down on one of the empty beds, and her Boiled Prince came and lay down beside her.

"You are a top-hole color," said the Prince with a strong Portuguese accent. "Is it all your own color or is it that new oil that I have heard strongly recommended?"

"It's in the grain," said Francis. "I've spent nearly all the last years in the sun somewhere and somehow."

"Jolly good," said the Prince.

"You're not a bad tinge, sir," said Minx, scrutinizing his chest and stomach. "Rather on the *mauve* side. But perhaps that's your royal blood—"

Adria murmured to Francis, "That's what's called being born 'outside the purple.'"

"I use always the products of Guerlain," the Prince was saying. As he spoke one of the "Mädchen in Uniform" came up and said that the Duchess had arrived at His Royal Highness's *capanna* in great distress, as they had searched the Excelsior for her monkey and had not been able to find it anywhere.

He got up at once.

"I gave orders that they were to find it." He strode off, Minx curveting beside him exclaiming, "How *ghastly—poor* little monkey!"

"I expect the hotel staff have killed it," said Adria. "The Duchess brings it to stay there every summer. And it's not 'poor' and 'little' at all. It's almost

as big as King Kong. The only amusing thing about it is that it's madly in love with the Lion of Saint Mark's, and the Duchess daren't bring it into Venice because it climbs up the column in the Piazzetta and does such awful things to the poor Lion."

Benedict interrupted her.

"I'm going back to Venice now. . . . Have you asked anyone to dine?"

She glanced at Francis. "I thought, as you're all going to Vicenza for the night, we'd dine quietly at home."

"Very well."

Adria said, smiling, but with Francis's hand in hers, "We'll have a romantic evening and go out in the gondola after dinner."

As Benedict got up, he said, fixing his glance that seemed to have been a long way off first on his sister and then on Francis:—

"Are you engaged or something?"

"Yes," said Adria. "Didn't you notice?"

Benedict put his sun glasses in his pocket and said, "I noticed you were slightly in love when you arrived. Lovely for you—I'm so pleased." He added, his glance scanning the shore for some figure that he couldn't find, "I can't think why you come to Venice, though." He sighed, smoothing his fair hair with one of his lovely hands, and murmured, "Lust is quite easy in Venice— But love is very difficult, you know."

He drifted off, putting on his dark glasses again. . . .

After dinner, when they were in the smaller room with the goddesses on the ceiling, Adria got up and went into her bedroom next door to fetch her coat.

When she came back he said:—

"I hated your being out of the room."

She stared. "How odd you are, darling."

"I know." He leaned back on the sofa, looking up at her. He said, "I feel 'unfurnished' without you."

She said, "I'm glad. Perhaps that's a safe sort of feeling."

"You mean it'll last?"

"Yes."

He said, "Darling. D'you think feelings last? I think they change. (I don't mean decrease.)—One day I love you in one way—and one another, and more, or not so much; and one half hour differently from another."

"Perhaps that's you," she said. "I—feel the changes in you, and I change with them—because I can't help it; as if I were dancing with you. But I don't think that *I* change. . . ."

Romeo came in to ask them if they wanted the gondola immediately. She said yes, they would come now. But as he went away across the green room next door they heard the bell ring, and a moment later voices out in the hall, and a woman's voice saying, "Romeo, where is Signor Benedict?—*Well* then, where is the *signorina* if he *isn't* here?"

"*Hell*," whispered Adria, "it's Linnet."

Linnet came in a moment later, flushed and very smart in black and a black hat, and followed by the other four Pleasure Seekers, still in their flannels and cotton frocks and looking disturbed but excited, like school children that have been got up out of bed for a fire practice.

"*Heavens!*" said Linnet. "Darling Adria, you must do something for us—The *most* awful things have been happening. We've *left* the Drages'."

"Mrs. Drage screaming after us and shaking her *fist* from topmost windows of her beastly *palazzo*," moaned Tessa.

"—Yes," Linnet went on. "Oh, *darling*, some brandy—just a *little* glass—thank you, sweet—and he, the 'Signor Drage,' came right down to the bottom step and *shouted* after us *all down the Grand Canal*, the most odious things!"

"He said we were 'spongers'!" sighed Tessa.

"And had *no* manners at all," cried Beryl.

"And that all we cared about was to drink his whiskey and take no notice of him," Mickey deplored.

"The old—what's it called—satyr!" said George angrily.

"Yes *indeed*, satyr!" said Tessa. "Because you know he tried to make Beryl promise to come to Chioggia alone with him in his *vile* little launch, and when she tried to get out of it *nicely*, by saying that George wouldn't like it, he said George was a ne'er-do-weel!"

"But what did you do with your luggage?" asked Adria.

"Oh, darling," said Linnet, "I'm afraid some of it's *here*—downstairs—and that we thought perhaps we could *send* someone for the rest—"

"The point is," said Beryl, winding her slim arms round George, "where we *are* going to sleep?"

"Yes," sighed Tessa, combing her brown curls and putting some gold out of a little jar on her eyelids, "there's something so depressing about *not* knowing, I *do* think."

They all looked at Linnet.

"You see, darlings," said Linnet, doing one smile after another, "your *palazzo* is so marvelously lovely (after the Drages' especially) that we thought—that if every spare room wasn't full—"

"Benedict's the housekeeper here. And you know he never has you, except to meals. Besides, all the mezzanine spare rooms downstairs are being used, *and* up here—"

"*Yes*," interrupted Linnet, who knew the accommodation of every house she went into. "But darling Francis's room is so enormous it would hold Micky *and* George—just for one night, on the settee thing—and Tessa and Beryl and I could *easily* arrange ourselves on your sofa and the two here—or you could ask Emilia to give up her room—for *one* night."

Adria wavered. "Benedict never allows sofas to be slept on—"

"But you *can't* turn us out into the night," wailed Tessa.

"Besides, *Drage* is probably prowling for us now in a rage."

Adria gave in. (She knew that no one had ever been so gross as to propose to the Pleasure Seekers that they should go to a hotel!)

"Very well," she said. "For one night!" (Though she remembered Ben's dictum that their "night" was always a thousand and one. . . .) "But I can't make you very comfortable, and the servants will insist on doing the rooms in the morning."

"Oh, I sleep through anything," said Beryl.

When Henry and Minx and Denis came in, Adria and Francis were busy spreading coverlets over Beryl and Tessa on their respective sofas, and Linnet was in the smaller room next door. (Adria had refused to have her on her sofa, as Linnet made any bedroom look like a Jumble Sale.)

"*Littered* with Them," said Minx. She added, "I knew They were blowing up to *stay* here. But they needn't hope to. Because when Ben comes back from Vicenza to-morrow he'll turn them out at once."

"Where'll they go then?" asked Denis, admiring Tessa dispassionately.

"*Linnet's* trying the Countess Frascati," said Minx. "But the others will be rather left—Linnet knows the Italians as well—which keeps her going here."

"Where are the Husbands?" asked Henry Evetts.

"They're in my room," said Francis. "They're asleep already."

"That's rather—inconvenient for you, isn't it, Radnor?"

"You are a sweet, Adria," smiled Tessa, tucked up now on the long green sofa, opposite Beryl, who was curled under a piece of sixteenth-century red brocade.

"Oh, *Adria*," called Linnet from the next room, "you haven't got a *smaller* pillow I could have here; these cushions are so enormous, and sleeping high makes me have a double chin."

"No one can double their chins in one night," said Adria firmly. "And lending one's 'tiny pillow' is like lending one's toothbrush or one's bed copy of the *Sonnets*. One just can't."

Linnet's voice was resigned. "Well—I'll look like the Duchess in *Alice* to-morrow."

Henry and Minx and Denis turned to go.

"Oh—!" called Tessa after them. "By the way—isn't it true that you're giving a lovely party here to-morrow night?"

"Yes," said Henry. "It's my party and Benedict's lending me the house." He added with his most attractively mollifying "platform manner," "I only didn't ask you all, just because I knew you'd come anyway—"

"Of *course*, darling, we would—"

As he went out Tessa said, "D'you really think that horrid Henry didn't mean to ask us—"

"Of course he did, dear," said Beryl complacently, snuggling under her brocade. "He couldn't *not* ask an earl's daughter, *and* a sprig of Rothschild, *and* an eleventh baronet."

"True," said Tessa sleepily, "there is always that—"

“There’s often *only* that,” said Beryl.

As Adria said good-night to Francis she said, “We never had our romantic gondola expedition after all—”

“To-morrow then—”

“Yes.”

Chapter III

When Francis saw Adria the next morning the sofas were in order, and there was no trace of even Linnet's disarranging influence.

"What's happened to Them?"

"Them?" Her mind seemed to have lost the imprint of their visit as completely as had the sofas. (He had noticed that their habits made altogether less impression on her than on him. It was part of her character to accept behavior rather than to question it—so that often, when they discussed people, she would describe their lives, when he would attempt to explain them.)

"—Oh," she said. "Well—Ben arrived back from Vicenza early this morning—having had a beastly time, poor darling, because his love affair is all going wrong, and that always makes him dignified—so he came in—about half past eight, and ordered them out (like the Money Changers). I was *really* rather sorry for them—"

"But what's happened to them?"

"—Oh well. They've gone back to the Drages' as usual. They do, you know, every year. Tessa always makes the peace—and cries a little, and poor Mrs. Drage softens all over and says, 'Dear Lady Theresa, it's just been a misunderstanding, hasn't it!' (Tessa really cries! She's awfully soft-hearted really.)"

"And their luggage?"

"Oh, they never really brought any. You see they always know in their secret hearts that they're going back!"

He said, "Well, anyway, I'm glad they have gone."

She smiled. "They'll be back for the party to-night."

"Heavens! *What* party?"

"Henry's. . . . The drink's ordered already and Henry and Ben have gone out this minute to order the flowers."

He said, "Oh yes. I'd forgotten."

"It ought to be heavenly. The dining room becomes the ballroom, and we can have the buffet in the hall—and I think—I shall put all *white* flowers in here, and pink—dahlias and amaryllis in the next room—"

"In fact you and Henry are going to be 'host' and 'hostess'?"

"Darling—what's the matter?"

He suddenly, and to his own surprise, lost his temper.

"Don't you *want* to be alone with me?"

"Of course I do."

"Why d'you keep committing yourself to all these people then?"

She was lovely and reasonable and nervous all in one gesture of appeal.

"Darling—it isn't a question of committing. But I can't 'turn savage' just because we love each other—"

"*Don't* you," he insisted, "care if we're together or not?"

"Don't you *know* the answer?"

"—You do more than tolerate them—you simply *invite* them to be with you all the time."

"Darling— Be reasonable. Whom have I invited?"

"Well—last night."

She burst out with a hurt, puzzled impatience: "*Was* that my fault—you *saw* how it happened."

"Well then—yesterday on the Lido—"

"You knew yourself that we should hardly be alone on the Lido."

"And afterwards when we got back here and found the entire place overrun with a cocktail party—"

She faced him, looking so troubled that his anger stopped and he said nervously, "I'm sorry, darling—" and put his arms round her and held her, repeating, "I'm sorry. It's just that I hate this feeling of being separated from you—and I can't help thinking all the time if only I could get you away from all these people—"

She said quickly, "They'll go soon. . . . Or we can. But this—sort of thing—people one knows being here—only lasts another fortnight and then it's quiet—"

"A fortnight?—My goodness!"

But she held him and said, "My dear, haven't we got all our *life* together?"

He gave in again. "Yes—of course—only—"

"You see—" she made out lucidly—"in a way you like my being—at least having been, so . . . *mondaine*. . . ."

"Yes," he admitted, "that's horridly true."

"It's as if," she suggested, amused, but still visibly anxious to calm him, "you were to like me to be very elegant—but resent my going to the dressmaker's. . . ."

"I *know*," he acceded. "It's all so mixed . . . and absurd."

"And anyway, darling, we've got all to-day. We needn't go to the Lido."

And he thought with relief, "Yes, at least we've got all to-day. . . ." And then, by some perverse impulse,—perhaps because in a flash he became aware of the contrast between his mere "relief" at this moment and the enchanted quality of his expectation,—he said:—

"No, let's go to the Lido. . . . It'll be lovely to bathe and it's too hot here —"

She stood back, trying to gauge his new mood.

"—We could stay indoors. . . . Or go out and spend the day on the Brenta —"

"Where? How?"

"At La Foscara."

"*More* people there!" he exclaimed. "And a host."

"No. He'd leave us alone, if we wanted it."

But he repeated, "Let's go to the Lido. After all we shall have lots of time together later."

She said, "I wish you wouldn't be . . . complicated and angry."

"I'm not—really."

Benedict came in and said, "Shall I leave the gondola for you?"

"No," said Francis. "We're coming now."

When they came in, just after six, there was an air-mail letter waiting for Francis on the chest in the hall. He recognized Lynne's handwriting.

Sunday

SIR,—

I thought I had better inform you that the French young lady phoned this morning after you was gone and when I said you was gone abroad she kept on asking me for your address, where you was gone to but I told her I couldn't give any address. So she did not seem too pleased and she said she was going straight off to find out another way. She said, "I will find out from that Chink!" by which I took her to mean a Chinaman but don't know of any that could tell her your address the man has been about the wastepipe in the bathroom and says it is a stoppage but is coming back. He is a different man from last time.

The laundry hasn't called yet for your shirts so I have phoned them.

Yours truly,
F. LYNNE

Adria was saying:—

"Darling, I must go and get the flowers done now. We're dining at nine. And they come about half past ten."

The rooms were lit by innumerable candles, their petals of flame stirring in the air that came in through the high open windows.

In the green *salon* that now, at night, was the color of Ming porcelain, the air passed across the chandelier and under the leaves and pagodas and trellises on the ceiling, and drifted, catching the fragrance of the tuberoses, into the ballroom.

Adria was dancing.

She said to Francis:—

"You are enjoying it? After all?"

"Yes."

She said later:—

"After the party, shall we be too silly and take breakfast in the gondola out on the lagoons—or would you hate that?"

"I'd do anything with you—take luncheon on a raft to China if you wanted to—"

Linnet said to Henry Evetts, "Adria and Francis Radnor have been dancing together now for an hour. I suppose she is *madly* in love with him."

Henry Evetts said, "Oh, it's just a *béguin*. He's not her sort really." But as they passed he touched Adria on the shoulder.

"The next with me?"

"The one after."

When they stopped she said to Francis:—

"I don't believe I *can* dance with anyone else after you. It'll be like a *mariage de convenance* after a *grande passion*."

They drifted with the crowd through the green room.

He said, "People in love don't usually dance well together."

"I don't agree. I think the same rhythm means something. Tessa could never dance well with her first husband when she was engaged to him; and when she married they slept badly together."

"What a 'Tessa idea,' darling."

Benedict interrupted them. "Adria, do *reason* with Minx. She is trying to smuggle in the Boiled Prince by the mezzanine—I told her that Henry wouldn't ask him and I wouldn't have him in the house, but she *won't* listen."

Francis followed them.

Minx, in a scarlet dress, was standing at the top of the mezzanine stairs saying, "Well, now I've got him here you *can't* throw him out. After all, he *is* royal."

"He is impossible," said Benedict. "If he was royal *and* possible Henry would have asked him."

Henry came up.

"You are *monstrous*, Minx. He's just come in by the *front* door now."

Minx giggled.

"How *divine*! How clever of him! Like Wolfe at Quebec or something."

Adria and Benedict turned to look and there, in the hall, in the crowd beside the buffet, was Minx's *protégé* accompanied by the "Mädchen in Uniform" in white mess jackets and white trousers that fitted very tightly over their little behinds. And Mrs. Redfern was drawing herself up to her overfull height. And Mr. Redfern, considering his smallness and smoothness and gentleness, decidedly bristling, and Countess Frascati making as if to protect her daughters.

The Prince himself, unconscious of, or accustomed to, such marks of distaste, was already seated on the walnut *cassone* while Minx and the "Mädchen" plied him with whiskey.

"After all, he isn't," said Adria, "the only uninvited person here. The Pleasure Seekers are furious because the Drages insisted on coming with them, and after this morning's *rapprochement* they couldn't refuse."

"*Look* at Linnet," groaned Beryl and Micky, who were walking about with jugs of claret cup in their hands. "*Working* on that poor silly young man who has a toffee fortune and means to take an apartment here."

"Now, Adria, darling, come and dance with me," said Henry Evetts.

"Then at *last* perhaps I shall have Francis to dance with *me*," said Beryl.

"Very well," said Micky, "if you throw me over like this in mid-ballroom I shall renounce you for the Princesse d'Armagnac. She'll probably be very grateful, as Monsieur Jean Jacquemart is sitting beside her and telling her how this party would have been done in the eighteenth century."

When Adria saw Francis again she saw that his mood had changed, and when she asked him if anything had happened he said curtly:—

"No, I'm sorry. I'm just suddenly depressed. I shall go to bed soon.—How they *do* all keep it up."

She said, "Darling, I can't bear you to be upset." And then, "When I've had this one more dance that I've promised I'll come back and we can sit and talk, or go out, or anything you like."

Meanwhile Benedict had dumped a Swedish baroness on Francis, who kept telling him endlessly about her "colon."

When Adria came back at last, the baroness transferred herself and her colon to Adria's ex-partner, an Italian playwright, and Adria turned to Francis and said:—

"Will you dance with me, darling?"

"I'd—rather not."

She was too lovely, and he felt too unhappy.

"Francis?"

The band was playing "Blue Moon."

"No, my dear. Not now."

She turned and went away on Henry Evetts's arm.

Francis went out on to the balcony, and saw that the dawn was beginning, the faint primrose sky burnishing the dark water of the canal. The air too had changed, and felt cooler.

He looked back into the rooms.

The candles in the chandelier were burning low and those in the sconces on the walls were already burnt out. And in the slow pallor that was coming in through the tall windows, the couples on the chairs and sofas looked pale, and the women had pale dresses, and the tuberoses looked like their own ghosts reflected in the dark mirror.

He saw a couple dance across the far doorway, and then Adria come in and look round (was she looking for him?) and then go back again into the ballroom where the band was playing "Blue Moon.". . .

He was shaving, and Romeo was standing behind him.

He knew beforehand what Romeo (so stout and immaculate in his fresh white sailor blouse) was going to say. His mind said the words with Romeo's voice.

"There is a young lady wishes to speak with the *signor*."

He put down his razor.

"Where is she?"

"She is in the 'all, *signor*."

"Show her downstairs, to the mezzanine. *Not* up here."

"*Si, signor.*"

As he was going out he called him back.

"Romeo?"

"*Comandi, signor?*"

"Ask the Signorina Adria if she can see me for a minute."

"The *signorina* 'as not yet come back with Signor Evett."

"Not come *back*?"

"The *signorina* and Signor Evett—took their breakfass in the gondola—with Dario (I could not go, I 'ave 'ad to clear here). I think that the *signorino* went with them."

"Thank you, Romeo—" He called after him, "Tell the young lady I'll come down in ten minutes."

"*Benissimo, signor.*"

Romeo had put her in Benedict's sitting room; a room whose walls were decorated with Eastern hunting scenes gilded on white tiled panels and set in gold and white stucco, its blue-grey ceiling traversed by dimly colored birds and butterflies.

Francis shut the door behind him.

"What does this mean?"

She faced him, smiling; her *sang-froid* so thick and cheap in its assumption, so obviously coated over some other sickening and hidden state, as to be, in this full summer light, and within the clear fantastic poetry of the room, positively loathsome.

"Why should it *mean anything*?"

His expression must have shown how he felt her in these surroundings, for she went on, "I suppose I have as much a right as anybody else to be in *Venice*!"

"In Venice . . . but not here."

"Why not here, I'd very much like to know? I suppose I can come and see any of my friends if I like, *can't I*?"

"This isn't my house."

She looked round, and smiled again. "No. But I have no doubt you'd be very pleased if it *was*, *wouldn' you*?" Her glance was smooth, the malice quaking under it.

"As it isn't my house, I'm afraid I must ask you to go away."

"It's Miss Leigh's house? Eh?"

"It belongs to Mr. Leigh, her brother."

"But she is living here. And it belongs also to her. 'Tong' tell me that."

"I'm sorry you should have gone to Miss Leigh's house in London without her permission."

"*Permission!* And who is she to give me *permission*?"

"Will you please go away?" He could see how rapidly she was breathing under her close-fitting pink dress.

"Not before you tell me why you go away like this from London and don't tell me? I should *very* much like to know why it is you went away with a smart young lady—that has plenty of money, and of course you don' bother to let *me* know because—" her voice was getting hold of her now —"because you think you can have me whenever you feel like it? Don't you?"

"Please be quiet. And go at once!"

"—You think *I* am just going to wait for you in London and then when you're all nicely fix up with your wealthy girl friend, and want a little *treat* —"

He checked her, "Will you please go now, Josephine. Otherwise I shall ring and have you thrown out."

"—An' that won't be the *first* time you do it. No— Ah, then you was glad enough to come back to me, weren't you, you dirty beast!"

He went to the bell.

"Shall I have you taken out, or will you go?"

She sprang suddenly and wrenched his hand from the bell. He got hold of her arms.

"You little *bitch*!"

He got her arms in his grip, but she was stocky and strong, half mad with temper, and forced her head down until she got her teeth on his bare forearm.

He said:—

"If you don't go *this minute*, I shall have the police in."

The words worked. She dropped off him—stumbled back, her hat awry. "You filthy beast, you—"

He began dabbing the blood off his arm with his handkerchief. He said, "You can have exactly one minute by that clock to pull yourself together."

She went to the glass, muttering and sobbing through her quick angry breaths, and began to rearrange the black chiffon handkerchief round her neck, repinning the pink carnation on it with the garnet brooch.

Francis rang the bell, and when Romeo appeared told him to show the *signorina* out. Romeo stood back, holding the door for her passing, and she went, without looking back, her high-heeled steps rattling across the marble floor. He heard her go downstairs, and Romeo's heavy dulled footsteps following her.

As the door downstairs shut heavily after her, Emilia came in and said that the *signorina* wanted to speak to him on the telephone. He came up at once, twisting his handkerchief round his arm. When he took up the receiver his hand was shaking so that he could hardly hold it. Her voice said:—

"—Darling, listen. I've got a plan. We've all arrived out here at La Foscara, and we want you to come over and join us, for the day—"

He interrupted her.

"I really don't think—"

"—Please—listen, Francis. Henry and Ben are going back, and you and I have been asked to stay if we like, because I explained how we were so besieged with people in Venice, and you could bring my suitcase and everything, and our darling host himself says he's going away anyhow for a few days, and we can have the whole heavenly place to ourselves—"

"I'm sorry, my dear. But I don't really think it's a good idea. You'd soon be bored."

"*Francis*. What is it? If you're going to be foolish, I'm going to come back into Venice now at once and fetch you."

"Quite unnecessary. I'm going out to the Lido for the day to bathe and sleep."

She hesitated and then he heard her decided, "Well then, I'll come back and join you there for luncheon. Tell the cook to pack lunch just for the two of us."

He said, suddenly moved, "Darling—I'm really idiotic." And then —"Listen, I *will* come and join you."

But she had rung off.

He took the 12.30 launch out to the Lido. When he got to the *capanna*, the *bagnino*, a picaresque-featured man, came up to him at once and said that a lady had come here, asking if he had arrived.

"The Signorina Leigh, you mean?"

Some dim expression that resembled amusement, or irony, showed in the man's face.

"No, no, *signor*. I know *la Signorina Leigh*."

Then he saw Josephine, halfway along the beach now, in her bright pink dress, talking to one of the fruit sellers.

He thought she looked in his direction. The idea of Adria arriving now at any moment and seeing her made him feel sick. If he'd gone to La Foscara . . .

He decided to go back at once now. He could leave a message for Adria saying he couldn't lunch, that he'd forgotten an engagement in Venice (even the Drages would do, as an excuse). He tore out a page of his notebook (he could see Josephine coming towards him now) and began writing the note. As he was reading it she came up to him and said:—

"You needn' bother about me, you know. I am lunching with quite somebody else! At the Excelsior." She spoke in her "coy" voice, and her face, so disturbingly attractive in its smoothly lacquered vulgarity, showed no trace of any emotion. She was outwardly—and he grasped at any reassurance—so much her normal self again as to appear (what he had always believed she was for him) nothing more than her own "type." He grasped nervously at the belief that the scene had (how luckily Adria was away) been an outburst which, as so often with these women, spent a whole accumulation of rage, leaving them, for the time, without resentment and almost without individuality. She was, indeed, quite capable of having already picked up with some friend at the Excelsior, or anywhere else in Venice.

"Well—" He let her vanity have this. "I hope perhaps I shall see you sometimes."

Her face expressed nothing more than a flash of satisfaction.

"Per— 'aps."

"You're lunching out *here*, you said?"

"Yes. At the Excelsior."

"I see. Well. Enjoy yourself."

He watched her go. He wondered if he should stay and lunch here, after all. But then, even if Adria saw her— He turned to watch Josephine as she walked away. She was the only woman visible who wasn't half naked. Her stockings, her dress fitted over corsets, her chiffon scarf, her little veil, her parasol, were, by sheer contrast, provocative and oddly suggestive.

Romeo had already laid out the luncheon.

Perhaps it was a false move to go into Venice. If he went, and then Adria came and saw Josephine, the thing looked worse: looked more definitely as if he were afraid. If he stayed he might, and Adria certainly would (that was what he found himself clinging to), carry off the situation. He faced the humiliating fact of her certain unquestionable loyalty. And found himself acknowledging, with a mixture of admiration and anger, just how she would take it (take Josephine, or her equivalent, under any circumstances). She would apply her standards (of decency and tolerance)—so, somehow, cutting him off morally again.

"It is now half past one, *signor*. The Signorina Adria has not arrived."

"I'll wait."

He wondered why she was late. She was capable of being so grand in some ways—and in other ways so irritating. (Was there any need for her to have gone at *all* with Henry? Going out at six in the morning—)

He looked up and down the *plage*. He thought of going to see if Josephine were really lunching at the Excelsior— Better not. He didn't want her to think for one minute that he was interested again. Better stay here. After all, Adria was a woman of the world. The thing wasn't so utterly unprecedented that she need look upon it as a "tragedy.". . . A jealous ex-mistress. . . . If Adria could carry her sort of high fanatical tolerance to the point of having had Josephine to manicure her—since she must, even before she knew, have suspected . . . supposed . . .

At two o'clock he decided to have luncheon. Probably she'd got back to Venice later than she expected. Or hadn't been energetic enough. (But she

might have telephoned.) Or—*more* likely—Henry Evetts had persuaded her to stay out at La Foscara after all and lunch with them all there. That, of course, was the likely—in fact the certain—explanation. . . .

The fact being, of course, that in some ways she was—there was no getting away from the fact—oddly indifferent. She didn't mind, as he did, that they'd come here to be together—and that ever since, every single time they had been together there had been some kind of nonsensical or tiresome distraction. And her plea that he couldn't "expect her to behave badly to her friends" was only another part of the sort of "facility" of character she had, which made it easy for her (that was it!) to behave well in circumstances where another woman would lose her head, and make scenes.

At least Josephine, whatever all her obvious lacks were, had a capacity for straightforward emotion.

Just before three the *bagnino* brought him a telephone message scrawled on a scrap of paper in the current Italo-English of the beach servants. "Miss Li," he made out, and a scribble: "late.". . . "Late" looked clear enough, anyway.

And *was* clear enough—already.

She simply hadn't bothered to come. It was now past three o'clock.

He got up from the mattress and went along to the terrace of the Excelsior.

Josephine was still sitting there in her pink dress, her coffee in front of her. He went up to her.

"I'm going back to Venice now."

"Oh—*are* you? Well . . ." She slipped a glance round at two Germans at the next table. "I think I'm goin' to stop here!"

"All right."

He left her, and went through the open lounge of the hotel, and downstairs the other side to the landing stage.

While he was waiting for the launch, he saw her pink dress out of the corner of his eye.

She didn't sit near him or speak to him in the launch. And when they got out at the Danieli she walked in front of him, and started to hurry away along the Riva, but with something conscious about the set of her head and movement of her haunches.

He caught her up.

"Where are you going?"

"Back to my hotel."

"Where's that?"

She pointed along the Riva.

"That little hotel along there," she said, again with her simper and her oblique upward glance. "It isn' half bad really."

"Are you allowed to ask your friends there?"

"Y—yes."

His eye followed the line of her black chiffon scarf. He noticed how a group of soldiers near them were looking at her.

"Are you going in now?"

"Yes—*mon petit*—" And again that oblique glance, and the husky tone that she knew how to use to get him.

"I've got a smart new *peignoir* I will show you—" He took her arm. She added, "Much nicer than the old mauve. Do you remember it—eh?"

Emilia was crossing the hall when he got in. She said:—

"Oh, I was just taking a note from Miss Leigh to your room, Sir Francis."

He took it from her.

> I am all right again now. Do come and see me when you get in.
>
> ADRIA

He went straight to her room. She was lying on the sofa.

"What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

She put down her book.

"Didn't you get my telephone message? I told them to take it to the *capanna*."

"I got a message saying you would be late."

"*Late?*"

"Well—that's what it looked like. I may still have it." He felt in his pocket. The slip of paper was there, crumpled up. He handed it to her.

She held it near the lamp and then smiled.

"*Oh*—but it says 'Miss Li *è ammalata'—ammalata* means 'ill.' That's what I did say," she added, holding out her hand to him in a gesture of apology. "I had a headache and felt horrible when I got back to Venice. . . . I suppose such a gay night and no sleep. So I spent the afternoon asleep—" She added, surprised because he didn't take her hand: "I'm sorry, darling."

He was, except for the mere sounds of his voice in answering her, completely unresponsive.

"I'm glad you're all right again. . . . I expect you needed some sleep."

"Darling—?"

"I hope you enjoyed your breakfast party?"

"—We looked for you everywhere to come. I suppose you'd gone to bed."

"It doesn't really amuse me to stay up until all hours."

"*Francis!*" She stared at him. He had become merely his own appearance for her. She saw his face, his white suit, his brown scarf, his sandals. But essentially he wasn't there.

"What's the matter?"

"It's I who ought to ask that. You weren't upset because I went out with Henry and Ben to breakfast? I had to, because I'd suggested it, and then when I couldn't see you anywhere I couldn't just refuse to go."

He took up the word "upset."

"Really, darling—I don't get 'upset.' You talk as if I were a housemaid."

She sat straight up with a little cry of, "Darling, *what's* the *matter*?"

"Nothing at all." He wasn't even sulky. Simply impassive and obscurely hostile.

"I hoped you'd come back when you got my message and we could have spent the evening together."

In the moment before he answered her she could feel his hidden hostility so strongly that she lay back on the sofa, exhausted, and with a feeling of giving in to a force she didn't understand.

“Our evenings together seem rather—imaginary. Anyway, it’s late now and you must have a good night’s rest, and I must go to bed.”

He was at the door, behind her. She heard him open it. She said in a low voice, without looking round:—

“Aren’t you going to say good-night to me?”

She could feel him standing there, behind her—and she got, through his stillness and hers, a sense of a state in him that was both actual and indefinable, reflected in her like a darkened room in a mirror, a state that was obscure and imprisoned and filled with the tormenting shapes of his thoughts.

The handle of the door clicked, and he went out as if he hadn’t heard her last words.

Chapter IV

When Adria was dressed she went to his room.

He was still in bed, but lying awake.

She said, "Have you had your breakfast yet?"

He stared at her as if she had unnerved him by interrupting his thoughts.

"—Oh," he said, "I had it hours ago." She met his opaque polite look, and thought, in a panic, "If I don't *break* this 'not understanding' between us we shall soon stop being able to love each other."

She sat down on the edge of the bed.

He slightly moved away from her; and the movement was so clearly reflex, and so little deliberate, that she got up and, without knowing what words she was using, said:—

"What I really came to find out was if you wanted to come out to the Lido this morning."

He said, "No, thanks. I think I'll stay here."

"Very well, my dear." She managed, now quite naturally, with a smile, "Why don't you rouse yourself and come out and bathe?"

"No, thanks."

"Shall we meet at the Piazza then—about five?"

He said, "We might do that."

"At Florian's then, at five?"

"Very well."

Adria was standing in the Piazza pinning a bunch of wild cyclamen into the lapel of her white dress, while the woman she had bought them from waited beside her, in her black shawl, holding a second pin in readiness. . . . She was standing there, preoccupied in the adjustment and security of the flowers, much as if she were in one of those immense Venetian bedrooms, where the furniture is moved here and there to its habitants (a lady dressing, receiving her looking-glass instead of visiting it—and the maid waits, holding up a pin) . . .

When Francis spoke to her, and she looked up, he had a feeling of breaking into a small but complete situation in which he had no part.

But she was charming at once. And this immediate ease and lightness and friendliness disconcerted him.

He had come, after a long, solitary, self-accusing day spent in the house, expecting her to be distant and uncertain, or possibly nervous and discernibly unhappy. He had determined to face out the whole thing with her, and, when they'd got, more or less unbearably, through the business of "facing out," then to take whatever form of forgiveness she could bring herself to offer him.

But as they took their table at Florian's, and ordered *apéritifs*,—and, by her direction, took note of their neighbors,—she was simply, continuously, and without the least effort that he could discern, "charming."

He watched her face while she pointed out all the regnant or pretendant Queens of Venice, sitting at rival tables. She gave, perhaps a little overemphatically, her accounts of them: the Countess Rosamini, whose lighthouse beauty flared out whenever she turned, so that no one ever had time between the flashes to count her age; old Mrs. Redfern, dressed in this and that and some Cartier jewelry, who, with the air of a bishop in full Confirmation, imparted the scandals of what she termed the "Alcove" (Venetian alcoves) to favored friends, and sometimes to the unfavored (and there were many); Princesse d'Armagnac, looking like a Roman Emperor in mufti; poor Mrs. Drage—inconspicuously dressed by Lanvin, and accompanied by a Mr. Flaill, an elderly American dressed like an English caddy master.

They saw the Pleasure Seekers drifting across towards them. Tessa came up and said what a "lovely party" it had been. Beryl said that Linnet had got off with a maharajah and had deserted them all day. "Thank goodness, really," said George. "Perhaps he'll ask us all to dinner to-night," Michael said. "I only draw one line and it's a 'color' one."

"Listen to his Virginian blood boiling," said Beryl.

They drifted off.

Adria said she had to go to the chemist's to buy a toothbrush. As they were getting up to go they saw Gervase Lloyd, sitting two tables behind them with Madame de Briac and the Howards.

As soon as he saw them he got up and came hurrying up to them, saying, "I had no idea you were in Venice—*both* of you." He was wearing a

yachting cap and his beard was newly trimmed. He said, "I've just stepped on land—so to speak. I'm doing a little trip with your friends. I saw *Benedict* a few minutes ago. Who was the young man with him? Oh?—Really?—Then I knew his mother. I was rather—mashed on her myself at one time."

It was not the least pleasing of Gervase's affectations to believe himself—in the interest of his "cult"—a generation older than he actually was, so as to maintain (and believe) that he had been in love with Famous Edwardian Beauties.

As they went off Adria said:—

"You must come and dine to-morrow night. Rose Linley will be here."

"*Rose!*" he exclaimed. "Fancy dear Rose coming. When I think of the days when we waltzed together. Certainly—I shall be delighted. *Informal?*" he added. "Or a real 'dinpy'?"

"—Oh," Adria thought, "*quite* real."

"Now we'll have," she said to Francis, as they went off, "to have two *entrées*, and going-in-on-people's-arms."

As they came out of the chemist's in the Calle San Moisè she bent down and picked something up.

He said, "What are you doing? Cleaning up Venice like Mr. Flaill?"

"A pin," she said. "It's lucky." She stuck it in the lapel of her dress. "I always pick up pins—"

She stopped speaking.

For a hardly perceptible moment she stood still (a moment that for him tautened, cracked, and, with that falling shock caused by the miss of a heartbeat between sleep and waking, gave way under him).

Then he heard her say, with no more change in her manner than perhaps an added, slightly hurried vivacity:—

"Why—it's Josephine!"

And Josephine—he got her expression, of pert assurance undermined by an obscure resentful fear—was stopping, responding, uncertainly but with an overreadiness to smile, to Adria's hand held out to her.

"How nice to see you! How amusing coming across you."

"I am taking my holiday here, Miss Leigh. I have some relatives here."

"—Oh, how amusing. I always thought you looked rather Italian. Well, I must say it's very tantalizing to see you here on a holiday. You ought to get Pierre's to send you out here on business. There isn't a good manicurist in the whole town."

"If Miss Leigh would like I would be delighted to come, to please Miss Leigh, and do her nails any time."

They spoke to each other as if Francis hadn't been there.

"But how perfect! What extraordinary luck meeting you. When can you come? Can I telephone to you?"

"I can come any time Miss Leigh would like." Her pertness had gone; whatever was under the surface of her behavior, and Francis had his own wretched awareness of what she had a right to feel, the surface itself was subservience.

Adria didn't hesitate.

"Very well then. Can you come at ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, Miss Leigh."

He looked at Adria now. He discerned a sort of whiteness round her eyes. But she was smiling.

"That'll be perfect."

"I do not know the address of Miss Leigh."

"Oh—don't you?" (He tried to catch the implication of meaning in that "Don't you?" What did she guess? Know? Imagine?) "I'll write it down for you."

"Thank you, Miss Leigh." As Josephine spoke she glanced for a second at Francis, caught his expression, and added:—

"I will be here for a fortnight, so if Miss Leigh want me I can come whenever she likes."

"That'll be *lovely*. It'll be the first time I have had really grand nails in Venice. Here's the address." She turned to Francis, saying, "How useful of you to have known Josephine's aunt, my dear. Well, then, ten o'clock to-morrow."

But when they moved off Adria turned back, saying, "*Oh*, but to-morrow morning the darling Rose is arriving. Mademoiselle?" she called after her.

Josephine hurried back.

"Yes, Miss Leigh?"

"Listen. Would it be *possible* for you to come *to-night*, instead of to-morrow morning?"

"Certainly, Miss Leigh."

"—I shall be in after dinner. You might, if you *can*, come then."

"Certainly, Miss Leigh."

"You're *sure* 9.30 wouldn't be too late?"

"Not the least bit, Miss Leigh. I don' mind when I come."

"*Perfect*, then. Good-bye."

And as they crossed the bridge at San Moisè and were getting into the gondola she said:—

"How convenient finding one's manicurist on the same holiday."

He said as they slid off down the canal:—

"Adria. Is it *necessary* for you to have her?"

"Well, darling, of course no manicure is a necessity. But it is one of my simple luxuries."

"But why specially her?"

"Because I feel she's been specially sent by heaven. *Look* at my nails!"

"Listen, Adria!"

"And she is *so* good at her job."

"Darling—it does seem—I mean I'm the last person to talk about it, but that's all over now and—"

"Really, Francis, you are sometimes *mal élevé*! Poor little thing. After all, she may be very glad to earn a few more lire for her holiday."

(This was true. Among all the motives he'd discerned in Josephine's eagerness to come, there had been that too.)

"Of course. But—"

She slipped her arm through his, leaned back, and said, as the gondola turned into the Grand Canal:

"Darling, don't be a *bore*. I don't allow my young men to dictate who shall manicure me and who shan't." A moment later she added, "If only I'd known, of course, I could have had her yesterday evening, while you were out, and then I needn't have wasted this evening on 'the beauty of the hands.'"

He looked at her. She met his look, and smiled without meaning.

"What a pity!" she said.

A moment later she added, "I think I shall devote the whole of this evening to beauty and rejuvenation. I shall dine in bed, like an Aging Beauty between love nights, and sit and have my paws done afterwards. And then, of course, to-morrow, darling Miss Rose will say, '*Really, Adria, does it "add"—this appearance of having dipped in gore?*'"

As the gondola stopped at the steps below the house he said:—

"Adria—I must talk to you!"

As she got out, she said without turning round: "Haven't we been talking all the afternoon? I really *do* want to go and rest now. . . ."

Emilia showed her in. She had already put on her white overall.

"Good evening, Miss Leigh."

"Good evening, Josephine."

Emilia brought a low table and set it beside the bed. She moved the lamp on to it. "That is enough light?" she asked Josephine.

"Oh, yes, thank you very much."

Emilia went out.

Adria watched the girl as she unpacked her case; considered her customary trim neat gestures as she laid out the implements and little pots of grease; glanced at her face that, in the amber light thrown upward through the lamp shade, was like the mask of a Javanese dancing girl.

"Where shall I get hot water, please?"

"Over there, through this door, in the *cabinet de toilette*."

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

Adria watched her take up the bowl and go with her strong rapid walk through the door. She heard her running the tap.

She watched her come back, moving slowly, with the bowl full. Josephine came round the foot of the bed, and then set the bowl on the edge of the table by her hand. Adria asked her:—

"How do you—like Venice?"

"I think it is ever so pretty."

Adria watched her sit down and take the cushion on her knee, and put the towel over it, smoothing it with her ugly stumpy hands. (He had held her hands . . .)

She put out her own right hand for her to take.

"Do you want them shorter, mademoiselle?"

"A little."

"It is a long time since I did them."

"Yes. More than three weeks."

She watched her bend her head forward so that the light from under the shade lit her forehead and eyelids and cheekbones. (He had seen her eyelids as close as this. Closer.)

"You were pleased with the other girl you had from Pierre', mademoiselle?"

"Betty? No—she isn't as good as you."

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

The light made the double row of pearl beads gleam round her neck, and showed the fine brown grain of her skin. (He knew its brownness and smoothness, with his eyes, with the touch of his hands . . .)

"Will you please dip that one now, mademoiselle?"

Adria stopped looking at her. She looked at the carved end of the bed, at the shapes high on the dim ceiling—at the night sky outside the windows. She shut her eyes. She could feel her nerves beginning to get hold of her. She told herself, "If I can stand this I can stand anything." But the business of standing it (the girl's touch, the girl's nearness, her fusty scent, her cheap stupid voice) was becoming more and more difficult (like a physical pain which in its beginning is a challenge to sanity, to control, to courage—and then, with a sharp unreckoned force, breaks down the defenses it has already undermined).

She said suddenly:—

"Would you mind doing something for me?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle."

(A bromide might get her through this.)

"Go into the *cabinet de toilette*, and there's a bottle of sleeping stuff thing—labeled 'To be taken at bedtime, when necessary.'"

"Yes, mademoiselle?"

"Bring me some. It tells you the doses. Bring it in the little medicine glass next to it."

"Certainly, mademoiselle. Would you dip your left hand while I get it, please?"

She got up and went round the foot of the bed and into the *cabinet de toilette*.

"D'you see it?" Adria called out.

"Yes, mademoiselle. It is the bottle half empty."

"Yes."

She tried to lie still, and think her nerves into quiet. What had made her ask the girl to come? Bravado? An hysterical need to say or do something?

The girl came back, walking very slowly.

"Did you put water in?"

She came up to the bed.

"Did you put *water* in?" Adria repeated, for she didn't seem to have heard.

"—Oh—*yes*. *Yes, yes*, mademoiselle."

"Thank you."

Adria drank it and gave her back the glass.

She lay back and put her left hand in the bowl again. "Put the glass back in there."

When the girl came back and took her left hand and started putting the red vaseline on the nails, Adria said (and this stuff would calm her soon, at any rate), trying to get hold of herself by hearing her own voice:—

"A lighter polish to-day." She added, "How *cold* you are. It can't be cold in here."

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle?"

"I asked if you were cold."

"Cold. No, mademoiselle, no. *Au contraire*—excuse me." She got out her handkerchief and Adria noticed that her forehead was perspiring—and thought automatically how unpleasant it was that these girls sweated so easily.

At last, when the girl was going, she said to her, "Please go out that way—by the *salotto*, and tell Sir Francis, if you see him, that I don't want to be disturbed."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"And I'll let you know (turn the handle, don't rattle it—that's right . . .), I'll let you know when I want you again."

"Yes, mademoiselle. Certainly. Yes. Good-night, mademoiselle."

"Good-night."

She shut the door after her.

Francis heard the doors rattled from inside. Then opened. He could hear Adria's voice. Now Josephine's, from the doors, saying, "Yes, mademoiselle. Certainly. Yes. Good-night, mademoiselle."

He didn't look up.

The doors were shut.

"Miss Leigh wishes to sleep," Josephine said. "She does not wish to be disturbed."

He didn't answer her. He didn't look at her. He was simply conscious that she hurried across the room as if she were aware, and frightened, by the hatred he felt, even of her voice. Her high-heeled footsteps cloppeted across the floor to the next room and out and across the hall.

He heard the hall door bang.

Adria had sent him her message by Josephine, "that she wished to sleep."

That was her only "scene." The only scene, he knew, that she would ever make.

Her revenge, as unconscious as it was fine and torturing, was that she would tell him, in Josephine's voice, that she "didn't want to be disturbed.". . .

He got up out of his chair and began to pace up and down the room.

Was she asleep already? He wondered. He went to the doors of her room and listened. There was absolute silence. Then he heard footsteps go past in the *fondamenta* outside. Then a voice talking in the square opposite. Then silence again.

He moved away from the doors, lit a cigarette, and began pacing the room again, until he began to hear the sound of his own steps, and threw himself on the sofa and took up a book off the table and threw it down again. He noticed that it was a white-bound edition of Racine.

He got up and went to the doors again, and listened. A draught must have drawn the scent of the tuberoses towards the doors, for as he leaned his forehead against them he got the scent thick in his nostrils and felt sickened by it, and turned to stare at them. But he kept his hand on the door.

He wondered how late it was. There was no clock in the room and his watch had stopped. It seemed hours since Josephine had arrived. And hours now, though it couldn't be more than twenty minutes, since she had gone.

He knew that he must do reasonable things like finding a book, and putting out the lights, and going down to his room, to bed. He didn't try to think about to-morrow. (It was one of so many to-morrows; and they were all waiting for him.)

Now he heard the barges down in the canal knocking each other and subsiding again.

He touched the handle of the doors. There was only one thing now that he wanted. He wanted, for one moment (and the realization came to him with a dreadful, unanswerable clarity, that, since he must go, it would be for the last time), to see her asleep.

He wanted to see her with her eyes shut; lying still.

For then at least (his fingers closed on the handle) he would have this one moment that, taken out of time, and out of the common context of existence, might be his life with her. In this sweet and last intimacy her eyes

would be closed; and her stillness, in the pale bed under the high canopy, would belong to him.

He pushed the door.

As he did so he heard a sound behind him and stepped back as the doors on the opposite side of the room were opened.

"The *signor* wishes the gondola?"

It was Romeo.

He heard himself answer, "No, thank you."

The man stepped forward and took the tray with the coffeepot and empty cup.

"Signor Leigh has just come in downstairs," he said. "He asked if you were in. I told him you were up here."

"Thank you, Romeo."

But when the man was halfway across the next room he went after him, saying:—

"Tell the *signore* I've gone to bed early," and, passing the man so that he jarred the tray and heard it rattle, he went across the dining room, the hall, to his own room.

As he shut the door he heard Benedict and Henry Evetts coming upstairs from the mezzanine.

As Adria began to see it all clearly, the sick jealousy (that had caught her when they met Josephine in the Calle San Moisè, and she'd understood, suddenly, his hostility of the evening before) changed to anger against the merely stupid "situation," which could so beset and torment him. A situation in which this girl was no more than one of the unendurable stupidities. . . .

She'd decided, as they came down the Grand Canal, to leave him. To go off early to-morrow morning without seeing him. Since being here without him would be unbearable.

But if she left him,—not "with Josephine" in the sense of leaving a man with another "woman whom he loved," but simply alone with what he most hated in himself,—then wasn't she, out of pride and cowardice and a sort of female vanity, leaving him when he most needed her? Making him feel, too, that her going was because she expected from him more than he could give

her; and so making romantic demands for loyalty, at the moment when he needed her unromantic and unstated friendship.

For if there was any naturalness and rightness, she thought, in their relationship, it couldn't be kept there by romantic attitudes; any more than it could be got back (if it had gone, as the result of these last days' misunderstandings) by tricks.

Obviously there was the whole "technique" of "getting" people, and keeping people—all the facile conjuring with emotions and situations. She knew them, and had used them with other men. (All the provocations, elusions—pretenses.)

But with him,—and she'd felt this from the beginning,—it wasn't a question of "behaving," of getting or keeping, or giving or taking; but simply—she set this vividly now in her mind—a question, for her, of being. Of "being there"—when he wanted her, and as he wanted her.

This was her answer, the only one she could make, to the questions that pressed about her imagination: the questions of whether, indeed, he loved her? or loved her enough? or in the right way? This was her refutation of the stale problems of emotional sufficiency; and her refusal of all the mean measuring of "returns."

To-morrow— Or, should she ask him to come and see her now?

But she was too tired.

Too dulled by the long stupid misery of the day.

And if she slept now—instead of crying like this—she might be sane in the morning.

Francis was still awake when the clocks outside chimed four.

And even then, as sheer exhaustion began to gain on him, his darkening sense was possessed by a belief, which worked in his blood and nerves and exasperated spirit, that if she were only with him now, this minute, in this absolute quiet,—before anything else went wrong between them,—if she were here now (he saw her lying beside him in this filtered moonlight under the white curtains) and, without speaking and hardly wakening, were to take him in her arms—he would be safe.

Chapter V

Emilia woke him.

There was glaring sunshine in the room, and Emilia was standing over him and saying something. . . . What? It must be late morning. But no one had closed the shutters—idiotic!—("La Signorina," Emilia was saying)—to keep the room cool. . . .

"The Signorina is dead—*é morta*. . . ."

He got hold of her arm. "What d'you mean—what d'you mean, Emilia? . . . What on earth are you talking about?"

She leaned right over him, and it was as if she were in a mad rage, trying to attack him, and crying out, "The doctor is here—there is nothing to do . . . it was that sleeping medicine." Her crying had changed suddenly to whimpering, like an animal in pain.

He was out of bed. He was in his dressing gown. He was brushing his hair carefully, in front of the glass in the bathroom— Emilia sank down on the platform at the end of the bed and through her little gasps of pain he heard her saying, "The medicine—she should never have had such a medicine. . . ."

He left her crouched there at the foot of his bed.

He went through the hall, and through the empty dining room, and in the green *sala* there was a girl huddled on one of the sofas. He saw that it was Minx.

He went into the next room, and there were Henry Evetts and Miss Rose Linley with white faces in the bright light, for no one had closed the shutters here, either. And he noticed the shimmer of light reflected up and in from the canal on to the big lapis blue vase by the writing table, as Henry Evetts spoke. He said:—

"Benedict's in there with the doctor still."

Rose Linley was sitting in the high-backed yellow armchair. He went to her automatically (hadn't Adria said she would arrive?) and took her hand. Henry Evetts said:—

"The doctor's already telephoned to the Department of the Pubblica Sicurezza." He spoke in dry even words, as if he were addressing a small group of invisible people, and not either Francis or Miss Linley. "The doctor

says the death is not a natural one. She had had an overdose of a sleeping draught. It was apparently one of the barbituric group of medicines. These can be dangerous, anyway. But she has definitely had an overdose. This means a report has had to be made immediately. The Department of Public Security is sending two officials along at once—"

Francis listened to the steady clicking of the words. Everything in the room was lucid and very bright, as if he were seeing it under water. He heard Henry's voice going on. ". . . They are bringing an interpreter. . . . Everyone in the house will be questioned. . . . They should be here at any moment. . . ."

The door of Adria's room opened.

Benedict came out with the doctor, a little man in a dark blue suit and black eyes that moved quickly in his impassive hawk-featured face. They went straight through the room into the green *sala* next door. Francis saw Benedict's look of terror half-hidden by his habitual deference of manner. He kept on saying, "Yes, yes, of course— *Si, si, capito*," while the doctor went on talking to him. Francis couldn't understand everything the doctor was saying, but he understood the word "hospital." Rose Linley was saying something to him. He listened now. She was saying:—

"Let me advise you to go and dress, Francis. I fear these formalities will be tedious and take some time." He stared down at his dressing gown. (It seemed hours already since Emilia had woken him.) He went back to his room, passing Benedict and the doctor. Benedict turned round and stopped him and said, "Y—you've heard, h—haven't you?" He asked this intensely, and then suddenly didn't seem to want an answer and turned back to listen to the doctor again; neither of them taking any notice of Minx crumpled up sobbing on the sofa.

When Francis came back dressed, everyone was in the shadowy green room, and the two officials and the doctor and the interpreter were in the next room with the doors shut. Each of them was summoned in turn. Then all the servants.

When Francis went in, there was a young man with a dark moustache sitting at the writing table, and an older man standing beside him. The interpreter, a fair dapper man, was seated beside the desk. They asked Francis for his passport, which he sent for. Then how long he had been in Venice?

"Five days." (The unrealness had become so intense that it affected him like a headache, shutting down all other sensations.)

"You are a guest in this house?"

"Yes."

"Miss Leigh was a great friend of yours?"

"A great friend."

"You had known her long?"

"Four months."

"When did you last see her?"

"Yesterday evening—before dinner."

"She did not seem—depressed?"

"Not—at all."

"She did not give you the impression of being nervous?"

"No."

"She did not say to you any time that she was taking this medicine?"

"I don't remember it. . . . But I knew she didn't always sleep well."

"Was it for any reason, you think, that she didn't sleep well?"

"No."

"She had no—troubles that you know about?"

"No—"

"No—love troubles that you know about?" The young man and the older one glanced at each other. Francis saw the younger half smile, and then become grave again.

"And this—manicurist that she had. . . . Do you know anything about her?"

"Only that Miss Leigh always had her."

"But she was *English*?"

"No, French, I believe. But she had her always in London. And I believe she happened to be having a holiday here."

"You know she often came then?"

"In London—yes." The futility of all this was beginning to make him feel sick.

"And the maid?"

"Which maid?"

The older man glanced down at some papers. "Emilia Giacometti. . . . We haven't seen her yet."

"She has been with Miss Leigh for years. She is devoted to her."

"—She is always with her?"

"Yes."

"Do you happen to know if she went in after the manicurist had left?"

"No. I don't know." Francis sat down on the sofa. The young man said quickly, "You would like something to drink?"

"No, thanks. Let's get this done."

"Very well, then. You cannot tell us any more about the maid?"

"No."

Both the men looked at some papers, then at his passport, and then again at the papers. Then the younger one said:—

"Thank you. That will be all right. Will you please ask the maid Emilia Giacometti to come in?"

Emilia was waiting in the next room. Her eyes were swollen. But she had stopped crying. She went in without hesitation.

Henry Evetts came up to Francis, and said:—

"I suppose they asked you a lot of regulation questions. As they did me?"

"Yes." Francis had a dim indifferent impression that Henry's grief (real enough and to be seen in his eyes and pallor) was tempered by a sense of his own behavior in some way "sustaining" the occasion. "Of course it's quite obvious that this is all formality. These drugs can be dangerous. I've had to deal with them in my law practice. They play tricks on people. She must have done what dozens of people have done, either misjudged her dose, or have been taking it a lot lately and so have been more susceptible. . . . I had a talk with the doctor myself, just before the officials came. . . ." He added, "By the way, Miss Linley's gone downstairs to write to Mr. and Mrs. Leigh. She thought it would be better than telegraphing. Apparently they're in Scotland."

As he spoke Emilia came out of the room. Francis stopped her. She was crying again. She said:—

"They asked me a lot of stupid questions; if I was fond of the *signorina*, and if I notice if she was sad lately, or if I knew anything of her. I said I didn't know anything, but she was quite all right and only take the medicine the English doctor give her once because she often slept badly lately. I told them I seen her last night after the manicurist went away, and then she told me she wanted to sleep and not to be waked in the morning."

Benedict's voice, slow and chill, behind Francis, said:—

"If anyone had tried to waken her in time she could have been saved, the doctor says. But Emilia didn't go in until after half past ten this morning. And when the doctor saw her her heart had stopped three hours before."

Emilia said: "They asked the address of the manicurist. I had asked her last night when she was putting on her overall—it is the Riva Hotel. So I told them. But it is stupid to go and ask her. It is nothing to do with her."

"They are obliged to interrogate everyone," said Henry. "But if they find no evidence of any sort against anyone, they'll simply go through the—hospital business—and then let it all finish." He added in his dry, clipped speech, "They won't have an inquest unless they have to. And they won't have to, as it must be obvious to them already that the whole thing's just a fearful mistake— Here they come. I suppose they've done with Romeo. And now they'll go straight to see this wretched girl."

Francis saw them across the room, talking to each other. Even his exasperation that they should go and involve Josephine—who would be terrified, simply by character, at any sort of official investigation—was too vague for him to act on it. He had a notion of going, and warning her that they were coming. But after all, if she hadn't come here she wouldn't have been let in for all this.

The older official came up to Henry Evetts and thanked him for his help. (What "help," Francis wondered.) Henry shook hands with him. When the man had gone out he said to Francis, "I can usually get on with all sorts of men like this. It's all a question of authority. . . ." He looked at his watch and said to Benedict, who was pouring himself out a whiskey and soda: "Well now, if there is nothing more I can do I think I shall be off. I've had my things packed and shall still catch the two o'clock train all right. . . ." He added in a confidential tone to Francis, "I want to get straight back to my constituency . . . so that they know I'm there, you know. . . . If there *were* an inquest by any chance I don't much want to figure in it. . . . Gives a bad

impression. They always only half understand things; and any sort of 'affair' like this, abroad. . . ."

Francis said, "Oh yes, I understand!" without irony.

"Whiskey, Francis?" said Benedict.

"Thanks."

"Whiskey, Henry?"

"No, thanks. I think I'll just go and make sure my packing is done. . . ."

Francis and Benedict were left alone with Minx, who kept on crying like a child.

Benedict took her a glass of water.

"*For God's sake, stop that noise, Minx*."

But she couldn't, and got up and ran out of the room, gasping and rubbing her eyes with her handkerchief.

Benedict poured himself out another whiskey. He said:—

"I feel as if I'd gone mad and were imagining all this." He didn't look at Francis. He went, holding his glass, and stood by the chimney piece. He said, "I was just going out; I was down in the gondola already when Emilia came down. . . . I can't believe it. . . ."

He stood with his back to Francis; and his pose, the right hip dropped, the left hand on the chimney piece, was exactly like Adria's.

Francis said, "What happens next?" He heard his own voice rise and curl and vanish like smoke far up under the ceiling.

"If they think there's any suspicion at all they take her to the hospital this evening."

"If not?"

"If not, the doctor gives a . . . verdict that she . . . that it was 'misadventure.' . . ."

Francis repeated, "Misadventure? And then—"

"Then there's simply the funeral."

"I see."

Francis put down his glass. The whiskey had no effect on him of any kind.

". . . She . . . looks too lovely," said Benedict suddenly. He moved a glass candlestick to and fro on the marble of the chimney piece so that it made a sharp whispering noise. "I can't bear the idea of their taking her away. . . ." He brought the candlestick carefully back to its exact place. "I think I'll go and lie down," he said.

As he was going out of the room Francis said, "Can I go in?"

Benedict veered round abruptly.

"Go in?"

"To see her."

He nodded nervously. "Oh . . . oh yes. . . . Well, no—the doctor doesn't want anyone to go until he's come back."

"Very well."

Romeo came in after Benedict had gone. Did the *signore* wish to eat anything? Francis nodded. "Oh yes. Anything."

He felt so empty that he could hardly stand up.

But when Romeo brought him in some luncheon on a tray, he couldn't eat.

He went and lay down on the sofa in the room next to Adria's.

When he had lain there for a long time Miss Linley came in. She said, "I have asked the good Romeo to take me in the gondola to the post office. I wonder if you would kindly escort me there?"

He got up.

"Of course."

"We can then make our way back on foot. Unless the heat proves too great."

She had two letters in one hand and carried her grey parasol in the other.

He said, "I'll just get my hat." As he was going through the dining room, he met Benedict. He said, "They've just telephoned from the Pubblica Sicurezza to say that they questioned the girl—the manicurist—and that, of course, there's no question of suspicion—of her or anyone else. . . . The doctor's coming back in about an hour."

Sometime in the late afternoon Benedict came to him and told him that the doctor had gone. And that he could go in to Adria's room.

She lay in the middle of the bed under the high canopy.

He came and stood at the end of the bed.

At first he was conscious of nothing but her absolute stillness.

Compared to her stillness the stretched sheets seemed to move, and the high shadows in the room to stir like a storm. Her eyelids were so carved into repose that he couldn't believe that her eyes had ever opened; and her lips chiseled to a strange and sweet and immutable gravity, so that he couldn't remember that he had ever heard her laugh.

For a long time he saw; without feeling or thinking.

Then his thoughts began going round and round in silly stumbling circles.

He remembered that he'd meant to leave her. He'd meant to go this morning, without seeing her. But now he was here with her. But she wasn't here, to go away from. . . .

(But if he'd gone to the other side of the world, away from her, he would have known that she was alive, and in some strange, tortuous way her aliveness would have been there for him.)

He realized now that he would have come back. And that she would have been there for him, when he came.

The silence in the room was broken by footsteps going past outside, on the *fondamenta*. He remembered how last night he'd stood with his hand on the doors. And suddenly he began thinking that if he'd come in and found her asleep, and bent over her and taken her in his arms, he would have saved her. For surely as he held her and she didn't wake, he would have felt a strangeness in the weight of her body, and in her way of breathing . . . and then . . . he could have saved her. . . . ("If they had only called me at seven, or even eight o'clock," the doctor had said.)

Now the silence round them became darker, and her face paler.

He bent down so that her white face was the reflection of his own, below him in dark water.

But as he looked she grew strange.

He stood back suddenly from the bed.

She wasn't there. . . .

Josephine saw him at last towards nine o'clock, in the dusk, coming out of the house and crossing the Bridge and hurrying towards the Zattere. She started running down the opposite side of the canal to keep parallel with him, and then got ahead of him at its corner.

"*Francis!*"

He looked at her, above her eyes, as if he were blind.

She said, "Where are you going?"

He shook his head and stared at her and walked on, but she kept beside him, running and stumbling to keep up, and at last when they got out into the Zattere, along by the water, he answered her repeated questions as to "what was going to happen now."

He said, "Oh, nothing. Nothing at all."

She stared at his face, which looked like a statue of him in this dusk. "*What* do you say?"

"Nothing will happen . . . I tell you. They questioned everyone, that was all . . . You just happened to be there . . . Your own fault anyway . . ."

He started walking again, and she stumbled beside him on her high heels, and at last they got to the *dogana* and took the *traghetto* (all this as if he meant to go somewhere definite, but she couldn't make out where or why). But then, when they got over, and were on the edge of the Riva, he stood still and seemed to go quite blank.

She took his hand and he didn't notice, but she said:—

"Come into my hotel, it's near," and he seemed quite glad to come. (But she'd been half mad afraid already when the men came; and now *he* made her afraid, in a different way, because he looked like a ghost; always looking above her eyes when she spoke to him and not really hearing her.)

When they got to her room he lay down on the bed, his head in his arms, and lay so quiet that he frightened her still more because she began to imagine that he was dead too, and that "they" would come and find him dead, and they would find out everything. So she went to him and gripped his arm and shook him, saying, "*Qu'est-ce que tu as?* Whatever's the matter?"

He turned on his side and stared at her, but as if he didn't really see her.

"What's the *matter*?" she whispered.

He buried his head in his arms and lay still again. She thought, hating him, that he had loved "her"—Miss Leigh. She had always been right; he *had* loved her! She had always known it; always suspected. . . .

She remembered how he had looked at her, Josephine, on the bridge yesterday. As if he detested her! She went to the untidy table and, trembling with pain and her horrible fear, began combing up her curls and putting rouge on. . . . Then she went back to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder. He was quite stiff and she didn't know whether he felt she was there at all. But she said "What's the matter?" again, trying to put tenderness into her voice, but hating him because he couldn't move out of his misery to look at her. "Tell me what is the matter, *mon petit*."

"Leave me alone. *Please leave me alone*."

"You are cold."

"Oh, *God*!" he said like a sob. And then he was stiff and quiet again.

"Poor boy," she said. And as she put her arm across his shoulders her real tenderness for him came back, and she bent, laid her cheek against his, and he didn't resist or speak; and she got on to the bed and lay down beside him.

At first he didn't move; and then he seemed to feel her as if she were a warmth that he needed near him because he was so cold; and he let her take his arm and pull it round her body.

And she herself didn't feel so sick afraid, now that he was with her (and to-morrow she would go back to London, and he was close to her, and then he would come back to her there).

Now he held her closer, but when his face was turned towards her he was looking over her head, and in the light of the unshaded electric bulb his eyes looked empty; and she was glad when he shut them.

When he was going, late, she said to him:—

"It's all over, isn't it?"

"—What?" He was like someone sleepwalking, she thought.

"The men? They won't come again?"

". . . I . . . don't suppose so . . ."

"But it *is all over*. They won't *come*?" She got his arm clenched.

He stared. "I—don't suppose so!"

He went without speaking to her or looking at her again.

Chapter VI

As he woke up he remembered Josephine's expression, and the way she had behaved when she asked him if it was "all over," and if "the men" would come again.

It was half past seven. He had fallen asleep when he came in, without undressing. He undressed and had a bath, and shaved and changed his clothes.

He did all this rapidly and automatically. When he was ready he went out. Romeo was cleaning the gondola. He didn't see Francis passing him. The morning was hot but thundery. The water of the canal looked dull and the bridges and houses lighter than the sky.

He went by the Bridge of the Accademia, walking very fast. When he got there to her hotel, he would go into her room and lock the door and question her so that she shouldn't escape. (Her manner and looks and words of last evening became slowly clearer and more explicit, like a photograph developing in acid. . . . And she had come out of Adria's room with that message—"that Mademoiselle wished to sleep—")

In his speed he knocked into a woman at a narrow corner. She exclaimed something. But he threw off an apology and went on.

(Wasn't she perfectly capable of it . . . even of working up, somehow, to the opportunity of giving the medicine. . . . *Mightn't she even have come to Venice for that—?*)

Already tourists were out feeding the pigeons in the Piazzetta. The lagoons looked dull, as if their surface had been foully breathed on.

He hurried over the Ponte della Paglia and along the Riva. . . .

The *concierge* at her hotel said before he had spoken:—

"The French lady 'as left, sir, I am afraid."

Francis saw his impudence without feeling it.

"When?"

"By a early train this morning, *signor*. She left 'ere at a quarter to seven."

"Where to?"

"I do not know, *signor*. She did not say."

"She left *no* address?"

"No, *signor*."

"She . . . You don't know where she took her ticket to?"

"No . . . I am *very* sorry, *signor*."

"Thank you."

The autobus drew up in front of the pink and cream houses of the *port* of Saint-Tropez.

A few of the people stood back on the cobblestones to make way for it, and then, with the ordinary curiosity of simple people, still unsophisticated in spite of the yearly tourist season, stood round the autobus while its passengers descended, some of them inhabitants of Saint-Tropez, who had been to Sainte-Maxime, Saint-Raphael, or somewhere further; others, *étrangers*, whose several appearances were used as a basis of conjecture.

As the last passengers got out a girl in the crowd said to her companion, "That is chic—that white hat and scarf with the black dress."

As the girl they were watching got out, the wind caught her hat so that she clutched at it, and as she did so she turned her face towards them, and the other one said, "How odd. She reminds me very much of the little thing —Josephine—that used to work with us for Monsieur Michel. . . ."

"Ah no, my dear. . . . Look at her face! That's not a girl, it's a woman of more than thirty. . . . Besides, she's got quite a different look."

They strolled on, arm in arm, past a group of sailors, towards the jetty.

The conductor said to Josephine, standing beside her valise, "Can I direct you, mademoiselle?"

When she took in what he was saying, lifting her bleared little face up to him and blinking in the sharp sunlight, she said, "I want to telephone," and taking up her valise hurried across the cobbles into the hotel.

When she came out again she called one of the taxis off the stand. As she was getting in, the driver, who had been staring at her, said suddenly, looking puzzled:—

"It isn't the first time that you've come here, is it?"

"Certainly it is." She slammed the door and gave him the address.

As she drove along towards Beauvallon, she sat with her hands pressed on her knees, shivering. She had been shivering all night in the train. The shivering had begun, waiting and waiting in Milan, in that hot waiting room, and thinking it would never be time for the train to go. Lucky that Aunt Léonie was here. She could stay here. She need never go out. She could say to Aunt Léonie only that she had quarreled with Francis. Now she remembered again what he said last night as he was going, speaking as if perhaps those men might come again—when she had believed (—God!—Those two men asking and asking her questions yesterday) that it was all over.

The taxi drew up outside the gates.

"Shall I drive in?"

"*No*, NO!" She paid him—she gave him two francs for himself. She wouldn't let him take her valise in. She didn't want him to see Aunt Léonie (and then be sure, of course, who she, Josephine, was).

She dragged her valise over the hot pebbles of the drive, up the high avenue of palm trees. The fountain looked cool against the white glare of the house and the scarlet geraniums, and she realized she was thirsty; and only her obsession to get inside the house and have the familiar ironwork door shut behind her prevented her from putting down the heavy case and going to the basin, to kneel down and drink out of her hand.

When the butler opened the door he didn't recognize her; and when she said, "Don' you know, you fool, it's Miss Gérard?" he looked queerly at her, as if he *knew something*. But he went to tell Tante Léonie, and then in a minute she came through the shadowy drawing-room from the verandah beyond it, saying:—

"But—my child, Josephine—but what a strange idea to come like this"—but holding out her arms and coming to embrace her. And then seeing her face, and her own expression changing as she said, "But what's the *matter*? What *is it*?"

And there was Harrison coming in too, from the verandah, saying, "Gosh! Here's our Jo!"

She said, "*Nothing has happened—nothing at all*."

But Tante Léonie got her arm and took her upstairs to her bedroom, which was still the same, white fur rugs and everything. But she slammed the door and asked, a little angry already, for Josephine could see that she smelt out some misfortune:—

"What is it now? What's happened with him?"

Josephine sat down because she couldn't stand. She said:—

"I'm thirsty."

"What has *happened*?"

Tante Léonie poured her out a glass of water and gave it to her, saying: "*He has left thee?*" staring at her with the outer corners of her eyes slanting up more, as they did when she was angry.

Josephine tried to stop the glass from shaking in her hand and spilling the water.

"Where dost thou come from?"

"Venise."

"Ven*ise*? Why?"

Her slanting red-brown eyes were fixed on her niece's face.

"He went there."

"Not *alone*?"

"No."

"With—Miss Leigh then?"

"Yes."

"And thou, little fool, followed them?"

"Yes." (Her aunt's stare had got hers locked in it, so that she couldn't even move her body.)

"And then—?"

"Nothing, *ma tante*. Nothing happened . . . only I was . . . miserable."

"That I don't believe. Put that glass down. Thou art spilling the water all over my rugs. I don't buy such rugs to have them drenched in water.—Why follow him?"

"—I— He went without telling me. I had to find out. He might never have come back."

"Thou art an idiot— What an idea! That's the way to make him hate thee. But what *then*? What happened—Did she—this Miss Leigh know thou wast there?"

"—Yes—"

"Well! Then what happened? Thou didst not speak with her?"

"Yes."

"*What's the matter now?* Art thou ill?"

"No . . . No, Tante Léonie."

"Well then, you saw her. How?"

"I did—her manicure."

"*What!* I don't understand! He let you?"

"Yes. Yes, yes, *yes*, he let me!"

Aunt Léonie caught her as she jumped up, screaming, trying to get away from those pointed eyes that asked and asked (like the men had asked—and perhaps they had been here?—and Tante Léonie *knew* already?). Tante Léonie held her wrists in her fat strong hands so that she could feel the rings pressing into them.

"What happened, Josephine?"

She screamed into her aunt's face:—

"I saw it there. I didn't go to do it. But I saw it. She asked for the medicine. I didn't know even if it would hurt her. But then I saw—I thought—how easy—she that I *hated*—yes, I hate her—she that takes him from me— She didn't even notice—there wasn't a way that anyone could know. I think that God perhaps has meant it—because she is wrong and wicked and proud—and I, that love him, should revenge myself—"

Her aunt's grip let her go, so that she stumbled back against the dressing table.

Her eyes, blazing at her now, were pointed like a tiger's. "Thou hast *killed* her?"

"*Yes!* And—"

"Do not scream. Thou hast done this. And now—to come *here*, to me, into my house, to think that thou wilt find shelter here, in the house of an honest woman—to have the police come *here, in my house*, to look for thee. . . ."

"But—they will not—they will not ask—"

"Thou dost *dare* to come here. To me that have done everything for thee —to such a house—when thou art no better than a common criminal, so that the police shall come *here—here*, to find thee—" Then, as Josephine bolted for the door, she shouted, "No. Not now, little fool— I am not going to have thee march out of my house in broad daylight. Now— *Wait here!* Until evening. *Understand?*"

And as she went out, locking the door after her, Josephine heard her exclaiming, "To come *here*—to my house—to bring the police *here*!"

She stayed there, huddled on the chaise longue in the bedroom, until it was so dark that the white rugs marked out where the floor was.

Then someone came to the door, fidgeted with the lock, and came in.

It was Harrison.

"Come on now."

When she heard his voice she was glad she couldn't see his face. She cowered, waiting while he went on. "Your bag's bin sent to the cloakroom at Saint-Raphael station. The ticket's here for it. And there's twenty-five pounds in the envelope, too. For you to clear out with. You'd better clear right out! *See?*"

He switched on the light. She saw his face. His eyes were black, and the neck of his shirt open. She knew him when he'd been drinking. "*Come* on, whaddyer doing sticking over there? Can't you understand English? Don't you know what *clearing out* means?"

She thought he was going to hit her, but he was only holding out the envelope.

She drew a breath, gave a spring forward, then tore past him, seizing the envelope from his hand as she went. She heard him snarl something after her; but she ran downstairs and across the parquet in the hall, and out of the front door on to the drive in the hot darkness, past the splash and thrown-up gleam of the fountain, down the drive in the canyon of shadow between the palm trees, the gravel crunching and cracking under her steps however lightly, tearing and panting along, she tried to go—out through the gates on to the road, where she checked suddenly in the flash of headlights. . . .

She threw herself backwards; a car, and then another, flashed past.

She stood with her back to the wall, clutching the envelope, her fingers, working to and fro, clutching and crumpling it.

Another dim, brightening flashing train of headlights; another zoom-and-gone of a fast car.

Now the curve of road was empty again.

Now she could see, between the silhouettes of the pine trees on the other side of the road, the phosphorescent darkness of the water. And far beyond, far across the water, the twinkling unresting lights of Sainte-Maxime.

She stared right and left.

Then, still clutching the crumpling envelope, she began to go to the right back towards Saint-Tropez, keeping against the wall, and every now and then looking back over her shoulder, whimpering under her breath, and stumbling in the dark.

Francis realized after the English nurse brought Rose Linley into the room that they must have come back.

Then he realized that she was speaking to him, and that he must have said something to her, or asked her about the funeral. (Could he have asked her?)

But now he found himself listening to her, just as this morning, early, he had listened to some of the things Colin Verney had said when he arrived.

But afterwards he couldn't remember any of them. (Except the part about Mrs. Leigh not being well enough to come.)

But now he heard Rose, and she was talking about Adria. (But that was what was so queer—that they all talked to him about Adria without even seeing, through his thin crackling silence, that he had murdered her.) He heard himself answer something Rose had said by the words:—

"I don't see any compensation anywhere."

"But isn't it at least something," she said, sitting so very upright and slender in her black clothes in the tall chair, "to have avoided so much, and, at the same time, to have lived so well?". . . She pursued, in her fine faint distinct tones, her black-gloved hands still on her lap—"To have been so very fair. And to have seen, here and there, so much beauty. And known such gay company.—How seldom she must have been dull!—And never to have felt the really great displeasure of seeing her friends, and even her lovers, grow old—" She hesitated. She lifted a gloved hand. "After all—to make one's farewells, my dear Francis, while the candles are still burning,

and there is still music—" The hand, the handkerchief, were dropped lightly to her lap. She drew a breath, carefully. "The inelegance of old age!" she said.

Her blue bright gaze was fixed on the tuberoses, seeing the dark glass beyond them, and beyond that. She said: "It would have been better if you had seen the end—if that is, indeed, the end. . . ."

He lay staring at her through the blur of his grief.

Her very precision, her conventional yet rich and fastidious acceptance of death (that was like the carved memorial tablets of the eighteenth century), gave, for the moment at any rate, a sort of form, and therefore relief, to the dreadfulness in his mind.

". . . The progress through the canals," she said. "So quiet, and none to stare at us. Before us the silver angel on the black barge. . . . Then the lagoons; and a sky of very great loveliness. . . . And the Island, planted with cypresses. . . ."

"Too awful," said Linnet at Florian's. "Really *too* awful."

"I can't understand a young woman of that age needing sleeping draughts at all," said Mrs. Redfern.

"Doubtless she had insomnia occasionally," said Mr. Redfern. "What about another *consommation*, Miss—er—Linnet?"

"That *would* be lovely," said Linnet.

"I hear," said the Countess Frascati, making sure that her daughter was out of earshot, "that she is supposed to have taken it on purpose on account of an Unhappy Love or something."

"Oh, I *know* she was *madly* in love with Henry Evetts, who doesn't care *twopence* for her," said Linnet.

Beryl said curtly, "I thought she was in love with Francis Radnor. She looked it."

"Yes," said George, "and he looked as if he—what's the word? —'reciprocated' it all right."

"You know," said Linnet to Mrs. Redfern, "that he's had a complete nervous breakdown, after the funeral, and is there, in the house, with two nurses."

The Princess d'Armagnac interrupted:—

"He's got one nurse, whom I got for them, and he broke down before the funeral. Not after."

"Well, well, it's a very dreadful business," said Mr. Redfern, dipping his sandwich in his coffee.

"Well then," said George, "it looks as if it were Radnor. And he did care."

"Men," said Mrs. Redfern, "break down just as often from drink as from love. More often."

"But he *didn't* drink, and he *was* in love," said Michael.

"Dreadfully," said Tessa quickly. She was sitting by Michael, holding his hand, and not drinking anything.

Mrs. Drage, all in white, bore down on the group.

"*Well*. What's the latest about that dreadful business at the Leighs'? I've just been talking to Countess Rosamini about it. I told her that *I* was convinced, whatever the police did or didn't believe, that there was foul play. One's heard of those kind of cases before, hasn't one? Of course, I've always had the impression—I didn't know her well, mind you—that she *was* a very hysterical sort of girl! And then"—she sat down, becoming more barrel-shaped as she did so—"she wasn't *so* young, was she? Didn't you say she was thirty, Lady Theresa?"

"She never seemed any age at all," said Tessa. She got up suddenly. "Come on, Michael. Let's walk about or something."

"—And there's no doubt about it," went on Mrs. Drage, "that often those girls who *don't* get settled young *do* get morbid."

Beryl got up. "Adria was the most unmorbid person in the world."

"Oh *well*, darling," provoked Linnet, "you can't really *pretend* on the other hand that she wasn't *rather* unbalanced—I must say *I* thought that Francis was *much* too attractive for her."

Beryl said abruptly, "Come on, George."

They walked off.

Suddenly George turned round and went back to the table again. He said, "I should like to pay for our drinks, please."

(The English nurse came in again and went through into the bathroom.)

It was so clear that he had murdered Adria that he couldn't make out why they hadn't mentioned this at the inquest.

For of course they had known. Their indifference was only part of their really minding so little altogether. Certainly, as they went out, they had said to each other that "of course the Englishman had murdered her; that he had given the French girl instructions to give her that overdose—and sat in the next room to make sure that she did it. For the French girl was his mistress, and between them, the Englishman and the little *manicura* wanted to destroy the English *signorina*. They had meant to, of course; they had come to Venice for that. . . ."

(The nurse came in and gave him a *piqure* in his arm. "That'll make you sleep," she said. He turned away from her.)

Sleep! "*'Macbeth does murder sleep,'—the innocent sleep—*"

He had murdered Adria just as certainly as if he'd gone into her room that night, that night when Josephine had gone, and taken her in his arms, and strangled her. . . . For he hadn't killed her suddenly. But gradually and deliberately. (He had an image of her coming to him in a thick choking twilight, and bringing him a light; and of himself, blowing it out; and of her coming again—and of himself, time after time, blowing it out again. . . .)

("You mustn't stop *long*, Mr. Verney . . .")

"I murdered her," said Francis. He sat up. "I murdered her. It was a long business—it took me three months to get it done. But you see how successful I was?" He fell back, feeling sick. Verney's dark look was on his. He said: "Nothing's so simple as that. . . . There are too many strands in the fabric. . . ."

He was like a cardinal in ivory.

"There was *no moment when I couldn't have saved her—*"

"She loved you," said Verney. "You gave her that."

"I killed her."

"You made her alive."

"I murdered her."

Verney's hand touched his. "Chance is sometimes so bad that it can seem like crime."

“Chance and character make crime,” said Francis.

The nurse came back.

“I’m *afraid*, Mr. Verney—”

“I’ll come again,” said Verney, “before I leave.”

“Thank you!”

“You’ll sleep now,” said the nurse, coming back to the bed.

He was beginning to be dazed.

“What time is it?” he asked.

She said, “Never you mind about the time.”

“What day is it?”

“Saturday,” she said soothingly.

“We were still in London a fortnight ago,” he said.

“Dear me, were you?”

“. . . Yes.”

He slept.

EPILOGUE

Epilogue

"*Well*," said Gervase Lloyd. "Good-bye, Radnor."

He held out his hand and for a second the glazed look of the specialist changed to a gleam of subjective attention. And whatever it was he saw in Francis's face made him add, "Come to see me, any time. . . . You know my address . . . 59, Pont Street . . . any time you should feel—er—lonely, or anything. . . ."

Francis thanked him, and stood for a moment watching his bottle-shaped figure in its waisted overcoat proceed with springing steps in the direction of Piccadilly.

Then Francis turned and went on, down St. James's Street, and through Cleveland Row into the Park.

This way had always been "their détour"; for there was a house here that Adria had coveted, always pausing for a moment to look up (he saw her profile in that small brown hat with the diamond arrow)—to make sure, a little resentfully, that the house was still inhabited.

He went past Stafford House, seeing her, and hearing her say, "If *only* I could get it!" And this coming upon her profile and her voice in Cleveland Row (though indeed he had come there as he, half consciously, went everywhere, to look for her) sharpened the want of her that had already seized him when little Lloyd (their "fantastic little Gervase") began his chatter in St. James's Street—the want of her simply being there, in the most easy, ordinary way, to laugh with him. . . .

He crossed the Mall and walked on towards the lake, through the unbearable sweetness of the sunshine.

He passed the people on the benches (that her mind would have made funny drawings of; that she would have invented about; and the children she would have turned to see again).

He went on towards the bridge, past the view of Whitehall that she always meant—and never remembered, or somehow "had time"—to paint.

He went on to the bridge and stood there, halfway across.

And there, facing the view (her "heavenly view" of flat bright lake, high delicate trees, pale-tinted architecture), he faced too his own accumulated evidence of the fact that death, so unreal, so unbelievable in its happening, is made real by its train of absences. . . .

He had seen Adria dead: and first it was Adria, asleep; and then a strange woman lying still in a high dim room. And after that, in those unthinkable days and weeks and months, he had known that she was dead. And the reason of it.

But it was only in these last days, since he came back to London, that she had begun to be "absent," and so to die for him.

For she was dead now inconsequently, at unexpected moments—and in places where she should have been alive. Dying, not only by her absence from places and occasions,—from a corner of Curzon Street, from a plush bench in the foyer of Covent Garden, from a table at the Embassy,—but by her eluding of all his senses (she, who had been so sweet in all his senses) when they most needed her.

It was these new acute absences that drove him—his sight and touch and hearing so cheated of her—to tricks of memory; using the hundred chance effects of her he'd kept, without intention, like a collection of snapshots thrown in a drawer. He took them out now to say, "This was Adria that day at Oxford. This was Adria on the lawn at Wrens. This is she in Venice!"

He watched a swan move across the water.

A man and a woman passed behind him. He heard the woman say, "The daffodils are prettier than ever this year."

He looked down into the water below the bridge, and saw, in silhouette, the reflection of his own head and shoulders, moving when he moved.

Last year she had looked over and said, "My shadow is the only thing that ever makes me quite sure I must be true—"

And on the same morning, she'd said, talking about "how one should live," and where, that her "perfect time-table" was "winter in the country; spring in London; late summer in Venice; and the autumn to play with.". . .

He went across the bridge, slowly, to the other side, and turned left towards Whitehall, wondering if indeed it were merely a brutish instinct-to-survive that made it possible for him to be here, in "her spring in London," without her.

Too many springs would come again in London.

And too many summers end in Venice.

For no spring would bring her back again, to stand beside him, in its quiet new sunshine, and say, "St. James's Park is *too* pretty—"

And summer after summer would burn itself out in Venice. And he could go this year again; and again in twenty years; and never find her standing in the middle of the Piazza pinning a bunch of cyclamen into her white dress.

There was no season and no place anywhere in the world where he could find her.

He couldn't telephone to her (saying "Grosvenor 2278" and hearing her voice saying, "Is it *you*, Francis?").

He couldn't even write to her—and tell her that he had met Gervase Lloyd in St. James's Street . . .

He couldn't go back, across the Park, and along the Mall to his Club, and write to her, saying, "Darling Adria: Of course I know that I murdered you, but I met Gervase Lloyd in St. James's Street . . . and the daffodils are prettier than ever this year."

He left the lake, and turned right, under the trees, towards Birdcage Walk.

The official from the Passport Office who had come out to walk for ten minutes in the sunshine, and passed Francis opposite Queen Anne's Gate, could hardly have imagined (if he had been sufficiently interested to imagine) that the ill-looking but assured and elegant man in the grey suit was wondering, as he passed him, whether he should kill himself.

For Francis (passing the official) saw and foresaw his life. And saw what it might have been.

So many windows had been open—and he had shut them; and barred the shutters, one by one.

A door had been wide open into the sun; and he had locked it.

He was alone in an empty room.

And the shutters were rattling.

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 *Third Act in Venice* by Sylvia Thompson]