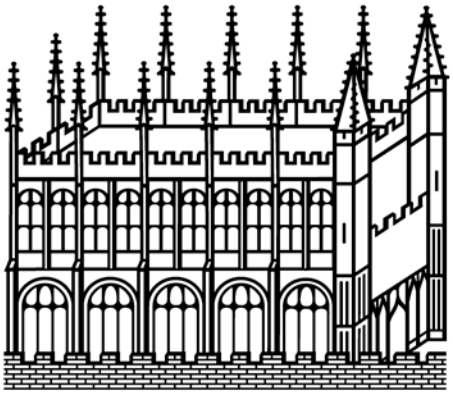

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THE WORKS OF
RONALD FIRBANK

Wyndham Lewis
1922

THE WORKS OF RONALD FIRBANK

VOL. II

ODETTE

INCLINATIONS

CAPRICE

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ODETTE: A FAIRY TALE FOR WEARY PEOPLE

IN ALL THE WORLD

TO

THE DEAREST OF MOTHERS

ODETTE: A FAIRY TALE FOR WEARY PEOPLE

I

In the long summer evenings, when the shadows crept slowly over the lawn, and the distant towers of the cathedral turned purple in the setting sun, little Odette d'Antrevernes would steal out from the old grey chateau to listen to the birds murmuring " good-night " to one another amongst the trees.

Far away, at the end of the long avenue of fragrant limes, wound the Loire, amongst the flowery meadows and emerald vineyards, like a wonderful looking-glass reflecting all the sky; and across the river, like an ogre's castle in a fairy tale, frowned the chateau of Luynes, with its round grey turrets and its long thin windows, so narrow that scarcely could a princess in distress put forth her little white hand to wave to the true knight that should rescue her from her terrible fate.

Just until the sun disappeared behind the trees, veiled in a crimson cloud, little Odette would remain in the shadowy garden, then quickly and mysteriously she would slip back into the old grey chateau; where, in the long dim drawing-room, before two wax candles, she would find her Aunt Valérie d'Antrevernes embroidering an altar-cloth for the homely lichened village church, that one could see across the rose garden from the castle windows.

" Where have you been, my child? " her aunt would ask her, glancing up from the lace altar-cloth that fell around her in a snowy cloud.

And Odette, in her pretty baby voice, would reply, "I have been listening to the birds saying their evening prayers," and then silently she would sit on a low hassock at her aunt's feet, and tell herself fairy stories until Fortune, her Creole nurse, should come and carry her off to bed.

Sometimes of an evening the old Curé of Bois-Fleuri would come to visit Madame d'Antrevernes, and little Odette would watch them as they talked, wondering all the while if Monsieur le Curé had really seen God. She had never dared ask.

Her aunt always sat in a high armchair of faded blue tapestry, embroidered in gold, with the family arms on a background of fleur-de-lys, and her pale beautiful face, as it bent over the lace altar-cloth, made little Odette think of angels and Holy Saints.

Odette had always seen her aunt thus, bending over an altar-cloth for God, so whenever she thought of Madame d'Antrevernes it was with a peculiar reverence that almost approached to awe.

One evening, when little Odette lay awake in her deep four-posted bed, watching the firelight dance upon the strange tapestry figures that covered the walls, she heard Fortune, her old nurse, talking to one of the servants. She caught her aunt's name, then her own, and without realising that she was doing wrong, she listened to what Fortune said.

She did not really understand what she heard, for she was watching the firelight as it shone upon a tall faded-looking lady in blue, who was regarding with outstretched arms the sky which was full of angels. All about the lady, in a field of red and white flowers, lay sleeping sheep. Her aunt had once told her that the faded-looking blue lady, whom Odette had imagined to be the Lady Virgin herself, was Joan of Arc receiving the message from heaven to deliver France.

So as Odette watched the firelight dancing upon

the faded tapestry, she listened, without knowing that she was listening, to the voice of Fortune, who, in the next room, sat gossiping with another servant.

" She never seems able to forget him," she heard Fortune say. " Ever since the day that Monsieur le Marquis killed Monsieur d'Antrevernes in a duel, Madame has never recovered.

" She had scarcely been married a month, sweet soul, when her husband was brought home to her dead . . . and so beautiful he looked as he lay in the great hall, his eyes wide-open and smiling, just as if he were still alive. . . . Madame la Comtesse was in the rose garden at the time with Monsieur le Curé—no one knew where she was—and when suddenly she entered the hall, her hands all full of summer roses, and saw her husband lying dead before her, she gave a terrible cry and fainted straight away. . . . For days after she hung between life and death, and then, when she at last got well again, she always seemed to be thinking of him, always seemed to be living in the past. Sometimes she would sit for hours in the garden staring in front of her, and smiling and talking to herself so that I used to feel afraid. Then, a few years later, when the father and mother of the little Odette were drowned on their way back from India, Madame seemed to wake up from her long dream, as it were, and went to Paris to fetch Mademoiselle Odette from the Convent of the Holy Dove."

Little Odette had fallen asleep berced by the lullaby of the old servant's voice, and when next morning the risen sun shone in a shower of gold through the diamond-paned windows of her room, and all the birds in the garden below were rejoicing amidst the trees, little Odette had forgotten the conversation she had overheard the previous night as she lay awake watching the firelight dancing upon the faded blue gown of the Maid of France.

II

SOMETIMES of an afternoon Monsieur le Curé de Bois-Fleuri would call at the chateau and ask Blaise, the long valued butler, whether Mademoiselle Odette d'Antrevernes was at home; and Blaise would smile at Monsieur le Curé and ask him to be seated whilst he went to see.

Then slowly, slowly Blaise would traverse the great hall, pass under the torn and faded flags that drooped sadly like dead things from the massive rafters, and, shaking his silver head and murmuring to himself, disappear on the great staircase lined with armour.

And the old Curé would sit musing on the past, his eyes fixed on the torn flags that had once been borne in proud splendour at Pavie and Moncontour.

Then the little Odette in her flowing robe would trip eagerly down the wide oak staircase, and, making a low reverence to the Curé, she would take his hand, and together they would walk out into the rose garden that faced the south side of the chateau.

There, by a broken statue, on a rustic seat they would sit surrounded by clustering roses, and the Curé, with his soft low voice, would tell little Odette beautiful stories about the Saints and the Virgin Mary.

But the story that Odette found the most wonderful of all was the account of the child Bernadette beholding the Holy Virgin in the mountains. This, for her, was the most perfect story in the world, and with her quick imaginative mind she would picture the little peasant girl Bernadette returning to her parents' distant dwelling, when suddenly in a ray of glorious

light the Holy Mary herself appeared on the lonely mountain path, like a beautiful dream.

Oh! how Odette wished that she could have been little Bernadette! And she would delight to surmise what the little peasant girl looked like; whether her hair was brown, or whether it was gold—and Odette was terribly disappointed when she asked the Curé this question and he only shook his head and said he did not know.

So the days slipped by quietly as on silver wings. Madame d'Antrevernes always in her high blue chair, her altar-cloth between her hands, and little Odette on a faded cushion dreaming at her feet.

Then one beautiful evening in August, as little Odette watched the twin towers of the distant Cathedral flush purple in the setting sun, and the great round dome of St. Martin's Church loom like a ripe apricot against the sky, a wonderful idea came to her. She, too, would seek the Holy Virgin. She, too, like little Bernadette, would speak with the Holy Mary, the Mother of the Lord Seigneur Christ.

III

It was the evening of the eventful night. For one whole week Odette had prayed steadfastly, and now this evening she was going to speak to the Holy Mary in the rose garden, when Aunt Valérie and Fortune, Blaise, and Monsieur le Curé were all fast asleep.

She felt terribly excited as she kissed her aunt good night, and trembling with a beautiful holy fear she allowed Fortune to undress her and put her to bed.

Then for two long hours she watched the moonlight fall upon the dim blue figure of Joan of Arc, for the frail summer fire that Fortune lit of an evening had long ago burnt itself out, and now the room was filled with mysterious shadows and strange creakings of furniture, so that it was all Odette could do not to be afraid. At last she heard the gentle rustle of her aunt's gown as she passed her door, and Odette could see the yellow light from Madame d'Antrevernes' candle glint like a fleeting star through the keyhole. Soon afterwards she heard the slow steps of Blaise cross the Picture Gallery, and then a sudden silence fell upon the chateau only broken by faint nocturnal noises from the garden.

Odette sat up amid her pillows listening. She felt her heart beating, beating, as if it were trying to escape.

Then silently she slipped from her bed, crossed to the window, and looked out.

Perhaps the Virgin was already waiting for her in the garden?

But she saw no one.

Far away she could see a few lights shining like fallen stars in the town of Tours, and through the

trees upon the lawn she saw the Loire glittering like an angel's robe beneath the moon.

"How wicked to expect the Holy Virgin to wait for me," thought Odette. "It is I that must wait for Her." And fastening a fair silver cross about her neck, she noiselessly opened the bedroom door, and found herself standing alone upon the great dark staircase.

To get to the garden it was necessary to cross the Picture Gallery; for the Picture Gallery was at the top of the great staircase.

Odette trembled as she passed down the long still Gallery where the portraits of her ancestors peered eerily from the panelled walls. But she was comforted by the thought that Gabrielle was at the other end.

It was the picture of Gabrielle d'Antrevernes, one of the beauties of the court of Louis XIV, that Odette loved most. And she never tired of looking at the long pale face, the sea-blue eyes, and the dull gold hair capped with pearls, of her beautiful ancestress.

Odette adored the tired languid-looking hands, full of deep red roses, that lay like two dead doves upon the silver brocaded gown, and she would weave beautiful tales about Gabrielle, seated on her favourite cushion, peering up at the portrait, her great eyes lost in thought.

This evening she did not linger as her custom was, but with a friendly smile to the beloved Gabrielle she hurried by, her cautious feet all a-pit-a-pat, a-pit-a-pat, on the parquet floor.

Then she went down the broad staircase between the pale armour, beneath the brooding flags, and so to the glass doors that led to the garden.

The door was locked, and oh! the dreadful creak it gave as Odette turned the key; and a pair of little exploring mice rushed helter-skelter, tumbling about on the slippery floor.

Odette tremulously turned the handle, and suddenly she found herself alone after midnight in the garden.

Her heart beat so that she thought she was going to die. But oh! how beautiful the garden looked beneath the moon! The roses seemed to look more mysterious by moon-shine. Their perfume seemed more pure. Odette bent down and kissed a heavy crimson rose all illumined with silver dew, and then quickly she picked a great bouquet of flowers to offer to the Virgin. Some of the flowers were sleeping as she picked them, and Odette thought, with a little thrill of delight, of their joy on awakening and finding themselves on the Holy Mother's breast.

Then, her arms full of flowers, Odette went and knelt down by the low marble seat, where so often Monsieur le Curé had spoken to her of the Saint Mary and of Jesus, her Son. And there, with her eyes fixed upon the stars, she waited. . . .

In the trees a nightingale sang so beautifully that Odette felt the tears come into her eyes, and then far away another bird sang back . . . and then both together, in an ecstasy, mixed their voices in one, and the garden seemed to Odette as if it were paradise.

Suddenly a low moan, like the sound of a breaking heart, made Odette start to her feet.

Could it be that the Holy Mother was in pain? She looked about her.

Yes, there it was again . . . a long, low cry . . . it came from the other side of the wall, it came from the road.

Odette hastily collected the flowers in her hands, and ran swiftly down the avenue of lime trees, her untied hair drifting aerially behind her as she ran.

Then, once upon the white road, she looked about her expectantly, but there was no one to be seen. The river ran the other side of the road like a silver chain, and far away in the town of Tours a few lights burnt

like candles in the dark. She stood still, listening intently; yes, there again, quite, quite close, was the long sad cry.

Odette ran forward to the river bank from where the sound seemed to come, and there, her face buried in her hands—a woman lay.

" Oh! oh! " cried the little Odette, the tears rolling down her cheeks, " the Holy Mother is in pain," and, stooping down, she timidly kissed the sobbing woman at her feet.

Then as the woman uncovered her face with her hands, Odette sprang back with a startled scream. There, on the grass, amongst the pale-hued daisies, lay a woman with painted cheeks and flaming hair; a terrible expression was in her eyes.

" Who are you? What do you want? " she asked Odette brutally; and Odette, afraid and trembling, began to sob, hiding her face in her hands so as not to see the dreadful eyes of the woman at her feet.

She felt the woman staring at her, though she did not dare look, then suddenly she heard a laugh, a laugh that froze her blood.

" Why, you have no shoes or stockings," said the woman, in a frenzy of mad laughter. " What are you doing here in your nightgown on the high roads? You've begun early, my dear! " And she rocked herself to and fro, laughing, laughing, laughing, and then suddenly her laughter turned to tears. All her poor thin body shook with terrible sobs; it seemed as if her very heart was breaking.

Odette uncovered her eyes and looked at this shattered wreck of a human soul and an immense unaccountable pity seized her, for suddenly she bent down and kissed the woman on her burning lips.

The woman's sobs grew quieter, as she felt Odette's pure cool mouth upon her fevered face. " Who are you? " she kept asking her. " Who are you ? "

And Odette in her baby voice whispered back, " The Holy Virgin has sent me, in order to make you well."

Presently the woman calmed herself, and sat staring at the shining river, as though she had quite forgotten that Odette was beside her.

" Tell me what is the matter," Odette said at length, " and I will try to help you."

The woman looked at her kindly. " How should you understand what is the matter?" she said. " You, who have lived always with good people, far away from the temptations of the world, what have you to do with the likes of us? "

" I do not understand," said Odette, looking at the woman with great questioning eyes.

" And may you never understand, little one," said the woman, kissing her. " When I was but a wee mite I heard the preaching folk tell of God and the Angels. You must be one of them, I think."

" Oh, no! oh, no! " said Odette, " I am not an angel, but I have been sent by the Queen of Heaven to save you here to-night."

The woman looked at her curiously. " You came only just in time," she said, and again her eyes strayed towards the river.

" Let me give you this silver cross," Odette said, changing it from her own neck to the woman's. " Keep it always, for it is holy, and is a sign that Jesus came into the world to die for us."

The woman took the cross into her hands, and seemed to weigh it. " Is it really silver? " she asked.

Odette smiled at her. " Yes, and is it not beautiful? It was given to me by my mother before she went away to India; I do not remember her giving it me, for I was then only a tiny creature. But Aunt Valérie has often told me that when mamma hung it around my neck, she cried, and kissed me, and told me to love

the Holy Virgin, for that faith and love were the only things that were beautiful in life."

The woman looked at her sadly. "I will keep it in memory of you, little one," she said, "it may bring me luck," and she got up as if to go.

"Will you promise never to do things that the Holy Mary would not approve of?" asked Odette, taking the woman's hand, and gazing earnestly into her eyes.

"I will try, little one," the woman said, and she stooped and kissed Odette passionately, the warm tears falling from her eyes upon Odette's upturned face.

Far away in the east the day began to dawn. A flush of yellow like ripe fruit spread slowly across the sky. The birds in the trees piped drowsily to one another, and the bent cyclamens by the river-side lifted their fragrant hearts in rapture to the rising sun.

The woman and Odette stood side by side watching the breaking day, then, as a clock struck from some church tower away across the meadows, the woman shivered, and looked down the long white road that followed the river bank.

"I must go," she said.

Odette looked at her. "Where to?" she asked.

"I don't know," answered the woman, "I am going to try to find work—honest work," and taking Odette in her arms she kissed her again and again. "Good-bye, little one," she said. "And since you pray to the Holy Mother, perhaps sometimes you will pray for me."

And then with a tired, sad step, the woman walked slowly away down the long white road, her shadow falling beside her as though it were her soul.

"O Holy Virgin, Mother of Our Lord Seigneur Christ, I thank Thee for having brought me here this night," prayed the little Odette. "Take into Thy

protection, dear Mother, this poor woman who has need of Thee, and bring her safely to Thy beautiful Kingdom in Heaven, for the sake of our Lord Jesus. Amen."

Then little Odette returned thoughtfully to the great grey chateau. And as she passed down the avenue of over-arching limes a thousand thrushes sang deliriously amidst the branches.

But Odette felt somehow changed since last she passed the castle gates. She felt older. For suddenly she realised that Life was not a dream; she realised for the first time that Life was cruel, that Life was sad, that beyond the beautiful garden in which she dwelt many millions of people were struggling to live, and sometimes in the struggle for life one failed—like the poor woman by the river bank.

And Odette turned as she walked, and looked behind her, to where, by the roadside, and dying beneath the golden sun, the red roses that she had gathered for the Holy Mother shone in the morning light like drops of crimson blood.

INCLINATIONS

PART I

" *Besides, I never ventured once to carry you with me to any conference I had with the Pope for fear you should be trying some of your coquettish airs upon him.*"—Lady Kitty Crockodile to Miss Lydell.

I

" ' HAIR almost silver—incredibly fair: a startling pallor.' " Otherwise, unmistakably, there was a close resemblance.

It is true, whenever she began a new work she said the same.

There were the Ducquelin, the Pizzi, the Queen Quickly periods . . . and that curious autumn evening when she had experienced the impulse of an old and wicked Cæsar. . . .

" And here am I rusting in Yorkshire! " she exclaimed.

In the twilight her face showed vague and indistinct: an earring gleamed.

" I adore your patience! "

" She seems to have had eleven children."

" Who, dear? "

" Mrs. Kettler. Catherine. Kitty."

" I wonder you don't get tired of going just on and on."

" My dear, you're always wondering."

" But now that Effie has begun her Tuesdays——"

" So often the mood only takes me as the gong sounds for dinner."

Viola Neffal moved her lips as if she were counting.

" Well, that Mortlake tapestry," she said, " pierced with nails and overhung by mirrors, is enough to make one weep! "

The Biographer clasped nervously her long, expressive hands.

" I sometimes think," she ventured, " that Modern things, rightly chosen, accentuate the past."

Through the open windows, a line of trees, leaning all one way, receded across the garden like figures escaping from a ball.

"Who was that woman, dear, who put her lover's head into a pot of basil?"

"You mean Isabel. But nothing shall ever dissuade me! Besides, after Princess Orvi I need a change. Two Italian women . . ."

Miss Neffal sprayed herself liberally with "Lethe Incarnate."

". . . Here's luck!" she wished.

"Somehow I feel it may be a failure. I saw the new moon with my left eye."

"You never told me quite what there is to admire in Mrs. Kettler. Why she attracts you."

"It's hard to explain. . . . As a man of rare weight once remarked, she was like some radiant milkmaid."

"Are milkmaids so radiant as a rule?"

"She was. And then she was so English! Even from her earliest utterance: 'I would worship,' she said, 'to spend a summer in a hut in a hollow of Old Sarum.' She was then barely two."

"She appears to have been a gipsy."

"After all, very little about her is known! There's not much material. Hers was one of those flickering shadow-lives. . . . You catch her in flashes. In her hey-day she is said to have grown weary of her world and gone to Ceylon."

"*Ceylon?*"

"Well, if it wasn't Ceylon—— With these constant changes one is bound to get mixed. I'm not sure if it wasn't Greece. I've an idea it was Athens!"

"At any rate she was insular."

"Soul is as rare as radium."

Miss Neffal revealed her mind.

"The persons whom I should most have cared to meet were Walpole and Sappho," she said.

"If you aren't contented now you never will be!"

"That's vain."

"I was referring only to Hugh."

"Hugh! I am marrying him, Geraldine, as you know, mainly for his conversation. And of course I shall be very glad to be married. . . ."

"My dear Viola."

"When one is nearing the *end* of the twenties——"

"Nonsense!"

"Tell me more about the little milkmaid."

"Oh, well, very soon, now, I hope to be setting out again on my travels. I intend making a fairly extensive trip in *her* footsteps."

"You're off to Greece?"

"I'm going wherever she went."

"Perhaps you'll wander round by Cannes!"

Geraldine O'Brookomore, the authoress of *Six Strange Sisters*, *Those Gonzagas*, etc., unlocked a sombre lacquer case: a work of art, in its way, with its many painted labels all on tinted pearl.

"Reminiscences. Anecdotes. Apologias. Crimes. Follies. Fabrications. Nostalgia. Mysticism. Trivia. Human Documents. Love Letters. His to Me: Mine to Him," she read.

"It's Nostalgia you need. . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore raised her eyes.

"I'm sure I'm willing to hope so."

"Isn't it difficult often to be impartial?"

"It depends so much upon one's health. When one is tired a little or below par——"

"How I wish you were more sensible. *Is* it wise when the gong goes——"

"I know. But Effie spoils me. . . . Only a moment ago she sent me a peach that tasted like a dark carnation. . . ."

"Effie overdoes her hospitality I somehow think.

Placing rouge in all the bedrooms. Even in Mr. Fairmile's room, poor boy! "

" Who is there downstairs? "

" Such gold-wigged Botticellis—playing bridge. They've sent me up to look for you."

" For me? "

" To watch them."

" I won't. Because where would be the good? "

" Then they'll come trooping here instead. After dinner it's usually Effie's way to take a candle and drag everybody to gaze at the children in bed and asleep."

" Here comes someone now! "

" Were I to look in should I bother, weary, worry you? "

" It's Miss Collins."

" Mabel! "

" I've been waiting for you ever so long. This is quite the dullest house——"

" You poor little dreary cat! "

Miss Collins, who had never gone out before, seemed to believe a soirée to be a succession of bons-mots, songs and bursts of laughter.

" One should try to be happy always! "

" I suppose you'll say it's silly, but I want so much to l-i-v-e! I want to go flitting about the world like you."

Miss O'Brookomore became pensive.

" My work," she said, " lies largely among the dead."

" Is it imperative? "

" The worst of modern biography, you understand, is, one is never quite sure to what one is entitled——"

" If only to avoid the pitiful consequences," Miss Neffal theorised, " we should go through the world neatly and compact."

Miss Collins turned from her, oppressed.

" Effie sends a fresh supply of fruit. She is coming up very soon to look at the children."

" Raspberries! "

" Are there raspberries in Chaldea? "

" You astonish me! Why do you ask? "

" For information. Naturally, living continually in the same place——"

" Do you never go away? "

" From home? Oh yes . . . Sometimes, in winter, we go to Scotland."

" Surely Scotland in winter would be a desolation! Stone, and slate, and asphalt, and the wrong red hair. . . ."

" You see, we cannot get rid of our house."

" Indeed. And why not? "

" Because it stands in a valley. Although, of course, at times one gets some surprising effects of mist. . . ."

Miss Neffal leaned back in her chair with listless arms and fingers interlaced.

" Why attack the scenery? " she inquired.

Miss Collins shuddered.

" All that waving green," she said, " before the windows. . . . Why, the Chase looks haunted even in the sun."

" Poor child! "

" You've no conception. . . . I assure you there isn't a creature in all the countryside to interest one except, perhaps, Madame La Chose, who's an actress, although she has nothing to do with the stage."

" How can one be an actress without anything to do with the stage? " the Biographer wondered, drawing Miss Collins to her.

But Miss Collins did not seem to know.

" I love that ripple in your throat," she said. " It isn't a second chin. It's just a . . . ripple! "

" Mrs. Kettler had the same."

" Are you perpetually pondering your great men? "

" Naturally, those in hand."

" Often they must haunt you."

Miss O'Brookomore smiled.

" Occasionally," she said, " they do. In my dream last night I seemed to hear all those whose lives I've lately written moaning and imploring me not. Let the editions die, one good woman said to me. Let them be cancelled! "

" Ingratitude! "

" Dreams, have you never heard, go by *contraries*."

" Still, I'm sure you must need a change."

" Am I getting cloddish? "

" Quite otherwise."

" Once again in a *wagon-lit*——"

Miss Collins slipped to her knees.

" What would I not give," she said, " to go with you ! "

Slightly startled, Miss O'Brookomore took from a cardboard box a cigarette.

" Supposing . . ."

" . . . supposing? "

" Supposing—I only say ' supposing '—supposing you were to accompany me to Greece. . . ."

Sparkling, Miss Collins rose.

" Only at the thought," she cried, " I could clap my feet in the air."

The Biographer considered her. Dark against the brilliance.

" My chief amusement," she explained, " has always been to exchange ideas with someone. And to receive new ones in return."

" At Corinth! . . ."

" At Aulis! "

" At Athens! "

" At Epidauros! "

" At Mycenæ! "

" In Arcadia! "

" It would be like a fairy dream."

" So long as you're good-humoured and sunny! "

" They say I'm rather silly sometimes at home."

Miss O'Brookomore dropped a sigh.

" Few of us are born mellow," she declared.

Miss Collins sank again to the floor.

" I suppose we should stifle all our emotions," she said. " And hide things. . . . But I never do. I just let my heart speak. And so——"

" I'm reading Lady Cray's *Travels*," Miss Neffal broke in. " ' In the desert,' she says, ' once, I tried to cook a partridge with a string, but the fire burnt the string and the partridge——' "

" Better to be foolish at home than——"

" Here's Effie! "

Candlestick in hand, and quite alone, their hostess appeared at the door.

" I knocked, but could get no answer! "

" I never heard you."

" Wild, interesting woman! Have you been doing *much?* "

" Not a great deal. One's best work is always unwritten."

" What she needs most," Miss Neffal reflected, " is the forsaken wing of a palace."

" Are you coming, Viola, to look at the children? "

" Dare I, I wonder, in these shoes. . . ."

" Is there anything wrong with them? "

" They might wake little Phillis. . . ."

" In any case, Mrs. Orangeman, I fancy, is destined to do that."

" . . . You hear her sad mind when she sings! "

Miss Collins looked shrewd.

" Her worries aren't enough," she prophesied, " to keep her going. . . ."

" Unless you are more careful," Miss Neffal threatened, " I will write you down in my *Book of Cats*."

" Have you kept it long? "

" Since I became engaged."

Their hostess tittered.

" Even we! . . ." she said. " Usually now on a dull day Jack likes to touch up his will."

" Doesn't it make you *nervous?* "

" Why should it? "

" I'd be afraid of his painting me out."

" That's because you're over highly strung. When people are pale and tired like you they need a rest."

" Well, I've finished almost for to-night. Perhaps I may come down presently when the curate's gone. The last time we met he referred to poor Kettler as a Hospital Case. . . ."

" Have you no sketch of her at all that we could see? "

" Only a replica. The original, if I recollect, is in the Liechtenstein Gallery."

And with her long and psychic fingers Miss O'Brookomore smoothed out a scroll.

" As a portrait," she said, " of course, it's a miracle of badness. But I think her face is so amusing and so alight."

Miss Collins gazed at the likeness sadly.

" I've seen so few good pictures," she lamented; " although an artist did come one autumn to Bovonorsip. He took a room at the Wheat Sheaf and trespassed all day at the Chase."

" Some artists can be very insinuating."

" So was he! It was impossible not to share this man's joy when he said he had captured a whole mood with a little grey paint. . . . 'Do not be too anxious to be like Corot, young ladies,' he would say when we went sketching too. And before he left he gave me a little wood scene with naked peasants."

Her hostess took up her torch.

" Poor Mr. Fairmile seems so miserable, Mabel, since you've disappeared! "

" How is he to show what he feels when——"

" When? "

" Oh, Effie, why did you tempt him? . . ." Miss Collins asked as she darted out.

" I wonder at anyone sitting down to pen the life of a woman so baggy about the eyes! " Miss Neffal exclaimed, returning the engraving.

" . . . Hark to Mrs. Orangeman. Well, Viola, will you come? "

Alone, Miss O'Brookomore wandered leisurely to the window and leaned out.

Beneath her a landscape all humming with little trees stretched away towards such delicate, merest hills.

" Was it solely Vampirism that made me ask her," she queried, " or is it that I'm simply bored? "

She looked up.

There was a suggestion of azalea in the afterglow that recalled to her the East.

" Either way," she murmured, " her mother most likely would never consent."

And seating herself before her mirror she began an examination of her raspberries for fear of little worms.

" When people are pale and tired like you . . ." had not Effie said?

She paused to dream.

How it tallied with Kate Kettler's description:

" Hair almost silver—incredibly fair: a startling pallor. . . ."

II

A BEEHIVE in Brompton, a tray of gleaming fish, the way the wind blew—everything that morning seemed extraordinarily Greek.

As Miss O'Brookomore made her way towards Harrods she rejoiced.

Miss Collins actually was in town!

"Take her and keep her," Mrs. Collins somewhat unexpectedly wrote. "Who better than Miss O'Brookomore could break my child of her tomboy habits? Athens, I imagine, must be a sweet spot. Those glorious noses! Fancies fade, but a portrait of Byron on horseback," etc.

And now, as Miss O'Brookomore strolled along, for some reason or other she screwed up her eyes and smiled.

All about her in heroic strips of green showed pastoral plots. Dark shrubberies. . . .

"Of course she will need a few new frocks," she mused, pausing before a—"Robes—Artistic Equipments"—at the corner of Ygdrasil Street, from whose folding doors at that same moment stepped the famous Mrs. Asp.

The veteran Biographer held out a hand.

"Your extensive acquaintance," she said, "I fear, has almost destroyed you for myself! They told me you had gone."

"I shall be leaving town now in about a week."

"Are you to be alone?"

"I shall have a maid—and a little Miss Collins, who is not yet fifteen."

Mrs. Asp began to purr.

" Should you need a really reliable maid," she said, " I could tell you of an excellent woman. Nine weeks with a Mrs. Des Pond and two . . . A treasure! Or, should you be requiring a becoming blouse, or an eerie hat, or anything . . . Mrs. Manwood in there . . . It would be a charity! Silly thing . . . She put all her money on Quiet Queenie, or was it Shy Captain, and lost. . . ."

" For my journey," Miss O'Brookomore said, with a glance of concern, " I shall take with me only what is most serviceable and neat, and absolutely austere."

" My dear, you will allow me, I hope, to know as much about travelling as you do. I expect I have been abroad as many times as you have."

" Rumours, no doubt, have reached you of my present choice? "

Mrs. Asp became faintly asthmatic.

" How hugely, purely, curiously and *entirely* reckless one's disciples are. . . ."

" Naturally, I shall suggest poor Kitty's cynicisms with fairy lightness . . . in fact——"

" To me," Mrs. Asp said, " Mrs. Kettler has always made her appeal. . . . And when you're in Athens you should go to Tanagra—not that there's very much there to see."

Miss O'Brookomore held up an arm.

" If I'm late at all," she observed, " I shall miss Miss Collins . . . or keep her waiting, perhaps, about the street. One can hardly credit it, but she has never been away from home before! "

" Well, even when I was still seventeen I would take my skipping-rope into the Park. . . ."

" I should like to have seen you."

" We have a wee box in the third tier at the opera for to-night if you would care to come! "

" This evening we are going to the Dream Theatre, and can't. . . . Besides, I've an aversion for Covent

Garden, I fear. One sits in a blaze of light, looking eighty, or ninety, or a hundred—as the case may be."

Mrs. Asp nodded.

"I shall expect to hear from you," she said, "at any rate, quite soon. An Athenian husband for you both . . . a villa each in Thrace. . . . I could wish for nothing more! And now, as the Oratory is so near, I feel tempted almost to run in. Although, as a rule, I never care to go to Confession in anything that's *tight*."

And there, in front of Harrods, teasing a leashed dog with a requirements-list, stood Miss Collins.

"Let us make haste," Miss O'Brookomore said, saluting her somewhat nervously, "to do our shopping. And afterwards, just to break the ice, I intend to take you to an Oriental restaurant in Soho. . . ."

III

" It's funny," Miss Collins said, " but even the most trivial things amuse me now I'm away from home! "

" Your strong *joie de vivre*," Miss O'Brookomore informed her, " your youthfulness, already have done me good."

" Tell me whom you see."

" Hardly one's ideal. On the couch, half asleep, are Guarini and Ozinda. Pirouetting round them, making their survey, is Lord Horn and the Misses Cornhill, and on the dais there's January, Duchess of Dublin, and her Doxy."

" Which is Doxy? "

" In tears. At galleries she's quite dreadful. She will begin to weep almost for the Spinario's ' poor foot.' "

" Once while beagling, accidentally——"

There came a murmur of voices.

" . . . terrifying nightmare women."

" . . . One of his wild oats."

" . . . fascinating, fiendish colours."

" It's unmistakably *his*."

" Pish! "

" Take me away! "

" And behind us," Miss O'Brookomore chimed in, " Lady Betty Benson is being escorted by a tenth son and a real murderer, and in ambush by the door, chatting to Miss Neffal's fiancé, is Mrs. Elstree, the actress."

" O-o-o-o-h! "

" You have the catalogue."

" What should you say it was? "

" Dear old Mr. Winthrop! He's so vague always—' Sunrise India.' And I know for a fact it was painted in his street. Those trees are in Portman Square."

" Is not that Miss O'Brookomore? We heard that you had gone."

Miss O'Brookomore turned slightly.

" We are in Ospovat's hands," she murmured, " still."

" Have you chosen yet your route? "

" We go from Marseilles to the Piræus, and from there we take the tram."

" O-o-o-o-h! "

" You have the catalogue."

" . . . know Mr. Hicky? " Mrs. Elstree was beginning to scream. " Why, when I was playing in the *Widow of Wells* I died in his arms every night for over a year."

" Hugh, where's Viola? "

" I'm afraid I must decline to tell you."

" Indeed! . . ."

" I left her burning *Zampironi* before a Guardi and invoking Venice."

" Anything later than the eighteenth century I know how she dislikes."

Mrs. Elstree addressed the Historian.

" Daring one," she murmured, " I admire you more than you're aware of! You're simply never trite."

" You mean my Mrs. Kitty? . . ."

" And even should you not discover much, failure makes one subtler! "

" All I hope to get's a little glamour."

" Once—did I ever tell you?—I rented a house in Lower Thames Street, where the Oyster Merchants are."

Miss O'Brookomore closed her eyes.

" When I was quite a child," she said, " I did not

care for sweets . . . but I liked Oysters. Bring me Oysters, I would say. I want Oysters."

" Poet."

Miss Collins folded herself together as though for a game of hide-and-seek.

" Really, Mabel! Noting you with dismay is Mrs. Felicity Carrot of *Style*."

" A reporter! "

" One should be the spectator of oneself always, dear, a little."

" Don't move—I am not sure but I see my aunt! "

" Your aunt? "

" Mrs. Hamilton-of-Hole."

" . . . My husband's horizons are solely political ones," Mrs. Hamilton was explaining as she elbowed by.

" And there is Mr. Winthrop, whose landscape——"

Mrs. Elstree moved away.

" Ozinda has fallen sound asleep in Guarini's arms! . . ."

There came a confusion of voices.

" Babes-in-the-Wood."

" We think of crossing over to witness the autumn at Versailles."

" . . . goes to auctions."

" The slim, crouching figure of the Magdalen is me."

" Those break-neck brilliant purples."

" Pish! "

" A scarlet song."

" ' Order what you please from Tanguay,' he said —' a tiara, what you please.' "

" ——You'd think they'd been set by Bœhmer! "

" O-o-o-h! "

" You have the catalogue."

" Mrs. Elstree took it with her."

IV

"LET us all cling together!"

Miss O'Brookomore blinked her eyes.

"Is it a station?"

"To-morrow," Miss Collins announced from behind her chronicle, ignoring the sleep-murmurings of the Historian's maid, "six Cornish girls are to dance at the Lune Grise. What a pity to have missed them. Although I believe I mind more about Mona. When she discovers I've been in Paris without even trying to find her——"

"Who is that, dear?"

"Napier's sister—Mr. Fairmile's. Oh, Gerald!"

"What is it?"

"Mr. Fairmile and I once . . . Yes, dear! We're engaged. . . . And when he said good-bye he didn't kiss me. He just crushed me to his heart. . . ."

"Crushed you?"

"My frock a little. One of Miss Johnson's jokes."

"That white one?"

"Of course Mona I've known always. She's just a dear. Tall, with a tiny head. And such beautiful, mystic hands. . . . She and I were at school together."

"I didn't know you had ever been at school."

". . . a Term. She was quite my bosom-chum at York Hill. Once we exchanged a few drops of each other's blood. Oh, Gerald!"

"Really!"

"It was on a certain Sunday in June."

Miss O'Brookomore dropped the fireproof curtain across her eyes. She glazed them.

"I think I shall tuck up my feet," she said, "and lie down."

"Just as there's a sunset coming on?"

"I'm tired. My head aches. My mind has been going incessantly all day. . . ."

Miss Collins showed her sympathy.

"Reading in the train would upset anyone," she observed. "I'm sure it would me."

"I was renewing my acquaintance with the classics."

"Before I came away mum made me get by heart a passage from *The Queen of Tartary* to recite to you the instant we landed, as a surprise. You know the great tirade! The Queen has taken the poison and leaves the Marquee on her confidante's arm. Inside, the banquet is in full swing. Now and again you can hear their hearty laughter. . . . Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha! And the Queen turns to Melissa—and mum declares she shall never forget the impression Madam Dolce Naldi made as the Queen, although Miss Faucet, as Melissa, was exquisite in her fragility as a foil—and says: 'My hands are cold. It's as if my eyelids had weights upon them. . . . I hear a singing in my ears. I feel,' etc. And so on through the greater part of the medical dictionary."

"It's curious your mother did not select the triumphal speech. Act II, Scene 3: 'Everybody crowded round me, . . .'" Miss O'Brookomore remarked.

"I don't know. The only books I care for are those about Farms."

"My dear, when one speaks of Farms one forgets the animals. Little piggy-wiggs. . . ."

"I don't think that *that* would matter."

"Perhaps some day, when you marry a country squire, you will have a farm of your own."

"It isn't likely. Before leaving town I consulted a clairvoyant. There are indications, she said, that some-

thing *very disgraceful* will come about between January and July."

"Oh, Mabel!"

Miss Collins reached towards a bag of sweets.

"In the crystal she could see mum reading my letters . . . she could see her, she said, on all fours hunting about. . . ."

"Your poor mother."

"What's the good of grieving?"

"Mab dear, you're always nibbling!"

"To beguile the time."

"But so bad for you."

"Beware of a dazzlingly fair man, the woman said. Beware of him. And in the end, after many petty obstructions, which you will overcome, she said, you'll marry a raven!"

Miss O'Brookomore became attentive to the scenery.

To watch the trees slip past in the dusk was entrancing quite. In a meadow a shepherdess with one white wether stood up and waved her crook.

"Poor Palmer seems completely worn out."

The maid stirred slightly at her name.

"When Greek meets Greek, miss," she asked informingly, "can you tell me what they're supposed to do?"

"Since we're all English," Miss O'Brookomore replied, "I don't think it matters. . . ."

Miss Collins covered her face with a soiled *suède* glove.

"Another tunnel!"

"You should really rest, Mab. You'll arrive so tired."

"I'm that already. But I won't lean back—for fear of contracting something . . infectious."

"Some day, dear, I may arrange your sayings in a wreath. . . ."

"Our coachman once——"

" No, please—I'm altogether incurious."

" Although, even bolt upright, dear, I can sleep as easily as a *prima donna* upon a dais! Nothing wakes me."

Palmer raised an eye towards the waning moon.

" The evenings," she remarked, " turn quite bleak. Had I known, I'd not have come away without my bit of fur."

V

" And then we almost ran. Anybody would have said our husbands were behind. . . . And perhaps they pitied us. But Miss O'Brookomore's so unpunctual always; it's a marvel we ever catch a train."

He waved a hand.

" Those talents! That gift! Her mind! "

" At Marseilles we even missed the boat. Otherwise, very likely, we would have never met."

" M-a-b-e-l," Miss O'Brookomore called.

Miss Collins turned.

" Do you need me, dear? "

" Who is your handsome friend? "

" He's . . . Oh, Gerald! "

" Where did you pick him up? "

" He began by speaking of the tedium of water for a sailor, and then——"

" I see! "

" Oh, Gerald, it's Count Pastorelli. . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore leaned back a little in her deck-chair.

" Take my word for it," she said, " he's not so pastoral as he sounds."

" And there's another! "

" You mean——? "

" A porpoise! "

Miss O'Brookomore crossed herself.

" I always do," she said, " when anyone points."

" Shall we take a little prowl? "

" Voluntarily."

" There's a person on board, someone perhaps should speak to her, who sits all day staring at the sea

beneath a very vivid violet veil. And when the waves break over her she never even moves. . . ."

The Biographer watched sagaciously the sun touch the dark water into slow diamonds.

" One should blur," she observed, " the agony."

Miss Collins became evidently intellectual.

" Which would you prefer," she inquired, " a wedding or a funeral out at sea? "

" I'd prefer there was no unpacking."

" For the one emergency I've enough, of course, of white . . . and for the other, I dare say I could lean from the ship-side in a silver hat crowned with black Scotch roses."

" Were it mine, I'd give that hat to Palmer."

" Poor thing, every time the ship rolls she seems to hear something say: *The captain—his telescope.*"

" She will see the land very soon now with her naked eye."

Miss Collins slipped an arm about her friend.

" I look forward first to eleven o'clock," she said, " when the ship-boy goes round with bananas."

" Tell me, at Bovonorsip does every one speak so loud? "

Miss Collins clicked her tongue.

" Shall we go down upon the lower-deck, Gerald, and look through the cabin windows? There's the Negress you called a *Gaugin*. . . . All alone in her cabin it would be interesting to see what she does. . . ."

" Somehow I'd sooner save that poor veiled thing from getting wet."

But that " poor veiled thing " was enjoying herself, it appeared.

" . . . I don't object to it, really," she said. " I rather like the sea! . . . I'm Miss Arne. Mary Arne —the actress. Some people call me their Mary Ann, others think of me as Marianne."

" The tragedienne."

" Comedy is my province. I often say I'm the only Lady Teazle! "

" Then of course you've met Lizzie Elstree? "

" . . . I can recall her running about the green-room of the Garden Theatre in I should be afraid to say quite what. . . ."

" Well, I always hate to hustle."

Miss Collins nodded.

" There's the Count," she exclaimed. " He will keep bumping into me."

" I wonder who he can be."

" I believe he's a briefless barrister."

Miss O'Brookomore looked wary.

" How is one to tell? " she murmured. " He may *not* be so briefless . . . ! "

" I know nothing about the law," Miss Arne said. " Although when I played in *The Coronation of Lucy* there was a trial scene that lasted nearly forty minutes."

" You must be delighted now to rest."

"Rest! I'm on my way to Greece to study Lysistrata."

" But couldn't you have done it at home? "

" Not with the same results. As I told the silly critics, I mean to treat her as a character-part."

" I understand. When one traces a shadow it's mostly for the scenery."

" At Cape Sunium," Miss Collins said, " I shall lie like a starfish all day upon the sand."

" My dear, at Sunium there is no sand. It's all rocks."

" How do you know there are rocks? "

" Do you think I haven't seen old engravings? "

" Perhaps I might paddle."

" ' Oh! joy, joy! no more helmet, no more cheese nor onions! ' " Miss Arne soliloquised.

" I adore Aristophanes."

" Certainly, he has a flavour——"

Miss Arne stood up.

" What can that be over there? "
" Those slopes. . . ."
" These villas. . . ."
" And temples. . . ."
" It must be . . ."
" It is——"
Miss Collins commenced a feverish country dance.
" It's Athens! "

VI

" So far I've not observed one! "

" Of what? "

" A nose! Athens and heavenly noses. . . . Mum said I should."

Miss O'Brookomore threw upon her head a bewildering affair with a vampire-bat's-wing slanting behind.

" Patience," she murmured. " We haven't been here long enough."

" Quite long enough to find out the English chemist isn't English! "

" Why, aren't you up to the mark? "

" I was attempting to ward off freckles."

" Pretty Mrs. Wilna often used to say the utmost she ever did was to apply a little cold-cream *just* as she got into bed."

Miss Collins moved from one chair to another.

" Oh, come and look! Oh!"

" What ever is it? "

" There's such a shocking dispute in the Square! "

Beneath a bruised blue, almost a violet, sky lay the town. Very white and very clean.

On the pavement some youths, with arms entwined, seemed to be locked in the convulsions of a dance.

" Let us go down and sit in a café."

Miss O'Brookomore became evasive.

" I want you to repress yourself a little for a few days. Be more discreet."

" Because——"

" Professor and Mrs. Cowsend have the rooms next ours. . . ."

" Buz! Let them! "

" Also, the Arbanels are here on their honeymoon. . . . You never saw such ghosts on their rambles."

" Who is Mr. Arbanel? "

" He's very blasé."

Miss Collins clasped her hands.

" I'd give almost anything to be blasé."

Miss O'Brookomore turned from her.

" Those Customs! " she lamented. " Everything arrives so *crushed*."

" Are you going out to see what you can find? "

" I dare say I may look in at the library of the University."

Miss Collins became contemplative.

" Who knows, away in the Underworld she may be watching you. . . ."

" My poor puss, Athens must seem to you a trifle dull."

" It isn't really. I could sit for hours on my balcony and watch the passers-by. So many of them don't pass. At least, not directly."

" You mean they stop? "

" Sometimes. But what does it matter?—when one isn't a linguist."

" Palmer should be with you more."

" Palmer seems so squeamish."

The Biographer fetched a sigh.

" Indeed, the way she sprinkles naphthaline has quite put out the violets."

" All except her own! "

" Her own? "

" Oh, Gerald. . . . Every week there is a dance, dear, in the hotel."

Miss O'Brookomore shrugged her shoulders.

" Don't expect me to attend any of them," she said, " that's all."

" Oh, darling, how can you be so Spartan! How? "

"You forget, dear, my dancing days are nearly done."

"Wait. . . . Wait. . . . *Wait* till you hear the throb-thrum-throb of a string band. . . . Oh, Gerald!"

"I should be sound asleep."

"Fiddlesticks! You'd fling a wrap about you and down you'd come."

"It's true."

"And you'd heighten your cheeks in such a hurry that everybody would suppose you'd been using jam."

"Believe me, I'd deal with the manager without the least compunction."

"You'd complain?"

"I'd demand to change my room."

"S-s-s-h! Here's Palmer."

"Ah, no more naphthaline, please."

"There's a packet for Miss Hill. . . ."

"Take it away. It's not for us."

"I expect it's for me! Collins, Colline, Collina *Hill*. I thought it was advisable not to give my own name at any of the shops. . . ."

"Collina! Have you been chatting with the Count?"

"As I went out he was stirring up the weather-glass in the front hall."

"I fear he takes you to be an heiress."

"But he's very well off as it is! Haven't you noticed? He doesn't tip. He *rewards*. Besides, dear, I could never marry a man who had corns on his feet, or who didn't say his prayers."

"How do you know he has corns?"

"Because he told me. He couldn't get up to the Acropolis, he said, on account of his corns. . . ."

"Isn't that a blessing?"

"Look, Gerald, I bought these tags to keep off flies."

"In Arcadia they will be just the thing."

" The Count was saying how rash it was for two docile women to go alone into such inaccessible places. . . ."

With pursed lips the Historian tuned her veil.

" Pooh! " she fiddled.

VII

" And when papa's reverse of fortune did come . . . why, then, of course, I thought of *everything* . . . to be a maid, I thought. . . . To look up at the moon through the palings. . . . But somehow, no! I couldn't. . . ."

" . . . Shall we have our coffee in the lounge? "

" The night is wonderful," a woman with a thrilling voice declared.

" Evening here is really the nicest time! "

In an alcove, unable to contain her laughter, Miss Collins was teaching English versicles to the Count.

" The naked oak-tree in the deer-park stands
Mocking the brooding moose."

" Dear? "

" *D-e-e-r!* "

" Oh, my dear! "

" *Hinds! . . . Deer!* "

" I adore you, dear."

" *Harts!* "

" Our two hearts! "

" Mabel! Miss O'Brookomore called."

" Oh, Gerald, what ever is it? "

" Come and thank Mrs. Cowsend. . . . She has consented to take you out occasionally when I'm engaged."

" I shall be delighted," Mrs. Cowsend said. " To-morrow we intend to pass the morning in the royal gardens."

" Unfortunately I'm not overfond of flowers.

Gardening in the rain was one of our punishments at home."

"But at the palace there are so few flowers. Scarcely any! It's bays a bit, and cypress a bit, and ilex a little, and laurel a lot, with here and there an oleander, perhaps, or a larch. . . . Nothing that could remind you!"

"The very sight of a wheelbarrow quite upsets me."

"Personally, I'm inclined to worship a wheelbarrow. It makes a change with the temples."

Miss O'Brookomore became introspective.

"To visit Greece with Professor Cowsend," she said, "would be *my* idea of happiness. . . ."

"My dear Miss O'Brookomore, I have found things in Somerset just as lovely as in the Vale of Tempe. And with none of the fatigue."

The Historian held up a map.

"Where we are going," she announced, "is dotted white."

"You must be very careful! . . . It's just the region——"

Miss O'Brookomore stiffened.

"Tell me everything," she begged.

"I dare say you've not encountered a sheep-dog here before? Some of them are so fierce. More like wolves."

"And dogs frequently fly at me!"

"Round Delphi they are quite dreadful. Parnassos, I assure you, is literally overrun. . . ."

"Dogs delight to lick me," Miss Collins said, "when they get the chance. . . ."

With a lorgnon Mrs. Cowsend drummed the map.

"At Megara," she said, "there is a calvary to commemorate one of the Seymoures. But of course Lady Maisie attracted attention by her peplum even in the town."

"I'm told the measles in Athens just now is very bad."

"Even so, I must say, I find the city dull. Mr. Cowsend, you see, is continually out gathering notes for lectures. Often he will leave the hotel as soon as it is light and pass the entire day poking about the Pnyx. . . . And the shops for me. . . . Well, on the whole, I don't think much of them."

"I would take a camp-stool sometimes and sit on the Pnyx as well."

". . . When I did the other day he didn't seem to like it! And, in any case, he never tells me much. I approach Greece by way of the Renaissance, and I don't pretend to know anything about either."

Miss O'Brookomore bowed amicably.

"Mrs. Arbanel to-night is really an Eastern dream. . . ."

"Her husband, it seems, is incredibly inattentive to her, poor dear."

"It seems a little soon."

"There's a boy in the porch selling strings and strings of amber," the lady murmured as she ambled by.

"Miss O'Brookomore has just been saying you could scarcely be more Zara or Turkish if you tried."

"How suggestive that is of chains!"

Miss O'Brookomore protested.

"With you," she said, "I only see the beads."

"We were wedded at St. Margaret's almost a month ago!"

"I read of your little adventure in the *Morning Post*."

"I forget if you know Gilbert at all. . . ."

"I can hardly say I know him, but I think we sat together once upon the same settee."

"Would it be lately?"

Mrs. Cowsend smiled urbanely.

"Absence or surfeit," she observed, "it seems there's nothing between."

"Although it *is* my honeymoon I'm not at all exacting."

Miss O'Brookomore used her fan.

"It's been such a heavenly day!"

"I spent most of it in a wood on the Marathon Road," Mrs. Arbanel said, "with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. . . ."

"Hermia! Lysander! Oberon! Titania! Oh dear!"

Miss Collins showed her culture.

"Bottom," she added.

". . . I hate to sight-see. However, to-morrow, I'm told I must. Mr. Arbanel has engaged an open coach. . . . But, as I said to him, it would no longer be a coach. It would be a waggon. . . ."

"You should take a cab and drive to Eleusis. . . . On Sunday, I believe, it's the only thing to do."

Mrs. Arbanel looked bored.

"I've seen nothing here quite as delicate," she confessed, "as the Little Trianon in a shower of April rain."

Mrs. Cowsend twinkled.

"You should tell that to the Professor presently when he comes in."

"Where do the men tide through the evening? They invariably disappear."

"In the covered passage behind the hotel," Miss Collins said, "there's a Viennese beer hall and a picture palace. Oh, Gerald!"

"Mr. Cowsend after dinner usually goes to a café in the Rue d'Hèrmes and does dominoes."

"All alone!"

"Or with Professor Pappas—who's apt, on the whole, to be dull. When he was introduced he started off about the county of Warwick. Or the Countess of Warwick. And then he referred to Shakespeare."

Miss Arne turned.

"What is that about the stage?"

"Nothing," Miss Collins said.

"One of these days, Marianne, you should arrange a Lysistrata *matinée* upon the Acropolis."

"Boxes full. Stalls full. Gallery full. Pit full. *Standing-room only!*"

"Don't people stand at concerts? They promenade. . . ."

"I dare say."

"There is a girl in the corner over there watching you who'd make a rare Lampito. . . ."

"She is an Australian, poor thing, seeking her parents."

Miss O'Brookomore blinked.

"Well, she needn't start staring at me!"

"In certain lights," Miss Collins murmured, "she has a look of Edith Jackson, who was sacked from York Hill."

"Why, what had she done?"

"Oh, nothing very much."

"She must have done something."

". . . She gave a dance in her bedroom—the *houla-houla!* But that wasn't *really* all. . . . Oh, good gracious!"

"To-morrow we shall have one here I expect in the hotel."

"Mr. Arbanel has composed a charming air expressly for it."

"My dear, how can one dance to his brain pictures?"

"Oh, listen!"

"When the wind breaks this way you can hear distinctly what they're saying in the café."

" Ta-lirra-lirra-lo-la-la.
La-lirra-lirra-lo-la-la!
Ta-lirra-lirra-lirra,
La-lirra-lirra-lirra,
Ta-lirra-lirra-lo-la-la! "

" It's politics! "
" It must be."
" Such optimism! "
" One does hope that Mr. Cowsend——"
Miss Collins drifted over to the Count.
" Deer—have you forgotten? . . ."
" Oh, the ' little dear '! "
" Mercy! "
" Another verse."
" Not now; I mustn't! "
" When shall I see you again? "
" To-morrow, I dare say, at the siesta hour—when Miss O'Brookomore goes to her room for a snooze. . . ."
He bent his head above her fingers.
" Good night, Miss Mabina. I kiss those charming hands."
Miss Collins glanced at them.
" Mine? " she sighed.

VIII

SARDONIC, she stirred the salad: tumbling, jostling, pricking, poking it, parting the trembling leaves. Pursuing a rosy radish, or . . .

"Oh, Gerald, everyone is watching you! . . ." unearthing the glaring eyes of eggs.

"Why begin throwing it about?"

Orchestrating olives and tomatoes, breaking the violet beetroot. . . .

"Oh, Gerald!"

. . . tracking provoking peas—scattering paprinka, pouring tarragon, dashing *huile*.

"Yoicks, dear!"

"Athenæus, you know, maintains a lettuce is calming to Love!"

"Who ever mentioned love? I only said I liked him dreadfully."

Miss O'Brookomore leaned her chin upon her hand: she rested.

"Where *is* this Pastorelli?" she asked. "I mean the town."

"It's a little way outside of Orvieto. Not very far from Rome."

"Really? Rome. . . ."

"Avid thing! I believe you long to be there."

"I see no reason to complain."

"Think of the countless persons who've never come to Greece." Then finding Worcester Sauce—

"It doesn't seem fair!"

Miss Collins looked sage.

"Such," she remarked, "is life!"

"You haven't told me, Mab, about Pastorelli yet.

. . . There's a cathedral with frescoes there, you say. Scuola di—*who?* A campo-santo. And what else? "

" There's the house, of course, where he was born. It stands beside such a wicked-looking lake, and the gardens sowed with statues. He showed me a photograph of his family seated in it. Oh, my gracious! "

" His family? "

" Just the natural blood ones. . . ."

" After *déjeuner* you should really write to your——"

" What's the good? . . . Mum's away in Edinburgh. She says she must try to content herself with *Modern Athens* as she doesn't suppose she shall ever see the other. So papa—poor old gentleman—is left all alone to look after my kiddy sister Daisy, who can neither read nor write. Mum won't let her be educated, she says, as it hasn't answered at all with me. And frequently, for a f-f-friend, she is asked to display her ignorance."

" Her what? "

" How you said it: What! I love Napier *best*, dear, always when he says, ' What.' W-h-a-t! What! Oh, Gerald, I can't explain. . . . You'll never know——"

" I do know. It's like the crack of a cart-whip. Exactly."

Miss Collins began eating crumbs at random.

" A whip? Oh, Gerald——"

" You seem to have entirely forgotten Napier since you've become interested in the Count."

" After all, what is he but a Yorkshire pudding? "

" Still, he's your fiancé! "

" Do look at the man exactly opposite. Doesn't he give you the impression rather of something torn up by the roots? "

" He obviously has a little money, and she is spending it! "

Miss Collins whisked her eyes over the room.

Midway along Mrs. Arbanel appeared to be ab-

sorbed in a vivacious and seemingly vital conversation with the *maitre d'hôtel.*

" I should love to seem so thoughtful! "

" I don't see Mrs. Cowsend, do you? "

" Breakfast was laid for four covers in her room."

" For four! "

" Or perhaps it was only three."

" Greece via the Renaissance would knock up most of us."

" Why, even the Tartary tirade——"

" Remember you owe me that."

" The library at Bovon, you know, is full of that sort of thing. . . . Although mum detests all serious books. She likes them frothy. Whenever she goes into York she's sure to come back with something smart."

" Hasn't the eccentricity of living near York ever occurred to your mother? "

"Oh, Gerald, it's dreadful for us all, dear, but what can we do if nobody takes the house? "

" There must be some way of getting rid of it."

" Mum's in Edinburgh now to see what can be done. She thinks some person perhaps pining for the South——"

" One never knows! "

" I'll read you her letter, shall I? There's a message too for you."

Miss O'Brookomore sipped listlessly her Château Décélée.

" ' My adored angel,' she says, ' my darling child, Mab. . . . If you knew how wretched I am without you!' Oh! . . . ' Couldn't you have got a *quieter* violet? . . .' She's interested too in Miss Arne! 'As Juliet,' she says, ' she was astonishing! Though one can't help feeling she has danced at the Empire. Crossing Princes Street I let fall the Ethiopian skin that I got from Mrs. Mattocks.' And she asks me to be

photographed in your . . . something . . . 'hat and Zouave jacket and a bunch of violets on one shoulder.' (Then she says, as I told you:) 'I must try to content myself with Modern Athens,' she says, 'as I don't suppose I shall ever see the Other. . . . Who should I come across at the Caledonian but Sukey and Booboo. They *were* so glad to find me here, and on Sunday we all went together to hear Father Brown. He spoke to us so simply, so eloquently, so touchingly that I quite . . . Never forget, my pet, that . . .

" 'He reminds me just a little of St. Anthony of Padua. . . . What is all this about *an Italian?* Oh, Girlie. If ever we let the Chase we must persuade papa to travel. . . .

" 'Listening lately to the Y.M.C.A. singing " There is a Green Hill," I felt I wanted to take a taxi and drive straight to it. Mum's picnic days are nearly over now. . . . Soon it's *she* who'll be the ruin. Those that care enough for her will toil to her bedside, perhaps, with their baskets, as they would to some decayed, romantic tower—the Lermers, poor Nell Flint, dear Mrs. Day—and they will sprawl upon her *causeuse* and trot out their ginger beer. Doctors will try to restore her, patch her up . . .

" 'But mum won't let them. She will just roll over on one side and show them . . .' "

" And the message? "

" I'm coming."

" '. . . and show them, as Dolce Naldi did, they arrive *too late*. The prospect of another damp winter ——' "

" The message! "

" 'Give my kind regards to Miss O'Brookomore.' "

" She writes curiously in the style of one of my unknown correspondents."

" She's full of trivial sadness."

" Scotland should do her good."

" What would you do, Gerald, if you were to look round and there was somebody in a kilt? "

Miss O'Brookomore blinked.

" I don't suppose I should do anything," she said.

" Oh wouldn't you? "

" I *might* . . ."

" Try one. . . . I don't know what they are; at school we called them French Madonnas."

" They look fairly rich, anyway."

" Once I ate nineteen méringues. . . ."

" Pig! "

" You've to eat a peck of dirt before you die, Gerald."

" Not if I know it."

" Give me a bit of the brown."

" What are your father's initials, in case I should write to him? "

" C. It's for Charles! . . . Poor old gentleman."

" You should answer your mother yourself. Promise her a photograph."

" On the night they draw the lottery there's to be a subscription ball at the opera."

" What has that to do with it? "

" It's to be in fancy dress."

" I understand."

" I thought we could be photographed in our dresses."

" I see."

" Oh, Gerald, you could be a silver-tasselled Portia almost with what you have, and I a Maid of Orleans."

" You! "

" Don't be tiresome, darling. It's not as if we were going in *boys'* clothes! "

" Really, Mabel——"

" Of course, it's as you like! "

" So that's settled."

" Oh, Gerald, for my sake subscribe."

"I subscribe? I subscribe! I subscribe nothing."

"When the Shire-Hall at home was blown away I helped to collect for the restorations. . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore pinned up her veil.

"After the siesta what do you propose to do?"

"I'm going out to do some shopping. I should like to buy a small piece of old pottery for Mrs. Elk, of York. You know she collects jars. And then our head housemaid asked me to lay out a few shillings on 'some very Greek-looking thing,' she said. And I mustn't forget the footman. . . ."

"What did he want?"

"A knife."

"You seem to have commissions for all the servants."

"At home, you see, dear, I nearly always use the back stairs . . . They're so much more interesting than the front ones . . . Once Daisy saw a soldier on them . . . He was going up! And another time——"

Miss O'Brookomore yawned.

"Mercy," she said, "the siesta-hour's upon us!"

IX

"No, there's really no resisting him. I'm sure there isn't. Who could? There's no resisting him at all—none. No. . . ."

Demurely she shed a shoe.

"I shouldn't care to be more in love than I am at present. No, indeed! Even if I could. . . ."

She sank slowly into bed.

"Oh, you silly creature!

"Love! O Lord!

"I shall never sleep. I don't see how I can. The die is cast! There's no telling, child, how it will end! . . .

". . . Via Tiber. . . . Countess P-a-s-t-o-r-e-l-l-i. Via Tiber. . . . 'O Tiber, Father Tiber, *to whom the Romans pray.*' Impossible! . . . If they did, it was a perfect scandal.

"And suppose he made me too? Oh, good gracious!"

By the bedside, mellowing among a number of vellum volumes, were the *Nine Prayers* of the Countess of Cochrane and Cray.

Who would do the burning?

That eighth one! What a clamour for a crown!

On the subject of jewels there wasn't much she didn't teach.

Two loose diamonds made a charming toc-toc sound.

At a dinner-party, now, who would work in first? She or Lady Cray? One would push past her probably, in any case—"the *Italian* woman!" . . . "*The Pasto* Countess thing!"

She played her eyes and flung out a hand towards a sugar-crystal-rose.

No; one couldn't exactly tell how it would end. "My dear, I shouldn't care to say! . . ."

There were those Beer-Hall voices. . . . "Fal de rol di do do, *di do do!* Fal de rol——"

Miss Collins turned her pillow.

"I suppose I've to lie and listen! . . . Oh, good gracious!"

X

" ' I AM sure I always found her to be most industrious, clever, natty, and honest.' That was Mrs. Vernigan's. This is Miss Miser. And here is the Ex-Princess Thleeanouhee."

" Why bother Miss Palmer any more about it? I always say it's a lottery wherever one goes."

" Once," Mrs. Arbanel's maid declared, " I took a situation with a literary lady—the Scottish-Sappho. She wrote *Violet's Virtue*, or it might have been *The Virtue of Violet*."

" Anyway! "

" Oh, for the wings of a dove."

" Come along, Miss Clint, now. It's not so far."

Before them the Acropolis, half hidden by thin clouds, showed like a broken toy.

" Naturally, one sees it has its old associations. . . ."

" I dare say. But to my mind it doesn't look half the age of the Abbey church at home. Now, that does look worn if you like."

" Worn, my dear, don't speak of being worn! "

Clint sighed.

" Whenever I'm lonely or depressed," she said, " or valeting anyone who's just a little wee bit . . . Well! I know there's only one thing for me to do. I take a taxi and go and sit in the church of St. Bartholomew the Great. It has a *je ne sais quoi* about it somehow that comforts me."

" It would give some people the dismals, dear."

" Well, I always leave when I'm annoyed! "

" ' Quick with her needle, an early riser, I am sure——' "

" Give them back to me."

" ' I am sure no hours are too *long* for her.' "

" It's what I should call the portrait of a slave."

" Where is Elizabeth? "

" I'm here."

" And Mademoiselle? "

" Lagging along behind."

Miss Clint made a gesture towards the Erechtheum.

" Come along, girls! " she called.

" Oh! I never knew Lot had six wives. . . ."

" Can't you see she's always the same? "

" Our previous butler was a widower. He seemed inconsolable."

" Sooner or later, we each of us bear our cross! . . . Where I lived last you might gather one of those downy-puffy things and, blowing, say: ' First footman, second footman, third footman, fourth footman . . . .' And if there was any down over ' Pantry-boy, page. . . .' "

" With the Jamjanets, of course, it was hotel-life half the time. Eating, drinking and dressing made up *their* day."

" In Arcady, if you go, you'll find the food is vile."

" What I look forward to most is the Cyclops Castle at Tiryns. We've a dwarf in our family, you see."

" There's nothing more lucky, is there? "

"Oh well, my dear, perhaps it may come, some day."

Clint turned.

" Come along, girls! "

" I shouldn't care to go with *them* on a walking tour. . . ."

" Mam'zelle Croizette, *chérie*, where ever have you been? "

" Looking for the Arbanel's bracelet."

" I'd forgotten it! ' The true-love-knot bangle he gave me when we became engaged.' "

Clint stood still.

"I don't know," she said, "but I believe I smell a rat."

"Fresh from the East, one is used to indelicate scents."

"Of course it's not for me to say. . . ."

"In a strange land, Miss Clint, we women should stand together."

"I noticed nothing until yesterday."

"And what did you notice then?"

"There's more than one trap set for Miss Collins."

"Lauk!"

"My gentleman's after her too."

"Oh, my poor strained nerves!"

"I suppose the bride's a bore."

"Of course she's neurasthenic and excitable and highly tuned. This morning, for instance, she sat and stormed at me because her white tennis shoes weren't white enough."

"Most young married women are ashamed of anything pale. . . . The Honourable Hester Dish on her wedding tour wore black all the time."

"Well, were there twenty traps laid for Miss Mabel she has too much gumption ever to go in."

"You astonish me! I'd have said now she would be very easily *épris*."

"Oh, mind the step!"

They had reached the Belvedere.

"I'd dearly like to carve my name on the leg of this seat."

"Without a fiancé's entwined, Miss Palmer, it looks almost as if——"

"*My* boy is in the Guards."

"Once I was engaged to a soldier."

"And you broke it off?"

"How he did bore me with his battles!"

Croizette peered down.

"Such a sunset," she remarked, "would have scared the ancients."

Palmer cleared her throat.

"I doubt it! . . ." she said. "When I went out into the world my dear mother told me a little about *them*. . . . There was the adventure of Titia Clarges. . . . She was one of those smart girls like the Midianites in Paris. Believe me, senility takes some scaring."

"Chatterbox!"

"What is the matter with Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth hid her face.

"There's a man," she said, "Miss Clint, carrying on in such a crazy way. . . . I think he means to draw us!"

"Let him ask permission."

"All this note-taking out of doors in my opinion really isn't nice. I'd as soon start hair-dressing in the street."

"It's on the cards you may. Professor Cowsend is to lecture in the Museum shortly from busts and coins and vases upon the Classic Coiffure. 'I shall expect you to attend,' Miss O'Brookomore said to me. 'It is never too l-l-late to learn! Campstools, flowers, unguents, pins and *peignoirs* provided. And we just sit down and do each other's hair."

"He'll not catch me there, I can promise him!"

"There'll be a prize."

"So I should hope!"

"The winner will have her expenses to any one of the islands—a day off."

"Who'd take an airing here from choice?"

"*Alone!*"

"Sprinkle ashes over me," Elizabeth murmured, "sooner!"

"Because Miss O'Brookomore's a bit of a bluestocking it doesn't signify that Dorinda, Lady Gaiheart's that way! Ours is quite another story. We're here to be nearer to Colonel Sweetish, who's at Malta. . . ."

"In your place, I'd not own it."

" How we do enjoy the saline breezes! ' Where's the wind? ' ' Which way's the wind? ' ' I don't know, your ladyship,' I reply, ' but it's as keen as mustard! ' "

Palmer examined her nails.

" My mistress isn't that sort," she said.

" What do you mean? "

" When I tapped at her door one night she didn't seem earthly. She came out to me with her pen in her hand, looking quite deranged—and old! My word! More like a mummy! "

" Worn out in intellectual excesses I dare say."

" *When she's with Miss Mabel she looks quite different.*"

" Were ever footsteps more out of tune! "

" An old dirge and a valse! "

Elizabeth giggled.

" Don't forget, Miss Palmer," she said, " you've promised to dance with me to-night when the band begins."

" Surely; only bear it, please, in mind, I never will dance gentleman."

" It doesn't matter. The chef said directly he'd finished he'd——"

" Finish me! "

" Whereabouts now were you born? "

" What makes you so inquisitive? "

" I could tell a London voice anywhere! Even in the dark."

" Hammersmith's my home."

" Hammersm——"

The Captive Women stared before them.

It was a bright and windy evening, with a mist that almost hid the sea. Now and then across Hymettos at a hint of sun swept a few pale shadows.

Miss Clint scanned the great groups of sailing clouds.

" Come along, girls," she murmured. " If it comes on to rain and we in our *derniers cris . . .!* "

XI

" NIGHT came with a big brown moon. . . . Ignatius knocked repeatedly on the door. At last a feeble voice —it was Haidèe's—cried: ' Come in! . . ' And I was led into the room by a Cowley Father. Oh, good gracious! "

" Go on. . . . His tired ecstasy makes me——"

" How's the poor head? "

" The dove did it good."

" I shouldn't have thought you had held it long enough."

" Quite long enough."

" Soon it'll grow weary of flying about the room."

" It sickens me so to watch it."

Miss Collins got up stealthily.

" Coo! "

" Don't, Mabel."

" It's looking at us both, dear, as much as to say . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore tittered.

" I believe all the time you're shamming."

" Oh, very well! "

" I'd do anything for you, Gerald."

" That's sweet. . . ."

" . . . It's exploring the ceiling now! "

" Open the window wide."

" Oh, listen! What tune is it? It's a slow-step of some sort."

The Biographer sat up slightly among her pillows.

" It sounds like the Incest-music," she murmured, " to some new opera."

"Oh, Gerald. . . . You do look bad. Upon my word you do."

"Really, Mabel, you have the tongue of a midwife, my dear."

"I'd run over to the pharmacy willingly if you thought. . . . It was they who invented the 'Eau de Parnasse.' It's made mostly out of sunflower seed. It's really *violets*."

"You'd stop to dance on the way!"

"Well? And if I did!"

"Just lately I've felt so nervous. I don't know why!"

"Accidents don't occur in a room full of people. Not often."

"It depends."

"Be good, Gerald. Now, there's a dear."

Miss O'Brookomore seemed touched.

"Run, twirl, dance, spin!" she said, "and come back in ten minutes."

"You're an angel."

"Carry me in your thoughts!"

"What good could *that* do you, Gerald?"

"Enjoy yourself—that's all."

In a black gauze gown with glorious garnitures, her hair tied up behind in a very Greek way, Miss Collins walked out into the hall where Miss Arne, to her surprise, was drilling a huge recruit.

"'Good day, Lampito,'" she was saying, "'dear friend from Lacedæmon. How well and handsome you look! What a rosy complexion! and how strong you seem; why, you could strangle a bull surely!'"

The Australian girl grew rigid.

"'Yes, indeed,'" she drawled, "'I really think I could. 'Tis because I do gymnastics and practise the kick dance.'"

"There, of course, I think Lampito should throw up a leg. We'd better begin again."

Miss Collins paused.

"Haven't you got it pat by this time?" she inquired.

Miss Arne waved a fan with the names of some old adorers scribbled across the sticks.

"Art," she remarked, "doesn't like being jostled. How's your friend?"

"Gerald? She's pretty bad."

"Health is like a revue. It comes and goes. Even I—in the morning when I rise I feel fit enough—at least! . . . But by lunch-time I'm exhausted . . . and then in the evening I'm myself again! . . ."

"Oh, good gracious!"

The Australian girl sat down.

"Phew! . . . It's warm acting!" she observed.

"We might have an ice."

"Won't you have a Vermouth-Cobbler with me?"

"What's that?"

"It's just a drink."

"Is it refreshing?"

"As a liqueur," Miss Collins said, "there's nothing like *mint sauce*. You can't fancy what it's like alone."

The Colonial looked intriguing.

"Tell me about the stage," she implored, "or of the people on your fan."

"I've forgotten! I forget!"

"Who's *Wellbridge?*"

"Ah! Dublin was a gay place when *he* was viceroy there. . . ."

"Silent Stanley!"

"At the Garden Theatre he was Bassanio. . . ."

"Freddy Fortune?"

"Oh, my dear, he was the lover in Lady Twyford's last play. He's the paramour in all her pieces."

"Alice."

Miss Arne took back her fan.

"I rang," she said to the waiter. "It's for an ice."

Miss Collins turned towards the ball-room. People either were pushing their way in or struggling to get out.

The Count touched her arm.

"Could you spare me half-an-ear for half-a-minute?" he asked.

"I'd sooner dance, if you don't mind."

"Are you fond of dancing?"

"I love it. Every winter nearly we give a ball. At least Mrs. Collins does. . . . It's really for me and Daisy. . . . We begin about half-past five and go on till about eight. After that there's a wizard."

"Outside the snow would be falling. The land would be white."

"Naturally *we* supply the rabbits."

"Have you much shooting?"

"We get all Lord Linco's birds as they fly across."

The Count sighed.

"With us," he said, "it's mostly hares and larks."

"I suppose you mean the Opera."

"Indeed no!"

"Are you in the country much?"

"Now and then. My mother, you see, is obliged to be a good deal in Orvieto. She has also an apartment in Rome."

Miss Collins was mystified.

"*Apartments?*" she asked.

"An apartment, a flat, a floor—it is the first floor."

"Oh, good gracious!"

"This is your very first season, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't care to say!"

"Excuse me."

"I live like a buried diamond half the year."

"Enjoy yourself now."

"Ah, that's . . . easier said than done . . ."

"Your friend ought not to be too hard on you."

"Gerald isn't really hard . . . You wouldn't say

so if you knew her well . . . Once she bought a little calf for some special binding, but let it grow up . . . and now it's a cow! "

They swung slowly out into the throng.

" I know this dance well. It's *Lady Randolph and the Old Shepherd!* "

" The old shepherd part is charming."

Miss Collins looked languid.

" Would you care to Cook me? " she asked.

" Cook you? "

" Show me round."

" Certainly. I should be delighted."

All Athens was responding to the dance. To Elizabeth, craning from the stairs, it seemed that the men resembled big black pearls while the women diamond drops—

" We might sit the rest out."

" Of course it's just as you like. . . ."

" There's such a moon! "

" I've just been reading to Gerald about the moon —a big brown one! "

" Do you read a lot? "

" Lately, out of pure politeness, I've been dipping into some of Gerald's spawn. But I never open a book unless I'm obliged. And my sister's just the same. Poor mite, she can't! . . . Oh, she's such a pickle! She is really *too* obstreperous. . . . You never know what she's up to! "

Mrs. Arbanel approached.

" What weapons can you muster," she asked, " besides darts? "

" Darts? "

" Did you bring a gun? "

" Gerald has a gold revolver. ' *Honour* ' she calls it."

" Well, to-morrow I and a few other women are going wild-duck shooting round Salamis, if you would care to come."

" Oh, wouldn't I enjoy it! "

" We meet outside the church in the Rue d'Hermès at ten o'clock."

" Gerald is very particular about whom she meets."

" She can pick and choose. We're sure to be rather a band."

" I don't know what Gerald will say. . . ."

" I noticed there was a tray outside her door."

" We did all we could to tempt her. But she took her tea. And that was a mercy."

" It's nothing, I hope, serious? "

" She gets these turns. . . . I think it's due to diet. Lately she has complained so much of her extraordinarily vivid dreams. . . ."

Mrs. Arbanel smiled darkly.

" When I dream," she said, " I'm watching most."

" What—for instance? "

" How do I know? "

" Then don't expect me to say."

Mrs. Arbanel addressed the " Hippolytus Charioteer " upon the ceiling.

" At the Rotunda," she murmured, as she moved away, " please to turn. . . ."

" What could she mean? "

" I've not the least idea! "

" Be careful of her if you go! "

" She's a jealous fury. . . ."

" Her husband appears completely depressed."

" I fancy he wants me to dance."

" Don't! And never let him."

" Why not? "

" Little miss, when love springs under your nose! . . ."

" Love? . . ."

" Only dance with me! "

" No. I'm going back to Gerald. Were anything to happen to her while I'm off duty I should never forgive myself."

Miss O'Brookomore had lowered her lights.

" Is that you, Mabel? " she asked.

" How's the poor head? "

" I've been drowsing."

" I'm glad you could manage that."

" Isn't the band *awful?* "

" Boom, boom, boom. . . ."

" Did you have a nice time? "

" I've found out one or two things by going down."

" What things? "

" Oh, Gerald, his mother keeps Apartments! "

" There. What did I tell you? "

" She has an Apartment in Rome. And I suppose it's a Boarding-house in the country. . . ."

" Well, to be sure! "

" After all, dear, Lady Frithelstock sells her fruit!"

" Even so! "

" And he has asked me, I think, to marry him."

" He's proposed? "

" Of course it's purely verbal . . ."

" What did he say? "

" First he asked to speak to me . . . and then he said, ' Little miss,' he said, ' when Love springs under your nose! . . .' That was his expression."

" A pretty one. But it has nothing to do with marriage. Oh, Mabel! "

" I long to be loved, Gerald."

" My dear."

" When he spoke of love it made me feel so important."

Miss O'Brookomore looked grim.

" You've yet to learn, I find, what frivolous things men are. . . ."

" What has that got to do with it, Gerald? "

" Be patient. You are sure to find a better *parti*."

" A party? "

" A girl like you."

" And Mrs. Arbanel has invited us to join her at a shoot."

" In town? "

" At Salamis."

" It's so far off. . . ."

" Bring ' Honour,' she said."

" Honour's no use. It won't go off! "

" Oh, good gracious! "

" Besides, if I went I would lie on the Plage and watch you all."

" Gracious me, Gerald! "

" It's the dove again! "

" Unless I'm much mistaken, dear, that bird will stay in the room all night."

XII

A WARM, miraculous morning made the Athenian pavements split.

Before an Ikon in the little dark building of the Kapnikaræa Miss O'Brookomore knelt. And if she stopped long upon her knees most likely it was more that she found herself comfortable than anything else.

Miss Collins touched her arm.

"Oh, Gerald, we're all waiting for you," she said.

"I'm just coming."

"I shouldn't over care to be troubled by a conscience like that!"

The Biographer drew on a glove.

"After all," she inquired, "isn't heaven a sort of snobbism? A looking-up, a preference for the best hotel?"

"It's no good asking me, Gerald. It's like that button-hook of yours. . . ."

"We won't discuss that now."

"You don't imagine, do you, dear, I'd take your button-hook? I suppose you think I'd steal it!"

"Hush, Mabel!"

"I'm glad it isn't teaspoons. Although, of course, it's equally unpleasant."

Outside all was confusion, chatter, cracking of whips.

"*βρεκεκεκέξ κοάξ κοάξ*!" Miss Arne harangued the mob.

"I don't suppose I shall knock down much," the Australian girl declared. "And, frankly, I don't much care. I'm one of those girls who wouldn't harm a fly. . . ."

"Dear Miss Dawkins. You'd think she was an auctioneer!"

With a sword-stick Mrs. Cowsend gave a sudden lunge into the air.

"In case the birds fly near," she said, "I shall simply prod them——"

"Mind the man."

"... δεν ἔχω χρήματα."

"What does he say?"

"He says he has no money."

"Hasn't he any?"

"οὐχί!"

"Apparently not. ..."

"Oh, isn't it dreadful, Gerald?"

"Some of these heads are really rather fine."

"That looks like the English Consul!"

Miss Dawkins pressed her heart.

"Every time I see anyone——" she said.

"Is your father tall?"

"As we drive I shall give you all his measurements."

Along a sympathetic, winding road skirting the Acropolis their carriages made their way.

"All these open-air theatres amuse me," Miss Arne said. "It is like old *café-chantant* days."

Seated between Mrs. Arbanel and Dorinda, Lady Gaiheart, her personality struggled.

"Thank you, I never touch tobacco," Lady Dorinda said. "A cigarette with me would create a thirst. ..."

"Fortunately Miss Dawkins has a flask."

"At the Antiquarians in Priam Place just now they've some nice Phœnician bottles."

Miss Collins nestled herself winningly against her neighbour.

"They showed me the smartest set of tea-things," she said, "that I ever saw. It belonged to Iphigenia —in Tauris. Oh, such little tiny cups! Such little teeny spoons! Such a darling of a cream-jug. ... And such

a sturdy little tea-pot! With the sweetest spout. . . . *Pout.* And a little sugar-basin! And a little slop-bowl. . . . "

"I suppose all destined for America!"

Mrs. Arbanel turned and threw a few kisses to someone in the brake behind.

"Who's the sun-helmet?"

"It's a Mrs. Lily Gordon Lawson—she has that big new villa on the Olympian Road. You know."

"They say Olympia for Love!"

"For love?"

"If people should come together there—it's all up with them."

"My dear, to see Greece, it's what I came out for!"

"Well, somewhere in me, far down," Miss Dawkins declared, "I don't mind admitting, there's a field with cows browsing."

"Have you been seeking them long?"

"Almost always."

"Just wandering!"

"Hotels, always hotels. *Yes!* And one does get so tired of tavern life!"

"You must be very weary."

"After this I propose to do the I's . . . India, Italy, Ireland, Iceland. . . ."

"When you've found them you'll be so bored."

Miss Dawkins raised to her lips her flask.

"What ever is in it?" Miss Collins asked.

Miss Dawkins fixed her.

"It's a digestive—cocktail," she said at last. "Or a *Blue Brazilian*, as some people prefer to call it . . . that is so."

Mrs. Arbanel gave a cry.

"The *sea*."

"Have you never seen it?"

"Mabel! . . ."

" What emerald or sapphire! " Miss Arne asked. " Aren't you ravished? "

" I mean to bathe," Miss Collins announced.

" My dear, how can you ? "

" Oh, Gerald, just a dip! "

Dorinda, Lady Gaiheart, relaxed.

" Colonel Sweetish and Captain Muckmaisie, both old and very dear friends of mine," her attitude seemed to say, " are somewhere across that light. . . ."

" How many guns are there? "

" Not so many as there seem. Neither Mrs. Cowsend nor Lady Dorinda will be shots. They're only going to pick up the birds."

Mrs. Cowsend chuckled.

" Like good retrievers," she said.

Mrs. Arbanel turned to throw an extra kiss.

" There's Mrs. Erso-Ennis and Mrs. Viviott," she said.

" Those two! "

" And little Mrs. Lawson, who's really *très* sport. . . ."

" She says she's sure she shall shoot someone! "

" Oh, she's clever, she's fascinating."

Miss Collins scowled.

" I should like her to start trying her tricks on me!"

" And then there're ourselves."

" I've no gun," Miss O'Brookomore said. " At most I could throw a book. . . ."

" What have you brought with you? "

" I've my Wordsworth."

" Is he your poet? "

" I'm told I should read *Le Charme d'Athènes*," Mrs. Cowsend said. " But I always disliked that series."

" I fancy there's a new one: *Notes on the Tedium of Places*—comprising almost everywhere."

Miss Collins glanced at her guardian.

" It's extraordinary Gerald doesn't go dotty," she observed, " writing as she does. . . ."

" Does the *Life* progress? "

" It's enough to say it assumes proportions."

Lady Dorinda spread out her parasol.

" The Kettler cult seems the only shade we have to speak of! " she said. " Since . . . Eleusis."

Mrs. Cowsend freckled faintly.

" Were I to have a baby girl here," she said at random, " O'Brien would insist on calling her Athene; and it would be Olympia. Or Delphine. Or, if on the way there, Helen! . . ."

" I should have thought Violet, or *Violets*," Mrs. Arbanel suggested as the carriage stopped.

Across a vivid, a perfectly pirate sea, Salamis showed shimmering in the sun.

Miss Arne held out arms towards it.

" It's like a happy ending! " she breathed.

Boats were in readiness.

" Where's the wind? " the Countess sniffed.

" There's almost an autumnal feel, isn't there? "

The wild apple-trees along the shore stood tipped with gold.

" Perhaps we shall see Pan! "

Mrs. Arbanel shouldered her gun.

" To avoid accidents," she said, " we should drift about in line."

" My dear, I always fire sideways! "

Mrs. Viviott covered up her ears.

" Don't! " she said.

" Why not? "

" I never could bear the crack-of-a-gun business," she confessed.

" Then what ever made you come? " Miss Collins queried.

" Mainly for Mrs. Erso-Ennis—to look after her."

" ' And the sun went down and the stars came out far over the summer sea! '—eh, Gerald? "

Miss O'Brookomore looked blank.

" I hope you know we're sweeping straight south-west! " she murmured presently. . . ." I've an inkling there's Megara."

" It was above Megara the Seymoures——"

Overhead the sky was purely blue.

Miss Arne scanned it.

" What is that large bird? " she inquired.

" Where? "

Miss Dawkins picked up an imaginary guitar.

" ' That which yonder flies,' " [she sang]
" ' Wild goose is it?—Swan is it?
Wild goose if it be—
Haréya tōtō,
Haréya tōtō,
Wild goose if it be,
It's name I soon shall say. . . .
Wild swan if it be—better still!
Tōtō! ' "

" Enchanting! "

" I learnt it in Japan—that is so."

Miss Collins drooped.

" The water's so clear you can see everything that's going on."

" Couldn't we moor ourselves somewhere and anchor? "

" I could fancy I hear turtle doves," Lady Dorinda remarked.

" Oh, they're city! "

Miss Arne appeared to pray.

" I love Finsbury Circus for its Doves," she said. " And I adore the Aspens in Cadogan Square. . . ."

" Does the sea upset you? "

"Oh, Gerald! . . . She's certainly going to be queer."

"I'm fond of that garden too, behind Farm Street, with those bow-windows staring out upon it. I could sit for ever huddled up in a black frock there exciting sympathy . . . listening to the priests' voices in the Farm."

Miss Collins jumped up.

"Don't, Mabel! You'll capsize the boat."

Mrs. Cowsend shuddered.

"I never could swim," she said.

"I trust the gods would drop down strings—a sort of parachute affair—drawing us through the water."

Mrs. Viviott addressed her friend.

"Were yours to give, Geneviève! . . ." she said. "That's just *you*, Iris!"

Miss O'Brookomore fluttered her eyelids.

"Did you ever see such a rag of a sail?"

"It's black."

"O-h, there went a fish with wings!"

"With——"

"Where?"

"Oh, my dear——!"

Mrs. Arbanel turned her gun about and—fired.

XIII

"I SHALL never forget the hideous moment!"

"They're driving her round the town."

Lady Dorinda slowly wiped an eye.

"To the departed," she said, "short cuts are disrespectful."

"I know Athens pretty well," Mrs. Viviott declared. "And they're going a statesman's way!"

Miss Collins threw herself into an easy seat.

"Oh, it's awful, awful, awful!" she said. "It doesn't do to think. . . ."

The Room of the Minerva in the National Museum lay steeped in light.

"It's as though one held a Memorial service to her somehow," Miss O'Brookomore commented, "amidst all these busts and urns and friezes. . . ."

"For the Lysistrata that Nymph in the corner was to have inspired her gown. 'I shall play her in lavender and helio,' she said to me. And now, poor dear, where is she?"

"Oh, it's awful, it's hideous!" Miss Collins broke out . . . "To-day I feel turned forty! This has made an old woman of me. Oh, good gracious!"

In her silver hat crowned with black Scotch roses drawn down close across the eyes she might perhaps have been taken for more.

"Mr. Arbanel, poor man, seems almost to be broken. Vina's vulgar violence, he said, disgusts me more than I can ever say—and when her maid went to her door she said, 'Go away! I'm Proserpine.'"

"Oh. . . . If anyone had *told* me, Gerald, that I'd

become acquainted with a bride-murderess . . . I should never have believed it."

" What do they intend to do? "

" Decamp—if they're wise."

" When I saw her in her black dress, Gerald! "

" It was a pure accident—naturally, she said, when questioned."

" One tries to believe it was."

" She *would* wave her gun about so. I was in terrors all the time! "

" I suppose there was an inquest? " Miss Collins said.

" I really couldn't say. . . ."

" I should like to have been at it."

" One longs for the country now—to get away."

" We leave for Delphi directly," Miss O'Brookomore said.

" Kettling? "

" Well . . . more or less. . . . Poor Kitty, she went to Delphi to consult the Oracle and found it had gone. You can imagine her bitterness."

" I dare say she consoled herself with the fruit. . . . There's a garden on the way to Itea. . . . You never *saw* such apples! "

" I dare say that's gone too."

" Be careful in Olympia."

" What *does* one do in Olympia? Tell me, please! "

Mrs. Viviott fetched a sigh.

" Oh, well," she said, " of course one sits, and sits, and sits, and *sits*, before the Praxiteles. . . . And then, if two people come together there I warn you they're sure to fall in love. . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore bowed.

" Here're more mourners! " she exclaimed.

" Oh, isn't it gruesome, Gerald? "

" We turned in here, dear," Mrs. Cowsend said. " I didn't feel I wanted to go on. . . ."

" That turquoise tinsel thing—*violet*, I should say —the pall! "

The Historian seemed to touch it.

" It was her doom, poor dear. . . . On the voyage out I've a recollection still of the way she sat on board while the waves burst over her."

" At any rate she had the sad satisfaction of dying in Greece."

" My dear, there was no time for reflections! "

Miss Collins covered her face.

" Was there no post-mortem? " she inquired.

Mrs. Cowsend showed distress.

" Have you been to look at the coiffures yet? " she asked. " It's to-day my husband holds his classes, and they're all in the Vase Room now."

" There's a room set aside somewhere for the ' Obscene,' " Miss Collins said. " Where is it? "

" My dear, how could one think of such a thing at such a minute!"

" Only to distract us."

" The Professor's classes are more likely to do that."

" In Arcadia," Miss O'Brookomore declared, " I intend to coil my hair like rams' horns."

Mrs. Viviott vibrated.

" My dear," she said, " I never vary. I *couldn't!* "

" In Arcadia you'll find the continual singing of the cicadas require some excluding."

Lady Dorinda raised a hand.

" Were I the wife of a gunner," she protested, " it would make no difference. I should always be high! "

Miss Collins slipped an arm about her companion's waist.

" Oh . . It's a Dance of the Hours, Gerald! "

" Dance of the Drumerdairies, my dear."

" Whose doing was it? "

Miss O'Brookomore appeared absorbed. . . . For

a moment Time hovered, wobbled, swerved. Miss Collins aged for her.

" It's lovely, Mabel," she said, " when—— Oh, Mabel! " she said.

Miss Collins started.

" This caps everything! " she exclaimed.

" Is there anything wrong, dear? "

" Mrs. Arbanel's actually dressing. . . ."

Mrs. Viviott glided forward.

" Geneviève! " she implored—" Geneviève *Erso-En-n-is!* "

Miss Collins caught at the Historian.

" Let us go, Gerald," she said, " before it happens again."

XIV

"It's nice to be in Delphi, Gerald!"

"After Athens," Miss O'Brookomore said, "it really is delightful."

"... We never saw the king and queen, dear."

"No more we did!"

"This morning I followed an empty river bed for miles and miles. ..."

"To do justice to the walks," Miss O'Brookomore observed, "one would need to have legs as hard, pink and resisting as a ballerina."

"Aren't you going round to look at the Auriga as usual?"

"I hardly know. Possibly I may take a turn presently in the direction of Parnassos. ..."

"There's a shrub in the garden, Gerald, all covered in mauve rosettes!"

"It's perhaps a Delphinium."

"Oh! I do think it sweet!"

"I wonder who's here beside ourselves."

"I noticed the names of Cyril Cloudcap and of Charlie Cumston in the Visitors' Book. ..."

"That sounds English."

"They left yesterday for Olympia, and there was a Mrs. Clacton, Gerald."

"Has she gone too?"

"The Count said we weren't to be surprised if——"

"My dear, if Pastorelli turns up here we move on."

"Fussy, fidgety thing!"

"When he makes that sort of *clearing* noise ... No! Really——"

"That's nothing, Gerald. Why I do it myself."

Miss O'Brookomore stared hard at the floor.

" I miss a carpet," she said.

" In my bedroom at home, Gerald, the carpet has big blue tulips on a yellow ground."

" Has the postman been? "

" He's been."

" Wasn't there anything? "

" There was a letter from mum. And another from Daisy."

" I thought she couldn't write."

" She sets her mark."

" Let me see."

" It's only a smear."

" Is the house disposed of—does your mother say? "

" I conclude it isn't. She says the greenfly this year has destroyed almost everything. Hardly anybody has been spared. At Patchpole Park the peaches just dried on the walls as though they were dates. And she's quite in despair about Daisy! She says she gets more hopeless hourly. She's taking her into York so as to have her ears pierced, poor mite. And papa, he's at Helstan with Napier—it's that new seaside——"

" Is the Count aware you're fidanzata? "

" I didn't tell him I wasn't quite free, and I don't think I will. I must write to Napier, I suppose, and break it off—I feel sorry for him, poor boy."

Miss O'Brookomore wandered to the window.

" It's going to be hot to-day."

" In the Gulf there's been rain in two places."

" Here we've the sun."

" What ever would the vines do, Gerald, without the olives to hold them up? "

" I can't think."

" They always say at home nothing can compare with the view from Mockbird Hill. On a clear day you can see to Ditchley."

Miss O'Brookomore shaded her eyes.

" There's an arrival," she said.

" Oh! "

" What is it? "

" He's here! "

" Oh! Mabel! "

" Oh! Gerald! "

" Oh! Mabel! "

" Oh! Gerald! "

Hand meeting hand, palm meeting palm (the vitality of the one rambling off into the other), they sought to find vent to their emotion.

XV

THE inn of the Pythian Apollo winked its lights.

Moving about the bare boards of her room, Miss O'Brookomore made her box. Now bending, now rising, now falling to her knees, it appeared from the road below as though she were imploring for forgiveness.

" For I am the old King's daughter,
The *youngest*, sir, said she!
The King he is my father,
And my name is Marjorie. . . .

Oh, my name is Marjorie, she said,
My father he is the King,
I am the youngest child he had,
And what will to-morrow bring?

What will to-morrow bring, she said,
Oh, what will to-morrow bring?
The King he is my father,
And what will to-morrow bring? "

" . . . Gerald, she always sings as she packs! Just making it up as she goes——"

" Why is she in such a hurry to be off? "

" I don't know. To-day she's been all veins and moods, whims and foibles."

" Induce her to remain."

" If only she would. . . . We haven't yet been up to the Cave of the Nymphs! "

" Ecco! "

" It's annoying to have to miss it."

" One night I sat upon the stairs
And heard him call my name!
I crept into the darkness
And covered my head for shame.

I covered my head for shame, she said,
Oh, I covered my head for shame!
The King he is my father,
And I covered my head for shame."

" Sometimes when she starts to sing she'll keep it up for hours. It depends on what she's doing! "

" My sister Yoland she is dead,
And Ygrind is no more. . . .
They went away to Ireland,
And nobody knows where they are!

Nobody knows where they are at all,
No one seems able to say——"

" Will you come for a little stroll? "
" Where ever to? "
" Anywhere."
She raised her eyes towards Parnassos, whose cold white heights glimmered amid the stars.
" Oh, it gets grimmish! "
" You shouldn't be afraid."
" Tell me," she asked, " would it be a Pension? "
" A Pension? "
" Those apartments of your mother's."
" What does it matter now? "
" Oh! . . . Perhaps I ought to aid poor Gerald! "
" Aiding harms the hands."
" Mine are spoilt already."
" I can't believe it."
" Mum pretends my hands are large because Time hangs heavy upon them."

" Time in the country, they say, is apt to drag."

" Not if there's a farm. Who could be bored by watching the manners of some old surly bull, or a dog on the scent of things, or a dove paying visits? "

" Very likely! "

" You're blasé."

" Nothing of the sort."

" Poor little Geraldine, her weariness exceeds most things. She says the world's an ' 8.' "

" That's better than an ' o.' "

" The repetition palls."

" There is always a nuance."

" It's better to be an Indifferentist, she says. Not to care! But if anything ever goes wrong . . . It's impossible not to smile at her philosophy."

" You must be her comfort."

" I don't know what she'd do without me. Because the maid's a perfect fool. When we arrive anywhere usually it's I who improve the terms. . . . Gerald hates to bargain. She seems to think it sordid. So I do it for her. Oh, it's such fun! . . . Is it to be a back room or a front room, with a double bed or a single bed, or would the lady disdain a back bedroom without any balcony? Then Gerald asserts herself. ' The lady requires a balcony with an unobstructed horizon ' —and if there isn't such a thing, then we try elsewhere."

He stooped a little.

" It's the case of a courier," he said.

" I think we ought to turn."

" We will," he answered, " when the road bends. Remember, the world's an ' 8 '! "

XVI

"WILL you talk to me about the Moon and Stars? . . . Would it amuse you?"

Miss O'Brookomore raised herself. . . . A young man whom she had never seen until now stood before her.

"I shall be delighted to talk to you about anything," she replied.

"When did you arrive?"

"My dear, we only got here yesterday."

There came a voice of protest.

"Oh, Gerald! It was the day before."

"What are your impressions of Olympia?"

"I love it, I think it sweet."

"Everybody says the same."

Miss OBrookomore breathed a sigh.

"I should like you to be my Literary Executor," she said.

He knelt down and took her hand.

"No, my dear Thing!" he answered. "I'm sorry —but I simply can't. Simply I should love to, my dear Thing! But it's impossible. . . ."

Miss Collins rose discreetly.

"Gerald—I think I shall leave you," she said.

XVII

"WHO ever was it, Gerald? . . ."

Seated before a mirror, her shoulders gilded by the evening sun, Miss O'Brookomore drew a net of sapphire stones across her hair.

"Some god of the woods—no doubt!"

"That's only for a diary. . . . It doesn't do for me. . . ."

"Things do happen so quickly!"

"Very likely it was Cyril Cloudcap. . . ."

"It may have been Charlie Cumston."

"Mer-cy! Gerald."

"How soon will you be ready?"

"I've no appetite, Gerald. While the Count's at Delphi I don't seem to care."

"Foolish girl!"

"Oh! I do long to be married, Gerald. . . . It's what I long to be most. Just married, dear."

"Not without your parents' consent."

"Nonsense, Gerald!"

"It's a caprice that will pass."

"Oh, Gerald, his love talk with me and what I reply—it's a real duet!"

Miss O'Brookomore tucked a few mauve satin flowers into her frock.

"Aren't they heavenly?" she inquired. "Especially the purple ones. . . ."

"Oh, Gerald!"

"My poor puss——"

"People's lives, dearie, don't seem to be a bit their own once they're in love."

" Love is a seed that needs watering from day to day. Otherwise it dies."

" With me it all accumulates."

" Don't let's miss the sunset—the later half."

" It's a sunset and a sobset, Gerald. Oh, it's so sad. . . ."

" In the end everything has to be paid for."

" Principally for that I'd sooner I didn't dine. It really isn't worth it, Gerald. . . ."

" No dinner? "

" Even gratis. Oh, Gerald! "

" We're sure to meet the Arbanels."

" I tapped at their door as I came along."

" I fear that was intrusive."

" Directly it dawned upon her it was me she flew forward brandishing a powder-puff."

" Her behaviour's getting Byzantine—more and more."

Miss Collins folded an arm about her friend.

" Why do you think it's Byzantine, Gerald? What ever makes you think it is? "

" On certain natures environment frequently reacts. I can recall the Queen of Snowland (when a guest at Windsor) frisking off one afternoon into the town in search of lodgings. She came to the very house where I was writing her life . . . and we met in the front hall."

" Oh, good gracious! "

" Similarly, I feel inclined to believe that Mrs. Arbanel in Egypt would be less vivid and more *Athenian* in her ways."

" Can a leopard change its spots, Gerald? "

" My dear, it can modify them."

" I'm surprised you lend her Palmer."

" I've only offered her, of course, until the faithless Clint can be replaced. Mrs. Arbanel hopes to secure someone locally."

" I shouldn't think there were many maids to be found locally, Gerald. I shouldn't think there was one. Not in Olympia."

" The deciphering of their characters, in any case, would require a skilful student," Miss O'Brookomore observed as Palmer came in.

Miss Collins rolled her eyes.

" Thank heaven! " she exclaimed.

" It didn't take you long! "

" I was as quick with her, miss, as I could be."

" We were prepared to hear some screams. . . ."

" Were I to be stabbed, Miss Mabel, I should endeavour to be considerate."

" Violets! "

" I suppose, poor thing, she is still very dazed? "

" She seemed lost in reverie, miss."

" I expect it's the air."

" She intends to ride to Sparta almost immediately, since Olympia, she hears, is nothing but cliques and coteries."

" It's their season now."

" There's a good deal of entertaining, miss, to-night. Dorinda, Lady Gaiheart, is to have a party for the Irish Archæological School. And Mrs. L. G. Lawson is bringing over some of her friends from the Villa Sophonisba."

Miss O'Brookomore began muffling a foot up in a silver-spangled shoe.

" Had I been told earlier I'd have gone into Corinth," she said.

" No doubt you'd have found Miss Dawkins there."

" My dear, she's in Olympia. She arrived this afternoon. I overheard her telling her father's chest-measurements to the boy that works the lift."

" And I dare say half-seas-over? "

" Poor thing."

" Oh, she's so common, Gerald! "

" I should like to be on a balcony, miss, for the Recognition."

" I dare say she'll be made to display her birthmarks first."

" There's no need, miss—if you'll pardon me—for birthmarks with a face like that."

" Brute! . . . You've pricked me. . . ."

The sound of the dinner-gong came dwindling up.

" Oh, the way they beat it! "

Miss O'Brookomore smothered a sigh.

" It might be the Ramadan! " she declared.

XVIII

O STARS! O perfumes! O night!

In the grey cedar crests, from the blue fir-trees of the Kronian hill, the owls flapped gabbling; among the fields of mournful olives the cicadas called; over the fragments of fallen marble, crushing the wild thyme, the fire-flies flashed; and on the verandah of the Hôtel de France, the scintillation of her diamonds harmonising equally with the heavens as with the earth, Dorinda, Lady Gaiheart was finishing a tale.

"He then walked off with her," she said, "in an appalling pair of old black slippers."

"He didn't run!"

"Why should he? Men seldom run away with girls. Not in these days."

Miss O'Brookomore looked relieved.

"I always think of Europa," she said.

"That comes from chattering so much about farms."

"With daughters of your own I was determined to consult you."

"I never bothered. They were just a nest of sisters, until one by one, alas, without requiring my advice, they deserted the family tree."

> "Her hour of love,
> How soon it passed!
> It passed ere Mary knew.

And that is the worst of all these rash marriages."

"I fear the Arbanels are already getting fidgety."

"She was crying so much at dinner, poor thing."

"He was telling me they propose to plant a bed of

violets, big white single ones, on the Acropolis, to the glory of the delicate and individual artiſte, *Arne* —the 'only' Lady Teazle of our time—in the presence of the *corps diplomatique* and the king and queen."

"Tears!"

"Toilettes!"

"Speeches!"

"I expect so!"

Miss Dawkins dropped a sigh.

"Where's Troy?" she said, wheeling round in her chair.

"You surely don't think they're there!"

Lady Dorinda looked reserved.

"I muſt rejoin my friends," she murmured. "In a few minutes we're all going over to the ruins."

Miss O'Brookomore lifted up her eyes.

"I shall ſtay where I am for the new girl dancer," she devoutly mumbled.

"Is she one of the Sophonisba set?"

"Mrs. Viviott found her . . . whirling to herself among the Treasuries."

"At Tanagra," Miss Dawkins said, "she was balancing herself, not long ago, in the village ſtreet. I was obliged to interrupt her to ask if a smart fair woman with an elderly, ſtoutish man had been seen that way: S-s-s-s-h! she said. In the evening when the peacocks dance . . ."

"I should be afraid of her!"

"She is really wildly pretty."

"Those deep wonder-rings about her eyes are quite unholy."

"At dinner Mrs. Viviott sat like a player with an unsatisfactory hand at cards."

"I hate all ingratitude," Miss O'Brookomore observed. "In Biography, of course, one sees so much of it. . . ."

" Tell me! How is *it* getting on? "

" Gaps! Gaps! ! Gaps! ! ! "

" There are bound to be a few."

" Did you ever meet Max Metal? " Miss Dawkins asked.

" No, never."

" Or Nodo Vostry? "

" I don't remember him."

" Or Harry Strai? "

" I'm sure I never did! "

" Why? . . ."

" In my opinion their books for girls are full of unsound advice."

" I'm glad I can still sometimes drug my senses with a book," Lady Dorinda exclaimed.

" Unluckily, racing round as I do, I very rarely find a chance."

" You must have met with some adventures by the way."

Miss Dawkins mixed herself a sombre liqueur.

" I had a good time in Smyrna," she drowsily declared.

" Only there? "

" Oh, my dears, I'm weary of streets; so weary! "

" And have you never found any trace——? "

" At Palermo, once. . . . I was wandering in the Public Gardens before the hotel, amid blown bus tickets and autumn leaves, when I thought I saw them. Father, anyway. He was standing at an open window of an eau-de-Nil greenhouse. He looked very much younger—altered almost to be a boy. I stood and stared. He smiled. I believe I spoke. And then, before I was able to realise it, I was inside his dark front hall. . . ."

" Who was he? "

" I can only tell you he was a dear thing. I shall hope to meet him in heaven."

Mrs. Arbanel swooped up lightly.

" I respond to the sound of the sea," she said, " and the tinkle of ice! "

" Let me make you a Cherry Cobbler."

" After interviewing a temporary-maid there's nothing I'd like *more!* "

" Are you satisfied? "

" Is one ever——"

" Still, if she understands hair! "

" That is all she seemed to follow."

" She'll do, I'm sure, for Sparta."

Miss O'Brookomore unfurled her fan.

" Frankly, I rather shrink from Sparta," she said.

" What is there to take one there? "

" I really forget—I believe there's a crouching Venus."

" What does Mr. Arbanel say? "

" He doesn't say anything. He leaves me to go alone."

" What? Isn't he going at all? "

" When the weather is milder he may."

" A man will have his comforts," Lady Dorinda affirmed.

" I long to hear about your new home."

" . . . Oh well. . . . It's quite a clever little house. . . . Five bedrooms. . . ."

" Modest."

" If you would care to see the plans——"

" My dear, there's no hurry," Miss Dawkins said. " Any-old-time will do."

Miss O'Brookomore turned her head stiffly towards the stars.

On all sides through the dusk, intermingling with faint nocturnal noises, rose up a sound of kisses.

She shivered as she felt something touch her own exceedingly sensitive skin.

" Where have you been, Mabel? " she asked.

"Writing letters. I've been describing the Temples to mum."

"Writing letters," Mrs. Arbanel said. "I think it must be an Olympic Game."

"Why, what?"

"Do you ask me for the rules?"

"How should I know—the rules?"

"They're really very simple. . . . You sit two at a table. A young man, perhaps, and a chit of a girl. With a piece of plate-glass in between. And then, when you've drummed with your fingers and played with your pen, you shuffle with your feet, and you throw dying glances over the top."

Miss Collins challenged.

". . . Prove it!" she said.

"Wild girl! You surely don't suppose I'm going to prove it?"

"Why, I was sitting with a widow!"

Miss Dawkins speared herself a cherry.

"Oh, for a quiet corner!"

"First, Mrs. Lawson's guest is going to dance."

"Who, exactly, is she?"

"She's a pupil of Tasajara, Gerald."

Miss O'Brookomore's nose grew long.

"I never heard of her," she said.

"Oh, she's a study, Gerald."

"One sees so many artists here——"

"With a water-colour in the Academy. Some people seem to think it permissible to look a little mad and to behave as if they *really* were. . . ."

"I heard the flowers scream as I picked them!" Mrs. Erso-Ennis was saying as she scattered a shower of blossoms upon the floor.

"If it's to be Botticelli——" Miss O'Brookomore complained.

Mrs. Erso-Ennis looked indignant.

"Botticelli! . . . I invented the whole thing just now."

"How could you!"

"It's the *Hesitation of Klytemnestra.* The poor Queen, you see, cannot quite bring herself to kill the King, and while he sleeps she performs a suite of interesting, *idyllic* poses over him with a knife."

"Better wait, Gerald," Miss Collins advised.

Mrs. Erso-Ennis flung a few last leaves of roses.

"Oh! Think of the earwigs!"

"In these old-fashioned places one should only wear short skirts."

"At the summer sales in Athens," Miss Dawkins seraphically said, "I picked up a regular siren's gown. . . . Looped up upon one side to reveal the knee."

"What you have now, if one may say so, is also very original."

"It doesn't fit. But it isn't meant to," Miss Dawkins replied.

Mrs. Erso-Ennis directed her eyes to the room.

On a couch, destined to be the royal bed, a young woman, evidently a prima donna, was caressing rapturously her little boy.

"My son," she was saying, "my opera . . . x! Opera . . . xx ! My Johannes . . . !! My *bébé!* . . ."

"She must be removed, I fear."

"And there're some horrid arrivals, too."

For those with ears fine enough Miss Collins caused an innocent bud to wail.

"Oh, Gerald," she said, "who do you think is here?"

"Not——!"

"He's in the bus, dearie!"

"My poor puss . . . You've turned quite pale."

"Oh, the shock to me, Gerald! . . ."

"You look so tired, dear . . . so sad and so worn out."

"It's because I'm dead beat, Gerald."

" Feel faint, at all? "

" No—but I've never felt like this before, Gerald. . . . You little know how I feel—I could not have believed it was possible."

XIX

"SIXTEEN of them," she counted, "and a diamond drop!"

"*Au revoir*. Until to-night."

"Oh, the rush!"

"You're ready? Packed——"

"All I dare. I could hardly bring away my big box —the one with the furs and flannels! . . ."

"You'll need your passport."

"It's lost."

"Lost!"

"Gerald must have burnt it, she says, among her papers. She's everlastingly burning things. She lights her fire in the evening just as she bolts her door. . . . And then she burns things, and dreams things, and pokes things, and mutters things—*l'heure exquise*, she calls it."

". . . Very likely."

"I've an idea it's rheumatics, poor soul. . . ."

"M-a-b-e-l!" Miss O'Brookomore called again.

"I must go to her. . . ."

"One kiss!"

"O-o-o-o-h!"

"Another!"

"Not till we get in the train."

"*Cara mia dolce!*"

"And thanks very much for the diamonds," Miss Collins replied.

Loitering up and down the hall among the tubs of orange-trees—now in full flower—Miss O'Brookomore was growing ruffled.

"It's charming!" she said. "It appears he's on our floor."

" Oh no, he's not, Gerald . . . He's on the floor above. Right overhead, dearie."

Miss O'Brookomore looked away.

" There are people, I find, who have no heads," she ruefully remarked. " They've lost them."

" I don't know why you should dislike him, Gerald. Because he doesn't you. He calls you the pretty priestess. . . ."

The Biographer unbent a shade.

" Does he? " she inquired.

" Are you going for your walk? "

" I told Miss Dawkins we would help her to find her parents."

" It's too late to go far, dearie."

" Nonsense! "

" How can she expect to find them, Gerald, sitting all day with a Gin Daisy or a Brandy Flip? Tell me that now! "

" Anyway we might take a turn round the garden. . . . If they're here at all I expect they're in the shrubbery."

It was the hour when, to a subtle string band, the bustling waiters would be bringing tea.

" Oh, the Sophonisbas, Gerald!—some of them."

Their tired, art-stained faces turned towards a little Saint with rose lips, eyes and crown, Mrs. Erso-Ennis and Mrs. Viviott were overwhelming with attentions the pupil of Tasajara.

" Mercy, Gerald! "

" *Hein!* "

" There's bound to be heart-burnings, Gerald."

" . . . I shouldn't wonder."

" And there's your God-of-the-Wood, dearie. . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore changed her course.

" *Not* before the windows! " she exclaimed.

" Olympia for love, Gerald."

" Olympia for tattle."

"Oh, Gerald! I mean to fling in my lot with a crowd of absolute strangers. . . ."

"What!"

"Love isn't logical, Gerald."

"Alas!"

"Oh! Gerald!"

"What has your friend a year?"

"How should I know, dearie?"

"It's important to know."

"It's better to be poor—I've often heard mum say—than to have a soft seat in hell."

"An Italian is very easily enamoured."

"I love his dark plastered hair, Gerald. I think it quite sweet."

"It isn't enough. . . ."

"He's like somebody from Marathon, Gerald!"

"You're young yet."

"Oh, Gerald, when he sang the Shepherd-Star-Song from *Tannhäuser* and gave that shake! . . . You can't think how much I was moved . . . How I responded. . . ."

"His *catches from Butterfly* would get on my nerves!"

"Had I nerves like you I couldn't rest without a passport."

"It's tiresome, I admit."

"It's that, dearie. . . ."

"Don't despond!"

"Suppose they detained you, Gerald?"

"Why, we'd sing a duet together."

"Wait till there's a warrant!"

"A warrant?"

"Sometimes I think of the prison we saw in Patras, with the prisoners all thrusting their heads out between the bars."

"Don't, Mabel!"

"Oh, Gerald! It's a climax and a perfect semax, dear."

" We're not helping Miss Dawkins at all! "

" You go one way, Gerald. And I'll go another. . . ."

Miss O'Brookomore glanced behind her.

Already the sun-topped hills were lost in lilac towards the ground. It would soon be night.

" Very well," she murmured, letting fall a glove; " we will meet again at dinner."

XX

" MABEL! Mabel! Mabel! Mabel!
Mabel! Mabel! Mabel! Mabel! "

XXI

HOTEL CENTRAL,
CONSTITUTIONAL PLACE,
ATHENS.

Saturday.

DEAR GERALD,—I was married this morning and we leave to-morrow early for Corfu don't worry about me dear I'm alright O darling I'm the happiest girl in Greece I wore my little amber tricorne satin cap dear and Oio gave me the violets I shall get my trousseau bit by bit I suppose as we go along I had wanted rather badly to be married in the Kapnikaraea but it was a Registry after all good-bye now Gerald and take care of yourself dear do in haste yrs always affectionately

MABINA PASTORELLI.

P.S.—I laughed the whole time the priest who married us would keep whisking his skirt.

Mrs. Cowsend is here still Old ox.

Oio says if I write another word he'll pour all my ink away.

PART II

" *Do you remember that picture of Jesus that poor Miss Turner used to show us?*" The Honeysuckle—D'ANNUNZIO

I

THE sunlight passing through the glass candlestick by the bedside shot out its rays towards her threefold and woke her with a start.

—Bovon! Home!

—The Countess gaped.

There was the fine old carpet stained with tulips, and the familiar text upon the lightly figured walls, and the dress bust in the corner behind the *causeuse* that cast its consoling outline so effectively at night, and the medicine chest above the rocking-chair, with the sage-chinoiseries on top, that would swing their heads in the affirmative almost for a glance—which responsiveness had been known to work like a spell upon certain sensitive natures in more instances than one.

The Countess sat up.

" Bianca! " she called.

By the wide " Elysium " bed stood a bassinet tricked in bows.

" Bianca, Borghese, Nancy, Sabina! "

From the doorway came a whirl of skirts—a croon —and Mrs. Collins entered.

" While the mother was asleep the granny came and stole the darling, and whipped down the corridor, out into the garden, and round and round the house."

The Countess held out her arms.

" Oh, my honey bear! "

" Don't, Mabel. You'll kill it."

" Oh, the interesting little pickle! Oh, the Roman rascal! . . . Poveretta! *Ah, Dio!* "

Mrs. Collins considered her daughter.

" . . . There's something I want to say to you," she said.

" Yes, what is it? "

" Everyone's inquiring for the Count—all the Bovon busybodies."

" Kra, kra, Mrs. Rook."

" They're concerned he hasn't come! "

" It's the Vintage. Directly that's over he will."

Mrs. Collins beamed affectionately.

" In any case," she murmured, " I mean to give a small dinner for you, and that, my dear, directly."

" Oh, good gracious! "

" I shall take you the rounds."

" Visits! "

" Rectory, Patchpole, Rising-Proudly."

The Countess lay back.

" I wish to offend the Warristons," she said, " and Napier—and the gorgeous Mrs. Lampsacus. Oh, and a whole pack besides! "

" Napier has asked for you repeatedly—almost every day."

The Countess averted her face.

" I dare say," she said, " when he first heard of my marriage he was frightfully, frightfully upset? "

" Not so very. For five minutes he seemed inconsolably unhappy—and then he smiled! "

" Providentially! "

" Oh, my dear, you can't think how I've prayed for you all this while."

" Of course it's Catholicism now with both of us."

" It must be so strange."

" The child was baptized in Santa Maria in Cosmedin—she's been baptized twice, poor dear."

" For sake of ceremony? "

" At Santa Maria it was on account of *them*. It's their parish. But afterwards I took her round quietly and had it done in St. Peter's."

" You obtained your audience? "

" At the very last minute."

" Well! "

" Oh, well! I was prepared to do anything. Naturally! I'm sure! Oh, good gracious!"

" Was the child with you? "

" Oh, she waved her fat little wrinkled wrists—and smacked his Holiness—mother's Bianca did! My blessing! "

" As a family I gather you're inclined to be devout."

" Of course the dowager's goody. She never goes out without a string of nuns."

" Is there any reason for it! "

" I couldn't say. Often she'll kneel in the garden. Or on the stairs. Or in a shop. Or on a tram. Whenever she wants to she'll kneel! "

" She appears to be insatiable."

" It doesn't affect me. . . . On Sunday, as a rule, I've a box at the Argentina or a sofa stall at the Alcaza."

" Oio too? "

" Occasionally he comes."

" And when he doesn't! "

" There's always someone."

Mrs. Collins looked round.

" Wow! Here comes a big black doggie! "

" Daisy—my *dear!* . . ."

" Papa's waiting breakfast. He wants you to boil him an egg."

" Tell him I'll come."

" He's grumbling so. According to him, nobody cares at all whether he lives or dies. . . ."

Mrs. Collins raised a hand to her curls!

" Oh, poor granny! " she murmured as she withdrew.

Daisy subdued her ways.

" How did your little child sleep? " she asked.

" Well."

" Do you regret Rome? "

" It's a joy to have no mosquitoes! "

" That's not so bad as snakes. Suppose you had married an Indian."

" Thank goodness."

" Tell me about the Marriage State. Is it what you expected it to be? "

The Countess threw up her eyes.

" I didn't expect anything," she said.

" Let me look at your wedding-ring, Mabel, may I? Only for a minute."

" What do you want it for? "

" I won't eat it. "

" There's nothing very novel in a wedding-ring. Wait till you see my pearls? "

" Where are they ?"

" With my other jewels. . . ."

" I should like to borrow some."

" I dare say."

" Do you know of anyone likely to suit me? "

" A lover? "

" Nobody, Mab! . . ."

" I'm sorry."

" . . . Mabsey? "

" Oh, have *patience*."

" It's a pity the Bovon boys are so rabbity—they're for ever with their noses down a hole."

The Countess fluttered her eyelids.

" How are the dear ferrets? " she asked.

" All right."

" And the farm? "

" All right."

" Any changes? "

" Only in the house. Olga and Minnie have gone. Olga said she was glad to go. She said nothing would induce her to stop."

" Is Queen as queer as ever? "

" Queerer."

" Impossible."

" He and Mrs. Prixon don't get on. What Spicer endures at meals—talk about silence! And next week there'll be a fresh footman. It's funny the effect it always has upon me—it's something no one could explain! "

" In days gone by," the Countess said, " the pantry with a stranger in it was as dull as any drawing-room. . . ."

Daisy wriggled.

" Shall you ever forget the time Frank flew at you and clapped his hands? You were reaching for the pickled walnuts."

" Mercy! "

" And I was steadying the table for you as you got on it. Suddenly he . . . sprang."

The Countess looked vexed.

" Now you've scared the child."

" Oh, the poor wee sweetie! "

" Zito! Zito! Ah, Madonna!"

" I'll take her a turn in her little pram if she likes. Just the Aunt and the Niece together."

" Stay within call."

" We'll peep in the larder, shall we, Babs? There may be a bare birdie dangling there, and perhaps a little white corpse."

The Countess rang.

" Better wheel her under the yew-trees," she said, " out of the wind. And don't upset the pram! "

II

" WHEN the crow's-feet come
And twirl about my eyes,
And my lips turn pale . . .
And my cheeks sink in,
Oh, say, wilt thou love me then? "

Divorcing itself from the piano, the voice trailed magnificently away, ignoring altogether the tragical scepticism of the accompaniment.

The listeners looked shrewd.

Above the little party rose the Chase, dark and eerie in the autumn sun.

" Wilt thou love me truly when my hair has flown,
When my teeth have fallen
And my hands are wan?
Oh, say, wilt thou love me then?

I will love you (said he) for ever and ever,
For ever and ever and ever and ever,
Amen."

" Bis. Bis."

" It's the air from *Cunigonde*," Mrs. Collins explained, coming to the window.

" We were wondering what it was."

" In the death scene she introduces parts of it again in her delirium."

Mr. Collins frowned ferociously.

" Hag! " he muttered.

" By-and-by I will rattle you some of the ballet-music from *The Judgment of Paris*," the Countess said.

"Oh, the valse Paris sings—! He and the Three Graces. —Da-da-da-di-da!"

"If only the Chase were rid of!" Mrs. Collins complained.

"Has anyone been to view it?"

"Madame La Chose had the impudence to come.... Queen came to me one morning with the news that a lady with *an order* desired to see over the house. I guessed by his tone there was something extraordinary, and on going into the drawing-room there was Madame La Chose."

"Did you show her round?"

"Oh, my dear . . . yes. We even went so far as to fix some of the rooms."

"Mercy!"

"I must say I thought her rather charming."

"Would she care to take it?"

"Without the meadow she might. . . ."

"It shows her sense. Land nowadays is much too impoverishing."

"Her idea is to revive *Basset*. . . ."

"York being mainly a military town it would probably be a boon."

"In any case the decision, it seems, does not rest with herself alone, and she has asked to come back again."

"My dear, if she does . . .!" Mr. Collins said.

The Countess caressed her child.

"Mother, oh! . . . Poor mother, oh! Give a kiss to mother, oh! She says she *won't!* Oh, good gracious! . . ."

"I'm unhappy about her nurse," Mrs. Collins said. "A trustworthy person is everything."

The Countess crossed herself dejectedly.

"Oh, when I think of her nurses! . . ." she said. "At first I had a Roman one for the child. She was a regular contadina—La Marietta! La Mariuccia! But

she was so dirty! . . . A regular slut she was . . . she wasn't even clean. And too *sans gêne*, by far. Bianca's most impressionable. Nothing escapes her little eyes. . . . So I sent her away and took a stranded Irish-woman instead. Oh she was a terror. 'I always try to please everybody,' she said, 'and I'm sorry I can't you!' But it was the tone of voice, dear, in which she said it more than the actual words. . . . *Sapristi!* However, one or two of them I liked. There was a Swiss. . . . If she hadn't been so vague. One night, my dear, she overturned the pram right in the middle of the Corso! It might have killed the child. . . ."

"Are there no nice gardens that she could play in?"

"There are. But it's a climb to get to them!"

"I'd an idea that Rome was flat. . . ."

Mr. Collins handled meditatively his cigar.

"What of the seven hills?"

"Ah, Charles!"

"Seven little hilly-willies!"

"I suppose the surrounding scenery is."

"You'd love Frascati. The land falls and rises, falls and rises. Oh, it's ever so dear."

"I've a letter of yours from there."

"Did you keep the Greek ones?"

"I kept them all."

"I should like you to show me Gerald's."

Mrs. Collins looked away.

"Had I known the sort of woman she was! But living as we do one never hears a thing."

"You had read her books."

"Ah, don't, Mabel."

"You liked her style."

"I'm told she's a noted Vampire."

"Who ever said so?"

"Some friend of hers—in Chelsea."

"What do Vampires do?"

" What don't they! "

" Of course she was always bizarre."

" Who could have foreseen her secret schemes?"

The Countess grew wan.

" Some of her literary secrets," she said, " were simply disgusting."

" Dissolute! "

" She'd force them from printers'-devils."

" Mabel."

" Was her last remarkable? "

" . . . The Londonisms! The Cockney! The slang!"

" She was a little too fond of her freedoms. . . ."

" Boys with their tutors. Girls with their mothers."

" According to you, Charles," Mrs. Collins said with umbrage, " I might be unwilling to chaperon the girls instead of fretting my life out in a hole like Bovon! "

Mr. Collins quelled the rising storm.

" There, Isabel," he said, with a glance towards the house, " if I thought we'd be here another summer I'd get new sun-blinds, dear . . . but what's the good? Just leaving them as fixtures."

III

" QUEEN," Daisy said to him one day. " If a fair young gentleman with large blue eyes should call and ask for Mrs. Collins you're to say she has gone out. . . . But he'll find the Sisters in. The Aunt and the Niece will be in the Yew-tree walk. With the Mother."

" Very good, miss."

" And, Queen——! "

" Fie, miss."

" Bashful? "

" I'm surprised."

The Yew-tree walk, the cause of so much gloom, ran ring-like about the house, to meet again before the drawing-room windows above the main road, where a marble nymph with a worn flat face dispensed water, rather meanly, out of a cornucopia into a trough full of green scum.

On a garden swing near by the Countess was swaying fitfully to and fro.

" Units, tens, hundreds, thousands. . . . Tens of thousands. . . . Hundreds of thousands! *Units*——" she was murmuring cryptically to herself with half rapt looks.

" Shall I push you, Mabs? "

" No. Ta."

" To prevent the perspiration? . . ."

The Countess sighed.

" I'd sell my soul for an ice."

" A strawberry. . . ."

" Or vanilla."

" I told Queen we'd be in."

" Where's mum? "

" Upstairs. Trying on. It's the armpits again. . . ."
" Goodness! "
" Do you know the new snook, Mab? "
" Is there one? "
" A beauty."
" Not before Bianca."
" It's a pity the child's so young. . . ."
" Carissima! "
" Her little amours. Tell me about them. . . . Has she many? "
" She makes new conquests from day to day."
" Tell me things, Mabel."
" What things ? "
" All sorts of things."
" Really! "
" In Italy have they Brussels sprouts—like we have? "
" In Italy they've everything," the Countess replied.
" Can *he* speak English? "
" Fluently. Oh! . . ."
" Swear? "
" Certainly."
" A foreign husband wouldn't suit me—not if he stayed abroad."
" No? "
" Mabsey! "
" What is it ?"
" Nothing. In the afternoon the yew-trees turn quite blue."
" The quietness. . . . You can almost hear the clouds go by."
" Let's all lie down on the grass as if we were dead."
" It's too hot for rough games."
" I shouldn't wonder if it rained."
" Pitter-patter! "
" Every now and then she turns her great beseech-

ing eyes at me and whispers ' Aunt.' Aunt! she says, come back with me to Rome. Come! And let me have no nonsense now. Oh, Blanche, I reply . . . it's my poverty, dear. But what can one do on a penny a week? "

" Papa, poor-old-gentleman, was saying how you should be going to school."

" To school ?"

" That was what he said."

" He can't force me to if I choose to remain unlettered."

" It's for the companionship there'd be."

" Never."

" School isn't so dreadful, Daisy."

" Nothing would induce me to go."

The Countess rocked drowsily.

" At York Hill," she said, " looking back on it all, I seem to have enjoyed everything. Even the walks! Oh. . . . Often we'd go round the city walls . . . or along the Ouse perhaps out to Bishopsthorp and there we'd take the ferry. All we screaming girls and governesses in mid-river. . . . Oh, good gracious! "

" I remember the letters you sent from there. And the complaints that were in them! "

" And in the evening of course there'd be Preparation. . . . Oh—! That was always a time for mischief. . . . One of us, Annie Oldport perhaps ('Any-Old-Port ' we used to call her), would give her next neighbour a squeeze, with orders to pass it on. How we did thrill when little Evelyn Rise, one of the new kids, took hold of the Principal herself. ' What are you doing to me, Evelyn? ' ' I'm pinching you, Mrs. Whewell.' ' Are you indeed ! Well, then——' And she dealt her a blow on the ears before us all. . . . Oh, Evelyn Rise! She was a little silly. . . . She hadn't any brains at all."

" No brains, Mabsey? "

" No," the Countess crooned. " She hadn't any."
" There! Queen's beckoning. . . ."
" Imbecile."
" It may be him."
" Who, him? "
" Your husband."
" Hardly."
" Your Excellency. . . ."
" Here I am."
" There's a person at the gate."
" Open it then."
" I fear it's a trouble."
" Why, who is it? "
" A stranger."
" It's perhaps the Count."
" It looks to be like a woman."
" The Sisters have gone away, Queen. . . ."
" Does she refuse her name? "
" Quite."
" A foreigner? "
" And *so* suspicious."
" The Aunt's away from home. . . ."
" I've often heard of the Black Hand, your Excellence, and lately I've noticed chalk-marks on the gate."
" *Ah, Dio!* "
" Is there no gentleman, Queen? "
" No, miss."
" It may be Jocaster Gisman."
" What Gisman? "
" The accomplice of Bessie Bleek that suffocated seven little boys and girls and was tried and executed for doing so. . . ."
" Oh, heavens! "
" Jocasta got herself off at the last Assizes—there were extenuating circumstances the judge said—and so he forgave her."

" *Bô!* "

" Mercy! "

" My dear, it's me," Miss Dawkins said, peering through the fence.

" That is so," she added, with an impetuous bound.

" Oh, the child! "

" Her aversion—I should say it's a flea," Miss Dawkins commented, subsiding upon the swing.

The Countess pushed it.

" Of all the surprises! " she said.

" I refused to give my name because it makes me cry to say it. I break down. . . ."

" You've not found them then? "

" No, dear."

" I imagined you in the I's."

" I sail for India within a week."

" The cathedral cities bring you north? "

" York and—they rhyme together . . . the first few letters. And I cling to every straw."

" Courage."

" Call me Ola."

" Ola."

" When I was in the Holy City I saw you one day."

" When was it? "

" During Passion Week."

" Were you with friends? "

" I scarcely knew anybody. I had an introduction to Countess Roderigos Samurez Dalmatia, but as I didn't like the look of her I didn't make use of it."

" I've heard of her often," the Countess said, " through the Grittis."

" Besides a letter to Princess Anna di Portici. . . ."

" Her house is occupied at present by the Marquesa Refoscosca! "

" And a card for Monsignor Ferrol."

" Old *débauché*."

" Well . . . and how's the pleasant husband? "

" Oio? He's in Orvieto still. It's the Vintage. . . ."

Miss Dawkins looked devout.

" In my opinion," she said, " Orvieto wine is superior to the best Castelli."

" You should have a dozen, dear, of our Old-Old-Old—the *Certosa*, if I knew where it would find you."

" I'm at the ' Wheat Sheaf.' "

" What? "

" Yes. I thought I'd repose myself there until I start."

" If you've made no other plans you'll just stay and rest with us until your ship sails."

" It's kind of you to ask me, but what will your kindred say? "

" My dear, they'll love to have you. And mum will tell you so herself. She's with the tailor now."

" It's the arm-pits! . . ."

" This is my little sister."

" And is that your babe? "

" Isn't she a darling! "

" Tell me, Contessa—have I changed since Greece?"

" I should say you're a little stouter."

" Ireland makes one sloppy."

" And I? . . ."

" My dear, you don't look fifteen."

" She's seventeen," Daisy said, " or thereabouts. And the child will soon be two."

" Were *I* to have a child I should be just like a lunatic," Miss Dawkins declared.

" With your tender heart I wonder you don't marry."

" Marriages are made in heaven, you know."

" Let me find you someone! "

" You, my dear. . . . I've a sprig of the real Chinduai charm-flower from the Malay. I've only to wear it! "

" Why don't you then? "

"Voyagers lose their illusions somehow. . . . They lose them. . . ."

"Take off your hat and really rest!"

"Shall I?"

"Do."

"It's pretty peaceful here anyway," Miss Dawkins said, with a sigh, her eyes riveted upon the cornucopia of the niggardly nymph.

"Is it iron?" she inquired.

"What, the water? It's always rather brown. . . ."

Miss Dawkins pressed a hand to her hip.

"It looks like a stream of brandy," she said, going off into a laugh.

IV

THE " intimate " dinner arranged by Mrs. Collins in honour of her daughter proved to be a large one.

A dinner of twenty at a table to hold eighteen.

As course succeeded course came the recurring pressure of a forward footman's knee.

Half asleep holding a shell-shaped spoon Miss Dawkins explored a sauce-boat as though it had been an Orient liner.

" Yes Mr. Collins."

" No Mr. Collins."

" Aha Mr. Collins."

(" *Thanks!*")

" Yes, God is Love, Mr. Collins, and I'm sure they couldn't help it! " she said at last.

" *Già! Già!* " the Countess struck in, allegro, across a bank of flowers.

" Well, here's health, old girl. The very best! "

" And success to you . . . and may the gods permit you to find them! "

" If you ask me, I think it silly to find people," the Countess's former inamorato declared. " I don't want to find anybody! . . ."

" No doubt you've tried clairvoyance? " the Member for Bovon asked.

" Indeed. And palmistry, and phrenology, and cards, and sand. . . ."

" Well? "

" Oh well . . ." Miss Dawkins said, " I was warned I'd marry a septuagenarian within the forbidden degrees and never know it! . . . Helios, Mene, Tetragrammaton! "

" Have you looked by the Rhine at all? "

" Where haven't I? "

" Courage! " the Countess crooned.

" I've a presentiment they're in India. Somehow I connect my mother's fair hair with Bombay. . . ."

Mr. Collins raised his glass.

" Then here's to Bombay! "

" Oh, nectar, Mr. Collins! Show me the cork—I always like to see the cork—! And my dear father was like me there. ' The cork, Ola,' he'd say. ' A bottle of wine is nothing without the cork.' "

" The Count! " Napier Fairmile with generosity proposed.

The Countess shrugged her shoulders.

" I'd a letter from Italy this morning," she said. " It appears in Rome all the roads are up."

" Up? "

" There's no getting by the Corso at all. Persons going to the Villa Borghese have to pass by the Via Babuino. Oh, good gracious! And my friend says the heat! It's a grill. Everyone is away still, of course, in villegiatura. But even so! At the Baths at Lucca she says she hears they're burning. . . ."

" Well, it was pretty warm, dear, in Greece," Miss Dawkins said. " The day of the accident I shall never forget how very hot it was! "

" At Salamis. . . ."

" Ah, don't."

" Was there ever such a misfortune? "

" There seems to have been some inexcusable carelessness."

" There are certain things we shall never know," the Countess murmured, " but I've sometimes thought that shot was aimed at me! "

Mrs. Collins shook her fan.

" The crazy people Mabel met in Greece! "

" Both Dorinda, Lady Gaiheart and Mrs. Arbanel

are parting from their husbands, so I understand."

"Poor Lady Dorinda! I fear she has fallen between two stools," the Member for Bovon said.

"And a piano. And a waste-paper basket, if reports are true," the Countess replied.

"Did you meet the Viviotts at all?"

"There was a Mrs. Viviott," Miss Dawkins said—"a nervy, pretty thing. She and a Mrs. Erso-Ennis.... Inseparable. And always quarrelling."

"They're reconciled again. And are gone to live at Birdingbury—quite near us—because it sounds Saxon..."

"Really, Viola?"

Mrs. Newhouse, *née* Neffal, nodded.

"Anything *fair!*" the Countess crooned. "Even a dancer."

"La Tasajara? I saw her one night. I believe it was at Astrea Fortri's house in Pall Mall. . . ."

"Such a little starved-soul ghost-face. Like a little thin-pale-pinched St. John," the Countess critically said.

"In the end she became indispensable to Miss O'Brookomore," Miss Dawkins stated.

"With Gerald?"

"Oh, that woman." Mrs. Collins shuddered.

"They tell me she's to chaperon an Eton boy straight to Tibet."

Miss Dawkins became abstracted.

"She evidently likes them young and fresh!" she observed.

The Countess started.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Come quickly!" her sister said. "The child's in her cups."

"Bianca is?"

"What have you been giving her?"

"It's only the little hiccoughs. . . ."

"Remember you weren't to come in till dessert."

"During the Stratford mulberries papa said I might. You've had them."

"Just look at her waist!"

"Now I'm here, mayn't I stop?"

"If you like to display your natural gifts," Mr. Collins murmured, "you may."

"You can't do much on an empty stomach."

"You can recite, I suppose," the Countess said.

"Recite? It's always an effort for me to recite. . . . I feel struck dumb in society."

"Remember Rome!" the Countess warned. "We've no use for shyness there."

"On his tombstone in the grass,
Record of him he was an ass,
He stretched out his neck and he flicked up his ears
And bid farewell to this valley of tears.

He lay himself down on a bed to die,
Right in a flower-bed himself he lay,
He stiffened his back and he whisked round his tail
And bid farewell to this earthly vale.

—On his tombstone in the grass,
Record of him he was an *Ass*."

"Charming!"

"How very, very, very, very vulgar!" the Countess frowned.

"Was it the devil, my dear?"

Mrs. Collins rose.

"Gentlemen," she murmured, "*à tout à l'heure!*"

"Let's all go into the garden, Mabsey."

"There's no moon."

"There are stars."

Miss Dawkins peered out.

"It's dark and like Gethsemane," she said.

[Chapter IV appears here as it stood in the edition of 1916.]

[Another, dated "Rome, April 1925," is now printed for the first time.]

IV

THE "intimate" dinner arranged by Mrs. Collins in honour of her elder daughter promised to be a large one. Covers for twenty guests, at a table to hold eighteen, insured nevertheless a touch of welcome snugness. In the crepuscular double drawing-room, commanding the eternal moors,* county society, as it assembled, exchanged cheery greetings. It was indeed to all intents the Doncaster Meeting lot.

Discanting away from homely topics, Sir Harry Ortop had just seen a fox, it seemed, crossing Cockaway Common, while Miss Rosalba Roggers had passed a traction-engine in the Rectory lane. "Horrid thing; but the Scarboro' road is really a disgrace," she pronounced, turning her attention to an angular beauty clad in sugary pink and a crown of birds' feathers.

Holding forth in a quizzical, hoarse-sweet voice, she was arraigning her husband with indescribable archness: "He always gets into his carriage first, and then half shuts the door on you!"

Momentous in his butlerhood, Queen, supported by an extra footman, announced each new advent with an air of serene detachment.

Mr. Napier Fairmile, Miss Nespole——

Entering on the heels of the former inamorato of the Countess sailed a mite of a woman enveloped fancifully in a fairy-hued cashmere shawl. The Cyclopean chatelaine of Cupingforth Castle, and one of the wealthiest women in the Riding, she was held, by local

* "Finely situated on the edge of the moors."—*Vide* Estate Agents' Announcements.

opinion, to be eccentric for preferring to live all alone, which may possibly have had its dangers for a person of her condition and sex; nevertheless, on occasion, to convince an intrusive stranger she had a male in the house, she would discharge a cartridge out of window, and knot her hair across her chin in front in a thick cascade to imitate *a beard.*

Lady Watercarriage, The Hon. Viola West-Wind, Captain Margaret-Baker——

Quite re-vitalised, performing her duties, Mrs. Collins circulated smilingly here and there. Throwing a veil of glamour upon each guest, she had introduced Miss Dawkins twice as " The Great Traveller."

" I ain't going back to Australia not yet awhile. That is so! " Miss Dawkins declared, recognising across the Rector's shoulder in the damp-stained mezzotints upon the walls some views of popular thoroughfares her foot had trodden—Trafalgar Square, the Place de la Concorde, the Piazza Colonna, the Puerta del Sol. " If I don't just spit at them! " she commented, idly opening and closing her fan.

The Farquhar of Farquhar, Mrs. Lampsacus of Gisborough Park——

Already a full quarter-of-an-hour late, they were yet not the last.

Masticating, chewing the air, Mr. Collins appeared to have become involved against his will in the esoteric confidences of a pair of expansive matrons: " In York I saw some very pretty . . . I enquired the price. . . . Would you believe . . . *Need* I say I bought them!"

Delivered from their effusive unbosoming by The Farquhar of Farquhar, Mr. Collins turned away.

Advancing like some marvellous automaton, The Farquhar, known as " Lulu " to all frequenters of the Turf, brought with him an atmosphere of one who had supplied a daughter, or at least a filly, to a Prince of the Blood. Excusing his wife Serafima (a woman

for whom undergraduates had shot themselves), he inquired, with a leer, for " la petite Comtesse."

She was looking summery and semi-Southern in an imaginative gown in every shade of white.

" Precious darling! She's only eight months; it's a critical age," she was exclaiming; apropos, doubtless, of her child.

Chatting to a bottle-nosed dowager in garnets and goose-flesh, she appeared indeed even prettier than she was.

Descending on her, The Farquhar was circumvented by Miss Viola West-Wind, a young girl of the County with a little Tatler-tainted face. She was supplying blocks of tickets, it seemed, for *The League of Patriots* ball . . . " *Fancy dress! Everyone to go as animals.*"

Dr. Dee——

It was as much as to say dinner; but an announcement, breathed from Queen, was to fill Mrs. Collins with apprehension.

" There's been a little catastrophe, 'm."

" What, not . . . ? . . . ! . . .? ? "

" To a cinder, 'm."

In the long low-ceiled dining-room, all in the robust mid-Victorian style, the failure of an *entrée* seemed a more or less trivial thing; in such an environment it is the haunch that matters, it is the loin that tells. . . .

" Even so," Mrs. Collins heard herself murmuring (almost callously) as she gained a chair on The Farquhar's arm—" Even so. The mornings begin to be frosty."

A random word wafting the talk naturally to the subject of foxes.

" Count Pastorelli is fond of hunting? "

But Mrs. Collins presumed a prudent deafness.

Adorned with foreign spring flowers, smart jonquils and early tulips, the table-arrangements left nothing to be desired.

"I could never go to Russia; I turn quite green in the snow," Miss Dawkins was telling Sir Harry Ortop of her Odyssey.

"I take it you've tried clairvoyance?" he asked.

"Indeed. And palmistry, and phrenology, and cards, and sand. . . ."

"Well?"

"Oh well . . ." she replied, regarding a scar on his third blue chin; "I was warned I'd marry a septuagenarian within the forbidden degrees and never know it. . . . Helios, Mene, Tetragrammaton!"

"According to my experience, it's a mistake to find people. I don't want to find anybody. . . ."

Miss Dawkins used her fan.

"I've a presentiment they're in India," she said. "Somehow I connect my mother's fair hair with Bombay. . . ."

Owing to the absence of a guest, it was agreeable to find the Countess in juxtaposition. With the Member for Bovon on her right, her tongue tripped heedlessly from Mussolini to Miss Anne: "Poor soul, she was interred in her lace, with a coin of Greece in her mouth, and a flask of Chalkis wine, and a tambourine."

A version of the Salamis affair that was new to Miss Dawkins.

"——!" she cooed, lifting her eyes in protest to a painting of Mary Marchioness of Jamaica and Miss Elizabeth Cockduck, of the school of Sir Thomas Lawrence.

". . . just as in the Golden Age; and the moon that night was extra enormous," the Countess broke off her tale, arrested by a wail of distress from the direction of the nursery.

The notion that Daisy might be diverting herself at Bianca's expense caused the Countess to rise.

"Precious darling! *C'est l'heure du berger* for the

child," she exclaimed, directing her steps towards the door.

Traversing the hall, she perceived Daisy in the morning-room examining the visitors' wraps; lifting the fabrics to her nose (much as might a savage), she appeared to be voluptuously revelling in the human odours they exhaled.

"Fie, girl! What are you up to?" her sister asked.

"The Farquhar of Farquhar's muffler, Mabel, has such a funny smell, something between honey and flowers and new goloshes."

"Oh!"

"And Lady Watercarriage's cloak! I don't know what it is, but it's almost overpowering."

"*Santo dio*," the Countess breathed, lending an ear to the uproar above.

Daisy displayed indifference.

"She's overturned her little Tamara again, I suppose, that's all! ! ! !"

In the shadowy nursery, bafflingly lit by the dancing stars, some romantic fancy, it seemed, had disquieted the child.

On beholding both Mother and Aunt with a radiant light, she crowed, she smiled.

"Bianca . . . Mother's heaven." The Countess hovered.

"From the look in those endless eyes of hers I shouldn't wonder if she hadn't seen the Owl that lived in an Oak.

> There was an owl lived in an oak—
> Whiskey, waskey, weedle;
> And every word he ever spoke
> Was fiddle, faddle, feedle."

"Don't, Daisy!"

"Oh, she loves her little Buen Retiro (when it's dry); her own private corner in Bedfordshire."

"Let her be," the Countess answered, availing herself of the opportunity to deck with fresh white and red her constantly piquant face.

"Has anyone cast a doubt on your union, Mab, being legal?" Daisy asked, surveying with the eyes of a retired bus-horse her sister's comfortable back.

"Don't ask silly questions, Daisy, if you don't want foolish answers," the Countess returned, following in the mirror her infant's yearning glance towards a bespangled negro doll, Topolobampa, Queen of the Sunset Isles.

"'Cos I s'pose you know that's what Spicer's been tellin' George. . . ."

"George?"

"The extra footman."

"Oh, good gracious!"

"Naturally he'll repeat it. It seems he goes all over Yorkshire waiting, but his home-proper is the Capital. Hull, he says, is a dreadful place. No season, and with the morals of Sodom. And, fancy, Mabsey, his brother is the boy from Willinghorse and Wheelits. . . ."

"What!"

"He aspires to the concert hall, he says, on account of his voice. So we made him sing and I must say his rendering of 'Early one morning before the sun was dawning' won all our hearts."

The Countess shrugged.

"She wants, I think, to take Topolobampa to bed!" she irrelevantly exclaimed.

"She'd rather take her old Aunt—eh, chubby?"

"Madonna, what next!"

"Her little body, Mab . . . it's as soft as satin! Oh, it's terrible!"

"—— . . . ?"

"How arch the puss looks in her little nainsook!"

"Mind and don't tease her, Daisy," the Countess enjoined as she frisked away.

An odour of meat, wine and flowers hung erotically upon the dining-room air.

"I want my life to be purple—— Never less," Miss Dawkins was assuring the Member for Bovon.

Curtailing their colloquy, the Countess resumed her place.

At a delicate advantage with her newly-geraniumed lips, she was in a mood to enjoy herself.

"Look two to your right; who is she, Countess?" Miss Dawkins asked.

"An immense heiress! Miss Nespole of Cupingforth."

"My dear, she's the most extraordinarily-looking woman that I ever set eyes on!" Miss Dawkins serenely stated.

Taking umbrage from her stare, Miss Nespole (with the eccentricity permitted to wealth) put out her tongue at her and drew it slowly in again.

"Oh, good gracious!" the Countess exclaimed, shooting a glance towards her father.

Listening to a description of Gleneagles from Lady Watercarriage, he appeared almost to have grown into his chair.

"And from there we went on to a ghastly hotel where *all the bedclothes are grey*," the peeress fluted, fingering the pearls on her forward-falling shoulders.

The Countess raised a discreet glass of Perrier to her lips.

But as course succeeded course The Farquhar was moved to beg his hostess to allow her younger daughter to join them for the sugared kickshaws at dessert.

A lover of young girls and with a cult for them, he was believed to harbour Satanesque inclinations towards the Age of Candour.

"Just for a prune!" he insidiously pressed, brushing a napkin to the spreading branches of his moustache.

Miss Dawkins, meanwhile, was becoming blandly Bacchic.

"Oh, thank you, Member for Bovon, sweetest of men to me," she exclaimed, addressing him champagnishly across her friend.

It was towards the close of dessert, just as the ladies were about to withdraw, that Daisy, clasping Bianca, chose to present herself. "I brought Niece, too; I thought it would widen her little sphere," she chirruped, coming blithely forward into the room.

She had a coronet-brooch on a well trussed-out blouse, and a strip of deep green velvet tied sparkishly below the middle.

Cautioned by her sister's eye, she turned towards the Rector, who was engaging to loan a stallion to a parishioner. "A thing I seldom do," he murmured, bestowing a frigid smile on the infant papist.

Refusing to wet her lips in some curaçoa, Daisy approached The Farquhar. Appreciating notice, his jolly ogle was a welcome stimulus.

A blood-orange? Grapes? . . . Preserve-of-ginger? She answered him whimsically by a little leap of the tongue.

"She's an amusette, Mrs. Collins, your wee girl; a sweet piece; ah, these golden blondes! . . . these golden blondes!"

"But why is that?" Mrs. Collins inattentively answered, watching her grandchild circulate, as might a fruit, from guest to guest along the table.

Flattered by The Farquhar's interest, Daisy was demonstrating already her social acumen.

"I've seen statues . . . often. Oh it's terrible!" she rapported, shooting back her hair.

"Little deviless! Where?" the Farquhar queried, stealing a surreptitious arm about her middle.

"Often on lawns, and in gardens, too; oh it's terrible!"

" . . . Indeed," he murmured, alarmed by an ear-piercing shriek, attesting to Bianca's aversion to the Rector.

It was a warning, it seemed, to adjourn. Laughing hectically as she rose, Miss Dawkins had lost her bearings.

" Where ever was I last old October? " she exclaimed, waving the long lyric feathers of her fan in Sir Harry Ortop's face. " I'll own I forget. . . ."

V

"YES, dear, and so I'm really off—! And there were so many things I had wanted to say to you. But somehow I've not found time."

"Stay another week," the Countess begged.

"Call me Ola."

"Ola."

"Your father's a regular rake, darling."

"What are you looking for?"

Miss Dawkins gazed with lethargy about the room. Above the mantelpiece were engravings of Salammbô in Matho's tent and Monna Vanna in Prinzivalle's, known collectively as *The Fair Trespassers*, and published by the Fine Art Society "as the Act directs."

"The Isol," she said.

"I love your box, Ola."

"It's not distinguished."

"The labels it has on it!"

"Driving to and from a place in carnival time the students take it away."

"I envy you your independence."

"I'd rather roost."

"Domesticity tires one so. Every time I enter the nursery now it's a strain. To-day was the climax. I've had many years' experience, Mrs. Occles said to me, as a nurse, and I'll have no meddling. Very well, I said to her, you can go! Oh, good gracious! Then at the door, dear, I turned back and I added, Am I the child's mother or are you? That, she said, is no affair of mine! But as a rule I'm accustomed to see the father!! What do you mean by the father? I said. But she wouldn't say."

Miss Dawkins passed her parasol beneath the bed.

" My button boots——! "

" A child has so many little wants, nurse, I said. . . . It should have proper attention. . . . *I* know what a child wants, she said (so rudely), and when it wants it. . . . And there was Bianca looking at her with her little eyes. . . ."

" Still, I wish the Count would come! "

"I hope he's not false to me," the Countess quavered.

" Foreigners usually are, dear. They deceive their wives. . . ."

" If I thought he was unworthy. . .? "

" You're sure, of course, it's binding ? "

" Binding? "

" No loopholes? "

The Countess tittered.

" None," she said.

" Knowing the world as I know it," Miss Dawkins sighed. " Ah, well. . . ."

" There . . . the carriage is at the door."

" I'm ready."

" Have you a magazine or anything for the train? "

" I've a novel only—*Three Lilies and a Moustache.*"

" I like a love story," the Countess confessed, " so long as it isn't drivel."

" Here is Daisy to say good-bye."

" Where's Niece? "

" In France! " the Countess crooned.

" Isn't the child here? "

" Come and kiss me," Miss Dawkins invited.

" I've such news! "

" What is it? "

" The Chase is let at last."

" Goodness! "

" Madame La Chose is in the library now with a professional witness."

" Well? "

" And they've taken the house. I was listening. . . . Madame La Chose said she was prepared to put her hand to an agreement for a ninety-nine years' lease without the farm. And it's to be pulled down immediately. . . . Oh, the rats! "

" Who's the witness? "

" General Lover."

" My dear father once struck me for listening at a door," Miss Dawkins observed.

" And as a reference she gives La Belle Zula. She says her diamonds *alone* are worth the half of Yorkshire."

" Mum must be overjoyed."

" She is."

" One place or another! " Miss Dawkins drawled. " Once the glamour's gone."

" Oh, Ola! "

" I maintain there's little in it."

" I long to go about! " Daisy murmured, pirouetting vainly before the glass.

" Jesu! "

" What openings have I here? "

" There's time enough yet," the Countess assured.

" One sister should help another."

" When you're eligible we'll see."

" If I'm not eligible now I don't know who is! "

Miss Dawkins drew on nervously a glove.

" You've my address in Australia, Viscountess, all right? "

" Belleview—isn't it? Lake George? . . ."

" That's it, old girl."

" I shan't forget."

" I hope the sea'll be level, dear. I can't endure it rough."

" Write soon."

Miss Dawkins nodded.

" It depends on the Master Potter now. But if I ever should find my beloved ones in the East I'll be sure to let you know."

VI

" How would Phryne Street appeal to you, Isabel? " Mr. Collins asked his wife as they sat one morning at breakfast.

" H-m, Charles! . . ."

" Maxilla Gardens then? "

" H-m! . . ."

" Or Gardingore Gate? "

" I want to live in Lisbon," Mrs. Collins said.

Mr. Collins cast aside the paper.

" Where to bend our footsteps to is a problem and a tragedy," he muttered.

" 'Vieto," Daisy suggested in an insinuating voice.

" What would one do dumped down in Orvieto? " Mrs. Collins asked. " It would be as bad as Bovon."

" At 'Vieto it's all arcades, and right on top of a hill! You've to take a lift to get to it. It's the funicular for all. . . ."

" If it's to be Italy I'd sooner it was Rome."

Daisy showed fervour.

" Mab was telling me of the preserves they sell there. All speared on little sticks. At the street corners, she says, the sugar-plums sparkle in the sun just as if they were jewels. . . . I should like to see them. . . . And to taste them too," she added.

" Papa has written to Mrs. Whewell already, alas," Mrs. Collins said, " to inquire whether she has a vacancy at all at York Hill."

" If I studied anywhere it would be abroad."

" Master your native tongue at any rate to begin with," Mr. Collins advised.

" I don't care a jot for distinctions! "

"At your age," Mrs. Collins asserted, "I had a diploma."

"For what?"

"As a nurse."

"Nursing's different."

"I assure you it's very disagreeable. Often it's by no means pleasant."

"Why?"

"What I never could bear about nursing," Mrs. Collins reminiscently said, "was sponging the paint off the face of a corpse."

"I would leave it."

"Even a hospital nurse can go too far. . . ."

"Where's Mabel?"

"I heard her romping with Bianca as I passed her door."

"She doesn't bother herself much of a morning about the time," Mr. Collins complained.

"It's on account of prayers, Charles. Until they're over she naturally doesn't care to come down."

Daisy sipped her tea.

"She did her best to convert me the other day," she said. "With one of her hatpins."

"What?"

". . . An old bead affair. Such a common thing. Not worth sixpence."

"Mab did?"

"And she has her eye on Queen!"

"I fear the tap-room at the Mitre is as near as *he'll* ever get to Rome," Mr. Collins remarked.

"S-s-s-h, Charles. Here he is!"

"Is the Signora stirring yet, Queen?" Daisy asked.

"She has just received her letters."

"Is there anything for me?"

"No, Miss Daisy. There is not."

"I was only wondering——"

Mrs. Collins raised a hand.

" Hark! "

" O-o-o-o-o-o-h! "

" It's her ladyship's cry."

" You'd think Great Pan was dead again—at least.

" Very likely it's her husband's handwriting that affects her," Daisy said. " Or it may be only a parcel! She's expecting, on approval, I know, some fancy-work pyjamas."

" O-o-o-o-o-o-h! "

" Breakfast! " Mrs. Collins carolled.

" He's coming. He'll be here to-day," the Countess announced, elated. " Oio will! "

" Positively? "

" So he says. Oh. . . . And in the night I was dreaming so vividly of a runaway hearse. . . . As it galloped by me one of the mourners gave me *such* a look. I can see it now."

" Was it anybody, Mabsey? "

" How anybody? "

" Likely to suit me."

" A husband! "

" Mabsey! "

" It was a young woman. . . . Poor soul!" the Countess replied.

" What does he say? "

" I'll read you out some of his letter. But it isn't all for you."

" Is it in Italian, Mabel? "

" It's half and half."

" Well? "

" ' My dear dearly,' he begins—he always calls me *dearly!*—' My own, own, little wife. My Mabina——' And then he simply says he's coming. ' *Spero di venire Sabato verso la sera.* . . .' And he sends his filial love, with a kiss, to the English mother—à la mamma Inglese. . . ."

" Ah? "

" Yes. . . . And he intends to take her back with him to Italy, where he has prepared for her benefit a violet and rose salotto. . . ."

" Bless the boy! "

" And then there's a piece of scandal. Oh, good gracious! . . . He says poor Citta Zocchia isn't to wait on the Queen any more! She's done it *this* time. . . . And Dona Formosa de Bergère is to be married in Naples—*Naples!* Oh! Mercy!—to a certain Signor Popi! . . ."

" At what o'clock will he be here? "

" *Verso la sera!* "

" What time would that be? "

" Towards night."

" How vague these husbands are."

" He'll be here for dinner, I dare say," Daisy said.

" We must try to consult his tastes."

" Simple, nourishing things," the Countess said, " he likes. He has a passion for curry."

Mrs. Collins concealed her anxiety.

" In Rome, for example, Mab," she asked, " what do they have when they dine? "

" It depends."

" Besides curry . . ."

" Oh, well, perhaps some little round, pink, sweet potatoes they'll have, and some plain stewed rice. Or, again, very likely it'll be a piece of cold pickled pork. With olive oil and onions. . . . Whatever's seasonable they'll have. . . . And on Friday, of course, it's *fish.*"

" You'll need to tell all this presently to Mrs. Prixon," Mrs. Collins said. " And don't forget one thing. . . . You've to replace that Mrs. Occles."

The Countess sighed.

" If I can't be suited with a Bovon girl or a York young thing I shall have an ayah and get the baby used to things. . . ."

Daisy raised a finger.

" There's her little howl! "

" Poor mite. She can't bear to be left alone with a strange Scotch woman. When Bianca takes an aversion! . . . She's a peculiar child in many ways."

" Let me dress her to-day, Mabsey, may I—just for once? "

" What ever for? "

" Leave her to me. I'll turn her out what's what! "

" Goodness! "

" I've my secrets. . . ."

" I dare say."

" I can build her quite a presence. . . ."

" Mercy! "

" With a proper projection you wouldn't know the child."

" I must fly to her."

" And do, dear, finish your toilet," Mrs. Collins beseeched.

" I trust her husband will confiscate all her trailing, bedraggled negligeys," Mr. Collins said. " Slovenly, nasty things! "

Daisy rippled.

" I wouldn't build upon it," she replied. " Her husband often doesn't get up himself in the morning at all."

" Not? "

" He lies a-bed until all hours. He's a regular sluggard. The shadows will be falling sometimes, she says, and daylight almost gone, and you'll find him still between the sheets."

" Fortunately Madame La Chose will be routing us out of this before very long."

" Eh, Is-a-bel! "

Mrs. Collins glowed.

" And what heavenly happiness," she remarked, " to have no housekeeping—ever any more! "

" Let's all dance to-night."

" My madcap fairy! "

" Her husband dances quite wonderfully, she says."

" Who would there be to play? "

" Victoria owns a concertina."

" That's no good."

" And William has a banjo. . . . According to him, the banjo is the king of instruments."

" Nonsense. I shouldn't think it was."

" Oh! Mumsey! . . ."

" We might perhaps call in the Bovon string quartet," Mrs. Collins said. " Just for a serenade."

" Oh! what ever has happened to Niece? "

" If she's peevish, poor mite," the Countess said, returning, " it's on account of the little mulligrubs. . . ."

" You can't expect a child of her years to be reasonable," Mrs. Collins commented. " It wouldn't be natural."

" Let me have her," Daisy begged.

" Don't, Daisy! "

" What the child likes best is a reel of cotton. She'll play with that when she wouldn't play with me. . . ."

" *Pucci! Pucci!* " Mrs. Collins ventured.

" *Ecco la nonna! La buona cara nonna.* . . . Ah, *santo Dio!* "

" When I say *cui* to her, somehow she doesn't seem to like it! "

Daisy wagged her tongue.

" Lat-lat! "

" How can you be so gross! "

" Let me lull her. Shall I? "

" She's never quiet for you."

" Wait till she hears the story of Blowzalinda and the Fairy Bee."

" Oh, it's beyond the child. . . . She wouldn't know. Buz-z-z! "

" Isabel! "

" Yes, dear? "

" Cook requires her orders."

" Where is she? "

" Behind the screen."

" Help me, Mabel," Mrs. Collins said.

" *Gigi! Ribu!* Oh, the clim pickle! "

" Give her to me, Mabsey."

" Yum. Yum."

" Give her to me."

" She lifts her little hand up to her little nose and then she presses it."

" It's one of her little sarcasms, I expect."

" She finds the world *so* weird."

" Still it's good to know she has such an aunt. A good aunt, she says, is an untold blessing."

" Help me! " Mrs. Collins implored.

" How? "

" Curry—and then? . . ."

The Countess turned her head.

" He can't endure a rabbit," she remarked.

" My dear, no one proposes it! "

" Once the child and I were driving on the Via Appia Nuova when we saw a bunny peeping out of a tomb. Oh, such a darling! So I stopped the carriage and told Luigi, the footman, to run and dispatch it if he possibly could. He brought it back to me. . . . And a few hours afterwards it was bubbling away into a fine chicken broth. Oio had it all. . . . But hardly had it passed his lips when he was seized with the most violent spasms. Whereupon he turned round and accused me of attempting to do what certain Renaissance wives are supposed to have sometimes done. Oh! He was so cross. He was as cross as cross. . . . So don't let's have rabbit."

" Polpettino, perhaps? "

" In olive oil; garnished ' Mussolini-wise.' "

" And then? "

" Oh, then, what he really adores, what he simply can't resist, is a fritter."

" Cheese? "

" Any kind. And he loves a savoury! Zuccata, he likes. Zuccata, Zuccatini. . . . And he's fond of a soufflé too, so long as it isn't *led*."

" Not to anticipate, my dear . . ."

" Then——"

" Olive oil! "

" And then——"

" Then," Mrs. Collins' voice rose as if inspired, " then Côtelettes—à la Milanaise. . . ."

CAPRICE

TO
STEPHEN HAMMERTON

Τίς δ' ἀγροιῶτίς τοι θέλγει νόον,
οὐκ ἐπωταμένα τὰ βράκε' ἔλκην ἐπὶ τῶν σφύρων.—Sappho.

I

THE clangour of bells grew insistent. In uncontrollable hilarity pealed S. Mary, contrasting clearly with the subdued carillon of S. Mark. From all sides, seldom in unison, resounded bells. S. Elizabeth and S. Sebastian, in Flower Street, seemed in loud dispute, while S. Ann " on the Hill," all hollow, cracked, consumptive, fretful, did nothing but complain. Near by S. Nicaise, half paralysed and impotent, feebly shook. Then, triumphant, in a hurricane of sound, S. Irene hushed them all.

It was Sunday again.

Up and up, and still up, the winding ways of the city the straggling townsfolk toiled.

Now and again a pilgrim perhaps would pause in the narrow lane behind the Deanery to rest.

Opening a black lacquer fan and setting the window of her bedroom wide, Miss Sarah Sinquier peered out.

The lane, very frequently, would prove interesting of an afternoon.

Across it, the Cathedral rose up before her with wizardry against the evening sky.

Miss Sinquier raised her eyes towards the twin grey spires, threw up her arms, and yawned.

From a pinnacle a devil with limbs entwined about some struggling crowned-coiffed prey grimaced.

" For I yearn for those kisses you gave me once
On the steps by Bakerloo! "

Miss Sinquier crooned caressingly, craning further out.

Under the little old lime trees by the Cathedral door lounged Lady Caroline Dempsey's Catholic footman.

Miss Sinquier considered him.

In her mind's eye she saw the impression her own conversion would make in the parochial world.

"Canon Sinquier's only daughter has gone over to Rome. . . ." Or, "Canon Sinquier's daughter has taken the veil." Or, "Miss Sinquier, having suffered untold persecution at the hands of her family, has been received into the Convent of the Holy Dove."

Her eyes strayed leisurely from the powdered head and weeping shoulder-knots of Lady Caroline Dempsey's Catholic footman. The lack of movement was oppressive.

Why was not Miss Worrall in her customary collapse being borne senseless to her Gate in the Sacristan's arms? And why to-night were they not chaunting the Psalms?

Darting out her tongue, Miss Sinquier withdrew her head and resumed her book.

"Pouf!"

She shook her fan.

The room would soon be dark.

From the grey-toned walls, scriptural, a *Sasso Sassi* frowned.

"In all these fruitful years," she read, "the only time he is recorded to have smiled was when a great rat ran in and out among some statues. . . . *He* was the Ideal Hamlet. Morose of countenance, and cynical by nature, his outbursts, at times, would completely freeze the company."

Miss Sinquier passed her finger-tips lightly across her hair.

"Somehow it makes no difference," she murmured, turning towards a glass. To feign Ophelia—no matter what!

She pulled about her a lace Manilla shawl.

It was as though it were Andalusia whenever she wrapped it on.

" *Dona Rosarda!* "

" *Fernan Perez? What do you want?* "

" *Ravishing Rosarda, I need you.*"

" *I am the wife of Don José Cuchillo—the Moor.*"

" *Dona Rosarda Castilda Cuchillo, I love you.*"

" *Sh—! My husband will be back directly.*"

Stretched at ease before a pier-glass, Miss Sinquier grew enthralled.

An hour sped by.

The room was almost dark.

Don José would wish his revenge.

" *Rosarda.*"

" *Fernando?* "

" *Ah-h!* "

Miss Sinquier got up.

She must compose herself for dinner—wash off the blood.

Poor Fernan!

She glanced about her, a trifle Spanish still.

From a clothes-peg something hanging seemed to implore.

" To see me? Why, bless you. Yes! "

With an impetuous, pretty gesture she flung it upon a couch.

" How do I like America? "

" I adore it . . . You see . . . I've lost my heart here—! Tell them so—oh! especially to the men. . . . Whereabouts was I born? In Westmorland; yes. *In England, Sir!* Inquisitive? Why not at all. I was born in the sleepy peaceful town of Applethorp (three p's), in the inmost heart—right in the very middle," Miss Sinquier murmured, tucking a few wild flowers under her chin, " of the *Close.*"

II

"SALLY," her father said, "I could not make out where you sat at Vespers, child, to-night."

In the old-world Deanery drawing-room, coffee and liqueurs—a Sunday indulgence—had been brought in.

Miss Sinquier set down her cup.

Behind her, through the open windows, a riot of light leaves and creepers was swaying restively to and fro.

"I imagine the *Font* hid me," she answered with a little laugh.

Canon Sinquier considered with an absent air an abundant-looking moon, then turned towards his wife.

"To-morrow, Mary," he said, "there's poor Mrs. Cushman again."

At her cylinder-desk, between two flickering candles, Mrs. Sinquier, while her coffee grew cold, was opening her heart to a friend.

"Do, Mike, keep still," she begged.

"Still?"

"Don't fidget. Don't talk."

"Or dare to breathe," her daughter added, taking up a Sunday journal and approaching nearer the light.

"'At the Olive Theatre,'" she read, "'Mrs. Starcross will produce a new comedy, in the coming autumn, which promises to be of the highest interest.'"

Her eyes kindled.

"O God!"

"'At the Kehama, Yvonde Yalta will be seen shortly in a Japanese piece, with singing mandarins, geishas, and old samurai—'"

"Dear Lord!"

" ' Mr. and Mrs. Mary are said to be contemplating management again.' "

" Heavens above! "

" ' For the revival of *She Stoops to*——' "

Crescendo, across the mist-clad Close broke a sorrowful, sated voice.

" You can fasten the window, Sarah," Canon Sinquier said.

" It's Miss Biggs! "

" Who could have taught her? How? " the Canon wondered.

Mrs. Sinquier laid down her pen.

" I dread her intimate dinner! " she said.

" Is it to be intimate? "

" Isn't she always? ' Come round and see me soon, Miss Sarah, *there's* a dear, and let's be intimate!' "

" Really, Sally! "

" Sally can take off anyone."

" It's vulgar, dear, to mimic."

" Vulgar? "

" It isn't nice."

" Many people do."

" Only mountebanks."

" I'd bear a good deal to be on the stage."

Canon Sinquier closed his eyes.

" Recite, dear, something; soothe me," he said.

" Of course, if you wish it."

" Soothe me, Sally! "

" Something to obliterate the sermon? "

Miss Sinquier looked down at her feet. She had on black babouches all over little pearls with filigree butterflies that trembled above her toes.

" Since first I beheld you, Adele,
While dancing the celinda,
I have remained faithful to the thought of you;
My freedom has departed from me,

I care no longer for all other negresses;
I have no heart left for them;—
You have such grace and cunning;—
You are like the Congo serpent."

Miss Sinquier paused.

"You need the proper movements . . ." she explained. "One ought *really* to shake one's shanks!"

"Being a day of rest, my dear, we will dispense with it."

"I love you too much, my beautiful one—
I am not able to help it.
My heart has become just like a grasshopper,—
It does nothing but leap.
I have never met any woman
Who has so beautiful a form as yours.
Your eyes flash flame;
Your body has enchained me captive.

Ah, you are like the rattlesnake
Who knows how to charm the little bird,
And who has a mouth ever ready for it
To serve it for a tomb.
I have never known any negress
Who could walk with such grace as you can,
Or who could make such beautiful gestures;
Your body is a beautiful doll.

When I cannot see you, Adele,
I feel myself ready to die;
My life becomes like a candle
Which has almost burned itself out.
I cannot then find anything in the world
Which is able to give me pleasure:

I could well go down to the river
And throw myself in so that I might cease to suffer.

Tell me if you have a man,
And I will make an ouanga charm for him;
I will make him turn into a phantom,
If you will only take me for your husband.
I will not go to see you when you are cross:
Other women are mere trash to me;
I will make you very happy
And I will give you a beautiful Madras handkerchief."

" Thank you, thank you, Sally."

" It is from *Ozias Midwinter*."

Mrs. Sinquier shuddered.

" Those scandalous topsies that entrap our missionaries! " she said.

" In Oshkosh——"

" Don't, Mike. The horrors that go on in certain places, I'm sure no one would believe."

Miss Sinquier caressed lightly the Canon's cheek.

" Soothed? " she asked.

" . . . Fairly."

" When I think of those coloured coons," Mrs. Sinquier went on, " at the Palace fête last year! Roaming all night in the Close. . . . And when I went to look out next day there stood an old mulattress holding up the baker's boy in the lane."

" There, Mary! "

" Tired, dear? "

" Sunday's always a strain."

" For you, alas! it's bound to be."

" There were the Catechetical Classes to-day."

" Very soon now Sally will learn to relieve you."

Miss Sinquier threw up her eyes.

" I? " she wondered.

"Next Sunday; it's time you should begin."

"Between now and *that*," Miss Sinquier reflected, shortly afterwards, on her way upstairs, "I shall almost certainly be in town."

"O London—City of Love!" she warbled softly as she locked her door.

III

In the gazebo at the extremity of the garden, by the new parterre, Miss Sinquier, in a morning wrapper, was waiting for the post.

Through the trellis chinks, semi-circular, showed the Close, with its plentiful, seasoned timber and sedate, tall houses, a stimulating sequence, architecturally, of whitewash, stone and brick.

Miss Sinquier stirred impatiently.

Wretch!—to deliver at the Palace before the Deanery, when the Deanery was as near!

"Shower down over there, O Lord, ten thousand fearsome bills," extemporaneously she prayed, "and spare them not at all. Amen."

Hierarchic hands shot upwards.

Dull skies.

She waited.

Through the Palace gates, at length, the fellow lurched, sorting as he came.

"Dolt!"

Her eyes devoured his bag.

Coiled round and round like some sleek snake her future slumbered in it.

Husband; lovers . . . little lives, perhaps—yet to be . . . besides voyages, bouquets, diamonds, chocolates, duels, casinos! . . .

She shivered.

"Anything for me, Hodge, to-day," she inquired, "by chance?"

"A fine morning, miss."

"Unusually."

It had come . . .

That large mauve envelope, with the wild handwriting and the haunting scent was from *her*.

As she whisked away her heart throbbed fast. Through the light spring foliage she could see her father, with folded hands, pacing meditatively to and fro before the front of the house.

" Humbug! " she murmured, darting down a gravel path towards the tradesmen's door.

Regaining her room, she promptly undid the seal.

" Panvale Priory, Shaftesbury Avenue,
" London, W.

" Mrs. Albert Bromley presents her compliments to Miss S. Sinquier and will be pleased to offer her her experience and advice on Thursday morning next at the hour Miss Sinquier names.

" *P.S.* Mrs. Bromley already feels a parent's sympathetic interest in Miss Sinquier. Is she dark or fair?. . . Does she shape for Lady Macbeth or is she a Lady Teazle? "

" Both! " Miss Sinquier gurgled, turning a deft somersault before the glass.

To keep the appointment, without being rushed, she would be obliged to set out, essentially baggageless, to-night—a few requisites merely, looped together and concealed beneath her dress, would be the utmost she could manage.

" A lump here and a lump there! " she breathed, " and I can unburden myself in the train."

" Okh! "

She peeped within her purse.

. . . And there was Godmother's chain that she would sell!

It should bring grist; perhaps close on a thousand pounds. Misericordia: to be compelled to part with it!

Opening a levant-covered box, she drew out a long flat tray.

Adorable pearls!

How clearly now they brought her Godmother to mind . . . a little old body . . . with improbable cherry-cheeks and excrescent upper lip, with always the miniatures of her three deceased husbands clinging about one arm. . . . "Aren't they pleasant?" she would say proudly every now and then. . . . What talks they had had; and sometimes of an evening through the mauve moonlight they would strut together.

Ah! She had been almost ugly then; clumsy, gawky, *gauche* . . .

Now that she was leaving Applethorp, for ever perhaps, how dormant impressions revived!

The Saunders' Fifeshire bull, one New Year's night, ravaging the Close, driven frantic by the pealings of the bells. The time poor Dixon got drowned—at a Flower Show, a curate's eyes—a German governess's walk—a mould of calves'-foot jelly she had let fall in the Cathedral once, on her way somewhere——

She replaced ruefully her pearls.

What else?

Her artist fingers hovered.

Mere bridesmaid's rubbish; such frightful frippery.

She turned her thoughts to the room.

Over the bed, an antique bush-knife of barbaric shape, supposed to have been *Abraham's*, was quite a collector's piece.

It might be offered to some museum perhaps. The Nation ought to have it . . .

She sighed shortly.

And downstairs in the butler's room there were possessions of hers, besides. What of those Apostle spoons, and the two-pronged forks, and the chased tureen?

Leonard frequently had said it took the best part of a day to polish her plate alone.

And to go away and leave it all!

" O God, help me, Dear," she prayed. " This little once, O Lord! For Thou knowest my rights . . ."

She waited.

Why did not an angel with a basket of silver appear?

" Oh, well . . ."

Gripper, no doubt, would suspect something odd if she asked for her things " to play with " for an hour. . . .

A more satisfactory scheme would be to swoop into the pantry, on her way to the station, and to take them away for herself.

She had only to say, " Make haste with them crevets," for Gripper to go off in a huff, and Leonard, should he be there, would be almost sure to follow.

Men were so touchy.

Hush!

Her mother's voice came drifting from below.

" Kate! Kate! Kate! Kate! "

She listened.

" Have the chintz curtains in the white room folded," she could hear her say, " and remember what I said about the carpet . . ."

Dear soul!

Miss Sinquier sniffed.

Was it a tear?

Dear soul! Dear souls! . . .

" Never mind," she murmured, " they shall have *sofas* in their box on the night of my début . . ."

She consoled herself with the thought.

IV

" MAKE haste now with them crevets! "

" For shame, miss. I shall go straight to the Dean!"

" Cr-r-r-evets! " Miss Sinquier called.

Clad in full black, with a dark felt *chapeau de résistance* and a long Lancastrian shawl, she felt herself no mean match for any man.

" C-r-r-r," she growled, throwing back her shawl.

After all, were not the things her own?

She laughed gaily.

" If dear Mrs. Bromley could see me," she beamed, tucking dexterously away an apostolic spoon.

" ' St. Matthew—St. Mark—St. Luke—St. John—
These sprang into bed with their breeches on.' "

At a friendly frolic once a Candidate for Orders had waltzed her about to that.

She recalled Fräulein's erudite query still:

" Pray, why did they not take off all like the others?"

And the young man's significant reasons and elaborate suppositions, and Fräulein's creamy tone as she said she *quite* understood.

Miss Sinquier turned a key.

S-s-s-st!

" Butter fingers."

In a moment she must run.

Terrible to forgo her great tureen . . .

She poked it. What magnitude to be sure!

Impossible to tow it along.

Under the circumstances, why not take something less cumbersome instead?

There were the Caroline sauce-boats, or the best Anne teapot, hardly if ever in use.

Her ideas raced on.

And who could resist those gorgeous grapes, for the train?

Together with their dish . . .

" Tudor, ' Harry '! " she breathed.

From the corridor came a hum of voices.

Flinging her wrap about her, Miss Sinquier slipped quietly out by way of a small room, where the Canon preserved his lawn.

Outside, the moon was already up—a full moon, high and white, a wisp of cloud stretched across it like a blindfold face.

Oh Fame, dear!

She put up her face.

Across the garden the Cathedral loomed out of a mist as white as milk.

The damp, she reasoned, alone would justify her flight!

She shivered.

How sombre it looked in the lane.

There were roughs there frequently too.

" Villains . . ."

She felt fearfully her pearls.

After all, the initial step in any career was usually reckoned the worst.

Some day, at the King's, or the Canary, or the Olive, in the warmth of a stage dressing-room, she would be amused, perhaps, and say:

" I left my father's roof, sir, one sweet spring night —without so much as a word! "

V

RAINDROPS were falling although the sky was visibly brightening as Miss Sinquier, tired, and a little uncertain, passed through the main exit of Euston terminus.

She wavered a moment upon the curb.

On a hoarding, as if to welcome her, a dramatic poster of Fan Fisher unexpectedly warmed her heart; it was almost like being met . . .

There stood Fan, at concert pitch, as Masha Olgaruski in *The Spy*.

Miss Sinquier tingled.

A thing like that was enough to give one wings for a week.

She set off briskly, already largely braced.

Before meeting Mrs. Bromley on the morrow much would have to be done.

There was the difficulty of lodgement to consider.

Whenever she had been in the metropolis before she had stayed at *Millars* in Eric Street, overlooking Percy Place; because Mr. Millar had formerly been employed at the Deanery, and had, moreover, married their cook. . . .

But before going anywhere she must acquire a trunk.

Even Church dignitaries had been known to be refused accommodation on arriving at a strange hotel with nothing but themselves.

She threw a glance upwards towards a clock.

It was early yet!

All the wonderful day stretched before her, and in the evening she would take a ticket perhaps for some light vaudeville or new revue.

She studied the pleasure announcements on the motor-buses as they swayed along.

Stella Starcross—The Lady from the Sea—This evening, Betty Buttermilk and Co.—Rose Tournesol—Mr. and Mrs. Mary's Season: The Carmelite—The Shop Boy—Clemenza di Tito. To-night!

Miss Sinquier blinked.

Meanwhile the family teapot was becoming a bore.

Until the shops should open up it might be well to take a taxi and rest in the Park for an hour.

The weather was clearing fast; the day showed signs of heat.

She hailed a passing cab.

"Hyde Park," she murmured, climbing slowly in.

She thrilled.

Upon the floor and over the cushions of the cab were sprinkled fresh confetti—turquoise, pink and violet, gold and green.

She took up some.

As a mascot, she reflected, it would be equivalent to a cinqfoil of clover, or a tuft of edelweiss, or a twist of hangman's rope.

VI

FROM the big hotel in the vicinity of the Marble Arch, to the consulting rooms in Shaftesbury Avenue of Mrs. Albert Bromley, it appeared, on inquiry, that the distance might easily be accomplished in less than forty minutes.

Miss Sinquier, nevertheless, decided to allow herself more.

Garmented charmingly in a cornflower-blue frock with a black gauze turban trimmed with a forest of tinted leaves, she lingered, uplifted by her appearance, before the glass.

The sober turban, no doubt, would suggest to Mrs. Bromley Macbeth—the forest-scene, and the blue, she murmured, " might be anything."

It occurred to her as she left her room that Mr. Bromley might quite conceivably be there to assist his wife.

" Odious if he is," she decided, passing gaily out into the street.

It was just the morning for a walk. A pale silvery light spread over Oxford Street, while above the shop fronts the sun flashed down upon a sea of brass-tipped masts, from whence trade flags trembled in a vagrant breeze. Rejoicing in her independence, and in the exhilarating brightness of the day, Miss Sinquier sailed along. The ordeal of a first meeting with a distinguished dramatic expert diminished at every step. She could conjecture with assurance, almost, upon their ultimate mutual understanding. But before expressing any opinion, Mrs. Bromley, no doubt, would require to test her voice; perhaps, also, expect her to dance and declaim.

Miss Sinquier thrust out her lips.

"Not before Albert! Or at any rate not yet . . ." she muttered.

She wondered what she knew.

There was the thing from *Rizzio*. The Mistress of the Robes' lament upon her vanished youth, on discovering a mirror unexpectedly, one morning, at Holyrood, outside Queen Mary's door.

Diamond, Lady Drummond, bearing the Queen a cap, raps, smiles, listens . . . smiles, raps again, puts out her leg and rustles . . . giggles, ventures to drop a ring, effusive facial play and sundry tentative noises, when, catching sight of her reflection, she starts back with:

"O obnoxious old age! O hideous horror! O youthful years all gone! O childhood spent! Decrepitude at hand . . . Infirmities drawing near. . . ."

Interrupted by Mary's hearty laugh.

"Yes," Miss Sinquier decided, crossing into Regent Street, "should Mrs. Bromley bid me declaim, I'll do Diamond."

Her eyes brightened.

How prettily the street swerved.

As a rule, great thoroughfares were free from tricks.

She sauntered.

"A picture-palace."

And just beyond were the playhouses themselves.

Theatreland!

Shaftesbury Avenue with its slightly foreign aspect stretched before her.

With a springing foot she turned up it.

Oh, those fragile glass façades with the players' names suspended!

There was the new Merrymount Theatre with its roguish Amorini supporting torches and smiling down over gay flower-boxes on to the passers-by.

And beyond, where the burgeoning trees began, must be Panvale Priory itself.

Miss Sinquier surveyed it.

It looked to be public offices. . . .

On the mat, dressed in a violet riband, with its paw in the air, lay a great sly, black, joyous cat.

" Toms! "

She scratched it.

Could it be Mrs. Bromley's?

In the threshold, here and there, were small brass plates, that brought to mind somehow memorial tablets to departed virtue at home.

Miss Sinquier studied the inscriptions.

Ah, there showed hers!

" M-m-m! " she murmured, commencing to climb.

Under the skylight a caged bird was singing shrilly.

As much to listen as to brush something to her cheeks, Miss Sinquier paused.

If a microscopic mirror could be relied upon she had seldom looked so well.

Scrambling up the remaining stairs with alacrity, she knocked.

A maid with her head wreathed in curl-papers answered the door, surveying the visitor first through a muslin blind.

Miss Sinquier pulled out a card.

" Is Mrs. Bromley in? " she asked.

The woman gazed at her feet.

" Mrs. Bromley's gone! " she replied.

" I suppose she won't be long? "

" She's in Elysium."

" At the——? "

" Poor Mrs. Bromley's dead."

" Mrs. Bromley *dead* . . .? "

" Poor Mrs. Bromley died last night."

Miss Sinquier staggered.

" Impossible! "

" Perhaps you'd care to come in and sit down? "

Miss Sinquier hesitated.

" No, no, not if . . . *is?* Oh! " she stammered.

" She was taken quite of a sudden."

" One can hardly yet believe it? "

" She'll be a loss to her world, alas, poor Betty Bromley will!"

Miss Sinquier swallowed.

" I should like to attend the funeral," she said.

" There's no funeral."

" No funeral? "

" No invitations, that is."

Miss Sinquier turned away.

The very ground under her seemed to slide . . .

Mrs. Bromley dead!

Why, the ink of her friendly note seemed scarcely dry!

On the pavement once more she halted to collect herself.

Who was there left at all?

At Croydon there was a conservatoire, of course—

She felt a little guilty at the rapidity of the idea.

Wool-gathering, she breasted the traffic in St. Martin's Lane.

She would turn over the situation presently more easily in the Park.

Instinctively, she stopped to examine a portrait of Yvonde Yalta in the open vestibule of the Dream.

She devoured it: Really . . . ? Really? She resembled more some Girton guy than a great coquette.

All down the street indeed, at the theatre doors, were studies of artists, scenes from current plays.

By the time she found herself back in Piccadilly Circus again Miss Sinquier was nearly fainting from inanition.

She peered around.

In Regent Street, she reflected, almost certainly, there must be some nice tea-shop, some cool creamery . . .

How did this do?

" The Café Royal! "

Miss Sinquier fluttered in.

By the door, the tables all proved to be taken.

Such a noise!

Everyone seemed to be chattering, smoking, lunching, casting dice, or playing dominoes.

She advanced slowly through a veil of opal mist, feeling her way from side to side with her parasol.

It was like penetrating deeper and deeper into a bath.

She put out her hand in a swimming, groping gesture, twirling as she did so, accidentally, an old gentleman's moustache.

Thank heaven! There, by that pillar, was a vacant place.

She sank down on to the edge of a crowded couch, as in a dream.

The tall mirrors that graced the walls told her she was tired.

" Bring me some China tea," she murmured to a passing waiter, " and a bun with currants in it."

She leaned back.

The realisation of her absolute loneliness overcame her suddenly.

Poor Mrs. Bromley, poor kindly little soul!

The tears sprang to her eyes.

It would have been a relief to have blotted her face against some neighbouring blouse or waistcoat and to have had a hearty cry.

" Excuse me, may I ask you to be so good——"

Just before her on the table was a stand for matches.

With a mournful glance she slid the apparatus from her in the direction of an adolescent of a sympathetic, somewhat sentimental, appearance, who, despite emphatic whiskers, had the air of a wildly pretty girl.

To have cherished such a one as a brother! Miss Sinquier reflected, as the waiter brought her tea.

While consuming it she studied the young man's chiselled profile from the corners of her eyes.

Supporting his chin upon the crook of a cane, he was listening, as if enthralled, to a large florid man, who, the centre of a small rapt group, was relating in a high-pitched, musical voice, how "Poor dear Chaliapin one day had asked for Kvass and was given Bass. And that reminds me," the speaker said, giving the table an impressive thump, "of the time when Anna Held—let go."

Miss Sinquier glowed.

Here were stage folk, artists, singers . . . that white thin girl in the shaggy hat opposite was without doubt a temperament akin.

She felt drawn to speak.

"Can you tell me how I should go to Croydon?" she asked.

The words came slowly, sadly almost . . .

"To Croydon?"

"You can't go to Croydon."

"Why not?"

The young man of the whiskers looked amused.

"When we all go to Spain to visit Velasquez——"

"Goya——!"

"Velasquez!"

"Goya! Goya! Goya!"

". . . We'll set you on your way."

"Goose!"

"One goes to Croydon best by Underground," the pale-looking girl remarked.

Miss Sinquier winced.

"Underground!"

Her lip quivered.

"Is there anything the matter?"

"Only——"

Folding her arms upon the table she sank despairingly forward and burst into tears.

"Poor Mrs. Bromley!" she sobbed.

"In the name of *Fortune* . . ." The pale young woman wondered.

"What has Serephine said? What has Mrs. Sixsmith done?"

"Monstrous tease!"

The stout man wagged a finger.

"Wicked!" he commented.

The lady addressed kindled.

"I merely advised her to go Underground. By tube."

"O God." Miss Sinquier shook.

"It's hysteria. Poor thing, you can see she's overwrought."

"Give her a *fine; un bon petit cognac.*"

"Waiter!"

"Garçon."

"Never mind, Precious," the fat man crooned. "You shall ride in a comfy taxi-cab with me."

"No; indeed she shan't," Mrs. Sixsmith snapped. "You may rely on me, Ernest, for that!"

Rejecting the proffered spirits with a gesture, Miss Sinquier controlled her grief.

"It's not *often* I'm so silly," she said.

"There, there!"

"Excuse this exhibition. . . ."

Mrs. Sixsmith squeezed her hand.

"My poor child," she said, "I fear you've had a shock."

"It's over now."

"I'm so glad."

"You've been very good."

"Not at all. You interest me."

"Why?"

"Why? Why? . . . I'm sure I can't say *why!* But directly I saw you . . ."

"It's simply wonderful."

" You marched in here for all the world like some great coquette."

" You mean the Father Christmas at the door? "

" Tell me what had happened."

In a few words Miss Sinquier recounted her tale.

" My dear," Mrs. Sixsmith said, " I shouldn't think of it again. I expect this Mrs. Bromley was nothing but an old procuress."

" A procuress? "

" A stage procuress."

" How dreadful it sounds."

" Have you no artistic connections in town *at all?*"

" Not really . . ."

" Then here, close at hand . . . sitting with you and me," she informally presented, " is Mr. Ernest Stubbs, whose wild wanderings in the Gog-magog hills in sight of Cambridge, orchestrally described, recently thrilled us all. Next to him—tuning his locks and twisting his cane—you'll notice Mr. Harold Weathercock, an exponent of calf-love parts at the Dream. And, beyond, blackening her nose with a cigarette, sprawls the most resigned of women—Miss Whipsina Peters, a daughter of the famous flagellist —and a coryphée herself."

Miss Peters nodded listlessly.

" Toodle-doo," she murmured.

" As a coryphée, I suppose her diamonds are a sight? "

" A sight!" Mrs. Sixsmith closed her eyes. "They're all laid up in lavender, I fear."

" In lavender? "

" Pledged."

" Oh, poor soul!"

" Just now you spoke of a necklace of your own . . . a pearl rope, or something, that you wish to sell."

" Unhappily I'm obliged."

" I've a notion I might be of service in the matter."

"How?"

"Through an old banker-friend of mine—Sir Oliver Dawtry. Down Hatton Garden way and throughout the City he has enormous interests. And I should say *he* could place your pearls—if anyone could!"

"Do you think he'd be bothered?"

"That I'll undertake."

"Does he live in town?"

"In a sense: he has a large house in the Poultry."

"Of course I should be willing to show him my pearls."

"Sir Oliver is offering me a little dinner to-night. And I should be happy for you to join us."

"Oh? . . . I think I scarcely dare!"

"Rubbish! One must be bolder than that if one means to get on!"

"Tell me where you dine."

"At Angrezini's. It's a little restaurant . . . with a nigger band. And we sing between the courses."

"Will Mr. Sixsmith be there?"

"My dear, Mr. Sixsmith and I don't live together any more."

"Forgive me."

"That's all right . . ."

Miss Sinquier's eyes grew dim.

"Used he to act?" she asked.

"*Act!*"

"I seem to have heard of him."

Mrs. Sixsmith looked away.

"Are you coming, Serephine?" her neighbour asked.

"Are you all off?"

The florid man nodded impressively.

"Yes . . . we're going now . . ." he said.

"What are Whipsina's plans?"

Miss Peters leaned closely forward over several pairs of knees.

"I shall stay where I am," she murmured, "and perhaps take a nap. There's sure to be a tremendous exodus directly."

Miss Sinquier rose. "I've some shopping," she said, "to do."

"Until this evening, then."

"At what o'clock?"

"At eight."

"On arrival, am I to ask for you?"

"Better ask for Sir Oliver—one never knows . . . And I might perhaps happen to be late."

"But you won't be? You mustn't . . ."

"I will explain whatever's needful by telephone to Sir Oliver now. And during dinner," Mrs. Sixsmith bubbled, "while the old gentleman picks a quail, we will see what we can do!"

"How can I express my thanks . . .?"

"The question of commission," Mrs. Sixsmith murmured with a slight smile, "we will discuss more fully later on."

VII

SUBJECTIVE. On a rack in the loom. Powerless oneself to grasp the design. Operated on by others. At the mercy of chance fingers, unskilled fingers, tender fingers; nails of all sorts. Unable to progress alone. Finding fulfilment through friction and because of friction. Stung into sentiency gradually, bit by bit—a toe at a time.

After all there was a *zest* in it; and who should blame the raw material should an accident occur by the way . . .

Careless of an intriguing world about her, Miss Sinquier left her hotel, just so as to arrive at Angrezini's last.

"For Thou knowest well my safety is in *Thee*," she murmured to herself mazily as her taxi skirted the Park.

Having disposed of her Anne teapot for close on seventy pounds, she was looking more radiant than ever in a frail Byzantine tunic that had cost her fifty guineas.

"Thy Sally's safety," she repeated, absently scanning the Park.

Through the shadowy palings it slipped away, abundantly dotted with lovers. Some were plighting themselves on little chairs, others preferred the green ground: and beyond them, behind the whispering trees, the sky gleamed pale and luminous as church glass.

Glory to have a lover too, she reflected, and to stroll leisurely-united through the evening streets, between an avenue of sparkling lamps . . .

Her thoughts turned back to the young man in the Café Royal.

"Of all the bonny loves!" she breathed, as her taxi stopped.

"Angrezini!"

A sturdy negro helped her out.

"For Thou knowest very well——" her lips moved faintly.

The swinging doors whirled her in.

She found herself directly in a small bemirrored room with a hatch on one side of it, in which an old woman in a voluminous cap was serenely knitting.

Behind her dangled furs and wraps that scintillated or made pools of heavy shade as they caught or missed the light.

Relinquishing her own strip of tulle, Miss Sinquier turned about her.

Through a glass door she could make out Mrs. Sixsmith herself, seated in a cosy red-walled sitting-room beyond.

She was looking staid as a porcelain goddess in a garment of trailing white with a minute griffin-eared dog peeping out its sheeny paws and head wakefully from beneath her train.

At sight of her guest Mrs. Sixsmith smiled and rose.

"Sir Oliver hasn't yet come!" she said, imprinting on Miss Sinquier's youthful cheek a salute of *hospitality*.

"He hasn't? And I made sure I should be last."

Mrs. Sixsmith consulted the time.

"From the Bank to the Poultry, and from the Poultry on . . . just consider," she calculated, subsiding leisurely with Miss Sinquier upon a spindle-legged settee.

"You telephoned?"

"I told him all your story."

"Well?"

"He has promised me to do his utmost."

"He will?"

"You should have heard us. This Mrs. Bromley, he pretends . . . Oh, well . . . one must not be too harsh on the dead."

"Poor little woman."

"Let me admire your frock."

"You like it?"

"I never saw anything so waggish."

"No, no, *please*——!"

"Tell me where they are!"

"What?"

"I'm looking for your pearls."

"They're in my hair."

"Show me."

"I'll miss them terribly."

"Incline!"

"How?"

"More."

"I can't!"

"They're very nice. But bear in mind one thing ——"

"Yes?"

Mrs. Sixsmith slipped an encircling arm about Miss Sinquier's waist.

"Always remember," she said, "to a City man, twelve hundred sounds less than a thousand. Just as a year, to you and me, sounds more than eighteen months!"

"I'll not forget."

"Here is Sir Oliver now."

Through the swing doors an elderly man with a ruddy, rather apoplectic face, and close-set opaque eyes, precipitantly advanced.

"Ladies!"

"'Ladies' indeed, Sir Oliver."

"As if——"

" Monster."

" Excuse me, Serephine."

" Your pardon rests with Miss Sinquier," Mrs. Sixsmith said with melodious inflections as she showed the way towards the restaurant. " Address your petitions to her."

In the crescent-shaped, cedar-walled, cedar-beamed room, a table at a confidential angle had been reserved.

" There's a big gathering here to-night," Sir Oliver observed, glancing round him, a " board-room " mask clinging to him still.

Miss Sinquier looked intellectual.

" I find it hot! " she said.

" You do."

" I find London really very hot. . . . It's after the north, I suppose. In the north it's always much cooler."

" Are you from the north? "

" Yes, indeed she is," Mrs. Sixsmith chimed in. " And so am *I*," she said. " Two north-country girls!" she added gaily.

Sir Oliver spread sentimentally his feet.

" The swans at Blenheim; the peacocks at Warwick! " he sighed.

" What do you mean, Sir Oliver? "

" Intimate souvenirs . . ."

" I should say so. . . . Swans and peacocks! I wonder you're prepared to admit it."

" Admit it? "

" Outside of *Confessions*, Sir Oliver."

Miss Sinquier raised a hurried hand to her glass.

" No, no, no, no, no, no wine! " she exclaimed. " Something milky . . ."

" Fiddlesticks! Our first little dinner."

" Oh, Sir Oliver!"

" And not, I trust, our last! "

" I enjoy it so much—going out."

Mrs. Sixsmith slapped her little dog smartly upon the eyes with her fan.

"Couch-toi," she admonished.

"What can fret her?"

"She fancies she sees Paul."

"Worthless fellow!" Sir Oliver snapped.

"I was his rib, Sir Oliver."

"Forget it."

"I can't forget it."

"J-j-j——"

"Only this afternoon I ran right into him—it was just outside the Café Royal . . ."

"Scamp."

"He looked superb. Oh, so smart; spats, speckled trousers, the rest all deep indigo. Rather Russian."

"Who?"

"My actor-husband, Paul. There. One has only to speak his name for Juno to jerk her tail."

"With whom is he at present?"

"With Sydney Iphis."

"We went last night to see Mrs. Starcross," Sir Oliver said.

"She's no draw."

"I long to see her," Miss Sinquier breathed.

"I understand, my dear young lady, you've an itch for the footlights yourself."

Miss Sinquier began eating crumbs at random.

"God knows!" she declared.

"C'est une âme d'élite, Sir Oliver."

"You've no experience at all?"

"None."

Sir Oliver refused a dish.

"We old ones . . ." he lamented. "Once upon a time, I was in closer touch with the stage."

"Even so, Sir Oliver, you still retain your footing."

"Footing, f-f-f——; among the whole demned lot, who persists still but, perhaps, the Marys?"

" Take the Marys. A word to them; just think what a boon! "

" Nothing so easy."

Miss Sinquier clasped her hands.

" One has heard of them often, of course."

" Mr. and Mrs. Mary have won repute throughout the realm," Mrs. Sixsmith impressively said, wondering (as middlewoman) what commission she should ask.

" Mrs. Mary, I dare say, is no longer what she was!"

" Mrs. Mary, *aujourd'hui*, is a trifle, perhaps, full-blown, but she's most magnetic still. And a warmer, quicker heart never beat in any breast."

" In her heyday, Sir Oliver—but you wouldn't have seen her, of course."

The baronet's eyes grew extinct.

" In my younger days," he said, " she was comeliness itself . . . full of fun. I well recall her as the ' wife ' in *Macbeth;* I assure you she was positively roguish."

" Being fairly on now in years," Miss Sinquier reflected, " she naturally wouldn't fill very juvenile parts—which would be a blessing."

" She too often does."

" She used to make Paul ill——" Mrs. Sixsmith began, but stopped discreetly. " Oh, listen," she murmured, glancing up towards the nigger band and insouciantly commencing to hum.

" What is it . . .? "

" It's the *Belle of Benares*—

" ' My other females all yellow, fair or black,
To thy charms shall prostrate fall,
As every kind of elephant does
To the white elephant Buitenack.
And thou alone shall have from me,
Jimminy, Gomminy, whee, whee, whee,
The Gomminy, Jimminy, whee.' "

" Serephine, you're eating nothing at all."

" I shall wait for the *pâtisserie*, Sir Oliver."

" Disgraceful."

" Father Francis forbids me meat; it's a little novena he makes me do.

" ' The great Jaw-waw that rules our land,
And pearly Indian sea,
Has not such *ab-solute* command
As thou hast over me,
With a Jimminy, Gomminy, Gomminy,
Jimminy, Jimminy, Gomminy, whee.' "

" Apropos of pearls . . ." Sir Oliver addressed Miss Sinquier, " I look forward to the privilege before long of inspecting your own."

" They're on her head, Sir Oliver! "

Sir Oliver started as a plate was passed unexpectedly over him from behind.

" Before approaching some City firm, it's possible Lady Dawtry might welcome an opportunity of acquiring this poor child's jewels for herself," Mrs. Sixsmith said.

" Lady Dawtry! "

" Why not? "

" Lady Dawtry seldom wears ornaments; often I wish she would."

" I wonder you don't *insist*."

Sir Oliver fetched a sigh.

" Many's the time," he said, " I've asked her to be a little more spectacular—but she won't."

" How women do vary! " Mrs. Sixsmith covertly smiled.

" To be sure."

" My poor old friend . . .? "

Sir Oliver turned away.

" I notice Miss Peters here to-night," he said.

" Whipsina? "

" With two young men."

" *Un trio n'excite pas de soupçons*, they say."

" They do . . ."

" Have you a programme for presently, Sir Oliver?"

" I've a box at the Kehama."

Miss Sinquier looked tragic.

" It'll have begun! " she said.

" At a variety, the later the better as a rule."

" I never like to miss *any* part."

" My dear, you'll miss very little; besides it's too close to linger over dinner long."

" Toc, toc; I don't find it so," Sir Oliver demurred.

Mrs. Sixsmith plied her fan.

" I feel very much like sitting, *à la* Chaste Suzanne, in the nearest ice-pail! " she declared.

VIII

MARY LODGE, or Maryland, as it was more familiarly known, stood quite at the end of Gardingore Gate, facing the Park.

Half-way down the row, on the Knightsbridge side, you caught a glimpse of it set well back in its strip of garden with a curtain of rustling aspen-trees before the door.

Erected towards the close of the eighteenth century as a retreat for a fallen minister, it had, on his demise, become the residence of a minor member of the reigning Royal House, from whose executors, it had, in due course, passed into the hands of the first histrionic couple in the land.

A gravel sweep leading between a pair of grotesquely attenuated sphinxes conducted, via a fountain, to the plain, sober façade in the Grecian style.

Moving demurely up this approach some few minutes prior to the hour telegraphically specified by the mistress of the house, Miss Sinquier, clad in a light summer dress, with a bow like a great gold butterfly under her chin, pulled the bell of Mary Lodge.

Some day Others would be standing at her own front gate, their hearts a-hammer . . .

A trim manservant answered the door.

" Is Mrs. Mary . . .? "

" Please to come this way."

Miss Sinquier followed him in.

The entrance hall bare but for a porphyry sarcophagus containing visiting cards, and a few stiff chairs, clung obviously to royal tradition still.

To right and left of the broad stairway two colossal battle-pictures, by Uccello, were narrowly divided by a pedestalled recess in which a frowning bust of Mrs. Mary as Medusa was enshrined.

Miss Sinquier, following closely, was shown into a compartment whose windows faced the Park.

" Mrs. Mary has not yet risen from lunch," the man said as he went away. " But she won't be many minutes."

Selecting herself a chair with a back suited to the occasion, Miss Sinquier prepared to wait.

It was an irregularly planned, rather lofty room, connected by a wide arch with other rooms beyond. From the painted boiseries hung glowing Eastern carpets, on which warriors astride fleet-legged fantastic horses were seen to pursue wild animals, that fled helter-skelter through transparent thickets of may. A number of fragile French chairs formed a broken ring about a Louis XVI bed—all fretted, massive pillars of twisted, gilded wood—converted now to be a seat. Persian and Pesaro pottery conserving " eternal " grasses, fans of feathers, strange sea-shells, bits of Blue-John, blocks of malachite, morsels of coral, images of jade littered the *guéridons* and *étagères*. A portrait of Mrs. Mary, by Watts, was suspended above the chimney-place, from whence came the momentous ticking of a clock.

" The old girl's lair, no doubt! " Miss Sinquier reflected, lifting her eyes towards a carved mythological ceiling describing the Zodiac and the Milky Way.

Tongue protruding, face upturned, it was something to mortify her for ever that Mrs. Mary, entering quietly, should so get her unawares.

" Look on your left."

" Oh? "

" And you'll see it; in trine of Mars. The Seventh House. The House of *Marriage*. The House of Happiness."

" Oh! Mrs. Mary! "

" You're fond of astrology? "

" I know very little about the heavenly bodies."

" Ah! *Don't* be too impatient there."

Miss Sinquier stared.

Mrs. Mary was large and robust, with commanding features and an upright carriage. She had a Redfern gown of " navy " blue stuff infinitely laced. One white long hand, curved and jewelled, clung as if paralysed above her breast.

Seating herself majestically, with a glance of invitation to Miss Sinquier to do the same, the eminent actress appraised her visitor slowly with a cold, dry eye.

" And so you're his ' little mouse '! . . ."

" Whose? "

" Sir Oliver's ' second Siddons.' "

" Indeed——"

" Well, and what is your forte? "

" My forte, Mrs. Mary? "

" Comedy? Tragedy? "

" Either. Both come easy."

" You've no bent? "

" So long as the part is good."

" ' Sarah '! Are you of Jewish stock?—Sarahs sometimes are! "

" Oh dear no."

" Tell me something of the home circle. Have you brothers, sisters? "

" Neither."

" Is your heart free? "

" Quite."

" The Boards, I believe, are new to you? "

" Absolutely."

" Kindly stand."

" I'm five full feet."

" Say, ' Abyssinia.' "

" Abyssinia! "

" As I guessed . . ."

" I was never there."

" Now say ' Joan.' "

" Joan! "

" You're Comedy, my dear. Distinctly! And now sit down."

Miss Sinquier gasped.

" You know with us it's Repertoire, I suppose? "

" Of course."

" In parts such as one would cast Jane Jacks you should score."

" Is she giving up? "

" Unfortunately she's obliged. She's just had another babelet, poor dear."

" What were her parts? "

" In *Bashful Miss Bardine* the governess was one of them."

" Oh! "

" And in *Lara* she was the orphan. That part should suit you well," Mrs. Mary murmured, rising and taking from a cabinet a bundle of printed sheets.

" Is it rags? "

" Rags? "

" May she . . . is she allowed Evening dress? "

" Never mind about her dress. Let me hear how you'd deliver her lines," Mrs. Mary tartly said, placing in Miss Sinquier's hands a brochure of the play.

" I should like to know my cue."

" A twitter of birds is all. You are now in Lord and Lady Lara's garden—near Nice. Begin."

" *How full the hedges are of roses!* "

" Speak up."

" *How full the hedges are of roses! What perfume to be sure.*"

" And don't do that."

" The directions are: ' *she stoops.*' "

" Continue! "

" What's next? "

" A start."

" *Oh! Sir Harry!* "

" Proceed."

Miss Sinquier lodged a complaint.

" How can I when I don't know the plot? "

" What does it matter—the plot? "

" Besides, I feel up to something stronger."

Mrs. Mary caressed the backs of her books.

" Then take the slave in *Arsinoe* and I'll read out the queen."

" These little legs, Mrs. Mary, would look queerly in tights."

" Think less of your costume, dear, do; and learn to do what you're told. Begin! "

" Arsinoe opens."

" Arsi——? So she does. You should understand we're in Egypt, in the halls of Ptolemy Philadelphus, on the banks of the River Nile. I will begin.

Cease . . . Cease your song. Arisba! Lotos! THANKS.
And for thy pains accept this ivory pin . . .
Shall it be said in many-gated Thebes
That Arsinoe's mean?
The desert wind . . .
Hark to't!
Methinks 'twill blow all night;
Lashing the lebbek trees anent Great Cheops' Pyre;
Tracing sombre shadows o'er its stony walls.
Within the wombats wail
Tearing the scarabs from Prince Kamphé's tomb.
His end was sudden . . . strangely so;
Osiris stalks our land. Kamphé and little Ti (his daughter—wife)
Both dead within a week. Ah me, I fear
Some priestly treachery; but see! What crouching shape is this? . . . Peace, fool! "

"*I did not speak . . . Oh, Queen.*"
"*ENOUGH. Thou weariest me.*"
"*I go!*"
"*Yet stay! Where is thy Lord?*"
"*Alas! I do not know.*"
"*Then get ye gone—from hence!*"
"*I shall obey.*"

". . . Wail it!" Mrs. Mary rested.
"Wail what, Mrs. Mary?"
"Let me hear that *bey*: O-bey. Sound your menace."
"I shall o-bey."
"*O beating heart,*" Mrs. Mary paced stormily the room, "*Tumultuous throbbing breast. Alas! how art thou laden? . . .*"
She turned.
"Slave!"
"Me, Mrs. Mary?"
"Come on. Come on."
"Slave's off."
"Pst, girl. Then take *the Duke!*"
"*Fairest*——"
"*High Horus! . . . What! Back from Ethiopia and the Nubian Army! Is't indeed Ismenias . . .?*"
"*Listen.*"
"*Hast deserted Ptolemy?*"
"*Fairest*——"
"*O Gods of Egypt*——"
"Some one wants you, Mrs. Mary."
"Wants me?"
"Your chauffeur, I think."
"The car, M'm," a servant announced.
"Ah!" she broke off. "An engagement, I fear. But come and see me again. Come one day to the theatre. Our stage-door is in Sloop Street, an *impasse* off the Strand." And Mrs. Mary, gathering up her skirts, nodded and withdrew.

IX

"BLACK her great boots! Not I," Miss Sinquier said to herself as she turned her back on Mary Lodge to wend her way westward across the Park.

She was to meet Mrs. Sixsmith at a certain club on Hay Hill towards dusk to learn whether any tempting offer had been submitted Sir Oliver for her pearls.

"If I chose I suppose I could keep them," she murmured incoherently to herself as she crossed the Row.

It was an airless afternoon.

Under the small formal trees sheltering the path she clapped her sunshade to, and slackened speed.

The rhododendrons, in vivid clumps of new and subtle colours brushing the ground, were in their pride. Above, the sky showed purely blue. She walked on a little way towards Stanhope Gate, when, overcome by the odoriferous fragrance of heliotropes and xenias, she sank serenely to a bench.

Far off by the Serpentine a woman was preaching from a tree to a small audience gathered beneath. How primeval she looked as her arms shot out in argument, a discarded cock's-feather boa looped to an upper bough dangling like some dark python in the air above.

Miss Sinquier sat on until the shadows fell.

She found her friend on reaching Hay Hill in the midst of muffins and tea.

"I gave you up. I thought you lost," Mrs. Sixsmith exclaimed, hitching higher her veil with fingers supermanicured, covered in oxydised metal rings.

"I was dozing in the Park."

" Dreamy kid."
" On my back neck I've such a freckle."
" Did you see Mammy Mary? "
" I did."
" Well? "
" Nothing; she offered me Miss Jacks' leavings."
" Not good enough."
" What of Sir Oliver? "
" I hardly know how to tell you."
" Has he——? "
Mrs. Sixsmith nodded.
" He has had an offer of two thousand pounds," she triumphantly said, " for the pearls alone."
" Two thousand pounds! "
" Call it three o's."
" Okh! "
" Consider what commercial credit that means. . . ."
" I shall play Juliet."
" Juliet? "
" I shall have a season."
" Let me take the theatre for you."
" Is it a dream? "
" I will find you actors—great artists."
" Oh, God! "
" And, moreover, I have hopes for the silver too. Sir Oliver is enchanted with the spoons—the Barnabas spoon especially. He said he had never seen a finer. Such a beautiful little Barny, such a rapture of a little sinner as it is, in every way."
Miss Sinquier's eyes shone.
" I'll have that boy."
" What—what boy? "
" Harold Weathercock."
" You desire him? "
" To be my Romeo, of course."
" It depends if the Dream will release him."
" It must! It shall! "

" I'll peep in on him and sound him, if you like."

" We'll go together."

" Very well."

" Do you know where he lives? "

" In Foreign-Colony Street. He and a friend of his, Noel Nice, share a studio there. Not to paint in, alas! It's to wash."

" What? "

" They've made a little laundry of it. And when they're not acting actually, they wash. Oh! sometimes when Mr. Nice spits across his iron and says Pah! it makes one ill."

" Have they any connection? "

Mrs. Sixsmith bent her eyes to her dress.

" Mr. Sixsmith often sent them things . . . little things," she said. " His linen was his pride. You might annex him, perhaps. He's played Mercutio before."

" Is he handsome? "

" Paul? He's more interesting than handsome. *Unusual*, if you know . . ."

" What *did* you do to separate? "

" I believe I bit him."

" You did! "

" He ran at me with the fire-dogs first."

" I suppose you annoyed him? "

" The cur! "

" Something tells me you're fond of him still."

From her reticule Mrs. Sixsmith took a small note-book and made an entry therein.

" . . . The divine Shakespeare! " she sighed.

" I mean to make a hit with him."

" Listen to me."

" Well? "

" My advice to you is, hire a playhouse—the Cobbler's End, for example—for three round months at a reasonable rent, with a right, should you wish, to sub-let."

" It's so far off."

" Define ' far off.' "

" Blackfriars Bridge."

" I've no doubt by paying a fortune you could find a more central position if you care to wait. The Bolivar Theatre, possibly——; or the Cone . . . At the Cone there's a joy-plank from the auditorium to the stage, so that, should you want to ever, you can come right out into the stalls."

" I want my season at once," Miss Sinquier said.

Mrs. Sixsmith toyed with her rings.

" What do you say," she asked, " to making an informal début (before ' royal ' auspices!) at the Esmé Fisher ' Farewell ' coming off next week? "

" Why not! "

" Some of the stage's brightest ornaments have consented to appear."

" I'd like particulars."

" I'll send a note to the secretary, Miss Willinghorse, straight away," Mrs. Sixsmith murmured, gathering up her constant Juno beneath her arm, and looking about her for some ink.

" Send it later, from the Café Royal."

" I can't go any more to the Café Royal," Mrs. Sixsmith said. " I owe money there . . . To all the waiters."

" Wait till after we've seen the Washingtons."

" The Washingtons? Who are they? "

" Don't you know? "

" Besides, I've a small headache," Mrs. Sixsmith said, selecting herself a quill.

" What can I do to relieve it? " Miss Sinquier wondered, taking up a newspaper as her friend commenced to write.

Heading the agony list some initials caught her eye.

" *S——h S——r.* Come back. All shall be forgiven," she read.

"I can't epistolise while you make those *unearthly* noises," Mrs. Sixsmith complained.

"I didn't mean to."

"Where are we going to dine?"

"Where is there wonderful to go?"

"How about a grill?"

"I don't mind."

"The Piccadilly? We're both about got up for it."

Miss Sinquier rolled her eyes.

"The Grill-room at the Piccadilly isn't going to cure a headache," she remarked.

X

To watch Diana rise blurred above a damp chemise from a fifth-floor laundry garden in Foreign-Colony Street, Soho, had brought all Chelsea (and part of Paris) to study illusive atmospherical effects from the dizzy drying-ground of those versatile young men Harold Weathercock and Noel Nice.

Like a necropolis at the Resurrection, or some moody vision of Blake, would it appear under the evanescent rays of the moon.

Nighties, as evening fell, would go off into proud Praxiteles-torsos of Nymphs or Muses: pants and ready-mades, at a hint of air, would pirouette and execute a phantom ballet from Don John.

Beyond the clothes-lines was a Pagoda, set up in an extravagant mood, containing a gilded Buddha—a thorn and a symbol of unrighteousness to a convent of Ursulines whose recreation yard was underneath.

Here, at a certain hour when the Mother Superior was wont to walk round and round her preserves, a young, bewhiskered man frequently would come bearing ceremonial offerings of rice or linen newly washed, and falling flat before the shrine would roll himself about and beat the ground as if in mortal anguish of his sins before her fascinated eye. Here, too, from time to time, festivities would take place—sauteries (to a piano-organ), or convivial *petits soupers* after the play.

An iron ladder connected the roof with the work-rooms and living-rooms below.

Ascending this by the light of the stars, Mrs. Six-smith and the *New Juliet*, gay from a certain grill,

audaciously advanced, their playful screams rendered inaudible by the sounds of a tricksome waltz wafted down to them from the piano-organ above.

Items of linen nestling close to a line overhead showed palely against the night like roosting doves.

" Help . . . Oh! she's falling," Mrs. Sixsmith screamed. " Are you there, Mr. Nice? "

" Give me your hand," Miss Sinquier begged.

" Should she rick her spine . . ."

" Whew-ps! " Miss Sinquier exclaimed, scrambling to the top.

London, beyond the frail filigree cross on the Ursulines' bleached wall, blazed with light. From the Old Boar and Castle over the way came a perfect flood of it. And all along the curved river-line from Westminster to St. Paul's glittered lamps, lamps, lamps.

Folding an arm about her friend's " wasp " waist, Mrs. Sixsmith whirled her deftly round to a wild street air:

" I like your ways,
I like your style,
You are my darling——"

she hummed as the organ stopped.

" Come to finish the evening? "

A small, thick-set, grizzled man with dark æsthetic eyes and a pinkish nose, the result maybe of continuously tinting it for music-hall purposes, addressed the breathless ladies in a broad, inquiring voice.

" Is that *you*, Mr. Smee? " Mrs. Sixsmith asked, surprised.

" Call me ' Shawn.' "

" We've only come on business."

" Don't! You make me laf."

" Then—do it," Mrs. Sixsmith serenely said, resting her left knee against an empty beer keg

" They're not back from the theatre yet."

" Turn for us till they come."

Mr. Smee dashed from a crimpled brow a wisp of drooping hair.

" By your leave, ladies," he said, " I'll just slip across to the Old Boar and Castle and sample a snack at the bar."

" Don't run off, Mr. Smee. You really mustn't. On tiles, they say, one usually meets with *cats*."

" Oh, my word."

Mrs. Sixsmith placed a hand to her hip in the style of an early John.

" How long is it—say—since we met? " she inquired. " Not since my wedding, I do believe."

" What's become of those kiddy bridesmaids you had? " Mr. Smee warily asked.

" Gerty Gale and Joy Patterson?—I'm sure I don't know."

" Oh, my word!"

" Well, how goes the world with *you*, Mr. Smee? "

" So-so. I've been away on tour. Mildred Milson and Co. Oh! my Lord—it was. No sooner did we get to Buxton—down in Derbyshire—than Miss Milson fell sick and had to be left behind."

" What was wrong with her? "

" Exposure . . . On Bank Holiday some of the company hired a three-horse char-à-banc and drove from Buxton over to Castleton Caves—my hat. What hills!—and from there we went to take a squint at Chatsworth, where Miss Milson came over queer."

" And how does Mrs. Smee? "

" So-so."

" One never sees her now."

" There she sits all day, reading Russian novels. Talk of gloom! "

" Really? "

" Oh, it is! "

" Well . . . I'm fond of thoughtful, theosophical

reading, too, Mr. Smee," Mrs. Sixsmith said. "Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Annie Besant are both favourites with me."

Mr. Smee jerked an eloquent thumb.

"Who have you brought along?"

"She's a special pal of mine."

"Married?"

"Mon Dieu," Mrs. Sixsmith doubtfully said. "Je *crois* que c'est une Pucelle."

"Never!" Mr. Smee, completely mystified, hazarded.

"Fie donc. Comme c'est *méchant*."

"Wee, wee."

Mrs. Sixsmith tittered.

"She's going into management very soon."

"Swank?"

"We seek a Romeo, Mr. Smee."

"Now, now! . . ."

"Don't look like that, Mr. Smee—nobody's asking you," Mrs. Sixsmith murmured.

Mr. Smee scratched reflectively his head.

"Who is it you're after?" he asked.

"We fancied Mr. Weathercock might suit."

"God has given him looks, but no brains," Mr. Smee emphatically declared. "No more brains than a cow in a field."

"His is indeed a charming face," Mrs. Sixsmith sighed. "And as to his brains, Mr. Smee—why, come!"

"Who's to create the countess?" he asked.

"Lady Capulet? It's not determined yet."

"Why not canvass the wife?"

"Has she been in Shakespeare before?"

"From the time she could toddle; in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, when not quite two, she was the Bug with gilded wings."

"Pet!"

" Sure . . ."

Mrs. Sixsmith clasped prayerfully her hands.

" And in Mr. Smee," she said, " I see the makings of a fine Friar Lawrence! "

" How's that? "

" With a few choice *concetti*."

" Faith! "

" I see the lonely cell, the chianti-flask, the crucifix . . ."

" Gosh! "

" I see Verona . . . the torrid sky . . . the town ascending, up, up, up. I hear the panting nurse. She knocks. Your priest's eyes glisten. She enters, blouse-a-gape—a thorough coster. You raise your cowl . . . Chianti? She shakes her head. Benedictine? No! no! A little Chartreuse, then? Certainly not! Nothing . . . You squeeze her waist. Her cries ' go through ' Lady Capulet and her daughter in the distant city on their way to mass. Romeo enters. So! " Mrs. Sixsmith broke off as Mr. Weathercock and a curly-headed lad, followed by a swathed woman and a whey-faced child, showed themselves upon the stairs.

Mrs. Sixsmith sought Miss Sinquier's arm.

" Listen to me, my darling! " she said.

" Well? "

" Write."

" What? "

" Write."

" Why? "

" Because I fear we intrude."

"Intrude?" Harold Weathercock exclaimed, coming up. " I assure you it's a treat . . ."

Mrs. Sixsmith threw a sidelong, intriguing glance across her shoulder.

" Who's the cure in plaits? " she demanded.

" It's Little Mary Mant—she's seeing her sister home."

" Oh! . . . Is that Ita? " Mrs. Sixsmith murmured, stepping forward to embrace Miss " Ita Iris " of the Dream.

Miss Sinquier swooped.

" I'm having a season," she, without further preamble, began. " And I want to persuade you to join——"

" Principal? "

" Yes."

" I should like to play for you," Mr. Weathercock said.

" Harold! "

Miss Mant addressed him softly.

" Well? "

" Honey husband . . ."

" Hook it! "

" Give me a cigarette."

" Mary! " her sister called.

" Quick! 'cos of Ita."

" Mary Mant."

Miss Mant tossed disdainfully an ultra-large and pasty-faced head.

" Why must you insult me, Ita? " she bitterly asked. " You *know* I'm Miss Iris."

" I know you're Miss Mant."

" No, I'm not."

" Yes, you are."

" No, I'm *not*."

" I tell you, you are! "

" Liar! "

" M-A-N-T! "

" Oh, stow it," Mr. Smee said. " Put it by."

" I'm Réné Iris."

" Réné Rats."

Mrs. Sixsmith looked detached.

" Is that a wash-tub? " she asked.

" Certainly."

" What's that odd thing floating, like the ghost of a child unborn? "

" It belongs to Mrs. Mary."

" There's a rumour—she refuses a fortune to show herself in Revue."

" With her hearse-horse tread . . ."

" Sh—— Harold worships her."

" Oh, no."

" He sees things in her that we don't, perhaps."

" To some ideas," Mrs. Sixsmith said, " I suppose she's very blooming still . . ."

" If it wasn't for her figure, which is really a disgrace."

Miss Iris smiled.

She had a tired mouth, contrasting vividly with the artificial freshness of her teeth.

" When I reach my zenith," she declared, " it's Farewell."

" Shall you assist at poor Esmé Fisher's? "

" A couple of songs—that's all."

Mrs. Sixsmith looked away.

" Naturally," Miss Sinquier was saying, " one can't expect instantly to be a draw. More than—perhaps—just a little! "

"With a man who understands in the Box Office . . ."

" Some one with a big nose and a strong will, eh? "

Mr. Nice lifted a rusty iron and wiped it across his leg.

" In my opinion," he said, " to associate oneself with a sanctified classic is a huge mistake. And why start a season on the tragic tack? "

" Because——"

" Suppose it's a frost? "

" Oh!"

" Suppose your venture fails. Suppose the thing's a drizzle."

" What then? "

"There's a light comedy of mine that should suit you."

" Of yours! "

" Appelled *Sweet Maggie Maguire.*"

" Tell me why she was sweet, Mr. Nice," Mrs. Sixsmith begged.

" Why she was sweet? I really don't know."

" Was she sentimental? . . . "

" She was an invalid. A bed-ridden beauty . . . and, of course, the hero's a Doctor."

" Oh! my word! "

" Is there anyone at home? " A tired voice came thrilling up from below.

" Who comes? "

Mrs. Sixsmith started.

" It sounds to me like my husband," she said, with an involuntary nervous movement of the hands.

" I forgot," Mr. Weathercock said. " He mentioned he might blow in."

" Oh! "

" I'd take to my heels! " Miss Iris advised.

Mrs. Sixsmith stood transfixed.

The moonlight fell full on her, making her features look drawn and haggard.

XI

LIKE wildfire the rumour ran. The King had knighted —he had knighted—by what accident?—Mr. Mary, in lieu of Mr. Fisher, at Mr. Fisher's own farewell. In the annals of the stage such an occurrence was unheard of, unique.

The excitement in the green-room was intense.

"M-m! He is not de first to zell 'is birs-r-rite for a mess of porridge!" Yvonde Yalta, the playgoers' darling, remarked as she poised with an extravagant play of arms, a black glittering bandeau on her short flaxen hair.

"A mess of pottage!" some one near her said.

"You correct me? Ah, sanx! I am so grateful, so—*so* grateful," the charming creature murmured as she sailed away.

From the auditorium came a suppressed titter.

The curtain had risen some few minutes since on Mlle. Fanfette and Monsieur Coquelet de Chaussepierre of the Théâtre Sans Rancune in the comedietta, *Sydney, or There's No Resisting Him.*

"It's extraordinary I've never seen a man knighted," a show-girl twittered, "and I've seen a good deal . . ."

"How do they do them?"

"Like this," a sparkling brunette answered, bestowing a sly pat on the interlocutress with the back of a brush.

"Of all the common——!"

"Ladies! Ladies!"

"Who was in front at the time?"

" I was! " Mrs. Sixsmith said, who had just peeped in to exchange a few words with her friend.

" You were? "

" I was selling sweets in the vestibule and saw it all. Really! If I live to be an old woman I shan't forget it. Mr. Mary—*Sir Maurice*—was in the lobby chatting with Sylvester Fry of the *Dispatch*, when the Royal party arrived. The King instantly noticed him and sent one of his suite, quite unpremeditatedly, it seemed, to summon him, and in a trice . . . Oh! . . . and I *never* saw the Queen look so charming. She has a gold dress turning to white through the most exquisite gradations . . . "

Mrs. Sixsmith was overcome.

" A-wheel," Miss Sinquier's dresser disrespectfully said, " how was the poor man to tell? Both the blighters—God forgive me—are equally on their last legs."

Miss Sinquier shivered.

" Is it a good house? " she inquired.

" Splendid! Outside they're flying five 'full' boards . . . There's not a single vacant place. Poor Sydney Iphis gave half a guinea for a seat in the slips."

" Are you here all alone? "

" I'm with Sir Oliver Dawtry," Mrs. Sixsmith replied, " except when I'm running about! . . . Can I sell anyone anything? " she inquired, raising sonorously her voice. " Vanilla! Caramel! Chocolate! . . . Comfits!" she warbled.

" What have you netted? "

" Eighteenpence only, so far;—from such an angel!"

" Comfits, did you say? " a round-faced, piquant little woman asked.

" Despite disguise! If it isn't Arthurine Smee! "

The actress displayed astonishment.

Nature had thrown up upon her lip and cheek two big blonde moles that procured for her physiognomy,

somehow or other, an unusual degree of expression.

" My husband has been waiting to hear from you," she said, " as agent to this *Miss Sin*——, the new star with the naughty name, and from all I could make out I understand it would be likely to be a *Double Engagement*."

" This is Miss Sinquier," Mrs. Sixsmith exclaimed.

Miss Sinquier blinked.

" Have you done it much? " she asked.

" Often."

" Where? "

" Everywhere."

" For example? "

" I may say I've played Pauline and Portia and Puck . . ."

" Mother-to-Juliet I fear's the best I've to offer."

Mrs. Smee consulted enigmatically the nearest mole in reach of her tongue.

" Were I to play her in ' good preservation,' " she inquired, " I suppose there'd be no objection? "

" Why, none! "

" Just a girlish touch . . ."

" Mrs. Smee defies time," Mrs. Sixsmith remarked.

" My dear, I once was thought to be a very pretty woman. . . . All I can do now is to urge my remains."

Miss Sinquier raised a forefinger.

Voices shivering in altercation issued loudly from a private dressing-room next door.

" What's up? "

" Oh, dear! Oh, dear! " the wardrobe-mistress, entering, said. " Sir Maurice and Mr. Fisher are passing sharp words with a couple of pitchforks."

" What! "

" The ' Farm-players ' sent them over from the Bolivar for their Pig-sty scene—and now poor Mr. Mary, *Sir M'riss*, and Mr. Fisher are fighting it out, and Mrs. Mary, *her ladyship*, has joined the struggle."

" Murder! " called a voice.

" Glory be to God."

Mrs. Sixsmith rolled her eyes.

" Da! " she gasped, as Lady Mary, a trifle dazed but decked in smiles, came bustling in.

" Oh, Men! Men! Men! " she exclaimed, going off into a hearty laugh. " Rough angelic brutes! . . ."

She was radiant.

She had a gown of shot brocade, a high lace ruff and a silver girdle of old German work that had an ivory missal falling from it.

" Quarrelsome, quarrelling kings," she stuttered, drifting towards a toilet-table—the very one before which Miss Sinquier was making her face.

On all sides from every lip rose up a chorus of congratulations.

" Viva, Lady Mary! "

Touched, responsive, with a gesture springing immediately from the heart, the consummate Victorian extended impulsive happy hands.

" God bless you, dears," she said.

" Three cheers for Lady Mary! "

The illustrious woman quashed a tear.

" Am I white behind? " she asked.

" Allow me, milady," the wardrobe-mistress wheezed.

" I fancy I heard a rip! . . ."

" There must have been quite a scrimmage."

From the orchestra a melodious throb-thrum-throb told a " curtain."

" Lady Mary—*you*, Mum," a call-boy chirped.

" Me? "

" Five minutes."

Lady Mary showed distress.

" For goodness sake, my dear," she addressed Miss Sinquier, " do leave yourself alone. I want the glass."

But Miss Sinquier seemed engrossed.

At her elbow a slip of a " Joy-baby " was holding forth with animation to Mrs. Sixsmith and Mrs. Smee.

" That was one of my dreams," she was saying, " and last night again I had another—in spite of a night-light, too! It began by a ring formed of crags and boulders enclosing a troop of deer—oh, such a herd of them—delicate, distinguished animals with little pom-pom horns, and some had poodles' tails. Sitting behind a rhododendron bush was an old gentleman on a white horse; he never moved a muscle. Suddenly I became aware of a pack of dogs . . . And then, before my very eyes, one of the dogs transformed itself into a giraffe . . ."

" You must have been out to supper."

" It's true I had. Oh, it was a merry meal."

" Who gave it? "

" Dore Davis did: to meet her betrothed—Sir Francis Four."

" What's he like? "

" Don't ask me. It makes one tired to look at him."

" Was it a party? "

" Nothing but literary-people with their Beatrices . . . My dear *the scum!* Half-way through supper Dore got her revolver out and began shooting the glass drops off her chandelier."

" I should like to see her trousseau," Mrs. Sixsmith sighed.

" It isn't up to much. Anything good she sells—on account of bailiffs."

" Pooh! She should treat them all *en reine*."

Mrs. Smee looked wise.

" Always be civil with bailiffs," she said; " never ruffle them! If you queen a sheriff's officer remember there's no getting rid of him. He clings on—like a poor relation."

" Oh, well," Mrs. Sixsmith replied, " I always treat

the worms *en reine;* not," she added wittily, "that I ever have . . ."

Miss Sinquier twirled herself finally about.

"There," she murmured, "I'm going out into the wings."

"When's your call?"

"After Lady Mary."

For her unofficial first appearance she was resolved to woo the world with a dance—a dance all fearless somersaults and quivering *battements;* a young Hungarian meanwhile recording her movements sensitively upon a violin.

She was looking well in an obedient little ballet skirt that made action a delight. Her hair, piled high in a towering toupee, had a white flower in it.

"Down a step and through an arch." A pierrette who passed her in the corridor directed her to the stage.

It was Miss Ita Iris of the Dream.

Miss Sinquier tingled.

How often on the cold flags of the great church at home had she asked the way before!

"O Lord," she prayed now, "let me conquer. Let me! Amen."

She was in the wings.

Above her, stars sparkled lavishly in a darkling sky, controlled by a bare-armed mechanic who was endeavouring, it seemed, to deliver himself of a moon; craning from a ladder at the risk of his life, he pushed it gently with a big soft hand.

Miss Sinquier turned her eyes to the stage.

The round of applause accorded Lady Mary on her entry was gradually dying away.

From her shelter Miss Sinquier could observe her, in opulent silhouette, perfectly at her ease.

She stood waiting for the last huzzas to subside with bowed head and folded hands—like some great

sinner—looking reverently up through her eyelashes at the blue silk hangings of the Royal box.

By degrees all clatter ceased.

Approaching the footlights with a wistful smile, the favourite woman scanned the stalls.

"Now most of you here this afternoon," she intimately began, "I will venture to say, never heard of Judy Jacock. I grant you, certainly, there's nothing very singular in that; for her life, which was a strangely frail one, essentially was obscure. Judy herself was *obscure* . . . And so that is why I say you can't have ever heard of her! . . . Because she was totally unknown. . . . Ah, poor wee waif! alas, she's dead now. Judy's among the angels . . . and the beautiful little elegy which, with your consent, I intend forthwith to submit, is written around her, around little Judy, and around her old Father, her '*Da*'—James, who was a waiter. And while he was away waiting one day—he used to wipe the plates on the seat of his breeches!—his little Judy died. Ah, poor old James. Poor Sir James. But let the poet," she broke off suddenly, confused, "take up the tale himself, or, rather —to be more specific!—*herself*. For the lines that follow, which are *inédits*, are from the seductive and charming pen of Lady Violet Sleepwell."

Lady Mary coughed, winked archly an eye, and began quite carelessly as if it were Swinburne:

"I never *knew* James Jacock's child . . .
I knew he *had* a child!
The daintiest little fairy that ever a father knew.
She was all contentment . . ."

Miss Sinquier looked away.

To her surprise, lurking behind a property torso of "a Faun," her pigtails roped with beads of scarlet glass, was Miss May Mant.

"Tell me what you are up to?" she asked.

" Sh——! Don't warn Ita! "
" Why should I? "
" I dodged her. Beautifully."
" What for? "
" If she thought I was going on the stage, she'd be simply wild."
" Are you? "
" I intend tacking on in the Pope's Procession."
" That won't be just yet."
" Oh, isn't it wonderful? "
" What? "
" Being here."
" It's rather pleasant."
" Can you feel the boards? "
" A little."
" They go *right* through me. Through my shoes, up my legs, and at my heart they sting."
" Kiss me."
" I love you."
" Pet."
" Do I look interesting? "
" Ever so."
" Would you take me for a Cardinal's comfort? "
Lady Mary lifted up her voice:

" Come, Judy, the angel said,
And took her from her little bed,
And through the air they quickly sped
Until they reached God's throne;
So, there, they dressed her all in white,
They say she was a perfect sight,
Celestial was her mien! "

" Lady Violet Sleepwell admires Ita."
" Indeed."
" She's a victim to chloral."

" Rose-coiffed stood J.
Amid the choir,
Celestial-singing! "

The august artiste glowed.

" Ita thinks she drinks."

" I shouldn't wonder," Miss Sinquier replied, covering her face with her hands.

Through her fingers she could contemplate her accompanist's lanky figure as he stood in the opposite wing busily powdering his nose.

The moment, it seemed, had come.

Yet not quite—the public, who loved tradition, was determined on obtaining an encore.

Lady Mary was prepared to acquiesce.

Curtseying from side to side and wafting kisses to the gods, she announced:

" The Death of Hortense; by *Desire*."

XII

The Source Theatre.

DEAR MOTHER,—I saw your notice in a newspaper not very long ago, and this morning I came across it again in the *Dispatch*. Really I don't know what there can be to "forgive," and as to "coming back!"—I have undertaken the management of this theatre, where rehearsals of *Romeo and Juliet* have already begun. This is the little house where Audrey Anderson made her début, and where Avize Mendoza made such a hit. You could imagine nothing cosier or more intimate if you tried. Father would be charmed (tell him, for, of course, he sometimes speaks of me in the long *trifle* evenings as he smokes a pipe) with the foyer, which has a mural design in marquetry, showing Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, sunning themselves by the side of a well. They say the theatre contains a well *beneath the stage*, which is why it's known as the Source. I have left, I'm glad to say, the hotel, which was getting dreadfully on my nerves, for a dressing-room here, where I pass the nights now: an arrangement that suits me, as I like to be on the spot. A sister of Ita Iris of the Dream Theatre keeps me company, so that I'm not a bit solitary. We understand each other to perfection, and I find her helpful to me in many ways. She is such an affectionate child, and I do not think I shall regret it. I've decided to have half my teeth taken out by a man in Knightsbridge—some trial to me, I fear; but, alas, we've all to carry our cross! I seem to have nothing but debts. Clothes, *as well* as scenery, would ruin anyone.

I'm allotting a little box to you and father for the opening night, unless you would prefer two stalls?

The other afternoon I " offered my services " and obtained three curtains at a gala matinée; I wish you could have been at it!

Your devoted Daughter.

I went to the oratory on Sunday; it was nothing but a blaze of candles.

Remember me to Leonard and Gripper—also Kate.

XIII

An absence of ventilation made the room an oven and discouraged sleep. Through the width of skylight, in inert recumbence, she could follow wonderingly the frail pristine tints of dawn. Flushed, rose-barred, it spread above her with fantastic drifting clouds masking the morning stars.

From a neighbouring church a clock struck five.

Miss Sinquier sighed; she had not closed her eyes the whole night through.

" One needs a blind," she mused, " and a pane——"

She looked about her for something to throw.

Cinquecento Italian things—a chest, a crucifix, a huge guitar, a grim carved catafalque all purple sticks and violet legs (Juliet's) crowded the floor.

" A mess of glass . . . and cut my feet . . ." she murmured, gathering about her a *négligé* of oxydised knitted stuff and sauntering out towards the footlights in quest of air.

Notwithstanding the thermometer, she could hear Miss May Mant breathing nasally from behind her door.

The stage was almost dark.

" Verona," set in autumn trees, looked fast asleep. Here and there a campanile shot up, in high relief, backed by a scenic hill, or an umbrella-pine. On a column in the " Market Place " crouched a brazen lion.

An acrobatic impulse took her at the sight of it.

> " Sono pazza per te
> *Si!* Sono pazza, pazza, pazza . . .
> Pazza per amore,"

she warbled, leaping lightly over the footlights into the stalls.

The auditorium, steeped in darkness, felt extinguished, chill.

Making a circuit of the boxes, she found her way up a stairway into the promenade.

Busts of players, busts of poets, busts of peris, interspersed by tall mirrors in gilt-bordered mouldings, smiled on her good-day.

Sinking to a low, sprucely-cushioned seat, she breathed a sigh of content.

Rid of the perpetual frictions of the inevitable *personnel*, she could possess the theatre, for a little while, in quietude to herself.

In the long window boxes, tufts of white daisies inclining to the air brought back to mind a certain meadow, known as *Basings*, a pet haunt with her at home.

At the pond end, in a small coppice, doves cried " Coucoussou-coucoussou " all the day long.

Here, soon a year ago, while weaving herself a garland (she was playing at being Europa with the Saunders' Fifeshire bull; flourishing flowers at it; tempting it with waving poppies; defying it to bear her away from the surrounding stagnance), the realisation of her dramatic gift first discovered itself.

And then, her thoughts tripped on, *he* came, the Rev. George—" just as I was wondering to whom to apply "—and drew all Applethorp to St. Ann-on-the-Hill by the persuasive magnetism of his voice; largely due—so he said—to " scientific production." To the *Bromley Breath!* He never could adequately thank Elizabeth, Mrs. Albert Bromley, for all she had done. No; because words failed . . . Her Institute, for him, would be always " top-o'-the-tree," and when asked, by her, " What tree ? " he had answered with a cryptic look: " She trains them for the stage."

Dear heart! How much he seemed to love it. He had known by their green-room names all the leading stars, and could tell, on occasion, little anecdotes of each.

It was he who narrated how Mrs. Mary (as she was then), on the first night of *Gulnara, Queen of the Lattermonians*, got caught in the passenger-lift on the way from her dressing-room to the stage and was obliged to allow her understudy to replace her, which with the utmost *éclat* she did, while Mrs. Mary, who could overhear the salvos from her prison, was driven quite distraught at a triumph that, but for the irony of things, would most certainly have been hers.

Miss Sinquier sighed.

"Which reminds me," she murmured, fixing her eyes upon the storied ceiling, "that I've no one at all, should anything happen to me."

She lay back and considered the inchoate imagery painted in gouache above her.

Hydropic loves with arms outstretched in invitation, ladies in hectic hats and billowing silks, courtiers, lap-dogs, peacocks, etc., all intermingled in the pleasantest way.

As she gazed a great peace fell upon her. Her eyelids closed.

. . . . . .

"Breakfast!"

Miss May Mant woke her with a start.

"Oh!"

"I laid it to-day in the stalls."

"Extraordinary child."

"Crumbs in the boxes, I've noticed, encourage mice. . . . They must come from the spring, I think, under the stage."

"One ought to set a trap!"

"Poor creatures . . . they enjoy a good play, I expect, as much as we do," Miss Mant murmured,

setting down the kettle she was holding and lowering her cheek graciously for a kiss.

"Well?"

"You were asleep."

"Was I horrid?"

"You looked too perfectly orchidaceous."

"Orchidaceous?"

"Like the little women of Outa-Maro."

Miss Sinquier sat up.

"What is there for breakfast?" she asked.

"Do you like porridge?"

"Oh, Réné!"

Miss Mant raised a bare shoulder and crushed it to an ear.

"Really," she remarked, "I'm at a loss to know what to give you, Sally; I sometimes ask myself what Juliet took . . ."

"Why, potions."

"*Ita* takes tea luke with a lemon; and it makes her *so* cross."

"Disgusting."

"A la Russe."

"Is she still away?"

"Yes . . . She writes from a toy bungalow, she says, with the sea at the very door and a small shipwreck lying on the beach."

"What of Paris?"

"I'm Page to him, you said so!"

"With her consent."

"Oh, Ita hates the stage. She's only *on it* of course to make a match . . . she could have been an Irish countess had she pleased, only she said it wasn't smart enough, and it sounded too Sicilian."

"Everyone can't be Roman."

". . . Oh, she's such a minx! In her letter she writes, 'I don't doubt you'll soon grow tired of the Sally-Sin Theatre and of dancing attendance on the Fair Sink.'"

" Cat."

" And her Manting ways just to annoy. Mant, Mant, Mant! She does it to humiliate. Whenever the Tirds are in earshot she's sure to begin."

" The Tirds? "

" Llewellyn and Lydia. Lydia Tird has an understanding with my big brother. Poor lad! Just before I left home he took the name of Isadore: Isadore Iris. Oh, when Ita heard! Bill Mant she said and made Llewellyn laugh."

" Oh! "

" And now that Mrs. Sixsmith ' Mants ' me almost as much as Ita."

" Why do you dislike her so much? "

" Cadging creature! "

" Réné? "

" Limpet."

" Réné? "

" Parasite."

" Réné——! "

" Scavenger."

" *Basta!* "

" I know all about her."

" What do you know? "

" If I tell you, I'll have to tell you in French."

" Then tell me in French."

" Elle fait les cornes à son mari! "

" What next? "

" She's *divorcée!* "

" Poor soul."

" Out at *Bois St. Jean*—St. John's Wood—she has a villa."

Miss Sinquier got up.

" Anyway," she murmured.

" Oh, Sally . . ."

" Well? "

" You do love me? "

"Why, *of course*."

"Let's go presently to a Turkish bath—after rehearsal."

"Not to-day."

". . . Just for a 'Liver Pack'?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because . . . and when you're out, don't, dear, forget a mousetrap!"

XIV

To bring together certain of the dramatic critics (such high arbiters of the stage as Sylvester Fry of the *Dispatch*, Lupin Petrol of *Now*, Amethyst Valer of *Fashion*, Berinthia of *Woodfalls*, the terrible, the embittered Berinthia who was also Angela) cards had been sent out from Foreign-Colony Street, in the comprehensive name of Sir Oliver Dawtry, the famous banker and financier, inviting them to meet the new lessee of the Source.

It was one of those sultry summer nights of electricity and tension, when nerves are apt to explode at almost nothing. Beyond the iron Calvary on the Ursulines' great wall, London flared with lights.

Perched upon a parapet in brilliant solitude, her identity unsuspected by the throng, Miss Sinquier, swathed in black mousseline and nursing a sheaf of calla lilies, surveyed the scene with inexpressive eyes.

" And there was the wind bellowing and we witches wailing: and no Macbeth! " a young man with a voice like cheap scent was saying to a sympathetic journalist for whatever it might be worth. . . .

Miss Sinquier craned her head.

Where were the two " Washingtons "? or the little Iris girl?

By the Buddha shrine, festively decked with lamps, couples were pirouetting to a nigger band, while in the vicinity of the buffet a masked adept was holding a clairaudience of a nature only to be guessed at from afar. An agile negro melody, wild rag-time with passages of almost Wesleyan hymnishness—reminiscent of Georgia gospel-missions; the eighteenth century

in the Dutch East Indies—charmed and soothed the ear.

Miss Sinquier jigged her foot.

At their cell windows, as if riveted by the lights and commotion, leaned a few pale nuns.

Poor things!

The call of the world could seldom wholly be quenched!

She started as a fan of seabirds' feathers skimmed her arm.

"Sylvester's come," Mrs. Sixsmith in passing said.

"Oh!"

"Aren't you scared?"

"Scared?"

"You know, he always belittles people. Sylvester traduces everyone; he even crabs his daughter; he damns all he sees."

"Boom!"

"How he got up those narrow stairs is a mystery to me." Mrs. Sixsmith smiled.

Miss Sinquier raised her face towards the bustling stars. An elfish horse-shoe moon, felicitously bright, struck her as auspicious.

"One should bow to it," she said.

"Idolatry!"

"There! look what nodding does."

A blanche bacchante with a top-knot of leaves venturesomely approached.

"I'm Amethyst," she murmured.

"Indeed?"

"Of *Fashion*. You are Miss Sinquier, I take it, whose costumes for Romeo—Renaissance, and ergo *à la mode!*—I so long to hear about."

Miss Sinquier dimpled.

"The frocks," she said, "some of them, will be simply killing."

"I want your first."

" Loose white."

" I suppose, *coiffé de sphinx avec un tortis de perles?*"

Miss Sinquier shook her head.

" No 'Juliet-cap' of spurious pearls for me," she said.

" You dare to abolish it? "

" I do."

" You excite me."

" Unless the bloom is off the peach, Juliet needs no nets."

Miss Valer lowered discreetly her voice.

" And your Romeo? " she queried. " He must make love angelically? "

" He does."

" I admire enormously his friend."

" Mr. Nice? "

" He has such perfect sloth. I love his lazaroni-ness, his Riva-degli-Schiavoni-ness . . . He's very, very handsome. But, of course, it cannot last! "

" No? "

" Like an open rose. Have you no sympathy yourself? "

" None."

" That's a pity. An actress . . . she needs a lover: a sort of husbandina, as it were . . . I always say Passion tells: *L'amour!* "

Miss Sinquier threw a glance towards Mrs. Sixsmith, who stood listlessly flirting her fan.

" I'm going to the buffet, child," she said.

" Then I think I'll join you."

And drawing her friend's arm within her own, Miss Sinquier moved away.

" She must belong to more than one weekly! " she reflected.

" You didn't mention your Old Mechlin scarf, or your fox-trimmed nightie," Mrs. Sixsmith murmured, dexterously evading the psychic freedoms of the masked adept.

" Have you no shame, Paul?" she asked.

" Paul! "

Miss Sinquier wondered.

" Mephisto! I know his parlour tricks . . . though it would only be just, perhaps, to say he did foresee our separation some time before it occurred."

" Oh, how extraordinary."

" Once as I was making ready to pay some calls, in order to frighten me, he caused the hare's foot on my toilet-table to leave its carton sheath and go skipping about the room."

" What ever did you do? "

" My dear, I was disgusted. It really seemed as if the whole of Womanhood was outraged. So, to *punish* him—for revenge—instead of going to a number of houses that day, I went to only one."

" There wouldn't be time? "

" I shall always blame myself . . ."

" Why? "

But a lanthorn falling in flames just then above them put an end to the conversation.

" That's the second I've seen drop," Miss May Mant exclaimed, darting up.

" What have you been up to? "

" Having my bumps examined."

" What! "

" By the masked professor . . . Oh, the things he said; only fancy, he told me I'd cause the death of one both near and dear! Ita's near . . . but she certainly isn't dear—odious cat."

" He must have thought you curiously credulous," Miss Sinquier murmured, turning her head aside.

To her annoyance she perceived the scholarly representative of the *Dispatch*—a man of prodigious size—leaning solidly on a gold-headed cane while appraising her to Sir Oliver Dawtry, from her bebandeaued head to her jewelly shoes.

" She reminds me just a little of some one *de l'Évangile!*" she could hear the great critic say.

" Sylvester! "

" Oh? "

" Should he speak," Mrs. Sixsmith murmured, wincing at the summer lightning that flickered every now and then, " don't forget the mediæval nightie or the Mechlin lace! Five long yards—a cloud . . ."

Miss Sinquier buried her lips in her flowers.

Through the barred windows of the convent opposite certain novices appeared to be enjoying a small saltation among themselves.

Up and down the corridor to the yearning melody of the minstrel players they twirled, clinging to one another in an ecstasy of delight.

Her fine eyes looked beautiful as, raising them fraught with soul, they met the veteran critic's own.

XV

"O, DEAR God, help me. Hear me, Jesu. Hear me and forgive me and be offended not if what I ask is vain . . . soften all hostile hearts and let them love me—adore me!—O Heaven, help me to please. Vouchsafe at each *finale* countless curtains; and in the 'Potion Scene,' O Lord, pull me through . . ."

Unwilling to genuflect in the presence of her maid, who would interpret any unwontedness of gesture as first-night symptoms of fear, Miss Sinquier lifted her face towards the bluish light of day that filtered obliquely through the long glass-plating above.

"There's a cat on the skylight, Smith," was what she said as her maid with a telegram recalled her wandering gaze to earth.

It was a telegram from her father.

"Missed conveyance York," she read. "Bishopthorpe to-night archiepiscopal blessings."

"Ah, well . . ." she professionally philosophised, "there'll be *deadheads* besides, I've no doubt."

"Any answer, miss?"

"Go, Smith, to the box office, and say G 2 and 3 (orchestra) have been returned; there's no answer," she added, moving towards the brightly lit dressing-room beyond.

Ensconced in an easy chair, before a folding mirror that, rich in reflections, encompassed her screen-like about, sat Mrs. Sixsmith pensively polishing her nails.

Miss Sinquier bit her lip.

"I thought——" she began.

"Sh——! Be Juliet now. We're in Verona," Mrs. Sixsmith exclaimed. "*Fuori* the doors."

" Fancy finding *you*."

" Me? "

" What are you doing in *my Italy?* "

Mrs. Sixsmith threw a glance at herself in the glass. " I'm a girl friend," she said; " a Venetian acquaintance: someone *Julie* met while paddling in the Adriatic —in fact, *cara cuore*, I'm a daughter of the Doge. Yes; I'm one of the Dolfin-Trons."

" Don't be ridiculous."

" I'm Catarina Dolfin-Tron."

" Kitty Tron! "

" Your own true Kate."

" When are you going round? "

" Let me finish my hands. My manicurist has left me with such claws. . . . Poor little soul! When she came to my wedding-finger she just twiddled her rasp and broke out crying. ' To be filing people's nails,' she said, ' while my husband is filing a petition! ' "

" Wonderful that she could."

" This city has its sadness. Your maid, Smith, while you were in the other room, said, ' Oh, marm, what you must have endured; *one Smith* was enough for me.' "

" Poor Kate! "

" Ah, Julie . . ." Mrs. Sixsmith sighed, when the opening of the door gently was followed by the entry of Mrs. Smee.

" Am I disturbing you? " she asked.

" No, come in."

" I want to tell you my husband isn't himself."

" He's ill? "

" He's not himself."

" In what way? "

" It's a hard thing for a wife to confess. But for a première he's nearly always in wine."

" Is he . . . *much?* "

" I never knew him like it! "

Mrs. Sixsmith examined her nails.

" So violent? " she ventured.

" He's more confused, dear, than violent," Mrs. Smee explained. " He seems to think we're doing *The Tempest;* Romeo's tanned breast he takes for Ferdinand's. ' Mind, Ferdy boy,' I heard him say, ' and keep the —— out.' Whereupon, his mind wandered to the Russian plays I love, and he ran through some of Irina's lines from *The Three Sisters*. ' My soul,' you know she says, ' my soul is like an expensive piano which is locked and the key lost.' Ah, there's for you; Shakespeare never wrote that. He couldn't. Even by making piano, spinet. O Russia! Russia! land of Tchekhov, land of Andrief, of Solugub, of Korelenko, of Artzibashef—Maria Capulet salutes thee! And then my man was moved to sing. His love, she was in Otaheite . . . But as soon as he saw me he was back at *The Tempest* again, calling me Caliban, Countess, and I don't know what."

" Oh, how disgraceful!"

" After the performance I'll pop home—Home!—in a drosky and shut him out."

" Meanwhile? "

" He'll pass for a Friar. The Moujik! "

" Still . . ."

" He'll probably be priceless; the masses always love the man who can make them laugh."

Miss Sinquier moved restlessly towards the door and looked out.

All was activity.

Plants for the balcony set, of a rambling, twining nature, together with a quantity of small wicker cages labelled " Atmospherics," and containing bats, owls, lizards, etc., were in course of being prepared.

The manageress knit her brows.

" Miss Marquis," she called, " instead of teasing the animals, I suggest you complete your toilet."

" . . . She'd better look sharp! "

Mrs. Smee consulted her notes.

" She reminds me more of a nurse-maid than a nurse," she murmured. " Not what *I* should have chosen for Juliet at all."

" Perhaps not."

" Miss Marquis has no stage presence. And such a poor physique—she's too mean."

" Anyway, Sally's got fine men. I never saw finer fellows. Even the Apothecary! Fancy taking the fatal dose from a lad like that; he makes me want to live."

Mrs. Smee purred.

" To have interesting workmates is everything," she said. " Hughie Huntress, as Producer, seemed quite stunned at the subtle material at his disposal. . . . In fact, he realised from the first, he told me, he *couldn't* ' produce ' all of it."

Mrs. Sixsmith lowered her voice.

" Where did Sally find her Balthasar?" she asked, " and where did she secure her Tybalt? "

" My dear Mrs. Sixsmith, I'm not in the management's secrets, remember, so much as you! "

" Or who put her in the way of Sampson and Gregory? And *where* did she get her Benvolio? "

" Through an agent, I don't doubt."

Mrs. Sixsmith threw a sidelong probing glance in the direction of the door. Already in her heart she felt herself losing her hold. Had the time inevitably come to make out the score?

Through the open door came a squeal.

" Sally, the owls! "

" Leave them, Réné," Miss Sinquier ordered.

" *Dearest*, what diddlies; one has a look of old Sir Oliver! " Miss Mant declared, coming forward into the room.

Clad in a pair of striped " culottes," she had assumed,

notwithstanding sororal remonstrance, the conspicuous livery of Paris.

" I just looked in to thank you, darling," she began, " for all your sweetness and goodness . . . Oh, Sally, when I saw the playbill with my name on it (right in among the gentlemen!) I thought I should have died. Who could have guessed ever it would be a breeches part? "

" Turn round."

" Such jealous murmurings already as there are; a-citizen-of-Verona, an envious super without a line, whispered, as I went by, that my legs in these tissue tights had a look of forced asparagus."

" Nonsense."

" Of course: I knew that, Sally. But devil take me. How I'll hate going back into virginals again; these trousers spoil you for skirts."

" Sprite."

" And I'd a trifling triumph too, darling, which I chose to ignore: just as I was leaving my dressing-room, Jack Whorwood, all dressed up for Tybalt, accosted me with a fatuous, easy smile. ' I want your picture, Miss Iris, with your name on it,' he said. ' *Do* you?' I said. ' I do,' he said. ' Then I fear you'll have to,' I said. Oh, he was cross! But all the while, Sally, he was speaking I could feel the wolf . . ."

" Better be careful," Mrs. Sixsmith snapped.

" As if I'd cater to his blue besoins! "

" Réné, Réné? "

" Although I snubbed him," Miss Iris murmured, stooping to examine upon the toilet-table a beribboned aeroplane filled with sweets, " he looked *too* charming! "

Mrs. Smee chafed gently her hands.

" I must return to my Friar," she said.

" He is saying the grossest, the wickedest things! "

" Mr. Smee's sallies at times are not for young ears,"

Mrs. Smee loftily observed. " His witticisms," she added, " aren't for everyone."

" My friend, Miss Tird, who came to watch me dress, was quite upset by his cochonneries! "

" Although your little friend appears scarcely to be nine, she seems *dazed* by her sex and power," Mrs. Smee unfavourably commented.

" I'll have to go, I suppose," Miss Sinquier sighed, " and see how matters stand."

" Prenez garde: for when making up he mostly makes a palette of his hand," Mrs. Sixsmith said. " I happen to know—because one day he caught hold of me."

Mrs. Smee protruded her tongue and drew it slowly in.

" Hist! " she exclaimed.

Along the corridor the call-boy was going his rounds.

" First act beginners," chirped he.

Miss Sinquier quivered.

" . . . Soften all hostile hearts and let them love me . . ." she prayed.

XVI

THE sound of rain-drops falling vigorously upon the glass roof awoke her. A few wind-tossed, fan-shaped leaves tinged with hectic autumnal colours spotted marvellously the skylight without, half-screening the pale and monotonous sky beyond.

With a yawn she sat up amid her pillows, cushioning her chin on her knees.

After last night's proceedings the room was a bower of gardenia, heliotrope, and tuberose, whose allied odours during slumber had bewildered just a little her head.

Flinging back the bed-clothes, she discovered as she did so a note.

" Sally," she read, " should you be conscious before I return, I'm only gone to market, cordially yours R. Iris. Such mixed verdicts! I've arranged the early papers on your dressing-table. I could find no reference to me. This morning there were rat-marks again, and part of a mangled bat."

" Oh, those ' atmospherics' ! " Miss Sinquier complained, finding somnolently her way into the inner room.

Here all was Italy—even the gauze-winged aeroplane filled with sweets had an air of a silver water-fly from some serene trans-Alpine garden.

Dropping to a fine *cassone* she perused with contracted brows a small sheaf of notices, the gist of which bore faint pencilled lines below.

" Her acting is a revelation."

" We found her very refreshing."

" There has been nothing like it for years."

" Go to the Source."

" An unfeminine Juliet."

" A decadent Juliet."

" . . . The Romeo kiss—you take your broadest fan."

" The kiss in Romeo takes only fifteen minutes . . . ' Some ' kiss! "

" The Romeo kiss will be the talk of the town."

" A distinctive revival."

" I sat at the back of the pit-stalls and trembled."

" Kiss—— "

" The last word in kisses."

" Tio, Tio, Io! Io! jug—jug! "

" Shakespeare as a Cloak."

" A smart Juliet."

" An immoral Juliet."

" Before a house packed to suffocation——"

" Among those present at the Source last night were"—she looked—" were, Queen Henriette Marie, Duchess of Norwich, Dismalia Duchess of Meath-and-Mann, Lady Di Flattery, Lord and Lady Newblood, Mr. and Lady Caroline Crofts, Sir Gottlieb and Lady Gretel Teuton-Haven, ex-King Bomba, ex-King Kacatogan, ex-Queen of Snowland, ex-Prince Marphise, Hon. Mrs. Mordecai, Lady Wimbush, Lord and Lady Drumliemore, Sir John and Lady Journeyman, Lord and Lady Lonely, Lady Harrier, Feodorowna Lady Meadowbank, Lady Lucy Lacy, Duchess of Netherland and Lady Diana Haviours, Miss Azra, Miss Christine Cross, Sir Francis and Lady Four, Madame Kotzebue, Comtesse Yvonde de Tot, Mlle. de Tot, Duque de Quaranta, Marquesa Pitti-Riffa and Sir Siegfried Seitz."

So . . . she sneezed, all was well!

A success: undoubtedly.

" O God! How quite . . . *delicious!* " she murmured, snatching up a cinquecento cope transformed

to be a dressing-gown, and faring forth for an airing upon the stage.

At that hour there wasn't a soul.

The darkened auditorium looked wan and eerie, the boxes caves.

The churchyard scene with its unassuming crosses, accentuating the regal sepulchre of the Capulets (and there for that), showed grimly.

"Wisht!" she exclaimed, as a lizard ran over her foot.

Frisking along the footlights, it disappeared down a dark trap-hole.

Had Réné been setting more traps? Upon a mysterious mound by a jam jar full of flowers was a hunk of cheese.

She stood a moment fascinated.

Then bracing herself, head level, hands on hips, she executed a few athletic figures to shake off sleep.

Suddenly there was a cry, a cry that was heard outside the theatre walls, blending half-harmoniously with the London streets.

XVII

THE rich trot of funeral horses died imperceptibly away.

Looking out somewhat furtively from beneath her veil, Mrs. Sixsmith could observe only a few farmers conversing together beneath the immemorial yews of S. Irene.

It was over.

There was nothing left to do but to throw a last glance at the wreaths.

"From the artists and staff of the Source Theatre as a trifling proof of their esteem"—such the large lyre crushing her own "Resurgam." And there also was the Marys' with their motto: "All men and women are merely players. They have their exits and their entrances." And the "Heureuse!" tribute by the sexton's tools—she craned—was Yvonde de Yalta's, it appeared.

"Yvonde de Yalta!"

Mrs. Sixsmith gulped.

"You grieve?"

Canon Sinquier stood beside her.

"I——" she stammered.

"So many tributes," he said.

"Indeed, sir, the flowers are extremely handsome."

"So many crowns and crosses, harps and garlands."

"One has to die for friends to rally!"

"Were you in her company?"

"I, Canon? . . . I never was on the stage in my life!"

"No?"

" My husband never would listen to it: he holds with Newman."

" . . . I don't recollect."

" Besides, I'm no use at acting at all."

" You knew my poor daughter well? "

" I was her protégée . . . that is . . . it was *I* who tried to protect her," Mrs. Sixsmith replied.

" My dear madam."

" Oh, Canon, why was her tomb not in Westminster where so many of her profession are? I was reading somewhere only the other day there are more *actresses* buried there than kings! "

" It may be so."

" Here . . . she is so isolated . . . so lost. Sally loved town."

" Tell me," he begged, " something of her end."

" Indeed, sir——"

" You're too weary? "

" Oh, I *hate* a funeral, Canon! Listening to their Jeremiads."

" You shall take my arm."

" Her father was her cult, Canon. . . . In that she resembled much the irresistible Venetian—*Catarina Dolfin-Tron.*"

" Sally seldom wrote."

" Her time, you should remember, was hardly her own."

" Tell me something," he insisted, " of her broken brilliance."

" Only by keening her could I hope to do that."

" One would need to be a Bion. Or a Moschus . . ."

" We laid her, star-like, in the dress-circle—out on Juliet's bier . . . Mr. and Mrs. Smee and her dresser watched . . . Berinthia . . . Sylvester . . . came. I cannot lose from mind how one of the scene-shifters said to me, ' How bonny she looked on the bloody balcony.' "

" My poor darling."

" On the evening of her dissolution, I regret to say, there was a most unseemly fracas in the foyer—some crazy wretch demanding back her money, having booked her place in advance; every one of the staff in tears and too unstrung to heed her. Had it been a box, Canon; or even a stall! But she only paid four shillings."

" Was there anything on my poor child's mind distressing her at all? "

" Not that I'm aware of."

" No little affair . . . ? "

" No . . ."

" Nothing? "

" Your girl was never loose, Canon. She was straight. Sally was straight . . . at least," Mrs. Sixsmith added (with a slight shrug) . . . " to the best of my knowledge, she was! "

" In a life of opportunity . . ."

" Ah, sh——, sir, sh——! "

" Had my daughter debts? "

" Indeed she had . . . she owed me money. Much money. But I won't refer to that . . . Sally owed me one thousand pounds."

" She owed you a thousand pounds? "

" She was infinitely involved."

" Upon what could she spend so much? "

" Her clothes," Mrs. Sixsmith replied with a nervous titter, " for one thing, were exquisite. All from the atelier of the divine Katinka King . . ."

" King? "

" She *knew!* Puss! The white mantilla for the balcony scene alone cost her close on three hundred pounds."

" And where, may I ask, is it now? "

" It disappeared," Mrs. Sixsmith answered, a quick red shooting over her face, " in the general confusion. I hear," she murmured with a little laugh, " they even filched the till! "

" What of the little *ingénue* she took to live with her?"

" May Mant? Her sister is sending her to school—if (that is) she can get her to go! "

" It was her inadvertence, I take it, that caused my daughter's death."

" Indeed, sir, yes. But for her—she had been setting traps! She and a girl called Tird! a charming couple!"

" Oh? "

" Your daughter and she used frequently to take their meals in the boxes, which made, of course, for mice. There was a well, you know, below the stage."

" So she wrote her mother."

Mrs. Sixsmith fumbled in the depths of a beaded pouch.

" There was a letter found in one of her jacket-pockets, Canon," she said. " Perhaps you might care to have it."

" A letter? From whom? "

" A young coster of Covent Garden, who saw your daughter at a stage-farewell."

" Be so good, dear lady, as to inform me of its contents."

" It's quite illiterate," Mrs. Sixsmith murmured, putting back her veil and glancing humorously towards the grave.

" Dear Miss,

" I seed you at the Fisher Mat. on Friday last and you took my heart a treat. I'm only a young Gallery boy—wot's in the flower trade. But I knows wot I knows—And you're It. Oh Miss! I does want to see you act in Juliet in your own butey-ful ouse, if only you ad a seat as you could spare just for me and a pal o' mine as is alright. I send you some red cars sweet and scenty fresh from Covent Market, your true-gone

" Bill.

" Hoping for tickets."

" Poor lad. Sally would have obliged him, I feel sure," Canon Sinquier said.

" Alas, what ephemeral creatures, Canon, we are!"

" We are in His hands."

" She knew that. Sally's faith never forsook her . . . Oh, Canon, some day perhaps I may come to you to direct me. I'm so soul-sick."

" Is there no one in London to advise you? "

" Nobody at all."

" Indeed? You astonish me."

" I'm perfectly tired of London, Canon! "

" Your husband, no doubt, has his occupation there."

" My husband and I are estranged . . ."

" You've no child? "

" Alas, Canon! I often think . . . sometimes . . . I would like to adopt one. A little country buttercup! Really . . . a dog, even the best of mannered—isn't very *comme il faut*."

" You seek a boy? "

" Mer-cy *no!* Nothing of the sort . . . You quite mistake my meaning."

" Your meaning, madam, was obscure."

" I imply a girl . . . a blonde! And she'd share with me, sir, every facility, every advantage. Her education should be my care."

" What is your age? "

" From thirteen——"

" An orphan? "

" Preferably."

" I will discuss the affair presently with my wife," Canon Sinquier said, turning in meditation his steps towards the wicket-gate.

" Before leaving your charming city, Canon, I should like beyond everything to visit the episcopal Palace: Sally used often to speak of the art-treasures there."

" Art-treasures? "

" Old pictures! "

" Are you an amateur of old pictures? "

" Indeed I am. My husband once—Paul—he paid a perfect fortune for a Dutch painting; and will you believe me, Canon! It was only of the back view of a horse."

" A Cuyp? "

" A Circus—with straw-knots in its tail. It used to hang in Mr. Sixsmith's study; and there it always was! Frankly," she added, brushing a black kid glove to her face, " I used sometimes to wish it would kick."

" If you're remaining here any length of time, there are some portraits at the Deanery that are considered to be of interest, I believe."

" Portraits! "

" Old ecclesiastical ones."

" Oh, Canon? "

" Perhaps you would come quietly to dinner. At which of our inns are you? "

" I'm at the ' Antelope.' "

" I know that my girl would have wished our house to be open to you. You were her friend. Her champion. . . ."

" Dear Canon—don't . . . don't: you mustn't! She's at peace. Nothing can fret her. Nothing shall fret her . . . ever now. And, you know, as a manageress, she was liable to vast vexations."

" My poor pet."

" She's *hors de combat:* free from a calculating and dishonest world; ah, Canon! "

" We shall expect you, then, dear Sally's friend, to dinner this evening at eight," Canon Sinquier murmured as he walked away.

Mrs. Sixsmith put up a large chiffon sunshade and hovered staccato before the dwindling spires and ogee dome of S. Irene.

It was one of the finest days imaginable. The sun shone triumphantly in the midst of a cloudless sky.

She would loiter awhile among the bougainvillæas and dark, spreading laurels of the Cathedral green, trespassing obtusely now and then into quiet gardens, through tall wrought-iron gates.

New visions and possibilities rare rose in her mind.

With Sally still, she could do a lot. Through her she would be received with honours into the courtly circles of the Close.

Those fine palatial houses, she reflected, must be full of wealth . . . old Caroline plate and gorgeous green Limoges: Sally indeed had proved it! The day she had opened her heart in the Café Royal she had spoken of a massive tureen *too heavy even to hold.*

Mrs. Sixsmith's eyes grew big.

Her lost friend's father wished for anecdotes, anecdotes of her " broken brilliance"; he should have them. She saw herself indulging him with " Salliana," wrapped in a white mantilla of old Mechlin lace.

An invitation from Canon and Mrs. Sinquier should be adroitly played for to-night: " And once in the house! . . ." she schemed, starting, as a peacock, symbol of S. Irene, stretched from a bougainvillæa-shrouded wall its sapphire neck at her as if to peck.

Her thoughts raced on.

On a near hill beyond the river reach the sombre little church of S. Ann changed to a thing of fancy against a yellowing sky.

From all sides, seldom in unison, pealed forth bells. In fine religious gaiety struck S. Mary, contrasting clearly with the bumble-dumble of S. Mark. S. Elizabeth and S. Sebastian in Flower Street seemed in high dispute, while across the sunset water S. Ann-on-the-Hill did nothing but complain. Near by S. Nicaise, half-paralysed and impotent, scarcely shook. Then triumphant, in a hurricane of sound, S. Irene hushed the lot.

Mrs. Sixsmith fetched a long, calm breath.

It was already the hour he had said.

" And my experience tells me," she murmured, as she took her way towards the Deanery, " that with opportunity and time he may hope to succeed to Sir Oliver."