

SERVANT
of
REALITY

PHYLLIS
BOTTOME

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: A Servant of Reality

Date of first publication: 1918

Author: Phyllis Bottome (1882-1963)

Illustrator: Norman Mills Price (1877-1951)

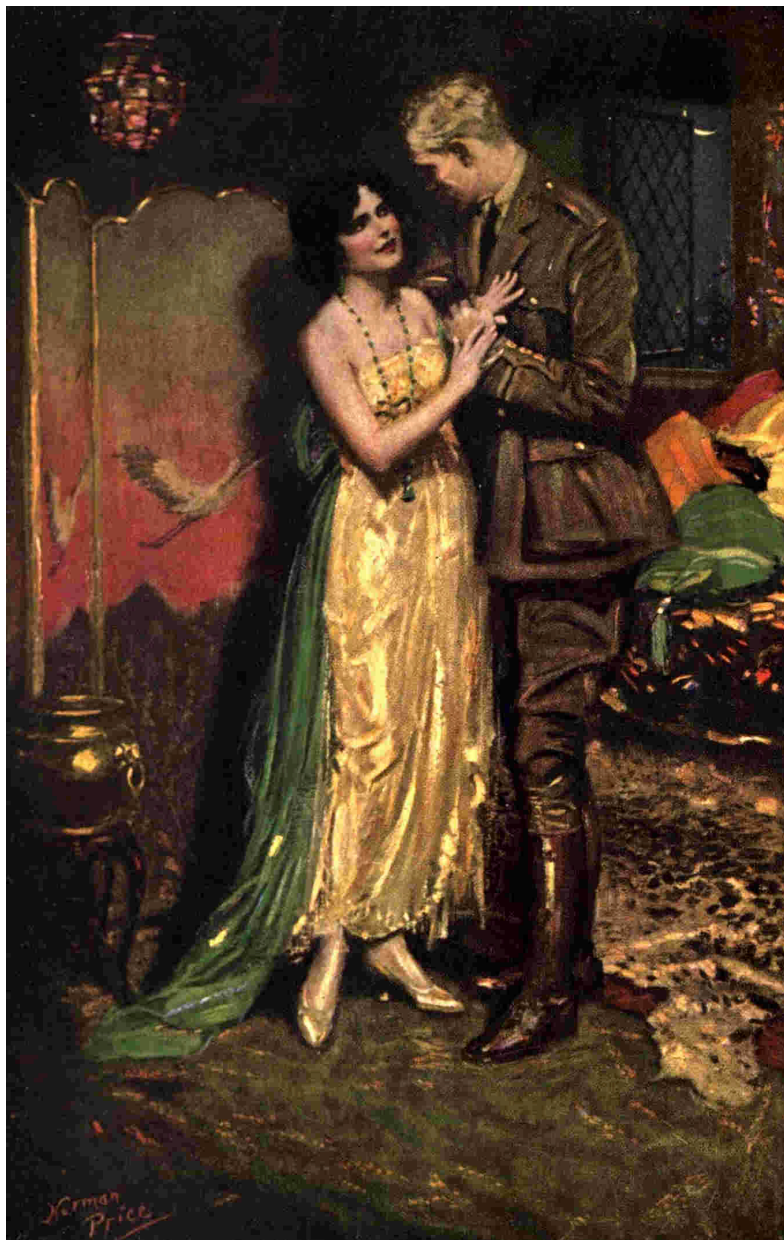
Date first posted: July 3, 2026

Date last updated: July 3, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260703

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive.



In the Tower Room.

A SERVANT OF REALITY

BY

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

Author of "THE DARK TOWER," "THE SECOND
FIDDLE," "HELEN OF TROY AND ROSE," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
NORMAN PRICE



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1919

Copyright, 1919, by
THE CENTURY CO.

Published, October, 1919

TO
BETTY AND MAIDA

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. In the Tower Room
2. Daphne pushed him back into his chair and knelt beside him
3. He did not know what was left of him or what was Kitty
4. There was no curtain left between Anthony and his pain
5. Like one of the June butterflies that haunt the down country

A Servant of Reality

CHAPTER I

Anthony Arden closed his eyes; he was trying to let the unutterable misery of two years slip from him. It was over; it was all over, as over as an extracted tooth, but he could not yet feel relief or exultation. These feelings must come later, when he saw England. When he closed his eyes he escaped seeing the very fat, red neck, passing without gradation into the round-shaped head of his German guard.

In two hours he would be over the frontier into Holland and have no guard. He kept saying to himself, "Free! free! free!" The word sounded perfectly meaningless. Fears assailed him; he was quite used to fears, ordinary fears about food, vermin, a bullying sergeant, or the collapse of a fellow-prisoner. These were reasonable fears; the new kind were not. They were too much like hopes; they were really terrible.

He had never been one of the men who collapsed; but he knew all about collapses. He had fought them as St. Paul fought with the beasts at Ephesus.

He knew their beginnings, the ominous vacillations of the will, when a man could wait for a quarter of an hour before deciding which foot to put his boot on. This would be the prelude to a fearful lethargy. Anthony had watched the restlessness of the driven body before the mind suddenly ceased to drive it; the rush and flutter of the helpless thoughts till the interludes came; the blank spaces when the thoughts subsided, and the thinker, exhausted, overwrought, and trembling, would appeal to him for drugs. Bromide was useful if there was any tiding over to be done, but too often it edged stupor with despair, and one could seldom tide over the illimitable seas of prolonged imprisonment.

Anthony was a wonderful hand at keeping people up. Even the Germans appreciated his power, and as they had by that time learned to prefer sane prisoners to mad ones, they gave him all the drugs he asked for and freedom to apply what other methods occurred to him.

Anthony had entered the war as one of the fighting forces; but in another life, a strange, safe, horizonless, dignified world, where men thought and acted without compulsion and knew next to nothing of fear, he had been a rising young surgeon with an unshakable nerve. He was the type of man who always rises; he could absorb himself in his aims and control his desires and yet escape the tyranny of self.

The universe was his center; he was not the center of the universe. He had no use for emotions and was not easily put out. He loved his home and went there very seldom. He disagreed with his father whenever they met, and wrote to his mother regularly once a week, on half-sheets of paper, without telling her anything.

Daphne, his favorite sister, infuriated and delighted him; he disapproved of everything she did, and generally found himself helping her to do it. His eldest brother Tom, he never wrote to, seldom saw, and loved ineradicably. Anthony would not have called it "love," neither would Tom; but neither would have hesitated an instant to die for the other. Tom had been killed. There was a third brother, Henry, cleverer than Tom, who fortunately had varicose veins. Owing to this he knew nothing about the war except what he was told and what he had gathered from the newspapers. He had a flat in London. Anthony was going there now.

London! He didn't really believe in it; that was why he shut his eyes to see it better. While he was a prisoner he had never dared to make pictures he could see; that was one of the ways in which men collapsed. They got to seeing things; quite sensible things at first, things that were there. Then they started seeing things that were not. It was always better to keep one's eyes fixed on little, every-day facts.

Anthony knew that London was safe. Zeppelins had done their best, aëroplanes had touched London as a boy's catapult drops pebbles into a field. You had to hunt to find the pebbles; the field remained placidly unshaken.

Daphne always slipped into her letters, "Funny old London is just the same." It was one of the faults he used to find with Daphne that she overlooked the essential, but he had not known how realistic it made letters. All his people had been wonderful about writing; they had arranged it

among themselves so that somebody, even if it was only an aunt, wrote to him every day in the week. And they had thought of everything in the way of parcels.

There had been six months' hell first. Hell is a place where you are forgotten by all you love and remembered by all you hate. Fortunately, this was at the beginning, when Anthony had his self-control intact, except for the first forty-eight hours. Anthony hadn't been self-controlled then, but he had not expected to have his broken leg kicked. It had startled him very much. He had resented it, and they had hurt him. They had hurt him so that when he remembered it he began to tremble all over and to feel like ice. It wasn't the actual physical pain alone; it was the cruelty and the surprise. It was such a strange feeling, to be quite powerless and hated, especially when one had lived a particularly normal and kindly life and never known anything about hate.

Hate is such a funny, medieval little word, like devil or hell; it means nothing till one has tried it. When Anthony was a young man and knew everything, and had learned nothing, he had laughed at these little medieval words. He had called them, rather proudly, to his mother, "theological nursery toys," and she had said, "I wonder." But he wouldn't have believed then that men could cry like children, or stop crying and go to pieces—utterly to little pieces before other men's eyes. He hadn't supposed, either, that other men could laugh at them or have such cruel eyes.

It had shot through him once or twice, during those first six months, that he had believed, actually believed, that people always behaved like human beings. He might just as well have swallowed the old story of Jonah and the whale. It was much better afterward. He himself had helped to make it better; he hadn't realized his own struggles. It just seemed very gradually to have got bearable; and when it was bearable, he had discovered that he was old.

All the top of his short, tight curls were gray, he could walk straight with a very slight limp, and hold his head up; but his keen, gray eyes were not as steady as they used to be, and if any one spoke loudly, he jumped, or if they moved near him quickly, he flinched like a beaten dog. Yes, he knew all about hate, and when the letters and the parcels broke through, and he found the other world still existed and he was remembered, passionately remembered and loved, just as if he were alive, he learned something about love.

His mother ceased to be a not very clear-thinking, extremely old-fashioned, middle-aged lady who had lived in the country all her life, and who would keep asking him to go to church; she became instead a steady hand to hold on to in a darkened room.

And as for Daphne, incapable, inconsequent, and most flirtatious Daphne, who forgot everything and never answered any one, and was always doing what she had much better not, and suggesting you should bear the consequences of it because you were so sensible, he couldn't have told any one what Daphne meant to him. She never forgot a post, and knew mysteriously the very moods in which he would meet her letters, and she would go on being just what she always was, only regularly. Her very voice reached him, like a lark singing under his window at dawn. It was her letter he got first about Tom; he always saw it in her words, but as if she had first put her own heart between him and the blow.

It was incredible to him that he could once have thought it a bore to go down to Pannell for week-ends. The whole of his body and all his being ached for home. Every night for a few minutes before he slept, if sleep were possible, he had allowed himself to think of Pannell. First, the railway station "Boscott," with its blue lobelias picked out with white chalk stones by Tuppins, the station-master. Then Daphne with her hair half down her back, because she'd driven the pony in by herself and it "hadn't exactly" bolted; then, beyond Daphne's hair and eyes, the line of the downs, sometimes swathed in milky mists, and sometimes very firm and velvety under a fleet of flying clouds. Boscott was a small village with yellow barns dropped in a hollow.

Pannell Manor was in Pannell woods. There was an open space for it, and the downs rose up in front of it. The church had been built at its gate, on a lawn with flitting shadows of deer. The deer slipped delicately in and out of patches of bracken. A wall separated them from the smooth green terrace in front of the house, but you could always look over it toward the downs, and watch the deer steal between the trees.

Pannell was an Elizabethan house, and the front of it was a mass of tall, thin windows shining out of old gray and yellow stone. It had suited Tom to perfection. It made Anthony sick to remember how it had suited Tom. It would be Anthony's now, and he wasn't a landowning type; he would simply have to do what he could with it in the intervals of his profession. Unfortunately, Pannell wasn't a place with which to do things at intervals. It wanted the steady landlore of a practical, unimaginative Sussex man. It wanted Tom. It had always belonged to people like Tom; slow, patient,

good-natured people who knew how to leave things alone and never hurried anything except a fox. The land would have to miss them for a generation now, because most of them were dead.

They were at the frontier at last. Anthony got out on to the platform with several other men. They all looked dazed and a little uncomfortable, and tried to pretend that they knew how to move about on platforms and get freely, without shouted directions, into trains. Fortunately, the Dutch guards helped them.

They had very little to say to one another. They lit cigarettes with shaking hands and grinned nervously when they met one another's eyes. Of course they were enjoying themselves awfully and weren't afraid of an accident on the train or the boat going down or suddenly finding they were dying of some acute disease, and couldn't get home first. It was absurd to suppose that they could have such fears, for they were all quite ordinary young Englishmen who had been in German prisons only a few years. They were perfectly all right, really; they had made a point of saying this in all their letters home.

Anthony knew exactly how they felt. He advised them to get a drink, but they were all too afraid of missing their connection, which couldn't start for half an hour. Anthony forced himself to go into the waiting-room and order a drink. He was very proud of still being able to make himself do things, and a little self-conscious about it. He had forgotten the time when he wasn't self-conscious and never had to make himself do perfectly obvious things.

They took the journey through Holland by moonlight. The country stretched out in a sheet of silver; water and land melted together into a delicate mist. The windmills moved across it like the black wings of strange, inanimate birds. There were no walls and no barbed wire; just wide-open spaces, with a low, broad sky above them.

They got on to the boat at midnight, and some one said it was England already, for boats were always England. There were a few wives who had not been able to wait for their husbands to reach England. They met them shyly and without words; and afterward, Anthony noticed, even though they were together, they still had a look of stubborn longing in their eyes.

Anthony was not going to be met at all; he had arranged everything with Henry. He would go to Henry's rooms for a night and just hear how everything was and be told about Tom; that would make things easier for his

mother. He would go down to Pannell next day; he had particularly said he didn't want Daphne to come up. He wanted to get into things gradually.

There could be no possible danger of the boat sinking; he told several fellows who asked him that all the accursed mines were swept away, the seas were free. They were English and they were free. Of course he didn't say this, nor did the other men; they merely felt it moving stubbornly in their hearts without words.

Anthony fully intended to go to sleep. He had wired for a berth, and the other men were quiet as mice; but he was under the impression that none of them slept; they were all quite ready to run up on deck if by any chance one of the mines had been overlooked. His idea had been to get up very early and watch the cliffs creep close across the sea. He remembered a poem of Macaulay's which he had learned as a boy—it was called "The Jacobite's Epitaph" and was a short reticent poem, with a line in it which had always haunted him,—

By those white cliffs I never more may see—

Well, he wanted to see them; but when the boat arrived, England was lost in a blur of rain. He saw nothing but a solid wall of grayness rising up in front of him. The other men were on deck very early, too; apparently the same idea had occurred to them, but none of them said anything about Macaulay's poetry.

It took an eternity to get alongside the wharf, and lots of accidents might have happened. Nobody spoke except the youngest of them, who had been in prison only a few months, and he remembered that it would be jolly to get a good hot cup of tea, and wondered if they still made dear old moldy buns.

There was no cheering to greet them, because they were not the first boat-load of prisoners to reach England, and it was particularly early in the morning. But there were two trains waiting, small, comfortable English trains that ran on velvet lines through an endless expanse of wet, green fields.

Two hours later the London Terminus closed on them like a large black shell. Nobody took any notice of them; they weren't, of course, any different from anybody else, except that they weren't quite so smart at picking up a taxi as people who haven't been in German prisons. They let opportunities slip.

Anthony was one of the first to get one. He shook hands with several of the fellows who hadn't been specially met, and gave a lift to a particularly

bewildered looking boy who had forgotten where he lived for the moment, but thought they'd remember it for him at the Oxford and Cambridge Club. He was very proud because, although he had forgotten his address, he could remember his own name perfectly.

Anthony wanted to explain to the boy that they had got back into a world where people were in the habit of remembering their own names, and that they must try to appear as much like ordinary people as possible. But when Anthony began to explain, he was brought up short, because he realized that he himself couldn't quite remember how ordinary people behaved.

Just as the quick, organized traffic in the streets was a dangerous blur to his unaccustomed eyes, so were those old unconscious ways of normal people a strange, a perilous blur to his insecure and unaccustomed senses.

Fortunately, some one at the club did remember the boy's address, but there was no one who could fill in the curious unexpected gaps in Anthony's hidden mind.

CHAPTER II

Civilization had gone to pieces, but outwardly London looked just the same. The winding loops of traffic weaved their perpetual chain, checked by imperturbable, blue policemen; picture palaces and public houses, congested tubes and swinging 'buses, the long, blue shadows of the dusk and the arched lights of the street corners, had no new secrets to reveal. The husks of everything Anthony saw were mercilessly indifferent to change.

But surely the people would be different? People cannot pass through hell and keep their values of life the same; they cannot lose security and not gain a certain spiritual significance.

It was startling to Anthony to find that Henry had not altered at all; he did not even look older. He lived in the same charming rooms, full of old French china. Henry could not afford good pictures, so he had very wisely limited himself to excellent prints. His books neither frightened the unreading public nor shocked the cultivated. Henry had kept an expensive cook, and during the war by her help had evaded food difficulties while keeping patriotically within his rations. There was no track once beaten that Henry did not follow; nor had he ever found it difficult to believe what he knew to be generally accepted. He shook hands with Anthony with some emotion, and asked twice how he was.

"This is really tremendous," Henry exclaimed, "quite tremendous." The situation promptly dwindled under his qualifying adjectives. "By Jove! what a lot we shall have to talk over! How does it feel to be back?"

"I can't tell you yet," said Anthony, sinking into a luxurious arm-chair before the fire. "Physically it's comfortable. I've often thought of this arm-chair."

Henry said, "My dear fellow!" deprecatingly. He hoped he wasn't going to hear too much about hardship; he always skipped what he referred to as "literary horrors" in the accounts of war correspondents. "Things," as he often used to say without specifying what things, "were quite bad enough without unduly harrowing one's feelings."

"We'll have dinner in a minute," Henry continued cheerfully, "and then we'll make history. Of course I know everybody has written regularly to

you, but it's quite extraordinary how facts drop out one way or another in correspondence—quite important little facts.”

“I haven't written everything back,” observed Anthony in a queer, tired voice, which sounded thick. “You see, I couldn't—lots of things. I couldn't; but I dare say they don't matter now.”

“I knew you'd take a sensible view,” Henry agreed eagerly. “It's no use raking over old troubles, is it? I assure you we've all had hardships to bear as well; air raids, for instance, *most* unpleasant and so noisy. The servants felt it a great deal. The one thing that has kept me up during the last few years has been the spirit of cheeriness. I've insisted upon taking a bright view of things, and I've found it paid; over and over again I've found it paid.”

“You would find it pay,” Anthony agreed after a short pause, looking round the room with curious, inattentive eyes. “And none of the china has been broken, has it? It seems to me I remember all the pieces.”

“No,” Henry replied; “Mary is very careful, you know. I shouldn't let her touch them if she wasn't. Some of this is priceless.”

“Quite right,” agreed Anthony. “Only being careful doesn't always prevent things from being broken, does it? There's an awful lot of luck in what breaks and what doesn't. D'you mind, before we have dinner, telling me what's known about Tom?”

Anthony moved as he spoke, and crouched forward a little over the fire as if he were cold. Henry couldn't see his face; he was privately shocked at the thin, rather weak, and shaky look of his restored brother.

Anthony had not kept his spirit up; he had lost smartness in a manner that, if it was pitiable, was also annoying to a relative who had been prepared to be proud of him. And it showed a certain lack of tact upon Anthony's part to ask Henry about Tom before dinner.

“I expect,” Henry said in a grave, constrained voice, which indicated deep feeling without transgressing good taste, “you know practically all there is to know already. Tom was acting as Forward observing officer in one of the woods on the Somme. It is a little confusing, as no one actually saw what took place, but they suppose a shell caught him and his telephonist. The messages stopped, and when they advanced they found the bodies. The major wrote, of course, and several of his brother-officers. Mother will show you all the letters. Dear old Tom, he did his duty like—”

Henry stopped abruptly. He was going to say a Briton or a hero; a burst of most appalling profanity checked him.

He stared blankly at the crouched and blasphemous figure in front of the fire. Anthony cursed steadily and monotonously for several seconds. He seemed beyond his own control; then he pulled himself together.

“I beg your pardon, old man,” he stammered. “I—I—my nerves, you know; that was why I wanted to have my home-coming over gradually. Don’t pay any attention to me. I’ll be all right in a minute. What I want to know is, How long was it between the time they got Tom’s last message and found the body? That’s all I want to know.”

“Have a whisky and soda,” Henry murmured sympathetically. “Of course it’s quite natural you should be upset; it would have been better to go into all this after dinner. As far as I can make out—the major was a little vague—there were three days before they actually found the body; but of course Tom was killed instantly. All of them said so in their letters. It was a great comfort to us to feel that there could have been no actual suffering—my God! Anthony! don’t laugh like that! It doesn’t sound human; it really doesn’t. Here, take this whisky and soda!”

Henry had to force the glass between Anthony’s stiffened lips. He was bowed and contracted with his unearthly laughter. His hands shook as if he were in an ague; his whole body shook. Henry had never been in such a situation in his life, and all of it was perfectly unnecessary. Tom had been dead two years. Then Anthony gasped out:

“Thanks. Yes, that’s what I wanted to know—three days.” The whisky and soda had quieted him. He stopped trembling.

Mary came in and announced dinner.

Henry asked Anthony considerately if he would like to wait five minutes, but Anthony, without any consideration whatever, replied that he was as hungry as a wolf. He really did seem very hungry, and ate like a wolf, but he drank nothing. Henry heard him say in a whisper that was perfectly audible:

“If I drink anything, I shall go to pieces. If I drink anything, I shall go to pieces.”

Henry looked anxiously at Mary, but her eyes were intent upon a green vegetable, over which she noiselessly readjusted one of Henry’s solid silver spoons. Anthony did not notice Mary at all, but in helping himself he dropped the spoon.

When they were back again in Henry's drawing-room, Anthony moved restlessly about and tried to pull the curtains to look out of the window.

Henry said:

"Sit down, my dear old chap," and Anthony sat down with a jerk, as if some one had pulled him.

"I don't know if you would like me to run over the terms of Tom's will," Henry suggested. "I suppose we must dip into business some time or other, but perhaps—"

"Run over anything you like now," said Anthony. He leaned back in his arm-chair and closed his eyes, but he wasn't asleep. He followed Henry's excellent account of business affairs with his old clear-cut attention. Henry was greatly relieved at the questions Anthony shot out at him. He went on to speak of Pannell.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if you were home for a time to look after things," Henry suggested. "Father has lost grip. You'll notice a difference in him, and in mother, too. The strain upon those who remained at home has been greater perhaps than you fellows quite realize." Henry sighed a little reproachfully. He wanted Anthony to understand that he had not been the only one to suffer; he felt that self-pity would be very bad for a man of Anthony's type. "I mustn't weaken him by my sympathy," Henry reminded himself.

"Yes," said Anthony, without opening his eyes. "If people realized it, it must have been—I was going to say worse for them; but mercifully we're so built that what we don't see reaches only the most imaginative. Knowledge and realization seldom meet. I see that now. I used to believe, as a doctor, that I knew something about pain; but of course I didn't. I knew as much about it as people know of an earthquake shock from reading about it in a newspaper. My nerves were untouched."

"I have always thought doctors must be rather insensitive," said Henry, complacently. "Frankly, I have never been able to stand the sight of suffering. I suppose things were pretty rotten over there for you?" As Anthony did not answer, Henry added tactfully, "You must tell me all about it some time when you feel more up to the mark, and things get easier to talk about."

Anthony's eyelids flickered; the lines between his lips and his mouth were deep as furrows.

It was obvious that with his usual good sense he agreed with Henry that it was better to postpone the history of his captivity.

Still, Henry did not want to postpone it entirely. He was curious to be told something about it—how many meals one got a day, and what amount of exercises one was allowed to take. He wanted to hear the kind of things one could afterwards talk over comfortably at the club with the other fellows.

But Anthony had lost the faculty of realizing what was expected of him in conversation. He didn't follow the line of Henry's thoughts. He began abruptly:

“Those were awfully good cigarettes you kept sending me. Wonderful what a civilizing thing a cigarette is! Did some fellows good, you know, just to look at them; kept them up to the mark. 'Pon my word, I shouldn't wonder if it helped 'em to be straight more than their prayers. What one wants, you know, out there is some point to hold on to, some point outside oneself. Religions that push you inside yourself make a shocking mess of it, and all religions do it too much. What you want is to get out, no matter how small the point you're aiming at; then you're safe—I mean that's your chance of keeping sane. Of course it's only a chance.”

Henry cleared his throat nervously.

“The Young Men's Christian Association,” he said, “has really done wonders in this war. It is one of the charities I made a point of backing up. I quite agree with you that the social element in religion is extremely important. The church has overlooked it shockingly. I put down its comparative failure to its inability to deal with its congregations socially.”

Anthony opened his eyes and stared at Henry. He looked as if he did not know what his brother was talking about. Apparently he had not been referring to the church.

The door burst open.

“I can't help it, Mary. No matter what Mr. Henry said, I will see—Tony!”

She was in his arms; when he heard her voice he had got up and felt for her as if he were blind.

It was Daphne; of course she had done exactly what they had arranged for her not to do. Her eyes blazed at him, fierce with tenderness; he could hardly meet them. He felt her arms tighten round him.

“Ah, they’ve hurt you! they’ve hurt you!” she gasped.

Anthony tried hard to hold himself together. He kept telling himself that he mustn’t make an ass of himself before Henry. Daphne pushed him back into his chair and knelt beside him, gazing at him with the piercing eyes of mercy and love. There was no use trying to hoodwink Daphne. She saw what war had done to Anthony; she saw nothing else.

Henry hovered ineffectually in the rear of the situation; he tried hard to stop its being a situation, but Daphne overpowered him. She took no notice of the halves of inconspicuous sentences which escaped from his lips except to say, after a moment or two, casually over her shoulder, as if he weren’t a member of his family and her host, “You’d better go, Henry.”

If Anthony had lifted his little finger to keep him, Henry would have stayed—but Anthony did not look in his direction either. His lips had started trembling; he held his elbow on his knee and his hand over his eyes. Henry tiptoed out of the room as if he had inadvertently strayed into a prayer-meeting.

Daphne took Anthony in her arms again.

“Oh, what have they done to you!” she murmured. “They have eaten half your life.”

Then she began to cry terribly, and it gave back Anthony all his self-control to see her cry. He laughed at her, and patted the back of her obstinately untidy curls. They were just like his own, only made out of spun gold. His had turned gray.

“Don’t be a goose,” he protested. “It’s all right now. Nothing’s the matter really. I’m perfectly fit. Are you crying about me or is it Tom?”

“Oh, you!” she sobbed. “Tom’s only dead.”

“Well, I’ll be all right soon,” Anthony reassured her. “I’ll be just as usual in a little while. All the fellows feel rather queer at first, you know. You ought to be at Pannell. I kept thinking you’d meet me there to-morrow. I suppose they’re all right, aren’t they? Henry would have told me if they weren’t.”



Daphne pushed him back into his chair and knelt beside him.

“Yes, yes, yes,” said Daphne, quickly; “everything’s quite all right.” Her sobs had subsided now, and she searched through his pockets to find the handkerchief she ought to have had the sense to bring with her.

“Something’s changed?” said Anthony, sharply. “What is it, Daphne? You’re hiding something from me.”

“No, no, not changed,” whispered Daphne. “I’m not changed, Tony; only I didn’t mean to tell you to-night. Don’t you see how old I am, how monstrously, awfully old?”

Anthony studied her beautiful, radiant face with keen, questioning eyes.

“You’ve turned into some kind of grownup woman at last, haven’t you?” he asked slowly. “Hullo! what’s that on your finger?”

“Yes,” she said, “it is really. Isn’t it funny? I can’t get used to it. I didn’t want to be happy a bit by myself without you, but he was in the Flying Corps, and I was so anxious! We were married last June. I made them all swear not to tell you. I censored their letters for months for fear of its dropping out. You see, I knew, if you were with me, you’d be glad. O Tony, doesn’t it seem wonderful! It’s over, and he’s all right. I keep saying that instead of my prayers all day. It’s over, and he’s all right.”

Anthony nodded.

“Yes,” he said; “yes, I suppose so. It’s over, and it’s all right, either way you look at it, perhaps.”

They were silent for a moment, then she said quickly: “Oh, Tony darling, Tom was killed at once. Jim found out for me; I can prove it to you. Tell me you believe me? You know I wouldn’t rest till I found out. Jim went over and saw the Major. You know I wouldn’t lie to you. You do believe me, Tony?”

Anthony was not looking at her; he was looking straight into the heart of the fire.

“Yes,” he said in a perfectly level voice; “yes, I believe you. I say—I say, Daphne, d’you think Henry’d mind if I kept a light in my room all night?”

CHAPTER III

Anthony would not have admitted that he had a creed, because he thought creeds unscientific; but if you habitually act up to certain unspoken principles, they become dogmas. Anthony's creed ran as follows:

“Play your best whether you are likely to win or not. Never let any one down for the sake of your own convenience; never lie; face disaster readily, even if you could by exercising a little ingenuity evade your share of it. Back whatever you believe in except your own mistakes; own up to a blunder instantly without the emphasis of egoism. Do not involve other people in your actions, and do not be involved by them, and let the end of your work have the same quality as its beginning.”

It was an excellent creed, full of self-respect and armed at all points against the inroads of reality; the kind of creed that gives a man peace at the last, unless he has had too bad a time in the interval. It had no mercy in it either for himself or for others. Prison shook it to its foundation. Anthony had not allowed for a life that was a hideous nightmare beneath the plane of self-control, or for a moral chaos without rules. There was nothing he could act upon; he simply suffered as those under the harrow of acute physical pain suffer, without horizon.

Incidents in Anthony's hospital career flashed into his mind with a new meaning. He remembered a woman dying in child-birth who had told her agonized husband with unflinching mendacity that it wasn't nearly so bad as she had expected. Anthony had admired her then, but he had not thought her superhuman; he had believed that people could always bear pain properly.

The last words of a boy of nineteen crushed in a street accident came back to him: “I don't want to live; it's too cruel to care about.” At the time Anthony had believed this remark to be a proof of the lack of discipline in the lower classes.

He knew now that there are moments in which it is a miracle to behave properly, when life becomes simply too cruel to care about. He felt that there was a power which sometimes saved people at these moments, but that it was not a virtue inherent in themselves; and he lost a little of his self-respect.

The other prisoners taught Anthony that kindness was more necessary than skill. It wasn't enough to do things for them; many of them were beyond the more direct aids of science, and even if they had not been, Anthony had not the proper means for assisting them.

What was necessary, if he was to be of any use to his fellow-prisoners, was for him to involve himself in their sufferings. It was precisely what Anthony had made a point of avoiding throughout his career. He had to put aside his personal fastidiousnesses and to overcome his love of independence.

At first the other men were afraid of Anthony's self-control, and they had left him alone in consequence, and Anthony had to destroy this salutary fear to which he owed his privacy. Nothing but the fact that he hated being useless gave him the courage to persevere. He wanted to work. He did not love his fellow-prisoners; they maddened him. They had had codes, too, once, but either they had not taken their codes so seriously as Anthony had taken his, or their power of control was slighter. They grumbled without ceasing, quarreled readily, and were often disgusting.

Only one or two of them were really complaining, quarrelsome, or disgusting men; these were the things that happened to them from outside, through the gigantic pressure of adverse circumstance playing upon their unnourished bodies. They could not help themselves.

In time Anthony realized the power of adversity, and it made it much easier to get on with his fellow-prisoners; he saw that their temper was no more to blame than their indigestion. Even their vices, or their endless references to vice, were merely like the outbreak of a tedious delusion. The difference between them and Anthony was that Anthony *could* help himself. It ceased to be their self-control that mattered; his became vital. If that went, he could be of no use to anybody. Anthony guarded his self-control as if it were the elixir of life. He measured it out by inches; when he felt it menaced, he retired into absolute silence. It was the only thing he could retire into; there was no space for solitude except in his own soul.

It was a long and difficult task, and Anthony never got to the end of it; but long before he realized that he was succeeding, every one in the camp came to him with their troubles. They saw that he had a margin of strength to deal with the affairs of other people, and most of them had become men without margins.

There were plenty of damaged bodies for Anthony to treat, and added to these were the more complicated cases, broken hearts, bad habits, and the

deadly collapse of the will. These attacked Anthony's inner citadel, and found him at a loss for supplies. He tried hard to evolve comfort for his patient from his scanty spiritual stores, because he had discovered that very unhappy men cannot live without spiritual comfort even when they are being half-starved. Men were going to pieces because they missed religion just as much as because they missed bread. It was even more disintegrating. The religion that they missed had no definite form; it was that of human ties, traditions, and the obligations of love. The prison rules did not take the place of these obligations, nor did quinine act as a substitute for love.

There was no give and take between their former existence and their present one. They could not send anything home except their hopes, and after a time these were broken by the endless monotony of expectation. Anthony fought against despair as if it were the German Empire. It became part of his profession. He had always fought death as if it were despair, and now he fought despair as if it were death. But his methods had to be more empirical.

"You'll have a hell of a time if you don't keep straight," he reminded his menaced patients, "a much worse hell than if you do." But he soon found that this was not a successful argument. Self-preservation has to be an instantaneous need before it can resist despair.

Tradition was a better specific.

"After all, we're Englishmen," Anthony urged. "We don't want them to think they've reduced us to behaving like pigs or sinking into idiots. We've got to keep our end up."

But this stimulant wore out in time. There was nothing fundamental in it; there is a greater need of letting go under great pressure than in preserving appearances. Men ceased to care what anybody thought of them; they even ceased to care what they thought of themselves.

Anthony was more successful when he appealed to their feeling for their people at home.

"We mustn't go back spoiled," he pleaded; "we must pull ourselves together so that there will be something to take back worth taking. One couldn't let one's people down."

Anthony often laughed at himself over his own methods, they were so rough and ready, and reminded him so often of the attempts at religious reformations, which he had always despised.

“It takes more,” he said to himself, grimly, “to make a good Salvation Army lass than I should have thought possible.”

And, after all, nothing answered for long, nothing that Anthony could find to say. He had no idea that what kept the tone of the camp considerably higher than it would otherwise have been was the quiet persistency of his own example. Anthony planned his advice, and it was good as far as it went; but his example was spontaneous, and it went very much further.

For two years Anthony fought in the dark the battle of the soul in which he did not believe, and now he told himself the battle could stop. There was nothing else to fight against except a few strained nerves. He could go back to his proper work, the study of how to heal the human body, a much more reasonable and satisfactory adventure than how to keep alive the human soul. He was still nervous, and he did not feel happy yet; but that was because he had the meeting with his people before him, and the memory of Tom’s death standing like a shadow across his return to Pannell. The first few minutes would be difficult, especially with his father.

Pannell meant Tom to Mr. Arden; the rest of his family was only a pleasant and expensive annex. He had built all his future, and the future of his race, upon his eldest son. Mr. Arden had never understood Anthony; he did not see why any son of his should wish to be a doctor. There was the army, the navy, the civil service, the church, and the bar, ample professions for any one with brains to find a career in. Ardens *had* doctors; they didn’t expect to *be* them.

Mr. Arden told Anthony plainly that a surgeon’s was not a gentleman’s profession. Quite good fellows went into it sometimes when they couldn’t afford better, but the squire was prepared to do something better than that even for his second son.

But Anthony had been obstinate about this low taste for science. He had clung to it as if it had been a barmaid, and there were moments when the squire would have preferred a barmaid; for it is easier to get rid of a woman than of an idea. Anthony knew that he had a painful struggle to face with his father, for he had no intention of giving up his profession for the sake of Pannell, and if science was a blunder in a younger son, it would be considered a crime in the eldest.

He thought perhaps it was because of this impending struggle that he could not enjoy the approach to Pannell. The velvety green fields did not move him, nor the wide expanse of the barebacked downs. He was nervously aware of the passing stations, as if he wished to retain them

between himself and Boscott. Daphne wouldn't be there now; he had left her with her husband. His first meeting with this new brother-in-law had hurt him intensely. Anthony had immediately liked Jim Wynne, but he hadn't got over the fact of the marriage; it made him feel absurdly lonely, and as if his return to his profession wouldn't be the final satisfaction he had expected. Of course going to Pannell would make it all right if he could overcome being afraid of rows. He'd always rather liked rows before. His father used to get hot over them, and Anthony used to get cold. They said outrageous things to each other, and neither of them ever came within range of the other one's arguments; but there had been no fear on either side, and no favor. Anthony was aware of fear now. He did not want to hurt his father.

Boscott came, after all, with a rush. Anthony saw his father's face as the train drew up at the tiny station before he recognized the two tall young sisters who had shot up into women during his absence. He reflected that his sisters had grown, but they had not changed. His father had changed.

The squire shook Anthony's hand with welcoming vigor, and looked him between the eyes.

"I'm glad to have you back, my boy," he said heartily; then he looked away suddenly, as if he were seeing some one else.

The squire had determined to be cordial. He had prepared the words all the way down to the station, but he had not known what it would cost him to meet the wrong son. And then Anthony refused to drive Vixen.

"Please yourself, of course," said Mr. Arden, gruffly. "She's a fine little mare, goes like silk. You won't have seen such a horse anywhere where you've been." The squire did not wish to say the word "Germany." He considered the bare existence of such a country indecent.

Anthony kissed his sisters' cool, firm cheeks. They were pink with excitement and extremely shy. They wondered if Anthony noticed how grown up they were, and why he was so terribly thin despite all their parcels.

"We didn't bring the dogs," Ursula explained—"we thought they would be too excited—but Max is quite well."

Max was Anthony's own dog, a brusque, unamiable, and fanatically loyal Aberdeen.

"He simply hated your being away, you know. He sleeps in your room regularly, because he won't sleep anywhere else, and he bit Mary for cleaning it last week—not badly—on the ankle."

“A quarrelsome, bad-tempered, crotchety cur,” Mr. Arden asserted, with restored good-humor; “but your mother thinks the world of him because he refused to eat for three days after you left. The girls tempted him with raw meat, and in the end he gave way to ’em. But he’s borne a grudge against ’em ever since.”

“That was awfully nice of you,” Anthony said gratefully to his sisters. He would have been ashamed to say how often he had thought of Max during his captivity, and that he hadn’t liked to ask how he was for fear of hearing he was dead.

“Your mother didn’t come to meet you,” Mr. Arden explained as they seated themselves in the dog-cart, and Vixen, after a slight premonitory shy at the gate-post, darted off down the long, white road like a swallow. “I persuaded her not to. She’s not up to much excitement nowadays, and of course we’re not giving any celebration in the village for your return. You’ll understand all that.”

Anthony nodded.

It was too early for the trees to be out, but there was a misty look over the budding boughs, and the tilled fields and woodlands had already slipped from the hand of winter and lay open for the visiting spring. The white road stretched between the Pannell woods and the Pannell farms, and straight before them, as the road wound up toward the low, soft skies, were the sloping shoulders of the downs. Pannell stood under them, gray and weather-beaten, facing the shifting shadows with its unchanging stone.

As they passed into the drive, Vixen, moving as if she ran on velvet springs, the gray walls of Pannell rose up in front of them. First the clock-tower in the massive stone stables, a stretch of open park, and then the long, uneven lines of the roof. Anthony’s heart struck suddenly against his side. He had not realized before what it would be to own Pannell. The knowledge flooded him with a kind of awe. The ancient trees, the mossy lawns were his, and his the evanescent spirit of the changeless place.

Mr. Arden glanced sharply at him. Neither of them said anything, but Anthony knew that his father divined his feeling and bitterly resented it. Anthony flushed painfully. He wanted to explain how gladly he would have given up that strange thrill of possession for the sight of Tom, broad-shouldered and casual, strolling out of the stable door, a gun over his shoulder and a dog at his heels. If his father could only have guessed that deeper feeling, that stubborn sense of loss which had become part of Anthony’s very being since Tom’s death, he would not have been hurt at the

momentary pride of place which had swept over him without replacing or touching the deeper sense of his grief. But it was Mr. Arden's misfortune that he could not read deeply into the mind of his younger son.

The last moments of the drive were intolerably long; even his sisters, who had been pointing out all the changes of three years to Anthony, ceased chattering.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and the February light lay level across the lawn, fugitive and without weight.

Vixen consented to draw up on the familiar gravel after a slight pretense that she had never been there before and couldn't be expected to remain an instant in so strange a situation. A groom ran to her head and out of a French window poured a torrent of dogs, a fox-terrier, two white West Highlanders, and more gingerly, as a matter of form, came Max.

For a moment he stood stock-still, his whole being centered in an anxious, questioning sniff, and then three years, a third of his brief lifetime, ceased to exist. He hurled the two white West Highlanders to right and left of him, he passed straight over the back of Demon, the ecstatic fox-terrier, he leaped at the thin, gray figure of Anthony fiercely and without a sound. Three times he flung himself upward silently at his master's chest, weaving like a shuttle the pattern of his desperate joy; then Anthony found a voice to say his name huskily, and Max, the sober, the undemonstrative, that foe to emotion in fox-terriers, sat down on the top of a flight of steps and proceeded to have a fit of violent hysterics.

Anthony had to push him aside in order to hurry through the open French windows to his mother's arms.

As he caught her against his heart, he heard her whisper over and over under her breath:

"Are you sure you're not hungry, Tony? Are you sure you're not hungry?"

She knew he had been in Holland and overnight in London, but she wanted to hear him say he was not hungry. She had thought of nothing else for two years.

Anthony felt quite happy at coming back to his mother, because he knew she would not want him to be Tom.

Tom was not the race to Mrs. Arden as he had been to his father. He was Tom, and the son she held in her frail arms was Anthony.

“You must have tea at once,” she whispered tremulously. “It’s quite ready, and I hope you won’t mind eating a new-laid egg with it, it’s more solid. Oh, you’re so thin, my darling!”

“I’m not nearly so thin as you are, Mother,” said Anthony, trying to see her face through misty eyes. “By Jove! you’re like a little leaf!” His mother shook her head smilingly at him.

“I’m not thin, Anthony,” she murmured; “I’m only old.”

And then Anthony saw that was what had happened while he was away; his mother had grown old.

CHAPTER IV

The house was extraordinarily quiet. Anthony kept listening for the heavy tread of a sentry, the raucous cry of a German voice, or the sound of a restless fellow-prisoner turning on his bed. Instead, he felt like a tangible substance the guarded silence of the old, thick walls. He was glad he had the electric light fully on. It showed him that it was, after all, an ordinary, empty room, a place you could get in and out of easily.

It had been his own, and everything in it recalled the memories of his boyhood. He could count the roses on the worn carpet, and see the hole he had burned in it under the window by a drop of acid. The old oak wardrobe was roughened and eaten into by time. It had made a splendid shy hole for treasures, mixed up with superfluous underclothes.

The book-case in the corner held all Anthony's school prizes, a fine, solid row of young achievements. It had always hurt Anthony's feelings that the squire never cared to look at them, and it had hurt the squire's feelings that Anthony had cared to win them when Tom was content with cups and bats.

Everything in the room came back to Tom. Tom was in old school photograph groups on the walls. It had seemed incredibly important to Anthony at the time to buy them, though, as a form of decoration, they resembled a paper of pins, and now he could hardly remember the fellows' names. They were healthy, well-made boys, with short futures. Most of them were dead. Tom was usually sitting in the center with a cup or a presentation bat behind him. Anthony tried to hurry away from that well-known direct gaze, looking straight out of the photograph at him; but however fast he hurried, Tom's eyes followed him. Anthony tried to fix his mind instead upon the prints of Watts and Burne-Jones which he had bought with a sense of thrilled compulsion in his early twenties, and hadn't had time to get rid of afterward.

He remembered that he had once encouraged the tenderest fancies for the half-starved, anemic creatures with long necks and heavy hair; but he could not rouse in himself the faintest interest in these weary ladies now. Anthony had not wanted real women in his youth. He had been afraid of them, and later on he had despised women. It is always simpler for young

men to despise what they are afraid of: it makes them feel less afraid; but it sometimes gives them in later life more reason for fear.

Anthony despised women because he thought that they interfered with a man's work. Bad women interfered with it intermittently, and good women interfered with it all the time. They did not understand the abstract, and Anthony, perhaps fortunately for himself, had not time to stop and explain it to them. Anthony remembered a curious, wistful saying of Tom's: "It must make a fellow feel rather like the Almighty to keep as straight as you do." It *had* made Anthony feel rather like the Almighty, but his virtue had isolated him. In order to exercise it he had become rigid, and rigidity is seldom popular with women.

Anthony had never been a success with them. Either they wanted to attract Anthony, and found they couldn't, or they did not want to attract him, and suspected him of thinking they did. In either case women misled Anthony, and avoided him when they couldn't mislead him. But for the sake of Pannell he would have to marry now.

Anthony's mind slipped indolently over his sister's friends; he had none of his own under forty. "Women become interesting," he thought, "when they cease to be attractive."

Ursula's and Gladys's friends were far too young to suit him. They considered themselves grown up, of course. They had round, firm cheeks like pink tennis-balls, and the eyes of intelligent puppies. Physically they were everything a woman should be, but they never opened a book, and would look frightened and drop things if Anthony spoke to them.

Daphne's friends were of the right age, but she was apt to like clever women who had been misunderstood by their families. Anthony disliked women who were misunderstood, and he suspected all cleverness in women. If it was genuine, and not a mere ruse of the unattractive, he considered that it led to grave nervous disorders.

Anthony wanted a wife without a nerve, with great practical common sense, like the best type of elderly trained nurse. She must not be more than twenty-five years old, with plenty of knowledge of actual life and its processes and no abstract intelligence.

Abstract intelligence played the devil with women. They carried their emotions into it, and thought with their blood. They poured personality into the universe as a man pours water into a jug, and the universe was not made to hold personality. Women were never impersonal, and they were most dangerous when they were being clever about hiding it. They could not deal

straight with fact. They did not have even a temptation without a serpent to support it, and they were capable of melting down the multiplication table into a channel for personal drama. Anthony's thoughts became a little vague at this point. He did not exactly want to marry a woman without charm; but he had got his mind away from Tom, at all events, or thought he had.

An owl shrieked under his window. He knew it was an owl, but the shriek curiously haunted and disturbed him. He got out of bed and began to walk up and down the room; it did not help him very much, because he had already got all the help there is to be got from this form of exercise while he was a prisoner. Still, it was curiously better to think about prison than to think about Tom.

To-morrow he had promised to tell his people his experiences; his mother had helped him to put it off a day. It would be wiser, perhaps, to prepare beforehand what he meant to tell them. It wouldn't do if he ran off the rails anywhere and told them the truth.

It was not that the truth was so bad, but that you could not tell it. It was so misleading. It would be like giving a coherent explanation of Christian Science to a hard-headed business man with a toothache.

It would have been easier to tell them perhaps—everything would have been easier—if they had not all been so silent about Tom. That was what made the house so infernally full of his presence. There was nothing secret about Tom; he was the most open person alive: but now he was being hushed up until everything became aware of him.

The moment Anthony had entered the hall he had felt conscious of the weight of this silence. It was in the servants' faces, and had taken possession of inanimate things. The very walking-sticks in the hall seemed under the weight of it, and silence brooded over the staircase and in all the empty spaces of the rooms. Everything was waiting for Tom to come and use it; everything had belonged to Tom and was still his.

All the evening the house waited. They hadn't put off dinner, because that was a meal which was never put off for anybody; but when the clock struck eight all their eyes had gone to the door expectantly.

The squire gave an impatient sigh. He had always been impatient with Tom for being late, but he had never really minded. Nobody said anything; they had just gone in to dinner, and the squire had opened a bottle of old wine and been vexed with Anthony for not drinking more of it. Of course he was really vexed with Anthony for being Anthony, but he put it down to the wine.

Anthony made up his mind to speak of Tom to his father directly they were alone after dinner; but the words stuck in his throat. He was afraid of breaking into something that mustn't be broken into. He had a feeling that the beauty of his home was unsubstantial. He was intensely aware of it: the spotless, delicate linen; the shining, unobtrusive silver; the quiet comfort and security of all its simplest processes. It seemed to Anthony that the bared voice of pain might break it all to pieces. It would be like touching porcelain with a hammer.

He longed for his father to speak of Tom, but Mr. Arden said nothing. He was heroically accepting the return of the wrong son, and his heroism cost Anthony his father's confidence. Mr. Arden was kind to Anthony and even mildly cheerful, but he held his son away from his grief. The squire had not shared his sorrow even with his wife. He had spared her. "I think we won't talk of Tom, my dear, at present," was what he had said to her after the first few desolate hours, and Mrs. Arden had appeared spared. She had kissed him silently and left the room. Tom unspoken of had settled down upon the house; no one spoke of him, and no one remembered him as Tom, and no one forgot him as a grief. It made Anthony feel in some strange way as if he was to blame for not being killed as well. He had gone to bed as soon as he could, and even here he couldn't get away from his false impression of Tom.

He opened the door of his room and listened. The house was perfectly still; he could hear the old clock down-stairs creak each time its heavy pendulum swung to and fro.

It used to creak like that when he and Tom were in the night nursery up-stairs, and they came out of it to hang over the banisters to listen. If it was very dark and late, they sometimes thought it wasn't the clock, but a bad old man creeping up-stairs to catch them; but they never went back into the night nursery until they had stopped being afraid, because they knew they mustn't be cowards. They knew that as soon as they knew anything.

Tom's room was at the end of the passage nearest the stables, because Tom loved to hear the grooms hiss over the horses early in the morning. Anthony felt that he must go to Tom's room and find him. It wasn't any use waiting any longer; only Tom could drive away the weight of this delusive ghost.

Everything was in order, and except that the order was a little too perfect it looked just as it used to look when Tom was in it. There were his boating cups and sport trophies on the mantelpiece; a cricket-bat stood in the corner, and Tom's school cap with colors hung over his fishing-rod.

There was a row of pipes over the writing-table by the window, and a series of sporting prints decorated the walls.

Nothing had been changed; the familiar smell of good leather, a great deal used, lingered over all the furniture. Anthony went to the writing-table and picked up a small, shabby red book. It was called "My Friends' Opinions," and had been given to Tom by Daphne on his sixteenth birthday.

It contained a series of printed questions on one page, with blank spaces for answers upon the opposite side, and would probably, as far as Tom was concerned, have remained blank if he had not been overtaken by influenza and a rainy day.

This unfortunate combination had produced Tom's opinions, written in a round school-boy hand, and as he had not changed them since his sixteenth birthday, they remained the sole expression of his unexpressive personality.

Anthony picked up the book and read it slowly, as if he were listening to Tom's voice.

"What is your favorite flower?" the inquisition began.

Tom had written, "A rose," because he felt that he was safe with roses. You could not catch him out there; most people preferred roses.

"What is your favorite Christian name?"

Tom had felt this to be a snare, and had confused the issue. He had put "Bluebell" and "Eleanore." Bluebell was Tom's sole excursion into prose fancy. He had never met a "Bluebell," and the name corresponded to Anthony's Burne-Jones ladies. Eleanore was supported by fact; she was Tom's favorite mare.

"What character do you admire most in fiction?"

"*Hereward the Wake.*"

Hereward wasn't really a character at all, but all that fighting had made him sound like one to Tom, and his battle-cry was worth many austere virtues.

"In history?"

"Richard Cœur de Lion." Richard, too, had escaped the strictest moral elevation, but his title and the Holy Land preserved him.

"In real life?"

“My father.” There was nothing to be said to this statement except that in the day of calamity the squire had come across it and been enabled to hold up his head.

“Your favorite book?”

“‘Black Beauty’ and ‘Tom Brown’s School Days.’ Besides, these are the only ones I have read through by myself except when I had to.”

Hunting was, of course, Tom’s chief pastime.

The questions did not go very deeply into religious matters. Tom had got out of them neatly by mentioning “the Church of England” and “the Bible.”

The inquiry ended romantically with, “What is your favorite quotation?”

This surprised Anthony, for Tom had written “Those friends thou hast and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel.” Of course this was what Tom would do, but Anthony had not known that he read Shakspeare, and Tom had added another line, though he was obviously unaware that it did not belong to the quotation above it: “For truth is truth to the end of the reckoning.”

Anthony put the book down. He felt as if Tom couldn’t haunt him any more. Tom had got to the end of the reckoning first; that was all there was to it.

The night before Tom’s regiment had left England, Anthony had asked Tom what he thought about death. He had not put it like that of course, because Tom would not have known how to deal with an abstraction. He had said, “What do you feel about things, old chap? D’you mind awfully the idea of going out?” And Tom had answered after a pause, as if the question was not wholly new to him: “Oh, I don’t know. It seems simple enough. Look at rabbits—you know what I mean: you’re awfully alive one moment, and then just a little bit of limp fur the next. I’ve often thought it funny, but never particularly terrible. What do you feel about it yourself?”

“You mustn’t judge by my feelings,” Anthony had answered. “You see, it’s my profession to fight death. Frankly, I hate it. I’ve tried to get the better of it for years, but beyond a certain point you can’t. Nobody ever has. It downs you. I dare say I shan’t mind extinction for myself. The act of death is generally unconscious, and if it isn’t, it is so disagreeable that no sane man would wish to prolong it. I never have believed there was the ghost of a life afterward.”

This had shocked Tom considerably. He had said:

“Oh, well, you know, I believe in the church and all that up to a certain point, of course; and then there’s the Bible. I’m not a clever chap like you, but I honestly feel as if it must be all right somehow, if one does the best one can, you know, and all that. There must be something in it.”

Anthony smiled at this remembrance; then he shivered as he turned to go back to his own room.

He was wondering again if death had come to Tom quickly, like the shot rabbit, one moment all alive and next a little bit of limp flesh and blood, funny, but not terrible?

He dared not let himself think of the alternative, and either way, what *had* come afterward? Nothing, as he believed, or whatever it was that Tom was groping after, when he asserted that: “It must be all right somehow. There must be something in it.”

“For truth is truth to the end of the reckoning.” That was the only enigmatical statement that Anthony had ever known Tom endorse; for it was enigmatic to any one else but Tom.

It was all very well for Tom to talk as if truth was the next door neighbor’s pig, but how was Anthony to find it so ascertainable? And how could he bear not to find it, when it included, as it included now, the possibility of Tom’s own immortality?

There was a tentative scratch at the door. Max had awakened to find Anthony gone and tracked him methodically down the passage. Truth was not enigmatical to Max. He had only to follow his instincts, which led him unerringly in the direction of his master.

CHAPTER V

Anthony's breakfast was sent up to his room on a tray. He felt an absurd inclination to cry at the sight of the delicate linen, the golden creaminess of the butter, the liquid sunshine of a honeycomb, and the thin egg-shell china, white with a green sprig, which had been one of his mother's wedding presents.

He wished he could get used to the physical beauty of inanimate things. Beauty struck raw against his strained and awakened senses, like the piercing music of a violin.

After breakfast Anthony found his mother in the morning-room. She was always to be found there at the same time, interviewing servants, going over household accounts, or writing her family letters. Her even, blameless existence was full of little cares and arrangements for her family's comfort.

Nothing had ever broken into Mrs. Arden's habits. She was always willing to assist poor people if they had anything usual the matter with them; and if what they had the matter with them was unusual, she referred it to the squire.

The room looked south on to the terrace, fronting the downs. It was full of sunshine. On the table by the window stood a bowl of early daffodils. Mrs. Arden turned as Anthony came in.

"I hoped you'd come here, dear," she said as he kissed her. "I rather wanted you all to myself this morning. The girls are in the garden, and your father had to go out. While we are alone together, I want to show you all the wonderful letters about dear Tom. You would hardly believe people could be so kind; every one wrote to us."

Anthony sat down on the window-seat, and Mrs. Arden took out the letters.

They were kept in a long, open box on her writing-table, and labeled in her exquisite, neat hand-writing: "From Tom's friends." "From his relations." "From the people on the estate." "From his regiment." "From the clergy." "From public people."

"I think I like his friends' letters best," Mrs. Arden explained quietly. "They sound more like him, and some of the villagers wrote about when he

was a child. It is such a comfort to know how well he was understood and loved. What I like best is to think of him being remembered. I don't know how to put it quite, but when people live a very long time, they are connected with so many things and events, aren't they? Even if they're quite dull people, they don't drop out so easily; but short lives like Tom's might disappear and be lost,—I mean humanly speaking,—mightn't they, if people weren't specially kind about remembering? Dear Mr. Medal is so good to me! He preached a wonderful sermon on purpose to reassure me about the remembrances of God. I think that was what he called it. But of course one believes that God remembers; only sometimes (perhaps you'll understand what I mean better than Mr. Medal did), one wants to think the *earth* remembered Tom as well. He did so much for it, didn't he, here at Pannell?"

Anthony nodded. He knew exactly what his mother meant. He, too, had the same feeling. He wanted the earth to remember Tom—the earth which he had tended with such care and had slipped out of at the last so unobtrusively.

Anthony read the letters out loud to his mother. She sat beside him, with her hand on his arm, and every now and then she cried a little, because it was such a comfort having Anthony read the letters out loud to her.

Anthony read packet after packet, holding on to himself and keeping his voice even. When he had finished them all, Mrs. Arden said:

"Now, then, if you wouldn't mind telling me all about Germany before your father comes in, then I should really understand what you have been through."

Mrs. Arden could say "Germany" better than Mr. Arden could, but she couldn't for the life of her say "prison."

"I tried to read all that the newspapers said about it, you know, Anthony," she explained, "and all the books that came out on the subject. I am sure they were wonderfully written, and no doubt their authors knew all about their subjects, only, you see, they never said any of the things I particularly wanted to know. I dare say it was my fault. I am so stupid at understanding descriptions in books; I always wish people would just tell you what happened."

Anthony cleared his throat and looked at the daffodils.

"Perhaps," he said, "you had better ask me exactly what you do want to know." Anthony expected to get off rather cheaply with his mother. She was, as a rule, very easy to get off cheaply from. She never saw points very

clearly, her own or any one else's. He had not counted on her asking questions, which, if he hadn't been very careful, would have told her far too much. He did not know how the most ignorant fears, if they come direct from the heart, hit at truth.

Of course he was intensely careful. He got round all her questions, he evaded the sharp issues of her fears, and he told her the strictest minimum of painful things. The Ardens never frightened women except by reassuring them.

Mrs. Arden listened anxiously to Anthony's answers. She did not press her points. She saw after a few moments that Anthony was sparing her, and that it made it easier for him to spare her.

Once she sighed a little, and at the end she said:

"People's hair isn't usually so gray at twenty-eight, Anthony."

Anthony got out of that very cleverly. He said it was the climate. Quite young Germans had gray hair or else they were bald. She couldn't say his hair wasn't thick.

"And they were really nice to you," Mrs. Arden murmured, "after the first?"

Anthony had admitted to her that at first they weren't very nice to him.

"They were all right," he said a little restlessly—"what they had to be, you know, Mother. Guards aren't supposed to be friendly, and the commandant was quite a good fellow, really. He had to be a bit stiff, you know; that was what he was there for. I generally took him the complaints; he was always quite decent to me."

"And what complaints did you take him, dear?" Mrs. Arden softly questioned.

Anthony did not meet her eyes.

"Oh, ordinary prisoners' complaints, you know," he explained carelessly. "Sometimes we wanted more exercise, or the heating went wrong, or what we had in the way of food wasn't quite up to the mark. You know the kind of thing."

Mrs. Arden was silent for a moment. She was not quite sure that she did know the kind of thing, but she saw that Anthony wanted her to know it. Then she said:

“Your father has asked Mr. Medal to dine with us to-night. He wants so much to see you again and to hear your experiences, and so does your father, of course. I thought perhaps you would tell them after dinner, when the girls and I had gone, you know.”

Anthony stiffened. He did not want to see the vicar or to tell him his experiences; he saw that his mother thought he would talk more freely to the two men.

He did not guess that she thought it would be good for him to talk more freely, and still less that if he had told her everything, she would not have known more surely than she did what he had suffered.

“I suppose I shall have to see Medal sooner or later,” he agreed after a pause, “only I don’t want to see people just yet or to be asked questions. I don’t mean yours, Mother, of course. It isn’t that one’s had such a hard time, you know. Most fellows have had a far worse one; only one wants to get used to things gradually.”

“Yes, dear, I understand,” said Mrs. Arden, gently. “Only, of course, you’ll want to tell your father, and I thought Mr. Medal might be a help. After all, he’s almost like one of ourselves.”

“He isn’t much like one of me,” said Anthony, with a rueful grin. “You forget he hasn’t got over my shocking opinions. He told me that I was the most poisoned skeptic he ever prepared for confirmation.”

Mrs. Arden smiled.

“Well, dear,” she said, “haven’t *you* got over your shocking opinions yet? I think one does, as one gets older, cease to shock.”

But Anthony had not got as old as that yet.

“I’m not the least more religious, if that’s what you mean, Mother,” he confessed a little uncomfortably.

Mrs. Arden sighed gently, but she waived the question. She did not think that with a really good man like Anthony it mattered very much what he thought he believed. Mrs. Arden never interfered with men’s opinions or children’s toys; it was her experience that they both preferred what you would least have chosen for them. But that as long as they were kept amused, it did not greatly matter what object their choice fell upon.

“Max is longing to take you round the garden,” she said. “You’ll find the girls out there waiting for you; they want to show you their improvements. They’ve been really wonderful since the war, you know, helping your father

on the estate; and Ursula is quite pretty, but not, of course, as pretty as Daphne. Go out and be nice to them; and don't, if you can help it, be too clever, Anthony."

Anthony couldn't really help it. He always had been too clever for the rest of his family. His mother and Daphne overlooked it, but it stuck in the throats of the others; they found it as difficult to swallow as a fishbone.

Ursula and Gladys did what they could with him. They strolled round the park together, and showed him where they had planted potatoes when the Government had made all that fuss about potatoes, and how much ground they had persuaded father to have cut up into allotments for the villagers. Ursula knew all about the land. It had been her war work, and she was rather disappointed to find that Anthony knew something about it, too. He was apologetic over his knowledge, but he had to admit that he had picked up a thing or two in Germany, and had ideas of his own.

Gladys had been a V.A.D. and of course she expected Anthony to talk to her about the extraordinary cases they had had in their cottage hospital. All their cases had been extraordinary, and what was the use of having a doctor in the family if you couldn't talk things over with him, and tell the other V.A.D.'s afterward where they were wrong? But Anthony said it was no use theorizing about a case you hadn't seen; you might as well try to paint a picture from a description of your great-grandmother.

When they asked him about his experiences in Germany he told them how he and the other officers had got up charades and mock parliamentary debates. They had had really tremendous fun over woman's suffrage, and Anthony had argued on both sides so persuasively that nobody had been able to guess what his real opinions were.

"But you do believe in suffrage now, don't you?" both his sisters cried breathlessly. "Almost everybody does since the war. It's not a bit like what it was when the Suffragettes were so silly, and father got so angry about it. Besides, we've got the vote!"

"It seems to me exactly what it was," said Anthony, aggravatingly, "and I always agreed with it. That is to say, I always agreed women had as much right as they had ability; until they have the right, of course we cannot judge of their ability. My theory has always been, if you want people to hang themselves, give them the longest rope."

"But do you want them to hang themselves?" Ursula asked uncertainly. "That's not being on their side, is it?"

Anthony looked from one flushed young face to the other. He felt he was, after all, tremendously on the side of women. But he was not considering them at all as they wished him to consider them: an intense tenderness pervaded his judgment.

His sisters were eighteen and twenty years old, bewilderingly young and untried. Nothing had finished for them, nor had they ever seen the betrayal of illusion.

The war had been a great call on their young and unawakened energies; they had met it dauntlessly, protected from all its horrors and free from its indelible stains. The tragic early deaths of their contemporaries had saddened and ennobled their lives. They had been tried by sorrow, but they had not been brutalized by pain. They had made the sacrifice of the pleasures of their class and race with a willing heart. All that had come to them and all that they had given up had developed and enriched them.

They had found out what was in themselves, and had acted capably and conscientiously on the material that lay to their hands. Beauty had never left them; love and companionship remained the unconscious support of their lives. They had never been terrified or beaten down or come to the end of their tether. Anthony, looking at their smooth young faces and fearless eyes, hoped passionately that they would continue to escape all such realities. If he had believed in prayer, he would have prayed that they might never know anything more terrible than their protected duty. He looked away from them so that they should not see his haunted eyes.

“I am on your side” he said after a long pause, “more, perhaps, than you know. As to believing in you as individuals, I believe in you very strongly. It’s quite a part of my creed to believe in my sisters.”

Neither Ursula nor Gladys was satisfied with this answer. They didn’t wish to be believed in as sisters, and they couldn’t explain what they did wish, so they showed Anthony the stables instead.

There was no doubt that Mr. Medal helped at dinner. He had a great deal of natural tact, and a good many openings arose for the use of it. The squire was irritable. He did not like Anthony’s ideas about land, he suspected him of socialism; and though, of course, a certain amount of socialism had to be let in to save worse, if Anthony was socialistic, it wouldn’t be in the kind of way that the “Times” suggested canny landlords should adopt.

Mrs. Arden was nervous because she thought it would be unfortunate if politics or religion turned up; but when there are one or two large subjects

which it would be unfortunate to mention, the conversation has a strange way of turning slap in their direction, especially if you are nervous about it.

The girls were a little nervous, too, because they felt they had the position of women to uphold before Anthony, and were not quite sure that their father and Mr. Medal would remember to show Anthony that they were quite grown up.

Mr. Medal did, however; he remembered it beautifully. He recounted all the girls had done for the cottage hospital, drew out the squire's well-known theories on agricultural prospects, and touched lightly on the histories of village families (not related to the footmen) in a way that did credit to his cloth.

Mrs. Arden kept thinking:

“How wonderful clergymen are! I am sure they must be specially helped.”

And Mr. Arden gradually thawed over the food. It was very good food, but if the conversation had gone wrong, he would have thought it wasn't. They did not talk about anything painful till the women had left the room; then the squire said:

“Now, Anthony, my boy, we should like to hear how those scoundrels treated you. Let's have the whole thing from the start, without any gloves on. I understand you were all taken in a lump, the men on your flanks having retreated without your knowing it. They killed some of you after you had surrendered, didn't they?”

Anthony looked down at the white tablecloth and began to play nervously with his empty glass. It had been a very long day. Of course he wasn't going to break down and see things, and only housemaids scream. He would get through quite easily if he just steered clear of a few awkward corners.

“Three hundred of us were taken together,” he began in a low, even voice, “but they killed about fifty or sixty before they were stopped by a fat man with glasses. I think he was a Bavarian. He said, ‘My God! these are men, not chickens.’ My leg was broken, so I was on the ground.” This was an awkward corner. Anthony couldn't tell them anything about that. He went on hurriedly:

“It was awfully cold, you know, in December, and we had five days on the train. For two days we hadn't any water,—I think it was two days,—and I don't remember much about the food on the journey. The guards were

rather rough. I was in a hospital for three months. It was quite well managed, on the whole, a little dirty, according to our ideas; probably on account of the nursing. Some of the nurses behaved well, and others didn't. There were one or two who took the patients' food, and nobody had any too much food.

"For the first six months we had rather a bad time; that was before we got the letters and parcels regularly. We were shunted about a good deal in cold, badly arranged camps; the bedding was very insufficient.

"We must remember that the Germans were not organized for a long war. They expected a short war and great victories, but not large quantities of prisoners to keep indefinitely without any prospect of final victory; and then there was the blockade."

"Ah, yes; we had them there," said the squire, cheerfully. "What happened when you made complaints about the food?"

"We didn't make complaints then," said Anthony, slowly. He looked up across the shaded electric lights, covered with yellow silk in the shape of tulips, at Mr. Medal's face. Mr. Medal was following Anthony with kindly intentness and peeling a walnut. He had a benevolent, comfortable face, with fixed ideas behind it. It was quite funny to think what his face would look like if a shrieking woman had spat into it and called him a cursed pig-dog.

When Mr. Medal was preparing Anthony for confirmation he had warned him against certain temptations which he might be called upon to face in his future life. A scene in the prison camp flashed before Anthony's eyes; it was another of his awkward corners. There was a temptation in it, but not in the least like anything the vicar had mentioned.

"When I could walk all right," he went on after a short pause, "I was put in the Westphalian camp I told you about, Father. It was in a bad sanitary condition; there was a great deal of dysentery and light typhoid, with some graver cases. I made complaints then, regularly, till they altered the conditions. I wasn't very popular with the authorities. You have no idea how difficult it is to face a well-fed, angry man and state your rights as a human being. When you are rather down in the mouth, you do not feel as if you have any rights, and they don't either, of course."

"They're not human beings at all!" shouted the squire, banging his fist on the table. "Damned bullying blackguards!"

Anthony jumped as if his father had struck him.

“It’s funny your saying that, sir,” he said after a pause. “They struck me as very human always, and very like some of our own people. It occurred to me that we might be treating Germans just the same if we thought of them what they thought of us. I often used to wonder if we weren’t. War makes people untruthful.”

“My dear boy,” said Mr. Medal, softly, before the squire could interfere, “it is your rundown condition which makes you feel like this. An underfed brain is hardly master of itself.”

“That’s quite true,” agreed Anthony, “and yet you have no idea how clearly one sees things when one is underfed. One sees everything as clear as glass. And not only the usual things, but what people are thinking as well, and why they think it. It is curiously disturbing to see so many things so plainly, and not be able to help them.”

He pulled himself up; this wasn’t what he had meant to say at all.

“We cleaned the camp,” he went on, “and the condition of the men improved greatly, and the rest of the time we just—well, you know—waited. I got a certain amount of exercise allowed me, and I taught the men Swedish drill to make them fit. They let me act as camp doctor, with a German medico to refer to if I needed outside help.

“I used to need outside help, you see, when any one went mad.”

Mr. Medal stopped peeling walnuts.

“Mad!” spluttered the squire. “What d’you mean, my boy? What did any one go mad for?”

And then what Anthony was afraid might be going to happen to him happened. He began to see things. He caught hold of the table to steady himself, and his glass rolled on to the floor and smashed to pieces. He tried to get up and go outside the circle of the light. Light infuriated as well as terrified him.

He saw the vicar’s face in a kind of blur jumping between him and the pictures, his large, round, contented face as frightened as a startled rabbit.

Anthony’s teeth began to chatter, and he felt he was going to scream. He caught hold of his lips and bit them till the blood came. That helped him to get to the window and open it without screaming. The cool, clean air from the downs caught and soothed him like the touch of a friendly hand.

He stood there breathing deeply, while the merciful, soft darkness covered up all he could not forget. The things themselves had never been so

terrible as the pictures. Anthony had been able to deal with what had happened, but he could not deal with the memories of what had happened. They ripped his self-control as if it was calico.

He felt his father's hand on his shoulder.

"Are you all right, my boy?" the squire asked unsteadily.

"Quite all right, sir," said Anthony.

For a moment they stood there together, and it seemed to Anthony as if some ineradicable stubbornness of blood connected him with his father and his father with him. It was an instinct stronger than any misunderstanding.

The squire said nothing, and in a minute they were all three sitting around the table as if nothing had happened.

Mr. Medal looked the most disturbed of the three.

Anthony finished his experiences quite comfortably without any awkward corners.

"D'you know, Mary," said the squire when he joined his wife in their room, "those German pirates have upset that boy of ours; I don't think I quite took it in at first. His nerve's shaken. What do you think we'd better do about it? Medal suggests sea-bathing. Did you notice the boy was at all upset?"

Mrs. Arden looked at the back of the squire's head with tender exasperation.

"Yes, dear," she said. "When I gave him his tea—when he first came in, you know—his hands shook. Anthony always has such perfectly steady hands. I don't think sea-bathing would help him at all. I want him to go and stay with Daphne. So many young people run in and out there in such a simple, free-and-easy way, I think it might be good for him. I have written to Daphne about it. It seems to me that some really nice girl, whose people we knew all about, would quiet Anthony's nerves down better than anything."

"Marry him?" said the squire, reflectively. "That's what you're up to, is it? Well, of course he's Pannell to think of now; but falling in love mightn't have such a quieting effect as you seem to fancy, Mary. I can remember that it had rather a stimulating effect on me."

"It depends," said his wife, slipping his pocket-handkerchief under his pillow, "on whom you fall in love with. I specially said to Daphne—a nice, quiet girl."

CHAPTER VI

Ruth Mellicot had perhaps rather too classic a brow; it rose above her clear gray eyes, white and firm and a little high. She would have made a perfect model for Minerva.

She had been to Girton, and besides a very quiet manner and an ability to follow the points of an argument, however abstruse, she spoke in a low, pleasant voice very agreeable to listen to. There was no reason why it should make people feel as if they had gone back to the school-room.

Both Daphne and Jim liked her extremely. She was a woman to be relied upon in every emergency and she was never in the way. She was modern in her ideas, without coming into conflict with respectability. She had grasped the convenient truth that it is well to think a century ahead, and to act a century behind the present. She was very open-minded about the other world and extremely clear-headed about this one.

Anthony could talk to her upon any subject he liked. He had always thought it was absurd that women should have to be talked to as if the facts of life did not exist for them in the presence of the opposite sex. If you wanted to know what a woman thought about life, she should be capable of telling you without shirking facts or showing embarrassment.

Ruth was perfectly capable of telling Anthony what she thought upon any subject; she shirked nothing, and it was Anthony who felt embarrassed. She regarded him with her grave, candid eyes as if they were fellow-students at a lecture, discussing one of the subjects in their course. She said that men and women must work together on the dissecting-tables of life, and doctors do not like illustrations about dissecting-tables. Daphne argued afterward with Jim that they oughtn't to have been left so much alone together.

It was wonderful weather for April, the kind of weather that seemed designed for long country rambles, teas at wayside inns, and late returns in time to dress for dinner. Anthony had explained to Daphne that if she wanted him really to make friends with Ruth Mellicot, they must be a great deal alone together. He made friends slowly, and he did not think women ever showed their real selves before a third person.

When Daphne said, "Do they before a second?" Anthony smiled the smile of a man who has reason to believe in his own power of discrimination, and replied that they probably did it unconsciously.

Ruth looked very well in coats and skirts, and walking suited her. In the evening she did not show to such advantage. Good walkers seldom do. She was not exactly clumsy, but her figure appeared rather pointless. When she moved she seemed to be shouldering her way through obstacles. There was very little slope to her shoulders, and her elbows and wrists were more prominent than they should have been.

Her conversation was extremely interesting. She read the newspapers carefully, and Anthony never heard her jump ahead of her facts. Ruth did not always share Anthony's opinions, but she was prepared to listen to his arguments, and he could see that on the whole she wanted to agree with him.

Ruth was twenty-five, and in a sensible, unferocious way she wished to get married. She hoped to find a man of her class with steady principles, a moderate income, and more or less the same ideals. A man who would wish to have a happy, hygienic home, two or three healthy children, and who had a genuine desire to improve the world up to a certain point. Ruth did not wish a crank; cranks wish to improve the world unreasonably and involve their personal futures in their efforts. Ruth did not think this a very necessary or desirable attitude. People's individual futures should run on one line, and their efforts to reform the world should run on another, and these two lines should be parallel and never meet. When she said she feared fanatics and disliked cranks this was what she meant. It is what people usually do mean. Anthony agreed with her, only he meant something a little different. Before he had been two years in prison he would have meant something exactly the same.

Ruth studied Anthony much as he was studying her. She had the same prospect in view; if she liked him, she meant to marry him.

It did not annoy Anthony to guess this fact. On the contrary, it rather amused him. He liked her quiet, appraising eyes and her distinct and unevasive questions. Sometimes he found them a little too difficult to answer, but he appreciated her asking them. She was not at all eager to attract him, which would have frightened him, nor did she appear to be greatly attracted by him.

Their cards were all out on the table, and they played them in turn without any effort at concealment. It sent Daphne and Jim into fits of laughter.

Daphne and Jim weren't superior about their happiness. It was a child of so much danger and uncertainty that even now when life appeared open before it, they walked delicately, like an Agag, and hid the sharpness of their joy. But they could not hide their happiness itself. They existed in a charmed circle of love, and though they looked over the edge of it from time to time, their inner life was complete, and uninterrupted by the actions of others.

"Of course," Anthony observed to Daphne when Ruth had left them to change her shoes, most sensibly, without a suggestion from Anthony, after they had been caught in a shower, "it's an immense comfort to hear exactly what a woman thinks about things. I appreciate it awfully and all that, you know. Miss Mellicot's just been telling me what she expects of a husband. Daphne, if you laugh into your tea like that you'll choke. Only it occurred to me to wonder if you'd ever put it quite like that to Jim."

"My dear," said Daphne, chuckling, "as if I should have dared! And if I had dared, it wouldn't have mattered. You see, I never thought about him in the least like that. I don't now. He was just Jim."

"Still," Anthony protested, "you must have said to yourself some time or other before you fell in love with him: 'What kind of fellow is this, good or bad? Would he make a good father for my children? That kind of thing—what?'"

Daphne's eyes brimmed with laughter. She shook her head violently.

"I never said anything of the kind," she answered him. "I always thought of him as Jim, *not* as a man, and I was terrified he'd fall out of his aeroplane and be killed before I knew if he really loved me, and I didn't think about anybody's children for millions of years afterward. Of course I dare say goodness was a part of his being Jim, but not nearly *all* of it. Badness wouldn't have mattered if it hadn't altered him. Of course I suppose some kinds of badness *do* really alter people. That must be awful, like losing your way in a fog—your way *home*—when you *know* it so frightfully well really; but it wouldn't stop being your home, would it?"

Daphne became quite serious, looking at Anthony over her bread and butter. It was funny to think of Ruth and Anthony, but it wasn't funny to think how badness might alter love.

"Of course," said Anthony, "neither Miss Mellicot nor I sentimentalize nature. If you act on sane principles, sufficient emotion will follow later; only—" his face slightly clouded as he regarded his sister's shining eyes—"I must confess, Daphne, just between you and me, you know, that it's rather like going to a dentist without a toothache."

“Doesn’t it ache the least little bit?” Daphne asked with anxiety as Ruth came into the room.

Anthony shook his head, and looked consideringly at the tall, tidy young woman in front of the tea-table. Ruth did her hair very well. It was bright, smooth, brown hair, and very thick.

“Not in the least, thanks,” said Anthony a little dryly. “I haven’t felt even a preliminary twinge. Won’t you have one of these little pink things, Miss Mellicot?”

“I’ll have bread and butter first, please,” said Ruth. “It’s the good old nursery rule, isn’t it?”

And then the door opened, and Kitty came in.

She did not wait to be announced as “Miss Costrelle.” She simply threw a long, blue chiffon scarf on a chair, followed by a gold handbag and a perfectly insufficient umbrella with a jeweled handle; then she embraced Daphne.

“I know I oughtn’t to have come,” she said apologetically, for the only welcome Daphne gave her was to say reproachfully, “O Kitty! Kitty!”

“It was only tea. I literally was dying for some on the doorstep, and the next house was miles off and full of women who hate me like poison, and won’t say so except when they think I’m looking the other way. And I thought you wouldn’t like Jimmy to find me just *dead* on the mat. It would make him think you such a bad housekeeper.

“This is your brother, isn’t it? I’ve met Miss Mellicot before, I believe. I’m awfully afraid of her. You are the one who went to Girton, aren’t you? I can’t think why Daphne has such awfully clever friends; she isn’t a bit clever herself, really, is she, Captain Arden? Of course I know *you* are, but men don’t matter. One isn’t afraid of *their* cleverness.”

“Give her her tea,” said Daphne, resignedly. She seemed to be simultaneously annoyed and amused at the appearance of her unexpected visitor. “She’s not really afraid of anybody’s cleverness.”

Kitty laughed over her tea-cup at Anthony. Her eyes, which were almost black and a little narrow at the corners, laughed, too; her long emerald earrings laughed at him. Everything about her glittered and sparkled, and seemed in some strange way directed straight at Anthony.

She took what color there was out of Miss Mellicot as sunshine takes the light out of a fire.

“Of course I’ve heard all about you,” she said, making room for Anthony on the sofa beside her. “Daphne’s really awfully fond of me, though you mightn’t think it. I’m one of her secret sins. She keeps me for dull, rainy days, as you keep chocolates and tell people you have a headache, and then shut yourself up with a box of them and a good detective story. Don’t you ever do that? Don’t you, Miss Mellicot?”

“I never eat chocolates,” said Ruth, coldly.

Daphne groaned inwardly. It was not the moment for Ruth to repudiate chocolates.

Kitty opened her eyes wider than ever. She had black lashes which curled upward, and when she laughed her eyelashes swept together and made her look as if her eyes were shut.

“Wouldn’t Miss Mellicot make a good food-controller?” Kitty murmured. “Perhaps you were one during the war, Miss Mellicot? I often wondered who the Government really got hold of. I don’t believe men did that kind of thing themselves, poor dears. There must have been some really clever people behind the scenes who knew just how much food there really was, and what was absolutely necessary for babies. Somebody very competent who didn’t mind people not having what they wanted.”

“Do you suppose that women are the only sex who wish to deprive others of what they want?” asked Miss Mellicot, disdainfully. “You don’t appear to have a high opinion of your sisters.”

“They’re the only people who really seem to mind my having what I want,” said Kitty, plaintively. “Still, of course, it wouldn’t be any fun getting it if nobody minded your having it, would it? Do you play billiards, Captain Arden? Yes?” Anthony nodded.

“They have a really good table here,” Kitty said, directing a glance at Daphne’s increasing gravity. “I’ve finished my tea now, and it’s begun to rain again, so I can’t possibly go home. It would be such a pity to spoil this hat, wouldn’t it, Miss Mellicot? But perhaps you don’t wear hats?”

“Not such perishable ones—in the country,” agreed Miss Mellicot, smoothly.

“It would die in a good cause,” said Anthony with appreciation, studying the golden wing that rested on Kitty’s dark, wavy hair.

Miss Mellicot’s lips tightened. It was the first time Anthony had seen her with tight lips. They accentuated her likeness to Minerva.

Kitty smiled at Anthony. Then she turned coaxingly to Daphne.

“We may just as well have a game now, mayn’t we, Daphne?” she urged. “Or is it bad for Captain Arden to play billiards?”

“It’s remarkably good for him,” said Anthony, quickly.

He had an intense desire to get Kitty away from Miss Mellicot. Of course it was Kitty who was behaving badly, but, curiously enough, it was not Miss Mellicot whom Anthony wished to take away from Kitty.

Miss Mellicot behaved extremely well. It is quite compatible with behaving well to look like one of the Muses in the Vatican. There is a didactic Muse fronting the stairs, who keeps a thin little finger very levelly lifted. She seems to warn the approaching onlooker not to be carried away by his feelings.

Miss Mellicot did not lift her finger. She merely turned her eyes a little fixedly on Anthony. Anthony avoided her glance. Perhaps some day it would be his domestic duty to meet fixed glances and reply to them, but at present he slipped into fluidity. He hurried out of the room behind Kitty.

When they were in the hall, with the door shut, Kitty turned and laughed at him.

“Now,” she said, “I know you are *really* brave, Captain Arden. Do you know how I should describe Miss Mellicot?”

“No,” said Anthony; “but I have no doubt your description would be picturesque and a little unfair.”

“No, it wouldn’t,” said Kitty, petulantly, throwing open the billiard-room door. “I shouldn’t be a bit unfair to her. I should describe her as a perfect wife and mother.”

Anthony found himself saying in a tone which he had never dreamed of using with Ruth Mellicot:

“*You* deserve to have your ears boxed.” But it was a perfectly suitable tone to use with Kitty. She merely made a face at him over her shoulder.

He watched her with delight swing down her cue and chalk it. She had fine little hands and delicate wrists; her short skirts revealed the neatest feet and ankles Anthony had ever seen. Every line of her small, graceful figure told. She was beautifully dressed, with that unnecessary expensive luxury which Ruth and Anthony had mutually deplored in modern women.

Anthony could hear the rustle of her silk petticoats as she swung round, and see through her transparent chiffon blouse the lace and ribbons under it. Kitty's lips were artificially reddened, and her small, tip-tilted nose was powdered. She had taken no pains to disguise the fact. She was a minx, a flirt, and a perfectly obvious danger-signal to any sane man.

And yet almost all sane men would have done precisely what Anthony did. He followed her into the billiard-room to see what she was up to.

She heaved a little sigh of relief when the door closed.

"I don't really like women, you know," she told him, "except Daphne, and not Daphne when she's cross with me, and she's awfully cross with me to-day. Still she's generally kind to me; other women aren't."

"I should hardly suppose that you gave them much reason to be," said Anthony, with his eyes on the poise of her figure bending over the table.

"Still," said Kitty, looking up at him with dancing eyes, "I don't know that I give men much *reason*, and yet men are always kind to me, even awfully clever ones like you. And even when I behave—and I do sometimes behave, you know—like a perfect fiend."

"I can well believe it," said Anthony. "Do you like to start, or shall I?"

Anthony did not believe that Kitty could really play billiards. He thought billiards was one of her ways of escape from other women. But he was mistaken. Kitty played a most excellent game of billiards, and was really fond of it; only she could play more than one game at a time.

"I'm being a fiend now," said Kitty in a low voice, like a subdued child's. "Perhaps you didn't know it, but I am—a fiend to Daphne. I promised not to come all the while you were here. Wasn't it awful to break it, when Daphne's been so tremendously good to me, and Jim, too, only Jim doesn't count. And it wasn't true about the tea—it was just curiosity."

"Well," said Anthony, "I hope your curiosity is satisfied agreeably. May I ask why you promised not to come here during my visit?"

Kitty measured her shot carefully, took it successfully, and looked up at him.

"Daphne thought I should be bad for you," she said. "You see, I am usually supposed to be rather bad for men."

Anthony aimed, and missed. It was an easy stroke and Anthony couldn't think how he had come to miss it.

“Do you try to be?” he asked her.

Kitty hung her head.

“Sometimes I try to be,” said Kitty.

“Are you trying now?” Anthony asked her. “Because I rather fancy you’re putting me off my game.”

“I don’t want to do that,” said Kitty, quickly; “not a bit. Do you *like* Miss Mellicot? Is she a great comfort to you, I mean? If you were unhappy, you couldn’t put your head against her as if she were a cushion, could you? It would be rather like leaning against one of those marble block tombstones, the ones that lie flat on the ground, and you feel no one could resurrect under them. Of course she has quite a good figure, really; only I’m *sure* her bones are hard.”

“I have not attempted to take that particular form of comfort from Miss Mellicot, if that is what you are asking me,” said Anthony, trying hard to keep his gravity. “It’s your turn, I think. I’ve missed again; there must be something wrong about my confounded cue.”

“Use mine for a change,” said Kitty, sweetly. “I hope you don’t mind what I said about Miss Mellicot’s bones?”

Anthony did not mean to touch Kitty’s hand; the thing simply happened. He felt it slim and warm under his fingers. Kitty’s long eyelashes fell over her eyes and hid them. He could not tell if what had happened had happened purposely; he only knew that it was difficult to take away his hand.

“You haven’t said if you really like her,” declared Kitty after a pause.

“I really like her very much,” said Anthony, dryly.

“Now it’s your turn again,” said Kitty, gaily. “You ought to be more careful this time, Captain Arden. I don’t believe you took aim properly before. I’m rather glad you like her as little as that.”

It occurred to Anthony that probably when other men were alone with Kitty, and she said this kind of thing, they kissed her. The thought of it stung him intolerably.

“Look here,” he said fiercely, “why do you talk to me as if you cared a hang what I think of anybody? You know you don’t. I suppose it’s your usual way of talking to men you’ve met half an hour ago, but I tell you plainly I don’t care for it. You’ve no right to behave as if it mattered to you

what I think when it doesn't, or as if it mattered to me what *you* think when —when—”

“When it doesn't?” asked Kitty, softly. “It's rather horrid of you to say that, even if it's true.”

“Well, you haven't any right—” said Anthony, sulkily. He wouldn't look at her, but he knew perfectly well what she looked like. She had caught her upper lip with one of her teeth and was trying to prevent herself smiling.

“As if having rights mattered,” said Kitty. “You are silly, Captain Arden.”

Anthony put down his cue deliberately and faced her.

“I don't know this game,” he said quietly. “Am I supposed to kiss you? Because in about twenty seconds that is what is going to happen whether I am supposed to or not.”

Kitty tossed her head defiantly, then said unexpectedly:

“Oh, I am a mean little cur to break my promise to Daphne,” and without a word of explanation she flung herself into one of Jim's neat leather arm-chairs, buried her head in her arms, and shook pitifully with sobs.

Anthony found himself on his knees beside her, with one arm across her shoulders.

“Don't; don't, my dear child, my dear baby!” he whispered. “If I was a brute and rough, I'm awfully sorry. I won't touch you. You can say whatever naughty, silly thing you like. Is that what you're crying for?”

Kitty shook her head. She was crying without tears, as boys do who have been beaten in a race.

Anthony drew her into his arms and held her close against him. She made no effort to release herself, nor did she seem aware of him. She fought silently to control her sobs. Anthony felt as if he had a bird's heart throbbing under his hand. She was such an exquisite, delicate creature! Perfume and softness breathed from her small crushed figure. At last Kitty raised her head and pushed away his encircling arms.

“I'll tell you,” she said. “I know it wasn't fair even to cry; but I couldn't help that. Just for a moment you looked, when you were angry, so like Dick—that was why I came to see you; I have such a funny feeling, as if I must see the men who do come back. You see, Dick and I were engaged. But he went off so quickly, before we could be married. He was in the regular army

—Mons—and then he was missing. I couldn't stop hoping. I hoped quite awfully and steadily for two years, then I knew it was no good. I didn't care what happened then. I don't care now, and I never shall in the least care what happens. I just amuse myself."

Anthony put his hands on her shoulders and met her defiant eyes; beneath the defiance he saw her frightened, broken heart.

He saw her as Daphne had seen her, not as the easier men who flirted with her saw her, or as the angry women whose jealousy she roused saw her. The pity and the waste of it went through him like a knife.

"You poor little thing!" he said gently. "You poor, dear little thing!"

She sprang away from him quickly.

"No, no," she said; "I'm *not* like that. I'm not poor. You needn't be sorry for me. I do just as I like, and I enjoy myself awfully. I dare say I shall enjoy myself awfully with you. I'm sorry I made such a fuss. I haven't cried like that for ages. It was just—that you reminded me; besides, I could see you've had a pretty bad time yourself. If you'd really liked that woman, I'd have left you alone. You do believe that, don't you?"

"I propose to believe everything you ever tell me," said Anthony, steadily. "But aren't you going to leave me alone?"

She turned and faced him.

"Do you want me to?" Kitty asked. Her eyes widened again, the corners of her mouth quivered, all of her became as it had been before—a glittering, dancing, creature, as bright and strong as a steel magnet.

Anthony made a few steps toward her.

"No," he said reluctantly; "I suppose I don't want you to leave me alone."

CHAPTER VII

Miss Mellicot behaved extremely well. She did not go away at once, and she never in Anthony's presence referred to Kitty. What she said to Daphne on the subject of Kitty, in the privacy of her bedroom, might have been taken from the most outspoken of the classics. She had not been to Girton for nothing.

Miss Mellicot was direct, and in her quiet and ladylike voice she stripped the career of Kitty Costrelle of all the pity and tenderness with which Daphne had attempted to cover it.

"It does not do to sentimentalize about facts, Daphne," Ruth told her. "This is the kind of girl you have chosen for a friend, and your brother, whose judgment is much less sound than I thought, has had to take the consequences."

"As if," Daphne said afterward indignantly to Jim, "you could arrange human beings in pockets, like cocoa—so much hot water to so much sugar—and know exactly what kind of cup you were going to get at the end of it."

But at the time Daphne could think of no evasive comparisons. She was crushed under the weight of fact. She had gone to Ruth's bedroom because she was afraid that Ruth would be unhappy, but Ruth was not unhappy. She was very seldom unhappy, and she was almost invariably right.

Jimmy drove Miss Mellicot to the station at the end of the week, when her visit came to a not too noticeable close.

Anthony had meant to fulfil this office, but he came in so late for lunch that he had to be left in the dining-room with some reproachfully cold mince.

Anthony assured himself that he was under no obligation to Miss Mellicot, and that she was far too sensible a woman to suppose that he was; but as he stood by the French window in the dining-room watching her drive off with Jim, he felt a little uncomfortable.

Miss Mellicot looked very well in a high dog-cart. Her veils and pins never betrayed her, and she kept her hat on without visible effort. These traits are indicative of character, the kind of character which Anthony particularly liked; and yet when the dog-cart had disappeared from view

behind the laurel-bushes, Anthony returned to his cold mince with a sigh of unmistakable relief.

He had kept his own counsel for forty-eight hours while he considered that he was thinking things over. Anthony told himself that he was not going to act precipitately about Kitty. He was going to ask Daphne a few straight questions first.

When he had finished his lunch he went out into the garden to ask them. Merry Gardens was not an old place, like Pannell; it was a comfortable, two-storied house, which rambled conveniently enough between a cedar-tree on a small, sloping lawn to the edge of the fields, which swallowed it up on three sides.

Daphne lay in a hammock under the cedar-tree planning new beds for the following spring. It was an absorbing occupation, and peculiarly difficult to carry on in a hammock, owing to the size of garden-books, the fluttering quality of catalogues, and the hopelessness (in a hammock) of once letting go of a pencil.

She did not hear Anthony approach, and he sat for some time gazing straight in front of him before he broached the question of Kitty. His eyes absorbed the pleasant, easy landscape of Rochett.

Essex is supposed to be an ugly county by those who do not live in it, but it contrives, once you get away from the endless ramifications of Liverpool Street Station, to have a very pretty little air of its own. It is like one of those women who, without being showily attractive, know how to carry their heads.

As a county it frequently ignores its reputation for flatness, and breaks away into the roundness of small, covered hills, and no one has ever accused Essex of not being green.

From the cedar-tree on the lawn the fields sloped softly away into innumerable folds of wooded copse and distant orchards. The rich pasture-lands glowed in the mild April sunshine with a light that was all their own. It had none of the emphatic clarity of the South, or the delicate, fine shades of northern Europe; it was a soft and lovely coloring that caused in Anthony an unexpected tightening of the heart.

When he had been given six weeks' solitary confinement in a whitewashed cell for making too many complaints about the condition of his camp, he had been haunted by just such a landscape. He slipped his hand out

to touch the rough bark of the cedar, to make sure of himself. He did not want to wake up suddenly and find the picture fade.

He wanted to keep the green blur of fields, the small group of cottages looking as if they were a thatched and mossy plant native to the soil itself, and the spire of the thick-set church across the village green safe in his eyes forever. Something in the tension of his figure caught his sister's attention. She looked up quickly.

"Oh, Anthony," she said, "how quietly you came out and how still you are! You look as if you were holding everything still with you, except, of course, my catalogues of Dutch bulbs. The attempts they make to get over the side of the hammock nobody could control. Poor Ruth! Did you see her drive away? She's so nice, really. I half hoped, and half didn't hope, you'd like her."

"That," said Anthony, feeling suddenly freed from the fixity of his attention, "was exactly how I liked her. Would you mind telling me why you asked Miss Costrelle not to come here during my visit? She made me feel rather a fool when she told me it was your arrangement to keep her out of the house while I was here. Did you suppose I couldn't keep my head with a pretty girl, or had you anything in particular against her? Forgive me for asking you, but I want to make up my mind about going to see her. I haven't been yet, you know. I felt I couldn't; but I'd rather like to now, unless there is some very definite reason against it."

"I wasn't thinking of your head being turned," said Daphne, slowly. She knew this question would come, and she had tried to prepare herself to meet it; but she wished that Jimmy were with her to give her the security of his admiration. She felt her tact might be a little fallible before Anthony's keen, gray eyes. "I was thinking most, I suppose, of poor little Kitty. But of course I thought of you, too, Anthony; I didn't want you to be disturbed. You've got so many new things to get used to, and Kitty would be rather a tremendous new one if you really got intimate with her. She wouldn't be like Ruth, an experience you can take or leave in cold blood."

"I don't wish to take life like a nursing home," interrupted Anthony a little unfairly, for Ruth was not like a nursing home. "But why 'poor Kitty'? You might tell me, I think, a little more about Miss Costrelle."

"Oh, I'll tell you anything," agreed Daphne, rapidly, "anything I can, of course, and I know what you mean about life; only there's rather a difference between taking it like a nursing home and taking it like the Niagara Rapids.

“Jimmy knew Kitty first, before he knew me, you know, and one day he told me about her, after her lover was killed. Jimmy was sure he was killed in 1914. Kitty was awfully plucky. She drove a motor-ambulance in France for two years without a break. She was considered one of their very best drivers. She never seemed to mind what she did or where she went, or what she saw; she seemed made of iron and fire. And then, of course, she broke down. No one could have stood her unrelenting work, and no one could stop her. When she stopped she just gave up everything—hope and her old habits and her work. She came back here, an unprotected little flame, burning whatever she came across. Nothing could persuade her to settle down or take up any fresh interests.

“Her father is a perfect old rip who used to own most of the land about here. He has succeeded in getting rid of all of it except an old farm-house he fortunately settled on Kitty as a present when she came of age. She lives there now, on and off, with an old nurse, and a French cook she picked up on her travels, and I believe her father turns up occasionally for week-ends. The greater part of his life is spent in London with a queer collection of blackguards and anonymous ladies.

“Jimmy and I have tried awfully hard to get Kitty received in the neighborhood. She used to be, of course, but now people are inclined to cold-shoulder her. She won’t go to church or do any of the usual things, and of course, as you see for yourself, she flirts with every man she comes across. I knew, if she saw you, she’d at least attempt it with you, and I don’t believe you know how to flirt—do you, Anthony?—properly.”

“I’m not at all sure I couldn’t learn,” said Anthony, consideringly, lighting a cigarette. “Of course it was quite sensible of you and Jim to try to get her out of my way; but now that she’s come and seen and conquered what do you propose to do about it?”

“What do you want me to do about it?” asked Daphne. “I wasn’t going to do anything.”

“That’s what I want you to do,” said Anthony, throwing away his match—“leave us alone. I won’t do Miss Costrelle any particular harm if I can help it, but I don’t propose to cut her acquaintance merely because she has had an unfortunate bringing-up and indulges in a risqué manner. It will be an interesting experience for me to know a flirt.”

Daphne said nothing. If this was the result of forty-eight hours’ solid reflection on the part of Anthony, she doubted if anything she could say would add to the weight of it.

Anthony felt sure from his knowledge of women that if Daphne had anything to urge against Kitty, she would very properly have urged it. She would not have invented adverse facts, but she would have stated picturesquely what adverse facts there were. He argued from her silence that there was none. He was relieved by Daphne's account of Kitty, and he did not realize that he had intended to be relieved by whatever account of Kitty he received.

He met Kitty on his way to the farm. She was driving a two-seated, rakish car round a precipitous corner. She pulled up when she saw him.

"Your brother-in-law is a splendid whip," she observed. "I came right on to him suddenly at the end of Clatter's Lane. I didn't do it on purpose, but there's an awfully sharp turn, and I wasn't expecting anything. I got by without touching the cart, but Polly bolted. Miss Mellicot didn't scream. She just held her hat on most sensibly. She wears rather hard hats, doesn't she? Jim swore."

"Did you happen to see the result of Polly's bolting?" Anthony asked with what gravity he could muster.

Kitty had on a purple slouch hat drawn nearly over her eyes, and tied by a long, purple scarf. She wore amethyst ear-rings, and a big bunch of Neapolitan violets was pinned to her breast. These facts served to reduce the anxiety with which Anthony waited to hear the fate of the dog-cart.

"Oh, Jimmy must have got her in hand all right," said Kitty, easily. "They'd be back by now in pieces if he hadn't. You ought to have driven Miss Mellicot to the station yourself, you know, Captain Arden. I do think it was rather shabby of you not to. Do you want to have a spin in my car? I'll take you if Daphne knows you were coming to see me. You were coming to see me, weren't you?"

Anthony nodded, and got into the car. Kitty turned it toward the distant hills without waiting for a further answer.

"Daphne knows perfectly," said Anthony at length, "what my plans are, and she's been telling me all about you."

Kitty kept her eyes on the road without speaking. They flew along in silence for a few minutes. Then she said in a curious, flat little voice:

"Whatever she said was true, you know, Captain Arden."

"She might have told me," said Anthony as they shot through the village and tore breathlessly to left and right down country lanes and palpitating

commons, “that you habitually exceeded the speed limit.”

“I wonder she didn’t tell you that,” said Kitty, with a sudden dimple. “But perhaps she thought that, as you were so very clever, you would have guessed it. D’you mind how fast we go?”

Anthony shook his head. He wasn’t going to explain to Kitty what it felt like, after sitting for two years in a small compound watching a man with a gun on the other side of a barbed-wire fence, with a wall beyond it, to be melting through space with the rapidity of a flying cloud.

He was not sure that he was afraid, but the sense of habitual unreality which possessed him was sharper than ever before. He felt as if some fine cord connecting him with the universe had been severed, and that he might at any moment find himself carried off into bottomless space. He lost the sense of his own body, and held on to his racing mind with all the strength that was left in him.

It was difficult to talk while Kitty was driving. She shaved disaster habitually by the turn of a hair; her small, steady hand barely touched the steering-wheel; her eyes ate up the oncoming road with a searching eagerness.

There were moments when it seemed to Anthony that she was not aware of what she was doing: she drove in a trance of speed. The wind caught her hair and blew it flat against her face, then lifted it suddenly, revealing her long-lashed, sparkling eyes, shining as water shines when trees are blown backward from a hidden pool. Her lips were parted with a fierce enjoyment. The purple scarf furred and unfurled itself against Anthony’s cheek.

Once or twice she turned her head toward him and laughed a little.

“Your nerve seems to be all right,” she assured him when they had escaped a donkey-cart by a miracle and hustled a perilous pathway through a herd of cows. “I wonder what it feels like to be afraid of being hurt,” she added speculatively. “I don’t mean disliking it. I dislike it myself intensely, but I can’t imagine not doing anything I wanted because I was afraid of anything, can you?”

“Yes, I can,” said Anthony, looking away from her. “I can imagine being afraid of all sorts of things—noises—angry voices, people’s eyes, not getting food when your whole body aches for it, thinking that perhaps you are going to be left without water, or seeing things that haven’t happened, but which you know *may* happen. Look here, don’t let’s talk about fear, Miss Costrelle. It’s something that’s inside you, and fierce, like a wild beast in a

cage; it's all right if you keep the bars shut. I can manage all my wild beasts quite comfortably then, but I don't want to feel as if any one's hand was on the lock, fingering at the bars. Understand fear? I can understand any mortal thing about fear except people's being able to overcome it. That I haven't been able to understand. Do you despise me for being a coward, or think I shall get quite right with plenty of good hard exercise and a quart of milk a day?"

"Miss Mellicot said that, didn't she?" asked Kitty.

She put on speed for a long stretch of flat road, and then looked at Anthony.

"Of course I don't think you're a coward," she said. "I didn't mean that kind of being afraid, though perhaps it helps you to understand the *personal-skin* fear, which was what I did mean."

"I have that, too," said Anthony, quietly.

"Well," said Kitty, gently, "if you have, you'll just set your teeth and hold on. The people I mean don't. They let their teeth and everything else go. They expect to be held on *to*. I know you aren't like them; that's why I want to be friends. It's rather fine when you know how, isn't it? I don't mean being friends, but just setting your teeth and holding on. Would you prefer being a dormouse and sleeping through all your winters?"

"Ah, you're not given the blessed chance," said Anthony. "I'd close with the dormouse to-morrow, Miss Costrelle, if I had the choice; but it's winters during which my imagination is particularly lively. Why do you drive with your gloves off? You'll get your hands cold."

"You can warm them if you like," said Kitty, calmly, "turn and turn about. I can drive just as easily with my left hand. I like to see my rings when I'm driving."

"It's very nice of you," said Anthony, "to make me such an offer; but I don't propose to have any of your friends, or even enemies, witness—what shall I call them?—your gloveless vagaries."

"You're too particular," said Kitty. "Other men aren't so particular, Captain Arden."

Anthony shot a vexed glance at her. Why was she like a charming, confidential child one moment, and an Eve with the hard knowledge of the ages in her the next?

“I don’t intend to treat you as you imply other men treat you,” he said coldly. “I have my own methods.”

“They treat me,” said Kitty, defiantly, “exactly as I intend to have them treat me. I believe you think that I’m a poor little persecuted angel half the time and a maddening little fool the other half. I’m nothing of the kind. I’m twenty-three, and I know my way about considerably better than you do. Shall I drop you here? We’ve come another way round. My house is up this lane and then to the right. Be rather careful how you turn, for I’m apt to come suddenly round the corner, and I always forget to sound my horn till afterward. I’m expecting my one and only parent just now, so I sha’n’t ask you in. He’s a very entertaining person. I can’t say you’re very entertaining yourself, Captain Arden, but I dare say I shall get used to you in time.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Anthony, “because it sounds as if you mean to give me time.”

Kitty pulled up to let him out. There was no one in the lane, and Anthony put his hand over hers and held it there.

She looked at him moodily with eyes which had suddenly turned dark and lifeless.

Anthony had never seen a face which depended so for its beauty upon its expression. When Kitty wished, her face became like a house with all its blinds down. She shut out everything, even her prettiness.

For a moment she looked like that now, speculative and sulky, as if she questioned Anthony’s possible worth to her, and was annoyed with him for not possessing it more obviously. Then she shrugged her shoulders and withdrew her hand.

“Oh, yes,” she said petulantly, “I suppose I do. You’re rather strong-minded and odd, and I dare say you’ll amuse me for a time. Only, for goodness’ sake, don’t try to take care of me or show me what I’m *not* like and ought to be! I really couldn’t stand that. I’m just what I *am*, you know, and you’re just what you are, and that’s quite different.”

“And if you’ve done with some of those Neapolitan violets,” said Anthony, unexpectedly to himself, “you can hand them over to me.”

Kitty laughed, and unfastened the bunch.

“You can have them all,” she said. “Father will only ask who I put them on for!”

“I don’t want all,” explained Anthony, carefully; “I want exactly half.”

He took them from her as he spoke, and repinned the rest with a steady hand.

“You do pin flowers on nicely,” Kitty remarked. “I will say that for you. Most men expect pins to stick into space, and let the flowers dribble all over you. I suppose it’s because you’re a doctor. You have a wonderfully steady hand, Captain Arden, even for a doctor.”

“It’s just as well,” explained Anthony, laughing at her. “You should know that you are not as intoxicating as you appear to imagine. I’m very pleased to have the violets, but they don’t excite me.”

“That sounds rather like a challenge,” said Kitty, while the laughter shot back into her eyes again. “A dangerous kind of challenge for you to make, coming on the top of the violets.”

“Ah, but I got my half safely first,” said Anthony. “I ran no risk over it.”

“You got half of what I didn’t want,” agreed Kitty, still laughing. “Good-by, Captain Arden. Don’t be too sure about that risk.”

She shot away from him through the leafy lane. The boughs met over her head and hid her from his eyes. The lane seemed curiously still and empty after she had gone; almost as if the spring had followed her out of it.

CHAPTER VIII

Anthony knew that Daphne and Jim disapproved of his intimacy with Kitty. They never interfered with him and they never let their disapproval out in words, but it was as solid as a mahogany table. They used the silent pressure of sensible and kindly people who expect common sense to triumph in the end if nothing is done to rouse bad blood by argument. They didn't invite Kitty to the house, and they never asked Anthony where he had been.

On one occasion Jim, at Daphne's instigation, went a shade further: he made a statement about Kitty that was not in her favor.

"It's no use my saying anything," Daphne privately urged him. "You see, men like Anthony believe what other men tell them about women, when they won't believe what other women tell them. If I say anything about Kitty, Anthony'll think it's because I'm fond of him or vexed with Kitty or recently married; but he'll think you *know*. Put it in your own words, of course; it'll be worse if he thinks I'm behind you."

Jim cleared his throat. He had not even told Daphne what he thought about Kitty in his own words. Men's thoughts about Kitty eluded words. They did not think about her; they felt her. But Jim realized quite as strongly as Daphne that it would be a good thing to pull Anthony up.

"The trouble is," he explained a little uncertainly, "that you never know about a girl—whether you're pulling a man up or setting him on by letting fly at her."

"Oh, don't let fly at her!" cried Daphne, suddenly remorseful. "Poor little Kitty! Just say what she *is*, you know."

Jim grunted. As if he could say what Kitty was without letting fly at her! He was not yet accustomed to the way in which Daphne slipped between the meshes of fact.

Jim chose the occasion when he was walking to the post with Anthony and Kitty whirled by them in a cloud of dust. He stopped to choke, and turned to look after her.

"There," he remarked, with unmistakable emphasis, "goes a piece of pretty hot stuff."

He couldn't have put it more plainly. Anthony's face set hard; he made no answer.

His mind set hard, too. He wasn't going to accept any one else's estimate of Kitty. He had got into the habit of living against current opinion when he was a prisoner, and he knew its value. You just said to your mind, "It is a lie," and forced your will to accept it.

You said it in the face of newspapers, guards, commandants, and the swift inroads of rumor, and it enabled you to live equably and indifferently among the broken pieces of your fears.

Anthony was in love for the first time in his life, and every one wished him to believe that the object of his love was worthless. Daphne and Jim, with their serene and prosperous happiness, wished him to believe it; a peculiarly stupid and suburban neighborhood offered him their cold shoulders as a proof; and Kitty herself made intermittent efforts to convince him of the same fact.

Anthony was convinced of nothing beyond the sense of Kitty's presence. She was everywhere, whether she was worthless or not. When he wasn't with her, he saw her, and heard through whatever else he was listening to, the sound of Kitty's voice.

He had no terms for what he felt for Kitty. She was part of the spring. The little dawn wind spoke of her; when he looked out of his window into the apple-blossoms, it was to see her face. He heard her hurrying voice in the thrushes' songs; a group of silver birches at the garden's edge were counterparts of Kitty.

Kitty wasn't very tall, and though she was slender, her figure had not the dignity of a silver birch. Her small, provocative face was artificially whitened and not the least like the apple-blossom; her voice was never for long as innocent of innuendo as a thrush's; and for all these divergencies from his dreams Anthony had for Kitty a fiercer tenderness. She was no longer a single "experience," however interesting. She had become for Anthony the medium of the spirit of life.

Anthony had never been in love before, and he was unaware that love concentrates the forces of the soul into one channel, and then, transcending concentration, breaks its expression over all the world. He only knew that there were a dozen different Kittys and that he loved them all.

He loved the wicked Kitty, who played on him as if he were an instrument; the gay, nonchalant, flirtatious Kitty, who never let him feel

unaware of a secret relationship between them, which might mean anything forever, and the next moment be as finished as a blown candle. He loved the child Kitty, who asked him what the Elizabethans were, with a secret hope that they might turn out to be negro minstrels. She loved people with banjos.

Perhaps Anthony cared for this ignorant child Kitty most of all; he felt he could hardly bear to have her out of his sight. And he loved his dear, confiding comrade Kitty, who told him what he ought to do when he couldn't sleep, and poured out to him the nuisance money was when you hadn't got enough. Father always supposed they had more till they found, of course, it was ever so much less. Anthony gathered that father was a great dear, if only people weren't such sharks. The world, according to Kitty, was divided into sharks and prudes: the sharks (horrid tradespeople who would send in bills when you hadn't paid them for years and couldn't be expected to) used up your money, and the prudes prevented you from enjoying what was left.

And there was the cruel Kitty. Anthony put her last in his mind because it hurt him to think of Kitty as cruel. This Kitty was an Ishmaelitish woman whose hand was against every woman, and every woman's hand against her. Kitty could be very cruel to other women. She left no man alone who belonged to them, she wounded the pride of happy women new to love, and she struck at their trust in their lovers.

She did it deliberately, with hard eyes and malicious laughter. She knew that she could set men alight, and she used her power indiscriminately. She made herself cheap in order to attract attention; but making herself cheap paid. Kitty always secured short successes. Sometimes they were short because Kitty didn't want to go on with them, but often because, after their first response to her, the men collected themselves and made a successful resistance. But whether they succeeded in resisting her or she succeeded in attracting them, Kitty always laughed. She laughed at the men for being such fools as to yield to her; she laughed at the other women for minding, because, as she pointed out to Anthony, she really wouldn't have done it if the other women hadn't minded; and she laughed at herself for not always being able to pull it off.

It was as if she did not care for her own discredit, and this was what hurt Anthony sharpest. One cannot protect people who do not mind discrediting themselves.

"She doesn't know what she's doing," Anthony argued defensively to himself. "She's only twenty-three. Girls are blind to passion; they're brought

up blind and explosive. It's a wicked combination, and they're the first victims of the explosion when it takes place, though they are not the only victims, of course! We're wretchedly uncivilized, and our worst sign of it is our fear of revealing nature to the young. They've got to handle it, and not to warn them is like putting a gun into a child's hands and not telling him what happens when you pull the trigger."

Anthony assured himself that Kitty did not know what happened when one pulled the trigger. He let life slip between him and his wits, he forgot Pannell, and he even put aside the preoccupation of his profession. He had some excuse for this, for a surgeon must have steady hands, and his hands were not quite steady yet.

Rochett was doing what it could for Anthony, and spring had set itself into his heart, but his raw nerves were not wholly covered yet. He could not count on his serenity.

Every morning he woke at dawn to listen to the country sounds. The earth stirred at three o'clock in a faint, gray light—a light which was like the mere absence of darkness. All the birds moved in their nests at its approach, and shook out a sleepy protest before they sank into their last short sleep. A wind sprang up suddenly and passed across the fields with a faint shuddering of shaken leaves; sometimes a brief shower fell, a hurrying small shower, leaving behind it the sweetness of the visited earth.

Anthony would lean out of his open window, watching the light come across the sloping fields. The big row of elms at the foot of the apple-orchard moved first; they drove their heavy, grave heads out of the dark, and between them the gray, clear fields tentatively took color.

The apple-orchard beyond the kitchen-garden became for a brief moment an unearthly splendor; the white and pink of its blossoms shone like an alabaster screen. The light deepened and kindled under a colorless sky; pink clouds floated up into it with golden edges; the sunshine came softly without fire. There was no direct moment of transformation before Anthony found the flowers in the garden had their natural colors, the fields their dew-washed green, and all the quiet land its daily covering of tranquil light.

Anthony drank in the sounds of life, the little regular country sounds, with a quickened sense of reassurance and returning energy. The mildness of England sank into his being, not all at once, and not with the blinding ecstasy he had expected, but at last it came. He felt he was at home and free. He slept quietly at night, and when he woke he knew before he remembered that nothing terrible was going to happen. He found himself not able to say

which was stronger in him, love of Kitty or love of England. Both consumed and restored him, and at first Kitty helped England to quiet Anthony.

It pleased her to see him happy, to make his restless, haunted eyes turn to laughter, to watch his strained senses relax under her confident gentleness.

He didn't make love to her. This was odd, of course, but Kitty rather liked it. His eyes showed her that he felt for her the hungry, obedient worship of a good dog. He looked at her with all the gentleness of a first passion before it turns to fire.

Anthony was not a weak person, but when he looked at Kitty his eyes were often as appealing as a child's.

He tremendously wanted her to be kind to him; and sometimes Kitty was cold and hard and shut him out of her eyes. She wanted him to entertain her, and took the life out of him by showing him that he didn't. Or she tried to hurt him by saying reckless things. Kitty didn't have to try very hard in this direction; she knew she could always hurt Anthony by depreciating herself.

It was the way she punished him for his occasional attempts to hold her in. Anthony always wanted to take care of Kitty. In order to take care of her, it was necessary to see as much of her as possible. The really awkward part of this task was the little that is possible in censorious small places like Rochett, when sooner or later people have to be in for meals, and neighbors do not acknowledge the lengthening out of spring evenings as a definite alteration to the clock.

Of course Anthony met Kitty every day, but this wasn't nearly enough for him. There was all the part of the day when he wasn't with her, when she might get her feet wet, or break without the immunity of his protection into some danger zone of mischief.

Kitty couldn't be expected to know the perils of life when Anthony wasn't there. She hadn't known them before he came, and she only laughed when he tried to point them out to her and to lay down laws and arrangements for the rest of her time. She either laughed or she grew a little restive; and when she grew restive, Anthony, who knew that nothing in the world could hold her, least of all his heart, quickly withdrew his claims.

He told her that of course he wouldn't bother her; she must do exactly as she liked, only for his sake to be a little careful. And Kitty laughed still more. It was so absurd of Anthony to suppose for a single moment that she wouldn't do exactly what she liked whether he told her to or not. But it was

nice of him to want her to be careful; it was not what men usually wanted of Kitty.

CHAPTER IX

Kitty had never had many advantages, but there had been a time when to be Kitty was in itself an advantage. Her mother died at her birth, and her father, though she was the only human being he really loved, was very little with her; he preferred his caprices to his affections. But Kitty did not miss either of her natural protectors very deeply. She had Peckham, and though Peckham was only an old nurse, she was a selfless fount of love; from a bump to a dead bird she was all attention, consolation, and reward.

Nothing that Kitty cared for escaped Peckham, and she stood solid and aggressive between Kitty and her occasional fears. Peckham was unable always to provide Kitty with what she wanted—the brass eagle off the lectern and the housekeeper's blue beads were a case in point—but she strained every nerve to procure substitutes. In all her happy childhood Kitty never knew what it was to be deliberately thwarted.

And then there was Dick. One said one's prayers to God, but everything else one said to Dick. Dick was the eldest son of the retired rector, an enchanting personage who did not preach sermons and who always went about with sweets in his pocket. He was the only pillar of the church who ever attracted Kitty.

Dick's people lived across the river, at the foot of the garden. There was an island in the river, and Dick made a bridge from his garden to the island, and from the island to Kitty's garden. Long before the bridge was built, when they were only babies, they were taken solemnly by the road to tea, to play with each other.

Whenever Kitty fell down, Dick, who was a year older, picked her up; and whatever Dick was given, he gave half of it to Kitty. Even his catapult he lent her. It was one of those strange affections which transcend relationship and never alter except to deepen as the years pass.

They took their first plunge into life together, hand in hand, and it never occurred to either of them to have a separate thought. They played together every day until Dick went to school, and they broke their hearts over the agonizing separations, between the golden flashes of the holidays. The gloom was slightly lifted for Kitty by Dick's rabbits (they were carefully

transferred to her across the bridge, hutch by hutch) and to Dick by her scrawled bulletins as to their increasing and pervasive families.

When he came back they still played together. Other boys had entered into Dick's life to war with feminine influences, but they did not touch his feelings for Kitty.

Kitty had none of the distinctive markings of a girl; she might just as well have been another boy. Dick's favorite pursuits were hers. There was no tree she feared to climb, she ran like a deer, and her high jumps cleared her own height. She was more unexpected than boys usually are, but she was just as truthful, just as loyal, just as plucky.

She did not stop being a comrade until Dick was eighteen, and then she became everything else. The comrade was still there, but submerged in something so tremendous and inspiring, so exciting and yet so intensely secure, that Dick found no words to explain even to Kitty what he felt for her.

But Kitty didn't need Dick's words. What happened first to Dick happened as a matter of course afterward to Kitty. When Peckham, unable to bear the responsibility of the situation, reported upon it to Mr. Costrelle, he listened to her with amused attention. Then he said:

"Have they been allowed to see as much as they liked of each other till now, no opposition at all, eh?"

Peckham in a flutter answered that they had.

"You see, sir," she explained, "Miss Kitty being such a tomboy, and Master Dick's mother an invalid and never out of the house, I was hard put to it to think of a reason why they shouldn't be together."

"Well, continue not to think of a reason," replied Mr. Costrelle, calmly. "Allow them to be together as much as ever they choose. They'll soon get over it. When young people are permitted to do exactly as they like, they seldom continue to like it for any length of time."

Not long after this conversation Mr. Costrelle decided to take Kitty abroad. He was in the habit of frequent and prolonged visits to Paris and Monte Carlo. Kitty, accompanied by intermittent governesses, wouldn't be a bother, and Mr. Costrelle wanted her to be taught to speak French and how to put her clothes on properly. He did not think these two subjects easily mastered in his own country.

“The only thing a girl need bother her head about,” Mr. Costrelle explained to Kitty, “is how to amuse a man and how to get a bit of her own back. Lots of old women will cram you up with nonsense; they’ll say a woman needs education, freedom, equal rights, and what not. Don’t you believe ’em. Men are what matter to women, and women are what matter to men.

“A clever girl hasn’t got equal rights; she’s got ’em *all*, and a girl isn’t clever if she’s read half the London Library and can’t make a man who looked at her once want to look at her again. Make ’em want and keep ’em wanting. You can’t begin too early, but don’t lose your head over it. That’s where women make such awful fools of themselves. They start caring about some fellow and running him down as if they were a Paris cabby after a foot-passenger. No man’ll stand it. Don’t you ever budge, however much you care for a fellow. Get him keen and then hold him. Good artificial fly, invisible line, firm hand at the end of it, feet well against the bank, and you’ll have your fish landed. D’you see my point?”

Kitty saw her parent’s point; she listened gravely out of the depths of her seventeen-year-old wisdom and innocence. She was never quite so old again.

“You won’t mind, will you,” she said consideringly, “if I marry Dick instead, and don’t play any particular kind of game? You see, I’d rather marry Dick.”

“Marry whom you like,” said her father, promptly, “provided he can support you. I can’t, as you know, and what your mother wanted to leave you three hundred a year for God only knows. You can’t even dress on it. She always was penny wise and pound foolish. But take my advice. If you want to keep your husband, learn to play your game. Any fool can get a husband; look at the sights who do. ’Pon my word, I saw a woman the other day with a cast in her eye and a harelip, with a wedding-ring on. Of course you’d think there was money back of it, but there wasn’t. Sheer will power. She’d been after him like a boa constrictor gets a rabbit. But that’s not enough to keep a man faithful for a fortnight. You must learn the ropes.”

“But Dick,” Kitty said reflectively—“couldn’t I keep Dick without playing a game? You see, there never have been any particular ropes with Dick.”

“I never met a man yet,” said Mr. Costrelle, emphatically, “who didn’t like a woman better because other men were after her. Besides, you’ve got

yourself to think of. Life's chancy. You want to have something to fall back on.

"I dare say a lot of people—all your mother's relations and that stuffy set at Rochett—would say I ought to have had you educated to some profession. Well, what I'm teaching you will pay you better than *any* profession. You never need be at a loss. If you're happy with Dick, or whoever you pick out to be happy with, you can *stay* happy; and if you're not, by Jove! you can make 'em pay for it."

"But I'm going to be happy, of course," said Kitty, calmly. "I settled all that long ago, and I sha'n't want anybody to pay for it."

"Well, make damned sure you can *make* them pay for it if you ever do want it," urged Mr. Costrelle. "No use thinking you'll have a shy at it later on, when your looks are going. You might as well race a horse that's never learned to start. You take my word for it, girls and horses need training while they're young."

"All right," said Kitty, thoughtfully; "I'll train."

It amused Mr. Costrelle extremely to watch Kitty training, and it didn't do Kitty any particular harm then.

Her heart was safe, and she learned point by point, sometimes from a lightly dropped reflection of her father's, and more often from the varied experiences that presented themselves, the mastery of her subject.

Mr. Costrelle knew men of all sorts and of all ages, and they all became sooner or later the declared admirers of Kitty. Peckham, perturbed and powerless, watched the strange procession. She could not interfere with Kitty's freedom, but she never left her alone. She sat and knitted on benches at Monte Carlo, she reluctantly attended the most risqué of French plays, she was seasick on board yachts, and giddy in racing-motors; but Peckham was always there. Perhaps, owing to this adamant protection, Kitty flirted serenely on without disaster. She learned the ways of men, and little by little she learned the powers of women. Dick didn't like it, but he fell deeper in love.

They argued and quarreled about Kitty's adventures, but neither of them ever doubted the other. Their future was plain before them, and in the depths of their hearts they knew that there were no other men or any other women.

When Kitty was eighteen Mr. Costrelle insisted on her spending six weeks in London with an aunt. Kitty didn't want to go. She didn't like her aunt, with whom she had occasionally lunched in an awe-inspiring, dark

London dining-room where she had been stared at reflectively and without kindness by three girl cousins.

The Mallards were a dull family; still, they had a large house and a wide acquaintance. They were modern enough to know what to go and see, though none of it adhered to them. No member of the family had ever said anything worth remembering or had done anything it was necessary to forget. London spoke of them as “the dull Mallards,” but it did speak of them.

Mr. Costrelle, who hardly ever urged any course of action upon Kitty, virtually insisted upon the Mallards.

“Yes, of course you’ll be bored,” he agreed; “but, my dear child, at your age what else can you expect? Young people must learn to be bored, and the sooner the better. I’ve been bored for fifty years, but I’ve learned how. I quite admit that your aunt’s a dowd and your cousins three young and very undistinguished frumps, but that’s precisely why they’re so valuable. If you have one good frump at your side, you have a margin; with three or four, any future is virtually open to you.

“You know all the men you need to know now, and none of the women you’ve met with me can be of the slightest use to you. It’s high time you should square a few frumps. Otherwise the men’ll do you harm. You’ll be considered fast.”

“But aren’t I fast?” Kitty inquired. “I thought knowing a lot of men was always fast.”

“So it is,” said her father, with a chuckle, “damned fast and damned convenient, but you’ll have to slow up over it. Sprinkle a few of these Mallard women across your track, and then you can do what you like. See?”

Kitty didn’t see, but she did what she liked.

It was, after all, quite an amusing time. Many of the men she knew turned up, and invitations were showered upon her, backed by flowers and chocolates. Her cousins didn’t like her even though she religiously shared all the chocolates and flowers with them, and her aunt stared rather hard at some of Kitty’s callers.

Kitty’s French clothes were a great success, but her French manners had to be toned down. Dick hated them, and the other men were sometimes a little tiresome. Kitty had long ago learned to deal with men who were tiresome. She did it with laughter and good humor and a little touch of decision, and she very seldom needed any other weapon.

A good many of the men she had met in Monte Carlo and met again in London were tiresome; and in the middle of the six weeks Dick wanted to marry her. He said quite suddenly he *must* marry her. The Mallards sent Kitty back to her father with expedition and without cordiality.

Mr. Costrelle shrugged his shoulders and said it was a pity.

“You’ve had a very short run for your money,” he observed to Kitty, “but do as you like. Dick’s a good fellow. I suppose you can pig it on nine hundred a year, which, I understand, you’ll scrape up between you, and Dick’ll have money some day. I dare say domesticity is best taken young. You can make a fresh start later on if you want to, now you’ve got the swing of it.”

They were to be married in a month, and two weeks later Dick was crossing the channel with the First Expeditionary Force.

He hadn’t expected to be called up so soon. A telegram to Kitty miscarried, and in the end they hadn’t time for marriage, only for a strange half-hour, in which they said nothing at all except queer, fragmentary things out of the tops of their minds; but of course they expected the war to be over in three months.

There was no time for anything but jokes, little clumsy jokes about Berlin and the kaiser; and then there seemed nothing left but interminable terror.

A few weeks later the rector came to Alington Farm to tell Kitty that Dick was missing. Kitty was spraying the second crop of roses against blight. They were Gloire de Dijon roses, growing low over the porch, full of heavy scent.

The rector said to her: “My dear, will you come and see my wife? She’s almost your mother now, you know.”

He wished that Kitty had had a real mother. She faced him for a moment speechlessly; her eyes slipped past his words to his fears. He answered them quickly.

“I do not know that he is dead,” he said, showing her the telegram.

Kitty was afraid the rector was going to say something about God, but he didn’t. He looked all about him vaguely, down to the garden’s edge, and across the rickety bridge.

“We don’t know what it means,” he said dully; he kept his eyes turned away from Kitty.

She stood quite still, holding the telegram, as if she could not make up her mind to give it back to him. It did not seem to Kitty that Dick belonged to either his father or his mother. They were old; they had had him. He had been their child. They were lucky people whose relationship was complete; no one could stop Dick having been their son. They could afford to know that he was dead.

“No,” she said at last, “I won’t go and see his mother.”

She turned and went into the house. The rector did nothing to retain her, and he never told any one what Kitty had said.

Kitty went to her room and locked the door. She lay on the bed, face downward, till the dark came.

Her body felt dry and as if it were broken. She shed no tears. Peckham came to her door crying, but Kitty told her to go away.

“Please,” she said quietly, “go right away, Peckham.”

The next day her father came down from London. Kitty unlocked the door for him. She knew he wouldn’t say anything to bother her. He brought her a cup of tea, and when she had drunk it, he said to her:

“’Member my telling you life was chancy? Well! it is, you see, damned chancy. If I were you, I should just sit tight and make the best of it.”

“So I would if I were sure he was dead,” explained Kitty. “You see, if he’s there,—anywhere at all, I mean,—I want to be what he wants—that kind of woman; and if he isn’t, well, then, I don’t care what I am.”

“Well, give the thing time,” urged her father. “Wait a bit; you’re very young. You can only be innocent once, you know; you can always be the other thing.”

“Oh, I’m not thinking of all that,” said Kitty, impatiently. “Men don’t matter. I’m wondering what to be—myself, you see, if things don’t come right.”

“No, of course you’re not now,” agreed her father. “But you will, you know, my dear. Dreams are what we all start out with, and it’s pretty tough when they get broken. But it’s facts we end up on, and when we want the facts, we want them worse than we wanted the dreams.”

“You talk as if Dick hadn’t been a fact,” said Kitty, bitterly; and then she began to cry, because she herself had spoken as if Dick were no longer a fact.

Mr. Costrelle helped her to go to France. He couldn't go himself because three relentless doctors refused to pass him for active service.

"If I were you," he said to Kitty as he saw her off, "I should wait two years. The war won't end any sooner. People say it will, but it won't. You'll have a hell of a time, but you can afford it at eighteen. So shall I, of course, and at my age it's more serious. I shall simply be bored stiff with people all around me doing things for their country, the kind of people, I mean, who will take this war as if it were a new sort of lap-dog.

"I sha'n't turn a hair myself. If my country doesn't want me to fight, it can leave me alone. I'm not going to turn myself into a Red Cross pin-cushion to please anybody.

"When you want to come back, you'll find me just as you left me—except for what they get out of me in the way of taxes."

"I wonder what you'll find me," said Kitty.

CHAPTER X

Peckham had none of the rights of love; she had only its services and its long suspenses. It was very gratifying, in the face of the entire dissolving household, to be put in charge of Alington Farm, to have an assured income, a kitchen maid, and a silk umbrella with her initials on the handle, presented to her by Miss Kitty as a parting present. But Peckham saw through these gratifications to the fact of her lamb's unprotected disappearance. No umbrella could soften the fact of Miss Kitty's going into the country in Europe of which Peckham least approved.

Peckham disliked all countries that were not her own, but she had a special horror of France. She thought it an indecent place, abandoned to a parcel of fly-by-nights and the sinister ministrations of the Roman Catholic Church. Peckham did not know which she disapproved of most thoroughly, the grands boulevards or the pope. Now there were the Germans, and by what she read in the newspapers, they were as bad or worse.

The French couldn't get them out of the country, and we had to help them, that is to say, Miss Kitty had to help them. The European War became for Peckham an act of reckless charity on the part of Kitty.

And after two years the war stopped. It went on in the newspapers and as far as the soldiers were concerned, and strange things took place or ceased to take place in the larder; but Miss Kitty returned.

Alington Hall had been sold. There was only Alington Farm left. It was the last piece of the old Alington estate. Mr. Costrelle had settled it upon Kitty as a twenty-first birthday present. It was older than the hall itself, and stood in an overgrown garden, with an ancient four-square tower rising out of it, flanked by an old stone chapel that had for years been the undisputed abode of a family of Berkshire pigs. Mr. Costrelle hardly ever came near it. He stayed in London, and sometimes in the summer he came down for a night or two, looked moodily over the little place, tipped Peckham, and told her that Miss Kitty was well, there was no occasion for her to starve herself, and the war would probably go on forever.

"Should you say Miss Kitty was really better, sir—happier, as you might say?" Peckham would venture as the last moments of Mr. Costrelle's occasional visit drew to a close, and Mr. Costrelle always shook hands with

her at the gate, most handsomely (the postman had remarked upon it with awe; for Mr. Costrelle was not one to demean himself with inferiors), and replied in the same words:

“There isn’t any news of Master Dick, you know, nurse. I should say Miss Kitty was about the same.”

And at the end of the two years Miss Kitty came back, but she wasn’t at all the same.

She was taller and thinner and a very great deal older. But her age was not a visible portent. She looked as pretty as a peach and as young as a June day. It was in her mind and in the presentment of her personality that Kitty had grown old. She had been like a flower in her youth, and now she was like a piece of very bright, well-polished enamel.

Kitty was very kind to Peckham, but there was something as hard as steel under her kindness. She was very gay, but there was something unapproachably bitter under her gaiety. She was a woman of the world, and she very soon became the talk of Rochett.

England was denuded of men, but Alington Farm was never long without one. Generals, colonels, lieutenants, engineers, commanders of men-of-war, each appeared and reappeared on leave, or stationed within motoring distance, and Kitty entertained them all. There were only a French cook, Peckham, and the kitchen maid, but there always seemed money enough for what Kitty wanted. Her room was always full of new French clothes and of strange French perfumes. There was a litter of men’s photographs in presentation silver frames that Kitty rarely looked at, and of endless letters that she barely read, and there was a good deal of valuable jewelry that she frequently wore. It was perhaps not surprising that Rochett should talk and that Peckham should suffer.

Peckham knew that Kitty had three hundred a year; so did Rochett. Rochett drew its own conclusions, and Peckham refused to draw hers.

Mr. Costrelle came down a good deal oftener. He got on remarkably well with whichever of Kitty’s friends happened to be there—they stayed at the inn and spent their entire days at Alington—and Mr. Costrelle seemed not in the least concerned by the regularity of their appearances or the lateness of their departures.

“Well, you’ve got Miss Kitty back,” he said on the first of these occasions to Peckham.

Peckham met his eyes in a way that was unusual with her.

“Yes, in a sense I have, sir,” she assented.

“Just the same as ever?” Mr. Costrelle remarked, smiling a little at the fixity of Peckham’s regard.

“I don’t find Miss Kitty the same, sir,” Peckham ventured breathlessly.

“Ah, well,” Mr. Costrelle said, turning away to end the conversation, “you must put up with what you have, Peckham. It’s a changing universe, and wise people change with it. I don’t say they improve—that’s a matter of opinion—but they change.”

Peckham did not expostulate directly with Kitty. She did not dare. The vicar’s wife expostulated, and she left the drawing-room with flaming cheeks and an air of having got the worst of it.

“Don’t let that woman in again if she calls,” Kitty remarked afterward to Peckham. “She’s been impertinent. I don’t like impertinent women.” But the vicar’s wife didn’t call again.

Gradually every one in the neighborhood—the women, that is to say—ceased to call, every one except Daphne Wynne. Daphne came often, and Peckham learned to love the sound of laughter which ensued—the old easy laughter that reminded her of the times before Miss Kitty went away and when she did not have that little cold ring in her voice, which made her laughter now have a formidable and dangerous sound.

Kitty never laughed like that with Daphne Wynne; and now even Daphne Wynne had stopped coming.

Peckham went slowly up-stairs to brush Miss Kitty’s hair. She was a splendid brusher, and it was the hour of the day she liked most. When Miss Kitty sat still in front of her long Italian mirror, with her thick, black hair sweeping to her knees, she looked like a little child again, and sometimes, when she was in the mood for it, she talked like a little child to Peckham. But this afternoon Peckham was afraid. She knew she must say something at last, she must risk the rebuff which would cost her more than it cost the vicar’s wife. She could not go on any longer saying nothing to Miss Kitty, when all the rest of the world had turned against her and was saying everything it could.

While Mrs. Wynne continued to call, Peckham had said to herself that Rochett was old-fashioned and stupid and didn’t know what went on in good society among young people without any harm in it. But Mrs. Wynne knew. Mrs. Wynne, with her kind, laughing eyes, would never stop seeing her friends for any but reasons which Peckham would have to consider grave.

Captain Arden was a grave reason. Miss Kitty wasn't being fair with Captain Arden. If she liked him, why didn't she marry him? And if she didn't marry him, why didn't she let him alone?

"Is that you, Peckham?" Kitty called out a little impatiently. "I'm going out this afternoon, so you must be quick. I sha'n't be in till late."

"Yes, Miss Kitty," said Peckham. She took out the large ivory brush and began with her steady hand a rhythmic movement of the brush over Kitty's thick, glossy hair.

Kitty's hair shone as a well-bred horse's coat shines under the hand of the most careful of grooms; she smiled at Peckham in the glass.

"You're grave to-day, Peckham," she said. "You look rather like Lot's wife going to seed when she looked back on Sodom. I suppose I'm Sodom, aren't I? What have I been doing now? Anything worth your turning into salt for? Do you think I'm a very wicked woman, Nannie?"

"Well, Miss, I'm sure I never think of you as a woman at all," said Peckham, evasively, "having brought you up, as it were, from a baby. Nor would any one, the length you wear your skirts, and all that stocking showing! I do wish you'd let me let down a tuck or two. The way people can't take their eyes off your legs is more than I can bear, Miss Kitty."

"But I like to have everybody's eyes on my legs," said Kitty, calmly. "If you had as pretty ones as I have, Nannie, you'd wear your skirts up to your knees, and thank God for them."

"You let your tongue run away with you, Miss Kitty," said Peckham, severely. "Respectable people in my class of life don't think anything about their legs, and if I'd been given pink silk stockings by a young man when I was a girl, and he not even a blood relation, I should have died of shame."

Kitty laughed.

"I made Captain Arden buy me those silk stockings, Nannie," she explained. "He's very like you. He wanted to die of shame, but people don't die of shame as easily as you think. Papa says shame was invented to keep modest people from boring amusing ones; only it hasn't succeeded."

"Don't you go quoting your papa to me, Miss Kitty," said Peckham, stiffly. "You know I never could bear to hear the things he said, before an innocent child, too. I wonder Captain Arden's sister don't come in with him sometimes like she used to. There isn't a nicer lady anywhere than Mrs. Wynne. Have you done anything to vex her, Miss?"

The small, white face between its two dark showers of falling hair winced suddenly; a sullen expression came into Kitty's eyes.

"I shall do as I like," she said shortly, "and behave as I please. It's nothing to you, Nannie, if I choose to quarrel with Mrs. Wynne."

Peckham went on brushing just as smoothly, just as steadily, but her heart was out of it; it was everything in the world to her what Kitty did, and Kitty knew it.

Kitty blinked her eyelids rapidly together and repented.

"Sorry, Nannie," she said. "It was horrid of me to say that. Of course you care, and I do, too, really. I am very fond of Daphne Wynne. I expect she thinks I'm not playing the game with Captain Arden, you know, and that's put her back up."

"If you was to marry Captain Arden, now," said Peckham, persuasively, "she wouldn't go for to object to that, would she, Miss Kitty?"

Kitty laughed again, with that note of bitterness in it, as hard as a stone under clear water.

"She'd have every right to, Nannie," she said; "but I'm not, as a matter of fact, thinking of marrying Captain Arden. I don't happen to be a marrying woman. I prefer a—single life."

"If you'll excuse my saying so, Miss Kitty," said Peckham, severely, "that's a mistake on your part. A man behind you is a man behind you, as it were. Ladies can be a great deal freer, with a gentleman to look after them, than they can living alone; and Captain Arden's such a nice gentleman, too."

"I don't want to be looked after," said Kitty, impatiently, "and why should I marry Captain Arden any more than any of my other friends? I've far grander matches under my hand if I wanted them, Nannie."

"Yes, I know, my dear," said Peckham, gently; "but you don't treat them as you treat Captain Arden. You have a way with him that seems more comfortable like, more as if you were at home with him; and that's what I like to see in any one coming to the house so often."

"Have I?" said Kitty, consideringly. "Have I a different way with him? I must stop it if I have, you know, Nannie. That's what I should call being unfair. I suppose it's because he's had such a bad time; still, that's hardly a reason for giving him a worse."

“If you feel like that about him Miss Kitty,” Peckham urged, “why not do a little more for him? He’s longing for a home and to settle down with you and all. I can see it in his eyes. Couldn’t you look at it like something you could do for him, and he having had such a bad time, as you say?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Kitty, coldly. “Besides, he’s come out of his bad time. It’s over for him; he’s come out all right. I’m not terribly sorry for him.”

She closed her eyes for a moment on the vision of those who had not come out all right. Peckham went on brushing her hair quietly and holding her breath for fear of checking what Miss Kitty might say next, but all Kitty said, after a minute’s pause, was:

“Where’s my scarlet tam-o’-shanter? I think it’s going to rain. And my Burberry. I’ll put on my chiffon dress to-night; the one you say heathen savages wouldn’t be seen in. As a matter of fact, Peckham, heathen savages wouldn’t dream of wearing anything like so much. A feather behind one ear and a necklace is quite sufficient for a heathen savage, and if you go on looking as solemn as the last trump at a race meeting, that’s the way I’ll come down to dinner to-night.”

Peckham whitened visibly under this dire threat.

“Some day, Miss Kitty,” she observed, “there’ll be a judgment upon you, there will surely.”

“Well, I don’t mind if there is,” said Kitty, defiantly, snatching up the scarlet cap and cramming it low over her eyes. “I’ve got a grievance against the judge, if it comes to that, worth any two of his against me. But don’t you worry, Nannie! It’s Captain Arden I’m going out with this afternoon; that ought to please you. He’s as quiet as a suet pudding, and as safe as a cathedral.”

“It don’t matter how particular gentlemen are if you aren’t, Miss Kitty,” said Peckham, quietly. “What they begin as has nothing to do with it. A hair turns them.”

“Well, I’m just going to try,” said Kitty, with a mischievous gleam in her eyes as she left the room, “if a hair *will* turn Captain Arden.”

CHAPTER XI

Anthony had no inner egoism; he did not make pictures in his mind of himself, nor did he try to make them to his advantage in the minds of other people. He was without that key to character that the desire to please others involves. Nobody had ever called him sympathetic or confided to him picturesque and inaccurate accounts of their lives. His desire to serve was evident; but it was roused only by those who were courageous sufferers, at the mercy of a stronger force. He took no interest in the aggrieved, and he always asked why a dog was lame before attempting to help it over a stile.

But he had made no such researches into the causes of Kitty's ostracism. He swept into the back of his mind all adverse facts against her. Kitty was not to blame; everybody else was to blame: her father, for her upbringing, which was admittedly careless; the neighborhood, for its blind-eyed strictness; and, above all, other women. The women of Rochett became Anthony's inveterate enemies. They were unappeasably at war with Kitty; but it was difficult for Anthony to fight them, because they did things which Anthony could not fight.

When they passed Mrs. Bucket, the clergyman's wife, in the car, she deliberately turned her back and gazed through the hedge.

One cannot get out of a motor-car and fight with a lady for looking at a hedge; and yet Mrs. Bucket's action was obviously hostile. There was nothing in the hedge, or through it, to look at except the silhouette of a preoccupied pig, and there was no dust in the road; there was only Kitty.

"A woman of that type," Anthony exclaimed angrily, "disgusts me. Their religion is supposed to be love, and their practice is hate. They wouldn't have been seen in the New Testament except behind the portliest of the Pharisees. None of them envisages a generous action, and they haven't enough courage to face one of their own ugly thoughts. If she has anything against you, why doesn't she stand up and say so? She belongs to a race of jackals that eat other people's kill."

"Rubbish!" said Kitty, lightly. "Poor old thing, she isn't a bit like a jackal. She doesn't like me, and I don't like her; why should she bow to me?"

“*You* wouldn’t have cut her,” said Anthony, a little crestfallen at this reception of his championship. “I saw you meant to bow to her.”

“It’s not in my interest to cut respectable women,” replied Kitty, coolly. “I don’t often get the chance; they turn their backs before I have time to do more than cock my tam-o’-shanter at them.”

“Even Daphne’s unfair to you,” went on Anthony, bitterly. “At least, I suppose she is. If she wasn’t unfair, you’d surely come to Merry Gardens.”

“Have you asked her why I don’t come?” replied Kitty, evasively, putting on speed with a jerk.

“Oh, she only says, ‘She can come if she likes, Tony; I sha’n’t stop her.’ But if she asked you, you’d come, wouldn’t you, Kitty? Not asking you is stopping you.”

“She won’t ask me,” said Kitty, dryly. “I should leave it alone if I were you, Anthony. I don’t believe Ishmael was a man. I believe he was a lady of certain attractions, living in a suspicious country neighborhood where nobody knew how to put on their clothes. But Daphne’s all right. I told you why she’s down on me before, but I didn’t tell you what she’d tried to do for me first.

“She came here to an awfully stiff and old-fashioned neighborhood, where the people were all friends of Jim’s, and had wanted him to marry one of their daughters, with her own way to make, and she tried to make mine instead. She saw me left out at a silly, frumpish, old school treat where they’d had to ask me to get a subscription; and from that moment she fought my battles in season and out of season, and it was mostly out of season with my battles. And what have I ever done for her? Nothing except try to turn her husband’s head.”

“Kitty!” exclaimed Anthony, aghast. “Old Jim?”

“Oh, well,” said Kitty, indifferently, “I did; and no thanks to *his* superior morals that I didn’t succeed. I got fed up with his explaining potato crops to me, so I dropped him. Jim’s a nice fellow and he hates me like poison now. He thinks it’s virtue, but it isn’t: it’s pure funk. But Daphne was never afraid of me. She was nice to me, not pitying or superior or ‘you-poor-thing-ish,’ just nice. She thought I’d had no luck.”

“Perhaps she didn’t know about Jim,” suggested Anthony, who refused to see his favorite sister justified at Kitty’s expense.

“Oh, she knew,” said Kitty, calmly, “as quickly as she would have known if her first baby had cut a new tooth. Daphne’s no fool about men. She knew she could really hold Jim, and she wasn’t afraid of me; but she wasn’t going to be nasty either. She isn’t really nasty now; she’s merely holding off because I’m not playing the game. She’d be nice again tomorrow if I’d behave properly to you.”

“What do you call behaving properly to me?” asked Anthony, with amusement. “I’ve not complained so far.”

“Never seeing you again would be behaving properly to you,” said Kitty, with a curious gravity. “I see that now, but it’s too late.”

“You couldn’t, I fancy, even the two of you, dispose of me quite so easily,” observed Anthony.

Kitty made no answer to this statement. She said after a pause:

“Women are all right. Look at Peckham. Peckham would be cut into little bits to prevent my having a chilblain. I don’t quite know a man who would be, not even you, Tony. Oh, actual bits, perhaps. But you wouldn’t always want to take a back seat so as to give me a front one, would you? That’s what old Peckham wants: she’d be willing to be jolted off on to the road to see me safe and sound on the front seat.”

Anthony said something about the maternal instinct.

“You can call it what you like,” said Kitty, indifferently. “All I’m saying is, women do more for you than men sometimes, and don’t get anything out of it. There was a woman once who did a thing for me—an angel from heaven would have turned its nose up at—and she made no more fuss about it than if she had lent me a pocket-handkerchief. I appreciate that you’re paying me a left-handed compliment by having a shy at women; but you can take my word for it, there’s nothing in it.”

“You dislike them yourself,” urged Anthony, hotly; “you told me so.”

“Of course I do,” said Kitty. “Why not? I dislike them because they’re not anxious for me to amuse myself at their expense, and that’s the only form of amusement that happens to appeal to me. I dare say you like burglars—I don’t blame you for it—but it’s a peculiar taste that the police don’t share. As far as other women are concerned, I’m a burglar and, they’re the police. It’s not much use your trying to reconcile us, is it?”

Anthony ignored this metaphor. He did not believe that Kitty broke laws. She merely ignored conventionalities.

“What happened to the woman you say helped you?” he asked, instead, a little resentfully. “If she was really a good sort, why didn’t you keep hold of her and have a friend to fall back on?”

“We couldn’t meet again,” said Kitty, briefly. “That’s the hill over there beyond the windmill, with the row of beeches on the top. We get out there.”

Anthony frowned at the windmill. He hated mysteries, and above all he hated coming on a mystery in Kitty’s life. He suspected that there were things he would dislike to know in Kitty’s career, but he disliked even more not knowing them.

“I haven’t the right to ask you any questions, of course,” he said stiffly.

“No,” agreed Kitty, “you haven’t; but don’t let that worry you. I wouldn’t answer you even if you had. I don’t believe in rights about questions. Live and let live, that’s my motto. We dump the car here and climb up. Rather a nice hill, isn’t it?”

Anthony stood looking up at the soft, green incline above them. There were thickets of young hazel-bushes on the slopes, hollows full of may-blossom, and the sharpened green of very young leaves.

“The new-born leaves,” Kitty quoted softly, touching them with her bared fingers. “That’s Dante, isn’t it? The woman I told you about said that to me once. Of course I never read myself except when it’s wet, and I shouldn’t read Dante in a blizzard. I prefer D’Annunzio.”

“I don’t believe you’ve read a word of D’Annunzio in your life,” said Anthony, crossly. “You just say that to tease me, because you know I hate decadent stuff, full of moonshine and mud. Why do you always try to make yourself out what you know I don’t like, Kitty?”

“Well, it does tease you, doesn’t it?” laughed Kitty. “Poor old Tony! You’re awfully easily teased. Never mind; that’s because you like me. I like you to like me, you know.”

“I wish you did,” said Anthony under his breath. He held a bramble back to let her pass. Kitty saw his arm tremble as she touched it.

“Oh, not like that,” she said lightly; “that’s a stupid, solemn way. Like me as if liking were a joke, not as if it were a state funeral and I were the corpse.”

Anthony stopped suddenly. He felt as if something had literally moved in his heart.

“For God’s sake! don’t talk like that!” he exclaimed harshly. “You’re not ill, are you?”

Kitty turned her head and opened wide eyes at him in which astonishment mixed with a curious look of resentment.

“Ill?” she said. “Why should I be ill? How just like a doctor! Of all the nonsense, Anthony!”

It wasn’t in the least like a doctor; it was the kind of statement that any doctor would have laughed at, and of course it was nonsense, only some stubborn instinct in Anthony remained unrelieved. He had felt one of those moments of panic that the heart never forgets.

Kitty’s lithe young figure stepped steadily on in front of him. She was beyond the copse of young trees and out on the open hillside. Anthony called to her to stop and watch the beauty of the expanding world at their feet, the line of may-blossoms like the crest of a breaking wave, beyond it the orchards, and a common covered with a burnished shield of gorse, flame upon golden flame.

But Kitty refused to do more than glance at it over her shoulder.

“It’s the same old view I’ve seen for years,” she said impatiently.

Anthony shut his lips. The view meant nothing to him if she would not share it. Kitty’s impatience stripped the woods of bloom and disallowed the beauty of the day. He wondered if he had been stupid to talk against women; perhaps Kitty had not realized that it was because she was different from all other women that all the other women must be in the wrong. Anthony couldn’t explain this to Kitty; he couldn’t really explain anything. For moment by moment he felt more aware of her and less aware of everything else.

He did not dream that Kitty was intentionally blinding him to everything but herself. She did not speak again until she had reached the group of beeches at the top of the hill. They stood silent and massive above her, as if their big brown trunks were the columns of a cathedral aisle.

“There’ll be thunder soon,” said Kitty under her breath. “I love storms.”

Anthony stood beside her as motionless as one of the tree trunks. He thought she did not realize what he was feeling. Perhaps she was thinking of the coming rain, while he stood tense with his struggle not to take her in his arms.

She turned and looked at him with eyes in which laughter brimmed over, seized him by the shoulders, and swiftly drawing his head down to hers, kissed him full on the lips.

Her action took Anthony completely by surprise. He caught her so close to him that she could not speak, and covered her face and eyes and hair with kisses. It was as if they ceased to be human beings, and became two wild creatures in the woods, full of magic and madness. Anthony slipped beyond her control and beyond his own.

All the years of his intense restraint fell from him; his whole being seemed to alter in her arms. He did not know what was left of him or what was Kitty.

Kitty said his name at last, over and over, very softly and steadily.

“Anthony! Anthony!” It seemed to him as if he were being called back out of another world. He let her go at last, forcing his will to answer hers.

She leaned, with her back against a tree, breathless and white, but laughing a little.



He did not know what was left of him or what was Kitty.

“I won’t scold you, Tony,” she said. “It was all my fault. I took you by surprise, and that was a little the way you took me. I didn’t know, you see, you would be that kind of lover.”

“I didn’t frighten you, did I?” he asked anxiously. “I’ll take the greatest care of you always, Kitty; I’ll never let anything hurt or frighten you again. I

never dreamed you could, I never thought I might—”

“Don’t put too much weight on anything I do,” Kitty interrupted him quickly. “The woods are full of mischief. Poor old Anthony! You do look done. That’s because you think I am, isn’t it? Well, I’ll race you to the bottom of the hill to show you I’m not.”

She was off like a flash between the trunks of the trees, and Anthony after her. It was a breathless, absurd, confusing race.

Anthony felt as if he had got into a nightmare. He did not know the path, and Kitty was mercilessly aware of it. She took short cuts and avoided rough places, leaving him to stumble into pitfalls and be caught by unexpected brambles. He broke free at last, and before they reached the car he had caught her and seized her by the shoulders.

“Kitty, you’re a little devil,” he said breathlessly. “Are you all right?”

Kitty ignored his question.

“That’s better,” she said, with approving eyes. “I’m a little devil, and you’re no better than you should be—now. You can come home and dine with me—no, I won’t be kissed on the roadside; but just bear those two facts in mind, won’t you?”

She sprang away from him into the car. Anthony swung himself up beside her, taking the steering-wheel out of her hands.

“No, you don’t,” he said fiercely. “I’ve had enough of your initiative for one afternoon. I’m going to do the driving from now on.”

Kitty yielded lightly, with smiling eyes. She watched Anthony’s face as he steered the car out of the narrow lane and road by the windmill. His eyes had a queer, odd light in them—a light of intense, controlled excitement, and his rather heavy jaws were set firmly. She would not be able to take him by surprise so easily again. The clouds had darkened rapidly, and just as they turned into the open road the rain began. Thunder rolled down on them from the low hills, and all the may-trees and the golden gorse were blotted out in storm.

Kitty leaned back in the car and shut her eyes; a little smile still lingered round her lips. Anthony glanced at her from time to time to see that she was properly wrapped up and did not look as if she was too exhausted by her race.

He swore to himself that he would never again leave her to her own discretion or let her do things for which she had to pay.

He would pay for whatever she did himself, and guide those small, wilful hands of hers, and put his heart under her feet. He could not tell if he was happy or sad, but he was settled; he knew what he had to do.

She was his life now; there was no other uncertainty. Nothing that people said of her could alter his judgment. Daphne and Jim, his people at Pannell, must accept her or be blotted out.

There was nothing left but Kitty. Kitty, too, was silent. She sat muffled up in her Burberry, with the rain lashing against her face. She was quite comfortable and content, but she made no resolutions. Only, as they flashed past the wet fields and round the familiar corners, she remembered Peckham's phrase, "A hair will turn him." A hair had turned Anthony. That was why Kitty was smiling.

CHAPTER XII

The tower room was unlike anything else in the shabby old farm-house. It was hundreds of years old, but Kitty had overrun it with modernity.

A staircase separated it from the rest of the house, the four narrow, deep-set windows looked out over the unkempt garden. Twilight was falling, and the scent of brier-roses invaded the still air, and filled the room with fragrance. It was the first time Anthony had been in the tower. Kitty took him to the foot of the little staircase and told him to go up and wait there while she dressed for dinner.

“It may amuse you,” she said, “poking about among my things.”

The rain had stopped falling. A gray mist surrounded the tower, out of which the dark shapes of the trees leaned like thick shadows. Roses climbed up above the window-sills, and swallows darted to and fro beneath them. Their nests were all about the tower.

Anthony leaned out of the window and heard the stirring of wings and the subdued movement of the leaves that parted to receive them. He thought that Kitty was like a swallow, swift and fugitive, a restless, reckless daughter of the air; and his heart moved in him with delight to think that he might make a nest to hold her, a place of security and peace for her to rest in between her circling flights.

The inside of the tower room was curiously unlike its setting; it was full of odd colors and extravagant luxury.

It contained beautiful things, but it did not express beauty; it expressed excitement and love of physical comfort. There was a long, very soft divan covered with cushions; the colors of the cushions clashed against one another, orange and green and gold, with here and there a bizarre note of black.

Between two of the windows hung a vivid piece of Sicilian embroidery with a design of grapes and pomegranates. By the door there was a Chinese screen of very dim gold, on which a flight of storks crossed a scarlet sunset, fading into gray.

The room was too small for the treasures it held; old French porcelain, lacquer boxes, and Italian bronzes jostled one another. Nothing seemed to

connect with anything else or with any idea behind itself.

A low book-case ran along the wall beneath the Sicilian altar-cloth. Anthony read the titles of the books carefully in the fading light. They were chiefly French novels of an unmistakable type. Kitty had been a great deal in France with her father; perhaps the books belonged to him. They were more like the books a man would have chosen, a man who had no moral sense, and particularly liked to have the lack of it stimulated.

Anthony did not know much about French novels, but a glance or two at them was enough to show him that they belonged to that light, evasive expression of evil that is hard to define, very expensive, and extremely disintegrating.

Anthony left the book-case and began to walk up and down. He had a curious, restless feeling, which he had not had for many weeks. It was as if he could not get out when he knew he could. It was a feeling that made him try doors and get as near as he could to windows, and it always ended in his walking to and fro as if his life depended on performing a series of vain movements.

It is a trick that prisoners learn in long confinements, and perhaps of all their habits it is the hardest to shake off.

Anthony walked up and down the little crowded room till Kitty came. By the time he heard her step he had almost forgotten where he was.

The room was nearly dark, and as Kitty opened the door she turned on the light and stood under it.

She was dressed in yellow gauze. One of the cleverest French dressmakers had designed the costume for her. It did not look as if it were a dress, but as if Kitty were a flower, an extraordinary, graceful, human flower from which the foliage had receded.

Her neck and shoulders rose bare out of the golden chiffon; the folds of it were fastened together with an amber ornament at her waist; the clinging, narrow skirt was slit up at the sides to show her slender feet and ankles; a green scarf escaped and hung behind her. A long chain of amber and green jade hung round her neck, catching and holding all the light in the room.

Kitty paused for a moment, and then moved quickly, like the passage of a sunbeam, into Anthony's arms.

Anthony no longer felt imprisoned. It seemed to him as if he had conquered space, and held all that he wanted of it forever.

But as quickly as he embraced her, Kitty gently released herself. Her eyes ran swiftly over him, alive with laughter.

“We must have dinner first,” she said. “How do you like my room and my dress and me? You’ll have to tell me after dinner. Poor old Anthony!” Her voice had a curious quality of control in it, as if Anthony had ceased to be himself and had become merely an instrument of her will. He was dimly aware of the fact, but he did not resent it. He only wanted to express Kitty’s will.

Anthony could not talk much at dinner. He ate and drank without seeing or tasting what was set before him. He was only aware of Kitty opposite him, Kitty laughing, Kitty recounting little tales of her life abroad, incidents in hotels, on railway stations. Wherever Kitty had been, incidents had followed.

Kitty always talked easily without the consciousness of any effect but her own amusement. She had little vivid turns of speech that stuck in Anthony’s mind, but her talking went by favor. At times she was stonily silent, and withdrew herself from any approach to expression.

To-night Anthony could not respond to her; he could not take his eyes away from her face or follow a word of what she said.

He knew her voice was music, and by the sound of it he knew that she was pleased. He was shut off from any other form of consciousness.

Peckham waited upon them silently, but her every gesture was a reproach. She put the plates down with severity, she poured out their wine as if she wished to mingle it with gall, she carried things in and out of the room with unveiled hostility; every movement of her starched apron was a remonstrance.

She wept in the pantry and she prayed in the hall; she even glanced imploringly straight at the impassive loveliness of Kitty.

But Peckham’s efforts and her pains counted for nothing. Anthony did not know that she was there, and Kitty, perceiving all she felt, took her own way.

After dinner they went back to the tower room. Anthony drew Kitty to him with a long sigh of relief.

“I thought you were never coming,” he said; “I thought I should never see you really like this again.”

“Poor old Tony!” Kitty murmured softly. “You do care for me awfully, don’t you?”

“Hopelessly,” said Anthony, smiling at her, “hopelessly. I can never show you. Kitty, you won’t keep me waiting, will you? I’ve waited all my life for you, and I don’t feel as if I could stand much more of it.”

Kitty’s eyes opened to receive him without barriers. She gave him a long, full look.

“No, of course not,” she said gently. “I shouldn’t be such a beast. You’ve had a terrible time; I’d like to make you awfully happy, Tony.”

“When?” he whispered. “Kitty darling, when will you marry me?”

Kitty jerked herself suddenly out of his arms.

“Marry you?” she said angrily. “I’m never going to marry you. What are you talking about, Tony?”

He stared at her in blank surprise.

“You silly old boy!” she said more gently, “you don’t seem to be very clever at taking things in. Sit down and be sensible; don’t stand looking at me like that. I haven’t done you any harm.”

Anthony sat down obediently. His eyes were still perplexed, but he put his mind on all that he remembered Kitty had told him about Dick. That was presumably the obstacle. Well, he would get over Dick. He was not going to have Kitty held back from life by a ghost.

Kitty slipped on to a footstool in front of the small wood fire. She looked thoughtfully at the amber beads at the point of her small satin slippers. They were where they should be; at first Peckham had put them too far forward.

She hoped Anthony wasn’t going to be foolish. He had a heavy line of jaw, and it was set exactly as it had been in the motor when he said he was going to drive; but Kitty had had no objection to his driving, so that it had not mattered. It was quite useless his talking about marriage. She did object to marriage.

“Kitty,” Anthony said slowly, “I think I understand what you feel. It’s about Dick, isn’t it?”

Kitty looked startled, but in a moment she had recovered herself.

“I told you,” she said a little uncertainly, “that I was never going to marry any one else but Dick.”

“I know,” said Anthony; “but that was before I cared for you. I think that must have made a difference, Kitty, for, after all, you’ve let me care.”

Kitty said nothing.

“You felt as if Dick were a part of your actual life, didn’t you?” Anthony persisted.

Kitty answered without raising her eyes.

“Not part of it,” she said; “all of it. And not only my life: he was part of me; he is still. That’s one reason why I can’t. But it isn’t any use talking about it, Anthony. Why don’t you stop talking?”

“We must talk about it first,” said Anthony. “We’ve got to get the whole thing straight. You are quite sure he is dead?”

Kitty flushed, but she answered without faltering.

“Yes; I waited to be sure. John Adams, from our old lodge, was his servant. They were posted missing at the same time; so there was always the chance.

“One day John turned up. He’d been maimed, so they sent him back. Dick died in one of their hospitals with a wound through his head. He kept calling my name till he died. He never said anything else. When John told me, I felt as if some one were laughing at me. We’d never been married. We might have been quite easily. That would have been something to hold on to; but there wasn’t anything.”

“No,” said Anthony; “sometimes there doesn’t seem anything to hold on to.”

Kitty looked up at him. His eyes were fixed on her with an intense watchful tenderness; he did not look lost as he had looked at dinner. All his faculties were alive for her; and because he was using them for her, he was in possession of himself. For a moment it occurred to Kitty that she might not be able to shake this possession.

“It is no use your turning into a doctor or anything,” she said shortly. “I can’t be doctored. I’m what you call a hopeless case.”

“There isn’t, strictly speaking, any such case,” said Anthony, smiling, “and you’ve got to listen to me a few minutes.

“You’re twenty-three, you’re a woman, and you’re not only Kitty. You’re not only Dick’s; you belong to life. Dick didn’t only belong to you. If he had, he wouldn’t have gone straight out to die; he would have waited till he

had to go. But he didn't; he went at once; he belonged to the service of life. You ought to give yourself honestly to the work of the world. You ought to be a wife and you ought to have a home and children. If you were one of the women who didn't take hold of men, it would be different. You'd be a worker then—some women are—or you'd be a mother, perhaps, just a natural mother with or without children, doing what she can for helpless lives. But you're not a mother woman or a worker, and you must not go on being nothing but a wasteful, mischievous will-o'-the-wisp. If you are, you'll be the part of Dick that contradicted him and refuses to serve life."

"He got a good deal out of serving life, didn't he?" said Kitty, bitterly. "And you think I'm going to be fooled, too? I'm just what you call me—pure mischievous waste. I won't be a wife; I don't want any poor, beastly, miserable little children born to get their hearts broken like the rest of us. I'll be what I am. You can't say I didn't warn you. I may be a will-o'-the-wisp, but I play fair, Anthony. That's more than whoever made me did with me."

"Do you—do you play quite fair, Kitty?" Anthony asked gently. "Is it fair to make a man feel for you as I do, so that he can't see or think or feel anything but a blind need of you—the need of having you in his eyes, in his home, so that he can serve and worship you all the days of his life? Is it quite fair to turn round and say, 'Yes, I warned you'? I don't think you did warn me of that, Kitty. You can play a light game with a light man; but you didn't think I was a light man, did you?"

Kitty was silent for a moment; she turned her eyes away from him.

"No," she said at last; "I didn't. I liked you. I didn't mean to like you. I didn't mean to care really at all; I never have before. If I hadn't, you wouldn't perhaps. You'd just have despised me and had a good time; that was all I ought to have let you do. And I did think you would—"

"Would what?" asked Anthony, perplexed.

"Would despise me," said Kitty under her breath.

"Well, I don't," said Anthony. "I think you're reckless and haven't been taken care of properly; but I propose to change all that. The only thing that matters is that you care. If you care, that makes it all right. You mightn't care enough to marry me yet; then I'll have to be patient till you do. But I'll make you care for me, Kitty; you've only got to trust me a little."

"Oh, don't, Tony! Don't!" said Kitty, shivering. "This is getting horrible. Why won't you understand? It isn't only Dick; I'm not *fit* to marry! I'm not fit to marry any man!"

She moved swiftly away from him to the other side of the room.

Anthony sat perfectly still where she had left him. He did not take in what she had said. The words got into his mind, but they refused to correspond with anything that was there. They stood separately like blocks of wood; there was no cohesion in them and no form.

She was not fit to marry any man. Kitty had made this plain statement, but it did not seem plain to Anthony.

She was Kitty, and he loved her, and she loved him. This confused the other statement.

Anthony did what he had so often practised when he felt his self-control leaving him in prison: he retired into absolute silence.

His mind moved against his will. He had got to think of Kitty; that was why he kept still. When his will was rested enough, it would attack his mind; till then he saw only pictures: pictures of Kitty in the red tam-o'-shanter laughing at the rain which blew against her face; Kitty in one of her moments of slow, childlike gravity; Kitty standing without help or guidance against an unjust, enigmatic world.

It was a long time before the pictures changed, and his mind struck upon the facility of Kitty—the deadly facility with which she handled men.

She was not defenseless then; it was Anthony who had been defenseless in her hands. He had been so careful to protect her and spare her even from his ardent thoughts, and he had never had a base or cruel thought of her. He had only wanted to wait till she was sure of herself so that he should not startle her by the strength of his love. Well, she was sure of herself and she was sure of him.

But was this Kitty, the Kitty he had meant to win? What had she to do with this facile, scheming, easily triumphant Kitty? This Kitty was not helpless; there was no need to shield her from anything. She had not tried to save herself. She had gone not blindly or weakly or from the sharp constraint of passion, but with deliberate steps, with perfect mastery, into the world of women who are not fit to marry.

Anthony had no longings for any such world. He had accepted long ago an ordered universe. He hated concealments and he despised light loves. He was not prepared to readjust his relationship with Kitty. His mind pointed out to him relentlessly what Kitty had always meant.

He understood the tower room, with its expensive luxuries, the violent colors; the enervating comfort. They troubled the senses; everything Kitty did troubled the senses. She had not wanted to go deeper than this. She would not have gone deeper if the senses were the measure of the soul; but something larger had broken through and shaken them both.

Anthony put the thought of this larger thing aside. It concerned him, perhaps; but he could not see that it concerned Kitty.

He was not going to stand any more from Kitty; he was going to get out.

He became suddenly pitiless with pain. The door of the round tower was in front of him. He need not look back. He could escape and get clean away. He could leave without compunction this creature who had set a snare for him, to trip him up out of the freedom of his new life, this creature, Kitty!

All this while she had not made a sound. He did not know how long he had been silent. Perhaps she had slipped out of the room without his noticing, but he did not think so; he felt she was in the room.

Perhaps she sat in some beautiful, seductive attitude, waiting to catch and hold his unwary eyes; but his eyes were not unwary now.

He turned his head and looked at Kitty.

She was crouched up in a small chair by her desk.

She had not even moved her dress to sit down. She looked like a school-boy who has told a lie and does not know how to confess it. She did not look at all seductive.

When Anthony turned to her she met his eyes with her miserable eyes without flinching; but her misery was not for herself. She spoke quickly.

“Poor old Tony! Hadn’t you better go? I’m frightfully sorry to have let you down like this. I didn’t dream you thought—such an impossible thing of me. You see, every one knows. I haven’t hidden anything; even Peckham, I think, knows. But I did hide a little from Peckham; it would have made her feel so—so awfully upset. So I just hoped she wouldn’t guess. I really didn’t think I need tell Peckham. D’you know, Tony, if I were you, I’d go? I would honestly. And don’t bother to think about me, because, you see, what you thought me—wasn’t there at all; it was just a girl who didn’t exist. But lots of frightfully nice girls do. I wish it hadn’t happened.” She paused and drew a long, difficult breath. “I wish it hadn’t happened,” she repeated dully.

Anthony stirred uneasily in his chair. She looked so different from the brilliant Kitty who had turned on the light and stood before him like a

golden flame. She looked tired and without any charm. She did not even hold up her head. She was perfectly right, of course; he had loved some one who didn't exist, a reckless, but innocent, girl whom he could have made a home for and protected from all the evil of the world.

He could get over a woman who didn't exist. He could not protect this Kitty; she was herself part of the world's evil. Still, this Kitty had said she cared for him and she looked upset. He told himself sharply that it served her right to care; and of course she was upset, because he had escaped her; he wasn't one of her many captives.

Anthony took human justice into his heart and felt it very cold.

He had known what pain was, and the complete knowledge of pain unfits the heart for executing justice.

He got up and went over to where Kitty sat hunched up on the Sheraton chair.

"I wouldn't be such a beast as to leave you," he said, kneeling down beside her. "I'm sorry I made that mistake. Let me stay on somehow, Kitty."

Kitty began to speak; then she moved nervously away from him to the window.

"Oh, you'd much better go!" she said between her teeth.

Anthony followed her.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked, fixing her with his eyes.

"How can I want you to go?" she said impatiently. "It's all too—stupid. I've been such a fool. I wish I hadn't, Tony, and now it's too late. If you've been a fool too often, you can't stop. I've got into the way of it; I can't get out. But what's the use—of your getting into the way of it, too?"

"Perhaps I sha'n't," said Anthony. "Perhaps together we can manage something? We might even manage to get out."

He was aware that he was suggesting something he did not know the strength of; but Kitty knew the strength of it. She looked at him with weary, doubtful eyes.

There was not a sound anywhere in the house. The rain dripped slowly from the eaves; the air hung in a thick mist about the old gray tower; the night shut them in upon themselves.

“Well,” said Kitty at last, “I suppose I’ll try and be your friend; I do rather want one. I’ll talk to you to-morrow. You’d better go now. It’s not exactly what I’d planned as an end to our evening; still, it ought to please Peckham. Good-by, Tony. Be careful of the stairs as you go down.”

He looked at her for a moment. She stood smiling at him with a queer, crooked little smile. It made him wonder why, after all, he was leaving her. He hadn’t any sense that he was doing right; he had only a queer instinct that he wanted to think things over and not to let her down. She had been let down so often. She had let herself down so often.

He turned and left her without looking back.

Kitty waited till she heard the door of the tower close at the foot of the stairs. Then she lay down on the divan and closed her eyes. Her face was white and drawn as if with very sharp physical pain. She kept quite still and made no sound; but after an hour had passed she got up and began walking to and fro, as Anthony had done while he was waiting for her; but no one came to bring any light to Kitty.

Once she went to the open window and looked out into the night.

“I can’t bear it,” she whispered between her teeth; and then, “I shall have to bear it.”

Toward morning she went slowly to her own room and undressed. The pain had gone now. She turned her face toward the dawn and slept.

CHAPTER XIII

Anthony found himself wondering the next morning if he hadn't put his foot into it. The breakfast-table is a place where the emotions of last night are apt to bring this metaphor home to one's mind. Heroism looks less heroic before ham and eggs, and the desire to save the world flickers in front of bread and marmalade.

The breakfast-table at Merry Gardens was a particularly normal and easy-going institution. There were things left hot on the side-board, and you could be as late as you liked. Very often there was no other company provided for you but sunbeams and the morning newspaper.

Anthony's adventure of the night before did not precisely sink in its significance, but he imperceptibly changed his attitude toward it. Hadn't he, after all, been rather a fool? He was a practical man, and he had allowed himself to get into a situation which was, to say the least of it, unpractical. Kitty had refused his offer, and he had refused hers. What, then, was their alternative?

Anthony knew too much about his feelings to suppose that the momentary shock given to them would do more than hold them back for a time. He was the same, and so was Kitty. She was a different person from the Kitty he had believed her to be, but she had the same powers of attraction. If they drifted, they would drift in one direction—the direction he intended to avoid. It was only if they parted that they could escape both the horns of their dilemma. The reasonable thing, then, was to part, as Kitty herself had pointed out to him.

Some strange, obscure, but very obstinate feeling in Anthony the night before had refused to endorse his reason. He could not leave her looking like a beaten child.

Daphne came in and poured out his tea. She explained that Jim had been up hours trying to persuade a calf that its best interests lay in the direction of the butcher. Jim was better than the cow-man at these moments of persuasion, because he always knew which way an unwilling animal is liable to turn. The cow-man went the other way with force, but Jim went the same way with strategy, and calves, like the rest of humanity, yield readily only to those who appear to be agreeing with them.

“That brings us back to the old question,” said Anthony, tapping a new-laid egg, “of which we are wisest to follow, reason or instinct?”

“It doesn’t bring Jim back to it,” Daphne replied, with a dimple; “because he hasn’t any reason. He just feels things are so, and they are so. I never knew a person who had fewer processes and more arrivals.”

“Then you think instincts are wiser than reasons, even when they contradict common sense?” asked Anthony, curiously.

“Oh, common sense!” said Daphne, with contempt. “Who minds contradicting common sense? I’m sure I don’t; it’s so crude! It sounds all right, and then you poke it, and over it goes like a house of cards. Besides, when you come down to it, it’s generally a way of saving one’s own corns. When people say, ‘But do let us take a common-sense view of things,’ don’t they always mean, ‘Don’t, for heaven’s sake! let me in for anything?’”

Anthony laughed.

“My profession is founded on common sense,” he explained. “Half of good doctoring is looking at facts straight and acting on them sensibly. People who get ill can’t do this, and doctors drag them back into it and hold them there till nature reinforces them. I can’t dismiss common sense so lightly. Besides, you let in other people as well as yourself if you act against reason. What becomes of bad instincts?”

“Oh, I don’t call them instincts,” said Daphne. “Those are desires, they come out of the top of your mind, you know, and pretend to be instincts, because they’re strong, and you want to do them. When I say an instinct, I mean the whole of you, back of your mind, that set feeling like a good chocolate shape. You feel, ‘I’ve *got* to do it,’ not, ‘I *want* to do it.’ Something bigger than you is getting at you or coming out through you, I don’t know which.”

“I don’t believe in things bigger than myself interfering with my will,” said Anthony. “I have not experienced it.” Then he stopped suddenly. After all, he *had* experienced it, had been himself subject in dreadful hours to strange reinforcements. He had known and done things that he could not account for; they had not come from himself. Perhaps they came from his unconscious self; but he disliked this phrase, which he thought fanciful.

“That’s a duck’s egg,” observed Daphne, swiftly. “They taste a little stronger, but they’re just as nice. If it’s *there*, the something I mean, it doesn’t matter whether you believe in it or not. I mean *it* won’t mind. It’s too large to mind; it just acts.”

“You seem to know a good deal about *it*” said Anthony, accepting the duck’s egg. “Newly married people make extraordinary discoveries. First they discover themselves. This, I believe, takes the honeymoon, and is not interesting to observers; then they discover the universe; after that they settle down and proceed to take both to pieces at their leisure. You seem to be in the middle phase, the most illuminating to the uninitiated. May I ask if you know how your glorified instinct is liable to act, and what it feels like?”

“If it’s your instinct,” said Daphne, with unshaken confidence, “*you’ll* know that. I don’t know anything about your instinct, you see; I only know my own. It’s just telling me I haven’t ordered the dinner, and the butcher may come any minute, so I must be quick about it. You’ll be in to-night, won’t you?”

Anthony hesitated.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Better not count on me.”

Daphne, too, paused for a moment. Then she said tentatively:

“Mother comes next week, Tony.”

Anthony met her eyes steadily.

“Yes, Daphne,” he answered.

“It’ll be rather awkward,” Daphne began a little uncomfortably, “about Kitty, won’t it? Mother’s sure to guess there’s somebody, and wonder why we don’t have her here. Do you really *want* me to have Kitty here, Tony?”

Anthony got up, and opened the door for her.

“No,” he said quietly, “I don’t.”

Daphne drew a quick breath as if something had hurt her. She knew that yesterday Anthony had wanted Kitty to come to the house.

Their eyes held each other for a long moment, but neither of them said anything. The Ardens were a frank, but uncommunicative, family. They expressed what they thought, but they kept their private affairs to themselves. When they most wanted to show sympathy they got out of one another’s way.

Daphne left him alone now. She went to deal with the cook, and Anthony resettled to his breakfast.

He had decided what to do. His conversation with Daphne had not altered him,—conversations with women never did,—it had merely helped

to crystallize his intention. He would go and tell Kitty their scheme wouldn't work:

It wouldn't be particularly easy to tell her after having persuaded her the night before to try it, but it would be less easy still for Kitty if they tried it and it failed. If they had got to part, they could at least part decently and as friends.

This was where Anthony made his first mistake: lovers do not part as friends. If they meet in order to part, they very seldom succeed in parting at all, and when they do succeed, it is with bitterness and without the sanity of reasonable forms.

When Anthony arrived at the farm he found Mr. Costrelle in possession. He had motored over from a friend's house in the course of the morning.

"I always arrive an hour before dinner and leave an hour after breakfast," Mr. Costrelle informed Anthony. "I consider it one of the chief rules of civilization. Nobody wants to see you trailing about his house all day with a train in your eye. I am sure you agree with me. I arrived here at this unearthly hour only because Kitty has persuaded me to look on this as a home; otherwise I would have motored to and fro from duck pond to duck pond till seven o'clock in the evening, poisoning myself with bad sherry and cold beef rolled in sawdust, which is what English inns provide you with in the place of food. The country is a beastly place for putting in time. 'The kindly fruits of the earth' are very much overrated. I never enjoy them, and there are no rational amusements. I don't know how you can stand it."

Kitty laughed.

"Tony hasn't found any difficulty so far," she remarked, "but of course he doesn't happen to be my father. You've just come in time," she added to Anthony. "Papa has brought me an invitation from an aunt to stay two or three weeks with her in London—an invitation that's been about five years en route, and I'm going to show him what rags I have to wear. You can help him decide if they'll do."

"You'd better go to Paris," observed Mr. Costrelle, "and buy new ones. It won't take any time and will save a lot of worry."

"I can't afford it," said Kitty, briefly.

Mr. Costrelle looked from Kitty to Anthony and from Anthony to Kitty. He drew out a long and extraordinarily good cigar. It was as fragrant as very good tea.

“Well,” he said in his slow, cool voice, in which suggestion always told with the directness of a carefully chosen chemical, “I should have thought you could have afforded it—somehow or other.”

If Mr. Costrelle had said, “Isn’t this man here to foot your bills?” he could not have made his meaning clearer.

Kitty flushed suddenly to the roots of her hair; the tears showed for an instant in her eyes. It was the only time in her life that she appeared obviously disconcerted. She spoke quickly.

“Oh, one can always raise money, of course—” she agreed, with a little shaken laugh. “I’m not totally at the end of my resources, Papa. Still, I think what I have will do. You two sit up here in the tower as a council of war, and I’ll try them before you one by one. It’ll be a mannikin show without music.”

Mr. Costrelle nodded and prepared to make himself comfortable.

He had spent between fifty and sixty years in the pursuit of comfort, and he could always effect the process better for himself than the most careful attendant could accomplish for him.

He shut the tower windows because he disliked drafts, then he chose the easiest position on the divan with consideration, placed himself with his back to the light—he disliked glare—drew a footstool in front of him, and proceeded to enjoy his cigar.

He did not ask Anthony if he smoked; he did not care if Anthony smoked or not. He considered his cigars far too good for young men.

Anthony watched him with an antagonism that was queerly blended with amusement. It was impossible not to be amused by a person whose absorption in himself was so unruffled. Mr. Costrelle was tall, lean, and pale. He had a long, well-finished face with remarkably blue eyes; they shone out of the hollows of his white cheeks like forget-me-nots by the side of a pool.

His hair was gray, thick, and very well brushed. He went to the best tailor in London and had an excellent set of the shoulders. He carried the marks of his perpetual dissipation lightly. They were plain to Anthony’s trained and scrutinizing eyes, but they would have escaped the ordinary observer.

Mr. Costrelle had done several generous actions in his life; he had not yet become incapable of doing them, but he had never continuously put himself out for any one. He did not care what people thought of him, and he

said whatever came into his head. When he wanted to do a thing he did it, whatever consequences might follow. He considered it extremely bourgeois to be checked by consequences; and though he had a very shrewd idea of the feelings of others, as people who live for sensation usually have, he never for a moment stopped to consider them. He asked no quarter and he gave none. He did not believe in any one else's motives. If they were different from his own, he thought them morbid or sentimental.

Mr. Costrelle believed that some people were foolish about getting what they wanted and other people were intelligent, but he did not think there was any other difference worth mentioning. He said to Kitty:

"I shall take trouble to show you the ropes, but I sha'n't take any further trouble about you. A person who knows the ropes and doesn't follow them properly is a fool, and a fool's a person that every one else had better avoid."

Mr. Costrelle observed Anthony without looking at him. Anthony was a good-looking man of his own class who had had a rough time of it and had succeeded in holding himself together. Mr. Costrelle had already decided that it was high time Kitty settled down and married. He came down on purpose to tell her so, and he decided that Anthony would do as well as any one else.

Anthony did not look a particularly easy man to fool, but his having had a bad time would probably make him easier, and Mr. Costrelle did justice to his daughter; he considered that Kitty, if she kept her head, could fool any man.

This decision did not make Mr. Costrelle politer to Anthony; it merely made him observant.

"You interested in women's clothes?" he remarked after a pause.

"No," said Anthony. "I suppose I have a general idea of whether they suit them or not."

"It's a great waste of time having general ideas about clothes," said Mr. Costrelle, dispassionately. "It's a thing men ought to study carefully in order to help the women. Women have very little sense about what they wear; they put themselves into the hands of dressmakers, ignorant and interested people, most of 'em, and get ruined. Of course my girl's different. I taught Kitty myself. She consults the one or two real designers there are in Paris, but she has her own ideas. She is the only perfectly dressed woman I know. You never see her in a motor looking as if she were going to a Sunday-school treat, or off to church as if she were leading a ballet. She considers

the occasion, what hat'll carry in a high wind, what in general suits her at different times of the day, and she gets the right shade and the right materials and puts 'em on properly.

“Cut is the main point. A woman should know her own figure as a captain knows his ship. If she goes wrong about line, give her up as a bad job; take her to the nearest department shop and let her run amuck among ready-made clothes. Nothing'll save her. The French haven't anything like our natural amount of beauty, but you hardly ever see a plain woman in France. Women have too much sense to be plain over there. They know how to avoid it; besides, their men help them. Look at a German *Frau*! By Jove! she is the indictment of the whole race. It's a satisfaction to me to think that the Germans have the women they deserve.

“Ah, here's Kitty, black and white, with a touch of scarlet. Those stripes are too broad for your height, Kitty; they make you look like a young zebra. You want to have the stripes halved. Get it copied with a smaller stripe, and, I should say, a quarter of an inch shorter. You can stand it, and the scarlet'll tell more; otherwise it'll do very nicely.”

The dresses followed one another in a bewildering flood; they seemed to Anthony interminable and extravagant, and yet he found himself enchanted by them. In each he was confronted by a new Kitty. It was like seeing a succession of Lady Hamilton's portraits: you could not fix your mind on which was loveliest.

Kitty was not so beautiful as the immortal Emma, but she had more spirit. She had the quality which makes a man sit up. No man in Kitty's presence ever forgot to make the best of himself; it seemed worth while.

Mr. Costrelle smoked on steadily, with watchful eyes. Nothing escaped his criticism. He examined the smallest detail, and he and Kitty discussed the points of difference inexhaustibly. They listened indulgently to Anthony when he spoke, but they plainly regarded him as one of the uninitiated.

Their relationship surprised Anthony, who had been brought up in a family where the feeling of kinship was strong, it was at once so cordial and so casual. Kitty and her father might have been congenial strangers meeting for the first time in a railway-carriage. They obviously got on well together, but there seemed no particular reason why they should ever meet again.

Kitty reappeared for the last time in the yellow chiffon dress she had worn the night before. It was intolerable to Anthony that she should wear it now. Kitty took it as a matter of course; she even sat in the small Sheraton

chair, with her head thrown back, and glanced across the room with unmoved eyes at her father.

“Do you think I’m all right in this particular primrose shade?” she asked anxiously. “I meant it to have less color in it, but they always coarsen their shades over here.”

“It’ll be better at night,” agreed her father. “If you want to tone it down a bit, have the scarf the same color as the jade ornament.”

“Are you sitting straight?” asked Anthony, suddenly.

Kitty stared at him.

“What a funny question!” she said a little irritably. “Yes, I suppose I am.”

“That left shoulder doesn’t look the same as the right,” said Anthony; “that’s all.”

Mr. Costrelle looked amazed.

“She never had a curvature,” he said. “I hope you haven’t done anything so stupid, my dear girl, as to develop one at your age.”

“Of course I haven’t,” said Kitty, impatiently. “Tony’s a doctor; he’s fussy. All doctors are fussy. They like to make discoveries; and as the only discovery they can make is something wrong with you, they’re very pessimistic company. What a pity you can’t discover I’m all right, Tony! It would be much nicer for papa, and have the added merit, for the scientific mind, of being accurate.”

Anthony did not answer her; he was looking intently at her shoulder. There was something wrong about it. Kitty got up with a little impatient swing of her skirts and left the room.

“I didn’t know you were a doctor,” observed Mr. Costrelle, thoughtfully. “I had an idea your people owned Pannell, that jolly old place in Sussex, under the downs.”

“They do,” said Anthony, shortly.

“You’re the oldest son living, aren’t you?” pursued Mr. Costrelle, ignoring Anthony’s annoyance.

“Yes,” said Anthony.

“It’s a strange fad,” said Mr. Costrelle, contemplatively. “Personally I think medical science is frightfully overrated. Things that don’t get right of

themselves, stay wrong; that's my experience. Besides, what you want of a doctor is not to stop your doing things, which is, I take it, what you prescribe half the time, but to show you how you can go on doing them with impunity. But you don't. Nobody gives impunity—there's no such thing—and when you come to think of it, it's the only thing you want. Who cares to be well if they can't do as they like, and who cares to do what they like if they can't be well?"

Anthony ignored this conundrum. He was still thinking hard.

"I ought to have noticed that before," he said under his breath, "unless, of course, she has her clothes bunched up there. That would account for it."

"Her *clothes* bunched up!" said Mr. Costrelle with scorn. "My dear young man, is that the kind of dress which has clothes bunched up under it, and is Kitty, poor innocent child—innocent I mean of being idiotic—the kind of person not to put on her clothes properly?"

Kitty came back, and the subject dropped.

"I don't see how you ever succeeded in getting Aunt Mallard to invite me to the house again," said Kitty, "considering my fearful reputation. Do you, Tony? You must have been awfully clever, Papa."

"No," said Mr. Costrelle, complacently, "I was not, in this instance, clever; I was merely good. Very few women who have passed their first youth are obdurate to a repentant sinner of the opposite sex. Your aunt was no exception. I sacrificed myself for you. I simply said: 'My dear Augusta, can you wonder that the child has tales told about her when you consider my career? I regret it deeply, but it has been I hesitate to tell you how shocking. I dare say if I had done as you advised earlier, and had a thoroughly good companion for her, people might have held their tongues; but you know what country tongues are, unsophisticated and anxious to believe the worst. And I admit I disliked the idea of a respectable middle-aged lady in my house—I mean in Kitty's house. They never have been in mine as far as I can remember. Either I should have shocked them, and they would have gone; or else I wouldn't have shocked them, and then they wouldn't have been of much use if they had stayed. You see my point?'"

"Your aunt said she did, and that it was deplorable; she added: 'As all my girls are married, I don't mind taking Kitty for a fortnight. But mind, no fast married men are to come to the house.'

"Your aunt is so intelligent and, for a deeply religious woman, so on the spot.

“I took the liberty of answering for you, Kitty; but I said I supposed it didn’t matter how fast the unmarried men were. And your aunt most tactfully remarked that it didn’t do to be too old-fashioned.”

“I dare say I shall have some fun,” said Kitty, thoughtfully. “I hope you said I must have a latch-key.”

Mr. Costrelle shook his head.

“I did my best,” he explained. “I said you were always very considerate about the servants not having late hours, and that if you happened to be out with me—to a theater or a lecture, you know—it might be as well for her to lend you an extra key. She said lectures were never late. It was the best I could do. I dare say you’ll manage it better.”

“Dear old thing!” said Kitty, appreciatively, “how well you get on with Aunt Augusta! It seems almost a pity you don’t see more of her.”

“It’s not at all a pity,” said Mr. Costrelle, firmly. “She takes away my appetite for lunch, to which she always invites me. Women with drab complexions should never wear fawn color; but they always do.”

“I’ll be one of the unmarried ones,” said Anthony, suddenly. “I suppose I can call even if I am not fast?”

“Will you?” said Kitty, carelessly.

She took it as a matter of course, and yet an hour ago it had not been a matter of course.

Anthony looked away from Kitty. He was aware that he had never cared so little for her as he did at the moment of his decision.

She and her father struck him as intolerably light. He could not understand their rapacity for pleasure. Neither of them had any fixed goal beyond their fugitive desires.

All their wits, all their ingenuities, were bent in attaining temporary gratifications. Neither of them had any roots or appeared to have any compunction.

Last night Kitty had seemed to be really sorry; she had spoken with what sounded like conviction. Where was the conviction now? She had wanted Anthony as a stand-by, if as nothing else. To-day she was apparently indifferent whether he was there or not.

It would be easy to leave her now, and yet Anthony knew that what held him to her was the very fact of her incorrigible lightness. It had flashed into

his mind that she was threatened—threatened as a butterfly is threatened by the brutal onslaught of a sudden storm. He could feel the pitiless cold of it against her colored wings. There was no shelter for her in Mr. Costrelle, and Kitty had herself broken down all other shelters.

Anthony could have left Kitty if he had been certain of the sunshine for her. There might, after all, be nothing wrong; but Anthony was not certain of the sunshine.

CHAPTER XIV

After lunch they went on the river. Mr. Costrelle excused himself. He explained that only the very young or the exasperatingly dutiful ever did things between the hours of two and four o'clock in the afternoon. This was a time that should be dedicated to a reticent idleness. As he was neither young nor dutiful, he intended to conceal himself until tea-time.

Kitty reappeared in a dress that was the color of a Malmaison carnation. She had a felt hat of the same shade, with a narrow black-velvet ribbon round it, and she carried a rose-colored parasol.

"The ways of women," observed Mr. Costrelle, regarding Kitty thoughtfully through a single eyeglass, "are strange. They are not past finding out, as we are told those of Providence are, but they have at times the same deceptive sidewise movement, like a crab's. Explain to us, my dear child, why you refrained from showing us that very excellent garment this morning. The pink topaz set in brilliants, which you wear round your neck, is new to me and a good note."

"Oh, this dress?" said Kitty, serenely. "I forgot I had it."

A flicker of amusement passed over Mr. Costrelle's heavy eyelids. He knew now what he had wanted to find out. Kitty liked this new young man; she liked him enough to reserve surprises for him, and then lie about them. He let his eyeglass fall and retired into the house.

It was one of those early summer days which England occasionally drops upon her appreciative, but unexpectant, inhabitants. May was at its loveliest, the trees were all in blossom, the blackbird gave his deepest underwater note, the thrush flung out his reiterated challenge of sheer joy, and the young world was full of the surprises of its multitudinous green shades. On the river the reeds and rushes lived a life of their own; loose-strife and forget-me-nots grew out from the green banks; yellow water lilies and lifted buds of coral set their small thick-set flowers afloat upon the stream. Dragon-flies darted to and fro, shooting blue and green flames between the fastnesses of the dark bulrushes, small shocks of speed and color.

Kitty leaned back against the apple-green cushions of the punt, supremely comfortable and at peace.

She was always capable of complete surrender to a sunny hour; her conscience never interfered with either her own or other people's comfort. She had the disposition of ephemeral things to love the light and play in it, however short it was.

Kitty crossed her slim ankles, and, opening a jeweled case, drew out a cigarette and lit it. She narrowed her eyes and fixed them upon Anthony with satisfaction.

Anthony's head was bare and his shirt open at the throat; his figure showed to better advantage in motion than at rest. Motion relieved and freed him from his own watchfulness. He punted with long, sure strokes and a steady eye.

Kitty had no need to think of her hat or fear the magnetism of low-growing bushes. The motion of the boat was imperceptible and noiseless; it seemed a part of the slow-moving stream. She yielded herself completely to the serene compulsion of the sunny hour. She smiled a little, but she had no thoughts; her mind melted into sensation.

But Anthony could not let himself go. He, too, wanted to enjoy himself; but he had an ulterior motive, and no one with an ulterior motive has ever yet succeeded in sharing the joy of others.

He leaned forward suddenly, with his eyes intent upon Kitty's face.

"What is the matter with that shoulder of yours?" he asked quickly.

Kitty turned her lazy eyes back to the stream. They rested on the quick spurt of a dragon-fly between the hawthorn bushes.

"Oh," she said carelessly, "didn't I tell you? You were right, after all. I'd caught up some ribbons I wear on a bodice underneath; they did make an awful lump. Don't tell papa. He'd think it so careless of me not to have taken it off."

"It was the only low-necked dress you tried on," observed Anthony, with the same intentness.

"Was it?" replied Kitty, indifferently. "I don't think I have any other decent ones. I must get some when I go to town. I hardly ever go out in the evenings here."

Kitty's carelessness would have deceived the very elect, but she did not quite succeed in deceiving Anthony. Added to the keenness of his professional training was the instinctive watchfulness of love. Anthony noticed that when Kitty had answered him she unconsciously straightened

herself a little, nor did she return to the same complete relaxation again. She in her turn watched him.

“Oh, that’s all right, then,” he answered in a tone of obvious relief, which was more successful in blinding Kitty than she had been in deceiving him. “I am going to stay here till you turn me out this afternoon,” he added. “To-morrow I sha’n’t be able to see you. My mother’s coming to Merry Gardens.”

“What’s she like?” asked Kitty, curiously.

Few men are capable of giving a comprehensive description of their mothers offhand, and Anthony was no exception.

“Oh, well,” he said a little awkwardly, “I suppose she’s like other people’s mothers.”

Kitty brushed aside this evasion.

“You must tell me about her,” she asserted. “I never met her, you know. She came to see Daphne after Daphne first came here, but I was away. I should like to see your mother, Tony.”

This was merely the expression of a pious hope on Kitty’s part. She was not really desirous of meeting the mothers of her men friends, with whom her one point of contact would have led to direct antagonism, and she would have let the matter slide if Anthony had shown a little tact.

Tact with women is the knowledge of when to leave a subject alone, and Anthony had not grasped this saving truth.

“Oh, no,” he remarked hurriedly, “you wouldn’t care about her in the least. She’s not your sort, she wouldn’t entertain you.”

Kitty’s narrowed eyes grew slowly larger.

“You mean,” she said in a voice of deceptive gentleness, “that she wouldn’t like me and would disapprove of me?”

This was, of course, what Anthony had meant, but the way was still open to him to save the situation by a direct denial. The path of transgressors is hard, but it is softness itself compared with the path of a man who tells an adverse truth to a woman who loves him.

Kitty could stand criticism, but she could not stand Anthony’s criticism.

“In a sense I do mean that,” agreed Anthony. “I mean both. It wouldn’t be at all suitable.”

“I assure you,” said Kitty, with dangerous sweetness, “I have sometimes had a *succès fou* with old ladies.”

Anthony winced. He did not like hearing his mother called an old lady, nor did he like to think of Kitty setting herself to win a delusive popularity from his mother.

“It wouldn’t do at all,” he said decisively. “I told Daphne so this morning.”

Kitty sat up perfectly straight. She threw her cigarette into the water; her eyes literally blazed at Anthony.

“You did what?” she asked incredulously. “You told Daphne that I was unsuitable to meet your mother?”

“Practically,” Anthony admitted.

“Then Daphne knows,” said Kitty in a cold, level voice, “that *you* know what I am.”

Anthony drew the punt into the nearest bank, shipped his pole, and sat down opposite Kitty. He saw now that he was in for trouble, and he prepared to face it.

“She only knows I didn’t think it suitable,” he replied doggedly. “I can’t help it, Kitty, I don’t!”

“Suitable!” exclaimed Kitty, her voice lashing at the word. “No, I suppose I’m *not* suitable; that’s what you all are in your nice, safe, tidy, unspeakably selfish world! Your mother’s *safe*, Daphne’s safe, you’re safe—and, if you like, you can play with me outside it, and take anything I care to give you, and *you’re* all right! My father could meet your mother,—you know his life, don’t you?—but that doesn’t matter. He’s quite suitable. Only girls who have had bad times and been broken by them aren’t suitable. They’re dangerous; they must be kept down! They’d do elderly respectable married women harm! We’d shock them, I suppose, by showing them what happens when things don’t go right in this awfully easy, decent, bread-and-butter world!

“You refused to let Daphne invite me. Yesterday you fought my battles and were keen to get me asked, but yesterday of course you thought I was innocent—a little rapid—but innocent. To-day I’m not. I’m just a graceless little pariah you can take out in a punt! You offered me your friendship last night, and I was fool enough to think you meant something rather fine by it.

You didn't; you meant just this—that I was good enough to amuse you, but I mustn't touch your precious family with a forty-foot pole.

“Take me back, Tony. I wish I'd left you to Miss Mellicot. But you're worse than her, for she'd have had the sense to leave me alone.”

“You're hopelessly unfair,” said Anthony, steadying himself against his rising anger. “You want both to eat your cake and have it. You went off the track of your own free will, then why don't you stay off it? I didn't make the damned rules that keep people on it; but I know they're there, and if you break them—and you have a perfect right to break them if you want to—you ought to be prepared to pay for it and not hold me accountable. If people take the trouble to keep a few plain rules in order to make a good, clean place for bringing up their children, why should they let in those who haven't controlled themselves to spoil it?”

“You've said enough,” said Kitty, white to the lips. “Take me home.”

“No, I haven't said enough,” said Anthony, firmly, “and I want you to listen to me, because I want to stand by you through anything except unfairness. But it's no use expecting me to agree to a lot of sentimental cant about the kindness and unkindness of a perfectly obvious fact. It isn't a question of my mother only. Of course it wouldn't hurt her to meet you, and of course if you wanted to charm her, you'd charm her, then she'd ask you to Pannell.”

“That,” interrupted Kitty, viciously, “*would* bring the world to an end, wouldn't it? How I should contaminate Pannell! You'd have to have the whole place disinfected afterward!”

“That's not the point,” replied Anthony, pitilessly. “The point is that you would be there on false pretenses, because my people wouldn't let you come, of course, if they knew what I know about you. Do you like going about on false pretenses? But of course you do. I'm a fool to suppose you have any honor; you're going to London now on false pretenses.”

“Ah,” interrupted Kitty, with a cruel little laugh, “I see. You object to my going to London. That's your real trouble, isn't it? I might meet a man there who wouldn't be as selfish as a dog in the manger and as moral as a curate. I might meet a *real* man.”

Anthony's impulse was to spring out of the punt on to the bank and leave Kitty.

She sat there looking at him with a little derisive smile on her lips. There was no light in her small, white face; it was fixed and implacable and as set

against him as an iron door.

Anthony felt every passion he thought he had conquered rise up in him, and they were all ugly, greedy, cruel passions without intermixture or relief. The green trees met over their heads; the high, pale clouds sailed by on idle wings; the whole lovely summer world about them was as unreal as a painted screen. Only their anger was real; their unsparing desire to hurt each other was real; their foolish, ineffectual combat, which took for both of them the light out of the day.

Kitty held herself as still as a trapped bird. Her heart beat painfully in her throat, but she met Anthony's angry eyes with her level, light gaze, and kept her smiling lips unshaken.

"D'you mean that, Kitty?" Anthony asked slowly. "D'you mean I don't seem like a real man to you because I want to make love to you and haven't? By God! I'll make love to you now if you do."

"If you dare to touch me," said Kitty, quietly, "I'll upset the boat. Of course I shall never speak to you again in any case."

"Oh, all right," said Anthony, "only in the future when you feel inclined to cry down the justice of good people you might remember with what kind of fairness you've treated me. I'm off. You can punt back by yourself, can't you?"

"No, I can't," said Kitty.

There was something in the way in which she said these three little words that shook Anthony.

He could not have said what it was that shook him, but there was a controlled helplessness in Kitty's voice which prevented him from leaving her.

"I'll take you back, then," he said stiffly.

It occurred to him afterward that he might have punted back and let Kitty walk home, but it did not occur to him then, and it never crossed his mind that it had occurred to Kitty already, but that she knew she could not walk.

He took up the pole suddenly and rose to his feet.

Kitty watched him for a few moments in silence, then she said in a small contrite voice:

“Tony, I was angry; I didn’t mean that—not the horrid thing I said about your not being a man. It’s just because you are I mind so awfully. Of course it’s silly. One really likes one’s own world best and one shouldn’t poach. I expect you did mean all you said, didn’t you?”

Anthony considered. He could not honestly say that he had not meant what he said, but he wished very much he had not said it. There are probably few regrets more keen than those we feel when we have been righteous over much.

“I dare say,” he admitted, “that what made me so nasty *was* partly your going to London. We were having—at least I thought we were—rather a good time here, and all of a sudden you seemed to forget all about it and only to think of clothes and nothing else, like a gnat in the air turning people’s heads and all that London rubbish, and I felt I’d been a fool to care so much when you evidently couldn’t have cared at all.”

“I see,” said Kitty.

She leaned back against the cushions with the lightness of a fallen leaf. She turned her head away so that the brim of her hat shaded her from Anthony’s persistent eyes.

“I do want to go to London, Tony,” she said slowly, “only I liked this, too. You make a mistake if you thought I didn’t care. I do care for all this. What you said about false pretenses, you know, I’ve always thought of differently. I never really believed I owed it to the world not to score off it when I could. I felt I had been downed. If Aunt Augusta had cared a button for me, I’d have told her the truth and taken the consequences; but she is getting something by having me up or she wouldn’t ask me. I don’t know how to explain quite. I’ve cared for awfully few people and I’ve never tried to explain unless I’ve cared, and I haven’t felt as if I owed anybody anything; but though I honestly chose my own line, and ought to face it, I would have kept my—my self-control, as you call it, and made the effort, if I’d been even a little happy or had had any one who cared a pin whether I kept straight or not. Of course there was Peckham, but she wasn’t with me then. I was awfully lonely, and then I knew how. Lots of other girls are quite as lonely, but a good many of them keep out of my little bothers because, you see, they don’t know how. Not all, of course; they’re real good ones too, only it’s not as different as you think. Awfully few people are *really* different; things that push them about are different.”

Anthony acknowledged this possibility. He didn’t want to hurt Kitty now; he wanted to spare her, but he was uncertain of the best way of sparing

her. Facts had not spared her, and Anthony still believed in the wisdom of facts.

“Still,” he explained, “if people have met hard times by keeping straight, it doesn’t seem quite fair for those who have chosen what is, I suppose, after all, the easier way, to come down on the straight ones for not wanting to share their privileges with them. There is something, isn’t there, in paying for your fun?”

Kitty smiled her little twisted smile.

“Oh, yes, Tony,” she said; “I know, and it’s more sensible to be good, and you get an awful lot of things thrown in—coals and blankets, you know. The fun doesn’t keep you half as warm as the coals and blankets, but I expect it’s quite fair really.”

“Sometimes it’s the other way round,” objected Anthony. “I don’t think being good or bad is advantageous in itself; it depends on what you’re out for. If you’re out for an easy time, I think the chances are that you get what you want more easily by being lawless. Only if you have to pay for it afterward, as I’m bound to admit in a carefully policed world the lawless usually do, you mustn’t squeal, must you? That’s my idea.”

“No, I won’t squeal,” said Kitty in a low voice. “I think I see what you mean, Tony. We’ll go home now.”

“Must we?” pleaded Anthony. “I’ve been such a brute and I’ve given you such a loathsome time, and I think I wanted to be particularly nice. I don’t know how it happened.”

“I do,” said Kitty, laughing; “I know exactly how it happened. It was all my fault. I wanted to be wicked, but now I want to go in. I’m not really feeling quite good yet. I’ve climbed down, and that’s made me awfully anxious for my tea. I’ve never climbed down for any one in my life before, Tony; so when I’m particularly tiresome you’ll remember that,—won’t you?—and in return I’ll try to forgive you for being in the right.”

“I don’t know that I was in the right,” said Anthony, uncertainly making for the landing-stage.

“That’ll make it all the easier to forgive you,” said Kitty, lightly. “You’ll put the cushions away, won’t you, while I go up to the house?”

She slipped out of the punt and up the narrow wooden steps before Anthony could help her, but she did not go straight back to the house.

It was some time before she rejoined Anthony, and her father, on the lawn.

“If I were you,” said Mr. Costrelle as she approached the tea-table, “I should send for some more of that face cream from Paris. You’ve sat out too long in the sun.”

CHAPTER XV

Kitty was unaccustomed to the processes of thought; she considered reason to be of the same general quality as coal-mining, a useful industry safely left in the hands of experts. She did not foresee trouble. She came against the corners of adverse facts as those who walk unwarily in the dark bruise themselves against unexpected obstacles.

When she went to bed the night after her quarrel with Anthony she found herself exposed to one of these unexpected spiritual bruises. She could not sleep. It was a soundless, mild June night. The garden lay gray and still under her window. There was no darkness; only a long suspension of light. Nothing was alive but Kitty. She drew on a scarlet dressing-gown and leaned out of the window.

It must be rather funny, she thought, being dead. If it was only stillness, like the gray shadow of the lawn, one wouldn't mind very much, and there would be no pain and no bother. You wouldn't have to decide anything.

She was not in severe pain to-night. Those singular paroxysms which seized her chest and her right arm, and made her feel like a creature caught in a trap, were mercifully holding off.

It was clever of Anthony to guess that there was something the matter with her, perhaps it was that odd little lump under her arm which had made one shoulder look higher than the other. She had examined her neck very carefully before she went to bed and noticed nothing herself.

Kitty had never taken the least precaution about her health. She knew nothing about illness except that it was very bad for people's looks. She did not think a lump under her arm could be an illness. If the pain got too bad, she would not stand it, but she wouldn't be bothered with doctors and operations. All the wild things she loved and knew lived freely, and when their time came, went into bushes and died. Of course it wouldn't be as simple as that for her, but you could make it fairly simple.

A bat flickered by, heavily drooping like a sagging leaf. Kitty moved a little and watched the darker shadow of the shrubbery swallowing its tiny form.

She liked the thin vague darkness melting away into the sky; there seemed nothing that could hurt you in it. After all, she'd had a good time, and a long life was merely the fading down of good times.

"I don't find anything new in it," her father had assured her. "Nor do I think the facts I already know worth the attention one has more or less to give them. I survive from habit, and so, I believe, do most people."

Kitty did not think habit worth survival. She wished to live a hundred lives, each of them different, and she had tried only one, and it was very much the same. The worst of it was, if you went into one kind of life thoroughly, it seemed to dish you for all the others. Hers for instance—she hadn't quite realized before how it had dished her for people like Anthony's mother.

Kitty's practice had always been to eat her cake and have it. She had eaten and forgotten; and when she wanted fresh cake, it was always there. It was true that there had been occasional breakdowns in this system; but on the whole she had lived the life she had chosen, with very few rebuffs and no remorse. It was rather absurd at this time of day to begin to want a different kind of life.

Perhaps it had been a mistake to take up Anthony. She hadn't seen at the beginning why they shouldn't just have fun—her kind of fun.

But Anthony had his own kind of fun. He thought about right and wrong, though he wasn't a bit religious. Kitty never thought about right and wrong if she could help it. She didn't see what it had got to do with her and Anthony. Why couldn't it be left to people who went to church and liked it? When Anthony had told her about his work as if it was a sacred obligation, she supposed it was because he had not had any opportunity of going to musical comedies for a long time, and had nothing else to talk about. She thought he was mad when he explained to her that if in the future it came to a choice between having to give up his profession or Pannell, he would give up Pannell. She hoped that he would get over it as soon as his overstrung nerves had become more normal.

But Anthony had got steadily more normal, and he had not got over it. He really wanted to do his work more than he wanted a good time. It was, oddly enough, his idea of a good time. He kept coming back to it when he ought to have been amusing Kitty. He actually appeared to think he was amusing her. It was part of Anthony's idea of fun. The rest of his fun was loving her—loving her in a way that disturbed everything else.

Anthony was more anxious to protect her than to please her, and he was apparently more anxious still that she should do right. He never had accepted the convenience of her recklessness. If he had, he might have been with her now in this emphatic night stillness, and then she would have told him everything. There would have been no barriers. But Anthony did not know this. It was hidden from him by his implacable innocence! He did not know what he might have had, or, if he continued indefinitely the part he had chosen, what would happen to him.

But Kitty knew. She knew that she would drag him under, and involve his life, so that the work he loved would be hindered, and his life caught away from the people and customs which belonged to him. He would become a part of the circle of her lawlessness.

He could think what he liked, that was the worst of thought it had so much margin, but that narrow path experience was against Anthony.

Kitty knew that out of certain situations certain facts arise, they do not happen as you like, they happen as they must; thought does not save any man's steps from the abyss unless he turns away from it.

It seemed to Kitty, as she sat huddled up on the window-sill, that the gray light over the fields had changed a little. The shadows were darker in it, and there was a sense of movement in the air, as if the earth was coming back to life. A long way off she heard the call of a bird.

There was only one way to save Anthony: she could disenchant him, she could do what he would think despicable. He had fine, stern principles, but Kitty hadn't. Her only principle had been to amuse herself; so that it would be much easier for her to give up hers than for Anthony to give up his. Kitty did not say, "I must not do wrong even to save Anthony." She knew she must do wrong if it *could* save him. She was thinking only of him.

The worst of it was that she would have to be really horrible. She couldn't put Anthony off with anything less than the complete disfigurement of herself. He had accepted too much already not to be willing to accept more, unless it was of such a nature as to shake his whole faith in Kitty's character. She must do something which would violate his taste and make him feel that she was contemptible.

He had forgiven badness, partly because he hadn't seen it, and partly because there were excuses which he could put between her and her acts. He would not forgive her if she could make him despise her.

Kitty hunted in her relentless, clear little mind for an essential ugliness. There were things she had done which she hadn't minded at the time, but which she now realized would hurt her to tell Anthony; she had not let herself think about these incidents before.

She could remember the time when she had hastened over their accomplishment because they had jarred some instinct in her, which had first rebelled and then sunk into acquiescence. They jarred her mind now to think about, but she faced each incident steadily in turn, to see if it was ugly enough to disenchant Anthony.

It must be something she had really done which he couldn't get over, something that would lash his memory and scar it with a cruel image, and she must attach this image to herself, so that afterward, when he went away, he would not crave for her, but be able to say, "Well, thank God, I saw through her in time!"

Kitty put her head down on the scarlet dressing-gown and shook a little with dry, reluctant sobs. She did not cry very long or very hard, because she was afraid of bringing on the pain; but she felt as if her spirit was buried in a place of tears. She didn't want Anthony to see through her, she did not want to see through herself. Why was it that after she had forgotten all about love, and stamped out the pure and perfect promise of her early years, love should return and haunt her with promises as strong as ever, and its attainment impossible? Could those fugitive, unconnected acts into which she had flung herself from excitement, and a desire to use her unexplored, untempered powers, close against her forever any fuller life?

Must she always be a "vagrant," shut outside those magic walls which hold mothers and their children, homes, and the rich security of love?

Kitty lifted her head and looked out once more into the mysterious life of the night. She could hear the distant droning of the frogs in the water meadows, and watch the mists blown by the strong dawn wind, flitting in strange shapes across the lawn.

Nature went on her own silent way, clothing in darkness the deepest processes of life.

Kitty could not expect the assistance of a revelation either from nature or from man. She had chosen the predatory life of loneliness in which there is neither sympathy nor companionship, and where the outcast is pitted against the solidarity of a hostile world.

She could do what she liked and let Anthony take the consequences, or she could take the consequences and do what she didn't like. There did not seem to be any other alternative. Her mind fixed suddenly on a sufficient incident. There was something she could tell Anthony which would be certain to send him away. She hadn't immediately thought of it because it had seemed trivial at the time, but it wasn't trivial if she looked at it in connection with Anthony, and she could make it worse than it was.

She shrank from proclaiming it because it unfortunately involved somebody else, though he wasn't very deeply involved. Kitty could manage to make him appear almost innocent in comparison with herself, and, fortunately, it never mattered that a man should be wholly innocent.

Kitty gave a wicked chuckle as she saw in a sudden flash how it would annoy the person involved. It would be the only amusing point in the whole affair; and she was perhaps entitled to that much amusement; for if he was annoyed, she would be ruined in Anthony's eyes.

Still, it really wouldn't do just to mess Anthony's life up for nothing. It would be awfully dull and horrible sending him away, but it would be more horrible to smash him up when he'd been awfully good to her. She wasn't going to like doing it, of course; she hadn't liked quarreling with him on the river. She hadn't been prepared for that particular quarrel, or she could have finished the whole thing then. Anthony had taken her by surprise, and she had been so hurt that her wits had broken down. She had stopped quarreling when she ought to have gone on. That was what happened when you got accidentally hurt—it did not happen when you meant to hurt yourself. You could keep your head then.

As the light broadened out over the fields and ran like silver down the little river, the pain in Kitty's arm came on her like a toothache. It was an extraordinary pain, dull at first and then as fierce as a blow, and it seemed to hold Kitty so that she was like some thing shaken in an iron vise. She could not move, and her breathing came uncomfortably, as if it were being forced through a narrow space.

The attack lasted longer than she had ever known it to last. The sun came out and drank up all the shadows, and the little shapes of mist that leaned over the water slipped into the willows; but the land was no longer real to Kitty. It looked like some foreign country. She was being held back by a dreadful iron grip, so that she could take no part in it.

The pain dulled down at last, and broken and white-lipped, she struggled to bed. She said to herself that she must do something about the pain soon if

it didn't get any better.

Then she fixed her mind on what she had better do to disenchant Anthony. It was easier to Kitty to put off the thought of death than to put off the thought of Anthony.

CHAPTER XVI

Mrs. Arden was enjoying herself very much. She was sitting under a large pink May-tree on the lawn, watching her children.

Daphne was in a lounge-chair half asleep; Anthony, with Max at his feet, was reading out loud emphatic modern poetry, which his mother could not understand; Jim was mending a fishing-rod; and nobody seemed to be in anybody else's way.

The two men were going to play tennis after tea despite its being Sunday; but this did not really matter, as Mr. Arden was not there to object.

After thirty-five years of married life the moral law had sunk for Mrs. Arden into the consideration of what would or what would not upset Mr. Arden. It was an extremely happy marriage. Her husband was faithful, tyrannical, and kind, and she gave way to him on every point except when he interfered, as he sometimes did from the highest motives, with the happiness of his children. Mrs. Arden always asserted that her husband was the best judge of his children's happiness, and spent her entire life in altering his judgments to suit the children. She had no intellectual ability, but she knew when children would rebel.

"When you are older you will understand your dear father better," she often told them; but it had never occurred to her to think that when Mr. Arden was older he would understand his children better. She knew he never would. Mrs. Arden's happiest hours were when she knew Mr. Arden was safe doing something he liked and the children were nowhere near him. She had never faced any problem that was not domestic, nor had she ever met a human being of her own class who was not respectable.

There had been a nervous flurry once over Tom and a musical-comedy star, but it had all ended most satisfactorily. The musical-comedy star had married a lord, and Tom had gone to India and killed a tiger.

Mrs. Arden looked reflectively at Anthony. He was getting over his imprisonment wonderfully well. His eyes no longer had that bright flickering look of an animal endangered, and he had ceased to keep himself in hand, as if what he was carrying would break if he forgot to hold it carefully.

Her tranquil eyes turned from their satisfaction in him to rest upon Daphne.

It was the hour of Daphne's life when she was of most importance to the universe. Her husband's every thought and hope centered in her, and nature had laid upon Daphne her greatest task and her supreme reward.

Mrs. Arden knew what Daphne felt like. She remembered her own sensations before the birth of Tom, her incredible deep content in the face of all physical inconvenience, and Mr. Arden's frightened tenderness.

He had waited upon her hand and foot, as Jim waited upon Daphne now; his thoughts had hung on her wishes. Mr. Arden's thought hung on his own wishes now, and he no longer waited upon his wife. She waited upon him instead, without, however, making him at all conspicuous by it. Mr. Arden liked to be thought a young man and to be treated with the deference due to an old one.

But Mrs. Arden did not look at the relinquished gifts of life with any self-pity. She realized that as you grow older, you have less and suffer more; but on the other hand you know how to suffer better, and you can enjoy with a delightful escape from responsibility the experiences of others.

Mrs. Arden approved the arrangement of Providence by which you had the prizes while you had the battles, and ceased to have the battles at the moment when the prizes became unobtainable.

It was a soft and peaceful afternoon. Anthony went on reading out loud, with obvious enjoyment. The startling paradoxes of modern poets rang harmlessly through the slumbering, flower-scented air. It was as if nothing very dreadful had ever happened.

Mrs. Arden sighed softly, because she never for an instant forgot Tom. When she repeated in the creed that she believed in the resurrection of the dead, she saw Tom in white flannels with his hat pulled forward over his eyes, precisely as she saw Anthony now, except that Tom's shoulders were broader, and he was usually doing something useful with his hands.

The garden gate clicked, and an extraordinary vision appeared upon the lawn. It was Kitty, accompanied by Mr. Costrelle. Kitty wore the pink Malmaison dress, with pale-pink stockings and remarkably smart black suède shoes. She balanced a rose-pink parasol to perfection.

Mr. Costrelle trailed indolently beside her, long, lean, white-faced, without expression except for his pale eyes, which had a sharpened, appraising look, as if he were on the look-out for a new possession, but had

no intention of being taken in by it. They approached the group under the pink May-tree with friendliness, but they belonged to a hostile tribe.

Kitty moved swiftly across the lawn, kissed Daphne, who was half asleep and taken unawares, perfunctorily; noticed Jim and Anthony with a little lift of an eyebrow more perfunctory still, and turned her undivided attention upon Mrs. Arden.

“I’m Kitty Costrelle,” she announced, “and I know you’re Daphne’s mother. I’ve wanted to meet you for ages.” She sank into a chair by Mrs. Arden’s side and turned her shoulder upon the rest of the group.

Mrs. Arden had a flurried sense that both her son-in-law and Anthony wanted, for some unknown reason, to intervene, but they didn’t know how; and Daphne, who did know how, found herself fully occupied by the fixed attention of Mr. Costrelle.

Mrs. Arden was not accustomed to the forward notice of very smart-looking girls without shyness, who ignore the polite and cautious responses of the provincial well bred.

Jim and Anthony still made baffled efforts to enter into their conversation, but Kitty relentlessly forced them out. Her vivid eyes, her expressive gestures, were only for Mrs. Arden.

Mrs. Arden was confused by these advances, but beneath her confusion she was oddly aware of a feeling of compassion. She was shy and inconspicuous and old, and quite incapable of facile friendliness; but she felt as if this brilliant, effective girl was somehow at a disadvantage.

Kitty wasn’t as sure of herself as she pretended to be; she wasn’t as sure of any one or anything as Mrs. Arden had all her life taken for granted that people naturally were. Mrs. Arden had an ineffaceable background, and Kitty had no background at all.

Kitty, with all her air of easy conquests and perfect assurance, fluttered there before them all, like a bird in a high wind, perched upon a swinging bough.

She talked very sensibly to Mrs. Arden about the country and the growth of flowers; she referred sympathetically to Daphne, and asked Mrs. Arden if she didn’t find her son wonderfully better. She seemed to have very accurate information about the Ardens, and Pannell slipped in and out of her sentences as if it had been a part of her own career; but Mrs. Arden in return could not remember that Daphne had told her anything at all about Kitty Costrelle.

It was reassuring, however, to discover, since Anthony must have seen a good deal of her, that Kitty wasn't an actress. Mrs. Arden knew Anthony's temperament well, and she was aware that you could not have put an actress out of his head by the insertion of a tiger.

Kitty was still talking to her with the same flattering intimacy when Anthony returned from an abortive set of tennis with Jim.

"If you are interested in roses," Mrs. Arden said to Kitty as Anthony joined them, "you must come and see my little rose garden at Pannell. Mustn't she, dear?"

Anthony's and Kitty's eyes met like flint.

"I don't think we've got very much to show her," said Anthony, quietly.

"I'll come with all the pleasure in the world," said Kitty, rising to her feet. She looked past Anthony; the brightness of her eyes deepened suddenly. She had done what she could with Mrs. Arden more or less successfully, but all the power she had was in her eyes as she looked past Anthony toward Jim Wynne.

"Jim," she said softly.

Daphne looked up from her fencing with Mr. Costrelle. Her eyes darkened suddenly; her words stumbled and broke off as if a wind had dispersed them. Kitty's slow smile deepened.

"Jim," she repeated, "I want one of those nectarines of yours, the jolly warm ones you grow in your houses. D'you remember you used to call them the apples of the Hesperides?"

"Did I?" mumbled Jim. "The deuce of a silly name for them!"

"I thought it a very pretty name," said Kitty. "Of course I didn't know what it meant, but it sounded such an awfully nice place to get apples from."

She slipped her hand familiarly on Jim's arm, and without a word he turned and followed her.

Daphne gathered up her sentence again, but the peace of the summer afternoon was gone. Only Mrs. Arden did not know what had happened. It seemed to her much safer to see Kitty walk off with Jim than if she had carried away Anthony.

"That's a very attractive girl, dear," she said to her son, "but what a curious thing none of you has ever happened to mention her to me before! I

think, if I were you, I should go into the house and get a little shawl for Daphne. She shivered just now as if she had caught cold.”

CHAPTER XVII

Jimmy was a good host, and he waited patiently while Kitty examined the nectarines. There was not much to choose between the solid pink and yellow globes hanging on the south wall of the greenhouse. The sun had burned its own color into them; the air was warm and full of the heavy scent of flowers and ferns producing artificially their precocious, unseasonable life.

Kitty took a long time choosing her nectarine. She was not quite sure what line to take with Jimmy. He had the peculiar shutdown look of a man whose nerves are being subjected to strain, and who has made up his mind to keep all possible approaches to them closed. He was not thinking of his greenhouse, and he wanted to get back to his wife.

Kitty chose her fruit at last, and strolled in silence out into the kitchen garden. There was a seat opposite a bed of pansies, on which she sat down. The bright upturned faces of the pansies stared at the sun; bees pushed their slow way above them to a cloud of feathery larkspur. In the elms beyond the paddock the rooks were cawing their wrangling pathway home to bed.

Kitty took out a cigarette and looked up thoughtfully at Jimmy.

"It's rather nice for men," she observed, "being able to be rude comfortably. We can't, you know; we have to put ourselves out and make conversation and hold on to the appearance of things. I don't know why, but we do. If you were in my garden now, I should have to look pleasant and find you a match. This dress has no pockets."

Jimmy handed her his box, reluctantly.

"I don't know," he said, looking over her head. "I think I'm quite polite enough; I brought you here."

"Of course I'm awfully grateful for that," agreed Kitty, "though I'm not at all sure whether you could help it. Your mother-in-law would have been so surprised if you'd said: 'Hanged if I give you a nectarine! Go home, and be damned to you!' By the by, are you afraid I'm going to make love to you, Jimmy? You look rather like one of those old Johnnies who thought they ought to resist visions and started to put the visions off by making

themselves look as disagreeable as possible. I never thought it was a good plan, really; it must have put the visions on their mettle.”

“I don’t care whether you try or not,” said Jimmy, untruthfully. “It doesn’t make the least odds to me what you think you’re doing.”

Kitty laughed a little under her breath.

“You’d sound safer if you weren’t so sure,” she murmured. “However, if it’s any comfort to you, I’m *not* going to make love to you. It would take such a long time and be such an effort, and might not be worth it even if I succeeded. I’m going to make you furious instead. You are cross already, so it won’t be so much trouble. What do you say to my marrying Tony? I’ve got a fancy for Pannell.”

Jimmy tried to look as if he didn’t believe her; but his eyes ceased to measure the new asparagus bed, and came back hurriedly to Kitty’s upturned face.

She looked as blandly innocent as the pansies at her feet.

“Yes,” she said consideringly, “that would make me a kind of roundabout sister-in-law to you, wouldn’t it? How would you like that?”

“I shouldn’t like it at all,” said Jimmy, coldly; “but I’m not sure even *that* would be sufficient inducement to you to do it. Why do you want Pannell, which you wouldn’t get in any case for many years? You aren’t usually so mercenary.”

“Nobody’s mercenary when they have enough money,” said Kitty, “but all really careful people lay up a pear for their thirst. Pannell’s a nice fat pear, and at present I’m intolerably short and by and by I shall probably be thirsty.”

“I’d rather give you two or three hundred,” said Jimmy after a pause.

“Thanks,” said Kitty, puffing at her cigarette and watching his face with obvious enjoyment. “But I don’t want a tip. I’d like something solid in the funds, and I wouldn’t even mind a husband. This kind of thing you know—” she waved her cigarette in the direction of the low-browed house and the distant lawn—“rather brings up the subject of family life in an attractive light. All husbands aren’t cross, and it isn’t always Sunday.”

“You can’t marry Anthony,” said Jimmy, doggedly. “If he knew what I know about you, he wouldn’t do it, you see.”

“But he doesn’t, you see,” mocked Kitty, with a malicious little laugh.

“If you were to insist on marrying him,” said Jimmy, quietly, “I should have to tell him.”

Kitty blinked and screwed her wicked eyelashes together.

“You’re a brave man, Jimmy,” she said, “but I shouldn’t advise it. If you dot Tony’s i’s for him, I shall dot Daphne’s, and it isn’t the moment I’d choose for Daphne’s.”

Jimmy had been expecting this thrust. He took it outwardly coolly, but inwardly he had only one conscious feeling—a desire to kill Kitty at once and with his hands. He kept quite still; the murmuring low voices of the bees and the far-off, distracted cawings of the rooks were the only sounds in the world.

Kitty read murder in his eyes and enjoyed the sensation. If there was a moment in Kitty’s life that she really prized above all others it was the instant when, sailing close up to the wind, she ran a perceptible chance of being capsized by it.

She had this moment now, it passed as suddenly as she faced it. Jimmy drew a long breath, and put his hands in his pockets.

“You could do that, of course,” he said carefully, “if you were cad enough.”

“Any one who tells is a cad,” said Kitty, calmly, “and we should both of us have beautiful motives. At least yours would be beautiful, and mine would be reasonable; it is always reasonable to pay back a hit if one can. Still, I grant it would be better not to begin. You see, they both know a certain amount already, and it wouldn’t be particularly reassuring to know more.”

“Rather than let Tony marry you, I’d tell them both—everything,” said Jimmy, sternly.

Kitty laughed out suddenly.

“Here is Tony,” she said, rising to her feet. “I only wanted you to wait here with me till he came after us. I don’t intend to marry him. As you wouldn’t flirt, I had to think of something to amuse you to fill up the time.

“Hullo, Tony. Jimmy and I have been having such an awfully funny talk—what they call in the newspapers ‘a grave moral issue.’ You’ll be glad to hear Jimmy chose the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth, in spite of the most fearful penalties attached to it. Only, as I was pulling his

leg all the time, there won't be any penalties. You can get off scot-free with your virtue, Jimmy."

Jimmy said something under his breath and turned to escape, but Kitty checked him.

"No, you don't," she said. "I'm going to make you feel perfectly comfortable first by way of reward. Tony, he's afraid you'll marry me, but you won't, will you, when you know he's been one of my lovers? I told you once I tried to turn his head, but I didn't tell you I *had* turned it."

Jimmy's self-control left him. He swore savagely at Kitty, and at the name he called her by Anthony sprang forward and struck him.

Jimmy struck back, and for a minute or two Kitty watched them with interested approval. She had seen men fight for her before and she had never interfered. Then she saw that Anthony was getting the worst of it. Jimmy was stronger and heavier, and he was, if anything, the angrier; the weight of the anger he felt for Kitty got behind his mounting rage with Anthony. He might have forgiven Anthony's blow if it had been the only one.

Kitty deliberately shut down the rose-pink parasol and drove it between the combatants. They started back for an instant, and in that instant she had slipped between them, the broken sunshade in her hands.

"Go to Daphne, Jim," she said over her shoulder. "She may come along here at any moment and see you. You don't want to upset her; leave Tony to me."

Jimmy obeyed her without looking at her.

"You'd better sit down," Kitty said to Anthony. Her eyes softened for a moment as they rested on him. "You shouldn't fight when you're so out of condition," she added.

Anthony shook his head vehemently.

"Is what you said true?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Kitty, "it was true. That's what annoys Jim so. Men are so silly! What's the use of being annoyed over ancient history? Besides, he's perfectly safe now; Daphne'll look after him. Why don't you sit down?"

"I'm afraid I'm silly, too," said Anthony stiffly. "If what you said is true, I can't stand it either, Kitty."

Kitty nodded; she had not meant Anthony to stand it.

“All right,” she said; “I told you before that it was better you should go away. Thank you for trying to knock Jimmy down.”

Anthony hesitated a moment.

“Why did you tell me?” he asked her at last. “You needn’t have told me; I would never have guessed it.”

“I don’t know,” said Kitty; “I suppose I got bored and wanted to stir things up. Everybody looks so comfortable here, all primed with tea and the ten commandments. I just wanted to show that they aren’t as solid as they look. Besides, Jim is really rather trying just now; he thinks being happy is a virtue which he’s hit on for himself. I can’t stand people who are righteous about their luck.”

“I haven’t got that virtue,” said Anthony in a low, unsteady voice, “and it’s me you’ve really hit, Kitty. Jimmy won’t care.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh, you’re just as bad,” she said without looking at him; “you belong to the same lot, you’re one of the solid people. Nothing can really get hold of you and break you up.” Her voice caught for a moment. “I wish you’d go away. I hate the lot of you.”

Anthony took a step toward her. For a moment he thought of her and not of the pain she was causing him. It seemed to him as if Kitty was, absurdly enough, the victim and not the destroyer; but there was no yielding in Kitty to respond to his instinct. Her chin was up, and her eyes, as hard as pebbles, met his unflinchingly.

“Don’t you *see*,” she said fiercely, “that I’m simply *bored* by you?”

And Anthony, struck to the heart, believed that she was simply bored, and left her.

CHAPTER XVIII

Anthony's hardly won control snapped like a broken twig; he turned from Kitty, and walked quickly out into the road. His mind was held in the suspension of shock. He neither knew where he was going nor considered what he meant to do. He stumbled as he walked with his head bowed and pushed forward as if he were tied to something he could not get rid of.

There was a desperate urgency in his broken mind, like the urgency of high fever; he knew there was something he mustn't think about, some dreadful image just beyond his conscious will which was prepared to leap into his mind. Fear ran at his heels. It had neither face nor name, but it pursued him like a shadow along the hot, white road.

Motors overtook and passed him, people watched him from their garden gates, and wondered at his crouched, absorbed figure hurrying past them. He never turned his head through the small, chattering villages or on the open road. Max followed him, foot-sore and perplexed, but one-indeed as Ruth. He knew that there was something strangely wrong with his master, and he was determined that whatever was wrong or strange, he would share it.

Anthony had lost his self-consciousness; he ceased to be aware of his own significance. Self-control and the governance of his mind dropped away from him like unheeded, unessential things. He was a human being hounded by an obscure emotion that he dared not face. Anthony ran from it, but he was conscious as he ran that he could not escape it. There would be a moment when exhaustion would catch him and force him to give battle, and there was nothing left in him to fight with. His heart was as empty as his mind.

They were passing the entrance to a small orchard that lay fronting an old farm-house when Max felt that they had gone far enough. He whined suddenly and ran in front of Anthony, lifting a dusty paw, and fixing his burning topaz eyes on Anthony's face. He would go on if Anthony went on, but he had made his protest. Anthony paused uncertainly, looking about him at the unfamiliar road, the distant red-brick farm, and the space of white blooms vivid against the evening light. He turned stumblingly, and sank on the bank under the apple-blossoms. Max crept beside him, pushing his head against his master's chest.

Dogs have only one way of showing sympathy with human beings; they offer themselves up upon the altar of their master's pain. Max pushed himself relentlessly into Anthony's suffering; he would not stay outside and be safe. He would be a part of Anthony's pain till the pain stopped. Anthony felt the warmth reach his heart and was a little comforted.

A late lark was still singing above the orchard trees, very high and shrill in the clear evening air; the sun lay like a sea of fire across the fields; every separate grass in the hedge stood up alive in it.



There was no curtain left between Anthony and his pain.

There was no curtain left between Anthony and his pain. He saw its face and eyes, and they were the face and eyes of Kitty. She had done an incredible thing incredibly, like some fifth-rate girl in a café. It was not only cruel; it was vulgar. She had said words that drew blood. They disfigured Anthony's love for her.

He might have stood the fact, but not Kitty's throwing it between the two men to force on a fight; and for what other reason had she thrown it? She was bored and light, and, like a bad little tune, her words ran on in his mind and tortured him. They did not set him free—spiritually Kitty was dead to him; but Kitty dead was Kitty accessible—the image of her pulled him back like a strong cable.

If this was what she was, why could he not take advantage of it, satisfy the hard hunger that possessed him, and grant himself at least the release of his strained senses?

He told himself this was what love was worth. It was the master miracle and cheat of life. Anthony had been let out of prison and confronted with ecstasy, and ecstasy was a trap. He buried his face in his hands and shut out the lark's song and the intolerable world.

If he went back, he had nothing to lose. Kitty had destroyed the spiritual part of love. The man who did not take the actual and make the best of it was a fool.

It was better to be like an ordinary man, and pigeon-hole women: one kind—Miss Mellicot, for instance—you marry and respect, and the other you go wild over and spiritually ignore. Anthony had never believed this method fair to women. He had not liked to think that any human being should be treated without respect to his humanity; but perhaps the judgment of the normal world was sound, and there were people—people like Kitty—too light to touch even the honor in others. One did not let them down by treating them at their own valuation because they were too low to be let down.

But one ought to be very sure of this condition. A memory stirred in Anthony of how he had thought the same once of his fellow prisoners: he had condemned them root and branch as fellows who had thrown away their codes and were therefore worthless.

Afterwards his condemnation had worn thin, he had found so many excuses, the black clouds of their follies and their failures had been stripped away like mists, and he had seen through the mists the havoc and struggle of their souls, for even below their code something had struggled in them.

Anthony was not sure of Kitty. He thought of her skimming life like a summer gnat above a pool, a light thing in the light air of her life, without balance or stability; but he could not be certain that she, too, had had no struggle. She had worked and suffered. For two years she had helped to stem

the tide of suffering in France when France was the cockpit of the world, and she had shirked nothing.

She did not shirk anything now, Anthony did not deny her pluck, and once he had seen her cry. The memory of Kitty's tears was a strange comfort to Anthony.

Love rose slowly in his heart and shook him; it would not let him be driven back cheaply to a worthless Kitty, it would not let Kitty be worthless. Love held him to her courage and her tears; it even involved him in her disasters and suggested that if he had been wiser, kinder, less full of the sense of what was due to the rules of his life—he might have served her.

Love did not seem to wish for a freed Anthony.

His mind caught against a new point. Whatever Kitty was like, he needn't make her worse, he needn't add humiliation to her. And it would be a new humiliation if he went back to take her on her own terms; for she would know that in doing so he despised her. She would let him despise her because she would think it was only fair, but she would not like it, and because she would not like it, he must not do it. He must let her at least feel that the man who had respected her still respected her enough to leave her alone. He tried to hold himself to this decision, but it took the taste out of his life.

He did not know now what to do. He realized that his body was exhausted and wanted food, but he had no wish to fight this exhaustion. He would have liked to crawl farther into the hedge and become invisible and part of the earth. Max stirring in his arms roused him to his feet. He pushed on heavily, with his face towards London.

The apple-blossoms were spectral in the evening light; the sun fell behind a group of flaming elms; for a long time the sky held a delicate mauve color, fading into darkness.

The endless houses of the suburbs began; they streamed past him with long gaps of ugly, empty fields and half-built roads. He noticed nothing but a sense of closing in and the merciful quieting of night. He did not hurry any more.

Pain had got up to him now and was no longer pursuing him, and pain had a familiar face, there was no surprise in it.

Beauty and joy had been the surprise and fear was the race to escape losing them. Anthony had been overtaken and the race had gone against him; but there was still pain and the mastery of pain.

Anthony had been near enough to happiness to divine that there is no such personal success as the success of joy.

He realized that joy is the chief principle of life, and that without it the Kingdom of Heaven must be entered maimed. Anthony ignored the Kingdom of Heaven because he could not see it; but he could see, in flashes, that he was maimed; and unconsciously he felt that the Kingdom of Heaven was anything that lay beyond the fact of his maiming.

Anthony tried to think about his work, but his mind beat relentlessly against the thought of Kitty.

His life had no value to himself without joy, but he could still serve the community. If the world was hard, it was the more important for those who had tasted the quality of hardness to set themselves towards discovering possible alleviations for others.

The success of the personal life was not the boundary of the human spirit.

Happiness serves life unconsciously and has chosen the better part, but pain is the Martha who must busy herself about many things. Anthony was like a drowning man clinging to a straw. He did not know that he was drowning, but the thought of helping the world against pain was the straw to which he clung.

As the persistent streets closed in upon Anthony a strange feeling of exhilaration stole across his senses. He had a lift of the mind, and was possessed by that false sense of strength which comes on the verge of complete exhaustion.

He told himself that, after all, happiness was the only risk, and that he had survived it.

CHAPTER XIX

It was long past midnight, and London was as still as a mountain pass. The lights rose up hard and straight out of the empty streets; the vast, dim spaces of the squares retreated from them as if they were the points of weapons. Every now and then a furtive loiterer passed Anthony, a creature as shadowy and unsubstantial as a dream. Sleepy and stolid policemen stood phlegmatically under occasional lamp posts, with their backs turned away from the mysterious secrecy of the dark. The tall houses were overpoweringly still, blank citadels of ease and security which forced a sense of outlawry upon the passer-by.

Anthony felt the sharp stir in him of a grudge against prosperity. It suddenly seemed to him as if law and order held too many cards. All humanity is at the mercy of certain casual blows, but how vast is the difference between the people who can afford to place in front of themselves the comfortable buffers of prosperity and those bleak wanderers whom the blast strikes full without any protection!

Anthony had learned as few men in his position had learned the grim habit of privation; he knew the difference between those who command conveniences and those who are commanded by inconvenience. He had been without comfort, he had forfeited privacy, and become inured to rest without ease. He knew that privations undermine you and unfit you for higher pleasures, and that the little jar and spite of painful living prevent in you the release of thought. He knew also that behind privation stands tyranny, the blind possessor who strikes against courage and freedom.

Anthony held no theories about rich and poor, but his prison experience had taught him that those without choice are captives.

If you cannot change a job, or correct a misfit, or gain a right without the risk of an appeal which may push you into an abyss, you are a captive.

Only men with margins can afford the courage of their convictions, and unfortunately margins, while they produce courage, change convictions. He remembered only by chance, because for the moment he had no money and could not get a meal for Max, what it had been like to be without a margin.

He remembered good Germans who were kind to prisoners. Their kindnesses were not worse than their brutalities, because nothing is worse

than brutality; but they were harder to bear.

Anthony felt again the fierce shudder with which he used to meet their victorious, satisfied eyes. He had found it harder than the others to bear benevolence. Their captors had looked at the prisoners and pointed out what was good for them; sometimes it was good for them, but the prisoners had no choice. There is often a great deal to be said for the safety of walls, but the weak go to them not because they like them, but because the strong push them there.

The big, fine houses of the West End looked down on Anthony contemptively; they seemed to be pointing out to him the rights of their solidity. Anthony changed Max from one arm to the other; he was near Henry's flat. It was a pity to disturb Henry, but Max was plainly exhausted. He lay like a springless log in Anthony's arms, and now and then whimpered to express his sense of the unseemliness of perpetual tramping through the night.

Anthony knew that he could find Henry's flat—his mind had a bewildered sense of the loss of other alternatives. He could not think of anywhere else to go. But Henry's flat stood out with a vivid, startling clearness because he had come back to it out of prison—he knew that he could find it in the dark.

Anthony was not conscious of his own fatigue. He had walked twenty-five miles between five o'clock in the afternoon and two o'clock in the morning, but his mind was fresh and his thoughts ran through it as fast as a stream runs with the leap of a waterfall behind it.

Some of his thought ran backwards as the eddies of a stream run backwards on to themselves.

Henry's flat was behind Buckingham Gate. He could see a microscopic view of the Green Park from it and the open drilling space of the Guards.

These were shadowed spaces now full of a held darkness. Henry had come in late from an evening's successful bridge, and he was preparing himself for sleep by reading a pleasant, well-written story. He liked to subside gradually from excitement to repose.

The maids always went to bed regularly at eleven. Henry listened with incredulity to the sharp tang of the bell. He opened the door and gazed with polite annoyance at the dusty figure of his brother.

"Really, Anthony," he exclaimed, "what an extraordinary hour to call—in flannels, too! And what have you in your arms? That Aberdeen?" Henry

invariably thought of dogs according to their species. “You know I *never* like dogs in my flat.”

“He has got to have a light meal and a drink,” explained Anthony. “I’ve walked him unmercifully—in fact, I’ve walked him from Rochett.”

Henry said no more. He prided himself upon the way in which his mind rose to face an emergency, especially by the manner in which, if possible, he evaded finding out what the emergency was until it was forced upon him.

He led Anthony into the dining-room, and said in a hushed voice:

“Above everything, we must not disturb the maids—that is the first thing to be considered. I hardly know what there is to eat in the house.”

“Well, look in the larder,” said Anthony, a trifle bluntly. “I suppose you know where your larder is? I do. I had a flat like this once. It ought to be on the north side of the kitchen. I don’t want anything to eat myself; I want only scraps for the dog, and something to drink. Don’t give him too much at once.”

“It is not easy to disinter food in the middle of the night,” objected Henry, “even if I can find the larder. However, I’ll do what I can. Why did you walk so far—in flannels? Has anything happened to any one?” Henry meant, “Is any one dead?” but he never spoke of the dead except collectively.

Anthony said that every one was perfectly all right, and Henry left him.

Anthony sank into a big arm-chair, and Max fell asleep instantly at his feet on a soft lambswool rug. The room was full of light. It was just what all the other big, inaccessible houses were like, so cruel outside, so full of comfort and hospitality within. Anthony wondered what it would look like smashed? Even this room, if you got up and broke everything in it, might look uncomfortable. Anthony’s eyes took in all the breakable things. He wasn’t going to touch anything, of course; but he had an odd, excited desire in his mind to see the room in fragments, broken down, and utterly in pieces, like some men’s lives, so that, no matter what you did, you could not put them together again. It did not seem quite fair to Anthony that outside things should remain safe and whole.

Henry came back on tiptoe with a plate of scraps for Max and a tin dish full of water. Max woke instantly, thanked Anthony for the food with a wag of his short, bushy tail, and ungratefully ignored Henry.

Henry was a little surprised and annoyed with Anthony for drinking only milk. He objected to his brother's abstemiousness because, as he knew, it did not come from principle. Henry felt that the only reason for being moral was morality, and Anthony had no grasp whatever of morality.

Henry had received disquieting accounts recently of Anthony's behavior from a friend who lived at Rochett. He had written discreetly to Daphne, asking for details; but Daphne, although she was a married woman and could have replied with sufficient directness quite nicely, had not replied at all.

Henry took a chair opposite Anthony and regarded him with tactful vigilance.

"I rather wonder," he said guardedly, "what made you walk twenty-five miles on Sunday night when you could have got up by the eight-thirty this morning."

"I might have asked for a lift," Anthony said consideringly, "earlier in the night, perhaps, if I'd had any money; but I forgot to put change in my pockets when I put on my tennis things, and then I started to walk. Have you ever been without money, Henry?"

"I've sometimes run it very fine," Henry observed thoughtfully, "after a race meeting, and of course during the war I was perpetually short."

"Short of everything?" Anthony strangely persisted.

"Hardly, my dear fellow," said Henry, with an indulgent smile, "or I shouldn't be here now, should I? Everything is a tall order."

"That's what I keep wondering," said Anthony in a low, uncertain voice. "If one is short of everything, even hopes, what does one do? These circumstances occur, you know, Henry. Have you ever thought what you would do if everything failed, and there was no ground left to fight on?"

Henry shook his head reassuringly.

"Those circumstances aren't likely to come," he answered. "Of course I know what you mean. Men have bad times. I had an extremely unpleasant one myself when you fellows went to France; it was no fun being kept out of it, and people discussing why one didn't go. I had hours of extreme depression, but I pulled myself together and got over it. Depend upon it, my dear fellow, making the best of things is a question of grit."

"Yes, yes," said Anthony, impatiently; "but you must have the things to make the best of. What I mean is, what happens when you reach the point

where nothing is savable?

“I’ve been thinking as I came along about the down-and-outers, men who are moneyless, without health, or without control, I don’t much mind which—the people who have gone under. Death is so simple! You just go out; but what happens when life goes on and everything else stops?”

“Do you mean when you have no income?” inquired Henry, anxiously. “Has anything happened to Pannell?”

“Oh, nothing,” said Anthony, “nothing at all, has happened to anything. I wasn’t thinking of us.”

He leaned forward, and Henry noticed with uneasiness that Anthony’s eyes moved and shone unceasingly.

“Henry, I wish you’d tell me honestly—what do you believe?”

Henry turned his eyes instantly on the carpet. He saw in a flash what had happened. Poor old Anthony had religious mania. That was why he drank milk instead of whisky, walked twenty-five miles on Sunday night, and wouldn’t carry money about with him. This was what came of never going to church: the pendulum—or was it the boomerang?—swung back, and Anthony had been hit by it. Henry’s mind acted with promptitude and decision. He would soothe Anthony and, as soon as he could, make an excuse to leave the room, and telephone for a doctor. Fortunately, Hilton Laurence, one of Anthony’s best friends, lived quite near. He had a disagreeable, curt manner, but he could probably give Anthony a sleeping-draft and not mention it to any one else. Henry cleared his throat.

“I am sure, my dear fellow,” he said with feeling, “that there is behind the world a creative and guiding power making for righteousness.”

There was no sound in the room except Max’s snoring. Anthony kept so still that he might have been made of stone. He seemed to be holding himself down in his chair with both his hands. Henry gathered confidence from Anthony’s fixed quiet.

“I don’t,” he continued gravely, “often probe into these questions—it seems to me wiser for us to take things on trust—but I am confident from my own experience—and I am sure, if you think it over, you will be from yours—that we are guided and provided for all our lives.”

“Was Belgium guided and provided for,” asked Anthony, suddenly, “or children maimed in air raids, or outraged women? If you’d seen some of the people I’ve seen in hospital, my dear fellow, you’d back down on a kindly

Providence. We've got to look at things differently, and not rake up old mufflers out of the easier ages. What I want to know is, have you ever thought about it? Do comfortable people think?"

Anthony did not really care what Henry thought; he knew that Henry took his ideas ready-made from leading articles out of conservative papers, the opinions of other well-to-do people, and his momentary personal convenience. Anthony doubted if Henry had ever had a naked thought except once when he was nearly choked by a quinsy; but he wanted to rouse Henry and also to talk himself. Thoughts ran through his brain as fresh and fast as the swirl of water; he wanted to see them take form and come out into the quiet room; he wanted to convince Henry of tragedy.

"What about other people?" he repeated. "You know the Serbians have had all their manhood rotted by typhoid and blotted out by guns? You know that men have been frightened out of their wits, and it takes an awful lot to frighten men out of their wits, and all the broken-hearted old people with nothing left to love till death takes them. Do you believe they were created for their good, robbed for their good by righteousness? And yet if there is no righteousness, one wonders why one minds. Why do we think about it at all, but not go on our own greedy way snatching at anything we like regardless of the sufferings of others? Horses don't care about other horses. They would face any shelled place, the trained ones—wonderful beggars!—without turning a hair—they'd see other horses struck in front of them, done in before their eyes, and never budge: but let a piece of shell scratch their flanks, and you couldn't get them near the lines again, no good at all after a personal hit. Men aren't like that. We mind other people's hits; some of us try to stop them at a risk to ourselves. That's what I can't make out, this something in us. Is hitting what we need to put us on to it? Are we meant to keep down the guns as well as to suffer by them? And is God just the same only on a larger scale, more hit, more determined to stop what's hitting us? The story of Calvary, for instance. Is it a kind of queer, double-edged truth to show us that we and God with us are caught in a trap of pain, and must voluntarily stick it out, even when we could escape, to help the rest from going under?"

"There is the love of God, of course," said Henry, with one eye on the door. "I quite appreciate that point."

"Yes, we've got to care," Anthony agreed slowly; "that's what I never used to see. If you don't care, you can't help. You're not a safe person even, except, of course, to yourself. We've got to care enough to be broken to

pieces; because that's what it comes to; you can't help people unless you're being broken with them, you're too far away."

"Self-control—" said Henry, going toward the fireplace and looking down into it as if he had lost something. "A religion without self-control, you know, wouldn't *do*. That is the value of form in Christianity."

"We've tried that," replied Anthony, impatiently. "Christianity which distinctly said 'the letter killeth' is too hard for us; so we set up churches and got out of it. We put the gold into the fire because it was so difficult to obey a spiritual God, and there came out a calf, an awfully clever golden calf, very convenient to worship, made up of all the ornaments of the people. But what ought to have gone into the fire was *us*! God went into it."

Henry shuddered. He disliked blasphemy.

"If you'll excuse me a minute," he said, "I'll just see if the spare room is ready. You must want to go to bed. I'll be back directly."

Henry came back humming cheerfully in the manner of those visitors to the sick who wish to encourage the sufferer by the sight of their own immunity.

Henry had remembered everything; he had told Hilton Laurence, who sounded extremely snappy at the other end of the telephone, to bring a sleeping-draft.

Anthony was sitting with his eyes shut. He did not speak until the electric bell sounded; then he opened them with curious celerity and remarked:

"That's probably the doctor you sent for just now. It's too early for the milk."

Henry jumped. He remembered the extreme cunning of madmen, and hurried to the door.

It was Hilton Laurence, and he said:

"Well, where is he?" as if he didn't want to hear Henry's explanations. However, he had to hear them while he was taking off his coat. Henry explained in a hushed voice Anthony's condition and his own inspired tact. The last time he had left the room he had taken away the poker.

Hilton Laurence showed no tact at all; he walked into the dining-room noisily, shook hands with Anthony, and said:

"Hullo, old chap! What's the matter with you?"

Anthony began to laugh. He laughed so hard that both the other men standing one on each side of him appeared preternaturally grave, and the graver they became the more wildly Anthony laughed.

Hilton Laurence looked at Anthony from under heavy questioning eyebrows and then looked away again, but he did nothing to stop him laughing.

After awhile Anthony stopped himself with a jerk.

“I’ve just discovered Henry thinks I’m mad,” he explained to Hilton Laurence. “The funny part of it is, I’m not sure whether I am or not.”

Hilton Laurence sat down on Henry’s chair and said:

“You’d better go to bed, Mr. Arden, and leave your brother to me. He’ll be all right. Let him sleep on in the morning.”

“The door on the left is his room,” Henry explained carefully; “mine is on the right, if you should want me.”

Hilton Laurence nodded. When the two men were alone neither of them spoke for a few moments, then Laurence said:

“What’s up with you, old chap?”

And Anthony, meeting his eyes, said quietly:

“I have been riding for a fall, and I’ve got it.”

“Some woman?” asked Laurence.

Anthony nodded.

Laurence said softly:

“Damn women!”

Anthony shook his head quickly.

“No,” he said, “that hasn’t answered. It’s been tried already, you know.”

Hilton Laurence took out a small bottle.

“Here’s a sleeping-draft,” he explained. “It’ll put her out of your head for twenty-four hours; then you’d better come and see me. I’ve got a good hospital under my care—brain and spine cases, result of wounds—and I want another man to help me. How rusty have you got?”

“The Germans let me look after our men and study some of their own methods in hospital,” Anthony explained. “I’ve helped at some good

operations and I read a lot. I don't think I did much less work than if I'd been here; I'll have to get used to the conditions, that's all."

"Good," said Hilton Laurence. "I dare say you can give me some tips. I have some very obscure cases." He got up and glanced at Anthony again. "Well," he observed, "that's all there is for you, you know—work."

"I know," Anthony agreed; "thanks awfully. I dare say I can work under you. I couldn't think how I should manage to get back into things. I had what the Quakers call 'a stop in my mind,' quite literally a stop, Hilton, and when you arrive at a stop you find a quantity of strange impulses ready to get hold of you—vultures of the mind hovering about on the off chance of a carcass, and there doesn't seem anything handy to keep them off. I was quite near going mad."

Hilton Laurence nodded.

"Take a good long rest in bed," he said, "and you'll find your mind's all right. But you must keep away from the sore spot. That's what work's for; work and—well, for some of us, you know, other women."

Anthony shook his head. "I know," he said. "I've thought of that, too, but it won't do. There are no other women for me. I've never cared about women like that."

"Ah, you're romantic," said Hilton Laurence, going to the door. "I can't cure romance."

CHAPTER XX

Nothing could have been less like Rochett than Number 27 Palace Court. It was one of thirty large, red, solid houses overlooking one another. It was sufficiently far from a main thoroughfare not to be noisy, and sufficiently near never to taste, except in the small hours of the morning, undiluted silence. It was a broad cul-de-sac of a street, neither green nor untidy, upon which the sun struck without the tenderness of shadows. In the summer it was full of hard, clear light, and in the winter it seemed particularly open to gloom.

The house looked as if every thought it had was born in London and had never gone outside it except for the week-end. All the other houses were the same; they employed the usual number of well-trained servants, and enjoyed the same number of good meals and carefully kept habits. The only difference between Number 27 and the others was that it had been taken over by the Government as a receptacle for human pain and helplessness. It was an officers' hospital for cases which needed recurrent surgical skill.

Behind its solid face spun the slow, cruel hours of the fight between life and death, the sometimes stagnant, but ever progressing, fight between the courage of the mind, reinforced by skill, and the helplessness of the broken body.

It was a grim, persistent fight, shrouded in mystery. Sometimes skill got the better of the mystery, and men who came there expecting never to walk again went away cured and rejoicing; and more often mystery got the better of skill, and hopes and efforts were alike baffled.

The hospital was only one of Hilton Laurence's many activities. He was an eminent surgeon, with his hands full, and glad to leave the unremunerative and more stationary work to Anthony.

Anthony didn't want money; he wanted work. He had no tastes; two ugly rooms in a quiet street, with an occasional ill-cooked meal when he and his landlady remembered it simultaneously, were all he asked for. He had no expensive pursuits and no desire for expensive objects. He had a nervous horror of society, and refused every invitation he received.

Books contented him, and the only form of exercise he took was to walk out of London down the North Road with Max at his heels after his work on

summer evenings. He walked straight out, sat in a hedge to smoke a pipe, and returned. When the weather became too cold, he went into a cottage for a cup of tea instead; but he never sought any companionship beyond Max's, and he disliked all attempts at conversation.

Anthony did not realize that he was trying as far as possible to reproduce his prison conditions; but it was, nevertheless, what his mind fumbled toward. He wanted to feel about him the safety of inflexible habit, set work, and an increasing inhibition. He wanted to close all the avenues to his senses down which might come the haunting images which racked his heart. He wanted not to remember, not to feel, not to see. He felt that if he could only completely cut himself off from his old conditions, he might be as marooned in London as on a desert island.

It was easy to get rid of his family by the hedge of his work and the reassurance of an occasional letter. He seldom saw Henry, who had been severely discomposed by his own lack of judgment. He was, of course, glad Anthony had not gone out of his mind, but at the same time he disliked to think that he had been provided with all the materials for thinking so without the event taking place.

Hilton Laurence persisted from time to time in trying to draw Anthony out of his packed solitude; but Anthony disliked his excellent, well-chosen dinners, where men aired their theories of reconstruction, and carefully avoided the subject upon which their lives were spent. All talk which did not deal with the immediate became for Anthony a mere cheating of the intelligence, a bite on empty air. He wanted to see speech used only for the purpose of action.

Thought was different. You must, he knew, accumulate thought in order to provide the safe material for activity, but no after-dinner conversation went very deeply into thought. London traveled more easily upon the oiled surface of its hourly topics; and Anthony, who had got into the habit of thinking a thing out till he hit against his last idea, was often disconcertingly aware that people thought he ought to stop, and that politeness forced you to leave your social foxes at some distance from their holes.

“You ought to be a Trappist,” Hilton Laurence said to him once; “you have made a religion of silence.”

The only exception Anthony made was that he talked to his patients; for them he waived all his rules and inhibitions, he encouraged them to speak off the point, because they did not know what the point was, and, if confined to its preconceived direction, might miss it altogether.

Anthony was peculiarly gentle and patient with his cases. He would listen intently to the irrelevant, and no complaint ever escaped him.

“It is just as important for a mind that manufactures complaints to get rid of them by airing them,” he explained to Hilton Laurence, who suggested shorter methods, “as for a real complaint to be looked into and tackled; only the remedy in the first case is chiefly in the airing of it. It is always worth while to listen to what people say if they have anything wrong with them at all. Of course if their only ground is to present themselves picturesquely, one might try a different method. All introspection is selfish beyond a certain point, and all selfishness increases the difficulty of breaking a habit. It is a curious point that unselfishness is invariably bad for other people, and selfishness bad for the person himself. One would like to know the moral, if any, a bishop would draw from it.”

“You may be sure he wouldn’t accept it if he couldn’t draw a moral from it,” said Hilton Laurence. “But what method would you try with a case of sheer nerves?”

“I’ll tell you when I’ve found one,” replied Anthony. “At present I don’t believe in sheer anything. I used to before I went to prison, and when I was first there—the first six months—I believed then in sheer misery; but other factors came in. There were curious, unexpected let-ups.”

“You must have had some odd experiences,” Hilton Laurence ventured tentatively. Anthony had never talked to him of his imprisonment.

“The most ordinary ones in the world,” Anthony answered dryly. “I learnt how to bear what I couldn’t, and I got this out of it—that now I know I can. The limit of human endurance is the limit of consciousness. When you get to a certain point you turn or break; or, what is perhaps more common, part of you breaks, and part of you turns. Life means you to have this process gradually. That’s why, in general, old people are weaker and wiser than the young; they don’t get their experiences all at once. But in this war some of us got it quick, and we have to pay for it slow.”

Number 27 Palace Court absorbed Anthony. He had cases outside it, private cases which came to him from his old practice or from the wide circle of the Arden family, and others came from his singular successes; but his life was the life of Number 27 Palace Court. He felt it move in him like the double consciousness of domesticity. He never took any obvious notice of the nurses, but nothing about them escaped him. If one of them needed a holiday, Anthony saw that she got it; and if another scamped her work, Anthony found out why, and if he couldn’t remove the cause—and he often

could remove the cause—he removed the nurse. He rather disliked the capable and unattractive matron, who seemed to rely more than the unattractive should upon the exhibition of her capacities; but he saw that her rule was in the main just, good for the patients, and bringing out, with occasional flares, the best qualities of the nurses, and he knew that justice, even a rough-tongued justice, is too valuable a quality to pass over. When Hilton Laurence said: “I can’t stand that matron; let’s get rid of her. Women were meant to please, and she wouldn’t please an iron door-scraper,” Anthony bluntly refused.

“I don’t think so,” he said. “I don’t see that women were any more meant to please than men. When they do, they often do it to get out of other things. Matron knows her job; we’ve never had a scandal here, or lost a case through carelessness. You don’t want a woman you can fall in love with for a matron; you want a woman you can’t.”

Hilton Laurence looked rueful, but he agreed.

“I’m not at all sure *you* can’t fall in love with her,” he said rather crossly. “You’re both made of cast-iron. The sisters are quite pretty, and I don’t believe you’ve looked at them!”

But Anthony had looked at them. He knew every detail of their work, and he had watched their absorbed complete self-consciousness, to which their daily life was a mere subsidiary fact. They were women long before they were nurses.

Anthony studied the Irish Roman Catholic sister, whose gay and joking exterior hid a determined unselfishness; he knew she would appear careless of details and be safe to leave patients with; he couldn’t trust her memory, but he felt certain of her punctual heart. She was one of the race of mother-women to whom all objects of care are more precious than their lives.

On the other hand, he deeply disliked a smart and neat-handed young woman whose interest centered in her own attractions, and who would sacrifice a patient’s comfort for a moment’s self-indulgence.

A flirtatious night sister once made an emergency call an opportunity for a determined attempt upon Anthony’s affections, but she did not do it again. He stared at her out of strange, gray eyes with ironic curiosity.

“I wonder why you are doing this kind of thing,” he said on the landing in his low, clear voice; “you do it very badly. I should strongly advise you to return to your duties.”

It was the first time that Anthony had realized that the nurses were of the same species as Kitty. It came over him as he looked at the confused and irate night sister how differently Kitty would have taken his question, and how in the end she would have triumphed over him. He could never have said that Kitty played the game of sex badly; she played it so well that half the time Anthony had never been aware that she played it at all.

Now he was aware. Every sense he had ached for her and demanded her perpetual stimulus. He was like a man athirst in a desert of sand; he could drug his brain with work, but at night his body and his heart beat out their revenge upon him; and this silly woman, with her unready eagerness for his attention, forced back his torture straight upon him.

He wondered, as he left her, if he had blamed her too sharply. Perhaps her desire to win his admiration had been aroused by the obstinate longing for another woman in himself. The invisible traffic between mind and mind is full of misleading messages. The night nurse hated him from that moment, but all the nurses preferred Hilton Laurence; he was less polite, much less considerate, and far more approachable.

It was the patients who wanted Anthony. There was something in his spare, tall figure, a little bent, in his grizzled hair and young gray eyes, which filled them with confidence and hope. He was young enough to inspire them, and old enough to reassure them by his steadiness, and they knew he cared.

They felt he was there for them, not for success or experience or money, not merely as a doctor, but as a personality. He would never let anything interfere between their cure and his efforts, nor would he give up helping them when help seemed useless.

The purpose of his being was to relieve pain, and in the depths of his quiet eyes was the full knowledge of it. He had that understanding of suffering, complete and without shrinking, which few doctors possess. He did not want, as Hilton Laurence did, to rush in with his health, his skill, and his brisk cheerfulness, and then get out again as soon as possible, forgetting.

Laurence's "cut and come again" attitude frightened the weak and gave no encouragement to men who had been slowly undermined by recurrent pain. They could not believe in quick or cheap escapes.

Anthony offered them none; he never deluded them or hurried from them. If there was nothing he could do, he listened carefully to what they had to bear; the most he ever said was, "I think this trouble will improve in time," or, "I hope this may help you a little," and when he said this,

improvement and help always followed, and renewed the smoking flax of hope.

He succeeded in persuading men to make efforts who had given up the attempt in despair, because they saw that he had personal dealings with despair.

“You see,” Anthony explained, “it is always worth while trying, because no one knows the exact place where courage takes over from failure, and it is a pity to stop at failure if one can help it. Miracles are merely getting the hang of a thing suddenly that you’ve tried at deliberately till you’re sick of it; you’ve got to help yourself just as far as you can before anything else helps you, and few of us know how far we can till we try.”

“It’s much easier,” he explained to another man suffering from general debility after a severe wound, “to get over a bad time than to get over having had one. That’s your trouble now. The bad time is finished, but it took half of you to get through it; you’ve got to win that half back. It will be quicker if you keep reminding yourself that you really *are* on the right side of things, though of course it won’t be easy. You must go on calling the other half of you back.”

But if his patience was endless with the weak, he was sharp with those who did forbidden things from bravado. Anthony had always despised the false courage which wants to be admired; it cloaked too clearly an invisible cowardice.

“Don’t think you are showing courage,” he would assert to a man who had disobeyed a restriction. “Courage is the patient handling of danger; it is not the foolish manufacturing of it for purposes of showing off. No one in a busy hospital is going to admire a fool. We should deeply regret it if we threw away your case by our carelessness, but no one is going to mind your throwing it away by your own.”

Anthony took endless trouble to divert his patients’ minds; he never rested till he found some taste or hobby which he could encourage. Nothing in the hospital was allowed to prevent a man’s carving out a healthy interest.

Hilton Laurence was often surprised, and the matron frequently irate, at Anthony’s waiving of the rules to suit the oddest occupations.

“In a short case,” he explained to Hilton Laurence, “you can concentrate on the disease, and one needs only to know enough of a man’s mind to keep his nerves quiet and his common sense uppermost; but in a long case you *must* know your man, and get him an object—virtually *any* object outside of

himself—to hook on to. Any invalid’s attention gets concentrated on discomfort and sensation, and the longer the case is, the more water-logged and self-centered the mind gets. You’ve got to fill it, if it’s only for half an hour a day, and never mind on what—comic songs, theosophy, tall stories, well-cooked food, the study of the Welsh language, or a music-hall star. Look at that jockey you handed over to me a month ago. I couldn’t think what to do with him, he seemed such a stuck case; all that septic business, going on so long, had just rotted him to pieces. Actually, the mischief had stopped, but I couldn’t start him up. He’d been ill too long. I wrote to my father to unearth some old racing papers I knew my brother Tom had kept for years, and the man lighted up immediately. Sister got him an album, and I found him sitting up in bed, a thing he assured me he would never do again, pasting in different records of horses as fast as he could go. Then we started getting a sporting editor to visit him and keep him up in what was going on now, and it’s astonishing to see the change in him. He’s sleeping and eating and getting quite a healthy color back, and all because he’s succeeded in finding something that interests him more than his own inside.

“All these long cases need humoring; they are beyond drugs and knives. We doctors have got to learn how to give them desires.”

“Desires,” murmured Hilton Laurence. “Well, I dare say you’re right. I’ve often acted on that theory without analyzing it.” He hesitated for a moment, then he risked, “Come to think of it, I did it in your own. You know, my dear fellow, six months ago, when I blew in to Henry’s flat, you were as near going bang off your head as any fellow I ever saw. I wondered how I dared trust you in an operating theater with the instruments.”

“I’d have been much more dangerous without them,” agreed Anthony. “Things you are accustomed to handle give you sanity straighter than ideas. I once knew a pianist who was so drunk before his performance he couldn’t walk across the stage. The manager asked him how on earth he was going to play? And he said, ‘Just get me to the piano somehow; it’ll take care of me.’ They put him on the music-stool before the curtain rose, and he played divinely. No one guessed why he didn’t get up to bow afterward.”

“Do you think your piano has cured you?” asked Laurence, curiously.

Anthony looked at him steadily for a moment, then he turned away.

“The man was still drunk,” he observed, “after he’d finished playing.”

CHAPTER XXI

Cheerfulness was the predominant note of the two long wards in No. 27 Palace Court. They were first floor rooms, formerly stately London drawing-rooms, leading into each other. One room had long, bulging windows looking over the short, broad street toward the high, red houses opposite, and the other large, straight windows which overlooked a small, open plot, a brown tank, and a tree. The room itself was divided by its small beds and enlarged by its shining, carpetless floor. A glass case by the door held beautifully polished sterilizing instruments. It was the only sign of the office of the place. A large center table was covered with well-arranged flowers. By each man's bedside was a convenient locker with room for more flowers. There were no curtains, no pictures, nothing but the friendly monotony of whitewashed walls.

Charming printed-cotton counterpanes covered the small beds, and in the beds were the broken men. The nurses moved in and out, young, starched, and brimming over with their helpful activity. They were always there when they were wanted, and their stereotyped smiles and jokes were as unailing as the cleanliness of the polished instruments; but the men were, nevertheless, alone, under the mask of their cheerfulness.

Visitors came in from outside; they brought the breath of the big, bustling world with them, and sometimes they brought its fatigue. They seldom knew how to talk to the patients. Either the sight of pain and helplessness reminded them of street accidents and doleful emergencies, which they promptly related, or they felt they must rouse their old friends to what was going on in their own full lives; so they poured out the wash of their easy cheerfulness across a sea of pain.

The tired and weakened minds of the patients gathered themselves together for the effort of attention. Very few visitors realized that in the presence of weakness personal strength should be used only to reinforce it along the lines of least resistance; and that those who are suffering pain are more vulnerable to accounts of pain than they can very well bear.

Anthony knew these points from memory. He knew how to slip a pillow under a tired head so as to give it the precise angle of fresh restfulness and in just the same way he had learned how to slip the subject a man wanted under his drifting mind. It was part of his treatment to spend hours in the

hospital. It upset the nurses and curtailed their jokes, but after a time they got used to him. He was very silent, and came in and out like a shadow drawn by some instinct toward the men who needed him most.

Of the three types of cases in the little hospital, one was of those who were nearing the point where they would have to be pronounced hopeless. When this was reached, they would be moved to a big hospital for incurables, or, if they preferred it, they could be returned to their own homes.

The mind of science—all that it already knew, and all that its patient skill was fumbling toward—would be switched off them; there would be nothing more to be done. Whenever they saw a doctor in the wards their eyes grew into the question: “Has the time come? Are we finished?”

The doctor or the matron always told them as if a pleasant change lay before them, and the men wanted to be ready to take the joke in the right spirit. They knew that when that change came there would be no more changes.

Hilton Laurence never dealt with the hopeless cases. He left them to Anthony. They were not operatable, and he frankly confessed that he didn't know what to say to them.

He could, he explained, tell a man he was going to die as well as any one, but he hadn't the nerve to tell him he was going on dying. He left that to Anthony. Anthony accepted his patients in a different spirit; he sat with them every day, and when he was not with them, his mind was seldom off them. He was determined they should have a future. His mind twisted this way and that against the teeth of their cages.

Whatever was left of them Anthony found a use for. He never let one physically hopeless case leave No. 27 without something he could do before him. Each patient cost him sleepless nights and endless watchfulness; his own life became sucked up in their problems, but he grudged nothing that he gave. He knew that death was far less terrible and far less an enemy than despair.

The second set of cases were those for which there was some hope, but in which the symptoms had continued so long as to obscure it. The patients might win through to approximate recovery if the men themselves could grasp it or were not too tired to wish to grasp it.

These cases were the most difficult of all, because unless the will was arrested and brought into action, they would probably sink into the same

class as the incurable. They had to be made to believe that they were getting better and at the same time stimulated to want it.

Their symptoms had already obtained a fascination for them; they longed to be left in the little effortless circle of their pain and weakness. Suffering was their world; it was no longer acute, and their strength had sunk below the line of any desire to escape it. They only wanted their condition to be acknowledged and to be left alone with it.

Anthony was endlessly patient with them. He found out what their old tastes had been before their symptoms blotted out their significance, and he worked down to them as a careful excavator works down to a buried marble. He was never in a hurry and he never struck too hard.

The third class of cases were the happy ones. An acute observer would have known them as he entered the wards. Their eyes were alive, and the look in their faces was resolute. They knew they were getting better and that they were contributing towards their own recovery. They often had to suffer intense pain, but beyond it was an horizon; they had not sunk below the level of personal fight.

Anthony found them a great help, because he set them in his mind as the models for the others. He learned from watching them what could be expected of the coöperative spirit, once you had found and roused it.

“Science can do a great deal,” Anthony observed to Hilton Laurence, “but if we get faith on top of it, it can do almost anything. The trouble is that scientific men aren’t taught to handle faith, and generally the faith-healing people are set against science; so we do our job about as well as a team of pulling horses.”

“The invisible isn’t our job,” said Hilton Laurence, impatiently, “and most people’s faith is nonsense.”

Anthony shook his head.

“I don’t think it is,” he said reflectively. “I think most people’s faith is courage; only we haven’t enough of it.”

Hilton Laurence looked suspiciously at his partner. He was sometimes afraid that Anthony was becoming a crank. Laurence was enough of a scientist to know that you must keep your eyes open for a new theory, but he wished to see a new theory produced on an old line. Cranks are people who want new lines. However, perhaps all Anthony needed was a holiday.

Hilton Laurence met Henry the next day by chance at a street corner.

“Your brother,” he said, “ought to go out more. Why don’t you take him to a music hall? Try ‘Yellow Slippers.’”

Henry had not seen Anthony for months. He had made several suggestions, but Anthony had always got out of them or asked Henry to meet him at hours and places that Henry thought unsuitable.

Henry urged “Yellow Slippers” over the telephone. Anthony replied that he would certainly dine with Henry, but he hated music halls.

Henry, however, convinced him that he must tolerate the revue because Anthony had, after all, tolerated nothing convivial for ages, and it was Henry’s idea of being with him. It didn’t occur to Henry as possible simply to dine with one’s brother and have the rest of the evening suspended in front of one.

“It’s not as if you played bridge,” he reminded Anthony, reproachfully.

They went to “Yellow Slippers,” and it was exactly what Anthony had thought it would be—one good song, several pretty dresses, boredom, noise, and very unanimating coarseness. Between the acts they walked up and down the promenade, and saw the over-dressed, over-painted, under-vitalized habitués. Henry knew who they all were, if they were at all well-known, but he was very careful not to do more than point them out to Anthony.

“We don’t want to get mixed up with any of them,” he explained. “At the same time, one can’t go about with one’s eyes shut.”

It reminded Anthony of a circus, but he didn’t say so—heat and dust and glare, and creatures held to be tame that ought to have been free to be wild. The wildness that he saw occasionally flicker up through the slow evening was not enough to tear down one of the bars.

The promenade was not, as it would once have been to Anthony, a boring or a disgusting sight. It shook him with pity. He knew now what these men and women wanted: they were seeking for the chief stimulant of life. The younger people had in their eager search the quality of freshness; they sought for this vivid stimulant with more uncertainty. Sex still had for them the survival of the unexpected. They looked for it in the wrong place, because out of this glare and noise, with its promiscuous expanse of professional charm, they could get only the least from their desires. They were throwing away quality for the sake of experience.

But for the older people there was a deeper pity, with a sharper penalty. They knew precisely what they wanted; there was no mystery to uplift and

disguise desire for them, and no escape into the unexpected. What they had had many times and with zest they wanted to have again with a flickering satiety. They wanted it less, and yet they wanted it with a sharper edge of eagerness than the young. They knew that they had only a short time, and there was nothing else that they wanted to do with it. Anthony watched them without condemnation; he, too, shared their sense of frustration. Experience which had shut them in had shut him out; he saw no reason for any superiority. There was something in them which they had wasted until it had lost its significance, and there was something in himself which for lack of use had no longer any significance at all.

“There,” said Henry, with a note of explanatory patronage, “is quite a different type—a woman with style. I am very much mistaken if she is not a woman of the world. One notices these differences at once if one has the observer’s eye. I dare say she has no more virtue than a professional cocotte, but she knows how to carry her head. She’d pass anywhere for any one.”

Anthony turned his head to follow Henry’s eyes.

“All these types are alike to me,” he began; then he stopped abruptly, for the words were no longer true. The girl leaning over the balustrade was Kitty.

Whatever Kitty was there for, even if she didn’t particularly want it, was already in her hands. She had an air of complete detachment and immunity. As she turned her gaze slowly back to the promenade her eyes met Anthony’s. She still smiled indolently, but in her eyes there flashed a sudden signal of appeal.

She looked at Anthony for a moment as his worst patients looked at him when he came into the ward and their eyes searched him to read their hopeless fate.

Then as he hurried quickly toward her, she gave her old careless laugh.

“Hello, Tony,” she said. “You’re as unexpected as an archbishop. I should never have thought ‘Yellow Slippers’ was your kind of form. You must be going down in the world just as I’m climbing up!”

She made no introduction to the man beside her; there was of course a man beside her, a tall, weedy youth with a single eyeglass. Kitty turned her shoulder toward him, and said over it, “Go and get me a box of chocolates; you know the kind I like.” Then she waited till he had disappeared. Anthony noticed with a sharp pang of dismay that Kitty had changed. Her face and wrists were curiously thin, and there were hollows under her unquiet eyes;

but her smile was the same, and she looked him up and down in a whimsical, unhurried friendliness.

“It’s awfully nice to see you,” she said, “once in a way, you know, after six months. Is that your brother Henry? He’s like you, only he’s much tidier —tidier in his nature, I mean, as well as in his lovely white waistcoat. He’ll burst with curiosity, trying to pretend he doesn’t want to hear what we’re saying. Why don’t you bring him over and introduce him to me? I couldn’t do him any harm, you know; I’m sure he takes far too much care of himself to run any risk. I suppose I’m a risk, aren’t I? I can’t say *you* look particularly nice, Tony. Your eyes are cross, and your hair’s too long, and your dress-suit is shocking. It looks as if you wear it only once a year to dine with the lord mayor. I expect you keep it the rest of the time under a pile of medical dictionaries, don’t you? I do like a man to be smart.”

“I’m not going to waste time introducing you to Henry,” said Anthony, quickly, “but I’ve got to see you properly myself. Where are you staying? Here’s your confounded ass with the chocolates.”

“He has fifteen thousand pounds a year, so he tells me,” said Kitty; “so he can afford to be silly. You can’t, you know, Tony. I shouldn’t bother about my address if I were you.”

“You’ve got to tell me,” said Anthony, stubbornly. Kitty’s eyebrows went up. “I mean,” he entreated, “you might let me know, Kitty. This isn’t seeing you, if you were honest when you said you were glad.”

The young man reached them and looked haughtily at Anthony.

Kitty held out her hand for the chocolates.

“Yes,” she said reflectively, “these are the kind I eat, only I don’t feel like them now.”

She raised her eyes to Anthony.

“I’ve taken a flat with Peckham,” she said, “a horrid little hole; but I’ve let the farm. You can come and see me to-morrow if you like, at four o’clock —6 Trevor Road, Kensington. Fancy Kensington! It sounds like mothers’ meetings and socks for the poor, doesn’t it? But you won’t meet any mothers at Trevor Road. Good-by, Tony.”

Anthony turned reluctantly away from her. He was aware of Henry’s tact in the distance, strained almost to breaking-point by his curiosity, but Anthony brushed it ruthlessly aside. Henry’s tact meant nothing to him; he must get away now, get away at once before his self-control broke like glass.

Anthony felt as breakable as glass, and as transparent, before Henry's searching eyes. He realized suddenly that he had, after all, been thinking about Kitty for six months. He had never left a moment unemployed, but behind the employment, behind the fixity of his outer mind, had lain inexorably, almost unconsciously, the central thought of Kitty; and now that he had seen her face to face, his thinking was no longer unconscious. It pervaded the visible universe.

"I've got to get out," he said brusquely to Henry.

"Oh, all right, all right," said Henry, soothingly. "But for Heaven's sake, old fellow, don't *look* as if you'd got to! The building is not on fire."

"Isn't it?" murmured Anthony, dryly, as he turned away. "I have a kind of impression that it is."

CHAPTER XXII

The very fact that Anthony had fought with the image of Kitty for months undermined his resistance to her; the sight of her set him ablaze, and there was nothing left in him which could put out the fire. He turned his eyes from her only because she possessed the universe. As long as he was sure of her presence, he could go on behaving as if she were not there; but from the moment the big door swung behind him and his sight was robbed of her, he lost all other consciousness.

It was a cold, raw evening in December, unhappy flakes of snow fell without direction or intent, and changed instantly to moisture on the pavement. Henry acquired a taxi with precision. He said something about skidding and something about the evening having been a pleasant one, and he was prepared to share the comfort of the taxi with Anthony; but Anthony shook his head. He stood there ambiguously without offering to give the taxi driver Henry's address. Henry gave it himself, finally, and dissolved like the uneasy snow, leaving Anthony to the wet streets and his persistent phantom.

Everything held Kitty, each darkened window, each hard bright light, each flying taxi. Anthony saw over and over again her thin wrists and hands, the hollows under her eyes, the mocking spirit of her laughter. What did it cover? What dreadful thing was Kitty hiding? What had attacked and eaten away her youth?

The physical aspect of her dimmed all other questions; he did not ask himself who the man was she had with her, or why she was in London. Sickeningly and with increasing pressure fear and memory rushed over Anthony. He saw the apple-orchards in June, he remembered how the buttercup-fields sailed toward him on their sea of gold, but fear was in every image of that returning spring. His heart beat uneasily under the vision of beauty.

All these things were Kitty. She had the mastery of the green hills and open skies. She was the breath of meadow sweet and the songs of birds; he saw again the innocent, reckless Kitty of his dreams. But why was she so changed and thin—what haunted her gay eyes and shadowed her soft lines and delicate curves? She was like a spring on which a blight has fallen.

When Anthony reached his empty rooms he walked to and fro till the late winter morning sent its unlovely, muffled light into the room; then he lay down on his bed without undressing. Sleep caught him and flung him like an enemy.

When he awoke it was late, and he could hurry through the early details of his day and let the hurry blind him. Anthony was only aware of an intense uneasiness awaiting him. He had to take a minor bone operation at the hospital for Hilton Laurence. It was a tedious, ticklish small operation on which Anthony could force his mind; he did not let himself think of anything beyond it. The usual instruments, the heavy net of the ether fumes filling the theater, came down like a shelter between him and his stalking fear.

After the operation he went the round of his wards, but here the sense of emergency died out and refused to support him.

The patients felt the quality of Anthony's attention was different; there was no strength in it. He looked at them, listened and commented on what they told him, but the force he used on them and for them was no longer there. It was reserving itself for an unknown ordeal; they could not touch it.

Anthony stopped to look at his bone case, slowly coming back to consciousness from the world into which the ether had mercifully plunged him. The white, inexpressive face on the pillow, with drugged, blank eyes, roused in him a sense of envy. This man could get through his worst moments buried in unconsciousness. Anthony was alive and aware as a man tied to a stake and facing flame is aware.

He prolonged his work till the late afternoon, and then hurried with a desperate sense of frustration toward Trevor Road. It was an unexpected small road lying between two main thoroughfares, a small, unmeaning little byway of low, fawn-colored houses.

The street was respectable, but dingy; it seemed planted there without intention, and it was difficult to imagine Kitty in any place so unobtrusive and so without the forms of life.

Peckham opened the door to Anthony, and Peckham, too, was changed. Her face was older and smaller than Anthony remembered it. She had faded, and become uncertain of herself. Her standards of life had fought with her love for Kitty. Love had, in the end, triumphed, but at the expense of Peckham's solidity; she could go on serving Kitty without believing in her, but there was less of Peckham left to serve.

She was glad to see Anthony, but her eyes told him that though she would rather see him than any one else, he had come too late to save her ruined standards.

She said a little dryly:

“It’s a long time, sir, since we’ve seen you. You’ll find Miss Kitty upstairs; she has the front room on the right.”

Kitty had the most expensive spot in the inexpensive house. There were more windows and heavier curtains in her room than in any of the others, and it was filled with larger pieces of insignificant furniture. Massive, curious-headed chrysanthemums bloomed oddly in hideous vases, and a box of chocolates lay unopen on the table.

There was a fog outside, and some of it had crept into the overloaded little room and given it an air of mystery. Kitty was sitting over the fire, crouched on a large blue-velvet footstool.

Her small, white face had a look of stubborn suffering. She glanced unsmilingly at Anthony over her shoulder.

“You’ve come, then,” she said; “you’d have been more sensible not to. It’s such a boring day! I don’t say I wouldn’t be pleased to see the Angel Gabriel walk in with his last trump. It would be some kind of sensation, anyhow. I’ve always thought the day after the judgment would be rather fun. It’ll be such a joke rubbing it into the other goats that they’re in the same box as you. There are sure to be some pious ones who thought they’d get off cheap and leave you to the burning.

“What do you think of my new quarters? Third-class lodgings rather remind one of hell, don’t they?” She waved her hand in the direction of the spotty, leaden oil paintings on the walls. “It’s not very amusing, is it?”

“You’ll have to tell me why you’re here before I can say whether it’s amusing or not,” said Anthony, carefully. “People’s idea of amusement differ. I didn’t find ‘Yellow Slippers’ entertaining last night, for instance.”

“It was better than the alternative, anyhow,” said Kitty, defensively. “Fancy being shut up with these spiky book-cases and blue roses all the evening! Personally, I consider my present surroundings a certificate of my respectability. Poor old Peckham! You might tell her it strikes you like that; it would please her. I shouldn’t stay in a place like this if I were going in for gilded rapture, should I?”

“The truth is, I’m stony broke. I’ve forgotten all about the two ends somebody or other tries to make meet. I haven’t even got one; and if I had, I’d sell it for twopence.”

Anthony’s eyes rested on Kitty’s jeweled fingers and on her barbaric dress of wallflower and old gold.

“Well,” he said, “you ought to see your way to twopence.”

“That’s clever of you,” she said approvingly. “Any one else would have offered me fifty pounds, and I should have no use whatever for fifty pounds. What I want is five thousand a year and no questions asked.”

“Even that,” said Anthony, “you might get if you put your mind to it.”

“Not without questions,” said Kitty, quickly. “If people do anything for you at all, they want to know what you do with it, and all about you. Then they try to make you do something else. Curiosity is so tiresome! I never want to know anything I don’t know already; the kind of things you can be told aren’t the least interesting.”

“I’m afraid they have a distinct interest for me,” said Anthony, slowly. “I came here to find out one of them to-day.”

Kitty looked at him appealingly.

“Didn’t you just come to see me?” she murmured. “Don’t ask silly questions, and after I’ve warned you so nicely, too, and I wasn’t feeling nice when you first came in. I might quite easily stop being nice now if you bother me about anything.”

“Kitty,” interrupted Anthony, “I’m sorry, but I don’t care a damn whether you’re nice or not. I’ve got to find out now what is the matter with your shoulder.”

Kitty stammered in a gust of frightened anger. She flung her head back, and her face grew pinched and changed, as a flower withers and alters under a touch of frost.

“What do you mean?” she said sharply. “There *is* nothing the matter with my shoulder. You’re stupid and interfering. I wish you hadn’t come.”

“Still, I have come,” said Anthony, “and I’ve got to find out.”

He got up and took her very gently by both arms. She twisted under his hands, and struggled madly against him like a wild thing.

“Let me go!” she muttered between clenched teeth. “I hate you! I’ve always hated you! Let me go, Anthony!”

But he did not let her go. He held her with a gentle force against which all her struggles failed her. She sank passively against him; the wild throbbing of her whole being stilled itself. She neither fainted nor cried.

Her eyelids covered her eyes. There was no color in her face except the delicate touches of rouge that stained its deadly whiteness. Anthony carried her over to a small, hard sofa by the window and laid her down on it. She was no heavier than a child.

Kitty opened her eyes and smiled at him. Her anger was gone as suddenly as it had come.

“Do what you like,” she said, shutting her eyes again. “After all, it doesn’t really matter what anybody knows.”

Anthony fixed his face so that, if she looked at him later, she would not see his expression change. He was aware of what he had to meet, and he knew that he must show nothing. The strength of her resistance to him had been the strength of her fear. He became aware of every sound in the small room: the muffled noises of the foggy street; a stir below him in the dining-room, where some visitors were pushing back their chairs; the plunge and vent of the small flames in the fireplace; and Kitty’s light, swift breathing under his hands.

He made his examination methodically and quickly. It was what he had feared, but it was worse, because not even Anthony had dreamed that Kitty could bear in silence such a burden of hidden pain. The lump on her shoulder and beneath her arm extended in a long line down her side; the growth had probably been very rapid for the last six months. It was already close to the wall of her lungs, if the poison had not already invaded it. He guessed from the unstable lightness of her breathing that the invasion had already taken place.

He finished his examination without comment, drawing the shimmering dress lightly over her deadly secret. He knew that Kitty’s eyes were on him now, and he turned his own to meet them. They showed her nothing but his steadiness.

“I hate lying down,” said Kitty, impatiently. She pulled herself up by a hand on his shoulder, shivered a little, and moved back to the fireplace. For a while neither of them spoke; then Anthony broke the haunted silence.

“It may be one of two things,” he said quietly. “I must get a second opinion before I decide which it is. Hilton Laurence had better see you with me to-morrow; but if you don’t mind, I must ask you a few questions first. I think we can do something about it, you know.”

“Oh, but I don’t want anything done,” said Kitty, quickly; “that’s just why I haven’t told any one. I arranged it all in my mind—you see, I hate fuss and doctors and nurses. I was afraid from the first it might be rather bad, and I simply won’t be an invalid. Directly I’ve had as much as I can stand, I shall send Peckham off for a holiday and then I shall go away by myself, to some nice, undisturbed place, and take veronal. It’s just been a kind of race between the fun and the pain. I didn’t mean to stop until I’d had enough fun, and I meant to stop if I had too much pain; but after I’d decided—it was—it was enough—” Anthony lowered his eyes. The room was foggier than before. Kitty leaned forward a little. The words that came from her seemed forced against her will; they crept out into the dim air like frightened things. “I’ve had enough pain now,” she whispered.

Their hands groped for each other. Anthony knelt down beside her and put his arms round her waist. He held her to him as if he could hold off the onslaught of all enemies; but it was Anthony who broke down.

Kitty drew his head into her lap and stroked his hair.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said under her breath. “It’s not as bad as you think. It’ll be all right, Tony. I won’t go on too long. I’m glad you know after all. I didn’t want you to, because I hate the—the ugliness; but you mustn’t mind so much. You see, my life isn’t really anything very important. I’m just waste—like a bit of dust that dances in the sunlight. It looks pretty jumping up and down, but when the light’s gone, it’s only dust.”

“Don’t, Kitty! don’t!” said Anthony. “I can’t stand it. I’m so horribly strong myself, and I can’t use my strength for you. I can’t get any of it out.”

“But there isn’t anything for you to worry about,” Kitty urged. “I’ve had all the things I wanted—I mean all the things I could have if I’d lived to be a hundred—and it would bore me awfully to grow old and fat, perhaps, with wrinkles. Now I shall just slip out, nicely and young, without any fuss.”

Anthony pulled himself together.

“Not yet,” he said, “Kitty darling. You haven’t begun to have the things you want yet, because I hadn’t got them to give you before; now I have. Only give me a chance. Let me fight your pain! For God’s sake, Kitty, let me fight it!”

She looked curiously down at him.

“How funny of you to care still,” she said, “when I thought I’d killed it! Dear old Tony, I didn’t mean you to have this wretched time. What is it that you want me to do?”

“Be patient,” he urged her; “do what I tell you. I’ll have to see Hilton Laurence first before I’m sure, but there are things that can be done for you. I admit it’s a fight, but you’ll have the whole of us on your side. Everything I am and everything I can do will go into this fight, Kitty.”

Her eyes looked gravely at him. She seemed to be weighing for him and for him alone the cost of what he asked her. She shut herself out of it as completely as if she had already ceased to exist. Then she said gently:

“All right, old boy. I promise you I won’t back out of it.”

CHAPTER XXIII

The two men discussed the case for an hour before Kitty came. They were busy men, and an hour was an unusually long time in which to go through the claims of even the strangest case. Kitty's case, though there was an element of doubt about it, was not strange; but it was, in a doctor's phrase, a "nearly perfect case." Hilton Laurence, poring over the diagram Anthony had drawn for him, had never seen one so far advanced.

"And she can come here," he said incredulously, "in a taxi? She must be a strong young woman; most women, or men, for the matter of that, at her stage of the proceedings, would be lying drugged in bed with a couple of nurses in attendance."

"She isn't like the ordinary run of women," said Anthony. "She has the thoroughbred's nerve; that's what seems to give her a chance, a fighting chance."

Hilton Laurence glanced quickly at Anthony.

"Do you know her very well," he demanded,— "as a friend, I mean, as well as a patient?"

Anthony hesitated a moment, then he faced his friend's eyes.

"I know her about as well," he said gravely, "as a man knows a woman when he can think of nothing else."

Hilton Laurence shook his head.

"Ah," he said, "that's a pity. I'd better do the operating myself, then. You can help me if you like, of course, but you'll be asking a good deal of yourself, Arden. If I were you, I'd leave the case entirely in another man's hands."

"I can't do that," said Anthony, quickly, "but I'll be glad if you'll do the actual operating. I'll see her through the rest; I am asking more of her than I am of myself. But you have to ask a good deal of people in order to be of any use to them."

A discreet parlor-maid came in with a card.

"Show her in," said Hilton Laurence without looking at Anthony.

Kitty came into the room as if she were arriving at a party—a party where she expected to be very successfully entertained. She looked triumphantly well and perfectly mistress of herself. She wore a set of Russian sables, a little gold-brown fur cap came down low over her dark curls, her emerald ear-rings danced beneath it, as Anthony remembered they had danced and flashed the first time he saw her.

She threw back her furs with a little gesture of relief; they were lined with green brocade and showed a honey-colored chiffon blouse.

Kitty moved like the light *Princess* in George McDonald's fairy-tale, the *Princess* who could not weep because she had no gravity.

At Anthony's introduction she gave Hilton Laurence an intimate, disarming smile. Kitty's smile was at once an invitation to good fellowship, and a promise that no tiresome exactions would follow. It was a smile that said, "Here I am, and I'm sure you're going to be awfully nice to me; but you won't find me a bit of a bother afterward."

The two men were aware that they had ceased for the moment to be doctors: Kitty had transformed them into alert and friendly hosts. Hilton Laurence held a chair for her, and Anthony was sent to find a biscuit for her Pekinese.

"I hope you don't mind dogs," Kitty explained. "As a matter of fact, Algy isn't a dog; he's a Chinese dragon. You can't keep a real dog in London, can you? But I must have something that wags. Besides, Algy is supposed to match my fur. He loves it so much he eats it. I suppose you haven't got chocolate biscuits; those are the kind he likes the best. Your rooms are rather nice, not like a doctor's a bit. Those old prints are so jolly, and I suppose you have flower-boxes in the spring—like an actress. But what a frightful lot of books! Do you make Tony read them? Poor old Tony! Do tell me about him. I suppose he's awfully clever, isn't he, like the strong, silent men in the detective-stories who find out everything in the end, if they don't turn out to be the murderer themselves? I shouldn't think you were a silent man, are you, Mr. Laurence? Though I'm sure you're a strong one. Tony says I'm to call you 'Mister,' because surgeons are smarter than doctors, and the smarter you are the less there is to show for it. Is that the idea?"

Hilton agreed that it was, only, if you got smarter still, he explained, they made you a knight, which rather landed you.

The Pekinese being satisfied with sweet biscuits, took the rug in front of the fire.

The sun came out and played upon the gilt bindings of the medical books and made patches of gold upon the thick, soft carpet. Kitty eyed it appreciatively. She loved the sun and thick, soft carpets and all the ease and brightness of the world. She leaned back in her chair and surveyed the two men before her with confidence. She knew that she could handle the occasion with the ease which was natural to her in all situations which contained men.

Men can put up with disagreeable occasions, but they do not like to feel that any woman they admire finds an occasion disagreeable, and Kitty invariably let them off this realization.

“You do yourselves awfully well,” she said appreciatively, “don’t you? I think it’s so sensible. Now here’s a place where I suppose a certain amount of tiresome things go on—and yet it’s quite cosy and nice to look at—and I expect, Mr. Laurence, you have a first-rate cook? Anthony didn’t say if I was to stay to lunch or not—I’ve never been to a doctor’s before—so I don’t in the least know what happens, but I suppose you ring a bell and turn me out when you have had enough of me? Perhaps Tony gets up on the hearth rug and says ‘Well—?’ I’ve tried that and it generally succeeds—when it doesn’t I turn on a gramophone with a record of Tosti’s ‘Good-by.’ You might find that useful, Mr. Laurence—of course it’s rather affectionate.”

“Kitty,” said Anthony, quietly, “I think you’d better come over here and let us have a look at you. You’ll have to take your things off, and lie down on this little sofa.”

The two men turned to each other while Kitty strolled across the room. She stood in the patch of sunlight, and slipped off the security of her sable furs.

She was silent now, but there was a tranquillity in her silence compared with which the perfunctory conversation of the two surgeons together was nothing but a nervous flurry. They had to say something, but Kitty hadn’t. She looked out of the window, lay down on the sofa, and turned her eyes in the direction of Algy, who yawned.

“Now we’ll just have a look at you,” said Hilton Laurence, with a renewed and impersonal cheerfulness.

Anthony said nothing. He stood on the other side of Kitty with his eyes fixed intently on his colleague. He was trying to see Kitty not with his own eyes, but with Hilton Laurence’s eyes. He was determined to know and feel about her exactly what Hilton Laurence knew and felt, so that he would not

be deceived by the sharpness of his own personal hopes and fears. He ceased to think of Kitty herself in his anxiety to read the other man's mind.

Hilton Laurence was not thinking of Kitty's personality either. She had become a case, an extraordinarily interesting, madly neglected, case. She was not a human being any longer; she was a little undressed figure on a sofa, a pitifully broken figure lying there to be, if possible, mended.

She was forgotten, but she herself did not forget; her mind wandered with amused serenity over the men before her. They couldn't be only doctors to Kitty; they were men, and it was the first time she had ever seen men intensely at work.

All the rest of her life had been connected with men at play.

Kitty had been their play. Games, dances, and entertainments had filled in the hours, and she had shared them all with an admirable mastery; but she knew that she herself was the aim of all the other pleasures. The men she knew had been intent, but they were intent on pleasing her, and these two men, who had forgotten her altogether, were just as intent without there being any question of pleasure.

She wondered curiously what it would have been like for her if she had had something to do, something besides men to interest her. Her whole life might have been different; less amusing, perhaps, but more worth while. She might have been just as attractive, but with something else to fall back on—something with more permanence and dignity. But perhaps she couldn't have managed both. Being attractive took a great deal of time. Her father had once told her: "People who rely on their natural charm wear it out or have to become unselfish. It's a subject to which you must devote your whole attention in order to succeed." And apparently the interest of work took time, too. After all, you couldn't have everything.

Kitty was glad that she had seen Anthony at work. Work would be good for him; it would be good for him whatever happened.

The Pekinese stopped yawning, drew his way slowly through the lamb's-wool mat, and sniffed suspiciously at the two doctors' legs.

"Silly old thing!" murmured Kitty. "They aren't doing me any harm. They think they're doing me good; that's their idea, anyhow."

Hilton Laurence was recalled by her voice. He spoke with his habitual reassurance, but without looking at her.

“Thanks,” he said; “I think we’ve seen enough. If you don’t mind, Miss Costrelle, there are just one or two points we’d better discuss while you’re dressing up again. I’m afraid we’ve tired you, rather. Shall I send you in a glass of wine and a biscuit?”

Kitty shook her head. She thought it rather funny of the two men to go away and leave her, but it made it convenient to powder her nose. Laurence had a sensible looking-glass.

When they came back they found the same conquering princess as before. Kitty’s head rested against a black cushion, and the Pekinese was rolled up in her lap.

Kitty had a habit of complete muscular control, so that she made very few useless movements. She could sit perfectly still for hours without stiffness or restlessness. She sat quite still now, smiling across the room at the two men as they came back to her.

Anthony had himself well in hand. His face expressed nothing; he even gave Kitty a slight answering smile, which did not touch the controlled gravity of his eyes. But Hilton Laurence came in with a reluctance he could not quite hide; he hated to pass sentence on this radiant young life before him. The thought of it made him look tired and old. He could stand his friend’s iron self-control, but it was harder to meet the friendly gaiety of Kitty.

He drew a chair opposite her and said quickly:

“I’m not going to beat about the bush, Miss Costrelle. That lump of yours is a nuisance; we’ve got to get rid of it. Arden and I are both of one mind; we think surgical treatment is needed.”

“Surgical treatment means an operation, Kitty,” said Anthony, with a little twisted smile; “it’s our pretty way of putting it.”

“No, I don’t want to be pretty,” corrected Hilton Laurence, frowning; “I’m going to be perfectly straight with you. This operation, which is for bad glands, is a tedious, difficult, and serious business, and you’re not in the very best condition to have it. But you’re a brave girl, and I think you’ll stand it.”

“Is it only glands?” asked Kitty, playing with one of Algy’s long, soft ears.

“Aren’t very bad glands enough for you?” asked Hilton Laurence, quickly. Perhaps he asked his counter-question a shade too quickly. Kitty’s

eyes rested on him thoughtfully, then they turned to Anthony.

“Is it only glands, Tony?” she repeated.

“We’re not perfectly sure ourselves,” said Anthony, gently; “but in any case, we think it’ll help the pain, Kitty.”

“You’ll undoubtedly be the gainer by it,” interposed Hilton Laurence. “You don’t stand to lose anything by the operation, Miss Costrelle.”

“No,” she said quietly; “only, of course, I’ll be ill, sha’n’t I—I mean it’s just lying in bed and having nurses and being an invalid? It’s rather sickening, isn’t it?”

“Life is a sickening business, Miss Costrelle,” said Hilton Laurence, gravely.

None of them said anything for a time. The fire crackled busily on the hearth, the winter sunshine filled the quiet room. There was nothing to be said against the impalpable and awkward fact that would turn a gay princess into a stricken, hopeless invalid. The two men facing Kitty could perhaps ease her downfall, but they could not prevent it. They knew what lay before her.

It was impossible to say what Kitty knew. She was grave for a few moments, then she picked up Algy and shook him.

“He likes to sleep,” she explained, “in the middle of the morning, though he’s quite young, really. I think it’s the cream he takes for breakfast—he will have it—and it goes to his head. It’s in the Bible, isn’t it, how shocking it is to be drunk at the third hour of the day? I don’t know if it was meant to include Pekes.”

She rose with her light, careless grace and glanced over her shoulder at Anthony.

“Let’s go to Kew in a taxi and have lunch at Richmond, Tony,” she suggested. “It’s such a heavenly day.”

Hilton Laurence gave a sigh of relief. She didn’t understand, then; he smiled paternally upon her.

“You couldn’t have a better program,” he exclaimed; “the air will do you all the good in the world.”

“All the good in the world?” repeated Kitty, teasingly. “And how much do you suppose that is?”

Of course she knew that nothing would do her any good. A dazed look had come over Anthony's face; he stood quite still by the door, holding it open for her.

Hilton Laurence transferred his swift, clear-cut attention to Anthony.

"Hand me over your case-notes for to-day, old boy," he said quietly. "I'll take them over for you."

Anthony pulled himself together.

"Thanks," he said gratefully; "but I must just go and telephone to the hospital."

Kitty passed out into the hall. Hilton Laurence followed her. She laid her hand on his arm with a little friendly gesture of persuasion.

"Look here," she said in a rapid undertone. "When I'm dead, make Tony stick to his work, make him think he ought to help people. He likes helping people, you know. It's funny; I had no idea work mattered so much to men, but I see it does. Make him stick to it. You see, it would be such an awful pity for Tony to be smashed, wouldn't it? Because he really *does* help people, and awfully few people ever really help. They just make a fuss on the top; they don't go down into it. I'm sure you know what I mean."

"My dear young lady—" stammered Hilton Laurence. Of course he ought to say she wasn't going to be dead, but something in Kitty's eyes checked him. He didn't say it.

They stood for a long, queer moment in the hall holding each other's eyes. Then Kitty heard Anthony's returning footsteps. She smiled at Hilton Laurence, reassuringly.

"I dare say I shall get better, and it won't matter," she murmured soothingly. "Another time," she added in her clear, high little voice, "perhaps you'll invite me to lunch. Could he, Tony? Or is it one of your dreadful rules that doctors can't eat with patients—like prisoners with their executioners? I'm fearfully hungry, but I dare say I shall hold out till I get to Richmond. Tell the man to drive fast."

Kitty leaned back in the taxi, and Algy, yapping with tremendous zeal, poised himself on her knees. He was prepared to feel that he himself was the engine. Every nerve in his small, erect body responded to the winding-up of the car. He stood upon Kitty's lap as an admiral stands upon his bridge, ready to direct the biddable universe.

Kitty turned her head and looked back at Hilton Laurence. He did not usually stand on the steps to say farewell to his patients, but he stood there now.

“Promise you’ll keep him up to it?” called Kitty, touching Anthony’s arm with her hand.

“I promise,” agreed Hilton Laurence, steadily.

“What’s that you’ve made him promise?” asked Anthony as they moved quickly down Wimpole Street, and flashed up the bustling stretch of traffic stretching away toward the Marble Arch.

“Oh, it’s just a little thing I wanted him to do for me,” replied Kitty, lightly. “And now I’m going to enjoy myself.”

CHAPTER XXIV

Anthony had known moments in the years of his captivity when he had let himself go in a sudden compulsion of happiness. He had shut out by an effort of the will all sense of his imprisonment, and enjoyed as separate things the sight and smell of summer fields. He realized that he and Kitty were doing the same thing now; they had their single sunny hour, and behind and in front of it were monstrous experiences. It was a green space, with edelweiss growing between precipices. They had had to climb up, and they still had the dangers of the descent before them; but for a little while they stood safe and triumphant among the flowers.

Kitty managed their precarious footing better than Anthony; her pleasure was not invaded by thought or by the conscious effort of her own will. She had the strange humility of those who have not set themselves free by moral struggles. She could be happy because she expected nothing of herself and very little of others. She knew no more than that it was a fine day and she had Anthony.

Kitty loved her lunch in the old-fashioned, dark dining-room at Richmond, and when they reached Kew she loved the gardens even more. She caught sight of a squirrel making a brief excursion between the trees in an open avenue, and she held out her bare hands and laughed at the feeling of the warm sunshine touching them. Without a sign of fatigue, she drew Anthony on and on, across the lawn, where in the spring the azaleas bloom, and on into the leafless, empty bluebell wood.

“It’s like a sea,” Kitty told him, “when they’re out; not the big, clumsy sea, full of water, but a string of clear blue pools left behind by a tide. You look and look till the blueness closes over your head. I think the light to-day is a ghost light, for I can almost see the bluebells. We must come here together one day next spring.” She broke off suddenly, and said she wanted to see the palace where Henry VIII’s wives spent the gayer intervals of their precarious existences.

“It must have been rather nice,” Kitty observed speculatively, “to have been one of those short queens; only I don’t believe Henry would have cut my head off. I’d have been short more naturally. The thing with Henry would have been to get tired first. I could easily have managed that.”

“Aren’t you tired now,” Anthony asked anxiously, “without managing it?”

“Ah, you aren’t Henry VIII,” said Kitty; “I don’t have to take the precaution of being tired of you.”

He hadn’t the heart to tell her that there were other precautions which it would have been wise for her to take. It was as if Kitty had for the moment evaded the line of fatigue, and was holding by sheer will to the absence of pain.

She strolled with him round the wide pond that lay as flat as an upturned looking-glass within a whispering thicket of yellow water reeds.

“Fancy it’s being a fine day,” Kitty exclaimed, slipping her arm into Anthony’s, “and then seeing a squirrel and having nobody about! I like winter best, don’t you? There’s nothing to take your attention off what there is. The trees are so jolly and black and bare; the grass is like a special treat; the sky is nearer; and when it’s fine, you don’t expect it. It’s so nice not to be sold by a surprise.”

Anthony was puzzled by this revelation of Kitty. He had not supposed she would like anything undecorative or bare. She voiced his very thoughts for him, and then, with a sudden little shiver of discontent, she said:

“I hate the water reeds. They all shuffle and chatter so—like a crowd of underbred women in church. It’s cold, too. After all, I think I like hothouses best. Do you know the blue lotus? Let’s go there. I like blue lotuses. They lie in a pool and do nothing but stare at you—awfully nice, lazy, well-dressed flowers.”

They walked back to the blue-lotus house. Kitty flung off her furs and gazed down into the pool. Palms and tropical foliage surrounded them, and in the distance there was the broad back of a discreet custodian.

“Funny old thing!” said Kitty, looking down at the blue lotus. “It looks just the same as the one I saw ages ago. I wonder how long the flower lives.” Anthony told her, but Kitty did not listen to him. She said suddenly: “I got into an awful row after you left Rochetts. I suppose Jim must have said something to Daphne. When I went back to the lawn to say good-by, they both got up and walked into the house without speaking to me. It’s funny the way married people act in lumps, isn’t it? Your poor mother didn’t understand. She was awfully bothered and kind, and kept saying she was sure Daphne couldn’t be well. Finally I said:

“‘It’s quite all right, Mrs. Arden, really. Daphne thinks I’m not fit to speak to—and I’m *not*, you know.’ Your mother put her hand on my arm and said:

“‘My dear, I’m *so* sorry.’ Wasn’t it sweet of her? I think it was the nicest thing anybody ever said to me. Papa was examining a rose-tree through his eyeglass. I don’t know what he heard or thought about it; what he said was:

“‘We must really get a Mabel Vernon.’ Then we went home. The nicest part of papa is he never says anything unless you do.”

Kitty gave a little inconsequent laugh.

“I think I must have been mad that night,” she added reflectively, “for I did such an absurd thing! I worked myself up into telling dear old Peckham all sorts of things she needn’t ever have known. It was so silly, for I wasn’t even going on with them. I knew I’d come to a stop. You can’t be ill and gay beyond a certain point, can you? Besides, I didn’t want to very much.

“Of course I’m as gay as I can be now, but nothing Peckham need have minded. I always think confessions are worse than sins. Don’t you? Usually you only upset yourself by your sins, but you upset other people by your confessions.”

Anthony drew Kitty to a seat.

“Tell me,” he asked her gently, “what made you make that scene there at Rochetts if you don’t believe in confessions and don’t like upsetting people?”

Kitty stared at him.

“Oh, that,” she said. “Don’t you know? I had to; I didn’t want you to get dragged into all this. I knew something or other was coming, and I meant you not to have the bother of it. I thought you wouldn’t go on caring for me if I was nasty enough and you got clean away. Heaps of people have got over caring for me beautifully. Of course I see you haven’t now; so it’s different. I can’t keep you out of things if you really care. I suppose I shall just have to do what you like.”

Anthony looked down at her eagerly.

“Will you really, Kitty?” he asked. “There is something else I want. I want it awfully, more than I can ever tell you; I’ve been thinking about it all night, hoping I could ask you, but afraid of being a bother, too. It makes the whole thing simpler if you can do it. I want you to marry me at once, in three days, before the operation. I want the right of taking care of you. If you

give it to me, we needn't have any nursing homes or nurses. I'll take a furnished house, and look after you myself with Peckham. Whatever we have to go through, we can go through solidly together. It was my being such a fool as not to share everything with you that left you alone with this —this misery. I can't let myself think of it. You won't mind marrying me now, will you?"

Kitty laughed.

"Silly old thing!" she said. "It was I that didn't want to share anything. It's awfully sweet of you to think about marriage, but why need we be married? If you want so awfully to take care of me, I'll let you do it; but marriage seems to me rather off the point."

"It isn't," said Anthony, passionately; "it matters tremendously to me. I want the right, the sanction, whatever you like to call it; I want our lives held together before the world as well as in our hearts.

"I want every one to know that we've hit on something that lasts."

Kitty looked at him consideringly.

"Marriage doesn't always last," she said a little dryly, then she slipped her hand over Anthony's. "You want nobody to say anything horrid," she said gently, "but I don't care any more what people say."

"I care," Anthony said desperately, "and, O Kitty, I want you for myself. I don't want any one else to interfere or speak or think between us. We've had so much of that already. Let's fall in with the world, if it's the only way to keep out the world."

Kitty moved a little restlessly.

"It isn't the world," she said; "it's your mother and Daphne. Those are the people I don't want to come across. They've been good and dear and kind, but it hasn't been possible—and it's I, not they, who have made it impossible. Because I'm ill, doesn't make me good, you know, Tony."

Anthony bent his head and kissed her hands passionately, one after the other; he held them to his lips as if he could not let them go.

"I can't stand any more, Kitty," he said quietly. "I'd like to stop and think of them if you want me to, but I can't. I think only of you. I need you as I never needed you. Don't shut me out for anything on earth."

Kitty watched him with bright, unshrinking eyes.

"How long would it be for, Tony?" she asked.

“Always, always,” he cried brokenly. “I hope so—I believe so, Kitty. I will have your life. It’ll be all right, if you can stand just for a time having to be ill—”

Kitty put her hand up to check the words on his lips.

“No, no,” she said; “don’t say doctors’ things, Tony. I don’t need to be reassured. Besides, it wouldn’t have the effect you want. If I thought marriage would really be for long, you see, I wouldn’t do it. I’d do anything else you want, but not tie you up—and hurt them. I’d think it boring; but if it’s for just a little while and you awfully wanted to, we could explain to them, and then they wouldn’t mind so much. But I must know the truth; is it only for a little while?”

Anthony bowed his head. The words that had stood outside his mind like armed sentries all the day rushed in and took possession: “She may live a year after the operation if her strength holds out.”

“Not awfully long,” he said thickly.

Kitty got up and peered down at the blue lotus.

“All right,” she said quietly. “Won’t it be fun being married? We’ll ask papa to give us lunch afterward at the Carlton. Will you see him for me, Tony, and tell him about it? Dear old thing! He’ll like ordering lunch.”

The shadows in the lotus-house had changed; the custodian approached them, jingling his keys significantly.

“It’ll be nicer in the air,” Kitty said, taking Anthony’s arm. “They’re rather stuffy things, blue lotuses, after all.”

Anthony became suddenly aware of how exhausted Kitty had become. Without a word they turned toward the gates. The garden was deserted, and the short winter day was drawing to a close. It seemed an eternity before the long road yielded them a taxi. Anthony lifted Kitty into it and held her in his arms.

She gave herself up to pain without resistance, in the same spirit in which she had given herself up to pleasure, only more quietly. The pain beat down on her as rain beats on a flower. Anthony was baffled by his separation from her suffering. His imagination struck and struck against it, as the sea fumbles and strikes against the walls of iron cliffs, seeking an entrance. He could not get in to share her pain with her, and Kitty could not let him in.

When they reached Trevor Road, the fire was burning brightly, and Peckham, vigilant and expectant, produced hot-water bottles and tea.

Moment by moment the gray pallor of Kitty's face lightened.

"It's been such a jolly day, Tony," she whispered. "I hadn't any idea Kew would be such fun. Go and see papa now; don't forget to tell him about the lunch."

Mr. Costrelle was always to be seen between four and eight o'clock at his club.

Bridge was his inflexible habit. He found the element of chance, he explained, purer in cards than in women, and nothing ever held Mr. Costrelle permanently, except the element of chance.

He told Anthony immediately that he could spare him only ten minutes.

"However," he added reassuringly, "most things can be said in ten minutes. Will you have a whisky and soda?"

Anthony not only consented, but poured himself out a very stiff glass.

"Rattled!" thought Mr. Costrelle. "Kitty! What a mistake it is not to diffuse one's sentiments!"

"I don't know if you have any idea," Anthony began after a short pause, "that I care for Kitty."

"You spent the larger part of six weeks in my daughter's company last year," said Mr. Costrelle. "I never ask questions, but salient facts rarely escape me."

"I want to marry her," Anthony said, leaning forward, "immediately, within three days."

Mr. Costrelle's long, white face lifted for a moment; his blue eyes passed rapidly over Anthony, and then returned to his glass.

"Thursday," he said, "I think that brings us to Thursday. People with superstitions, I believe, avoid Friday. I always respect superstitions; there seems as much reason to believe in them as to believe in anything else. I am glad you have avoided Friday."

"Unfortunately," pursued Anthony, "this is not all I have to tell you." He hesitated for a moment. Mr. Costrelle screwed his eyeglass into his eye and waited patiently. He disliked sentences beginning with "Unfortunately," especially if they referred to Kitty. "Do you remember," Anthony began again, "that I thought last summer there was something wrong with her shoulder?"

Mr. Costrelle continued to regard Anthony with defensive passivity.

“Certainly I do,” he agreed. “Most doctors think there is something wrong with somebody—a most disconcerting profession.”

“Well,” said Anthony, impatiently, “in this case I happened to be right; there was a growth below the shoulder which threw it a little out of place. It has increased rapidly. I saw Hilton Laurence with her this morning; we both think we ought to operate immediately.”

Mr. Costrelle drew out a slim cigar-case, took out a cigar, lit it, and leaned back in his chair.

“What is the nature of the growth?” he asked when he completed this arrangement, “and what will be the effect of the operation if it is successful?”

“We are not absolutely certain of its nature,” replied Anthony, “but all the symptoms point to its being malignant. It is probably a fibroid cancer. The operation will prolong her life. She could not live six weeks if we left her as she is, and the pain—”

Anthony stopped abruptly. The memory of Kitty lying motionless in his arms choked him. He could not speak to Mr. Costrelle of Kitty’s pain. Mr. Costrelle finished his sentence for him.

“Naturally,” he observed, “the pain will be considerable in either case. Well, it’s a very disagreeable subject, and as I suppose you know all there is to be known about it, I leave it entirely in your hands.”

Anthony drew a deep breath. He had not known what to expect from Mr. Costrelle, but this entire detachment left him with a sense of its not having been necessary to expect anything. He realized what Kitty had always had to face, a responsibility from which in every emergency Mr. Costrelle invariably withdrew.

Mr. Costrelle wished to be quite friendly and nice about it, and as he met Anthony’s astonished eyes, it occurred to him that possibly he had not entirely fulfilled his future son-in-law’s expectations.

“I’m quite pleased about the marriage,” he added cordially. “The point of it, under the circumstances, entirely evades me, but I am sure it’s an admirable thing for Kitty. Marriage always suits women. Did she send me any message?”

It hardly seemed a convenient moment to suggest a luncheon party, but Anthony, remembering that it was Kitty’s wish, made the suggestion a little

tentatively. Mr. Costrelle's consent was as spontaneous as if the idea was a relief.

"Certainly she shall have a luncheon at the Carlton," he said. "I could have arranged, perhaps, a more perfect meal elsewhere, but women like other things besides food. Shall we say lunch at two o'clock? I shall arrange to bring my own wine. I have a Château Yquem which is tolerably well known. Our ten minutes is up, I think."

Mr. Costrelle's self-possession was complete. He shook hands with Anthony loosely and briefly, and joined his bride four with his usual long-limbed, lounging gait. But despite Mr. Costrelle's impassivity, his ten minutes had taken the zest from his life.

Sorrow could not disarrange his habits, but it could devitalize a failing taste. Mr. Costrelle knew that he would never enjoy his bride so much again. Anthony thought his future father-in-law did not know the meaning of grief. He did not realize that the grief which the mind evades is a grief which dogs a man's footsteps to the end of his days.

Anthony plunged into the short concentrated time which lay before the operation with a queer sense of relief. He had gained no support from Mr. Costrelle, but he would have Kitty all the more to himself.

CHAPTER XXV

When Anthony informed Henry of his impending marriage over the telephone, Henry exclaimed, "Good God!" but he was very useful afterward. He gave Anthony the address of a house in Duke Lane that belonged to friends of his who wanted to go abroad immediately and were willing to let it as it stood; and he volunteered to go down to Pannell for Anthony to break the news to his parents.

Henry knew that a great deal of manipulation was necessary if the marriage was to be accepted by the family, and he thought it had better be accepted, because, after a talk with Hilton Laurence, he had come to the conclusion that he couldn't prove Anthony mad, and that the marriage wasn't a permanent disaster.

"Insane acts are seldom certifiable," Hilton Laurence explained rather dryly to Henry, "and in any case you won't have long to put up with it."

Henry felt very strongly that a thing that couldn't be stopped and wouldn't last long had better not be looked into at all.

It was unfortunate that Anthony insisted his parents should be told the truth before they decided whether they would receive Kitty or not, but Henry, in whose hands the truth had been deposited, felt that it was open to him to deal with it economically.

Powder in sufficient quantities may destroy an empire, but readjusted, and with the explosive elements left out, it is said to give a beneficial appearance to overheated complexions.

Henry told his father that he probably wouldn't consider the marriage suitable. Miss Costrelle came from a good old Essex family, but she was poor and had lived a long time abroad. She hadn't any particular home, and Anthony was marrying her before the operation in order to look after her himself.

"Of course it's quixotic," Henry continued swiftly before Mr. Arden was fairly launched upon his first negative. "Poor old Tony has had a bee in his bonnet ever since he returned to England. It isn't an ordinary marriage, and you know I feel with you, sir, that ordinary marriages are always the best; but I do think he might have done worse. If the girl recovers, which is, I fear,

extremely improbable, she'll make him more normal; and if she doesn't, he'll have had his head, and be free again, without much damage done."

Mr. Arden listened to Henry with some consideration. He knew that Henry, with very little help from him, had carved out a successful legal career. His father appreciated success and respected the law. It was true the law was not always amenable to force, but on the whole it usually protected the rights of those who had most of them, and you could not override it when it went against you. Mr. Arden listened to Henry, even when he differed from him, with more patience than he usually found convenient.

"If she comes from a good family, she must have relatives," he said severely; "all good families have relatives. It's pure nonsense for Tony to make himself responsible for an invalid bride. I don't approve of it at all. You may tell him so from me. I sha'n't accept it. Why should I? It's not the kind of thing an eldest son should do. What's to become of the place? Tony is as selfish as if he were a scatter-brained young fool, and he hasn't the excuse of being one. Doesn't he know at his age he ought to have children?"

"But Henry says, dear," interposed Mrs. Arden, gently, "that it's a really dangerous operation and that it is not likely that Miss Costrelle will live long after it, and then dear Anthony could marry again."

"That makes it worse," declared Mr. Arden. "It sounds to me like adding murder to matrimony. I don't want to sit and wish for a poor girl to die, and I don't like re-marriages. The whole thing is both silly and shocking. I shall have no hand in it."

"You hear what your father says, Henry," said Mrs. Arden, with an air of finality, which always soothed her husband. "I shouldn't say any more about it until after tea."

But when tea-time came Mr. Arden had had a further conversation with his wife—a conversation in which, after a good deal of heated repetition, on Mr. Arden's part, a few suggestions on Mrs. Arden's, which he had come to feel were his own, had softly permeated the repetitions. They ran as follows: Anthony was of age, he could really do what he liked; therefore opposition was useless, particularly as it had never been known to answer with Anthony. It was almost certain the girl would die, and dead girls are not aggressive. They need not say anything very definite until after the operation. If it was successful, and the girl got better, she did belong to a good family; if she didn't get better, she wouldn't belong to any family at all.

Anthony was not asking them for money. He had said nothing about settlements. The squire hated settlements. You had to tie up your money and then keep your hands off it. He wouldn't have to do this in the circumstances, and he couldn't have got out of doing it in any other. A message founded on these facts was produced at tea-time, which could easily be presented to Anthony in the light of acquiescence.

"He's of age," Mr. Arden said reluctantly, "and I can't stop him making a fool of himself. Tell him from me that we sha'n't come to the marriage—the whole thing is very disagreeable and odd—but if the girl gets better, she can come here to convalesce. Pannell's his home, and I sha'n't keep him or his wife out of it."

Mrs. Arden hid in the shrubbery and preceded Henry to the steps of the dog-cart.

"I remember Miss Costrelle quite well," she said, with a curious little flush on her face; "I thought her quite fascinating. Of course I know she's not suitable for Tony's wife, poor dear. It's a pity she is so—so French, but I can't help feeling sorry she is ill. Give them *both* my love, Henry."

Henry did not give the whole of this message, either; he thought it was rash. He seldom gave the whole of any message.

He offered to write to Daphne, but Anthony had done this for himself. He wrote:

I know you once understood and loved Kitty. I didn't when I was with you; I only saw what the world had done to her and I blamed her for it. It's so hard not to blame people for their scars. Anyway, you'll forgive her now if she hurt you, for she is under the harrow. I can't lift it off; I can stand by her, that is all.

I have found a way of doing it which perhaps even you won't understand; but if anybody can understand, you will. I daren't look ahead at any future, but I suppose instinct, or whatever it is that pushes us forward to help each other, will keep me up to the mark. Laurence operates on Friday; I shall assist.

Don't bother to come even if you want to; only think of her with kindness. For your sake she would not have married me if she had not known that it was only for a little time. Do you remember how happy you were when I came back from prison? I like to remember your happiness; only I think it is true that one loves even more when one is unhappy.

ANTHONY.

Henry settled all the details of the marriage. Bishops and chaplains in his hands were as malleable as butter. There were no impediments.

Kitty had been so exhausted after her day at Kew that Anthony had insisted on her remaining in bed until the morning of her marriage. He had succeeded in keeping her out of pain.

Kitty enjoyed the rest of lying in bed and looking at her new room. It was a quiet, pretty room. The windows overlooked the Carmelites' garden on the other side of the narrow street.

It was not a large garden, but there were trees in it, and Kitty took a great interest in the Carmelites.

"Monks are the kind of men I don't know," she explained to Anthony. "I do so wish I could have one to talk to! I want to ask them what it feels like to live all day long under a rule and never to know what God made the world for. For I suppose He did rather mean it for men and women to live in, didn't He? And yet I admire them; it's rather fine to shut yourself behind a wall into a stone church because you think it pleases anybody, even God.

"I wonder if there's some kind of trick about prayer. Do you think there is, and that's why they can go on for such an awfully long time and not mind being bored? Peckham prays, too; but she takes off her stays first, and prays in her dressing-gown. Do you think God hears her and the monks as well? It must be rather nice for Him, I should think, that some people don't pray. Peckham expects to get answers. Do the monks?"

Anthony said he thought they did, but probably not the same kind of answers. He told Kitty his own theories about auto-suggestion, but Kitty only said:

"I don't think that makes it any easier. Where does the auto-suggestion come from? There's always an outside as well as an inside, isn't there? And if God made the outside, He could put the idea into you from it, couldn't He? You must start a ball of wool somewhere."

Anthony wanted to go on with the subject, for it surprised him to see that Kitty had lit on a connected form of reasoning. But she broke off immediately, as if she was afraid of anything deeper than a chance question.

"I'm so glad you like Peckham," she said softly. "I think I've got an awfully nice family now—you and Peckham and Henry. Henry came to ask me this morning if I wanted a red carpet. He said I couldn't have a carpet

without a carriage or a carriage without a carpet. I do like Henry's mind. I told him we were going to walk down the little alley to the church, so he said we couldn't have a carpet; but we might have bells afterward, if we liked."

The walk to St. Mary Abbot's was a mere stone's-throw from Duke Lane, but Kitty's strength was only in her mind. Her eyes laughed, and she pretended that when she paused to look into the tiny square or at the quaint shop-windows of Church Walk she was doing it for fun and not because her breath had failed her.

She had wanted to walk, because she said it would seem more like the country. She lingered as they came to the open doorway of the church beneath the trees. They could look up the long nave of the church toward the altar.

Henry had had it beautifully decorated with lilies and white lilac. Kitty had not thought of the actual marriage before; she had thought of her dress, which was the color of autumn leaves, of lunch at the Carlton, and the fun of the way Henry had dealt with the bishop; but the grave service under its white shrine of flowers came to her unexpectedly. She had a wave of sudden fear; her face remained impassive, and the gravity that settled down upon her seemed merely appropriate to the hour, but her heart beat against her side like an imprisoned bird.

It was the emptiness of the church which disconcerted Kitty. There was no one there but Peckham and Henry in a seat in front of the altar. A verger with a duster stood in a distant corner, and an expectant curate put his head round the door from the vestry to see if they had arrived.

Peckham was on her knees, and her black bonnet, with its single red rose, looked as if it were being shaken by concealed emotion. Henry's face was a blank. He was prepared for anything, and his entire consciousness rose to hide the signs of his preparation. Kitty might faint, Anthony might start some dreadful skeptical fad. They might be late; they ought not to have walked in together. The situation bristled with irregularities, and it depended upon Henry's face to make it look as regular as possible.

Anthony was entirely preoccupied with how much Kitty could stand and whether he couldn't persuade her afterward to give up lunching at the Carlton. The service passed over his head without any significance whatever, except that of length.

As Kitty turned toward him to make her answering troth, her eyes widened a little, and her lips stiffened. She had forgotten the great words,

but they raised suddenly in her heart a storm of memory. Dick had said them to her, long ago, by the bridge he had built across their gardens: “For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.”

Anthony wavered and disappeared before her eyes, and Dick came in his place—Dick, who was all her early life—and held in his hands her rich, untouched, and perfect memories.

Anthony stood only for broken things, for hours of pain and indecision, for her incomplete and torturing emergencies, and for her blind hours of shame. She laid her small hand firmly on the rails until the pain shot up her arm into her shoulder. The pain brought back the figure of Anthony. He stood looking down at her with reassuring, watchful eyes.

Death and innocence and Dick took no part in this marriage, but a love that was stronger than youth and innocence stood by her and would stand by her to the end.

CHAPTER XXVI

Anthony felt that he knew Kitty in the church; she was there in his world, a part of the act that bound them. He was not sure of her thoughts, but he was sure of her attitude. Outside the church she ceased to belong to him. When he suggested under his breath that they should give up the Carlton, her amazed eyes met his in a flash of hostility.

“Give up lunching with papa?” she exclaimed. “But he’s ordered it!”

Anthony had touched by accident on one of Kitty’s laws. She had so few that it was not surprising he should have failed to recognize their existence. But the law of pleasure is at least as strong in its compulsion to its votaries as any other law. Business appointments never disturbed Kitty. You kept them if you remembered them and if you had nothing better to do; but social engagements, which were meant to be an exchange of pleasure, were inviolate. Inconvenience, suffering, fate even, bowed before a luncheon party. You couldn’t put off what was meant to amuse. It might even bore you; but if you’d promised, you’d promised.

The intention was, after all, there, and the intention was sacred.

Henry understood this immediately.

“If you had thought it would be too much for her,” he said a little reproachfully to Anthony, “you should have telephoned overnight to Mr. Costrelle.”

“It won’t be too much for me,” said Kitty, impatiently; “I shall like it. It will be great fun after that stuffy, old, black church. The flowers were charming, Henry. I like to be drenched in lilies. I could get drunk on the scent of them, couldn’t you? They’re the least-innocent flower in the world, and yet every one gets taken in by them, especially in church. The curate had adenoids. I dare say he couldn’t help it, but I hate men with adenoids. This is what the troth, or whatever it was called, sounded like.”

Kitty imitated the curate to perfection. Henry laughed, and Anthony wondered where the Kitty was who at the moment of those uttered words had looked afraid. She had not been thinking of the curate’s adenoids then.

He was absorbed in his thoughts of Kitty’s remaining hours. Did she realize how few there were, or know the awful curtain which would come

down between the Kitty as she was to-day and the Kitty she was to be to-morrow? He wanted every moment of her held in the privacy of their small house, dedicated to their love and understanding, and he felt a bitter rebellion against the artificial public hours that she had claimed instead.

It was a harsh, unlovely day. London had a look of dirty cold, the houses were pinched into mere shelters, the raw air pursued and baffled the passers-by, forcing them into an irritated consciousness of their errands. There was no color anywhere. The gray of the sky was dead and unluminous, the streets a greasy brown. Their motor skidded and shuffled through the traffic like a sleep-walker, blind to everything but its own passage.

Henry talked cheerfully of possible skating. At present it was too damp, but the temperature was falling fast; a good hard frost—

He hoped Kitty and Anthony were not going to fall out on their wedding day; neither of them made any suitable response to the possibility of frost. These hasty rushes into marriage usually ended in bad temper.

Henry congratulated himself inwardly on his escapes from matrimony. They had never been narrow escapes. He had foreseen the danger a long way off, but they had been complete. People were likely to turn out unsatisfactory at close quarters, especially women. Women were romantic, and when they were married they were incessant, and it took a very strong digestion to stand incessant romance. That was the worst of marriage; you couldn't turn away from it with a good conscience.

Of course Anthony had made the situation a great deal more difficult than it need have been. Miss Costrelle was perfectly charming, but none of her charms were domestic, and all of them were undoubtedly a shade too obvious. She reminded Henry of a picture in the Wallace Collection. It was a portrait of Perdita Robinson with a muff. Perdita Robinson hadn't been very domestic, either.

Kitty smiled across at him.

"I know what you're thinking," she said alarmingly. "You're like the man in the Bible who thanked God he wasn't as other men were. You know the proper kind of wife is a bother, and the kind of wife who wouldn't be a bother—that's me; you know, Tony—isn't a proper kind of wife at all. Confess you were thinking something like that, Henry."

"Few men can be so fortunate as Anthony," replied Henry with skilled irrelevancy; but he was glad when they reached the Carlton.

If Kitty had been guilty of a gust of bad temper, it left her as she entered the hotel. The big, smart lounge was like home to her. She drew in a long breath of the slightly stale, slightly scented air as if it refreshed her. She knew exactly how to hold herself in public. She was more conscious than any Englishwoman is by nature, and more trained than any Englishwoman allows herself to be to hide her consciousness. Her studied spontaneity gave an impression of perfect ease, which is the seal of the true artist.

The Carlton was Kitty's sphere; in a moment she had seen and mastered the human material in the lounge. No other woman there held men's eyes as Kitty held them. She moved slowly, with little pauses, in exactly the right space and light. With each brief phrase she threw at Henry or Anthony she was aware first of its effect upon them, and then in the widening circles of a disturbed pool she noted the further effect spreading throughout the room.

Mr. Costrelle rose slowly from behind a palm and greeted his guests phlegmatically. His eyes ran over Kitty with a steady critical appreciation. Anthony saw with a pang of pure surprise that at the moment it mattered more to Mr. Costrelle that Kitty should be dressed properly than that she shouldn't look ill.

She did not look ill to the ordinary spectator, who failed to take account of the carefully hidden signs. She was made up with finished and unerring skill. Her picture-hat, with its thick, shaded plumes of dull pale pink, softened the outlines of her face. She carried her head as if she had never known physical fatigue.

Kitty had what other women missed, the art of personality. Nothing that she did miscarried, and no movement of her fine, supple body was without significance. To-day she was more alive than Anthony had ever seen her; differently alive, for it was not the life of her inner self: it was the directed energy of a trained workman performing his task.

Mr. Costrelle led them to the table he had prepared for them. He had chosen the most public and visible spot in the room.

Kitty sat down with her back to the light, and smiled at him across a bowl of mauve and pale-pink carnations. Her smile was like a signal between two trained performers.

Mr. Costrelle had done his part. The meal was perfect. He had ordered a few dishes, each one the best and most delicate of its kind. He had chosen two sound wines, and crowned them with the Château Yquem, which lay in a basket beside him.

It was now Kitty's turn to play hers. She must be entertaining enough to keep everything going, and not so absorbing as to interfere with a due appreciation of the food. She must make each man feel at his best for not too long at a time, and without interfering with the attractions of the other men. She must also make all the other women in the room jealous and their men envious.

Anthony, with his heart on the rack, watched her with grim concern. Everything in the big, spacious room was utterly unreal to him: its little tables, its flowers, its groups of well-dressed people. Their idleness, their privileges, their evocation of temporary tastes, revolted and amazed him.

For years he had lived hard and thought continuously, he had seen pain and struggled with it as the man in the Laocoon struggles with the presence of the coiled serpent; and these people lived dead against the image of pain, even when, as in Kitty's case, it hung poised above them ready to strike; they blinded themselves against the issues of life. They spent money and time and strength on expensive clothes and foods and endless reiterations and repetitions of unnecessary, unenlightening words.

Sometimes Anthony caught a clever phrase. Mr. Costrelle and Kitty herself were often inadvertently witty, but they had not set out to be, and they never let it go very far. They wanted to entertain, but they hadn't any notion of sticking to an idea; it did not seem to them very entertaining to stick to anything for long.

Kitty sat there discussing a notorious career with clipped expert phrases—the career of a woman she didn't know, a mere bagatelle out of a newspaper—and she was within a few hours of the sharpest of personal struggles, she was even now menaced by acute and driving pain.

Anthony saw the shadow of it in her eyes, and heard in the faint hardness of her laughter, the effort of her self-control.

They were wasting their few hours, that tiny margin left to them, on a dish called "*les jeunes demoiselles*," a careful preparation of shell-less crawfish in a cream sauce. Kitty's eyes rested on Anthony for a moment, but only with the genial audacity with which they passed on to Henry. They had no message for him. She acquiesced in the *jeunes demoiselles*.

A smart, good-looking man, whose attention had been riveted on their table for some time, rose, and crossed the room to speak to Kitty. His eyes had a look in them which was like the sudden assertion of a claim.

“What luck!” he exclaimed as he reached them. “Who in the world would have expected you here?”

“And why not here?” asked Kitty, with a veiled challenge in her laughing eyes. “It’s very jolly and comfortable and not unknown, I believe, as a European resort. You know my father, don’t you? This is my husband— Captain Arden. Sir Frederick Stair.”

The claim in Sir Frederick’s eyes sharpened into incredulity. He turned from Kitty to Anthony. Anthony met and returned his hard critical gaze.

The two men measured each other, and Kitty, leaning back in her chair, watched them with unconcealed amusement.

Mr. Costrelle poured out a glass of wine imperturbably. The situation appealed to him; he liked to watch Kitty handle a difficult moment.

Henry cleared his throat. He was not sure that everything was quite comfortable, and he was annoyed that Sir Frederick had apparently forgotten playing bridge with him some time ago at the club.

“Oh,” said Sir Frederick at last, with his eyes still on Anthony. “We haven’t run across each other before, I think?”

“We have not been particularly likely to,” said Anthony, a little dryly. “I spent most of the war in a German prison.”

“I was in Egypt,” said Sir Frederick. “A good deal going on there one way or another. Where does one find you now, Mrs. Arden? I can’t afford to have you disappear again. But perhaps you will be more permanent now that you’re married?”

“I don’t think I shall ever be awfully permanent,” said Kitty, closing her long eyelashes together and then opening them suddenly. “We’re just passing through town.”

Sir Frederick’s eyebrows shot up. He was being dismissed, and he had not expected dismissal. Kitty smiled at him. Her smile was reassuring to his pride.

Stupid things, her kind eyes said, had intervened. She didn’t like dismissing him, either; but still she dismissed him.

“I was fortunate,” he said politely, “to have caught even this glimpse.”

Kitty gave him her hand. Mr. Costrelle mentioned his club.

Sir Frederick threw back a very fine pair of shoulders, bowed stiffly to Anthony, and walked away.

He had been perfectly polite and he had shown Kitty no sign of disrespect, perhaps he had been a shade more respectful than a man need be to a woman for whom no other idea had ever occurred.

“An odd coincidence,” said Mr. Costrelle, “Stair turning up to-day. I shall now open the Château Yquêm.”

He took up a small napkin and the best type of corkscrew in silence, and with great precaution he first held and then detached the cork, handing it round to each in turn to catch the perfume which clung to it; then with unfaltering gravity he poured out the four glasses. The wine was golden and as soft as honey; the dry fire in it had blended with the ripening touch of time.

They drank in silence and without a toast. Anthony raised his eyes to Kitty, but she was not looking at him. She was smiling, but her lips were grave. Some memory or perhaps some premonition held her.

“I don’t think,” said Mr. Costrelle, slowly and gravely, “that you can beat this wine now in England.”

“The war has done a dreadful lot of harm,” agreed Henry, sympathetically. “Priceless wine has been parted with—I believe rashly—to Americans.”

“People who can take wine like this across the Atlantic,” said Mr. Costrelle, “deserve to drink nothing but their own raw grapes.”

“It’s been simply awfully jolly, Papa dear,” said Kitty, drawing on her gloves; “but I suppose we must be off. I’ve enjoyed myself immensely.”

Kitty lingered in the lounge. She liked watching the throngs of people passing in and out. The veiled admiration of the men, the covert glances of the women, eased her heart. After all, it was her world. She had succeeded in it.

She said good-by laughingly to Henry and her father. Henry’s appreciation of the lunch had brought Mr. Costrelle to offering him one of his best cigars.

“I’ll see you next week, I dare say,” Mr. Costrelle observed to Kitty. “That dead pink is a good shade, especially with sable.” And to Anthony he added, “You might perhaps ring me up sometime.”

Henry shook hands warmly with them both. Anthony had, after all, done nothing out of the way, and Kitty had been perfect—perfect, that is, as another man’s wife. For Henry himself she would have had to be a little toned down.

When they were alone in the motor, Kitty turned to Anthony with appealing eyes.

“You didn’t mind awfully, did you?” she asked quickly. “You see, after all, Tony, it *is* the only kind of thing I know how to do.”

CHAPTER XXVII

For the last three days before the operation Anthony had succeeded in warding off from Kitty any fresh attack of pain. He had studied her with an absorption as acute as the absorption of personal consciousness in the presence of mortal danger. All his senses had been alert to forewarn and protect Kitty, and he had accomplished the temporary miracle.

After the luncheon party, Anthony noticed with alarm that she showed that peculiar physical restlessness which is often the forerunner of severe pain. He made Kitty go to bed, and sat beside her hour after hour, soothing and quieting her. Peckham had been invaluable; she had brought out various garments of Kitty's for correction and comparison. She had been full of stories of Kitty's childhood, and questions about their going abroad. It had been settled that as soon as Kitty recovered from the operation they were to go to Spain.

At last Anthony had left her quiet and apparently asleep. He went into the dressing-room next to hers, leaving the door open so that he could hear her turn or sigh. He felt that he must be alone for an hour. All these days his mind had been taking bitter account of the symptoms ranged against him.

This was his hour of reckoning. He knew that he had done all that was in his power; he had given Kitty a respite before the operation, but he could do no more: the disease was progressive and inexorable. Anthony saw with a terrific clarity the force of all that was against him. The symptoms of Kitty's case came on against his mind like the resistless impact of waves. If he succeeded in beating the first line of breakers, the limitless ocean heaved up a further challenge. His puny strength would spend itself against them in vain; sooner or later the sea would overwhelm them both.

It was too late to save Kitty. Anthony did not need Hilton Laurence's verdict; something in his own heart suddenly failed him. He saw that he had done his utmost in the last few days, and that his utmost was worth nothing. He wondered fearfully, if he had been a younger man, untried and undaunted by experience, could he by mere audacity and blindness have snatched Kitty back from disease? Suffering is not a school of strength; it is a school in which one learns one's weakness.

Anthony knew what he could bear, and to that extent knowledge freed his mind; he was not surprised by the weight of pain. He was too used to it, but he was incapable in his turn of surprising pain. He had learned not only his powers, but his limitations. Facts entrapped and hampered him. He was aware of the frailness of his mind; strung to too high a pitch, it would not give him any reassurance of its capacity.

Ever since the early days of Anthony's captivity darkness had broken in upon him from time to time and shaken the steadiness of his mind. He knew the only thing to do was to wait till it passed, to keep before his eyes the fact that the darkness was from outside and impermanent, and to hold to the integrity of his unflinching will.

In the long run, what Anthony had decided to do he could do; he could not attain the desired result, but he could force himself step by step to take the right direction toward the result. He held to his will now, but he was aware that the struggle was harder. He needed more for Kitty than he had ever needed for himself.

He steadied his mind to confront the future. He wanted to envisage the whole course of Kitty's case. He had to put out of his mind the insistent pictures of the operating-table, the arrangements he had made with Hilton Laurence, the minute preparations and precautions for the actual hour. The details kept rushing at him like delusive lists of uncompleted purchases. He knew there was no need for him to keep them in his mind, but they flickered to and fro, taunting him with his fallibility.

Suppose he forgot something important, something vital? Kitty depended on his memory, and his memory was outrageously tired. It played Anthony tricks to show him how tired he was, and then with a gloomy clearness it reiterated a string of details none of which he needed or could control. He did not want to use his memory now. He wanted to get beyond it to some point of decision. If he could not save Kitty, what should he do?

If he let things take their course, Anthony saw exactly what would take place. There would be the operation, a tedious, dangerous business, which must in the nature of the case be left incomplete. Moment by moment Kitty's life would hang by a thread. Hilton Laurence would hold the threads. Anthony could trust the task to him; he was a masterly operator with a thorough, placid mind. He had been known in moments of great tension to hold the ends of a severed artery together and tell a funny story to relieve the nerves of his audience. Probably Hilton Laurence would safely disentangle

and keep together the threads of Kitty's life. She would, what is called, get over the operation.

Her left arm would be powerless for a long time. She would suffer again regularly and without strength the onslaughts of atrocious pain. Kitty would very gradually get better up to a certain point; then she would stick for perhaps two or three months; then the little innocuous-seeming, deadly signs of a return would start up. The disease would be very quick on its returning pathway, and, short of the mercy of an accident, it would be very dreadful.

Words from "The Duchess of Malfi" haunted Anthony's mind: "her death a hideous storm of terror." Was that all he could do for Kitty?

It wasn't any use fighting for her life. The question was a smaller one than that—he was only fighting for time. Fighting for life, with every symptom set plainly against you, was only fighting for a convention, an idea. But this convention was a sacred one to Anthony.

It was a professional necessity, a point of honor to prolong menaced existences. It was not a real necessity; because, unlike real necessities, he had in his hands the power to evade it. Nor could Anthony delude himself with the mercy of an accident. He had no talent for self-delusion, and he had seen too many cases where there were no accidents.

If all he wanted was to save Kitty, why couldn't he still save her by letting her go? Why force her through a year of misery, with its shadowed horror at the end? Why not now, on the top of the course of her momentary security, grant her freedom?

But had he the right to let her go? She would have let herself go without a qualm—it was only her confidence in his love, her pity for him, which held her back. But who was he to judge what was best for Kitty? He could not see the sky for the stars, nor her body for her soul. All his being was invaded by his tenderness for Kitty; there was no desire in her which did not meet in him with a passion of response. He did not know what she most wanted now; her reticent, shy spirit was buried under all the haphazard promiscuities of her life. Kitty had fenced it away not only from Anthony, but from herself. She had snatched at the trivial to cover the eternal.

He longed desperately at this moment of her great ordeal to stand by her spirit, as he stood by her beleaguered body, and help it forth upon the chartless seas. Was it fair to set this child soul free? Fear of her anguish and her mortal struggle bit deep into his heart, but he had a deeper fear, a deeper question, to which he found no answer.

He sat torn with his indecision; then he heard her voice murmuring, "Tony! Tony!" and went back into the lighted circle of her room.

The room was full of flowers and shaded wax candles. Kitty sat up in bed with long plaits of dark hair down her back. She looked like a child of ten, a very frightened child.

"Tony," she said, "Tony, it's the pain coming—"

Her eyes fastened themselves on his with a look of shaken entreaty—then they left him, to wander restlessly about the room, as if to hold and keep all the safety of the inanimate things beside which her own existence was so fugitive and insecure.

Anthony gave her a slight sedative, and lay down beside her, taking her hand in his. He felt his old power flow back into him to meet her emergencies. He fixed his mind steadily upon Kitty's pain, and held it as the one point upon which his whole conscious being hung. He meant to take her pain away, reduce it, and keep it from her.

He had never yet succeeded in moving pain by his will; he had only helped by his actual services to relinquish the grip of it. The experiment he tried now was different. He determined literally to *take* Kitty's pain. He felt as if in the room beside them there was another strength more formidable than his own fighting for Kitty.

He did not know what the power was, but he was aware of it to his finger-tips. It seemed to be tearing at Kitty as desperate hands tear at a wall between themselves and safety. It was as if the power in the room wanted to take Kitty's life to pieces in order that something behind her life might escape.

It did not occur to Anthony that this was a benevolent power, for Anthony did not believe that there was anything behind Kitty's life; he was concerned only with what he saw, the inert and pain-stricken body beside him. Kitty spoke no word; only her eyes moved—moved as the eyes move of some one who is searching for something which they cannot find.

It was an unhurried, implacable search. Kitty herself knew nothing of it. She lay still with her small, stubborn mouth set to bear her pain, and all her faith centered upon Anthony.

For an hour the fight went on between Anthony and his unseen opponent, and then suddenly he felt it relax; the power, whatever it was, had withdrawn. Anthony knew instinctively that he had not conquered. This had

been a voluntary retreat; but it was Anthony, and not the retreating power, who was exhausted.

“I’m better,” Kitty said in a thin, flickering voice; “much better, Tony. I’ve not been better so quickly for a long time.”

Anthony did not answer at once. He was too aware of a swift, massive pain set like a vise upon his arm and shoulder. He was astonished at the violence of this sensation, but his reason quickly supplied a cause. He had removed Kitty’s pain by hypnosis, and had weakened himself too much in the process to be able to defend himself against the hysterical reaction of his own body.

He assured himself that he could not really have taken Kitty’s pain, but he could, of course, really think he had taken it. This was the true explanation, and not the delusion which suggested itself to Anthony, that the power he had felt himself struggling against had agreed to transfer the pain in answer to his own intensity.

“Lie quite still, Kitty,” he said, “while I make you a cup of tea. You want something to make you warm and comfortable after that attack.”

“You’re awfully clever, Tony,” she murmured. “I want to ask you something rather queer. You won’t mind, will you? What is there ahead of me to-morrow if—if things don’t go right?”

“They will go right,” said Anthony, quietly, lighting the spirit-lamp. “I am quite positive of it, or I shouldn’t have suggested the operation. What is it you mean exactly by—‘ahead of you’?”

“Well,” Kitty explained, “you know, when you set out on a railway journey, how quickly everything changes, and you don’t. What I mean is, what will happen if nothing else changes, and you *do*? Or shall I just be dead?”

Anthony’s mind shot back to Tom. It was curious how he and Kitty claimed with the same simplicity and without dread a prospect beyond mortality.

Tom had felt it more solidly than Kitty, but neither of them had had Anthony’s blank incredulity in the face of the invisible. How could he believe what nobody could prove or see? And yet, since he had answered Tom’s question, he had felt his skepticism shaken over and over again. He was no longer sure that there was nothing else.

“I used to think,” said Anthony, slowly, watching Kitty’s face as he chose his words to meet her need, “that there was nothing beyond death, that all our struggles and our troubles ceased automatically. I am not so sure now. When I thought like that I hadn’t been in love. There was nothing in my life that felt it wanted to reach beyond it. I can imagine now something stronger than death. I don’t say there *is* something stronger, but I can imagine it. You see, I don’t know how to put it quite, but since I’ve known you, I’ve cared, cared all round a lot more for everybody. Before I only knew things from the outside. My work was as good as I could make it, but I always stood outside it. Since I cared for you, lots of me gets inside. It isn’t only liking to make a success; it’s caring for a person. It’s you, Kitty, who have given me that feeling.”

“Have I really?” asked Kitty, incredulously. “How nice of you to tell me, Tony. I should have thought I’d put you off. I’ve put off most people. I’m awfully glad you care more because of me. I care, too; that’s what rather upsets me just now. I’m not afraid a bit, but I do feel sorry. I see now I must have done such a lot of harm not caring. I don’t believe my doing all the things I oughtn’t really matters, do you?”

“But not having cared enough about the people I did them with, that’s all wrong, and having hurt poor women who loved their men, that’s rather awful, isn’t it? I don’t like to think of hurting people now I know what being hurt is like. Besides, if there is a God, I suppose we’re all in the same boat and part of Him; so the worst thing we can do is to hurt each other, isn’t it?”

Anthony nodded. He did not attempt to evade Kitty’s scruples. Brushing aside truth did not seem to him a kindness.

“We all do it,” he said gently, “some of us from being too strict with our lives, so that we feel better than other people, and are worse, and perhaps those who haven’t been strict enough—hurt as well. Because, if you haven’t counted the cost, other people have to pay as well as you. Still, you’ve paid a good deal by now, Kitty, and I suppose, if there is a God, what matters most, is to have learned love and courage. I don’t see anything else I want to carry on myself into another world, and you’ve had plenty of those. If you do go out anywhere, you’ll take them both with you.”

Kitty drew his hand against her cheek.

“I’ll take love with me,” she said, “now, Tony.”

They were silent while Kitty drank her tea, then she said:

“I’m awfully sleepy, Tony, but it seems such a waste of time to go to sleep.”

He bent over her and kissed her.

“Go to sleep,” he said. “There’s plenty of time really for everything, and it will make to-morrow better.”

“To-morrow,” said Kitty after a little pause, “is just a sort of adventure, isn’t it, Tony? It’ll be awfully funny if you and the monks and Peckham and I all come out some day in the same place. Can you hear the bell? They go and pray in the church at two o’clock.”

Anthony listened from the open window. He heard very faintly the signal of the monks for their first prayers.

Kitty turned towards him, smiling, and she was still smiling when Anthony saw that she was asleep. Anthony’s mind stilled itself, and turned once more to meet its new ordeal.

He had determined what to do. Just as he had taken her pain, so he would take her life; he would take everything that menaced her, and dispose of it. It did not matter what the consequences were or what the risk; they would fall upon him and upon him alone. Kitty should go forth upon that great adventure freed of her pain and of the long year’s waiting.

Anthony was intensely sure of himself now, and he was aware of nothing else with which he had to reckon.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Kitty slept placidly till six o'clock. She was not aware of Anthony's leaving her or of his whispered conversation with Peckham at her door. She woke to a bright fire and her morning tea with a sense of unusual security. Peckham always lit her fire early and brought her tea, but that was usually after a bad night, and this had been a good one. Kitty's arm and shoulder felt numb and stiff from the recent attack, but mere discomfort was a small thing after acute pain. It was a minute or two before Kitty remembered that the day held a new experience for her. Her nerves rose unflinching to meet it.

"Well, Peckham," she said, "is it a nice day? Am I to have nothing to eat, just when I'm hungry?"

"That's Captain Arden's orders, Miss Kitty," said Peckham, firmly, "and I don't need to have starched caps and aprons to carry them out. It's not many gentlemen would have been wishful to do their nursing themselves, with me by way of being hands and feet to them, when they could have had all the certificated sisters, or whatever they call themselves, and welcome. If I'd been his mother, Captain Arden couldn't be more considerate of my feelings, and I can't say a word to thank him, Miss Kitty. I should say Ma'am, for fear of not looking like flint, the way the young ladies do in the hospitals."

"Dear old Peckham!" said Kitty. "I'll tell him you're pleased. Is the cook down-stairs giving him a good breakfast?"

"I dare say he'll be able to eat it," said Peckham, dubiously. "I don't wish to say anything about other people's servants at a moment like this, Miss Kitty; I will only remark that they mean well and leave it at that. The h'omlette the cook made him last night looked trod on, and the tweeny maid wears corsets that pinch her to the bone, and scamps her work according, as well she may. Only one cup of tea, please, Miss Kitty, Captain Arden says, and then to lie still till he comes up to you. You're not to have no hair pins in, and stockings you must. I wish I could have gone in with you, my dear lamb, but the captain says he'll take care of you there himself."

"Pooh!" said Kitty, "I sha'n't need any taking care of. Don't make faces at me, Peckham. I know you want to say something religious to me, and I don't like religion first thing in the morning. Have you brought in the lace

cap with the butterflies on and my best lawn nightgown? I'll wear my blue satin dressing-gown with the old lace collar."

"I ironed the butterfly cap last night, Miss Kitty," said Peckham, severely, "though I must say I think it out of place, butterflies not being what you should call upon in a time like the present."

"I don't know about that, Peckham," said Kitty. "You're no more likely to suit eternity plain than pretty; rather less, I should think. However, I'll turn up here all right again, don't you fret. I shall just buzz off and then buzz back again, and don't forget I want the paste buckles on the blue slippers."

Peckham produced the blue slippers.

"You stick to Captain Arden, whatever happens," Kitty added; "he'll take care of you. Papa's no good, poor old thing! I dare say he'd like to be, but he's like me; he has expensive tastes. Is that you, Tony? Come in and see what I look like. It's a pity you aren't going to have more doctors. I shall be rather wasted on only two of you."

Kitty laughed at him from the fireside. She stood there, blue and white, like one of the June butterflies that haunt the down country.

"You haven't seen my post," she said. "Henry has sent me pink roses, and your mother a box of her own flowers, the flame-color cyclamen I love so. It was too sweet of her. And here's a wire from Daphne. 'All love and sympathy. Coming up to-morrow.' Of course you must stop her; their baby's nearly due, isn't it? But tell her I was awfully glad she wanted to come; but I'll tell her that myself, of course, later on. Your people are most awfully nice, Tony. I'm not surprised—" Kitty broke off suddenly. She was going to say that she was not surprised he had not wanted her to know them, but it might hurt him to remember this now; so she said instead: "I'm not surprised. You're rather nice yourself." She looked up at him with the old provocative light in her eyes.

Anthony drew her to an arm-chair by the fire.

"I didn't mean you to get dressed so soon," he said gently. "Hilton Laurence may be a little late."

He sat down opposite her, and Kitty drew a cigarette out of a long silver box, lit it, and put it between his lips.

"You'll feel happier smoking," she said kindly. "Men always feel so stupid before things happen; they don't know what to do with their minds. It must be specially boring if they're clever like you, Tony, because then they

expect to say such awfully good things, and no one can say good things at last moments.”

“I don’t know that I want to say anything good,” said Anthony; “but it’s true there are things I’d like to say to you.” He spoke as unemotionally as possible, but the words forced themselves out of him.



Like one of the June butterflies that haunt the down country.

He could not let her go without a sign into the dark. She would never hear or speak to him again, because before she had recovered from the operation, when they had left Kitty in his care, he intended to inject sufficient morphia to prevent her coming round. He had the syringe in his

pocket now, and as he looked across at her, his mind was registering the weight of the moments which lay between her life and his action.

“You do trust me, Kitty?” he asked her in a low voice—“trust me to do what I think best for you?”

Kitty laughed.

“Oh, yes,” she said gently; “you’ll always do right, poor old thing. Perhaps I might be afraid of what’s right, but I couldn’t be afraid you wouldn’t do it.”

“You needn’t be afraid, Kitty,” said Anthony, holding her eyes. “I should do what was wrong without hesitation if I thought it could help you.”

“That’s nice of you,” said Kitty, appreciatively. “I like people to say they don’t mind what they do for me; but, still, don’t do wrong. It would only make you feel uncomfortable. I shall get on all right. D’you like my buckles?”

Anthony said he did like her buckles.

The room seemed full of the clumsiness of great moments. There was so much that lay unachieved between them, everything, except the slender thread of their strange tenderness. Anthony found that he could say no more; his heart was dumb. He took her in his arms and kissed her. He was intensely aware of her life, of the response in her, the supple sweetness of her youth and its surrender; and deeper still he was aware that his own strength, which he held back for the sake of her frailness, was as incomplete to hold or protect her as if he had been a cripple.

Her slight, delicate body dragged at the root of his being. Her eyes smiled into his, sunny, dauntless, challenging eyes, as laughing as an open stream.

“There,” she said, “off you go to meet your old wise men. Don’t worry about me. It’ll amuse me to think of all the funny things that may be going to happen in another half-hour.”

Anthony forced himself to leave her, but his whole being resisted his will. He felt himself one with Kitty; to go from her was like falling over a cliff.

He guessed by the slam of the front door that Hilton Laurence had arrived. He bent his head to meet her lips and left her. It was a cold, black morning. The little, empty room Anthony had arranged as a theater was very hot and light, a large fire burned at red heat, and all the lights were on.

“You’d better have a pick-me-up,” Hilton Laurence observed to Anthony after they had made their brief arrangements.

“I don’t need one,” said Anthony, quietly. “Shall I fetch her?”

Laurence nodded.

“It’s a rum job not having a nurse,” said the anesthetist, fretfully. “I do dislike innovations in an operation case.”

“Oh, well, as long as your tools are handy, and you have a man with a head on to stand by you,” said Laurence, cheerfully, “it’s all the same in the end. Nurses have a nice look and save a good deal of bother, especially with a nervous patient. But this isn’t a nervous patient. She’s had a lot to fight through, poor little woman!”

“For a long job like this, chloroform is the most satisfactory,” said the anesthetist. “However, we can start with a mixture and see how she stands it.”

The amazing vision of Kitty broke off their conversation. She had never looked prettier in her life. The long, blue gown, the butterfly cap, the delicately reddened lips, brought out the intensity of her great, dark eyes, alive with spirit and laughter. She wrinkled up her nose as she entered.

“You poor old things! how hot you have made it for yourselves!” she said. “I shall soon be the only comfortable person in the room.”

She shook hands with Laurence and the anesthetist, and with a quick movement sprang sidewise to the table, swinging her feet toward the floor.

“You didn’t think I could do that with one arm in a sling, did you?” she asked gaily. “That’s the advantage of being light.”

Her breathing came as swiftly and easily as a child’s. Anthony stood on one side of her, his hand on her wrist, and the anesthetist on the other.

Her eyes smiled across the table at Hilton Laurence, and then closed. She opened them as the anesthetist, satisfied by his examination, began to give her his last directions in soothing professional tones. Her lips curved in a faint mocking smile. She looked away from him to Anthony; behind the laughter in her eyes was a sudden gleam of reassurance. It was as if her spirit gathered itself up together and called to him not for help, but to give him help. She had never said in words that she loved him, but her eyes said it now, definitely, completely, without wavering. Then they closed finally and did not open again.

“She’s off like a bird,” said the anesthetist, with satisfaction.

Hilton Laurence reappeared from behind a screen ready to begin his task. No one spoke for a time.

Then Anthony became aware that there was another presence in the room. It was the same power he had fought the night before.

It filled the room with a strange, preliminary tension before it began to act.

Anthony’s outer attention was fixed upon Laurence’s needs, but his inner faculties concentrated to encounter this new element. As he did so, he discovered that the whole force of his centered will was useless. Hilton Laurence and his unrivaled skill, the anesthetist and his intent watchfulness, were nothing against this unseen power; they were blown before it like leaves in a wind.

In a moment of terrible despair Anthony felt himself flung back and beaten before the battle had begun. The unseen force had swept them all aside and broken its way into the life of Kitty. There was a moment of suspense, and then as quickly as his despair there shot into Anthony’s brain an amazing and sharp relief.

He knew in a flash that this power was not an enemy. It was true it tore to pieces the husk of the beloved life, but mercy was at the root of the destruction. It was tearing her to pieces because the pieces were in the way, life itself was in the way of Kitty; and Anthony became aware that what he thought was his enemy was an immense reinforcement.

Once more he centered his will in the struggle, but he went with the stream now and no longer threw his impotence against it.

He alone was aware of the unseen power, but he saw the others moving at its bidding.

Anthony knew what had happened to Kitty before the eyes of the anesthetist had caught the sudden change. He leaned forward and said quietly—he heard the words slip out into the room without effort or excitement—“She’s gone.”

Hilton Laurence, bending over a severed vein, said:

“Nonsense! my dear chap, keep your head. She’s as right as rain.” But he looked up sharply as the anesthetist cried:

“By Jove! he’s right! She’s gone!”

Anthony stood by them curiously unconcerned, while Laurence and the anesthetist tried one after the other their useless remedies. He obeyed their flung directions automatically, threw open the window, drew out the oxygen-cylinder, and filled it; but there was no flicker of a response.

He had prepared everything. Nothing had been forgotten or overlooked, and all the time they used their ineffectual, puny efforts over Kitty's little broken body, Anthony felt his heart singing within him. They could not set back the clock. Kitty had escaped them. She was no longer there.

Swiftly, simply as the lift of a gull's wing, she had flown, and not for anything in all the world would Anthony have recalled her.

After a time Hilton Laurence turned away from the table.

"I'm awfully sorry, old boy," he said defensively. "You see for yourself, don't you—it's no damned good?"

"I'm sure I don't understand it," said the anesthetist more defensively still. "I took every precaution. I've never had a case slip like that before. It's most disconcerting. I needn't say, Arden, I'm most terribly sorry."

They stood looking at Anthony like school-boys detected in crime by the head-master. Anthony turned away his face so that they could not see the triumph in his eyes.

"Of course you did everything," he said reassuringly, "everything you could. I am perfectly satisfied that nothing could have saved her. The lungs were not working properly, and the heart couldn't carry on. It was always a risk, but I feel we were justified in trying it."

"More than justified," said Laurence in a relieved tone. "In my opinion it would have been criminal not to have tried. I am most thankful, my dear boy, you can see it all so sanely."

"I think I'll carry her back into her room now," said Anthony, uncertainly.

The two men stood aside to let him pass with his light burden.

Peckham was standing by the bed in Kitty's room. He laid her down without speaking, and looked across at Peckham.

"She's all right," he said gently; "more all right now than we could ever have made her, Peckham."

Peckham bowed her head.

“Yes, sir,” she murmured between her sobs. “I felt she was going to be took. She do look just as she did, poor lamb, when she was a little girl, sir. One couldn’t, if I may say so, take her naughtiness to heart, and I can’t go for to believe the good Lord will be any harder.”

Then Peckham left him.

He was alone now with his wife. She was broken like a toy by the hand of science to which he had entrusted her. All his desires were frustrated and his endeavors destroyed. He had not even saved Kitty. Something else had intervened to save her. Anthony was not aware of this power now; the unresponsiveness of death closed down on him.

His eyes fixed themselves on Kitty’s little lace cap made in the shape of butterflies, and this last futility broke his heart.

CHAPTER XXIX

Grief slows all the processes of time. To Anthony it might have been weeks that he had been alone with silence in Kitty's empty room, and yet it was only two hours before Henry, calling to inquire for Kitty, became aware of what had taken place.

Henry was aghast to discover that nothing had been done. He had not been telephoned for. Anthony, though a doctor, had ignored the urgencies of death.

Peckham, who had made tea twice, but never even knocked at Kitty's door, had received no instructions. Anthony remained for two hours, "apparently," as Henry said to himself, "brooding."

Henry always considered time spent upon thought as "brooding," unless it was accompanied by paper, a writing-table, and ink; then it became thinking.

When Anthony came down-stairs, Henry was surprised to observe no outward change in him. He bore none of the marks of grief, and he was uninclined to speak in a hushed voice.

Henry came forward with an outstretched hand.

"My dear fellow," he said in a low tone, "I am shocked and distressed beyond words."

Of course Henry was not distressed beyond words. Words did very nicely for him. He was, as a matter of fact, intensely relieved.

Providence had acted, as it could only occasionally be relied upon to act, with considerable tact and promptitude.

Perhaps the promptitude was a little overdone; six weeks later, considering the date of the marriage, would have been less startling and no less convenient. But Henry was prepared to overlook this slight lapse of taste on the part of the higher powers in view of the fact that they had carried out his main intention. They had got rid of Kitty.

Henry was not, however, in the least prepared for Anthony's saying in an offhand tone:

“Yes, I suppose it was the best possible thing, really,” quite as if he were answering Henry’s thoughts and not his words. Henry was sorry for Kitty, he had been charmed by her, and he was readily sorry for those who were capable of charming him; but the fact remained that Kitty was not respectable and that all Ardens married respectable women. Now that Kitty was dead, he thought it would have been better taste on Anthony’s part not to refer to her disabilities. To admit death as a solution was, Henry felt, a direct slur upon Kitty.

“Let’s have something to eat,” Anthony unexpectedly suggested. “Peckham, have you got some tea hot for us?”

“Yes, sir,” said Peckham, fluttering, but justified. “It’s in the dining-room now, sir, and an egg, if you could face it.”

“I’ll eat anything you’ve got,” said Anthony with conviction. He did not even have to be tempted.

Henry felt a little bitterly how much more devastating grief would have been to him. He had had his lunch two hours earlier, and he did not want tea now; though Kitty had only been his sister-in-law.

“I thought, perhaps,” he said gravely, “I might be of use to you, my dear fellow. There are certain things—”

“Yes, I know,” interrupted Anthony, who was standing to eat his food in a thoroughly uncomfortable, restless way by the door. “There are heaps of things—telegrams, undertakers, the registrar. I’d be awfully obliged if you’d do them for me. Hilton Laurence said he’d look in and help later. I want to go out for a walk.”

“People will expect to hear from you direct,” suggested Henry, who did not think that widowers should go for walks before the funeral.

“Sign my name, do anything you like,” said Anthony, hastily. “She hadn’t any wishes. Will you see Costrelle for me? Don’t interrupt his bridge; he plays between five and seven-thirty.”

“On an occasion like this—” said Henry, severely. He was going to give up his own bridge.

“Yes, yes, I know,” said Anthony, hurriedly; “but Costrelle doesn’t think in occasions; he won’t like being interrupted. It’s awfully good of you, my dear old chap, to do these things for me. I think—I think I must get out.”

“There will be certain questions which you alone can decide,” said Henry. “When shall I expect you back?”

Anthony looked for the first time as if he was a little changed. He fumbled perceptibly for an answer.

“I don’t know what time it is now,” he said jerkily, and without waiting for Henry to tell him he walked out into the hall, shutting the door after him.

The day had grown unexpectedly mild and sunny. Anthony walked listlessly and without any definite direction. He wanted to get to some open space where people would cease to pour past him like part of a great procession. He found himself at last by the river. The light lay faint and thin over its gray waters, gleaming with a pale, transparent silver upon the distant towers of Westminster. The huddled, low waterside houses looked full of the stubborn comfort and unconsciousness of England. Westminster brooded high and bright above a flock of little, ugly dwelling-places. There was no background to the ancient river but the smoke from factory chimneys and the low, dim sky.

Anthony was not aware of his grief, but he was aware of a great desire, a compulsion of his inner being, to get away from all pity and arrangements. He wanted to place between himself and Kitty’s death a host of less immediate objects.

The towers of Westminster rested him, the rocking motion of the motor buses, passing like broad-sided ships down the stream of the open thoroughfares, lulled him. The slow pressure of the river upon its unhurrying journey to the sea placed a merciful image between his thoughts and Kitty.

Time stood still. The hours hung on Anthony heavily with the weight of years.

As he leaned over the bridge and watched the long, slow ripples pass his thoughts unnumbered, he felt eternity. The sun sank into the misty west; there was a faint deepening of color and light along the Embankment. Five white swans rose on massive wings high above Battersea Bridge; they slipped dazzlingly across a path of light into the darkening sky, taking the day with them.

Twilight slipped gray and blue in long lanes between the shadowy houses; the lights at the street corners had misty haloes round them, like a cloud-encircled, opal moon.

Anthony became aware of an overwhelming physical fatigue; it was so intense that, despite the chill of the falling night, he sank with relief on to one of the benches. It was empty, for it was too early for the prowlers of the

night to seek their rest there, and too late for the belated children playing their last games.

Anthony could no longer see the river, but he was aware of it moving quietly beside him in the dark. It seemed to help his mind to turn slowly and without pain back to the thought of Kitty. He reflected what a wonderful and easy chance his life would afford a cynic for laughter. Only a few years ago his career had been so shapely and definite a fact. He knew what he meant to do, and he had the means and the ability with which to do it. He was as sure of his surgical powers and his unshakable nerve as of the continuity of bread upon his table. He had no bad habits, no overmastering temptations. His life was a clear and steadfast plan, and in due time, with substantial success behind him and ripened ambition for the future, he meant to seek and find a fitting mate.

He laughed out suddenly into the dark. He was not that sane man now, with his iron-like securities. He had lost the rapier-like decision of the unbroken. His mind saw many issues, his will flickered at a choice of opportunities, a long day's work unstrung him like a delicate girl. His memory was uncertain, his clean slate was written across with undecipherable, lost activities. He was not sure of anything at all.

And his love, that reserved and whole-hearted quality on which Anthony meant to found a home, had been called out and wasted on a light woman, happily dead. Destiny had applauded him for his equipment and then destroyed it.

And yet he was aware, sitting there in the dark and cold, with his weaknesses and his great grief, that he would not for anything in the world be the old Anthony, secure and hidebound, moving with blind assurance among infinite things. The old Anthony had been a master of material facts; he had not been a servant of reality. Broken and twisted and sore, unsure of his aims, diffident of his remaining powers, Anthony knew that there was nothing in him that reserved itself for its own purposes.

He could meet all that came with his naked new possession. The old Anthony had given his faculties only to his work; he himself remained aloof, fastidious, and unused. He had been imprisoned in a fortress of privilege.

An unseen hand had plucked him out of it, and plunged him into a fettered, dreadful intimacy with miserable human beings, so that he should learn the reality of pain. Pain had taught Anthony his own insignificance and broken a little of his isolation away from him. Anthony had given more of himself than he knew to his fellow-prisoners, but he had not given all. His

sympathies were touched and widened, but his heart remained intact. He could still blame men for their weaknesses.

He thought of his return to England, and how its beauty and serenity had rebuilt him. But he was not the same again; there was more that was accessible in him, or he would never have known Kitty.

She would have been to him either what she intended to be, a few weeks' amusement, or perhaps merely a fresh peg upon which to hang his measured morality. It would have been so easy for the old Anthony to have dispensed with Kitty. But his new responsiveness to pain had saved him from this ignoble security. Her need had called to him, and his whole being had rushed out to answer it.

Kitty had taken from him one by one his old immunities. She had shaken him with a passion so vivid that he saw his code as a little thing, and she had roused in him a tenderness that was stronger than any self-control. She had not done these things of a set purpose; she had no purposes. She was one of the instruments of life.

She could not give him the completeness of love because love's completeness had been defaced in her, but out of the shattered gifts and images of their hours together she had left him one changeless memory: Kitty had never blamed or judged a human soul.

From her father to the vicar's wife she absolved them all. All women were her natural enemies before their faces, but behind their backs she was their indignant advocate. She could even stand up for the self-righteous with a whimsical admiration. Anthony remembered with a pang of shame how easily and quickly she had let him off his own rigidities.

He had felt his rigidity was his strength. Even now he was aware of the loss of it, with a certain sense of formidable exposure; but he was no longer afraid of the exposure.

He did not want to get out of anything until he had taken with him the comradeship of what was in it.

Kitty's little, narrow life was like the foam of a wave. It had been lived for pleasure; and, miscarried by the wind, had broken itself against the iron rocks of life.

Anthony's wider being was like the force and purpose of the waters beneath; but for a moment the powerless foam had lit it onward and enlightened its purposes.

Kitty had not changed the direction of Anthony's life, but she had changed the angle of his vision. She had told him that she was only an atom of dust dancing in a sunbeam, and that when the light went, there would be nothing left of her but dust. It seemed to Anthony that it was the dust that had gone, and left him with the memory of light.

A cold, wet wind rose from the river, cutting against his weariness. He shivered, rose, and set his face toward home.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

[The end of *A Servant of Reality* by Phyllis Bottome]