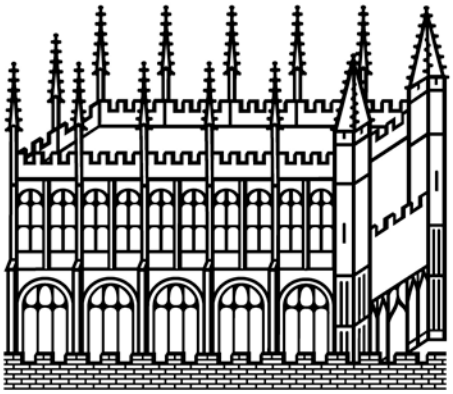

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THIRTEEN ALL TOLD

BEATRICE HARRADEN

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THIRTEEN ALL TOLD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT
IN VARYING MOODS
HILDA STRAFFORD
THE FOWLER
KATHARINE FRENSHAM
THE SCHOLAR'S DAUGHTER
INTERPLAY
OUT OF THE WRECK I RISE
THE GUIDING THREAD
SPRING SHALL PLANT

THIRTEEN ALL TOLD

BY

BEATRICE HARRADEN

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

First Published in 1921

BOD LIBR.
OCT. 1921
OXFORD.

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THIRTEEN ALL TOLD

THE ENCHANTED HOUSE

I

IT was a curious thing how Wilberforce Keith hankered after that house in St. John's Wood. It was all the more curious because never before in his life had he wanted a house. A couple of rooms, a few good books, a piano, a violin and his liberty constituted his idea of what was necessary for the enjoyment of life.

Certainly not a house with all its awful and terrifying responsibilities and its puzzling limitations. Puzzling, because the greater the space, the more rigid the limitations. He had always noticed that. It was as if Abstract Space had said: "If you attempt to make me concrete, you'll lose me—you'll lose the sense of me."

That immense house of Eridge's, for instance. You could feel the walls pressing on you, the ceilings high enough in all conscience, yet bearing down on your head. You simply couldn't breathe. The wonder was that you got out alive. And a still greater wonder that anyone remained alive there, year in, year out. A small house was safer because it attempted no rivalry with an Abstract Idea. The walls didn't press against you; the ceilings, however low, didn't rest on your head, for the simple reason that you weren't expecting Space.

You were, in fact, outside Space, independent of it, unconcerned with it. And therefore, free.

But as for wanting to buy or rent any house, big or small, well, he had invariably said: "Never," until he noticed that house in St. John's Wood.

He had seen it first on a wet and windy night, and very little of it had he seen—just a glimpse through the outer gate. That's all. It was detached and surrounded by a high wall; but at the very moment when he was passing, the gate was thrown open, and he caught sight of the garden and dim lights from the house, which stood well back, secluded, mysterious, peaceful, final.

A young woman had opened the gate. She called back to someone in the house:

"It's raining hard. Don't come out. See you to-morrow for the last time here. It's awful that the board's going to be put up. I shall come and tear it down. Well, so long! What a night!"

She strode off and was soon out of sight. She was equipped for the roughest weather, and wore a sou'-wester hat and a green oilskin coat. He remembered also that she carried an electric torch which she switched on for a moment, whilst she stopped to take something out of her pocket and look at it, probably an address, for she said aloud:

"Idiot that I am. Of course, it is Campden Hill, and not Camden Town. Whatever was I thinking of?"

But that did not concern Wilberforce Keith. What did concern him were her previous words: "*It's awful that the board is going to be put up. I shall come and tear it down.*"

So the house was to be let. A board was going to be put up, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the next day. Anyway, the house was to be let. And he'd been told that direct at the moment of passing—he of all people who had never hungered after a house. The news made such an impression on him, that when he arrived at the end of the road, he turned back and passed the house again. He even stood for a minute or two outside it, regardless of the rain and wind. Not being equipped with oilskin coat and sou'-wester, he became drenched, but indifferent, so obsessed was he with the significance of the

message which he believed had been meant for him. He heard a voice whispering softly but clearly to him:

"The reason why you have not had a house all these years is, that this, and this only, could be your home. *And you must have it.*"

The idea pursued Keith day and night. It often kept him awake or haunted him in his dreams. And why? Ah, that was the curious part. He could not have said why—had not the least curiosity to know why. If anyone had put the question to him, he could merely have answered: "Some secret force is impelling me."

II

It chanced that Keith was called away on business to Newcastle-on-Tyne, and was absent from London for about ten days. Directly he returned, he made a pilgrimage to St. John's Wood and found that the house was to let and the board up. In addition to the names of two agents, he read the words: "*Caretaker within.*"

He rang the bell. In a few seconds he heard the sound of slow footsteps over the paved pathway; and an old man with a singularly beautiful face opened the gate.

"I am sorry to keep you waiting," he said, courteously, and in a tone of voice which betrayed the scholar and the gentleman.

"I fear I have disturbed you," Keith said. "I am much afraid I have come at an hour when the caretaker is out."

"No, you have not," the old man said, with a smile. "Come in. I am the caretaker."

He led the way through the pretty garden up to the secluded house, to which the twilight of an early spring afternoon lent an added touch of mystery, but with no faintest sign of anything sinister or forbidding. On the contrary, the immediate impression Keith received was joyousness.

The old man paused on the threshold and said:

"You will find each room more lovely than the last."

And this was the only information he appeared to think it was necessary to give. He waved his hand with circular gesture as if indicating that his visitor was free to roam through the house, and then retired to what had probably been the dining-room of the previous occupants. Keith glanced in and saw a table, a comfortable chair, a bedstead, and a number of books. A fire was burning in the grate. Although the room was dismantled, there was no air of desolation about it. The very marks left by the pictures taken away from the walls, produced no depressing effect of departure and abandonment. They seemed, in fact, to be outward and visible signs that things of beauty and sweetness had hung there, and had shed an abiding benediction on the place.

As Keith strolled from one empty room to the other, he felt extraordinarily happy, not in the sense of being elated or tuned to excitement, but as one might feel on beholding for the first time a land of unusual loveliness, of ideal promise. He could not have particularised or described his sensations: all he knew was that he was under the thraldom of influences which made for joy of spirit, an indefinable and yet an especial joyfulness for which he had been hungering all his life.

When he came downstairs, the old man was waiting in the hall to receive him. He scanned Keith.

"Ah, I see you have found out the secret," he said, half-regretfully. "I knew that sooner or later someone would arrive to whom it would be revealed. Many have been here and gone away without the faintest idea of it. But I judge from the expression on your face that you know."

"You mean that the secret is happiness," Keith said. "If you mean that, then it is true that I have discovered it. I have never in my life been so conscious of the benediction of quiet happiness."

"Nor I," the caretaker said.

And he added:

"It would interest me greatly to know in which room you experienced the greatest joy."

"It was in the garret," Keith answered, without a

moment's hesitation. "In the smaller of the two rooms. I felt . . ."

"Yes, yes, what did you feel?" the old man broke in eagerly.

"I felt," Keith continued, "as if beautiful poems had been written there—poems which broke down barriers, disclosed visions, revealed truths."

"Ah, that is precisely what I felt there," the old man said, with a radiant smile.

"Very strange, very strange," Keith said, half to himself.

"No, not strange," the old man said. "If beautiful poems were born there, surely it is not to be wondered at that they should leave their impress. The mystic Spirit of Place is . . ."

He broke off. Whatever he had intended to say, he had changed his mind about giving expression to his thoughts. He stood silent and aloof, waiting for his visitor to depart. In this respect he bore close resemblance to all caretakers in possession of premises, though so different in all other characteristics. Keith had a great desire to ask him why he was acting in this capacity, but instinct told him that the old man must not be questioned; and, indeed, he was himself too sensitive to intrude on anyone's barriers of privacy. He accepted his dismissal, and withdrew.

He paid three more visits to the house, and on each occasion found, to his joy, that it was still unlet. It was borne in on him increasingly that he must acquire the place for his home. He eventually entered into negotiations with the owners; and one day he was able to tell the old caretaker that the arrangements were completed, but that he could only secure a yearly tenancy, and that he had to take the house as he found it, without renovations or repairs.

"And there is something I want to say to you, sir," he said. "I do not, of course, know who you are, nor why you are here. But I do see that you love the house, and something tells me that I must not deprive you of it. Nor do I wish to do so. I would like you to stay on and be happy."

"You mean to say that I have not got to go?" the old man asked with an eagerness which betrayed to Keith the measure of his apprehension.

"Yes, you must stay on and be happy," Keith answered kindly. "I know I have been disturbing your peace of mind, because you have seen that I have wanted desperately to live here, and you have feared that this meant you would lose your haven. Isn't that so? Well, you see it does not mean that. Keep your room and live your own life. I will not interfere with you."

"But the others who will come with you, may dislike the presence of a stranger," the old man said, his face suddenly falling.

"There are no others," Keith said gravely. "I am alone in this world—a lonely man. I have a married sister, living in London, but separated from me by the barriers of fashionable life. She used to count in my scheme of life in the old days, but now she does not. So I am practically alone in the world."

"You will not be lonely here," the old man said. "You will have companionship—wondrous companionship. It is an enchanted house. But you know that yourself."

Keith nodded.

"Yes," he said dreamily. "I was caught by its spell from the beginning."

"I also," the old man said. "If you care to hear, I will tell you the simple history of my presence here. Perhaps you will come and sit down in the room which you say may still be mine."

Keith followed him into his den and sat near the fire.

"I was out in India," the old man said. "I was in a hill station, and an Englishman, a Civil Servant, on his holiday, was taken very ill. I looked after Hebden as well as I could, but he had a mortal illness on him, and the end was very near. He knew this. And one day he asked me to look for a letter he had put aside somewhere; and I found it and read it to him. It was merely a short note sent from this address, in which the writer said he feared that he would not be able to get a renewal of the lease,

and he was much troubled. That was all. But Hebden became greatly agitated, and he tried to write, but could not. Then he dictated these words: '*Renew the lease of the house at all costs. I have left you money. Make every sacrifice to stay on. It will be worth while.*' "

Keith nodded his head as if in confirmation.

"It will be worth while," he repeated softly.

The old man continued:

"After his letter had been sent off, Hebden seemed easier. But the subject of the house was always in his mind, and he made me promise, when I came to England, to go straight to his friend Arncliffe, and give a farewell greeting and a further admonition that the lease should be renewed. He kept on saying that the house was too valuable to lose, though he never once gave any reason. It was a curious thing, but his only regret in dying seemed to be that he would not again have the joy of living in that house."

The old man paused a moment. He seemed lost in thought.

"Hebden died," he went on. "I carried out his wishes directly I came to England, a few weeks after his death. I had scarcely crossed the threshold of this house when I learnt its secret. It was enchanted—and in a very beautiful way."

"And what about Arncliffe?" asked Keith eagerly. "Did he perceive that you had learnt the secret?"

"Yes," answered the old man, "he had only to look at my face, just as I only had to look at your face. But he gave me no chance of asking questions. He was hugging the secret to himself—defending it from the outside world. So when I left, I knew nothing save that I had entered and quitted an enchanted zone. But I have kept constant watch over the house; for the memory of my emotions on my arrival haunted me night and day. When at last it stood empty, I managed to secure the post of caretaker, as I longed to learn more. That is how I chance to be here. It was my only chance, since the rent was quite beyond my means."

"And your sojourn has not disillusioned you?" Keith

asked. "But I need not ask that. You look entirely happy."

The old man smiled.

"You will look the same," he said gently. "Happiness gives all people, however differently featured, an unmistakable resemblance. I can promise you happiness here—and companionship. If you have been lonely as I have been in my life, and as Hebden, I think, and Arncliffe were lonely, here you will never have that misery to endure. That much I can tell you—and the rest you will find out for yourself."

Keith went away thrilled with wonder and expectancy. The Promised Land for which he had ever vaguely been steering, was spread before him at last.

III

A FEW weeks later Keith moved his few possessions into the unfurnished house. The caretaker had made a curious remark to him. He had said: "You will, of course, not need much furniture. *It is already furnished.*" But in any case, Keith would not have dreamed of buying things to add to his equipment. He might want a home, but he certainly did not want the added complications of tables, chairs, sofas, wardrobes, curtains, carpets and other similar trials of the flesh. He had a few beautiful bits of the best Jacobean period, and these he installed in his bedroom and sitting-room. His sitting-room was the drawing-room of the previous tenant. The dining-room remained, as promised, the abode of the old man, whose name was Halton—Samuel Halton.

In the beginning Keith's chief trouble was dealing with and dismissing the many representatives of firms who wished to supply him with all the usual appurtenances of a well-regulated normal household. It took a great deal of firmness and resourcefulness of brain to make these gentlemen understand that their services were not required and never would be required, and that all he asked of them was that they should never return, never

send any circulars, never write. They went away greatly puzzled, of course, and could only suppose that he was out of his mind.

Keith's friends certainly thought he was out of his mind. They found it amazing that he, who for years had lived in two rooms, and had ever shrunk from the responsibility of a house, should suddenly, without any warning, and apparently without any reason, take a big one and settle down in it alone, except for the ex-caretaker. They could have understood and appreciated his action if he had produced a wife for the occasion. But to have no wife and no furniture—well, it was past human comprehension. His sister, Elizabeth, whom in the past he had always liked, expressed her mind quite openly about his mental condition, and urged him to see a specialist.

"A rest cure, dear Wilberforce, is what you need," she said soothingly. "I do beg of you to consult Dr. Hawthorne Jenkins."

Keith smiled good-naturedly, and patted her hand. He was much too happy to be annoyed with her or anyone.

"Look here, Elizabeth," he said, "you just sit down and play the Corelli Sonata in D with me. I want to know how music sounds in this room. I'll tune up the fiddle whilst you find the volume. It is in the corner there."

But she shook her head. She was not in the mood for Corelli.

"And you know nothing about that old man," she said. "I do think you are behaving strangely, Wilberforce. He may murder you. Such awful things happen."

"Yes," Keith conceded, "awful things do happen, but they are not going to happen in this house. You need not be alarmed about Halton."

"Why have you asked him to stay on?" she persisted.

Keith still did not lose his temper over what might well have been considered her impertinence. Instead he answered, half dreamily:

"If you went into a lovely garden and found a noble oak tree within its precincts, would you wish to uproot it?"

After this remark Elizabeth's fears for her brother were confirmed, and she went home and confided them to her husband, a prosperous and shining Q.C., who had never had any flattering opinion about Wilberforce Keith's mind or character.

"Don't worry about him," he said. "He is a queer fellow. His view of life has always been an absurd one. All that nonsense about spreading his money amongst others and only having few personal wants and possessions, is as irritating as it is ridiculous. His present aberration is merely another manifestation of his unbalance. You cannot do anything about it, Bess. Leave it. Some day Keith will go out of his mind, and then we can settle him comfortably where he will be happy, poor chap."

"But he is so happy now," Elizabeth said. "I have never seen anyone so happy."

"Part of his unbalance, of course," said the Q.C. "What sane person is happy?"

"Aren't you happy, Jack?" she asked anxiously.

"I'm all right," he answered, smiling at her. "I'm busy and prosperous and interested and ambitious and all that sort of thing, and devoted to my wife and children, but happy—I don't know. Are you?"

"I don't know, Jack," she replied wistfully.

She remained uneasy about Wilberforce. She had a rooted belief that he was in danger of being murdered by the old man. She did not hint at the possibility of this tragedy to her husband. She could not have borne it if he had taken off his eye-glasses, cleaned them, twiddled them about, and remarked, as she knew he would:

"Aha, this gets interesting. We must watch the development of events."

No, she could not have borne that.

She wished she had played Corelli's Sonata in D when Wilberforce asked her.

IV

So Keith settled down in his new home, having secured a woman to come daily and do a reasonable amount of

work. He had views about the dignity of honest and efficient labour at a time when very few people were giving this subject even a passing consideration. There were plenty of workers to choose from in those far-off days, and he chanced upon a Mrs. Wedderburn, the widow, firstly, of an Italian who had been a dealer in sculptures. She had spent several years in Italy, and had evidently seen better days. He probably engaged her because she recognised his picture of the Bargello staircase. That would not necessarily have meant that she would clean a staircase well, or prove in any way to be a domestic treasure. But, oddly enough, she did turn out to be extraordinarily efficient. And she prepared macaroni cheese in a fashion which would have made Elizabeth's husband uphold the innocence of the most hardened criminal. (Elizabeth's husband was fond of good cooking.) She was pleased with her liberal wage, which was exceptional at that period, though now accepted as ordinary standard; and she was gratified with the appreciation of her services, also a phenomenon in that brutish age of domestic slavery. She seemed, in fact, happy and contented, and sounded, therefore, no discordant note in the atmosphere. When asked whether it were not rather desolate and depressing working in that big, empty house, her answer was:

"*Oh, dear no, there are plenty of people about.*"

It is not known whether she referred to Mr. Halton and Keith only, or whether she included in her statement the invisible Presences pervading the enchanted house.

For there were invisible Presences. Keith sensed them from the beginning, feebly at first, and gradually with a finer perception. Either they became more insistent, or he more sensitive. Either they tuned themselves to him, or he unconsciously tuned himself to them. Probably a period of trial and acclimatisation was necessary before they and he could form anything except a vague elusive acquaintanceship. Perhaps they had not been able to decide whether Keith had credentials of sufficient value to entitle him to eventual intimacy of intercourse. Anyway, weeks passed, and there were no developments

or changes, save in himself. He became amazingly well and looked years younger. Before he lived in the house, he might have been taken for a man of sixty years: whereas he was only fifty-one or two. But now quite twenty years of apparent age vanished into nothingness. He faced the world as a man of forty.

Elizabeth was astonished when she saw him She arrived one day after having dreamed that he was murdered, fearing to find him in that condition, and yet hoping against hope that he *was* intact and that they could play the Corelli Sonata in D as in the old days, when she used to make music with him, hour in, hour out. Yes, she gave up a particularly brilliant Society function that afternoon, discarded her hat with its scandalous aigrette, laid aside her Manner of Prosperity, and her long bobbing earrings which had always annoyed Keith beyond human bearing, and came because she was impelled.

"I had to come, Wilberforce," she said. "I wanted to see if you were well, and I really yearned to have some music with you. It was horrid of me to refuse the other day. You look well."

"Not murdered yet, you observe," Keith laughed. "The old man is still quite harmless. A very interesting personage. I suppose there is nothing about Oriental languages and Indian dialects that he does not know. One of the few people who have been to Thibet. Imagine that, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth did not try to imagine it. Her principal interest in Mr. Halton was that so far he had considerately spared Wilberforce's life.

So brother and sister played together not only Corelli, but Bach and Schumann and Brahms. It was an extraordinarily happy afternoon, and once Elizabeth looked round, nodded at him, and said, "Jolly, isn't it, Wilby."

"Jolly," he answered. "Downright jolly."

And another time she looked round, not at him, but into space, with an expression of pleasurable expectancy on her face, which lent her a distinct charm, never contributed by her aigrette or her bobbing earrings. She left with a marked reluctance, and when she had got as far

as the gate, she said she had forgotten her ring which she had taken off, and she must return to find it. It was an invention. Elizabeth had not forgotten her ring. The truth was that she wanted to enter the house again, to linger a little and bathe herself in the atmosphere. She found her ring, not on the ledge of the fingerboard, but in her satchel, and remarked innocently: "How silly of me —here it is. Now I am really off, Wilby."

Keith did not notice her little bit of subterfuge. What he did notice, and what interested and pleased him, was that Elizabeth seemed more like her former self than on any occasion he had seen her since many years. She had grown important with prosperity; and Importance, of course, is far more separating than Death. You may lose a person by Death physically, but not necessarily spiritually. But by Importance you lose a person absolutely. Elizabeth had not been important that afternoon. She was the Elizabeth of his childhood again, who had played and quarrelled with him, run races, climbed trees, and later, climbed mountains in the Bernese Oberland, seen with him the beckoning snow-peaks and the tenderness of the Alpine glow.

He stood thinking of her for a long time after she had gone.

V

LATE one afternoon, when Keith returned home, he had scarcely opened the door with his latch-key, when he heard the sound of children's laughter and voices. Even the most stereotyped journalist could not have described it as shrill. It was clear, bell-like, but subdued, as though it were wafted from a far distance.

"No, no, it's your turn to catch me," someone cried.

"Go on then, I'll give you a good start," cried someone else.

There was a scampering across the hall right up against Keith, and a mad rushing up the staircase and a dashing into all the rooms, and a subdued yell when pursuer caught the pursued. Sounds—but no visible signs of the children.

Keith stood still with a smile on his face. There was no need to ask whether the children had been too quick for him to see, whether Mr. Halton had been receiving guests, or Mrs. Wedderburn entertaining relatives. These were some of the Children Presences of the house. They belonged here.

He felt it.

Were the Presences really going to make themselves known to him? The very thought thrilled him. And if so, how entirely delightful that the joy in store for him should start with the children. He must tell Halton that something had begun. It had been agreed between them that he must find out everything for himself, with no promptings from Halton, but that it would be quite safe to report the different stages of his admittance into the inner life of the house.

So he knocked at Mr. Halton's door, was told to come in, and found the old man as usual deep in his books, but as usual, quite ready for Keith's companionship. Not that he often ventured to disturb Mr. Halton. Keith was sensitive, and the mere fact that the old man was the first of them to live in the house, gave added reason that his seclusion should be respected and his method of life not interrupted. Mrs. Wedderburn had received strict injunctions on that point. She, therefore, never intruded on him, and Keith but seldom. But now it was an absolute necessity that Mr. Halton should be told the news, and Keith was so excited that he could scarcely get it out.

"Ah, so you have begun with the children," Halton said, putting down his book on the Dialects of India, and smiling in sympathy with Keith's eagerness. "No doubt you love children. I am sure you do. Well, you will love these children very specially. They have great charms, and are subject to bouts of excessive naughtiness. I trust it will not be long before you see them as well as hear them. They kept me some time waiting, but then I am not exceptionally attached to children—or was not. I am attached to them now. But you, loving children already, will have a better chance."

He then returned to his Indian Dialects, and Keith could get nothing further out of him.

A day or two afterwards Keith, sitting alone in his room, became acutely aware of Presences ; and these fragments of conversation were borne to him.

"Yes, the sweet peas are very beautiful," said a voice. "Thank you for bringing them. Your experiments. have been most successful. I have never seen such large ones nor such tender colouring. And their fragrance is delicious. You ought to feel triumphant and happy. You won't get a prize, of course, but you will not mind that, Peter."

"No, I think I can survive that tragic deprivation," said Peter, laughing. "Flowers bring their own reward of an abiding joy. Wonderful things flowers—increasingly wonderful, I think them."

"You have a way with them," said the other. "You could conjure up a rose garden with a wave of your little finger. I wish you'd take a look at the garden here, and deprive it of its complacent smugness. It's too well cared for in the wrong way. Marian won't change the gardener because he has a large family to support with three sets of twins. So we have to put up with his efficiency. Perhaps you could have a talk with him, and undermine some of his best professional qualities. Do, Peter."

"I'll try," laughed Peter. "But efficient gardeners are almost as impenetrable as Permanent Officials. And we all know what we think of *them*."

A little soft chuckle of amusement followed—and then silence.

That same evening, Keith, feeling restless, wandered over the house, and came finally to the garret where, on the occasion of his first visit, he had received his strongest impressions of the all-pervading happiness. The door was shut. He paused on the threshold. He knew perfectly well that the room was empty : and yet it was borne in on him that he must ask permission before entering. He knocked.

"Come in, come in," said a voice, joyously.

Keith opened the door. He saw no one.

"You have just come at the right moment," said the voice. "I've finished my Ode to the Dawn. Oh, the travail of creation—but the joy—the ineffable joy! Nothing can take that from one—neither failure nor success. Yes—yes, the dawn breaking on the distant scene—liberty, freedom of spirit, fetters unfastened for evermore."

Keith had ever loved poets. He believed them to be the salvation of the world. And as he stood there, a great longing and sympathy and gratitude surged up within him. He stretched out his arms to that invisible Presence.

And, slowly, slowly, it materialised. He saw the form of a man, dimly outlined, small, ordinary, insignificant, but in his eyes the fire of vision, and on his countenance, written large, the thought that penetrates the ages to come.

It faded—and was gone.

VI

One day Mrs. Wedderburn came to Keith's sitting-room and said that a young lady had called and asked whether she might see him for a minute. She was waiting downstairs in the hall.

"Are you sure she has not come from one of the furnishing firms?" Keith asked apprehensively.

"I am not sure, sir," Mrs. Wedderburn answered. "But she does not look like that. And she hasn't a business manner at all. She almost skipped into the hall when I opened the door, and said aloud, 'Oh, the darling old place.'"

"Sensible girl," Keith remarked, smiling. "She deserves to be received. But if she should prove to be a disguised emissary from Hampton's or Shoolbred's or any of those Hostile Houses, what on earth am I to do?"

"Ring, sir," suggested Mrs. Wedderburn. "And then leave me to manage her. I'll soon tell her we don't want no furniture here and no carpets."

The visitor was shown in, and Keith rose to receive her.

"Good morning," he said gravely but courteously. "I think I had better say at once that I trust you have not come from Hampton's or Shoolbred's."

"Well, it is curious you should mention it," she replied, "but I have this moment come from Shoolbred's."

"Ah, I feared so," he said, moving in the direction of the bell. "But I can assure you I am not in need of their help. I need neither carpets nor furniture."

She laughed merrily, and very charming she looked, her eyes dancing with amusement, and a slight flush—Nature's unaided tint, on her face.

"Oh, I understand," she said. "You thought I was a representative of the firm intent on business. But I'm not. And I've only been to Shoolbred's to buy a couple of tea-trays. I am sorry if I have alarmed you. I really ought not to have come at all, but I could not resist. You see, we lived here for some time. Some friends lent us the house whilst they were away in South Africa. And I was never so happy in my life. I was passing near, and felt I must come in."

Keith moved away from the bell. His manner underwent a complete change.

"*You lived here*," he repeated, smiling. "Then I am sure you are most welcome. I can well understand that anyone who has once lived here, would never pass the house without wishing to come in. In fact it would be impossible."

"Yes, it would be, wouldn't it?" she said eagerly.

"Roam through the house at your leisure," he went on. "You will need to be alone to collect old memories, so I will not come with you. If you wish to see me again, you will find me here."

She lingered for a moment before wandering off.

"It was most curious," she said half-dreamily, "how happy I was here. I don't think I am by nature a happy person, and we have always had great tragedies in our family, which have helped to make us all sorrowful. But you would have been amused to see the change in us here. None of the others knew the reason of the change. They

were light-hearted and at ease in body and spirit without realising that they were under some influence. But I knew. After I had been here a day or two, I had learnt the secret of the house."

"Ah," said Keith quietly, "a beautiful secret, isn't it?"

"Yes," she answered, her eyes shining.

She passed swiftly up the staircase. Keith heard her singing as she went. He recognised the song. It was "*L'Heureux Vagabond,*" a little song by Alfred Bruneau.

He felt certain that there was a stir in the atmosphere. He could well imagine that she was being welcomed as one in perfect accord with the harmonies of the house.

She bore the signs of pleasurable excitement on her radiant countenance when she came downstairs again.

"Darling old place," she said, "I love every inch of it. But I must see what used to be the dining-room in our time. May I? The dining-room was to me the most wonderful room in the house."

Keith hesitated.

"I don't know whether we can disturb Mr. Halton," he said. "I found him here in possession of that room, and here he abides. But wait a moment. Perhaps he is asleep, and then you could steal in and sit awhile."

He opened the door very cautiously. Mr. Halton was fast asleep in his armchair. His book on Indian Dialects had fallen on the ground. Keith beckoned to his visitor, and she crept in on tiptoe.

"What a grand-looking old man," she whispered. "He is the right personage to be here. He belongs to the room."

Keith nodded, put his finger to his lips to enjoin silence, and pointed to a chair in the corner and left her. He did not close the door. He waited in the hall, wondering what she was feeling, what she was hearing, seeing, thinking. He longed to ask, but he knew well that he would never dream of taking that liberty. If she told him anything, spontaneously, of her own free will, he would be glad. Would she tell him?

It was only about ten minutes, but it seemed to him ten years, before she came out.

"The old man is still fast asleep," she said. "I scarcely breathed lest I should rouse him."

And she added:

"The peace in that room is just as wonderful—more wonderful, and my favourite landscape more beautiful than ever. I always loved that silvery backwater with its grey reeds. I hope the dear old man sees it and enjoys it."

"I have not a doubt he does see and enjoy it," Keith said gravely.

She held out her hand to him.

"You have been very kind to me," she said, smiling. "Thank you ever so much. I feel buoyed up with happiness."

Then she darted off like a bird, and Keith heard her singing that same little song as she danced down the pathway.

"*Je m'en vais par les chemins, lirelin, et la plaine,*
Dans mon sac j'ai du pain blanc, lirelin, et trois écus dans ma poche."

Keith stood for a moment lost in thought; and then he stole into Halton's room, and glanced at the empty walls with the marks left of the places where pictures had hung. There were none now.

"A silvery backwater with its grey reeds," he murmured. "Perhaps I shall see it one day."

By degrees the Enchanted House yielded up more and more of its secrets. Keith caught glimpses of the Presences at nearer intervals; and snatches of conversation were always reaching him. Laughter broke upon his hearing—happy laughter, never sinister, always reassuring. Music greeted him sometimes. And he heard the opening movement of Beethoven's String Quartette in F, known as the Harp-Quartette. On that occasion he did not see the players, but later they revealed themselves to him, two men and two women, and they seemed in a state of beatific enjoyment over their own performance.

"We're playing very well, to-night, aren't we," said the leading violinist, who was a woman. "We're eclipsing ourselves. We shall soon be playing at St. James's Hall."

"Let us finish up with a Mozart," said the 'cellist, "so pleasant and comforting."

The sounds and the vision faded, but Keith knew he had made new friends. And later, added to them, were two women, one of whom was bending over some exquisite embroidery work, and the other, an exceedingly beautiful personage, was engaged on some chemical experiment in her laboratory.

And not so long afterwards, in his own room, the veil lifted and showed him, for one brief moment, the picture of a little girl curled up in an armchair. She was writing hard, and her little thin face, tense though it was with eagerness, was lit up with a marvellous radiance, that strange radiance seen only on the countenances of those to whom the gods have given the mystic gift of genius. Her doll was lying pathetic and neglected on the ground. A tall, grave-looking man, with grey hair and a grey beard, was bending over her.

"My little one hard at work," he said, "far, far away in her own world, and with no thoughts for her old father or her old doll."

"Darling father," she cried impulsively, and flung her arm round him.

Keith saw the expression of pride and love on the man's face—and then the veil descended.

One night before Keith went to bed, he strolled out into the garden to enjoy the moon and stars which were making of the heavens a silver paradise. He was filled with wonder at them and with gratitude for their splendour thus spread before him in a healing lavishness. When he returned to the house, he heard a voice saying:

"But as I have often told you, I never have painted for the present. I do not expect that my meaning and method will be understood now. My eyes have always been fixed on the distant scene."

"Very distant is that distant scene," said another voice, not mockingly, but on the contrary with anxious concern.

"Let it be," said the first voice. "I make towards it—it is my goal. You would not like me to be prosperous like Eridge. Don't ask it of me. I really could not oblige you."

The other laughed. Then there was silence. Keith had a sort of feeling that the two friends went off arm in arm together.

He thought constantly about that artist whose eyes were fixed on the distant scene. And of course he longed to see one of his pictures, and hoped, almost prayed, that one day he might behold the work of a man who cared not for the praise and profit of the moment, but was content to steer towards a far-off goal. For Keith himself was unworldly, free, unmanacled. If he had been a writer or a painter or a creative genius of any kind, his eyes would have been fixed on the distant scene.

Keith's hope was realised at last. He saw the artist working in his studio—a tall, grave, greyhaired man, the father of the little girl who wrote and wrote curled up in an armchair. He was alone now, alone with his aims and ambitions, and he was finishing an amazing picture, quite different from anything that Keith had ever imagined.

You had to look at it a long time before you realised that it was supposed to represent peaks of snow mountains freeing themselves from the mists. The method, the colouring, the conception were startling in the extreme; but when you had recovered from the bewilderment, you began to think that here indeed were the peaks themselves, here indeed the mists themselves, and here before your very eyes Nature at work jewelling the snow with emeralds and rubies as the sun leapt joyously to greet the liberated prisoners.

VII

To Keith's amazement Elizabeth's husband arrived one evening about six o'clock. It chanced that Mrs. Wedderburn was constructing her famous dish of macaroni cheese

at the time, and the fragrance of it was wafted benevolently upstairs. The Q.C. sniffed it, and said to himself:

"Ha, something good cooking here. I must enquire into this."

It gave him an unexpectedly favourable impression of the place. He had come intending to be patronising and satirical, for he had always fostered a contempt for Keith and all his ways. But he could not be contemptuous confronted with a succulent aroma of this description. The thing was not possible.

"So this is your new home, Wilberforce," he said affably. "Well, I hope you will continue to be happy in it. Elizabeth seemed to think you had settled down very comfortably."

"I have, thank you," Keith said icily. He did not like John Fortescue.

"Elizabeth enjoyed her afternoon here," the Q.C. continued. "I must say I have never known her for many years to be so light-hearted. Something here seems to have pleased her extraordinarily."

"Indeed," remarked Keith. "I am glad."

"You look very well, Wilberforce," Fortescue said. "Very well and astonishingly young."

"Thank you, I feel both," Keith said with the same stiffness of manner which the Q.C. always provoked in him.

"Not burdened with furniture, I perceive," Fortescue remarked, looking round. "Is there by any chance a chair in the establishment? I was never one for standing."

"My bedroom and sitting-room are furnished," Keith said rather more pleasantly. "Come in and sit down in my easy-chair in my den."

"Ah, that's better," Fortescue said as he followed Keith into the sitting-room and sank down into a comfortable armchair. He lit a cigar and spread himself, as if he were entirely welcome and could do as he pleased. Prosperity had made him sure of himself, and he had never been dowered with even a minimum of sensitiveness. Keith watched him, wondered why he had come, wondered how long he was going to stay, and wondered what Elizabeth had ever found to like in him.

"Curious idea of yours, Wilberforce," he said, "to take a big house after all your protestations against houses and your theories about freedom from unnecessary responsibilities and so forth."

"Yes, very curious," Keith agreed good-temperedly. "No one could be more surprised than myself."

"If it isn't an impertinence, I would like to ask why you did it," Fortescue said, rather coaxingly, as if he were attempting professionally to wheedle a bit of information out of a stubborn witness. "I have always been interested in motives."

"It is an impertinence," Keith said, smiling. "I might just as well ask you why you moved to Curzon Street."

"Oh, that's easily answered," Fortescue said, laughing. "It was the obvious thing to do in my position—and I did it. Prosperity has to proclaim itself to be believed in, and to accumulate compound interest. I don't mind telling you that I am not at all happy in Curzon Street. But I had to go. That's all."

"That is exactly my case," Keith said. "I had to come here. Only I had no motive that I was conscious of."

"Perhaps it was for space," Fortescue suggested. "You have always cramped yourself up."

"No, it was not," Keith replied. "I have never cared for space in itself and don't now."

"Well, you have plenty of space here whether you like it or not," said the other. "Empty space. It ought by rights to feel desolate; but I am bound to confess it doesn't."

Keith was on the point of stating that it was not empty and could not feel desolate, when he restrained himself; for it had never been his habit to talk intimately with Elizabeth's husband on the few occasions when it was his misfortune to be brought into contact with him. But oddly enough, to-day he felt it to be less of a misfortune; and although he was not intending to give Fortescue confidences, he neither resented his questions nor even his presence. For the first time in their intercourse Keith did not actively dislike him. In fact he found himself

owning that there was a sort of boyish charm on Fortescue's face which he had never noticed before, and a suggestion of good-nature making an unconscious appeal for a belated appreciation.

The door opened at this juncture, and Mrs. Wedderburn appeared with the evening tray, from which the cheese macaroni sent forth an enticing invitation.

"By Jove, what a jolly good smell!" said Fortescue boyishly. "You've got a good cook here, Wilberforce. Plenty of space, no furniture—but a good cook. Well, well!"

Mrs. Wedderburn was pleased.

"Shall I bring another plate, sir?" she asked of Keith.

"Yes," Keith answered, laughing. "You'd better prove your statement, Jack."

Jack Fortescue proved it, and when he returned home, surprised Elizabeth by telling her that he had paid that queer old Wilberforce a visit, and found him greatly changed for the better, more companionable and easy to be with, and obviously happy and contented.

"As for his macaroni cheese," he added, "well, words fail me."

It was evident that whatever the cause—macaroni cheese or the Secret of the House—he had passed a pleasant evening, and had absorbed some of the happiness of the surroundings.

He went whistling into his library.

VIII

One day when Keith was sitting with Mr. Halton, he suddenly saw the landscape of the silvery backwater with its grey reeds.

"The silvery backwater!" he cried aloud joyously.

"Ah, I am glad you see it," the old man said. "I always hoped you would. It speaks of peace and calm trust and everything beautiful. It has been a great comfort to me. If you had turned me away, I should have mourned for it."

"I could not have turned you away," Keith said kindly. "It would not have been possible."

"No, I do not think it would," Halton said. "You do not like to give pain to anyone. I am sure of that. And you have been rewarded as you ought to be."

"I don't in the least deserve to be rewarded," Keith said, smiling. "But I have been. All my life I have longed for the sort of companionship we have here. Out in the world they call real, it was unattainable. I have no key with which to unlock the gate which shuts off ordinary ungifted people from intimate contact with the great. I had no aims, no attributes to serve as passport, no right of entry. Nothing except a great longing. One saw them from afar, and now to be with them in their midst seems——"

He broke off. Voices were heard in the room.

"The fact is I can never tell you or anyone how great the conflict in my own spirit has been," said one of them. "You know I have cared passionately for my art, Ned, and yet for many years I have been torn by the feeling that I must devote more of my strength to public service. I have envied those who, like yourself, were able to remain outside the region of that insistent call. Still, if one hears a call, one has got to answer to it—and these labour questions are awfully pressing. If we don't handle them now—don't begin to handle them now, I mean—we are storing up endless difficulties and multiplying tenfold the injustices which we refuse to remedy."

"Poor old chap, I do wish you were not obsessed by injustices," said the other voice. "No one has your touch. No one paints a sunrise on the sea like you. Anyone can look after injustices. They're not nearly as important as sunrises on the sea."

"Aren't they though!" laughed the other. "That's the trouble. Well, I must be off. I've got to speak at the Working Men's College to-night. Don't take any notice of my outpouring. I'm an awfully happy fellow when all is said and done. Wouldn't be without my contradictory calls for all the peace of spirit in this life or hereafter. So long."

Keith had the feeling that the Presence withdrew. There was a moment of silence, and then Ned said :

" Come here, Buster, good dog. Come here. That's right. Now, Buster, I want to tell you that I would not mind so much if those confounded people for whom and with whom he works, realised a little the sacrifice he makes. But they don't. They think he is just like themselves. But we know better, don't we ? "

Keith saw the dim outlines of the man bending over his dog. They were very faint, and faded into nothingness.

There were many days when the Enchanted House parted with none of the details of its secrets, and when neither voices nor visions reached Keith's ears and eyes. But even then the Presences did not leave the precincts, and there was always the sense of a pervading, delightful companionship which gave him all he wanted, and yet left him free and unfettered to pursue his own life. There was the stimulating expectancy also that at any moment, something might happen.

New friends revealed themselves as time went on, amongst them a pair of young lovers whose faces were radiant with the wonder of their happiness. There were several authors, one of them a novelist, and the other a writer on philosophical subjects, so far as Keith could gather from the fragments of conversation heard on different occasions. And then there was someone who was always spoken of as " the disinterested politician." He was evidently considered by his community to be a miracle of nature, for his approach was always heralded by the words :

" Aha, here's our phenomenon, the disinterested politician."

And of old acquaintances Keith saw or heard, or both saw and heard frequently the poet, the painters, the little girl writing her stories, the woman of science in her laboratory, the woman of the beautiful embroidery work, the children playing about the house, the string quartette, Peter, the enthusiastic gardener, and the artist-social reformer whom Keith loved with all his heart and

understood with all his brain. Buster, the retriever, too, made many appearances, sometimes with the children, or his master, or alone on guard in front of the easel. Certainly all the people who had lived in that house or frequented it, as friends or acquaintances, had been fine people with aims, aspirations, enthusiasms, ideals.

Was it any marvel, then, that it had become a Temple of Enchantment ?

Sometimes, nay often, Keith wondered who had built the House, and what had taken place on the ground before it was built. Had it in past ages been the site of an altar where sacrifices of the spirit had been offered up to a God of Happiness ? Who could tell ? Only one thing was sure—and that was its marked influence on all Keith's friends. They had no knowledge of its secret, and indeed were scarcely conscious of the spell it cast over them. All they knew, was that they liked to come ; and of course they got no enlightenment on the subject from Keith. The secret was sacred. Halton and Keith by tacit agreement rarely spoke of it, even to each other.

" It is safer to be silent," the old man said. " I have a belief that if we were to speak much of them, discuss them, compare our experiences, the Presences might withdraw themselves."

Keith shared his view, and beyond reporting from time to time, as had been arranged between them, another addition to his list of introductions, he kept his impressions and emotions to himself.

Only once did Mr. Halton particularise.

" If we could choose out of all these lovable Presences," he said, " I think I would single out the artist-social reformer as my favourite."

Keith nodded. He thought the same.

So the happy months sped on. Elizabeth looked in several times, and was fully satisfied that Keith was not qualifying for a lunatic asylum, nor in danger of being murdered by Mr. Halton. On her visits to the Enchanted House she dropped all her society manners, and became a real human being, not a sawdust doll. She enjoyed playing Brahms and Schumann and Beethoven with

Keith and his violin. She strolled about the house, sang, and made the acquaintance of Mr. Halton, who however refused to be interested in her, and always courteously but quite definitely retreated to his Indian Dialects after two or three minutes of her companionship. She was not hurt.

"He can do anything he likes," she laughed to herself, "as long as he does not murder dear old Wilby."

The Enchantment of the House had renewed and restored the old friendship between brother and sister interrupted by marriage and importance and prosperity and all other separating circumstances of social life. It had also affected the relationship between Keith and the Q.C. The Q.C. came several times, and not really for the macaroni cheese. He lounged in the easy-chair, smoked a very big cigar, played a game of piquet with Keith, spread himself and said on leaving that he felt enormously rested.

"A pleasure to be with you, Wilberforce," he said once. "I fancy I've been a nice fool these many years."

Keith did not contradict him.

And once again the young lady arrived whom Keith had mistaken for the representative of the Furnishing Department of Shoolbred's. She was going out to South Africa to be married, and she wished to take a last farewell of the place where she had been so happy. She wandered alone in all the rooms, and as before, came downstairs with an air about her as if she had been seeing many friends who had welcomed her and stimulated her. Keith prepared Mr. Halton for her arrival, explained her, and impressed on the old man's mind that this was her last visit to the Enchanted House. Might she come in? Mr. Halton said of course she might. And he rose from his chair, and was preparing to withdraw from the room, so that she might enjoy the atmosphere undisturbed, and in silence and quietness be imbued with the Spirit of Place.

But she prevented him.

"Please, please, don't go, dear old man," she said eagerly. "You are the very personage to be in the room. You make it even more mysteriously healing than it was before."

Mr. Halton's face lit up.

"My child," he said, "may the memory of the Magic of the House abide with you always, together with an old man's blessing."

IX

One morning about eighteen months after Keith had obtained possession of the Enchanted House, a tragic piece of news reached him. He received a letter which he at once read aloud to Mr. Halton. The property which included their home had been sold to a Syndicate, and flats were to be erected. Liberal compensation was offered Keith for an immediate surrender of his tenancy.

"Compensation," Keith cried indignantly. "There could be no compensation."

"No, there could be no compensation," Mr. Halton said, shaking his head gravely.

It was the first time that any shadow had come over their happiness there; but it was only transient. The Spirit of Place did not allow the atmosphere of the Enchanted House to be changed. The offer of compensation for immediate surrender was of course firmly refused, and during the three months which preceded the legal termination of their tenancy, Keith and old Mr. Halton enjoyed an even more intimate intercourse with the Presences, unmarred by any touch of sadness or any regretful concern over the parting in prospect. They lived only in the Present, and the Present was beautiful and charged with a happiness, compared with which the joy of the first months had been but a prelude heralding in an era of finer sensitiveness, richer fulfilment.

Was it that the Presences had learnt to know and trust them, and were anxious to bestow on them the full measure of friendship as an abiding memory? Was it that they themselves in their distant world were reluctant to part with a link of rare understanding and sympathy, and therefore set to work to forge it with added security?

Who can tell? Yet, is it not conceivable that those

who have passed beyond the barrier and have found a hidden channel of communication running clear and fresh and free from garish hindrance, may yearn to keep it open for their own sakes and on behalf of all the so-called Dead ?

Who can tell ?

But this much can at least be told, that the Presences revealed themselves with increasing frequency during those last wonderful weeks, and finally were seen and heard at all times and in all places. Formerly they had confined their intimacy to a tacit acceptance of the companionship of Keith and Mr. Halton, with whom they were at entire ease. But in these latter days they broke one more barrier down, and established a direct and personal communication, only intermittently, it is true, yet often enough to show that the boundary line was becoming more and more negligible.

The children penetrated even into Mr. Halton's den, and romped round his table, and played havoc with his books and Indian Dialects.

" Ah, you have come again, dear children," he said, smiling. " And you are as welcome as flowers in May."

" Of course we are," they cried, " we know that well, dear old man."

The artist reformer was always sauntering in and out of Keith's sitting-room, sometimes holding forth on Art and sometimes on Labour. And once, to Keith's ineffable joy, he addressed him. He said :

" I am sure you will understand how happy I am, Keith, when I tell you that I have made up my mind to give myself a period of rest from all public questions which have been torturing me, and throw myself into creative work again. I began this morning—and already feel years younger."

" Ah," Keith said eagerly, " I am glad to have that good news."

Down from his garret strolled the poet with a Sonnet to the Sea, which he declaimed to Mr. Halton with passionate fervour. The musicians played in the hall, and one evening the first violin turned to Keith and asked :

"Shall it be Brahms or Beethoven or Mozart to-night? You shall choose."

The last night came. Mr. Halton and Keith, quiet and dreamy, but not unhappy, sat together in the old man's den, and in silence watched the red glow from the fire, which lit up the room with a tender radiance, and disclosed the landscape of the silvery backwater with its grey reeds.

The delicate fragrance of sweet-peas stole over the air.

Soft sounds of music wafted from afar, and through the harmonies the poet's voice was heard whispering:

"It is not farewell, comrades of the earth. It is not farewell. Sharers of the Secret dwell together for ever."

Keith and Mr. Halton fell asleep smiling.

THE CLARIONET PLAYER

MONTH after month the clarionet player found his way to a certain street in the West End of London, and standing by the lamp at the corner of the pavement, began his recital. His tone was perfect; anyone hearing the unfailing rhythm of his phrasing would have known that he was no ordinary street musician. He came in all weathers—in the damp cold of the winter, and on the uncertain spring nights, and the long summer evenings. He was generally at his post any time between eight and nine. Month after month Janet Ravenscroft listened to him, and every time he came, the fixed sum of sixpence was sent out to him from the rich woman's house.

Sometimes he came when she was in the midst of a dinner party, engaged perhaps in listening to some interesting conversation, or talking with a really intelligent member of Parliament, or a distinguished traveller, or a successful playwright: for many persons of all sorts gathered together at her hospitable house. But whether she were hearing about our Imperial destinies, or the last new play, something in her memory became arrested when she heard the clarionet player; and she said to herself: "The clarionet player." Then she beckoned to the butler, who already knew what she meant, and she whispered to him: "Send out sixpence to the clarionet player."

It was an unwritten rule in the household that if she did not hear him, she was immediately to be told of his arrival. She had never given instructions to that effect, but her wishes on the subject were taken for granted.

And so, even if she were holding a musical reception, and some well-known artist were singing or playing, the butler would wait until the song or the piece was finished, and he would step softly in and say to her:

"The clarionet player, madam."

She never gave more than sixpence, except at Christmas, when the sixpence became a shilling. And he always sent back some message of thanks.

"Tell the lady that I feel her kindness very greatly," he said.

Once he said:

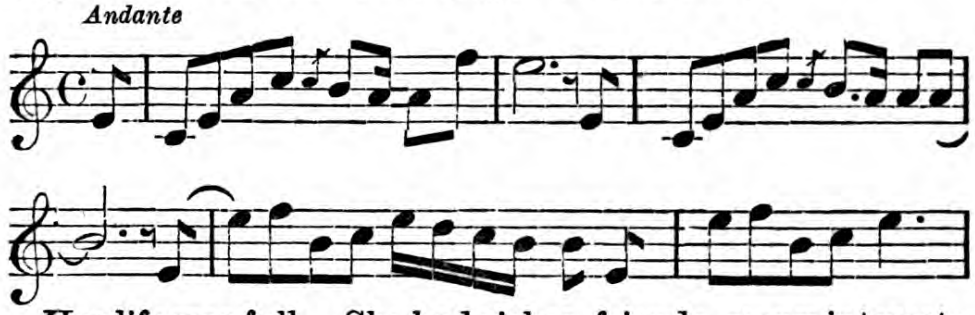
"Tell the lady that I have been away in Margate, doing a pretty fair season."

That was all that ever passed between them month after month.

She had never seen him, had never asked to see him, and had never questioned her servants about him. She seemed to have no curiosity concerning him: so that her nterest in him was not personal. It was, indeed, a memory—nothing save a memory. For in the years which were gone, her husband—happily for her, now dead—had played the clarionet, had played it with skill and feeling, with rhythm and with poetry; and now, whenever she heard its mournful voice, her thoughts, in spite of themselves, wandered back to the time when the man whom she had loved, and who had used her cruelly, had lifted his instrument to his lips and had filled the air with the haunting tones characteristic of the clarionet.

And since this unknown musician was merely the embodiment of a memory, it did not concern her whether he were tall or short, dark or fair, of grave or gay bearing, a broken-down ne'er-do-well, or merely a careless Bohemian who might have seen better days. Indeed, she scarcely took the trouble to identify the music which he played: the usual Irish songs, of which he seemed to prefer "Rich and rare were the gems she wore": various airs and variations from Donizetti and other Italian masters, passages from Weber's "Clarionet Concertino": several *tours de force* which showed off his skill as an executant, and many plaintive melodies, in the rendering of which

he was always at his best. But she noticed that he always began with the same melody. This was it:



Her life was full. She had riches, friends, many interests, increasing as the years went on. She was fifty years old. Her face, still beautiful, bore signs of grief. Although she never referred to her married life, it was known that Mrs. Ravenscroft had endured bitter years of tragic suffering and unhappiness. When her husband died, disgraced and in a foreign land, she could only be thankful that she was free at last. She was obliged to change her name on coming into a large fortune unexpectedly, and she was thus able to alter her whole mode of life, and to forget that fifteen years of marriage had been to her fifteen years of misery. She was considered metallic by most people; indeed, she gave out very little tenderness to anyone, and therefore received but little in exchange.

Perhaps she had given all she had.

And then the clarionet player came. In the beginning she never thought of him, except at the moment of his arrival and whilst he was playing. When he ceased playing and passed on his way, her reawakened memories fell into lethargy once more, and she took up her new life as if nothing had occurred to disturb its continuity. But as time went on, she found herself thinking about him; and one day, remembering that he had not come for many weeks, she said to the butler:

"Surely the clarionet player has not been here for some time?"

"No, madam," he answered, "not for several weeks."

But at last he came again. She heard with a sense of relief his preliminary trills and shakes and runs, and the plaintive melody:

She sent a message of welcome out to him, together with the usual sixpence.

"Tell the clarionet player that I have missed him and his beautiful music."

The answer came back: "Tell the lady that I have been ill, but that I am well again."

One day she fell ill. She was ill for many weeks, weeks of great loneliness; for in spite of her riches and her position, in spite of all her many interests and occupations, she was alone in the world. And her thoughts turned involuntarily to that unknown clarionet player. She longed to hear him. She began to wonder why she had never made enquiries about him, why she had never interested herself in his life and misfortunes, why she had let him come time after time, and go time after time, without even the slightest sign of personal sympathy. Then she began to excuse herself to herself, urging as a strong argument in favour of her attitude, that she had only erred on the side of wisdom. He was just a street musician. Of what possible concern could he be to her?

At last he arrived, eagerly waited for, although he did not know it; and she lay in her room listening more intently than ever before to his delicate phrasing. In the months that had passed, she had only listened half-heartedly, vaguely, distracted by her company and the circumstances of her life. But now she listened with all her heart and with all her hearing. That melody he was playing—*what was it?* She remembered now that he always began with it, and played it more beautifully than anything else. Why did he always begin with it? There was a world of sorrow and regret and longing in it. Was it the expression of his own feelings?

She sent out to ask the name of this beautiful, melancholy melody, and the answer came back: "Schumann's Third Romance for Oboe, arranged for clarionet."

A few more weeks passed, and she was still laid up, weak and ill, cut off from all her ordinary activities. And he came again.

For the first time an uncontrollable impulse seized her. She felt she must see him. But at the moment when she reached the window and leaned out, she saw his tall form retreating down the street. She saw him put his clarionet in his pocket and go his own way. She stood for a moment lost in thought.

With the return of spring, strength came back to her, and one evening she was sitting in her boudoir, still alone, and full of many thoughts, when she heard the sweet opening notes of the Schumann Romance.

She summoned the butler.

"Tell the clarionet player that I should wish to see him, if he can spare me a few minutes," she said, in her grave way.

The well-trained servant showed no sign of surprise. After he had gone, she drew the curtain and looked across to the other side of the road, where the clarionet player was standing, as usual, near the street-lamp. She was anxiously restless whilst she waited. Those few minutes seemed to her like years. She laughed nervously at herself.

"It must be because I've been ill," she said in excuse.

She rose and stood against the mantelpiece. She rested her arm on the shelf, and stared fixedly into the fire. The door opened, and the clarionet player was ushered in.

The musician came a few steps towards her. He held his clarionet in one hand and his hat in the other, with an old-world, easy grace and irresistible charm. There was a smile of gratified surprise on his pale but handsome face. He bowed and began in a soft voice:

"It is very good of you, madam, to wish to see me. I assure you I——"

He broke off as she turned round and looked at him.

"Good Heavens!" he cried, with a horrible change of voice and manner. "Why, it's Janet!"

She was still leaning against the mantelpiece, but her face had turned deadly white. Some words rose to her lips, but she could not give them utterance. She merely stared at him.

"Why don't you speak?" he said roughly. "I know you—I should know you anywhere—you're Janet, my wife Janet, with the same steely face and steely manner that used to madden me with irritation."

She gave no sign.

He threw himself down in the armchair, threw himself back recklessly, rudely, and laughed as though in a frenzy. And still she did not stir. He waved his arms in the air and clasped them over his head.

"Good Heavens!" he cried, loosening them again and slapping his knees violently. "And to think you've only been sending me out sixpences! You living in this fine house here, and I a poor devil out in the street! Well, you have done me at last. To think you've only been sending me out *sixpences*!"

He laughed, and laughed. It was appalling to hear him.

Suddenly he fell back and was silent, and his clarionet slipped to the ground.

She moved towards the chair and bent over him. The stony expression on her face gave way to no concern.

"Dead," she said in a low voice. "Dead."

She touched the bell.

BONDAGE

I

IT was about half-past twelve at night, and Robert Eriswell sat alone in his great studio at Queen's Gate. He was profoundly moved. He and his wife had been to see the French company at the Royalty Theatre, and the first piece given was from Alfred de Musset's poem, "Les Nuits," that wonderfully beautiful duologue of the Poet and his Muse. Madame Bargy had impersonated the Muse with an idealism which had stirred to renewed life the passivity of his artist spirit. He heard her voice echoing in his ears :

"Poëte, prends ton luth ; c'est moi, ton immortelle.
Prends ton luth, prends ton luth ! je ne peux plus me taire.
Qu'as tu fait de ta vie et de ta liberté ?"

He saw the whole scene before him. The poet in his lonely room, given over to the troubles of his heart, and forgetful of his life's work. The Muse calling to him, pleading with him, reasoning with him, and reminding him of all the fair and lovely themes awaiting the inspiration of his genius. Why was he silent ? What had he made of his life and his liberty ? Why should he not take his lyre and sing once more ? Did he not know that Spring was born that night, and that the wild rose had broken into flower ?

Robert Eriswell sprang up from his chair and paced

restlessly up and down the room. What had he himself been making of his life and his liberty? His own muse had for many long months asked him insistently that searching question, and he had turned a deaf ear to her entreaties and offered a stubborn resistance to her exhortations. Then, discouraged, she had abandoned him. She had left him to his wealth, his ease, his worldliness, and his prison-walls of commonplace content.

But to-night the message which he had refused to hear direct from her, had reached him from another source. He saw himself in the poet whose lyre had been silent. He saw in the poet's unsung songs his own unfinished pictures, his own unrealised ideas.

He met himself face to face, and suffered agonies of remorse in the encounter. He saw that he had sold his birthright when he married that rich and beautiful woman to whom the visions of the spirit were unknown joys.

She had weaned him first from the originality of his ideas. Conventional herself, she demanded, with an unconscious tyranny, conventional ideas and thoughts from him. Then, by slow degrees, she weaned him from his work itself, from his fine ambition, from his belief in the necessity of expression. Her commonplace mind recognised no need for wings with which to soar above the low-lying plains of everyday life. His wings made her uneasy. She clipped them, without his knowledge, and hedged him round with love and kindness, and all the so-called benefits of wealth. She held him in subjection by her beauty and her physical charm. She dominated his outer circumstances by her money. She crushed, with unthinking cruelty, the frail flowers of his mind. She lured him from his own regions in which he had wandered over mysterious and trackless paths, and led him by the hand to her own world, where the high roads of everyday life stretched baldly to the North, the South, the East, the West.

He did not judge her. He judged himself. If at the beginning he had been true to his genius, loyal to his ideals, he would never have suffered the silken bonds of passion

to become as iron fetters of custom. He would have rent them asunder, and stood free—free to express himself once more in his own language, free to choose the untrodden desert, the hidden trail. But now it was too late. He had sold for ever his birthright of detachment, without which no poet can sing, no musician awaken the interchords of life.

Yet was it too late?

Again he heard the words:

"Poëte, prends ton luth, prends ton luth; c'est moi, ton immortelle."

He stood listening. A smile lit up his face. Some pent-up gladness escaped and flooded his whole being. He switched on all the lights in the studio, and with a joyous alertness, began to draw out some of his old canvases and open some of his old sketch-books and portfolios. Here were the songs unsung, here were the unfulfilled fancies of the spirit, here the unrecorded thoughts which had once possessed him. They encompassed him now. He was in his own world again, restored, if only for the passing moment, to the true companions of his mind. He looked at one sketch, and said aloud:

"Yes, I remember distinctly the idea I intended to carry out here. I must work it out on the same lines."

He looked at an unfinished watercolour of Twilight, and said aloud:

"Yes, I remember deciding that it was lacking in mystery. I must have another try at it and see what I can do now."

He examined this, he criticised that, sometimes silently, sometimes with spoken words. He was so intent on what he was doing, that he did not hear the door open, and did not know that Edith, his wife, was standing watching him. When at last he looked up and saw her, the sketch which he was holding fell from his hands. He realised, with a shudder of apprehension, that the moment had come when he must declare himself, and find some means of setting himself free from the trammels which impeded his life's work.

Edith's very first words helped him.

"What on earth are you doing here, Robert?" she said. "Come, dear, leave all this rubbish and come to bed. Do you know, it is nearly two o'clock?"

"Rubbish," he said bitterly. "You call all this rubbish? Well, Edith, let me tell you that it is the only thing in my life which is not rubbish."

She stared at him in astonishment. She did not believe that she had heard his words aright. She sank on to the couch and leant back, a beautiful, regal figure of a woman, clad in a sumptuous dressing-gown of that Florentine blue which always accentuated her loveliness. For a few minutes she did not speak. But at last she said slowly, as if trying to fathom some hidden depth of meaning:

"*The only thing in your life which is not rubbish.*"

"It is hateful to me to have put it in that way," he exclaimed eagerly. "It is insulting. I'm bitterly sorry."

He had risen up and come towards her; but she signed to him with her hand to keep at a distance.

"How would you put it in another way?" she asked. "I'm curious to know."

He was silent.

"I think that I have the right to know," she added gravely.

Robert Eriswell stood speechless with despair. He knew he could never make her understand his meaning. Looking back over his four years of married life, he knew that he had tried from time to time to impress on her the needs, the importunities, the imperious demands of the creative spirit. Nothing had reached her. She was entirely without imagination. Nothing would reach her now. Her type of mind could never learn to decipher the invisible letters of an unknown language guessed at easily by a finer perception.

Perhaps even at this juncture he would have given up the struggle as hopeless, and succumbed as ever before to her physical charms and temperamental ascendancy, but that, echoing in his ears, whispering to his heart, throbbing in his brain, he heard those magic words:

" *Poëte, prends ton luth ; Poëte, prends ton luth ; c'est moi, ton immortelle.*"

" I think I have the right to know," his wife repeated still more gravely.

If she had shown anger or grief, his task would have been easier. If she had even vaguely hinted at the benefits which she had conferred on him, she would at least have given him the chance of explaining to her that these benefits were not benefits to him, but definite disasters. If she had reproached him for his rudeness, he could have answered, justly enough, that he had been stung by her thoughtless, scornful allusion to his work. But she gave him no opening ; and many a stronger man than Robert Eriswell has been forced, in a similar predicament, to capitulate to circumstance, and wear for evermore the livery of an intolerable serfdom. So that his courage, by comparison with the usual mental cowardice of men, was something immense, amazing.

He leaned against the wall, with his arms folded tightly together. His face was ashen, but his eyes shone with a brightness which, in the old days, had ever been their true characteristic.

" I will put it in this way, Edith," he began in a low voice. " A poet needs certain things to stimulate his creative powers. And without them his gifts are laid waste. He needs freedom of spirit. He needs mental detachment. He needs an atmosphere where he can breathe. A poet should be solitary. More or less, he must be a soul set apart. He is of the world, and yet not of it. He must climb the mountain-side alone. He must descend into the abyss alone."

He paused. She made no sign.

" Inspiration is the frailest of frail flowers," he went on, his courage now becoming greater by the mere using of it. " It is dependent for its very existence on fostering circumstances. Without these it dies, or else it meets with a far worse fate than death—degeneration into the commonplace. And this is my fate. Oh, yes, I know it —I've known it all the time, Edith. At first I fought with it. But my passionate love for you overcame my

resistance. I said to myself after each defeat: 'The world of dreams—the poet's world—my own world well lost for love of her.' After a time I struggled no more. But when I ceased to struggle, I knew in my heart of hearts that I had begun to deteriorate. I knew that wealth and ease and worldly position, and all those garish things, which I had despised in the past, were taking firm hold of me, in body, brain and soul. And then it was that you said to me: '*I have moulded my darling into shape at last. I have made him care for the life for which I care.*' Do you remember saying those words to me, or have I dreamed them?"

"No, you have not dreamed them," she said slowly. "I remember saying them."

He scarcely heard her answer, but goaded on by fierce anger with himself for the madness and folly of those lost years, he continued with increased intensity:

"If I had not been a fool, that speech of yours alone might have warned me. I believe it did warn me for the moment. But it came too late for any continuous effect. I had allowed myself to be moulded into the commonplace. Oh, don't think that I am judging or blaming you—I am judging and blaming myself. I am the one in fault. I had the larger knowledge. I had the wider outlook. I had the inner call. I ought to have known that your world could never be my world, and that I should only cease to be an alien in it, when I had completed the sale of my birthright, and given up my last lingering aspiration. You couldn't have known that. I never told you. I scarcely told myself. And if I had told you, you would not have understood. I——"

He broke off suddenly, for he had glanced at her face and had seen its expression of blank bewilderment.

"You don't understand now," he exclaimed hopelessly.

"No," she said, "I don't."

She rose from the couch and stood for a moment as though in a dream. Then, without a word, without a look, without a trace in her manner of anger or indignation, she left her husband alone in his studio.

II

ROBERT ERISWELL stood staring at the door through which his wife had passed. He was paralysed by the suddenness of her departure, and by the certainty that he had failed to make himself understood, and had only succeeded in bewildering her. It would have been some consolation to him if she had been angry with him. Anger at least implied a certain amount of activity of intelligence. Anger could be dealt with, either successfully or unsuccessfully. Anger did not necessarily exclude every ray of hope and every possibility of resilience.

A dull, deadening despair took possession of him; and he glanced round his luxurious studio and saw in it a barred and barricaded prison-cell, from which all escape had been made entirely impossible.

But suddenly, in rather a dark corner of the room, he caught sight of Will Beaudesart's portrait, on which the light from one of the electric lamps was shedding a remarkable radiance. Beaudesart's eyes were looking at him in their kindly, mischievous way, and his humorous lips seemed on the point of addressing some cheery remark to his old friend. A great heart hunger for Will came over Robert Eriswell.

"I shall go to him now," he said. "I shall go now."

The clock struck two.

"Two o'clock," he said. "But that doesn't matter. Will's hours are always accommodating."

For a moment he smiled as the remembrance of old and happy, irresponsible days swept over him. Then he slipped on an overcoat, stuffed a few cigars into one of the pockets, clapped on a hat, and let himself noiselessly out through the garden entrance. He stepped into a dark and chilly night, breathed a sigh of relief, and went quickly on his way to Beaudesart's studio in Messina Road, St. John's Wood. Good luck attended him, and for the greater part of the way he got a lift in a hansom. He rapped at the studio door. He used his old rap, their secret sound of comradeship and jolly good fellowship. There was no answer. He knocked

again, and this time with one or two more of the old familiar sounds. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and Will Beaudesart appeared, in shirt sleeves, and with his pipe tucked tightly in a corner of his mouth.

"I couldn't believe my ears, old fellow!" he said excitedly. "Couldn't believe my own ears! Thought I was dreaming."

There was no mistaking the welcome in his voice and his manner, and Robert Eriswell felt something like a renewal of hope and happiness as he followed his friend into the grubby workaday old studio, the scene of much good cheer, honest work, and irresponsible revelry in the past. Nothing seemed changed. The same disorder reigned around. The same lay figure occupied its old position in the corner, and was posed in its usual menacing attitude. The traditional sausages and bacon were frying in a saucepan over the gas-ring, and a bottle of the same familiar Scotch whisky was waiting to be uncorked.

"Just in time for supper," Beaudesart said, flourishing a fork gaily. "Heavens! I'm hungry. Been at work all the evening. Have had a devil of a rush cockering up some Spanish scenes for *The Pictorial*. You can help me, old chap. You used to be a regular dab at that sort of thing. Regular sort of handy man, weren't you? Too rich now, perhaps?"

"Yes, Will, that's the trouble," Eriswell said, with a half laugh, sinking down into the armchair. "Too rich. Done for."

Beaudesart stood still, paused in the middle of his cooking, shot a keen glance at his friend, and saw the sadness written large on his face.

"Poor old Bob," he said gently. "So it has come?"

Eriswell nodded.

"It had to come," Beaudesart added. "You were never meant for that sort of life."

"No," Eriswell said. "And I told Edith to-night. I told her that I——"

He broke off, and leaned back wearily, as if the effort of speaking were too much for his strength. Quick as thought, Beaudesart mixed a whisky and soda, and put

the glass into Eriswell's hand. Eriswell took a long draught of it, and then watched Beaudesart attacking his savoury meal. A smile broke over the sorrowfulness of his face.

"You at least haven't sold your birthright, old Will," he said.

"No, but I've done almost everything else except that," Beaudesart answered.

"It seems to me as if nothing else matters, if only one has not done that," Eriswell replied.

There was a pause. Beaudesart gave Maria, the black cat, some bacon ends and poured some milk into her saucer. Eriswell drew his cigars from his pocket, and handed them to his friend.

"Crumbs from the rich man's table, Will," he said, smiling.

"Ah, I've no objection to the crumbs, I can tell you," Beaudesart answered gaily. "Mighty good crumbs, I should say. The best cigars in the world."

"Yes," Eriswell said, and he lit one and watched Beaudesart light his and nod approval.

"The same idea has been carried out all along the line, Will," he said, after a pause. "Nothing has been too good for me. But it hasn't been what I've wanted. I tried to tell Edith this to-night. She—she didn't understand."

"How could you expect her to understand, old man?" Beaudesart put in gently. "A different language altogether. She wouldn't be able to learn even the rudiments. No fault of hers. A person can't help being born commonplace. Rich and beautiful and commonplace. No fault of hers."

"No, you're right," Eriswell agreed. "No fault of hers. Mine has been the fault all through, for I knew more. And I ought to have made a sensible use of my knowledge, and refused to allow myself to be drawn out of my natural sphere of work and life."

Then, in his own way, by degrees, unasked, uncoerced, Eriswell told his story, and unburdened his heart. He dwelt on the gradual weakening and deadening of his

ideals and ambitions, and the growing consciousness of his spiritual and mental deterioration. He was entirely frank about himself. He said that no one realised better than himself that if he had been great enough, he could have triumphed over the temptations of wealth and ease, and trampled over the barriers which divided him from his own rightful kingdom. Something in his temperament had prevented him from being able to do this. Some inherent weakness in his nature had hindered him from recovering his lost ground.

"But the whole time," he said excitedly, "yes, the whole time, that inner voice has been calling to me: 'Poëte, prends ton luth; poëte, prends ton luth; c'est moi, ton immortelle.' I've tried not to hear it. But to-night, at the theatre, the message was unmistakable. *The message was for me.* For if ever a man was impelled, against his own will, to receive a direct message, I am he. I went most unwillingly to that theatre, and was destined to hear a brother poet calling clearly to me from far-off space. The voices of all those who have believed in me, were merged in that one voice—yours amongst them, Will. I had come to tell you. We all end by coming to you."

Will made no comment, asked no questions, offered no suggestions. He had learnt to know that life, which for him had been extraordinarily simple, was not necessarily simple for other people. He had been born with a few definite necessities of spirit. Other things to him were not even superfluous; they were non-existent. For him, life meant work, giving expression to one's individuality, guarding one's birthright of freedom. Wealth and social distinction had no meaning for him. His unworldliness had never suffered any change as the years went on; and he stood for his old friends as an unbroken ideal of single-mindedness and directness. Everything else might have failed: hopes might have passed into illusions, love into hate, passion into boredom, success into surfeit; but the respect which they all felt for the fine simplicity of Will's nature had never been given the chance of degenerating. So, as Eriswell said, they all

came to him, and laid their bereftness before him, sometimes with words, and sometimes in silence. They had, most of them, sacrificed much of what was best to attain to things which, in the end, did not count. They loved and honoured him for being able to keep what they themselves had lost, wholly or in part.

Thus they found their way towards his studio as towards a lighthouse in a great waste of water. The passage of time made no difference to their purpose. They knew that the lapse of years, the separation brought about by circumstances, were mere unimportant details never entering into Will's large interpretation of life and comradeship. They felt sure that their place was waiting for them, and that once there, they would scarcely believe that there had been any interruption of their intimate intercourse of former days. This had been Robert Eriswell's belief; and as he sat in the old chair which had ever been indisputably his, and poured out his heart to his friend who understood, he forgot that, owing to his wife's dislike of Will Beaudesart, he had for several years dropped away entirely from the old companionship. He forgot this so completely that he made a curious remark, not once, but repeatedly. He said:

"Well, at least Edith was not able to separate you and me, Will." "At least that tragedy was averted. She was not able to separate you and me."

Will stared at him in astonishment for a moment, and some words rose to his lips. But suddenly the whole matter became clear to him, and he checked any exclamation of surprise. He saw that the unreality of the last four years of his friend's life had become obliterated in the reality of a few minutes of kindred intimacy. He was greatly stirred. He put aside his half-smoked cigar, and turned impulsively to Eriswell.

"Bob," he said, "you must break through this bondage. You must free yourself. I don't know how. I don't pretend to know how. I don't know how much you love her, or whether you love her at all. I don't want to know. But you must free yourself somehow. You must win back your liberty of spirit, and continue to

justify to yourself, as well as to the world, the splendid fame which your work has won. I believe you will do your finest work yet—yes, your very finest. The thoughts pent up in you during this barren time will burst out into flower when you are free. You missed your way for a bit—that's all. You got into an enclosure. But the open moors lie all around you, and you'll win them yet. I seem to see your finest picture before me now. I don't know the subject, and it isn't even begun. But I see it, and know it to be yours. And it is so full of finest thought and feeling that even commonplace people are stirred and awed. Even your wife."

"It would indeed have to be something overwhelmingly great," Eriswell said with a half smile.

"So it will be," Beaudesart answered gravely. "I'm as sure of that as I am of my love of liberty."

"You put a brave heart into me," Eriswell said excitedly, springing up from his chair. "I see the picture myself, Will. I see it this moment!"

He dashed to the easel, snatched up a piece of cardboard and a crayon and began sketching a group of figures in his own rapid way which in the old days used to fire Will with envy and pride. He glanced at Eriswell now with a smile of quiet satisfaction, turned to his own work, and went on with it in silence.

"He'll do," he thought. "He'll do. He'll break through his bondage somehow. But he'll have to be helped. Can I help him? No. He'll have to do it himself. No, he can't, silly fool. He never could stand alone. Always came whining like a baby when things went wrong with him. Who's to help him? Must I? Suppose I must. And how? Go and remind her that he's a genius—an acknowledged genius—a famous man, with laurels on his brow, and that she's all very well in her way, but—damned commonplace."

A smile broke over his face. The idea seemed to amuse him immensely.

"Well, why not?" he answered to himself. "That's the whole trouble."

He shook his head, and rejected the scheme as being

too preposterous; but it continued to haunt him, for at intervals he paused in his task and whispered to the black cat:

"Damned commonplace, Maria, I tell you. That's the whole trouble."

Suddenly, after they had been working for half an hour or so, Eriswell turned to Beaudesart and called out:

"There now, Will! I've got it! It came to me in a flash, as you spoke. You waved your wand, old man, and it came. Look here. I'll tell you my idea about it now. No—not now—I'm tired—worn out."

He drew a deep breath, a breath of happiness, of freedom, of mental and spiritual release. His face was radiant. His eyes were shining. He bore little resemblance to the broken, nerveless man who had knocked at the studio an hour or two ago.

"Tired, worn out," he repeated.

He threw himself upon the couch, and in a few minutes was fast asleep from sheer exhaustion and effort. Will covered him up with a warm rug, and watched by his side until he was satisfied that all was well with him, and that for the moment nothing was troubling Robert's spirit. The complications of his life had passed from his remembrance, and he was smiling in his sleep, dreaming, perhaps, of the joy of reawakened creative power.

Will crept softly to the easel and studied the sketch. He nodded his head approvingly.

"Always the same genius," he said, "but bricked up by a commonplace woman not worthy of the honour of washing his paint brushes. Well, he must be rescued somehow or other. Heaven knows how. I don't know. I haven't the ghost of an idea what to do. The only thing I can think of is to go and tell her she *is* damned commonplace. Perhaps that would be better than nothing. After all, it's simple enough."

He lit his pipe, and went back to his own work, smiling.

"It's simple enough here," he thought. "But I'm sure it wouldn't be simple there. Still, if I can't hit upon any other plan, I'll stick to this one for want of a better."

But plans of action were not within Will's scope. He smoked, worked, and made valiant attempts to grapple with the difficulty of the situation. His brow became puckered in the great effort which his brain was making to find some solution of this perplexing problem. Finally, as the clock struck the hour of six, a merciful drowsiness stole over him.

"Nothing else to be done," he murmured. "Positively nothing else. Must go and tell her she's——"

He fell asleep.

III

When Edith Eriswell left her husband's studio she went slowly up to her bedroom, feeling her way vaguely as one in a dream. She remained for a long time in a state of entire bewilderment. But at last, after a spell of painful passivity, her thoughts gathered themselves together into something approximating to coherence; and she was able to recall her husband's extraordinary words, the tense expression of his face and the excitability of his manner.

It was characteristic of her mind that she did not for one moment dwell on the abstract side of his remarks. For all she cared, anyone might climb mountains alone. Anyone might descend to abysses alone. What roused her and took hold of her with accumulating intensity, was the remembrance that she had given him all she had to give, herself, her wealth, and the many benefits of her social position, and that he had told her deliberately he regarded them as mere rubbish.

The word haunted her.

She paced up and down her room, murmuring it to herself. Astonishment gave place to indignation, and indignation to anger. He had not only wounded her feelings, but had insulted her pride. He had dared to say that he had deteriorated in her world and by reason of her influence.

And this was her reward for having loved this man with passionate devotion. She recalled her patient and

persistent efforts to rouse him from his queer, dreamy ways, and awaken his interest in the new pleasures which were spread before him. She remembered how she had striven and striven to wean him away from his easel, reminding him repeatedly that there was no need for him to paint, since she had money enough for all their most luxurious wants, and that all he now had to do, was to enjoy himself with her, and free his mind from those dull plans and schemes of work to which she had at first listened so indulgently. She had endured a martyrdom of boredom until she had finally succeeded in moulding him into shape.

Yes, she did remember her words, and the occasion on which she used them: "*At last I have moulded my darling into shape.*" And apparently it was her own delighted approval of the change in him that made him realise that he had deteriorated. This was all that he thought of her codes—this was his estimate of the circumstances in which she had placed him. The pride of the beautiful and rich woman whom everyone in her set had always courted, praised and admired, was wounded to the quick. Her vanity was humiliated. Her self-esteem was outraged. His scorn seemed to her an unforgivable insult, and his ingratitude an unhealable wound.

She was unable, with her limited understanding, to grasp any single one of his points, or to make any allowance for his difference of temperament and for his nervous sensibility. That which was precious in his nature was just precisely that which she desired most to stamp out in him. She believed that she had nearly succeeded in her task when all at once, without any warning, this "something" in him rose up and defied her, this unknown "something" which, so she felt instinctively, had always been an enemy to her. It was in order to fight more easily with this secret foe that she had gradually separated him from his old haunts and his old comrades, and especially from Will Beaudesart, to whom she had, from the beginning, taken a profound dislike.

She walked up and down her bedroom, revolving the whole matter in her mind, when suddenly, amidst the

conflict of thoughts and emotions, the idea seized her that perhaps her husband had been seeing some of his old friends.

"Yes," she said excitedly, "that would explain some of it. Perhaps Beaudesart has been putting some of his ridiculous notions into Robert's head again. Yes, yes—that's it."

She stood still a moment.

"That's it," she said slowly, as though recalling some forgotten details. "I remember now. Robert was not himself at Ranelagh. Nor at Ascot. Nor even at the Carlton the other night. He wasn't himself at the bridge drive last Wednesday. He——"

She broke off, and flung her arms over her head.

"Of course—of course. I understand it all now!" she exclaimed. "Beaudesart's the cause. He has been seeing Beaudesart again. I'm sure of it. Beaudesart is at the bottom of the whole affair. He has always had a most annoying influence on Robert. And. fool that I am, I've been congratulating myself all this time that I had cured him of that friendship. Well, at least Robert shall hear what I think of that friendship—he shall hear now—this moment—yes, this moment."

The mere thought of Will Beaudesart had always roused a devil in her. She dashed to her door, opened it violently, rushed downstairs, switched on angrily the electric lights everywhere, in the hall, the dining-room, the drawing-room, the library and finally broke like a tornado into the studio.

"Robert," she began, "that friend of yours, Beaudesart——"

She started back. He was not there. No one was there. Only one lamp was burning, in the corner nearest the garden door. It lit up the portrait of Will Beaudesart. The kind eyes seemed to mock her. The humorous mouth taunted her. She turned away from the picture in an access of rage.

Instinct told her that her husband had gone to his friend.

Then her eyes caught sight of the water-colour

sketches and studies which lay strewn about: the songs unsung, the unfulfilled fancies of an artist's spirit. She stooped down, picked them up, tore them recklessly into pieces, and trampled the fragments beneath her feet.

Then, horrified with what she had done, she fled to her room.

IV

As Will Beaudesart stood on Mrs. Eriswell's doorstep about eleven o'clock that same morning, his courage and determination underwent a serious though momentary relapse. It was one thing to face Robert's wife at a safe distance; it was quite another thing to confront her at close quarters and find the nerve to tell her a few uncompromising truths. It struck him suddenly that he had set himself an impossible task, and that his easiest way out of the difficulty was to beat an instant retreat before he changed his mind again. He hesitated, however, and was lost.

"No, I must see her," he said doggedly. "I must see her, and tell her what I think of her."

In a few minutes he found himself in the library awaiting her arrival on the scene. He walked restlessly about the room, glanced at the pictures, picked at the newspapers, looked at the titles of some of the books, and finally arranged his tie before the overmantel mirror. That act was ever regarded by his friends as a symbol of inflexible resolution. It meant that he had stiffened himself, and that all the world might advance against him in solid phalanx. So when at last Edith Eriswell deigned to grant him an audience in her boudoir, he was well prepared for the encounter.

There was no trace on her beautiful face of her recent outbreak of turbulence. Her manner was calm; her voice was low and subdued. Will, quick to observe, noticed the sorrowful dimness of her eyes.

She began without any preliminaries.

"I conclude that my husband is with you, Mr. Beaudesart," she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Eriswell," he said.

"I suppose he has sent you?" she asked indifferently.

"No," Beaudesart replied, shaking his head. "He is fast asleep. He has no idea that I am here."

"And you ask me to believe that?" she said with a slight laugh.

"No," Beaudesart said quietly. "I don't ask you to believe anything. All the same, Bob *is* fast asleep on the couch in my studio. He threw himself there when he'd sketched out his new picture. Threw himself there, and went fast asleep almost immediately."

"His new picture?" she repeated slowly. "I suppose he has been painting it in your studio, then?"

"Painting it in my studio?" Beaudesart said. "Why, I haven't seen a sight of Bob for more than two years, until last night. No, he had one of those sudden and mysterious inspirations peculiar to a great genius."

She made no comment on his words, but she noted them well.

"If my husband has not sent you, why have you come?" she asked, after a pause.

"I've come to tell you something," Beaudesart said uneasily.

"What have you come to tell me?" she asked coldly.

Beaudesart remained silent, trying to summon his courage for this ordeal.

"What have you come to tell me?" she insisted.

"I've come to tell you," he said, "that you are—that you are——"

He broke off. His self-appointed task was too difficult, and the intense sadness in her eyes appealed to his kindness of heart. He saw that she had been passing through a time of great suffering.

"Well?" she urged. "Say what you please. No one need surely hesitate at this hour to hurt my feelings."

"That you are—you must forgive me, Mrs. Eriswell—that you are—er—er—commonplace," he jerked out.

He drew a breath of relief, and waited for the oncoming storm. But to his immense surprise, his audacious statement occasioned no outburst of anger from Edith Eris-

well. She rose from her chair, and stood for some time in silence by the window. At last she turned to Beaudesart, and said quite quietly, as though she were not speaking of herself, but of someone else :

"Yes, I believe you are right, Mr. Beaudesart. I *am* commonplace. Come with me into Robert's studio, and I will show you what I did last night."

He followed her, wondering at her words and her forbearing manner towards him, which, on all other occasions, when he had never deserved her ill-will, had been so inexplicably hostile. When they stood in the studio, she pointed to the water-colour sketches and studies torn up and lying strewn upon the floor.

"The destruction wrought by a commonplace woman," she said almost inaudibly.

"Yes, yes," Beaudesart murmured, shaking his head sorrowfully.

He stretched out his hand to her and said in his simple frank way :

"I am so truly sorry for you."

The note of sincerity in his voice, and the unexpected kindness, brought a flush to her face. She took the hand held out to her, and was more than grateful for this little sign of human sympathy, even though it came from this man, whom she had always disliked.

"Thank you, Mr. Beaudesart," she said. "I assure you I've been fearfully in need of a word of good cheer."

"Well, it's a funny thing it should come from me, of all people, isn't it ? " he said quaintly.

"Yes," she answered, with a ghost of a smile.

There was an interval of painful silence, during which they both stared at the deplorable wreckage spread before them.

Then Beaudesart was seized with one of his happy impulses, the outcome, literally, of his simplicity of heart.

"Look here, Mrs. Eriswell," he said cheerily, "it's no use our staring at this scene as though we were two idiots. We must buck up. The first thing to be done is to save what we can of these precious pieces of paper. You tore 'em up, and you must roll up your sleeves, as

it were, and help me to put them together again. I think some of 'em can be saved, don't you ? Upon my soul, I do ! This one, for instance. And this, too."

"And this one ? " she asked eagerly.

"Yes," he answered. "And this one. Hurrah ! Twilight. I know Bob thought a good deal of it."

"And this one ? " she said anxiously.

"Yes, three cheers ! " he replied. "The Mill on Westleton Heath. Scarcely hurt at all ! What a piece of good luck ! But this one, confound it, is done in altogether. Not so sure, though. It will make a queer sort of mosaic. Still, we'll have a try at it. We'll have a try at 'em all."

They were both kneeling on the floor now, deeply engaged in the difficult task of sorting out the separate pieces and fitting them together where they appeared to belong. Beaudesart had foraged about for paste and cardboard, and Mrs. Eriswell had found scissors, gummed paper, and a sharp knife. It was a curious sight to see these two people, who had always been tacitly at variance with each other, now collaborating with quiet friendliness in an anxious attempt to retrieve the disaster over which they were both mourning. It said a good deal for Will Beaudesart that he, who knew the magnitude of the mischief, was able to suppress all signs of anger and indignation ; and it said even more for Edith Eriswell that she, who had wrought the havoc, was able to rise above her humiliation and take her part earnestly in this pitiful labour. They did not speak about anything at first except the sketches and pictures, and then only a word or two as to the possibility or impossibility of saving this one or that. But when Will shook his head sorrowfully over some silvery little seascape ruined beyond rescue, she closed her eyes, ashamed to look, and said :

"Last night I felt that the only thing left for me to do was to kill myself."

"That would not have been great of you," he said kindly.

"Great ? " she questioned. "Do you expect commonplace people to do great things ? "

"The funny part of it is that they generally do," he answered. "Unexpectedly, too. Why, it's always the commonplace people who lead forlorn hopes, and do absurd deeds of heroism which no one knows of until long afterwards—perhaps not even then."

"Do they?" she asked with strange eagerness.

And at that moment a noble thought was born in her brain.

"Yes," he answered, nodding, "I've always noticed it."

They went on with their work.

"Supposing you had committed suicide," Beaudesart said, after a time, "what good would you have got out of it, or Bob either?"

"Robert would have been free at least," she said.

"No, he wouldn't," Beaudesart answered. "He would have been manacled tighter than ever—with 'mind-forg'd manacles.'"

"And I should have been free," she continued slowly, after a pause.

"*You would have been free,*" Beaudesart repeated, half to himself.

"Yes," she answered.

"Do you want to be free, too?" he asked with an eagerness which he could not conceal.

"Shall I tell you something?" she said. "You have not heard my side of the question. No one has heard my side of the question."

"No, that's true," he said a little shamefacedly, for this idea had never occurred to him.

"Well, then, I am going to tell you that it hasn't been all honey and happiness for me," she said. "Anything but that, I can assure you. Oh, how I've been bored and bored with him—sometimes to extinction. If this is the price one pays for living with a genius, then, in God's name, let me never set eyes on one again. He told me last night that a poet needs an atmosphere in which to breathe, and without it he perishes. And I tell you, Mr. Beaudesart, that a commonplace person also needs an atmosphere in which to breathe; yes, and freedom of spirit in which to be comfortably commonplace."

She waited a moment, and then went on with increased earnestness:

"Last night I was stunned, wounded, humiliated by the words he had said to me in his despair, and by the cruel wrong I had done him in my despair. Yes, last night I could have killed myself in my misery and my shame. But now as I speak to you, a feeling of intense relief begins to steal over me, and I realise that things have indeed come to a climax between us, and that there can be no question of our remaining together. No question. This means that he can take the freedom for which he longs—and I can take mine. Oh, the relief it will be! No longer any need to suppress my boredom. No longer any occasion to make even a feeble attempt to be different from my real self. And in addition, release from his sullenness, his irritability, his joylessness, his depression, his changing moods—signs of genius, I suppose you'll call them. I don't know. What I know is, that I don't want them. They have tired me to death. But there is yet hope on the horizon for both of us. There is still time for him to rescue his birthright and safeguard his aspirations. And there is still time for me to recover my lost ground and enjoy the full exercise of my birthright. So each of us will be born again. And with all my heart, I say: 'Thank God for it.'"

"Mrs. Eriswell, do you mean this?" Beaudesart asked excitedly.

"Mean it?" she cried. "I mean every word of it. I accept this way of escape with gratitude and joyfulness."

He came nearer to her, with a radiant smile on his kind face.

"Mrs. Eriswell," he said, "if you really mean all this, don't you see it's the solution of the whole difficulty? Let us both go and tell old Bob at once."

"I have heard," said a voice slowly.

And they turned towards the garden door, and saw Robert Eriswell.

He looked at the scene of desolation, at his sketches and studies, his unfulfilled fancies, his unsung songs, his unrecorded thoughts: at the pitiful signs of

attempted restoration: at Will: at her. No one moved. No one spoke.

It was Edith who first found the courage to break the terrible silence.

"What have you to say to me about my work of cruel destruction, for which I am bitterly, bitterly sorry?" she said.

"I have only to say that I have deserved anything and everything for my words to you last night," Robert answered, "and that there is nothing to forgive."

For one brief instant her lip quivered and her heart hesitated, but she recalled those very words of which he spoke—words which she knew now had been prompted by no one, but which he had uttered in the despair of his soul. She strengthened herself with the memory of Beaudesart's words about the great things done unexpectedly by the commonplace people, and their absurd deeds of heroism known by no one except themselves. They had implanted in her mind a magic seed which had forced its way through the resisting soil and sprung into instant blossom and flower.

She gathered herself together to make the sacrifice on which she had secretly resolved. Very grand she looked, very beautiful, taking her eagle's flight which no one ever measured, doing her deed of heroism which no one ever knew.

She turned to her husband.

"We at least know where we both stand," she said in a voice which had no tremor in it. "You have heard now what I think of our marriage. And I heard last night how I have come between you and all the ideals and ambitions you cherish most. We know now quite clearly that this is not a one-sided affair, but that we both yearn for freedom. Let us therefore part in peace and without bitterness. Do you agree?"

There was a brief suspense.

The voice of the Muse whispered softly but insistently:

"Poëte, prends ton luth, prends ton luth, c'est moi, ton immortelle."

Robert heard the voice of the Muse, and his mind's eye saw a fair and lovely vision of her standing near him with outstretched arms, claiming him for her own. It faded, and another vision rose before him: a vision of himself, with a legend, in burning letters, of his mean spiritedness, his selfishness, his self-centredness, his ingratitude.

"Edith," he cried, in the agony of his soul, "give me another try—I implore you."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Eriswell," said Beaudesart, "give old Bob another try."

She glanced quickly from her husband to Beaudesart.

"You say that to me, Mr. Beaudesart?" she exclaimed, her lip quivering.

"Yes, yes, I say it with all my heart," he answered, as with bowed head he stole from the room.

Husband and wife were left alone together.

"Try me again, Robert," she said, with an infinite tenderness.

IN A BAVARIAN FIDDLE VILLAGE

HERR RUDOLPH RIEMER had a tragic accident with his Stradivari fiddle one evening at the Tonhalle in Munich. In some unaccountable way it slipped from his hand and fell to the ground. It burst open, making a sound like that of an exploding pistol. It lay there wrecked, a ruined temple. Riemer stood gazing at it, motionless, stunned by the terrible shock. The conductor himself, and a score or so of the players in the orchestra rushed forward instinctively to pick it up. But suddenly a queer, strange-looking man amongst the audience gave utterance to a wild yell of rage.

"Don't touch it—don't dare to touch it—I'll kill anyone who dares to touch it!" he cried, waving his arms in the air.

The next moment he was on the platform, keeping everyone at bay.

"He's a madman!" someone cried. "Catch hold of him and don't let him escape. He's dangerous."

"I may be mad, and I may be dangerous," he shouted wildly, "but no one shall touch that fiddle except me—not even Riemer himself."

Then it was that Riemer awoke from his stupor and turned round.

"Why, it's Paul Stilling!" he cried, in a voice which had a ring of hope in it. "Paul Stilling, the clever fiddle-mender! Keep back, all of you. He's right. This is his work—not ours. What sends you here, Paul, in my hour of need?"

Paul Stilling took not the slightest notice of him. Now

that no one was opposing him, his fierceness and excitement had died away. The audience, the orchestra, the conductor, the great and famous violinist, ceased to exist for him. The world was blotted out from his consciousness. He took off his coat and doubled it up on the ground. He knelt down, a smile of loving concern on his face, and with all the tenderness of a mother and deftness of a surgeon, lifted the stricken fiddle into his coat, and bore his burden swiftly and triumphantly away.

Riemer followed him.

There was a moment of silence, in which the audience and the orchestra recovered from the amazing episode. The conductor tapped with the *bâton* on his desk, and proceeded with Schubert's Unfinished Symphony as if nothing had happened to disturb the continuity of the programme.

But in the artists' room Paul Stilling sat at a table examining Riemer's Stradivari. Riemer bent over him and made one or two remarks, to which Paul paid no attention at first, though he frowned and looked irritated.

But at last he said glumly:

"I wish you would go away. I don't want you."

Riemer bit his lip. He knew well that he must put up with any of this queer fellow's vagaries, for the sake of his marvellous skill. He also knew from hearsay that when an accident befell a famous fiddle, and Paul Stilling was called in to "attend the case," he took absolute possession of the instrument, something in his strange, wayward brain claiming an ownership which no one dared dispute.

So poor Riemer answered humbly:

"All right, Paul; I'll go. I know that my treasure has become your treasure. That's as it should be, and I am grateful."

He had taken up his hat and coat and was going away, when Paul signed to him to stop.

"You can stay if you like," he said sullenly. "Look here, there's a fearful crack in the belly, just under the sound post—the worst I've ever seen. And this one—well, it's horrible. It makes one shudder."

He shuddered as he spoke. Riemer shuddered too; and the tears coursed down his cheeks. Finally he covered his face with his hands and sobbed like a child. Paul looked at him, looked at the fiddle, looked into open space, murmured something to himself, shook his head impatiently as if contradicting himself, and after a secret mental struggle, emerged from the conflict and smiled one of his radiant smiles which seemed in very truth the outward sign of an inner visioning.

"You shall come and be with me whilst I work on it," he said mysteriously. "I'm going back to Mittenwald to-morrow. You shall come with me and sit in my workshop. Perhaps I'll even——"

He broke off, his fitful mind returning to its task of pondering over the injuries of the fiddle, which were of far greater moment to him than the mere grief of the violinist. Still, Riemer, who understood a little about him, realised that Paul had made a distinct effort in a human direction. He was comforted in the midst of his distress.

"It is good of you, Paul," he said gratefully. "I will come to Mittenwald."

Paul made no answer, but remained immersed in thought, until the sound of loud clapping in the hall disturbed and annoyed him. He rose, with a curious furtive expression on his countenance. He might have been a burglar suddenly warned by ominous noises of an awakened household. He beckoned slyly with a finger to Riemer.

"They'll ask questions—they'll want to see," he whispered. "A-ha, they shan't see! We'll be off before they come."

Laughing softly to himself, he fled, carrying the fiddle, which still rested in his folded coat. Riemer fled, too, in charge of the empty case.

II

THE next morning Paul Stilling and Riemer were on their way to Mittenwald, the fiddle village in the mountains of Bavaria. They took the train to Partenkirchen, and from the Hotel zur Post hired a carriage for themselves.

Riemer loved the mountains passionately, and if anything could have consoled him for the great disaster which had befallen his Stradivari, it would have been the unspeakable joy of seeing them thus unexpectedly face to face.

His professional plans would have taken him at once from Bavaria to England; but he cancelled them ruthlessly, so as to be free to remain in Paul's company and watch over the fate of his fiddle, with a pose of aloofness and indifference assumed for diplomacy's sake.

He smiled now as he recalled the experience of the night. Directly they left the Tonhalle, he had managed to manœuvre Paul into a motor, and thence safely into the bedroom of his hotel. Paul sat up half the night staring at the Stradivari; and when at last he succumbed to fatigue, it was with his hand clasping firmly the neck of the fiddle, even as a tired child might fall asleep holding a favourite toy from which it was impossible to part. Poor Riemer hungered to touch his instrument and examine its appalling injuries; but he remembered that any undue display of interest or exercise of interference, however natural and friendly, might produce dangerous results—at any rate to the instrument. There was a tradition, dating some time back, it is true, that Paul had once, in a fit of rage at being interfered with, dashed against the wall a fiddle on which he had bestowed more than three months of loving labour of restoration. But that was before people had learnt how to deal with the queer, singular fellow whose unerring skill claimed, justly enough, too, the indulgence and understanding necessary for free expression on his own lines: not impossible lines, either, since Paul's natural disposition was mild, and his instincts were all kindly.

He was well known in the fiddle world; and there were few violinists coming from all parts of the Continent who did not, whilst they were in London, seek him out and bring him their sick instruments. Sometimes, if he were in a sulky mood, he would shut the door in the face of the most distinguished artists. But if they returned at a more propitious moment, they invariably found that they had not in vain reckoned on his amazing cleverness and his anxious and, indeed, passionate concern.

So Riemer now reckoned on it. As they drove along, he glanced at Paul from time to time, and noted that the fiddle-mender's eyes were riveted on the Stradivari case and saw nothing else—no wonders, no mysteries of the mountains, no glimpses of the snow-peaks, no glories of the autumn tints: nothing except that wooden box in which the wrecked violin lay in all its helplessness, awaiting the healing touch of his deft hands.

Once or twice he spoke, half to himself.

"A fearful crack in the belly," he said, shaking his head. "The worst I have ever seen."

"Yes," said poor Riemer, his thoughts leaping instantly back from the beauty of the scenery to the memory of his misfortune.

Paul frowned.

"No, it isn't the worst," he added sulkily. "You don't know."

Riemer made no comment, but sought refuge once more in the moving clouds and changing visions around him.

"All the same," Paul said, after a long period of silence, "I believe the tone can be saved. The crack does not actually reach the sound post."

"No, I don't think it does," Riemer said eagerly.

Paul frowned.

"Yes, it does," he said still more sullenly. "You don't know."

After this second rebuff, Riemer resisted all impulses either to agree with or contradict Paul's intermittent remarks. But his crisis of passive heroism occurred when Paul suddenly leaned forward and proceeded to open the violin case.

"I can't be sure about that crack," he muttered.

Riemer longed to help him, longed to take the Stradivari in his own hands, longed to see for himself whether or not that terrible crack *did* actually reach the region of the sound post. But he did not move a muscle. He sat patiently, pretending to be a detached person who had no connection whatsoever with the tyrant by his side, nor with that loved companion of many years lying on the

seat opposite. He looked steadfastly at the mist, which was fading away and revealing yet another glistening snow-peak. He was more than rewarded for his self-control by Paul's next remark made after he had shut the case.

"I have never disliked your playing," he said vaguely. "I have never minded hearing you."

Riemer smiled. He knew that this statement from Paul Stilling was the height of praise and signified that he was in great favour, and that Paul was pleased to help him.

"Thank you, Paul," he said gravely.

Paul nodded and relapsed into himself again.

"The crack stops short of the sound post," he said, after a long pause.

"Ah," remarked Riemer indifferently.

And he added:

"Do you know, I have never seen such beautiful colouring in the mountains anywhere. These wonderful tints of autumn fill my heart with rapture."

"I don't believe the tone will be ruined," Paul said, with one of his radiant smiles. "I——"

He broke off and whistled softly to himself.

A light came into Riemer's eyes. What did he hear? His Stradivari was not to lose its splendid tone. If Paul believed this, it was probably true. The heaviness of the violin-player's heart was dispelled, and he would have fain have made the mountains echo with a shout of gladness. He became indiscreet, and resolved to ask Paul how long he would take to restore the Stradivari.

"Paul," he said eagerly, "how long do you think it will be before——"

He stopped suddenly, for Paul had ceased whistling, and his face had darkened ominously with the suspicion that Riemer was intruding on private preserves.

"*Before we reach Mittenwald,*" Riemer finished, with sudden inspiration.

The shade on the violin-mender's countenance passed away as though by magic, and he just shook his head good-naturedly.

"As if it mattered," he said cheerfully. "A stupid question."

"Yes, you are right." Riemer laughed, thankful to have escaped from dangerous rocks. "Of course it doesn't matter. The longer the better, so far as I am concerned."

But after this lesson of warning, he ventured on no more probings. He watched the superb Karwendel group of mountains disclosing themselves in all their glory: took note of the flame-red colour of the mountain ash berries, seen here in great profusion: revelled in the rich russet carpet of the woods nestling against the lower hill slopes: felt the invigorating air touch his nerves with buoyant renewal: saw shadows and reflections of trees and peaks in the lovely little marshy lake on the left-hand side of the road; and thus full of the comfort and strength which Nature alone can give to those who love her, arrived with his strange comrade at the fiddle village of Mittenwald.

They drew up at the Hotel zur Post. Before Riemer had time to get out of the carriage and ring the bell, Paul, whose face had become crafty and whose manner furtive, seized his treasure and vanished from sight.

III

PAUL'S Mittenwald home was not in one of the grander houses decorated on the front with brightly-coloured pictures of saints, apostles and angels, or with paintings of scenes and subjects both sacred and secular. Years ago, when he was first brought to Mittenwald, so as to live in the atmosphere of fiddle-making and perfect himself in the craft which was the one absorbing passion of his whole being, he had been placed in the care of old Mathias Hoffmann and his widowed daughter Justina. They had been Paul's own choice. He had seen Mathias working at a scroll, had sat down by his side in the humble little cottage, and had never left him for hours, so enraptured was he with the masterly and bold touch of the old craftsman. Justina had put aside her task of varnishing fiddles, and had made some fragrant coffee for them all,

on the green china stove in the corner. Then she had produced some delicious *Zwieback*, at which Paul munched delightedly, now nodding at her in approval, now following with lynx eyes every movement of the old scroll-maker's clever hand, and now darting up and examining the condition of one of the fiddles which had just received from her practised brush its fourth coat of varnish.

"Good, good, amazingly even—good, good, amazingly even!" he said, laughing with pleasure. "Clever people. Splendid coffee, too. And that scroll—I must make a scroll like that. And such biscuits. A very fine varnish; not too quick at soaking in, either. And that scroll. Yes, I must make a scroll like that. I must begin now—this moment."

Just then Paul's people—Robert, his step-brother and Harriet, his wife—found him in this cottage. They had been searching for him everywhere, for he had slipped away from the Hotel zur Post, where they had taken up their quarters.

"Ah, Paul, here you are," Robert said gently, and without any sign of anxiety or annoyance. "Now we must all go together and find a home for you."

Paul looked up.

"A home?" he asked simply. "But this is going to be my home, isn't it?"

"Is this where you would like to be, Paul?" Harriet said.

"Why, of course," Paul answered, glancing in happy confidence first at the old man and then at his daughter. "Any person in his right senses knows at once where he wants to be, doesn't he?"

"Quite right, Paul," his brother said, concealing the smile, half of amusement and half of respect, always called forth by Paul's simple way of settling everything by a leading idea divorced from detail. "Quite right. We'll arrange it somehow."

So, in this wise, Paul had settled down in the scroll-maker's cottage; and when he was in Mittenwald, nothing would have induced him to live anywhere except with these friends, whom a true instinct told him he could

safely trust. That was many years ago now, but they had never failed him ; and when he was away from them, with his own people in London, they counted the days until they should once more see him bending happily and contentedly over his own bench near the green china stove. Justina had learnt to know his queer ways almost as well as she knew the mysteries of the art of varnishing ; and if he were in one of his sullen, black moods, she waited patiently, and, with watchful care, chose the right moment and the right method for enlisting his help and interest.

" Paulchen," she would say, " this stubborn fiddle won't take the varnish. I'm in despair about it."

" You're stupid—that's what you are," Paul would answer. " Here, give it to me. I'll see to it."

" Yes," she said humbly, " I'm getting old—old and stupid."

" Yes," he answered severely, " that's what's the matter with you, Justina. There is nothing the matter with the wood."

But he generally took over the task with which she pretended to have failed ; and when she heard him whistling softly to himself, she was satisfied that his dark hour had passed.

This, then, was the home where Paul worked at Riemer's Stradivari, whilst Riemer, like a wandering spirit for which there is no rest, haunted the precincts of the cottage, visited the violin factory, climbed the mountain paths, strolled through the lovely woods. When he dared, and when good, understanding Justina, who was exceedingly sorry for him, signed to him that all was well, he stole into the living-room, and sat by Paul's side, grateful even for the concession of proximity.

" Come in," she said one morning. " Paulchen is very kind to-day. And he even saved half of his coffee for you. What do you think of that ? Doesn't that show he is sorry for you ? And old father says it is wonderful what he is doing. I, too, think it is wonderful. Now, come in without fear, and drink your coffee."

Paul looked up when Riemer entered, and nodded to him. The scroll-maker, who, although more than eighty years

old, still worked at his little bench, carving out the scrolls for which he was famous in Mittenwald, looked up and greeted Riemer.

"Ah, you've come to see my new scroll," Mathias said, his handsome face beaming with pride and pleasure.

"No, he hasn't come to see your scroll, Mathias," Paul said sharply. "He has come to see my Stradivari. That is what he has come to see. What else could he want to see?"

The old man shook his head.

"It's my scroll," he said quite firmly.

"You're both wrong," Justina remarked soothingly. "He has come to help me with my varnishing. I need a little help this morning, for I want to do some washing—yes, and to make more *Zwieback*. Paulchen was greedy, and ate it all up in the night, except one bit."

"For Riemer," Paul said, recovering his good temper at once. "And the coffee, Justina, for him, too. Then he can do some of your varnishing."

It amused him vastly to think of Riemer varnishing. And he laughed happily and waved his tool in the air.

"What a good thing if more people did the varnishing and fewer people the playing!" he said merrily. "But I've never disliked Rlemer's playing—never."

They all laughed, and settled down together. They made a picturesque group, which no one having once seen could ever forget.

Thus, helped by Justina's tactful management of her strange charge, Riemer was able, more or less, to follow Paul's work of restoration; and there were even times when Paul, if he were in a good-natured mood, explained what he thought of doing to the instrument, and prophesied that it would, without any doubt, be finer than ever. On other days, if he were sullen, he would cover it up with his apron and refuse to let any human eye see it; and if he were depressed, he would keep on murmuring to himself: "*Never will it sing again—never!*"

This phase usually heralded a temporary collapse. Paul took to his bed and slept for a couple of days, awoke fresh as a flower, happy, good-humoured, and ready to work

again on the fiddle, which they had not dared to take away from his side.

"Listen," he said gaily, on the occasion of one of his recoveries, as he munched an apple and returned to his bench, "this fiddle, Mathias, is going to have a finer tone than ever. I dreamt I heard it. Such a tone, Justina. I wish Riemer could have heard it. But he could never make it sound like that. Quite impossible. No one could."

"No one could if Herr Riemer couldn't, that's quite certain," Justina said. "Ach, he has been playing to us so beautifully, Paulchen. So kind he has been to us and to the children. You would have laughed to see them running after him. The children have danced to his music, and the old people have wept to it."

"I have wept to it," the scroll-maker said. "Never has such music been heard in Mittenwald."

"You ought to go and hear him this afternoon," Justina urged, half to tease him, for she knew that he would not stir from his bench to listen to anyone's fiddling. "Herr Riemer has promised to play in the school-house again, and everyone is going from the factory. They told me so yesterday. I shall put away my work. Won't you? Won't you come with me?"

Paul frowned and shook his head.

"I can't waste my time," he said severely. "Much more important things than that in my life, Justina. Concerts are all very well for idle people who have nothing to do."

"What's that about concerts and idle people?" Riemer asked, coming in at that moment.

"Paulchen says that concerts are all very well for idle people," Justina explained, with a smile on her face.

"Well, let us hope that the idle people will always be on the increase," Riemer said, laughing. "No idle people, no audiences, no musicians, no instruments. No need in the world for you or me, Paulchen. What a prospect before us! What a problem!"

Paul looked worried. Then his face lit up. He had solved the difficulty to his own satisfaction.

"There will always be idle people," he said, returning

to his work; and after that no one could get a word out of him. Riemer saw it was useless to linger in the hopes of receiving attention of any description from Paulchen, and had to be satisfied that his long spell of sleep was over, and that he was once more at work on the Stradivari.

It was a trying time for Riemer, especially after the first novelty of his life in Mittenwald had worn off; but he made the best of circumstances, and was determined not to leave the village until the violin was rehabilitated and once more in his possession.

It was torture to him not to possess it. It had been his daily and intimate companion for more than fifteen years; and though he had other beautiful instruments, a lovely Bergonzi and a superb Joseph Guarneri, it was the wrecked Stradivari which was knitted to his soul and interlaced with all those longings and aspirations, those failures, those fulfilments of expression which are the artist's true heritage. There were days when he felt that he could have killed Paul, and carried off the violin in murderous triumph, no matter what its impaired condition. But when these fierce and primitive moods were past, he resigned himself afresh to the bitter sacrifice of ownership for the sake of his love's welfare. And no one seeing him roaming quietly around the village, would have believed him to be capable of the wild outbreaks of impatience and anger to which he gave vent in secret.

The children certainly would not have believed it. He loved children, and they knew it, and followed him fearlessly in his wanderings, until he began to look upon himself as the Pied Piper of Hamelin; and one day, for fun's sake, he played his fiddle out of doors, down this street, and in front of the statue of Mathias Klotz, who had first started the fiddle-making industry in Mittenwald, and then up this turning, and down that, and so out of the village in the direction of the mountains, with all the little ones after him. A new audience for him, and the most flatteringly exacting he had ever had. Encores numberless, and no refusals taken! No chance of bowing and going away into a safe retreat. There was no retreat. For that day he was the children's captive.

Thus he won their hearts and eased his own spirit. But in spite of his good fellowship with everyone in the village, he would have come off very badly if he had not, at the onset, been inspired with a fine theme for a violin concerto which he set himself to write as an offering to his Stradivari. It was a labour of love as well as a real consolation to him ; and he worked at it hour after hour, and lived with it and in it. He wove into it the whole history of the tragedy—his despair, his relief, his hopes, his wonder over Paul's skill, his gratitude, his longing and loneliness, his anger, his impatience, his jealousy, his remorse, his joy in the children, and "*the sleep that is in the starry skies, the rest that is among the hills.*"

He called it "The Mittenwald Concerto" ; and he had made up his mind to play some of it to his little mountain audience that afternoon in the school-house. When he arrived there, he looked round and saw to his pleasure that the whole village apparently had assembled to support him—varnishers and fitters, scroll-makers, back- and belly-makers, packers, bow-makers, old and young, men and women, the priest, the mayor, the manager of the factory, everyone—except Paul.

He saw, with his mind's eye, that strange, fitful worker bending over his bench, dead to every outside influence, with brain, body, and spirit concentrated on the Stradivari. And Riemer said to himself :

"Even although he is not here, I shall play to him. Something may reach him. My gratitude, for instance—my real and deep gratitude and not my impatience."

Something did reach Paulchen after a time. Was it, perhaps, that beautiful passage in the *Andante* which embodied praise and gratitude ? Anyway, he ceased work and leaned back in his chair. He seemed pleased and smiled radiantly. Then he frowned and shook his head rather crossly, and returned to his task for a few moments. He left off again, and glanced towards the door, a little longingly, a little shamefacedly, perhaps. He half rose. He stared sullenly at the green china stove.

"Why not ?" he murmured. "I have never disliked ——"

He broke off and stole into the streets. He stood and gazed around him. Everyone seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth. No children were playing near the statue of Mathias Klotz outside the church. No women were fetching water from the fountain. Through the windows of the cottages no figures of workmen were seen bending over their benches. The fiddles themselves were there, of course—the backs, the bellies, the scrolls, the pegs, the tailpieces, all of them integral parts of the life and atmosphere, as permanent and characteristic as the great Karwendel mountains dominating the village.

But this marked absence of the human element struck a chill at Paul's heart. The realisation swept as an avalanche over him that he was alone, aloof, cut off by invisible barriers from that world where people walked together, did things together, were happy together. Why could he not be of their number? What was it that prevented him, Paul, from sharing in the everyday affairs and interests which knitted human beings together for better or for worse?

The question died in his brain at the moment of its birth. The consciousness of the suffering passed, even as it made itself felt. But the tense expression on Paulchen's face showed that, within that narrow boundary of time, there had been space enough for a vision of eternity.

The last lingering trace of mental strain faded. Paul, dead once more to the inner call of Riemer's music and the secret cry of his own solitary spirit, returned to his work. Old father, Justina, and Riemer found him there as they had left him, and never knew that he had made the attempt to reach them—and failed.

IV

One night, in the middle of the night, when everyone was sleeping, Paul put the last touches to his work of restoring the Stradivari, and gave vent to his joyfulness and satisfaction in his own peculiar way. He left it on the bench at first, surveyed it from a distance, then gradually approached nearer to it, keeping his eye fixed on it as if

he were trying to mesmerise it. After a time he nodded, and his face was wreathed in smiles. Very tender grew the expression round his lips. A light came into his eyes.

"Mine," he murmured. "My own. No one else's."

He took it in his hands, tenderly, proudly, and turned it over, whistling happily whilst he examined it. He raised it into position under his chin, and with his bow arm drew an imaginary bow over its strings. He tapped the ground with his left foot, and marked time to some imaginary music.

"Yes, yes, I knew it would be better than ever," he said to himself. "Better than ever."

He clasped it to his breast.

"Mine," he murmured again. "Mine."

Suddenly he became fierce.

"No one else's," he said angrily. "Let there be no mistake about that. Mine and mine only."

He stood thinking, and the fierceness of his mood faded into furtiveness. He laughed softly.

"Ah," he said, "if they think they are going to find it——"

He broke off, glanced stealthily round the room, listened to make sure that no one was stirring, opened a drawer where Justina kept his clothes, took out a flannel shirt and wrapped the Stradivari in it, listened once more, with his finger on his lips and a curious smile on his face, stole on tiptoe to the door, unlatched it with unbelievable noiselessness—and fled from the village.

It was a lovely moonlight night, and the stars were jewelling the heavens with unwonted resplendency. But Paul had no eyes for the wonder of the scene spread before him. His dominating idea at the moment was to hide his treasure in some safe and secret spot at which no one could possibly guess; and he made his way in the direction of the Hussel Mühle, hurrying always as if he were being pursued, yet careful of every step he took, lest he might trip and wreck the precious instrument so lovingly re-created by his hands.

"No one shall rob me of it," he said from time to time. "The robbers will never find it—never."

He crossed the Isar and began to ascend the path which led to the Seinsgraben. The goal which he had in his mind, was an old dark brown cow-house next to a disused forester's hut, about half an hour's stretch between the Seingraben and the Vereins Alpe. He went forward through woods and over rough and rugged tracks, now disappearing amongst the trees, now emerging into the moonlit vastness, a solitary figure impelled by one thought—symbolic, in his aloofness, of all those driven forward by an overwhelming idea. He did not pause to rest and recover, and he did not cast so much as a fleeting glance at the wild ravines and the peaks of the Wörner and Wetterstein flooded with the silver splendour of the moon. He did not hear the sound of the mountain torrent, nor heed the cry of a startled bird speeding on a sudden flight. All he knew was that here, in this solitary place, where he had the whole world to himself, his Stradivari would be safe from prying eyes and robbing hands.

At last he reached the hut where he used so often to have his bowl of milk and his bit of cheese and black bread with the forester and his wife. Frunde, the cow, and Gemse, the sprightly young goat, had been on excellent terms with him, and he was often able to coax them back into the cowshed when every other power on earth seemed to have failed. He made his way at once to the cowshed, and laughed softly as he opened the door.

"Frunde's manger," he said. "It will be quite safe in Frunde's manger. No one would dream of looking there. Quite safe."

With smiling face he laid the fiddle, still carefully wrapped in the flannel shirt, in the empty manger which had once been Frunde's. After reflection, he added his own coat. He rubbed his hands gleefully, and appeared intensely amused and pleased.

"I've cheated them!" he said. "Frunde and I have tricked them! No doubt about that!"

He laughed until the tears coursed down his cheeks.

"A good thing Frunde isn't here to munch it up," he said. "She would have made short work of it."

Then he became grave again. He was not quite

satisfied that all *was* well with the Stradivari; and he took it out of the manger, turned it over, swathed it once more, first in the shirt and then in the coat, and replaced it tenderly in its appointed resting-place. He stood contemplating it, as if in some doubt.

"It will be all right," he said slowly. "But it was stupid of me not to have brought the case. Much better to have the case. I must go down at once and fetch it. Then it will be all right."

He closed the door after him, and without further lingering, sped at a furious rate on his homeward journey, fully intending to return at once with the violin case. But when he arrived back, he suddenly became conscious of great fatigue. He threw himself on his bed, and was soon held in a deep sleep of entire exhaustion, with his secret hidden in his heart. But he had been seen by Jakob Erckmann, the woodcutter, coming down the lower path on the other side of the Isar, opposite the Hussel Mühle. And it was this clue which led to the discovery of the Stradivari.

It was nothing new to those who had the care of him, that his moods of extreme activity and tenseness should be succeeded by prolonged sleep lasting often thirty-six hours or more. Justina, therefore, was not in the least troubled by the continuation of his sleep. She knew that he would awake refreshed and restored, ready to take up his life and work with all his purposeful eagerness.

But what did worry her was that she could not find the Stradivari. She searched the cottage in vain. She crept into Paulchen's bedroom, and found no signs of it there. She came to the conclusion that he had finished it, and hidden it. But where to look for it, she knew not. She did not tell Riemer at first, but made inquiries amongst the neighbours, and went to the violin factory, hoping that Paulchen might have stolen in there without observation and secreted his treasure in some safe and secluded corner. There was plenty of "cover" to choose from—room after room of violins and guitars in all stages, piles of carefully chosen wood for the making of the instruments, and endless packing-cases. The watchman said he was sure that no

one could have entered the factory that night without his knowing; but the manager, although he agreed, had the whole place ransacked, and with no happy results.

Old father shook his head when he heard where Justina had been.

"Of course, he would not hide it there, Justina," he said. "You might have known that. Of course he'd know you would be stupid enough to go there. Paulchen is too clever for that. No, he has thought of something much more safe than the factory."

Riemer had to be told at last, and Justina broke the bad news to him, with tears streaming down her cheeks from despair and mortification; for she was dreadfully concerned for poor Riemer's sake, and dreadfully ashamed of Paulchen, and angry with herself for not having kept a more vigilant eye on the Stradivari in its final stage of restoration. She ended by collapsing into her chair and sobbing her soul out amongst her varnish pots and brushes.

Riemer stood looking at her, stunned by this fresh tragedy in connection with his fiddle. His face became ashen, and something clutched at his heart. He had been looking forward with passionate anticipation to the moment when the work of restoration would be successfully ended. And now came this appalling news. He could not speak at first, but continued to stare at Justina. It was only when he turned away and met old father's sorrowful eye of sympathy that he was released from the bonds which held him in silence and stupor. When he at last spoke, his voice sounded as if it came from limitless distance.

"Don't fret like that, Justina," he said. "You've done your best. I know you've watched it with lynx eyes all the time."

For answer she went on sobbing, and again there was a pause, during which speech failed him.

"One thing only I want to know quite honestly," he said, with painful effort—"quite honestly. Do you think he will have destroyed it?"

"No, no," Justina cried through her sobs. "No, no, I'm sure of that."

"No, no," said the old scroll-maker. "He would not do that."

"*But I heard he did once*," Riemer said, shuddering at the thought.

"Not since we've known him, fifteen years this autumn," Justina said, drying her eyes and trying to gather herself together.

"He has not destroyed it," the old scroll-maker insisted. "He has hidden it because he did not want to give it up. He has loved it too much to destroy it. I, too, love what I make—even now, old as I am. This scroll I'm making —well, I love it. No, no, take comfort. Our Paulchen has not destroyed it. He has hidden it."

"If you believe that, I must try and believe it, old father," Riemer said gently, touched always by this old man whom everyone loved.

"We'll never rest until we have found it," Justina said determinedly.

She had recovered herself, and was prepared to do anything and everything to run the Stradivari to earth. And as she was trying to recall some of Paulchen's favourite haunts, the woodcutter Jakob Erckmann, who had been away at Garmisch, came in to say that he had seen Paul in the early morning, hurrying down from the opposite side of the Isar, evidently in a state of great excitement, and without his coat.

Riemer's half-paralysed brain leapt once more to thought and action.

"I'm off in that direction," he said, dashing to the door. "You'll come with me, Justina, won't you?"

"The best plan would be to wait till Paulchen wakes, follow him at a distance in that direction, and find out if and where he has hidden the fiddle," she said. "Then we must return when he is not there and steal it. It is the only way."

Old father nodded his head in approval; but Riemer was too overwrought and distressed to listen to any advice, or to wait for the hour of Paul's awakening.

"I can't wait," he said, flinging his arms about wildly. "I can't wait. It's impossible."

He rushed out like a madman, knocking over two or three of Justina's white fiddles which lay in the corner ready for varnishing. She cast one motherly, anxious glance at them—one only—and fled precipitately after Riemer, resolved to go with him and share in the immediate search, however futile it might be. Jakob Erckmann picked up the fiddles.

"Why, neighbour," he said, "it seems to me thou hast three mad people now in thy house, instead of one."

"And there would be a fourth, if I weren't so old, Jakob Erckmann," the scroll-maker said, with a smile. "But when one's old, Jakob Erckmann, one must sit quietly and wait. Old people have to wait, Jakob Erckmann."

"And make splendid scrolls, Mathias Hoffmann," the woodcutter said, taking up a fiddle neck admiringly.

The old man's face lit up.

"Ah, well, there is always that," he said, with gentle pride.

But his face clouded over; for he was greatly harassed about the Stradivari, and he waited anxiously for the return of Justina and Riemer, unable to work or smoke or take his simple meal. Once he got up and went into Paulchen's room.

"Paulchen, Paulchen!" he murmured, shaking his head reproachfully at the sleeper.

Meanwhile, Riemer and Justina were spending fruitless hours in a wild-goose chase which no one in his senses would have undertaken. Even Riemer saw the futility at last, gave it up of his own accord, and returned with Justina to the village.

"You see, I couldn't rest, Justina," he explained pathetically. "I had to be doing something. But of course, yours is the wiser plan—to wait until he wakes, and follow him when he goes to the hiding-place. That is to say, if he does go. Perhaps he won't go. How do you know he will?"

"Of course he'll go," Justina said. "It's the first thing he'll do when he wakes up and thinks he has got us out of the way. I can see him gloating over his hidden

treasure. Oh, he'll be very sly and suspicious! I know him. I know his sly smile when he has a great secret."

"I can't get it out of my head that he may have destroyed it," Riemer exclaimed, working himself up to another outbreak of anger and despair.

"There's no real danger of that yet, I'm sure," she said. "Don't give way like that, Herr Riemer. The danger would only be if he found us trying to steal it from him. I don't know what might happen then. He might get into a great passion and smash the fiddle in his rage. But we must not let him find us. We must be careful. That's all."

Riemer paused outside the scroll-maker's cottage.

"What a fool, what an unutterable fool I've been to give it into the care of that madman," he cried passionately. "I deserve all I've got."

"Come, come," she said half angrily, half soothingly, "you mustn't think that, and you mustn't say that of Paulchen. You know there's no one as clever as Paulchen at his work. And when you hear the Stradivari—*ach*, it will sound beautiful. You will forget all this trouble, and you will only praise our good Paulchen then."

He smiled, in spite of himself, at her championship of the culprit, and let her urge him into the cottage, where she made him drink a large glass of *dunkles* and eat some bread and sausage, and smoke a pipe with old father, who badly needed good cheer and companionship. She treated the great artist very much as she treated Paulchen —as a wayward child, to be coaxed and managed with a large indulgence; and she refused rigidly to allow him to return to his hotel, lest he should mope and be miserable, or start off suddenly on another aimless expedition. She did all she possibly could to cheer and encourage him, and finally took him into Paul's bedroom, where the fiddle-maker lay fast asleep on his bed, with that sly smile on his face which she knew so well spoke unmistakably of some crafty joyfulness.

"There," she said triumphantly afterwards, "didn't I tell you he would look like that if he had a secret? He is pleased with himself, is Paulchen. He'll be very sly

when he wakes up, and very suspicious. What was the word he was muttering? Frunde, wasn't it? Yes, it was Frunde. Now, what could he mean by that? Well, well! Suppose you just settle down quietly, and do some varnishing for me. Those four violins in the corner must have their coat of varnish on by to-morrow. There's plenty for you to do to keep your mind quiet. And the time will pass."

"Yes, yes, the time will pass," murmured the scroll-maker.

At intervals he turned to Riemer and, as if to reassure him, nodded his beautiful old head and said:

"He has loved it too much to destroy it. I know. I, too, love what I make."

V

PAUL awoke late the next evening, and according to his wont after a long spell of sleep, exceedingly hungry. Bread, apples, raisins, and a banana or two, together with an unlimited supply of coffee, formed his meal, which he took at his bench. He did not enter into conversation either with the scroll-maker or Justina, but seemed engrossed in his own thoughts, and showed every sign of being in one of his mysterious and suspicious moods. The only remark that he did at length make, pointed to his anxiety to get rid of his companions.

"It's your bed-time soon, isn't it?" he asked vaguely, in that innocent and detached manner which invariably implied some secret scheming.

"Not yet for a long time," Justina answered, to put him off his guard. She knew well that if she fell in with his plan to get rid of her, she would at once increase his suspiciousness.

He took no more notice of them, and pretended to occupy himself with the fiddle at which he had been working before he began repairing Riemer's Stradivari. But he only played with his tools, and kept looking round slyly to see whether they were making any preparations for going off to bed. At last old father, who had finished

smoking his long pipe, nodded and retired. But Justina lit another lamp and began to mend a shirt. She yawned several times. Paul watched her.

"Why don't you go to bed, Justina?" he asked severely. "People are so stupid to sit up when they're tired. Bed is the proper place when one is tired."

"Yes, Paulchen, but the shirts have to be mended, all the same," she replied cheerfully.

"Will that one take long?" he asked innocently.

"A quarter of an hour," she said, turning away to hide a smile.

"Ah," he said. And he fidgeted with one of his aluminium planes, and began to shave off tiny shreds from a fiddle back.

Eventually she rose.

"There, that's done," she said, with another yawn. "How tired I am! Well, good night, Paulchen. You'll find some fresh *Zwieback* in the oven."

"I don't want any *Zwieback*," he said sulkily.

But when he was alone, he sprang from his seat with a joyful alertness.

"Ah," he said, "at last! But I'll wait a few minutes to be sure they are safely out of the way. Then I'll be off."

He smiled, rubbed his hands gleefully, crept about the room on tiptoe, and took a case from the corner. He sat down at his bench, and drummed on it with one of his tools. He rose again and listened for ominous sounds. There were no sounds. He nodded his head as if satisfied that the little household was hushed to permanent rest, and without further attempt to curb his impatience, stole from the cottage armed with the violin case. But Justina, whose nerves were on the alert, heard his soft departure, and from her tiny window saw that he went in the direction of the Hussel Mühle. She followed closely after, and signalled to Riemer, who by arrangement was keeping guard in his room at the Hotel zur Post.

In a few minutes the two confederates were in swift but judicious pursuit of poor Paulchen, whose suspicions had been forgotten in an overwhelming eagerness to reach Frunde's manger. Once or twice he stopped short and

stood listening. They had hidden themselves behind a great rock, and if he had retraced his steps, he would not have discovered them easily. Moreover, the moon was in one of her coy moods that night, and retired at intervals behind a veil of passing clouds: so that she was a useful ally to Paul's pursuers, both in lighting them on their way and in obscuring them at critical moments. She failed them altogether at the ravine, and if Paul, when he turned round, had looked to the right instead of the left, he would have seen them without fail. But again they were lucky; all the more so since he was actually thinking of them at the time.

"They are all fast asleep," he chuckled. "I've tricked them. Frunde and I have tricked them. They will never know."

Then, with a gay laugh, he passed on his way with ever-increasing speed, for his excitement and concentration of effort and purpose grew greater as he neared the end of his journey. And at last he reached the cowhouse. He dashed in, rushed to Frunde's manger, gave an exclamation of joy when he saw the bundle lying there sound and safe, took it out, unwrapped the Stradivari, stared at it a long time by the light of the moon, gloated over it, revelled in the possession of it, touched the strings, caressed the scroll, laid it in the case, placed the case in the manger, and covered it up with his shirt and coat.

But suddenly an expression of great anxiety broke over his face. A devastating doubt assailed him. Was the tone going to be as fine as ever? Was it—was it? After all, he had not tested it. He had only heard it with his mind's ear. All traces of craft and suspicion vanished from his countenance, which now spoke only of grave concern.

"I must hear it, in order to be quite sure," he said aloud. "Yes, I must hear it. I must——"

He broke off. He was deeply troubled and puzzled. His right hand sought his forehead—his invariable action when he was trying to think. His passionate wish to keep the Stradivari to himself was assailed by the promptings of his artist's nature to make all and any sacrifice for the sake of his work. Should he go and fetch Riemer?

Should he take it to Riemer? Ah, that would be better. But then, Riemer would want it. Riemer would want to rob him of it. And that was not to be borne. No, he could not give it up. He would leave it in the manger and come up again secretly with a bow and try it himself. That would do equally well.

But would it do? No, he knew it would not. Someone like Riemer would have to play on it, to sweep the strings and test its singing powers in every detail. Yes, yes, he must take it down to Riemer and——

He shuddered. He passed through an intense mental agony. He could not bear to part from it. But he was impelled against his will to submit to the dictates of faithful workmanship; and with reluctant hands he took it from its resting-place, put it under his arm, and went slowly towards the door. He stepped over the threshold and advanced two or three steps—not more. There he stopped. And a stubborn, determined look settled on his face.

"No," he muttered, shaking his head, "no."

He made for the manger again, replaced his treasure there, and to prevent any recurrence of the severe conflict which had torn his mind and spirit, fled precipitately from the scene, leaving, in his hasty retreat, the case uncovered and the door flung back for anyone to enter.

Meantime, Justina and Riemer, who had followed close upon him, were lying in wait near at hand, and saw him pass down. It had not dawned on Justina at first, in their pursuit of him, that he had perhaps chosen the forester's hut for the hiding-place of the Stradivari. It was only when they were approaching the spot itself that she remembered how often, in the old days, he used to wander off there. And at the moment when these memories revived, the significance of the word *Frunde* broke on her. Then she knew. Tired as she was, and out of breath, too—for Justina was no longer young, and not given to climbing steep places—she laughed, and Riemer asked her rather crossly the reason of her sudden merriment.

"*Frunde, the cow—Frunde, the cow!*" was all she could say, and she laughed again.

But when Paulchen had been gone for ten minutes or

so, she led Riemer direct to the forester's hut, and hard by they found the dark brown cowhouse, with its door inviting them to enter. They saw Paulchen's shirt and coat on the floor.

"Frunde's manger!" Justina cried, pointing to it excitedly.

Riemer literally leapt towards it and found his violin. He lifted it with trembling hands—and stood speechless, overcome by emotion. He held it to his heart.

"Mine again!" he whispered.

It was Justina who roused him.

"Didn't I tell you our Paulchen would not hurt it?" she said proudly.

But Riemer did not heed her. He whipped out a bow which he had brought with him, drew it across the strings, and began tuning the violin. His face was tense with excitement. Justina tried to stop him.

"No, no, don't do that," she said, in alarm. "It isn't safe. He may not have gone far. He may return. He'll be angry. There is no knowing what——"

But Riemer had come into his own, and the crack of doom itself would not have prevented him from playing on his Stradivari and testing for himself the capabilities of its tone and volume, its power and quality of singing.

He tuned it, raised his bow defiantly, triumphantly, and, regardless of outer circumstances and dangerous possibilities, began to put it mercilessly through its ordeal of sound. But in a few minutes he had lost all consciousness of a critical purpose. He only remembered that he was once more united to the instrument which had been his intimate companion for years. He poured out his passion on it, and wooed it with noble music loved by and familiar to them both, and drifted into the Mittenwald Concerto, his own tribute to it in his hours of distress and separation. On, on he sang, as a poet invoking his muse.

Justina, in spite of apprehension, was held by the spell which he wove around himself and her. And neither of them knew that the danger she had dreaded had come to fulfilment, and that Paul had returned.

At last Riemer's bow fell to his side.

"My wonderful Stradivari," he cried, his face aglow with joy. "Yes, and that wonderful Paul. There's no one like him—a prince in his art. I must make him hear me play, whether he likes it or not. He shall hear for himself that the tone is more beautiful than ever."

Then Justina looked round, and saw Paul standing in the doorway, his body slightly bent forward as if ready for action, and with an expression on his face which was an alarming mixture of fury, craft, interest, pride, delight, hate, and sullen jealousy. Her heart stood still, not from fear for herself, but for Riemer. Riemer was in danger, and she must protect him. She tried to speak to Paulchen, but no sound came from her lips. She tried to move towards him, but she had no power to lift her feet. But she did what she could in that moment of peril. She kept her eyes steadily fixed on his eyes, and met their steel-like glance unflinchingly. A strange and almost imperceptible quiver passed over his face and through his frame. He lowered his eyes—Justina had overcome him. His tense nerves relaxed, and he heaved a deep sigh as if he had freed himself from bondage. And instantly a radiant smile lit up his countenance, and a boyish eagerness bounded into his whole bearing.

"Yes, yes, you're right," he cried joyously. "The tone is more beautiful than ever. It's richer than ever. I thought it would be. Once or twice I wasn't quite sure. But only once or twice. More mellow than ever. Deeper. Splendid, isn't it, Riemer? I'm glad for my sake—oh, yes, yes, and for yours, too. I have never disliked your playing. Never."

He was flinging his arms about in delight, when his face suddenly clouded over again, but not in anger this time. His hand clutched his head as always when he was trying to make some great mental effort.

"It is yours, not mine, yours, not mine," he said, in a strained voice which betrayed the effort of mind and the sacrifice of spirit. "I know it's yours, Riemer. It must be yours if you can make it sing in that fashion. It can be no one else's. I don't understand how I always make that mistake. I——"

He broke off, shook his head, and looked helplessly first at Riemer and then at Justina. For answer Riemer clasped his hand in a silence which was eloquent of kindness, tenderness, appreciation, and gratitude; and Justina slipped her arm through his and waited, as she had so often faithfully waited, until that brief but bitter consciousness of his mental limitation had faded into a merciful oblivion.

"Paulchen," she said, as to a child, "shall we go home? We've come a long way, and I'm frightfully tired, aren't you? I suppose it is because I am getting old. I want to go home and have a hot cup of coffee like you always make for me when I'm tired, you know. I always wonder what you put in it. Some of your favourite gum mastic, I believe! *Ach*, I'm tired—my legs do ache. My left one worse than my right. No, they're both equally bad. *Ach, ach!*"

He had brightened up at once, and seemed immensely amused over the coffee and the gum mastic.

"Yes, let's go home," he said, laughing happily. "That is a good idea of yours. And I'll make some coffee for us all. Aha, I'm not going to tell you what I put in it. It isn't gum mastic, though! And it isn't Venetian turpentine! It's a secret, like the Cremona varnish—eh, Riemer? Come along, Riemer. You and I aren't tired, are we? But Justina is getting old. That's what is the matter with her."

It was Paulchen who led the way home, gaily and triumphantly. He had ceased to be interested in the Stradivari, and did not vouchsafe a single glance to it. But Justina whispered to Riemer that this was only a temporary indifference, and that his safest course was to leave Mittenwald as soon as possible, before Paul's mood had changed.

So Riemer, happy but anxious, took her advice. He only lingered long enough to drink that cup of coffee, delicious but mysterious, and to bid old father a secret farewell. And then off he stole like a thief, and first began to breathe freely when he landed his Stradivari safely in his home in Prague.

But his thoughts returned constantly to the fiddle

village and its mountains which he had learnt to love; and the first time he played the Stradivari again in public he had a curious lapse of memory, on which the newspapers in their ignorance commented ominously.

The truth was, not that he was losing his memory nor his technical skill, but that an unforgettable scene rose before him, and he smiled as he gazed on it with his mind's eye. He saw the little room with the green china stove in the Mittenwald cottage, old father, with his beautiful old face, working at his scrolls, Justina varnishing fiddles, but glancing up now and again to see if all were well with her fitful Paulchen whom she managed with such astonishing wisdom, and the fiddle-maker munching at an apple and staring intently at a fiddle back which he held before him for scrutiny and criticism.

Riemer laughed aloud, too, for he heard Paul say distinctly, in a sullen and reluctant tone of voice:

"I have never disliked your playing—never."

McGRATH'S HOMECOMING

THE train steamed lazily into the little station of N—— one glorious September afternoon in 1917. A tall Australian soldier stepped on to the platform, sniffed the air and glanced around in obvious appreciation of the countryside.

"Gee," he said aloud, "something like air after a London Hospital."

Then he addressed the stationmaster, who stood staring at him; for up to that day no Australian soldier had been seen in those parts. This little village on the Yorkshire Moors was as remote from the happenings of the war as some of the comfortable, well-ordered households in the heart of the Metropolis.

"Mister," he said, "are there some people of the name of Pattersen living here on a farm on the road to Hebden? They came here about six years ago, I think."

As he spoke, he took from his pocket an old torn letter and glanced at it.

"Ay," he said, "that was the name of the place—towards Hebden."

"Pattersens are here all right," the stationmaster answered. "Jim's at the Front. Friends of yours?"

Andrew McGrath nodded.

"Promised to give them a look up when I came to the Old Country," he said vaguely. "Made a promise I would."

And he repeated as if to himself:

"Yes, I did. I made that promise to myself. And why I did, I don't know."

"Well, you go straight up yon hill, and on through the village until you get to the last house," the stationmaster said. "Then you bear off to the right. That's the road to Hebden. Pattersen's is the first farm you come to; a large barn begins it. You can't mistake it."

McGrath nodded again, took out a cigar case, invited the stationmaster to help himself to a big, prosperous-looking cigar, and passed into the bar-room of the Station Hotel hard by.

Grandma Passmore was serving in the bar at the time, and when she saw the Australian soldier saunter in, her quick old eyes summed him up in a moment.

"So you be from the Colonies," she said, a smile lighting up her countenance. "Glad to welcome you here. And a real change from the sight of them horrid interned Germans and the like working at the quarry."

She jerked her head in the direction of a group of three or four men, obviously Germans or Austrians, all bending over the morning paper, which contained an account of a British reverse, and all unable to conceal signs of great satisfaction over the news, which had been disquieting to the whole country.

"Aren't they just enjoying themselves?" she said. "It fair makes my gorge rise. It isn't *beer* I'd like to serve out to them. No, it's by no means beer."

"Want me to pick a quarrel with them?" McGrath asked. "I'd just as soon."

"Nay, lad," she answered. "They're peaceable enough, and civil spoke. I'll own that much. But when bad news for England comes through, they're not half pleased, I can tell you. Twenty of them working at the quarry. Good food, good shelter, good wages, and the run of the countryside. And that's called being interned. I wouldn't mind it myself!"

McGrath strolled over lazily to the table where the men were sitting. He was tall and lean and strong, and looked a menacing presence as he stood watching the aliens, with an expression on his face which was alarming in the extreme, and a tenseness of manner which certainly seemed a prelude to sudden violence.

"Interested in the news, are you?" he began in a low drawl. "I'll teach——"

McGrath got no further. Grandma Passmore saw to that. The last thing she wanted was a scene, and she regretted instantly that she had been indiscreet enough to say a single word about the aliens to this Colonial soldier. A scene was bad policy all round. And her daughter-in-law was always warning her to keep silent on this subject, which never failed to agitate her. She simply could not keep silent. Whenever she saw these men come into the bar, something approaching fury invariably took possession of her. Still, she didn't want a scene. And now there was going to be one. She felt it in her bones.

How could she prevent it? It struck her that the only thing to do was to make a scene herself—and at once. She accordingly gave sudden utterance to a curious and frightening gurgling sound, and fell back carefully into her armchair—with great caution but sufficient disturbance for the purpose.

There was immediate alarm. The Australian rushed up to her. The "interned" vanished instantly, for they had not liked the look of this fierce and formidable Colonial soldier, and were glad to save their skins. The bar-room was cleared. The word went forth in the town that Grandma had had a fit. Tim, the old boots, was dispatched for the doctor. Mrs. Passmore Junior, and Hetty and Susie, her bonnie young girls, who had hastened to the bar, were preparing to give first aid to Grandma, when she opened her eyes, smiled at them and said:

"Let be—let be. Granny's as right as rain."

"Oh, Grannie," Susie cried, "darling Grannie, you've given us such a fright."

"Not such a fright as I've given myself," Grandma said, sitting up again. "I thought maybe the tall Australian man was going to murder the aliens. He looked that fierce at them. And all through me. All because I couldn't keep my tongue quiet about them. So I decided I'd better be taken ill."

"Well, it's a good thing you're all right, Mother," Mrs.

Passmore Junior said, laughing. "But you really ought to be more cautious. Time after time I've asked you."

"Yes, my dear, and time after time I've promised," Grandma said humbly, but with a knowing wink at Hetty, who laughed and hugged her.

McGrath laughed also.

"Plainly, there mustn't be any more British reverses," he said, "then Mrs. Grandma won't be tempted to be indiscreet."

And he added:

"But I tell you I'd made up my mind to twist their necks for them."

"Well, at least Grandma saved the situation, didn't she?" Susie said staunchly.

"Ay, ay, she did," McGrath answered, smiling. "And if all people who start mischief could repair it so quickly, the world would get along a mighty sight better. I guess I take off my hat to Mrs. Grandma."

This little incident dispensed with all preliminaries of acquaintanceship. They took McGrath into the private room at the back of the bar, served tea for him and found him one of their best cigars. He had to tell them about Gallipoli; and they hung on every word as he gave the story of the tragic landing and the reckless courage of the gallant dead. He learnt that Mr. Passmore had joined up on the third day of the war and was now in Salonika. The women of the family, old and young alike, had been carrying on the business in his absence; and it was the ambition of the girls, who evidently loved their father dearly, to show him on his return that they had done their best to keep things going.

McGrath was touched to the core by the feeling of family kindness and devotion amongst them. He was on his way to his own people, whom he had not seen for many years and to whom he had not written a single line. In disgrace and anger he had left them, as a youngster; and though at times the thought of them had tugged at his heart, and a vision of his mother grieving over him had often haunted him, he had cast them all aside and given no sign.

He asked himself, why had he given no sign ? Why had he been content to tread his own path, to live as if he were alone in the world, with no home to which to return, no one to greet him, welcome him, forgive him ? Oh, simply because he had been a fool. Or was it because he had never cared ? He remembered that years ago, when he was quite a boy, old Aunt Rebecca had maintained that he had no heart. She had said that he would grow up to be a fine figure of a man, but that, whatever Andrew did and whatever he was, he would never have a heart. And his mother, nearly always mild and gentle, had turned fiercely on Aunt Rebecca and swept her to the door. He remembered Aunt Rebecca had called out, as a parting shot :

" Never."

He smiled as the memory of the scene returned to him from those distant days.

Well, had Aunt Rebecca been right, after all ? Perhaps. Perhaps his mother, who had taken up arms for him then, had come to the bitter knowledge that all her love and care and yearning for her eldest born had been lavished in vain on one who gave no response. Yet there had been moments during these years of silence when his craving for home was so great that he could almost have died of it.

No one would believe that. No one would believe it of any one of the rough hardened fellows with whom he had kept company out in the wilds of Australia. But it was true. And his mind travelled back to a winter's night, on a lonely station in the Bush, when The Terrier himself, toughest of the tough, fiercest of the fierce, had been taken ill and turned his face to the wall.

What ailed him ? What could they do for him ? What could they give him ?

" Nothing, except Home and all the love I chucked away," he had said at last. " That's what's the matter with me, boys. Leave me alone."

These thoughts claimed McGrath with increasing persistence as he sat chatting with the Passmores. It was his first experience of family life since he landed in England ;

and his plan of visiting his home, definite but hitherto only of temperate interest, leapt suddenly to a fierce flame of eagerness. One of those moments of longing had come.

He rose abruptly, took leave of his new friends in a hurry which disconcerted them a little, and made them think him ungracious. They never knew that they themselves had sped him on his way—they and what they represented to him: the intimacy and interplay of a home, and their concern and affection for that absent father and husband and son watched over day and night by their anxious love.

He recalled the stationmaster's directions for finding Pattersen's farm and stalked off, a typical Australian soldier figure, tall, lean, independent of bearing, with his slouch hat slightly tilted and a hand in his pocket. His face was a little grim; but there was a distinct twinkle in his blue eyes, and something kind about his mouth. It may have been true that Andrew McGrath, as he called himself, had gone away without a heart; but it was probably true that, in spite of Aunt Rebecca's judgment, he had found one and was bringing it back now.

McGrath passed over the bridge, but paused a moment to glance at the view on either side and to watch the river Wharfe, which was swollen by recent rain and was rushing along, turbulent and tumultuous, yet not too angry to be courted by the caressing sunshine which showered jewels amidst its spray, lit up the green pastures with a magic lustre and set the heather-clad moors beyond in a blaze of purple splendour. Then he mounted the hill which led to the moorland village of N——.

The district was new to him. Everything was strange: river, upland, moor, fell. Yet the familiarity of a purely English scene moved him in a fashion he would have deemed impossible even a few hours ago.

"England," he said aloud. "Nothing like it to be seen in the whole world."

Down the hill came a huge cart-horse ridden by a microscopic boy. McGrath laughed, and saluted the child for fun.

"Well, well," he said, "I guess you've got some horse there."

Freddy stared with a truly British stare, and then grinned. He turned round and stared for a long while, whilst the big horse took care of herself and him.

McGrath stood still, and said aloud:

"That kid would be about Jimmy's age when I left. And now Jimmy's at the Front, the stationmaster told me. Well, well, to think of it. Little Jimmy at the Front! A smart youngster he was, too!"

He continued saying to himself as he climbed the hill:

"Little Jimmy at the Front."

Then there was Hazel, the wee sister whom he had always loved in his own way and with whom he had played many an hour, cutting all sorts of capers for her delighted benefit. In all his ups and downs of home life in the past, he had never been in disgrace with Hazel. Would he be now that she had grown up and understood more about life and its claims and duties?

Would his mother look much older, he wondered? Would his father seem as rigid and uncompromisingly stern as in the years gone by? Would they be pleased to see him? Or would they turn from him and say that he had no place in their lives? No, not that. He was sure that they would not turn from him. His mother would only remember that he had come home at last; and the long space of absence would be bridged over by her love. His father might speak some harsh and richly-deserved reproaches; but once they were said, he would stretch out his hand in welcome.

Thus he reassured himself as he passed slowly up the cobbled street, noting, as he went, some of the old-world grey houses, picturesque with mullioned windows and curious markings on their door lintels. Finally he came to the market-place, with its ancient pump, round which the children were playing. And here he paused, seized suddenly with misgiving and panic.

Suppose his people did turn from him? Then every time that a great longing for home obsessed him when

he was in distant parts, there would be no sustaining hope at the back of it. Always the longing—and no hope. That wasn't to be borne. Far better not to run that risk. He sat down on a bench. He would go no farther. He had been a fool to come. He remembered that The Terrier had once said that if he went home, he lost all, but if he remained away, he at least kept something which no one could take from him—the illusion of welcome, reunion, reconciliation, wiser understanding. The Terrier had been right.

So in a few minutes he would retrace his steps and take the first train back to Skipton. And if there were not a train that evening, he would stay at the Station Hotel and throw his lot in with Grandma and her dear friends, the interned aliens. But even as he pretended to make this decision, he shook his head and smiled at himself. To come all the way from Australia and stop short at the market-place when his people were within reach, a few hundred yards further up the village and a step or two along the Hebden road until one reached the first big barn. No, not likely. He knew in his heart of hearts that he would go on.

At the back of him stretched the purple moors. In front of him tier upon tier of them rose in the distance like rolling waves, and above them towered the fells, caught that moment by a shaft of sunlight which had broken bravely through a cluster of ominous grey-blue rain-clouds. This vision of beauty cheered and fascinated Andrew McGrath, who loved Nature in all her manifestations; and he only turned away from it at the sound of merry laughter. He saw then a wounded soldier on crutches, with one leg amputated just below the knee, negotiating the cobbled street with a reckless gaiety and accompanied by friends as joyous as himself at the return of the native. He had evidently not been discharged from hospital, for he was still wearing his blue armlet, and probably he would have to go back and undergo another operation—perhaps two operations—perhaps even more. Perhaps he had had a long spell of suffering and they had sent him home on furlough to see whether a

change to his own surroundings would speed on a retarded recovery. Anyway, there he was in his own village, amongst his own people, welcomed and made much of. He was decorated with the ribbon of the military medal and the Mons star. And McGrath envied the young corporal, not for the possession of them, but for the pride they most surely brought to those who loved him.

Then an old shepherd with his flock of sheep and his dog passed down, and later a procession of cows wended their way slowly and cautiously in the direction of the bridge; and when they had disappeared, old Swainston, the cobbler, sauntered by, probably thinking, as usual, of all the ghosts of his intimate acquaintance—amongst them the monk at Marton Grange, the fiddler in the Mill House, and Barguest, the soft-footed hound, whose cold breath frightened people out of their wits.

Children came running down with heather and ling from the moors, and Harry, the village idiot, slouched near, crooning to himself. A housewife crossed the market-place carrying some hot Yorkshire buns which encircled McGrath with such a tempting fragrance that he almost commandeered them on the spot. Out of one of the cottages emerged a frail, bent, old, white-haired man, whose face shone with love as a little damsel playing round the pump suddenly caught sight of him, forsook her companions instantly and rushed into his arms.

And now the yellow omnibus, dating from the Flood or even before, clattered up the hill, and came to a standstill within a yard or two of McGrath's bench. It was full of people inside, and heaped up with parcels outside; and there was an immediate onslaught of the shopkeepers, which the driver met with a good-natured patience born of long custom and kindness.

"All right, Mr. Martin, here be your cask of margarine," he said. "All right, Mrs. Beaconsfield, now don't ye get flustered, here be three packages for you, and here be Mr. Onslow's hardware, and a whole stock of things for Mr. Grant, and a box for Farmer Pattersen. Anyone from Pattersen's handy?"

McGrath looked up. He had the impulse to say "Yes," but he checked the word.

"Miss Hazel was down here a few minutes ago," Martin, the grocer, said. "But she was in a hurry to get back. I'll take charge of the box for her."

"Ay, ay," said the driver, with a benevolent smile. "That you would, I'm sure, Mr. Martin; not but that she couldn't carry it up herself on her strong young shoulders. A proper strong lass, Miss Hazel. And don't she just look fine in her Land Army rig."

"Hazel a Land Army girl!" McGrath said aloud. "That's great."

But no one heard him; and all were too much occupied in their own affairs to take much notice of him at the moment, though one or two of them did glance at him and wonder who he was, and then forgot him until later. But a flying boy who tumbled out of the bus gave him a nod and said, "Hullo, uncle," and was then engulfed by his relations, who bore him off in triumph. And a gunner in the R.F.A., evidently direct home from the Front, laden with his helmet, water-bottle and all his belongings, grimy, grubby, tired out, but in the height of good spirits, called out, "Hullo, mate, you've come to the best place in the whole of old Blighty. You can take my word for it. So long." Then he, too, was swallowed up by friends.

The thought passed through McGrath's mind that these fellows had homes waiting for them and that there had been no need for them to doubt the nature of their reception. Well, he had a home waiting for him. Why could he not be like these boys and go to it direct without a moment's hesitation?

Yet still he lingered, wishing to start off, but unable to brace himself up. He watched the other occupants of the yellow omnibus claiming their luggage and dispersing to their destinations. A man who looked like a commercial traveller exchanged a few words with the blacksmith, and disappeared with him into the Commercial Arms. An overdressed girl, oversmart with furs and a fashionable hat, brand-new gloves and a silk satchel, was

talking loudly to a friend who had that moment run down to meet her. She was a munition worker somewhere, for McGrath heard her friend say:

"My, Lily, you do look a toff! And aren't you glad to get away from them munitions for a bit?"

"Yes," she said, laughing. "Like my furs, Liz? Topping, aren't they? Nothing to what I'm going to have, though!"

A girl telegraph messenger, extraordinarily like the munition worker, hurried up.

"Lil," she cried excitedly, "how jolly that you've come. I'll be back soon. I've just got to take this wire to Pattersen's, worse luck."

"Oh, blow the wire," said Lil. "That's a nice way to welcome your long-lost twin sister home. Well, hustle all you can, Bess. Got heaps to tell you, and a lovely present that'll make your head swim. Cost ever so much money. Like my furs?—top hole, aren't they? Now, don't be long gone. Run all the way."

McGrath rose on impulse, lifted his hat, and said with a half-shy smile:

"Excuse me, miss, but I'm going right along now to Pattersen's. Perhaps I could take the message for you."

The sisters looked at him, looked at each other, and the munition worker giggled a little and whispered:

"There now, Bess. That settles it, as the gentleman is going to be so kind. Give the wire to him, and come along with me."

But Bess hesitated. She wanted desperately to go with Lil, but she knew she ought not to fail in her duty of delivering the telegram in person.

McGrath saw her hesitation, and then something happened to him which astonished him. He dropped his disguise of name and parted with the secret of personality.

"It's all right," he said, reassuringly. "You can trust me all right, miss. I'm Andrew Pattersen, Pattersen's eldest son, home from Australia."

"Pattersen's eldest son from Australia?" they exclaimed together. "Jimmy's brother?"

"Yup," he said, "little Jimmy's brother."

"A six-footer," laughed Bess, "taller than you be."

"He has been growing whilst I've been roaming," McGrath said, smiling. "I think of him, you know, as little Jimmy."

"A handsome lad is Jimmy," said Lil. "Strong family likeness, Mr. Australian! But Jimmy looks merrier than you by a long way, always laughing and full of fun and mischief. The life of the village. My, didn't he look a stunner when he went off in his khaki. And the last thing he said was——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted McGrath eagerly, "the last thing he said was——"

"The last thing he said," continued Lil, "was: 'The folk in these parts don't need to worry. I'm going to win this war for them right enough. I'll see it through!'"

McGrath laughed softly.

"I reckon that was the right thought to have," he said. "Well, I'll be off with your message if you'll trust it to me."

Bess, without further compunction, gave him the telegram, and the two sisters ran off in high spirits down the hill. And McGrath started immediately for Pattersen's farm. As he pursued his way to his parents' home, his longing for his own folk began to burn with an intensity which made him suffer as acutely as either he or The Terrier had sometimes agonised in the Bush. But now he was really going to see them. He was going to hear his mother's voice, clasp his father's hand in real friendship, give Hazel a hug, get the latest news of little Jimmy, explain how a wild and wayward nature, resentful of control in early days, could nevertheless look back and know how much it owed to those who had tried in vain to help and guide it. He could tell them, too, that a heart can grow apace when the mind gets a grasp of life, and experience ripens the understanding. And he could show them that he had cared for the Old Country. His two stripes for wounds would testify to that. But what he wanted them to know, most of all, was that when the call came, he had responded, not only with the gladness

shared by thousands upon thousands of others, but also with a deep gratitude for his chance of " making good."

So he strode on, filling his lungs with the clean, bracing moorland air, and at last reached the big barn which he had been told marked the beginning of Pattersen's land. A few yards further, and he came to the farmhouse, a low, long building, evidently old, with a fine roof and mullioned and traceried windows. It had a clearing in front of it through which he passed to a small garden, and here he paused a moment before knocking at the door. Even then, in spite of his heart hunger, he nearly turned away.

Suddenly, from the side of the house guarded by a great yew tree, appeared a tall, strong young woman in Land Army attire, looking every inch like one of Shakespeare's heroines setting forth on her adventures in men's disguise. The description McGrath had heard of Hazel helped him, of course. But out of the past leapt his remembrance of the shape of her face and of her frank blue eyes, which looked out on the world fearlessly, trustingly, and with a quiet joyaunce.

" Hazel ! " he cried, " I'm sure you're Hazel, aren't you ? I'm your brother Andrew. Do you remember me ? "

She was carrying a large hay rake, which she cast down as she made a dash for him, as she had always done in the years gone by, and hugged him in exactly the same old fashion as she had ever been wont to hug that troublesome big brother of long ago who had been unfailingly good to her in all his ups and downs of home life.

" Andrew, Andrew, dear old Andrew," she cried. " Home at last."

She grasped his hands and swung his arms backwards and forwards in her glee, and kept on saying :

" Of course I should have known you. At least I think I should. Yes, I'm sure I should."

He laughed happily. Never had it entered his head that such a welcome awaited him from Hazel. She had no idea of what she did for him, nor any faintest notion of the resilience, the hope, the courage she imparted

to him by treating him as if there had been no break in their intimacy.

"You know," she said, "we've been expecting you ever since the war began. Mother has always declared that if you were alive, you would be sure to come and fight for the Old Country. And if you didn't come, she would think you were dead. But she said you would turn up. She knew it."

Andrew's eyes grew dim.

"And——father?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Father's top-hole," she answered with a smile. "I've brought him up well. He isn't nearly as stern as he used to be. I've knocked all that out of him. So has Jimmy. He hasn't ever said audibly that you'd come. But I can tell you that he has kept a sharp look-out on the Australian Force, and he has always studied the casualties in that paper which I'm sure you must know also—the *British Australasian*. And many a time I've seen the look of relief on his face when he has finished the last page. That has been his way of waiting for you."

Andrew bowed his head.

"And little Jimmy?" he asked. "What of him?"

"Oh, Jimmy's great," she said. "He's a huge creature and a huge joke. Everyone loves Jimmy. No one could help it. We had a letter from him last week. He's at the Front, of course. He's all right and in the best of spirits. He has been expecting to see you, too. He wrote that he hadn't come across that bloke of a brother of his yet, but he shouldn't wonder if he did. Some chum had found a long-lost brother from Canada and they had palled up tremendously. He reckoned to do that with you after he had given you a knock-out blow."

Andrew laughed.

"Little Jimmy," he chuckled.

"Six foot one," she went on. "And every bit of him a darling. Not selfish, you know, and always ready to do anyone a good turn. We've missed him fearfully. Everyone has missed him here. And such a handsome lad. Someone to be proud of, I can tell you."

"You're a topping girl yourself," Andrew said, glancing at her approvingly. "Smart get-up, Hazel."

"Yes," she answered, smiling. "Now just wait in this room whilst I go and break the news of your arrival to the old people. Shocks aren't good for them, not even joyful ones."

"Will this shock truly be joyful?" he asked with sudden apprehension.

"Yes," she replied kindly. "Of course it will. You stay here until I come back. I won't be long. Look—here is this week's *British Australasian* in the window-sill—an outward and visible sign, Andrew, that you have not been forgotten."

She was running off, when McGrath suddenly remembered the telegram.

"The telegram," he said, fishing it out of his pocket. "I offered to deliver it as I was coming this way. The girl wasn't inclined to trust me until I declared myself to be a Pattersen."

"A telegram," Hazel said uneasily. "Who's wiring to us, I wonder?"

She paused for a moment before opening it, as if arrested by some vague foreboding. Then she read it. It slipped from her hands.

She stood as one turned to stone.

"Jimmy is dead," she said in a voice which seemed to come from a far distance. "'Died of wounds.'"

McGrath stooped down and picked up the message.

"Little Jimmy dead," he repeated.

Hazel leaned against the wall, covered her face with her hands and wept her heart out, silently, tearlessly. McGrath did not make a sound or sign. He felt he had no right to share that sacred grief. He was but an outsider who had left his home in anger and forfeited the ties that linked him with it. Jimmy was interwoven with it—its life, its joy, its very essence, its pride, its mirth, its kindness. And he was dead.

He stood by the window, staring at the *British Australasian*, saying to himself a thousand times that he would fain have died in Jimmy's place, and that it was monstrous

that he should not have been the one to be taken—he who would not be missed—could not be missed. And by what irony of fate had it fallen to him to bring the bad news, to return after twelve years and be the bearer of the worst tidings the family could receive? Did it mean that he ought not to have come, and that he ought to have remembered his father's prophecy, that he would never bring luck to his home?

Out of the past it echoed discordantly to him:

"*You will never bring luck to this home.*"

That was what his father would say now. Far, far better, then, to have stayed away, both for their sake and his own. Again The Terrier's warning smote him, and this time with added realisation of its bitter truth. *If he returned, he lost everything.*

But in the midst of his misery, Hazel uncovered her face, glanced at him standing forlorn and remote, guessed at his suffering, at his need, and was seized with true pity.

"Andrew," she said as she put her arm through his, "what good luck that you've come at this very moment of trouble. You'll help me to comfort them, won't you? Wait here until I come to fetch you. Poor old Andrew—what a homecoming. Jimmy would never have wished you to get this sort of knock-out blow. He had the kindest heart in the world; he——"

She broke off, but kept up valiantly and tried to smile at him.

Andrew pointed to the *British Australasian.*

"If only my name could have been there instead, Hazel," he murmured.

"Such good luck for us that you've returned to help us in our need," she repeated bravely as she turned to the door. "That's what you have to remember whilst you're waiting. Only that."

Later she returned to fetch him and signed to him in grave silence to follow her to the living-room where his mother and father were sitting close together on the lang settle.

He was gathered to his mother's breast, and his father grasped his hand and said in a low voice:

"The Lord hath taken away and the Lord hath given. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

THE FIRST WIFE'S PICTURE

IT was about two o'clock in the middle of a June night. Gweneth Sirrell lay awake in her bed, whilst her husband was sleeping quietly and dreamlessly in his bed against the opposite wall of the room. For weeks she had been increasingly obsessed with one idea, which had now taken such a strong hold on her, that she knew the moment had come when she must decide between the claims of her brain and the dictates of her conscience.

Her conscience said: "You are contemplating an irreverent and an ungenerous act."

Her brain said: "You cannot stand this strain any longer; it is telling on you both mentally and physically."

Her conscience said: "You would never forgive yourself for your paltriness; it would for ever haunt you."

Her brain said: "It isn't as if you have not tried to wrestle with this trouble; you have wrestled. But you have failed. There remains only one thing to be done. Go and do it now—and the network will loosen."

The network will loosen. The word echoed in her ears loudly, softly, with a soothing cadence. Her decision was made.

She crept from her bed, slipped on her dressing-gown, and stood listening to her husband's quiet and regular breathing. She opened the door carefully and passed out into the landing, where she lingered, straining her ears to be sure that no one save herself was stirring in the house.

She was a good-looking woman, with an abundance of soft, fair hair which fell caressingly around her shoulders.

Her bearing was gallant. One could have imagined that even at that moment, chained as she obviously was by some compelling secret circumstance, she would, nevertheless, have freed herself instantly, if some great and unexpected demand had been made on her courage and initiative.

But meantime there was an elusive expression of subtle mystery on her face; and the pupils of her eyes had contracted to a pin's point. Her arms and hands were slightly extended in a position of strained rigidity. She noticed this herself, and let them drop to her side; and as if this simple movement had eased some painful tension, she sighed and went with noiseless tread down the stairs into the hall.

She found her way, without a light, into the drawing-room. Here she switched on the electric lamps and glanced around at the pictures: the portrait of an old man by Raeburn, a silvery seascape, a Dutch interior, two or three interesting impressionist country scenes, and a specially fine Sargent, the portrait of a young relative of her husband's, who had thrown up the Law and entered the Order of the Jesuits.

At last she went to her little bureau at the right-hand side of the fireplace, lit a candle, and took from the drawer a pair of scissors and a strong penknife. She opened this, and tested the larger blade against the back of an oaken photograph frame. She nodded her head, satisfied with the result of her experiment. Then, armed with the candlestick, which she carried rather high, and with these two intimate everyday life weapons which she had thrust into her pocket, Gweneth Sirrell stole into the hall once more, paused to reassure herself that no one had been roused overhead, turned the handle of her husband's library door, and entered the room.

She locked the door. She raised the candle, and let the light fall on the amazingly lifelike portrait of a beautiful young woman which alone occupied the wall facing the great writing-desk. There was no doubt that this extraordinary picture dominated the room. It would necessarily have dominated anyone who sat in that room. It

would have been impossible even for a stranger glancing at it casually, not to have been haunted by a vivid remembrance of it. And what, then, about the man who spent all his spare time in its presence ? Was it to be supposed that he could resist gazing at it day after day, week after week, month after month ? If for nothing else, its magnificent imperiousness demanded, exacted a relentless homage. Sargent had consciously or unconsciously read that relentlessness in the woman's character, and had recorded it in her lineaments and in her bearing. The woman was what is called dead. Yet one had only to look at the picture to know that her spirit was not dead, but was hovering around, animating this presentment of her former self.

Gweneth addressed the picture in quiet, incisive tones.

" You dominate the room, the house, his heart," she said. " I can no longer stand your tryanny. I have tried to be patient and great-minded. When he and I together visited your grave and I witnessed his grief, I knew that I, his second wife, would have to battle with your memory—for his sake, for my sake. I vowed it should be a generous contest—not a contest at all, but a fair and reverent understanding. You have made this impossible. But one hope remains. This living presentment of you must vanish from his life."

She placed the candle on the writing-desk, and laughed a curious, little, short laugh, the mirthlessness of which attuned with her grave manner.

" It was one thing to plant snowdrops on her grave," she said, as she opened the penknife, " and quite another thing to let them rise up and choke me."

She turned on two of the electric lights nearest the picture, placed a chair before it, mounted up, and began her appointed work. She inserted her knife carefully at the extreme right edge of the lower end of the frame, and by degrees cut out the whole canvas. The intensity of her breathing betrayed the violence of the emotions which were governing her. The portrait fell to the ground. She picked it up leisurely, and as she rolled it into a long roll, she said again :

"It was one thing to plant snowdrops on her grave."

She looked at the roll intently for a moment, and a sudden thought struck her.

"Yes," she said, smiling craftily. "The other Sargent, too."

Without any delay, but without any hurry, she returned to the drawing-room, and in the most business-like fashion, cut from its frame the portrait of her husband's young Jesuit relative. She rolled it and bore it proudly to the library, where she fitted it into the larger roll of the first wife's picture. Once or twice she took alarm and fancied that she heard a disturbance in the house. But when she realised that it was only the wind which had been gathering strength to spend itself in sudden tempestuous gusts, she sank contentedly into the armchair. She glanced in triumph at the long roll. She scrutinised with alternations of anxiety and relief the empty space which had so recently been filled by that imperious personality.

"A blank now," she muttered, laughing softly. "You've gone. Gone. And yet I still seem to see you here. Ah, but that's only my fancy. You've gone. Gone. And yet——"

She snatched up the candle and stood before the empty space.

"Of course. Gone," she said excitedly. "I thought I could not be mistaken."

Once more she sank into the chair, but once more she sprang up, with fresh doubts in her agitated brain.

"Still there—still there, surely?" she said.

Again she lifted the candle and held it with trembling hand before the empty frame.

"No. Gone. Of course, gone," she whispered, with a final sigh of reassurance. And for the time being, her mind did not travel beyond the fact that she had accomplished her task.

She sat hugging her knees and smiling, wrapped in her own strange thoughts, unconscious of the coldness of the night, the desolation of the hour, the danger of detection. Her face wore an expression of triumphant pride, intermingled with an impersonal aloofness which

seemed to disclaim for her any share in her recent activities.

Twice she spoke aloud words which gave a leading idea of the memories encompassing her.

"The honeymoon journey," she said. "All the identical places she visited with him, taken in exactly the same rotation. Exactly the same rotation. And ending up with her grave, where I planted the snowdrops."

There was a period of silence, during which she clasped her knees still tighter.

"And that flower-bed in his country garden," she continued. "It spelt her name. It——"

She broke off and shook her head impatiently. The memory of the flower-bed aggravated her even more than that of the honeymoon journey.

At last there floated across her mind the sudden realisation that her task was incomplete, and that she must now remove these two portraits to some sure hiding-place. Her brain leapt over all difficulties and impossibilities, and arrived at the easiest and safest solution of this problem. But this part of her programme was evidently of little importance to her in comparison with the beginning: for she took no further precautions of stealthy silence, but went upstairs with an entire recklessness, carrying the trophies unconcealed under her arm. She made straight for the spare room at the end of the passage. She turned on the light, and glanced in the direction of a cupboard on the right-hand side of the fireplace. She opened it. A large golf-bag rested against the extreme corner.

"Ah, I thought I remembered seeing it there," she said.

She hauled it out of the cupboard, unfastened it, and took from it in leisurely indolence two or three of the clubs. She even examined them, identifying now the cleek, now the mashie, now the putter. Then she slipped her Sargent roll in amongst the remaining ones, and nodded her head gravely when she saw that her calculations had been correct, and that there was more than enough depth for the portraits, and plenty of space left over for the clubs which she had dislodged. She replaced them,

restored the bag to its accustomed corner, and was on the point of seeking her bedroom again, when she remembered that she had left the candle burning on the desk in the library, and her knife and scissors lying on the floor.

Directly she crossed the threshold of the library, she fixed her eyes on the empty portrait-frame.

"Surely, surely, it is still there," she said in a low, agonised voice.

Her hands sought her head. She pressed them tightly over her brow. She closed her eyes, as if unable to endure the vision. But at last, with a supreme effort, she gathered courage, snatched up the candle, and looked. Gradually a joyful change came over the distress of her countenance.

"Of course," she whispered, smiling. "It is gone. No doubt about that."

In a few minutes all incriminating signs of the night's work had been effaced; and Gweneth was safely in bed. She listened for a moment to her husband's continuously regular breathing, nodded her head, gave a sigh of relief, yawned from sudden infinite fatigue, turned on her side, and fell peacefully asleep.

II

When the discovery was made the next morning, the whole house was in a state of consternation. Andrew Sirrell stood as one turned to stone before the empty frame which only the previous day had contained the portrait of his idolised first wife. Suddenly a light broke in through the wall of his stupefaction.

"Two Sargents," he said excitedly. "That speaks for itself. C—— has always believed that the same gang would start sooner or later on the New Masters. And he said they would begin with Sargent. He was right."

His mind never for one moment included Gweneth in his suspicions. He was a selfish man, entirely without imagination; and these defects in his nature had caused

him to be unconscious of the demands which he had made on her chivalrous forbearance. And since he had no knowledge of her suffering, it was natural enough that not even the barest idea of her guilt entered into the region of his surmises. Indeed, now, as ever, he claimed from her an inordinate amount of sympathy. He led her into the library, pointed tragically to the empty frame, and burst into an hysterical fit of sobbing.

"It's gone, Gwen—gone," he cried.

"Gone?" she echoed, in a questioning tone. "No, no, surely it's there."

"I don't wonder you cannot believe your eyes," he cried. "But it's gone, Gwen—gone."

"Yes, yes, I see now," she said gravely. "It's gone."

"I shall have the whole world ransacked," he went on excitedly. "I can't live without it. It has been everything to me—everything to me. It is a wonderful portrait. Sometimes I have almost cheated myself into believing that it was really she herself."

"Yes, I know," Gwen said, in a low voice. "And now you've lost it, Andrew."

"Oh, but it shall be found," he said desperately. "If I have to spend my last farthing on the search, it shall be found."

He had quieted down a little by the time the detective arrived; but he was still in a distressing state of excitement. And it was to Gweneth that the official finally addressed himself for sensible information on the usual habits of the household. Gweneth gave all her answers with an impersonal calmness which would have produced a most favourable impression on any jury. One of her replies was a masterpiece of unconscious subtlety.

"I have no reason to suspect anyone of our household," she said. "I might as well suspect myself."

The man smiled. Even Andrew Sirrell smiled at the absurd remoteness of such a suggestion. And when, for form's sake, the house was searched, it was Gweneth who led the way into the zone of danger, opened the cupboard door, and stood staring dauntlessly at the golf-bag, impelled against her own interests to contemplate

the hiding-place of the lost treasure. If the detective had not been a detective, and the husband had not been obsessed by his one idea of tragic personal loss, Gweneth's peculiar expression of countenance and her persistent lingering in that spare room before that cupboard door, would surely have made some impression on the minds of her companions.

Nothing, however, reached them. No thought transference took place. The detective glanced at the golf-bag, and an almost human light stole over his impassive face. He thought immediately of his favourite golf links at Seaford, and not of the First Wife's picture. Andrew Sirrell travelled a little nearer. He recalled to his saddened memory that bright May morning when he and his first wife had together bought that golf-bag. But the sight of it prompted no thought of the missing portrait. Yet Gweneth almost pointed to the objects of their united search. And once she nearly said aloud:

"Surely it is there—there and nowhere else. Surely I cannot be mistaken. I must look and know for certain. This uncertainty is not to be borne."

Suddenly her unbalanced mind readjusted itself to the requirements of the situation which she had created, and with a last effort of will, which cost her dear, physically and mentally, she was able to control her speech and check her impulse of movement.

So the search in the house proved, of course, ineffectual. The detective sped on his enlightened way, with his note-book full of important but vain details, which, so he and Andrew Sirrell believed, would provide him with valuable clues connecting this theft with the interesting series of picture robberies proceeding steadily for some time, after judicious and fixed intervals. He had persuaded himself that one was due now. Well, one had come. Needless to say, nothing human or superhuman could have ousted this belief from its geographical position in the map of his mind. Andrew Sirrell, sharing this faith, strengthened the active attitude of the detective and the passive preventiveness of the real criminal. Yet once Gweneth almost relented. For when she and her husband

were alone again in the library, he turned tragically to the empty wall, and gave way to yet another paroxysm of passionate grief.

"Do you care so fearfully—do you care so fearfully, my poor Andrew?" she cried suddenly.

"She was all the world to me," he answered. "No one could ever have taken her place."

"Then why did you ask me?" Gweneth returned, with a simple dignity.

He glanced at her, and for the first time a faint glimmering of the unseemliness of his behaviour, and of the discourtesy of his uncontrolled regret stole upon the darkness of his selfishness. Some words rose to his lips, but he was unable to give utterance to them. Her quiet dignity paralysed him. It removed her out of the reach of perfunctory apology, inadequate excuse. He could only stand staring fixedly at the empty frame; and it was she who broke the terrible silence.

"You can see for yourself," she said, with a strange smile on her face, "that the picture has been very carefully cut out from its setting. There isn't a shred anywhere."

"No, not a shred," he said, thankful to regain the power of speech. "The knife must have been fearfully sharp."

"Yes, it was—evidently," she said.

"I don't even notice the indent where the man began to cut," he said, "unless it was here on the right."

"Yes, it was here—evidently," she said.

"I can't believe it is gone," he said, with a wild return of frenzied grief. "I see it before me even now."

"I see it," Gweneth said slowly. "I see it always there."

That was her punishment. She saw it in its frame, in its accustomed place in the library, endowed as ever with an irresistible and unrelenting influence. It was in vain that her brain reminded her of the night's happening; it was in vain that she wandered from the spare room to the library, and from the library to the spare room; in vain that, to reassure herself, she locked the spare room door, and took the two pictures out of the golf-bag, gazed at them with painful intenseness, and restored them deliberately to their seclusion.

Yet a few minutes afterwards, she was more convinced than before that the portrait of her rival hung undisturbed on the wall in the library, and that her agony, her effort, her eagerness, her debasement had failed of their set purpose. To have sinned and succeeded would at least have been a mental satisfaction and triumph, physically if not morally healing. But in Gweneth's dangerously unbalanced condition of mind, to have sinned and been frustrated could only mean an access of mental disaster.

That night, after many hours of strain and restlessness, her brain gave way.

III

"SNOWDROPS—in the golf-bag—ransack the world—always there—on the grave."

These were the words, constantly repeated in poor Gweneth's ravings, which, amidst the incoherence, arrested the attention of the doctor who watched by her side. He took out his notebook and pencil, and tried the words in separate combinations. These were his entries:

"1. Snowdrops in the golf-bag.

"2. Snowdrops on the grave.

"3. Ransack the world, snowdrops always there in the golf-bag.

"4. Ransack the world, snowdrops always there in the grave.

"5. The golf-bag always there in the grave, ransack the world for snowdrops.

"6. Snowdrops always there on the grave, ransack the world for golf-bag.

"7. Ransack the world for the grave, snowdrops always there in golf-bag."

He shook his head gravely as he read them over. They did not strike him as being ridiculous, for he knew that, even in their disjointed connection, they stood for certain fundamental ideas, the secret of which, once grasped, would reveal to him the workings of her disordered mind. She had collapsed. Why had she collapsed? He had,

of course, been told of the picture robberies ; but although he took into consideration the excitement which such an event would naturally have occasioned in the household, he regarded it merely as an accelerating agent, and not as a causative force. It was obvious to his practised judgment that she had been on the verge of a precipice, and that eventually she would have fallen over. Chance had contrived that it should be a little sooner.

But what was the driving power which had impelled her in the direction of the precipice ? He believed that if he could solve that problem, he could indirectly or directly help towards the healing of her mind. He never allowed himself to rely only on intuition, or on accumulated experience, physical and mental. He searched the spiritual atmosphere of the sick person, and added his spiritual knowledge to his scientific equipment of analysis. Some of his *confrères* thought that he laid undue stress on the value of the spiritual. Nevertheless, in their doubts, they sought his help and the benefits of his methods, justifying themselves by attributing his successful results to the weight of his personality, and not to the soundness of his views.

So he had been called in, in Gweneth's instance. And he continued to linger in the sick-room, puzzling over his notes, straining to catch some muttered fugitive word which would perhaps guide him to some clue of her spiritual condition. No fresh word came. But he was struck with her unceasing reference to snowdrops. Why snowdrops ? This was the month of June, the month of roses, and no one ought to be harping on snowdrops until the hour of their sweet and welcome arrival in their own due time. He concluded that there must be some special reason why she was thinking of them. Did they represent to her a sweet memory, a sad experience, a happiness, a sorrow ? He must try and find out. Before he left the house, he put several questions to Andrew Sirrell, and finally he referred to the snowdrops.

" She speaks constantly of snowdrops," he said. " I am curious to know whether they are her favourite flowers ? "

"They were my first wife's favourite flowers," Andrew Sirrell replied, in a low voice.

"Your first wife's favourite flowers," the doctor repeated. Then, after a pause, he said casually:

"Did your present wife know this?"

"Oh, yes," Andrew Sirrell answered. "Of course, she knew it. She—we—planted snowdrops on—on the grave. We went together—in fact——"

He broke off and turned away, overcome with emotion.

A light broke in on the doctor.

"Ah," he said thoughtfully, "perhaps she has been fretting. Forgive me for asking you—but no doubt you were passionately attached to your first wife?"

"Yes," Andrew answered almost inaudibly.

"Did you perhaps claim from your second wife an unreasonable homage to the memory of her whom you had lost?" Dr. Newbold asked.

"I was not conscious of doing this," Andrew Sirrell said.

"Of course not," Dr. Newbold said. "And that's where the whole trouble lies. No man would deliberately set out to hurt the feelings of his second wife, if he had any regard for her happiness. I myself never meant to do this. Yet I did it, Mr. Sirrell. And that is why I dare speak to you, because you will understand that I do not speak as a judge, but as a fellow-blunderer. My first wife's picture pervaded the house, and her memory pervaded my heart. My second wife bore the trial as long as she could, and then she quietly left me. She wrote: '*I leave you to your pictures and your memories.*' I awoke instantly to the realisation of my selfishness in hurting her, and of my bereftness in forfeiting her love. It took a great deal of pleading and persuasion to make her leave her parents' home in Cumberland and return to me. But she yielded at last, and we entered on a new life, in which memories and actualities found a due and healthy relationship."

He paused. Andrew Sirrell, who had been standing staring out of the window, sank into the armchair, and for a brief minute covered his face with his hands.

"I begin to see it all," he said, in a tense voice. "Oh, what a fool I've been—what a selfish and cruel fool."

"One of a large company," Dr. Newbold answered kindly, "fellow-blunderers, fostered by an unjust tradition that women are here to bear anything from us. I rejoice that their new day has come."

Andrew Sirrell did not heed his words. He was invaded by an army of reproachful and accusing thoughts.

"And the portrait," he cried aloud, in mental agony. "I must have made her suffer untold miseries over the portrait alone—and the robbery of it. I've been out of my senses. I've expected her to grieve over its loss as much as I grieve. I've——"

The doctor interrupted him suddenly.

"Of whom was the portrait?" he asked. "Not of your first wife?"

Andrew Sirrell gave silent assent.

"And it's one of the missing pictures?" he asked again.

Andrew Sirrell nodded.

"And I suppose she saw that your bereavement was renewed in its loss?" he asked.

"You torture me," Andrew Sirrell cried. "You torture me because the thoughts you suggest are only too true. I told her I could not live without the portrait. I told her that if I spent my last farthing in the search, it must be found. I remember I told her that the world must be ransacked."

Dr. Newbold glanced at the man's haggard face, and made no comment on this pitiful confession. But he ran his eye over his own notes, and with a secret sense of professional triumph, he mentally scratched out "*Snowdrops—ransack the world—on the grave.*" He believed that he had now probably solved the ideas for which they stood. The sick woman upstairs was suffering from a mental illness brought on, or aggravated by jealousy and outraged pride. Yes, these were, perhaps, the forces causing her illness, the climax of which could very easily have been hastened by the robbery of the portrait and her husband's uncontrolled regret over the loss of his treasure.

But there were still two phrases unexplained and disjointed from any apparent connection—"*In the golf-bag—always there.*" What was "always there"? Did she mean that something was always "in the golf-bag"? Or did "always there" refer to the snowdrops on the grave? Impossible to guess. And probably that detail might not matter. It might, of course, but it might not. But it did matter to know why her mind dwelt on the golf-bag. Was she fond of golf? Was her husband fond of golf? Had the first wife been fond of golf? Ah, perhaps there was a golf-bag in the house—"always there"—belonging to the first wife.

He turned to ask the question, but he saw that Andrew Sirrell was overcome with grief, and that the poor fellow needed the mercy of peace to help him to withstand the inner tempest which was gathering force in relentless fashion. So he forbore. He went away and left Andrew Sirrell alone, to meet himself face to face.

Andrew met himself. And as the encounter became more intimate, his suffering grew more acute. Numberless instances of his thoughtlessness and selfishness rose to his mind. The honeymoon, which they had spent in visiting all the places where he and his first bride had stayed during their honeymoon. The sacred pilgrimage to her grave, where they had planted her favourite snowdrops, and he had been unable to control his passionate grief. The flower-bed, spelling with its pattern the letters of her beloved name. The portrait dominating his library and the shrine of his heart. Her books over which he was always poring. Her letters which he was always reading. His constant demands on Gweneth's sympathy. His entire disregard of her feelings.

He shuddered. He was shocked. He was ashamed. He had accepted everything—and given nothing.

Why had she not made some sign?

Why had she not tried to stop him in his pitiful course?

But stay. She had tried. He remembered now. He recalled two or three occasions when she had appeared to fall short in sympathy and kindness, and he had re-

proached her. He heard her voice saying gravely: "*I do my best in a very difficult position, Andrew.*"

Why did not that warn him?

Once she had refused to sit in his library. He heard her saying: "*There is no room for me in the library.*" Fool that he was, he had chosen to believe that she referred to the smallness of the room, and not to the mental space occupied by the portrait. Looking back now, he realised that he had received many warnings, all of which he in his folly, selfishness, insolence, had entirely disregarded. Insolence. Yes, that was the word. He had rewarded her kindness, her tenderness, not with gratitude, but with insolence. What was a man made of that he should dare take up such an attitude to the woman whom he had asked to share his life? What was a woman made of that she should deign to accept such treatment from a man's hands?

Ah, but Gweneth had not accepted it. She had been fighting it silently; and it was her silence which had cost Gweneth her sanity. Why had she not left him, as that other man's wife had left her husband? Why had she not cried out: "*I leave you to your memories and your pictures*"? Had she stayed on, hoping by her love and patience to wean him from the past and win him for herself? Was it true that, as the doctor said, his grief over the loss of the cherished portrait had proved to be the finishing touch to her despair? He knew it to be true. He knew now that his unrestraint had been disgraceful. He remembered that for one brief moment a sense of shame had stolen over him, when Gweneth's quiet dignity had arrested the onward rush of his unmeasured words. So that he must have known even then. And yet, in spite of that knowledge, he had continued to wound her. But not wilfully, not wilfully. What had the doctor said? Fellow-blunderers, belonging to a large company. But that did not help him. That did not make his individual blunder less fatal. That would not restore Gweneth to her sanity. That would not give him back his lost chances of loving and serving her.

The words of the sad old German song echoed in his

ears: "*The mill will never grind with the water that is past.*"

He said them aloud: "The mill will never grind with the water that——"

The door opened and the maid announced the detective.

"I have good news for you, sir," the man said, with a smile of professional triumph. "I have got on their track. It's as I thought—that same gang. We shall now find the portraits, without a doubt."

Andrew Sirrell gathered himself together and listened with apparent attention to the man's report.

But the only words he heard were the words of that old German song echoing ever mournfully in his ears: "*The mill will never grind with the water that is past.*"

IV

THERE was no improvement in Gweneth's condition the next day. The night nurse reported a night of continuous brain excitement, which the opiate had not succeeded in allaying. Dr. Newbold asked to be left alone with the patient for a few minutes, and he drew his chair near the bed, and began to speak to Gweneth as if she were in her right mind, calm, conscious, and receptive of ideas.

"It has been one of those sad blunders, Mrs. Sirrell," he said gently, "which mar our lives and the lives of those we love. But your husband loves you. You must give him another chance. The snowdrops are dead. They will never bloom again."

He waited for a moment, and then he said again slowly and, if possible, with added kindness:

"It has been one of those sad blunders which mar our lives and the lives of those we love. But your husband loves you. You must give him another chance. The snowdrops are dead. They will never bloom again."

There was a pause in her pitiful moaning. But it was of the briefest duration. He bent nearer her. His voice, his manner, were as the voice and manner of one giving a benediction.

"Your husband loves you. The snowdrops are dead," he whispered again and again.

There seemed no end to his patience and persistence.

There was another pause in her moaning. It appeared to him to last longer than the previous period of restfulness. And he felt encouraged.

"Your husband loves you. The snowdrops are dead. Your husband loves you. You must give him another chance," he kept on murmuring softly but very clearly.

She lay quite still. She slept.

He rose and wiped the sweat from his brow. Had he reached her, or was it merely that the opiate had at last taken effect? He could not tell. He only knew that, armed with the secret of some part of her mental suffering, he had put forth the best of his brain strength in an attempt to reach her brain.

He went downstairs to the library, and gave the good news to her husband that she was at least quiet for the moment. That was some gain, if only temporary.

"But I believe her to be very ill, Mr. Sirrell," he said gravely. "It seems to me that to-day she has less strength than yesterday. The puzzle to me is that you should never have noticed she was slipping into a most peculiar mental condition."

Andrew bent his head.

"I am ashamed I did not notice," he said humbly.

The doctor remained silent.

"I would do anything to make reparation to her," Andrew said, with painful earnestness.

"We will leave no stone unturned to save her, so that you may be able to make reparation," Dr. Newbold said. "But she's very ill, and I'm deeply puzzled."

He questioned Andrew about her character, her temperament, her tastes, her habits. He asked permission to speak to one of the maids. The parlour-maid, Flora, helped him in an altogether unexpected way. Yes, she said, she thought Mrs. Sirrell had been very peculiar of late. She had gone about the house with a strange smile on her face, always rather preoccupied and sometimes talking to herself in a whisper. No, she had not been irrit-

able to them. On the contrary, she had been kinder than ever, and there was no one in the house who would not have served her to the uttermost. Yes, she did vary a good deal, not only from day to day, but hour to hour. She was always different when Mr. Sirrell was at home. Directly she expected him, she left off brooding. Yes, that was the word. Brooding. Yes, on the whole, she had been worse than ever lately. Where did she spend most of her time? Oh, she spent most of her time in the library. What did she do? Nothing—except——

Flora hesitated and coloured.

"Well?" said the doctor kindly.

"Once or twice I've seen her standing staring at the portrait," Flora said nervously.

"Yes," said the doctor quite calmly, as if the matter were of no importance.

"And once lately I heard her talking to it," Flora added still more nervously.

"Ah, that must have been your imagination," the doctor said, a little brusquely.

"No, sir, she was talking to it, and at first she didn't hear me come into the room," Flora insisted.

"I suppose the other maids knew this?" the doctor said casually.

Flora shook her head.

"I haven't spoken of it till now," she answered, the tears coming into her eyes. "I was upset for her. She —she has always been good to me. But the next day I didn't let her go into the library. I gave it a good turn-out—and she had to keep away."

"Ah, then, she has had someone to watch over her very kindly," Dr. Newbold said gently. And he signed to the girl that she might withdraw. But when she had reached the door, a sudden thought struck him, and, with the thought, came an impulse of need for further details of information which he believed she could probably supply. For some reason or other, which he explained to himself later, he checked the intensity of his eagerness, and confined himself to one or two points only.

"I should like to ask you a few more things," he said.

"And I will tell you why I ask. It is important that I should learn something about Mrs. Sirrell's behaviour immediately previous to her collapse. Mr. Sirrell tells me he was out in the afternoon. He, therefore, could not know. Did she seem excited and overwrought? And, as far as you know, what did she do with herself? Did she have a shock of any kind? You are attached to Mrs. Sirrell, are you not? Well, my reason for asking is, that I believe we might have more chance of saving her, if we knew exactly what caused her final breakdown. I feel sure there was something."

"She wasn't excited at all," the girl said. "She was just restless—fearfully restless. She kept wandering up and downstairs, and went first into the library and then into the spare room. She didn't even settle down to her afternoon cup of tea. She left it half finished, and hurried up to the spare room."

"What did she do there?" the doctor asked slowly.

The girl shook her head.

"I don't know, sir," she answered.

"Was it her habit to go there often?" he asked.

"No," the girl replied.

"I should like to go there," he said, after a pause.

She led him upstairs to the spare room, and disappeared at once, thankful to escape from further examination. He was alone; for Andrew Sirrell, who seemed as one stricken and paralysed, had shown no sign of wishing to follow him, and had merely nodded assentingly when he had expressed a wish to see the room.

The doctor himself could not have explained why he wished to see the room. There was obviously nothing exceptional about it. It appeared to him the usual kind of visitor's apartment, not belonging to anyone in particular, and therefore without any intimate personal characteristics to proclaim personal ownership. He saw nothing in it to arrest his attention, and he was on the point of leaving, satisfied that he had at least passed over the same ground as his patient, when he suddenly felt that he must remain where he was, in the middle of the room, on the very spot, perhaps, where his patient had stood.

And a curious thing happened. He was standing lost in thought, trying to piece together the scattered fragments of the information he had received, trying to break down mental barriers and get in touch with Gweneth's mind, trying to analyse a new idea which had been creeping stealthily into his brain, when he looked up and noticed a door probably leading into a dressing-room. He approached it with a strange reluctance. He opened it, found it was the door of a big cupboard, and was closing it again, when he caught sight of a large golf-bag in the far-end corner.

"*The golf-bag*," he said in a startled whisper. He remembered in a lightning flash that this was one of the things on which his patient was harping. He hesitated for a moment, and finally, with an effort of resolution, moved the golf-bag on to the bed. He took out the driver and the niblick first of all; then the putter, which he examined with a quite unnecessary attentiveness; then the cleek, which he kept in his hands an interminable time; then the brassie, at which he stared as though he had never before seen a brassie with its brass shoe. His manner became slower and more deliberately procrastinating with each successive club. At last he took out a roll.

"A roll," he said slowly, and as he held it in his right hand, his left hand sought and covered his eyes.

"A roll," he said again.

He opened the roll, and found that it consisted of two portraits, one of a most beautiful woman and the other of a young man.

He stood as though turned to stone.

"I see now," he whispered, "her work—her work."

Up to now, only the faintest suspicion of this probability had entered his brain, and then mainly as the result of his conversation with the parlour-maid. He realised, as he was always realising afresh, how hopelessly little even an expert could ever know of the workings of another person's mind. Theories, generalisations, deductions could all be wrecked by some unforeseen development. *Yes, this was her work.* It was plain to him, from the scattered fragments of her incoherent talk, from the know-

ledge he had gained of her suffering, her jealousy, her restlessness after the disappearance of the pictures, and her mysterious visits to the spare room where her secret was in hiding. The interesting fact that two of the portraits had been removed, confirmed him in his belief. From his vast experience he recognised in this precaution the protecting craft characteristic of the unbalanced mind. Yes, it was her work.

He turned impulsively to the portrait of the beautiful woman, opened it out, and laid it on the floor. He stood staring at it, fascinated, dominated by it.

"It is not a portrait," he thought; "it is a living person. One could never forget it. It would be always there—always haunting one. It was not fair on her to have such a marvellous picture in the house. It could not have failed to become a living reality to her. She might take it out of its frame—poor, tortured spirit—she might take it out a thousand times—but she would always see it there—always see it in its accustomed place."

And at that moment, as though in answer to his understanding pity, he heard the moaning of the sick woman.

"Always there—always there," she cried.

He listened. He knew now that he had touched the bedrock of her mental agony.

He replaced the clubs and the pictures in the golf-bag, which he put back into the cupboard, and hastened to her side. Peace had passed from her, and given way to renewed and increased turmoil.

V

DR. NEWBOLD kept his own counsel until the next morning, partly from a chivalrous loyalty to his patient, and partly because he wanted to think things out, and determine in which way the knowledge of this calamity might be used for the benefit of both husband and wife. No scheme presented itself to his puzzled mind, and when he arrived at the Sirrells' house, he had nothing to express beyond the bare statement of a painful fact.

"Mr. Sirrell," he began, "I have made a distressing

discovery. I regret to tell you that I believe it was your wife who removed the portraits."

He described to him briefly how he had found them concealed in the golf-bag.

Andrew Sirrell turned deadly pale. He did not answer, but rushed out of the room and locked himself in the spare room. When he returned in about ten minutes, his face was drawn and his manner ominously quiet.

"I can never forgive her," he said deliberately—"never."

The doctor made no sign. He was standing at the window staring at the plane trees, now in their sweetest beauty. There was silence in the room, and outside in the street there was an assenting suspension of the traffic.

"An outrage, a sacrilege, an act of incredible debasement," Andrew said.

The doctor still remained speechless.

"I can never forgive her," Andrew repeated—"never."

Dr. Newbold stood staring at the plane trees.

"And you take her part—you defend her," Andrew said angrily.

"No, I don't defend her," the doctor answered, turning round at last. "But I do say that the portrait is not a portrait. It is a living person, haunting one with an irresistible tryanny."

"Your words are equivalent to a defence," Andrew said bitterly.

"No, pardon me," Dr. Newbold returned. "They are merely an attempt at explanation. I repeat it. The portrait is not a portrait; it is a living force. Your wife ought never have been expected to bear the strain of its influence."

"Nevertheless, she has committed an outrage, a sacrilege," Andrew replied. "I can never forgive her."

"I don't believe you will be called upon to forgive her," Dr. Newbold said quietly. "In a grave case like this, one can only surmise, but I think she is quickly losing ground. The turmoil of her spirit is wearing out the strength of her body. If we knew how to stop the turmoil, we might save her reason and her life. As it is, we have

only secured her short spells of partial peace—poor, tortured spirit."

The gravity of his words and his deep-felt pity for the sufferer awakened in Andrew the sense of his own unworthiness.

"Dr. Newbold," he said, "this discovery has been a great shock to me, but I am behaving like a cur. I take back all my words. I will put all my own feelings on one side. I will do anything and everything to help her back to peace. I entreat of you to tell me what I can do."

Dr. Newbold laid his hand kindly on the man's shoulder.

"Of course, it was a shock to you," he said. "It was a shock to me, a stranger. And to you with your memories it must, indeed, seem a sacrilege. All that I can understand. But we have to bear in mind that this portrait has become burnt into her brain. She has a gallant face, Mr. Sirrell. It is not the face of a mean-spirited, paltry person. I have no doubt that for a long time she made a brave struggle to live side by side with it and banish its haunting effects from her mind. Well, we know she failed. And she has failed in a double sense. This to me, as a psychologist, is the most tragic part of the story, viewed from her side. She has committed this pitiful deed, and yet she has not succeeded in banishing the picture from her mind's eye. It is always before her—to use her own words—'always there.' And it will always be there, unless death releases her from its spell, or unless we are able to release her."

"Unless we are able to release her," Andrew repeated to himself.

"Yes," said Dr. Newbold.

"How?" asked Andrew, after a silence.

"I don't know," Dr. Newbold answered.

"Doesn't a great shock sometimes work a miracle?" Andrew asked.

"Yes," Dr. Newbold said. "But one never takes the risk until one is fairly sure that nothing else can help. You see, a shock may cure, or make matters worse, or kill. But when one judges that the right moment has come, one has to face those chances."

"And you think the right moment has not come yet?" Andrew asked.

"No," the doctor replied. "Her physical strength is failing, I should say; but, all the same, it must be allowed its full innings."

Andrew paced restlessly up and down the room, and his face bore signs of intense mental agitation. He knew that the doctor was right, and that Gweneth had nothing mean-spirited or paltry about her, and that she had probably fought her fight gallantly up to the limit of her endurance.

"I will do anything and everything to help her back to peace," he exclaimed.

"I am sure you will," the doctor said. "I rely on your pitifulness—yes, and on your sense of justice. We have the right to trust each other—fellow-blunderers, you remember, belonging to a large company."

"If only she'd left me," Andrew groaned. "If only she'd forsaken me and said as your wife said: '*I leave you to your memories and your pictures.*' That would have been far more just to herself and merciful to me."

His anger and indignation swept over him again in a great wave.

"She has not been fair to me," he cried, in great bitterness of heart.

Then he remembered that he had not been fair to her, and he passed once more through an agony of remorse. When he was able to speak, he asked almost inaudibly:

"What kind of shock might have the chance of restoring her, if everything else had failed?"

"I have not thought that out," Dr. Newbold answered. "I only know vaguely that it should bear direct on the very thing which tortures her—on the portrait."

Andrew made no comment on the doctor's words, but roused himself sufficiently to communicate with the detectives, and to bid them suspend operations for a few days; and after this effort he drew his chair near to the fire, for it was a bitterly cold and rainy afternoon, and he became immersed in thought.

Finally he slept.

And he had a curious dream. He dreamed that he restored the portrait to its frame, and carried it in the middle of the night to his wife's bedroom. When she saw it, she cried out in her distress: "*Always there—always there.*" Then he heard himself saying, in a voice which did not falter:

"No, Gweneth, not always there. Because, you see, I don't want it to be always there. And I'm going to take it out of the frame myself, so that you may understand that I do not want it to be always there. Watch me now carefully."

He was beginning to cut it out of its frame—with the utmost physical pain and mental reluctance—when he awoke.

"Thank Heaven it was only a dream," he cried—"a dream, impossible of realisation—a sacrilege."

He shuddered over the remembrance of it.

VI

DURING the next days Gweneth became worse. Her physical strength was not holding out against the tumult of her mind. Dr. Newbold looked graver, and called in two other brain doctors in consultation. They decided that her only chance was a shock to her nervous system; and when Andrew heard their verdict, he knew that the moment had come when he must fulfil the dictates of his dream, dictates against which he had been appealing with passionate though silent persistence. For his dream had been haunting him, even as the portrait of his first wife was haunting Gweneth. In vain he tried to banish it from his remembrance; in vain he said to himself that it would be impossible for him to do such a deed, even to save Gweneth's life or brain: impossible for him to put that indignity on his dead wife's memory and on his homage to her memory. To all his reasoning and combating came the invariable answer that his form of homage to the dead had wrought an injury to the living, and

that he would not be desecrating his true homage, but expiating a wrong and selfish method of expression.

That same afternoon he went to a picture-framer's and bought some cardboard and various other necessary appliances; and that same night, without taking anyone into his confidence, or giving Dr. Newbold the barest hint of what he intended to do, he carried out the first part of his dream. He stole, as a thief, into the spare room, brought the roll of pictures downstairs, locked himself in the library, lifted the empty frame down from the wall, and replaced the portrait of his dead wife as well as he could. When the portrait was once more in its frame, he passed through another tempest of doubt and anguish.

"It will be sacrilege," the false prompter said to him, "sacrilege and desecration."

"It will be a finer homage," the true prompter said to him.

"An outrage on your natural feelings," the false prompter insisted.

"An expiation of your blind selfishness," the true prompter whispered.

Suddenly, as he stood, torn with conflicting feelings, his face haggard, his body tense with the emotional and mental strain, he heard a terrible noise outside in the hall, and the ominous sound of a struggle. The handle of the door was violently tried. Several people seemed to be dashing themselves against the door. He rushed to unfasten it, and there, to his horror, stood Gweneth, with her hair streaming over her shoulders, wild and strong with a sudden and fearful violence, which the two nurses were vainly trying to stem.

"Always there, always there," she cried, and her eyes sought the portrait and found it.

"Always there. I knew it," she cried, pointing to it with increased excitement.

Andrew glanced at her, and threw all his hesitation, his selfishness, to the winds.

"Not always there, Gweneth," he said quickly and with infinite kindness, "because I don't wish it to be

always there. I don't want it to be there at all. Watch carefully what I am going to do."

His words appeared to arrest her attention, and, as one fascinated, she watched him take a knife and loosen the portrait from the frame.

She watched it fall to his feet.

She watched him lift it up and place it on one side indifferently, as if it were of no value to him.

A light came over her face. She turned to him, muttered some incoherent words, and with a deep sigh fell back unconscious into the arms of her attendants.

"He has killed her," they said to each other with unspoken words.

But they were wrong.

He had saved her.

THE BACH DOUBLE CONCERTO IN D MINOR

THE last sounds of the violin died away. For a moment there was silence in the Queen's Hall, followed by that deafening applause to which the famous artist had been accustomed for many years. He bowed repeatedly to the audience, shook hands with the conductor, and greeted the orchestra. But as he greeted it, his quick eye noticed that his old friend, Fritz Grünfeld, one of the second fiddles, was not clapping him. He stood arrested by this astounding fact. He nearly called out: "*Fritz—what are you thinking of? You surely know that I cannot get along without your approval. The shouts of the audience cannot make up for the silence of Fritz.*"

Suddenly he recollected what he had to do. And once more acknowledging the enthusiastic appreciation of his thousands of admirers, Rudolph Riemer went off the platform. Five times he was recalled. Five times he glanced toward the second fiddles, and saw that Fritz leaned back, indifferent and sullen.

What could it mean? Riemer knew that he had not disgraced himself. He knew well that he had handled the cadenza of the Bach Double Concerto in D Minor in masterly fashion, and had carried out faithfully some of the very effects over which Fritz and he had conferred and agreed in their earlier years of comradeship and friendship. What could be wrong, then? He was puzzled and troubled. He felt as if he had been unexpectedly deserted by someone on whose faithfulness he had placed absolute reliance. It is not too much to say

that he sulked in the artists' room; and the conductor, who came out during the interval and did not succeed in extracting a single genial word from him, thought:

"Riemer is in one of his black moods. Yet surely he ought to have been contented with his wonderful reception. These people are never satisfied. They always want something more."

The conductor was right in idea, though wrong in interpretation. Riemer wanted that hitherto unfailing sign of fellowship, that treasured link with the old student days, that message from distant time, when Fritz and he stood side by side on equal terms with each other in honourable and happy emulation. Fate had willed it that the laurels should come to Riemer; and Fritz had accepted this decree with a generous-hearted finality which betrayed no faintest feeling of rebellious envy.

"*Riemer has the secret 'something,'*" he had always said. "*There is no appeal against that living truth.*"

Riemer, therefore, had never realised the cost of bitter suffering with which failure pays its tribute to success.

He was to realise it at last to-night.

He left the Queen's Hall before the concert was over, and made his way, as usual, to Fritz's home in the Borough. It was a time-honoured custom that after a London Symphony concert, he should take his supper in homely German fashion with the little family which he had ever dearly loved. Sometimes he brought with him a bit of *leberwurst*, cooked afresh, as Mrs. Fritz always laughingly said, in the oven of his great-coat; and he always was able to produce from his fiddle-case a carnation or two for Mrs. Fritz, a fine cigar for young Friedrich, and *marzipan* for Trüdchen. He was armed with these bounties now; but there was no gladness in his heart as he mounted the stairs leading up to the Grünfelds' flat, nor any buoyancy of joyful anticipation always associated with his visits to the Borough.

Something struck chill at his soul. What was it? What had gone wrong with Fritz? Was there trouble in the home—illness—added money anxiety—disappointment, perhaps, about the careers of the two children?

Well, well, he would soon know. One more flight, a pressing of the bell, a stepping over the dear threshold, and then he would learn and understand all.

Trüdchen opened the door to him.

"Why, it's Onkel Rudolph!" she said joyously. "How perfectly jolly that you've come early! You can make the coffee instead of me, can't you? No one makes it better. And where's the *leberwurst*? Ah, here, Mütterli, quick—quick! Here's the *leberwurst* twice cooked as usual. And Onkel Rudolph in time to make the coffee. I'll take the Strad. But why are you looking so serious? Wasn't the concert a good one? Didn't the horrid audience pet you enough? Never mind. I'll pet and spoil you. We all will. Come along now, and get things ready for father. You'll be able to cheer him up. He has been rather down in the dumps lately."

"Yes, Rudolph," Mrs. Fritz said earnestly. "We've been longing for you to come to cheer him. No one else in the world can do it."

"He did not seem quite himself at the concert to-night," Riemer said. "Do you know, Mrs. Fritz, he—didn't—well, he didn't—clap me."

It was evident that Riemer could scarcely get the words out.

"Didn't clap you?" Fritz's wife and daughter cried together. "Impossible."

Riemer shook his head and turned aside for a moment.

"Did you play badly, Onkel Rudolph?" Trüdchen asked fearlessly.

"No, Trüdchen," the great man answered with the simplicity of a child. "I played my best."

"Well, never mind," the girl said, putting her arm through his. "You'll soon be able to find out what is the matter with him. We don't know, do we, mother?"

"No," Mrs. Fritz said sadly. "If he has any trouble, he is keeping it secret from us. It will be an unspeakable relief to me if he can open his heart to you to-night, Rudolph. Do try and get him to talk to you. We will leave you alone after a time. Promise me you'll try."

"Of course I will," Riemer reassured her. "And now for the coffee."

Then off he went to the kitchen with Trüdchen. But Mrs. Fritz stood for a moment lost in thought.

"*Didn't clap him,*" she said aloud. She repeated the words: "*Didn't clap him.*"

She was searching her memory for a remark which Fritz had made only a few days ago about the ridiculous homage paid to mere virtuosity. Yes, she had found it.

"I'm sick and tired of the solo instrumentalists," he had said. "Sick and tired of the whole tribe with their airs and graces. I would not raise my little finger to applaud any one of them."

"Except Riemer, of course," she had put in.

She remembered now that Fritz had not answered. Other things came to her mind as she sat down and took out her work. She recalled that her husband had expressed no pleasure at the prospect of Riemer's approaching visit to England.

"Riemer will be here next week," she had said.

"I believe so," he had replied. But in the old days he would have said: "Hurrah for Onkel Rudolph and all of us. And blessings on his bow!"

She knew only too well that her husband's life as an artist had been full of grievous disappointments and real chagrins; but he had borne them bravely and pressed on his way uncomplainingly with a true courage which had something noble in it. The years had come and gone and brought him no honours: nothing, in fact, except a bare recognition of dependable usefulness: no thrill of the artist's career: no realisation of young and buoyant ambition.

Very often she had marvelled at him. Constantly she had wondered whether his weakness or his sweetness of character had protected his heart from envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness. She had never dared to probe those secret recesses. But to make up to him for the unattained joy of fulfilment, she wrapped her weakling round with a mantle of sheltering love through which she hoped the wounds of frustrated expression could never

penetrate. She had given to him a home atmosphere which many envied and deemed a rich fortune falling to the share of only the few. Did not Onkel Rudolph always say that she allowed him to come there "*to gather crumbs from the rich man's table*"? This tender tribute of Onkel Rudolph's had always been her secret consolation and encouragement through many years of struggle and difficulty. She would hear the words to-night. She heard them now ringing in her ears: "Well, good-bye, good-bye, all of you. And I thank you, Mrs. Fritz, for allowing me to come and gather crumbs from the rich man's table."

She was still held by these thoughts when Fritz came into the living-room.

"Well, dear," she said, "and did the music go all right?"

"Yes," he answered, putting down his fiddle.

"Riemer came early," she said. "He is making the coffee with Trüdchen."

"Oh, is he?" Fritz said in a vague way, as if the matter did not concern him.

It was on her lips to ask him whether Riemer had played well, but a wise instinct restrained her. She sat silent while Fritz took his fiddle out of its case, according to his wont, and warmed it a little before the fire.

"A damp night for the Bergonzi," he said. "I don't know why I took it."

"You always use it when Riemer plays, don't you?" she said unthinkingly. "His own dear gift to you."

"Well, you need not remind me of that," Fritz returned roughly.

"Fritz," his wife said, putting her hands on his shoulders as he knelt before the fire, "what has happened to you? What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, nothing," he said more gently. "I'm tired—that's all."

At that moment there was a sound of merry laughter, and in came Trüdchen, beating time with the *leberwurst* and followed by Riemer carrying the coffee.

"You observe I'm conducting the great and famous violinist," she cried dramatically. "Be careful, Onkel.

You'll spill the coffee. *Non troppo agitato. Lento*—in fact, *lentissimo.*"

"Ah, Riemer," Fritz said with the ghost of a smile on his face, "and so there you are."

"Yes, here I am once more," Riemer said genially. "Frightfully glad to escape from the concert to my palace of delight."

"Not much palace of delight here," Fritz remarked gruffly, but not unkindly.

"I beg your very much pardon, father," Trüdchen said, with mock injuredness. "There never has been such a palace of delight as ours—not even in 'The Arabian Nights.'"

And still grasping the sausage, she danced a saraband round the table and finally sat down near her father amid laughter and applause.

But the mirth did not last. There was an impending trouble in the air which weighed heavily on the little company. And soon Mrs. Fritz went out of the room. Trüdchen followed her.

The two men were left alone. They smoked their long German pipes in a tense silence which was at length broken by Riemer.

"Fritz," Riemer said without any preliminaries. "All is not well with you. Tell me your troubles that I may help you."

"Help, always help," Fritz said with sudden fierceness. "I hate the very sound of the word. I'm sick of being helped."

Riemer glanced at his old comrade in astonishment. He could scarcely believe that he had heard rightly. But he made no comment; and his mind wandered back to his old and merry student days when he and Fritz used to fall out, arrange for an immediate duel, and then settle down to the Bach Double Concerto in D Minor from which there was no disturbing them. So vivid was one of the scenes which rose before him that he could not restrain himself from speaking of it.

"Fritz," he said, "do you remember that wonderful occasion when we ended by attacking our seconds who had

come to fetch us to our own duel ? We were playing the Bach in D Minor, weren't we ? And very well it was going when those confounded fellows interrupted us."

No answer came from Fritz. The rigid expression on his face did not relax.

There was a long pause, and at last Riemer spoke again :

" Fritz," he said, " did I play badly to-night—did you think I bungled over the cadenza ? "

" No," Fritz answered slowly. " You played—splendidly."

" But you didn't clap me," Riemer said reproachfully.

" No," Fritz said in a low voice. " Why should I ? "

" *Why should you ?* " Riemer repeated. " But you have always done so."

" Yes, precisely," Fritz replied. " And more fool I. I've spent all my life clapping other people for what I could have done just as well myself if I'd had the chance. And now I've finished with it."

" Good God ! " Riemer said almost in a whisper. " Is this how you have been feeling ? And I've never thought of it."

" No, of course you haven't," Fritz said bitterly. " You people who go about with halos round your heads—what do you know or care about the disappointments and sufferings of the failures of the world ? It may not strike you—but you can take it from me, that we have some feelings left. Some faint spark survives out of the ashes of our old ambitions."

The flood-gates were open now, and he went on with increasing excitement :

" Yes—to be helped—that's what falls to our lot. And we have to pretend to be grateful, while all the time we're hating those who are giving us loose odds and ends of money, influence, sympathy, and pity. Hate is the word. And pray, what would all you laurel-crowned successes do for us derelicts if we interfered with your regal state or trespassed on your private territory of fame ? Why, it's only because you know yourselves to be safe hat you risk holding out the hand of help. Do you uppose there is any reason why we should be grateful for hat ? No, I say—a hundred times, no. There's not one

of you that would stoop down and haul us up into our proper positions, side by side with the very best of you aristocrats of the platform. That alone could and should call forth real gratitude. Everything else is a sham, a pose of kindness to flatter and satisfy yourselves, a base attempt at propitiation which deceives no one—let me tell you."

He paused a moment in the midst of his scorn and bitterness. Riemer made no sign. He was stunned almost to the point of unconsciousness. But he was beginning vaguely to understand.

"Recognition—that's what we want," Fritz cried, dashing up from his chair. "No more of this eternal playing second fiddles to someone else's lead. No more pretence that we like it, and are content. Content, indeed. No—furious, impatient, outraged, hostile—and honest about it at last. The years passing and nothing happening to us. The thrill of life for others and never for us. Spectators always of others' triumphs, and no faint signs of any feeblest triumph for us. Nothing for us, except the dull, deadening routine of usefulness. Clap any one of you again? Never. I'd rather that my hands withered away. And now you've heard the truth, Riemer. Do you like it?"

He threw himself back in the armchair, exhausted by the force of his emotions. Riemer still gave no outer sign of being either interested or impressed. But his brain had become almost painfully active, and he was seeing with his mind's eye things hidden to him before: reviewing life from Fritz's point of view for the first time: trying to imagine to himself how he himself would have felt, if no laurels had fallen to his share, and if he had been in Fritz's position and Fritz in his place of honour and consideration. Would the years have brought to him also this terrible accumulation of anger and bitterness of spirit? Would he also have only been able to give hatred and suspicion in exchange for help and kindness? Would he also have believed that a hand was only held out to him *because there was no risk involved in the act?* Was there perhaps not some truth in the scathing assertion

that the derelicts of fame and fortune might only dare to claim concessions and not rights from the favoured ones who reigned supreme? Who could say for certain? He could not say for certain that he had not been influenced by this feeling of safety.

The more he thought, the more he realised that if Fritz's circumstances had been his, he might not have come through the ordeal any better than his old comrade. He might have grown to hate rather than have continued to love his old friend of former days. It flashed through his mind for the first time that he had for years claimed too much from Fritz: that he had, in very truth, taken his friendship, his homage, his loyalty as a matter of course, and had never recognised the greatness of spirit in Fritz which had made their relations with each other possible and joyful. It was nothing to the point that the greatness had suffered a human collapse. If he himself had known it from the beginning and paid his spiritual tribute to it, it might not have perished.

But it had perished. Riemer, with a curious cold chill at his heart, was face to face with the desolate fact that he had lost for ever his palace of delight, lost his friend whom he had never really possessed. Death itself could not have cut him off more completely from his ownership. He was a lonely man, left lonely by tragedies and disasters in family life. The thought of Fritz's home had always been a consolation to him. And now? Well, in a few minutes, when he had gathered himself together, he would pick up his fiddle, pass over the threshold into the darkness of the night, and never return..

But before he went, he must let Fritz know that he saw with clear vision Fritz's picture of life.

He bent forward a little and stared into the fire. He did not take his eyes off the fire.

"Fritz," he said gently, "I understand. I wish for both our sakes I could have understood years ago."

Fritz made no answer, and Riemer, with painful effort, was on the point of rising from his chair, when the tension in the room was broken by a racketing noise outside in the hall, the door was thrown open with boisterous violence,

and in dashed Friedrich, followed by three young fellows all in good humour and lively form.

"Ah, Onkel Rudolph, there you are!" cried Friedrich. "I told these fellows that you'd be here after the concert. We had a wager on it. And I've won. And there is another wager. I told them, if I asked you, that you and father would play us the Bach Double Concerto in D Minor. They said, 'Go on, you're gassing!' 'Gassing!' I said with scorn. 'Why, father and Riemer are life-long friends. We don't think of Riemer as a platform person.' Of course you'll play it, Onkel Rudolph and father, won't you, and make these chaps sit up, to say nothing of the second wager won? It's quite early. Only half-past one. You will—won't you?"

There was a moment's pause. Then the two men stirred with almost imperceptible movement. Fritz, with no expression on his face, glanced at Riemer. Riemer, as though in a dream seeing some far-off phantom, glanced at Fritz.

They nodded a silent assent.

They took their fiddles out of their cases: Fritz his Bergonzi, Riemer his Strad. They screwed up their bows and resined them. They bent toward each other and tuned their instruments. Their little, eager, excited audience had been increased by Mrs. Fritz and Trüdchen, who shared the secret belief that all would be well with father if he and Onkel Rudolph were going to play together.

Fritz raised his bow arm, tapped his left foot once, and led off gallantly with the opening theme of the concerto.

Those who know the famous concerto will recall that it is written for two violins on absolutely equal terms with each other, and that the instruments follow, answer, supplement each other, sometimes joining forces in direct

unison, sometimes making independent excursions, but always renewing eventually the bond of good-fellowship. Even thus, in the spirited Vivace, in the beautiful and tender Largo full of lingering sadness and regret, and in the finale with its headlong dash and reckless abandonment.

Did Riemer and Fritz believe that this was their last song together—the dying swan song of their friendship? Was it because of this that they played as they had never played before, and made the voices of their fiddles throb with radiant joyousness, deep feeling, acute emotion?

The end came. The audience clapped and shouted and cried "Bravo—hurrah—hurrah!"

But the two friends stood still and silent as statues, with no trace of a smile on their faces. Their passiveness suddenly chilled the very atmosphere. No one spoke. No one moved.

It was Riemer himself who first found words.

"So you've won your second wager, Friedrich, my boy," he said, "and made these fellows sit up, haven't you?"

He glanced round the room with a wistful sadness. He was taking in all the familiar details in one swift, last comprehensive survey.

"Well, now, I'll go home," he said. "It's late, and I have to start off for Edinburgh early. Good night, Fritz—good night all of you. And Mrs. Fritz, thank you, as ever, for letting me come to gather crumbs from the rich man's table. That's right, Trüdchen, better turn the key in the fiddle-case. You were always rather sensible. No, young Friedrich, don't go and put on your coat for me. I'll go home alone to-night, I think."

"No, you won't," Fritz said brusquely and almost fiercely. "I shall go with you."

"You?" Riemer said; and as he spoke, the light of hope came into his eyes.

"Yes," Fritz answered, half defiantly, half appealingly. "And why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" Riemer answered. "Come then, Fritz."

They passed out together, arm in arm.

THE JEWEL GHOST

TAMAR SCOTT, of Dean Street, Soho, dealer in precious stones and antique jewellery, known to her friends and clients generally as T. Scott, received a letter one day asking her to go down to a country house in Dorsetshire, not far from Puddletown, and give her expert opinion on a collection of jewels. She was famous amongst her friends and clients for her rudeness; and her answer was characteristic. She wrote:

"Madam,—Fee offered not worth my consideration. Cannot come. Have never enjoyed doing anything for nothing.—T. Scott."

She dismissed the matter from her mind, and was amused and astonished when, after a week or so, she received another letter from the same address, written in a faint and trembling handwriting, evidently that of an aged woman. This was the letter:

"Madam,—Your rude letter interested me vastly. Felt buoyed up to think there was someone on this planet ruder than myself. Name your fee, which I will gladly pay for your expert opinion and personal acquaintance.—Sarah Bracebridge."

A faint smile stole over Tamar's face as she read these words, and she fingered the piece of paper in a curiously sensitive way which seemed to suggest that she was seeking information about her correspondent from the feel of the written pages.

"I shall go," she said aloud at last. "Perhaps it is a case of Greek meeting Greek."

She had heard of this collection of jewels from her old friend Christopher Bramfield, a diamond merchant,

who never failed to put her in the way of a good piece of business. She understood that she was being called in only to give an opinion on the stones, and that there was no question of securing any for herself. But she hoped, all the same, that she might get the chance of making an offer for one or two of them. For Mrs. Bracebridge's collection was known amongst dealers to contain many beautiful specimens.

As soon as she could, she started off for Dorsetshire, and was driven to Stranham Hall, an old Tudor manor house about five miles from Puddletown. It stood in its own park, a dreary, neglected-looking domain. Tamar Scott, who did not take much notice of the sweet things of Nature, thought that she had never seen such a depressing spot.

She rang at the bell, and after a considerable delay, an old man servant, a frail and almost tottering retainer, opened the door. On learning her name, he nodded, as if to indicate that she was expected, and in silence showed her into a dim room with a wonderful stone fireplace, and with diamond window panes studded here and there with armorial bearings. She glanced around, and was at once arrested by the many objects of interest. Choice bits of china which she would frankly have loved to "annex" then and there, reposed enticingly on various tables and shelves. That exquisite little piece of Spode, for instance, ought certainly to be hers, and no one else's; and it was not any sense of moral obligation which prevented her from stealing it. She was merely deterred from dishonesty, even as so many of us are, by considerations of expediency. She sinned in the abstract, though not in the concrete.

She was still gazing at it when the door opened, and a very old lady, bending heavily on a black cane, advanced slowly towards her. She chuckled when she saw Tamar.

"Ah," she said, "I suppose you're thinking that you want to walk off with that piece of Spode of mine?"

"Yes," Tamar answered. "That's just what I am thinking. But how do you know?"

"For the simple reason that I have always wanted

to steal everything I liked," the old lady said. "On one occasion I did, too. Many years ago. But I've never lost the memory of the enjoyment of my theft."

Tamar looked at her for a moment, and then a curious smile spread over her face.

"One doesn't lose it, does one?" she said with a soft little laugh.

Mrs. Bracebridge laughed softly also. She sat down on a high chair, and pointed to an easy one for Tamar to occupy.

"Well," she said, "and so you don't enjoy doing something for nothing. A proper sentiment. But why pray did you write your book on Precious Stones? You couldn't have got much out of that. A book produced regardless of cost. And comparatively cheap to buy. Where did your returns come in there, I wonder?"

"That's my affair," Tamar answered roughly.

"Yes, distinctly," replied the old lady. "I'm glad it is. I shouldn't have liked to pay for that Burma Ruby plate. Beautiful, though. And a wonderful book. But inaccurate here and there."

"I deny that," Tamar said with fierceness. "I verified every statement. No one shall dare to accuse me of inaccuracy."

"I dare," the old lady said with obvious enjoyment of the situation. "Ring the bell. Jenkins shall go and fetch the book."

To her own immense surprise Tamar obeyed. When the old man appeared on the scene, his mistress said:

"On the table by my bedside, Jenkins, you will find two books, the two books I always keep there. One is a Bible. I don't want that. I want the one called 'Precious Stones.'"

The angry look on Tamar's face gave way to a gentler expression. Her pride, like that of many an author, was naturally gratified at knowing that the book into which she had put so much of her knowledge and enthusiasm, was the daily intimate companion of someone who cared and understood. And when Jenkins reappeared bearing the volume on a silver salver, she herself took it and

handed it to Mrs. Bracebridge with a respectable amount of courtesy, considering that she was Tamar.

Mrs. Bracebridge, who wore no glasses, and whose eyes were bright and sparkling with mischief, opened the book and read aloud:

"Page 88. 'Corundum has perhaps a wider range of colour than almost any other mineral, but it will be considered here chiefly with regard to the red varieties approximating to the colour of the ruby.'"

"Corundum ought to be spinel," Tamar said angrily.

"Page 161," went on Mrs. Bracebridge imperturbably. "'Tourmaline is one of the most dichronic stones.' It should be dichroic, of course. Page 180. 'The sapphire was engraved sometimes in the later Roman days, but more frequently in the quattrocento time.' It should be quinquecento time. Page 195. 'So large and finely coloured an emerald as No. 1284 in the Townshend collection is an exceptional stone; it is nearly one-quarter of an inch across.' That's wrong. It is twice that size across. I've measured it myself. Page 203——"

"You seem to have prepared a full list," Tamar interrupted sullenly.

Mrs. Bracebridge put down the book and looked at Tamar.

"My list has been waiting for you a long time," she said. "I have always intended sending for you to see my collection. Ever since I read this wonderful book. It is wonderful. It is written by one whose passion for precious stones is as great as my own. Greater perhaps. I'm not a fool. I can see that. But you have had an advantage over me. Your circumstances have admitted you into the inner shrine. Mine have kept me outside it."

"But you have a collection coveted by many," Tamar said. "One can't have everything. You are probably enormously proud of it. Anyone would be."

"I am proud of it," the old lady replied. "It is part of my family honour. But there are times when I would infinitely prefer to have acquired it for myself, stone by stone, by a long-drawn-out continuity of effort, rather

than to have inherited it as my right. You'd understand that."

"Yes, I can understand that," Tamar answered dreamily. "To see a stone, to be spellbound by its beauty, to be thwarted about it, to dream about it, to have no rest about it, to be haunted by it day and night——"

"Ah, to be haunted by it," Mrs. Bracebridge broke in with a cry, almost of despair. "That I know only too well. And to be thwarted about it."

She became lost in thought. She leaned forward on her stick and kept on nodding her head.

Tamar watched her for some time in silence. She seemed suddenly to have put on centuries of age and infirmity. Gone was the sparkle from her eye and the captious animation from her face. Something tugged at Tamar's heart. She did not, as a rule, like old people; but here was distinctly a comrade, of inferior rank perhaps, so far as jewel lore and learning went, but a comrade for all that, and certainly not inferior in rudeness: if anything, superior, and therefore, rather to be respected. A comrade in some kind of distress, too, definite, though hidden, from which she must be rescued before she became annihilated by a further instalment of extreme old age.

But how to rescue her? That was the difficulty. No, there was no difficulty after all, since they spoke the same language. Tamar rose.

"My time is valuable," she said gruffly. "I did not come here to sit and do nothing. If I am to see that collection I'd better see it and have done with it. If not, I'd better go. My fee in any case will be ten guineas."

A quiver passed over Mrs. Bracebridge's countenance. And she returned from that far-off distance to which her secret thoughts had sped her.

"Far too much, far too much," she said sharply. "But I suppose I have no choice since I told you to come."

"No," Tamar said, quietly triumphant at the success of her methods.

"Well, ring the bell," the old lady commanded.

Tamar made no movement. She might not have

heard. She had fixed her eyes on a picture, and she continued to stare at it.

"Ring the bell," the old lady repeated peremptorily, tapping on the ground with her cane.

Tamar did not stir an inch.

"Well, I never saw such ungraciousness," Mrs. Bracebridge said, an amused smile beginning to steal over her face. "However, I suppose it matches my own. I will give that much in."

Tamar's stubbornness relaxed at the old lady's admission, and she turned to her with a touch of conciliation and indulgence in her manner, which was both quaint and attractive.

"We do appear to share the same code of manners," she said, "as well as the same love for jewels."

"I was going to show you the jewels," Mrs. Bracebridge went on. "They are upstairs. And I wanted Jenkins' arm to lean on. That is what I wanted. Not much of an arm, I admit, but better than nothing."

Tamar hesitated, and then, half gruffly, half shyly, said:

"Wouldn't my arm do as well?"

The old lady glanced at her, laughed softly as if something had tickled her fancy, and said:

"Perhaps it would. Come, we will go then."

So they passed out of the room together, and progressed slowly and silently up the oaken staircase to the enclosed gallery which ran round the inner part of the three sides of the old manor house. They paused before a window which contained two very old shields of arms, and Mrs. Bracebridge pointed out the inscriptions with her stick. A green segment of the stained glass, of rich lustre and deep emerald colour, attracted Tamar's attention, and she exclaimed:

"What a colour! Like the richest and rarest emerald!"

At the sound of that word the old lady started as if she had received some kind of shock, shuddered slightly, turned away from the window, and leaning a little more heavily on Tamar's arm, passed down the gallery until she reached her boudoir. Jenkins was there to help

her into her chair, and Tamar, mystified, but intensely interested, stood surveying her surroundings, wondering with half her brain why the name of any jewel could mean anything save music to a true lover of jewels, and with the other half conjuring up for herself a vision of the precious stones hidden in the iron safe opposite the great oaken chest.

II

WHEN Jenkins had gone and had closed the door after him, old Mrs. Bracebridge rose from her chair, and with tottering steps approached the iron safe. She fumbled in her bodice and produced a key, with which she tried to open it. As she seemed incapable of this effort, and looked a little distressed, Tamar went forward to lend her aid, but was rather fiercely repulsed.

"Leave me to manage my own concerns," the old lady said, glaring at her. "This is not the first time I've opened a safe."

At last she turned the key. The door swung open. And one by one, slowly and with obvious difficulty, Mrs. Bracebridge took out the caskets and placed them on the great round table, where four large silver candlesticks were striving in vain to light up the dim old panelled room. But a log fire at the other end cast some cheer around; and as Tamar bent down and warmed her hands, which were icy cold from suppressed excitement and curiosity, she thought she had never before been so thankful for the heat and glow of a hearth. From her retreat she watched, without stirring a hair's-breadth, that bent old figure arranging her collection of precious stones, and bearing on her face the signs of pride and triumph inseparable from passionate ownership.

The old lady seated herself at the table and beckoned to Tamar.

"You can come now," she said. "They are all here."

And she added defiantly:

"You can criticise and find fault as much as you please. It won't have the least effect on me."

"I shall say what I think," Tamar said sullenly. "That's what I've come for, isn't it?"

She took no notice of Tamar's words, but began to display her treasures, which Tamar proceeded to examine with a calmness of manner effectually concealing the eager interest and fierce enthusiasm which always took possession of her at the moment when she saw any precious stones. And her practised eye recognised at first sight that some of these jewels were exceedingly beautiful and valuable. There were sapphires, rubies, spinels, opals, diamonds, tourmalines, pearls, lumachellas, topazes, turquoises, and many others, some mounted in rings, others unmounted, some in pendants and brooches and necklaces and bracelets.

They held her spellbound with delight. It always took her some little time to recover from the shock of secret rapture which she invariably felt on seeing a number of precious stones together in a company. The degrees of their lustre, their colour, their value, and the manner of their cutting affected her not at all in the beginning. She feasted luxuriously on their general splendour; and the glamour of them permeated her whole being. She always looked strangely beautiful on these occasions, with a dreamy, languorous Eastern passiveness. Mrs. Bracebridge, who, whilst pretending indifference to her opinion, was observing her like a lynx, noticed this peculiar access of beauty, and was arrested by it. She waited contentedly, even proudly, for some time, realising that it was the jewels which had worked this miracle on Tamar. But finally she lost patience and said peevishly:

"Well, have you nothing to say, or do you expect me to pay you for your silence?"

Tamar returned from her fairyland to real life.

"That is a very poor ruby," she said, singling out one, "and I don't think anything at all of this pearl. That sapphire is not bad. But this one has white, glassy stripes in it. Very poor indeed."

"It isn't," Mrs. Bracebridge said angrily. "It is one of my best sapphires."

Tamar looked at her as though she were non-existent, and went on:

"Now this is something like a ruby, without a single milky speck. Not too light in colour, not too deep. A real gem, that. I shouldn't mind having it myself."

"I don't suppose you would," chuckled the old lady, and her face shone with pleasure at Tamar's praise.

"But this diamond," continued Tamar, "is a disgrace to any collection. It hasn't any brilliancy at all. And it has faint hues of brown in it."

"I deny that utterly," Mrs. Bracebridge exclaimed indignantly. "Utterly."

"Oh, you can deny it as much as you like," Tamar said. "That doesn't hurt anyone. But it doesn't take away the brown hues. I wouldn't give ten shillings for that stone. Not even nine."

"You wouldn't get it for nine," the old lady said.

"No, I can quite believe that," Tamar remarked. "Amateurs nearly always prize the wrong things."

Mrs. Bracebridge winced at the taunt.

"There's a history attached to it," she said almost pleadingly; and something in the tone of her voice made Tamar conscious that she had been too rough.

"Ah, well, that's different," she conceded with a gracious condescension. "No one sees brown hues then. Perhaps I shouldn't, either. But this diamond, for instance, is superb—its fire is astonishing—and that opal you've got there is one of the finest I've seen. Opals of all kinds delight me. I would like to have thousands of them, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, thousands," repeated the old lady eagerly; and the heads of these two jewel-lovers got closer together as they bent over this really beautiful specimen of harlequin opal.

So they made friends one moment, quarrelled the next, insulted each other, softened to each other; and thus the hours sped on unheeded by them, and everything passed from their minds except that fierce and yet dreamy ecstasy known only to those to whom precious stones are a living passion.

But suddenly Tamar leaned back in her chair.

"A most curious thing," she said half to herself. "There

are no emeralds. Not a single emerald. I had a vague feeling of uneasiness the whole time that something was missing."

"No, there are no emeralds," Mrs. Bracebridge repeated in a low voice; and as she spoke her face became troubled, and the light faded from her eyes.

"No collection is perfect or even representative without emeralds," Tamar said sternly. "I never remember seeing a collection without one or two specimens."

Mrs. Bracebridge remained silent. Indeed, she could not speak. The vitality which she had been spending during these last hours had now failed her again. She sat inert, detached, claimed once more by inexorable old age. Tamar, whose mind was entirely taken up with the curious discovery that there were no emeralds, was not paying any attention to her, and was therefore unconscious of this subtle reaction, signs of which had arrested her pity and attention at the beginning of her visit. She continued relentlessly to abuse and depreciate a collection which contained no emeralds, and then, having given full vent to her disapproval, yielded to a gentler mood, and began to pour forth an impassioned ecstasy on these beautiful stones, their mystical properties and influences, their peculiar sensitiveness, their secret power of attraction.

Suddenly she stopped, uttered a low cry, half of alarm, half of wonder, and sprang up and stretched out both hands as if to clutch something directly in front of her.

"Emeralds!" she exclaimed. "Emeralds in the air! Flawless emeralds of deepest colour. A necklace of them there. And rings there. And a cross there."

At the sound of her words, old Mrs. Bracebridge miraculously came to life again, and in a state of intense excitement, half rose from her chair.

"Yes, yes, there they are!" she cried. "So you see them too, so you see them, too? But you won't be able to get at them. Don't think it for a moment. No one can get at them. But they're here—in the house—no mistake about that—they're——"

She broke off. Her eyes closed. But she continued to point frantically at something in the air, and then

tottered forward, and would have fallen down, but that Tamar sprang to her in time and received her in her arms as she lost consciousness. Jenkins, evidently on guard outside, hearing a disturbance, came almost tumbling into the room in his anxious haste, and pushed Tamar unceremoniously aside, and took entire charge of his aged mistress.

"Has she seen the emeralds?" he asked, shuddering.

Tamar nodded.

He shook his head gravely, as with trembling hands he poured some liquid into a medicine glass, and with difficulty put it to the old lady's lips. Tamar, touched by the sight of the old ministering to the old, wished to help him.

"No, no," he murmured. "I have always done it. I shall do it to the end."

It was some time before Mrs. Bracebridge regained consciousness; but at last she opened her eyes, looked at Jenkins fixedly, and afterwards at Tamar, on whom her gaze remained riveted for a long spell. Her mind became gradually clear, and she remembered circumstances and events.

"You couldn't get at the emeralds in the air," she said in a whisper. "They were safe enough. No one could get them. But what about the jewels on the table? Count them, Jenkins, count them."

Jenkins counted them.

III

It was too late for Tamar to make for the inn about two miles off, and Mrs. Bracebridge gave directions that she should occupy the room known as the priest's bed-chamber, at the farther end of the old Manor House. A fire was lit, and everything made comfortable by Jenkins himself and another retainer of advanced years, a woman, who cast suspicious glances at Tamar, and seemed bitterly to resent the intrusion of a stranger.

"It is the mistress's wish, Keturah," Jenkins chided gravely. "Do your duty and prepare the room without

grumbling, and in a manner suitable to the family honour."

So Tamar was housed in comfort and almost in state, and was thankful to find herself alone with a cosy fire blazing on the hearth, and quiet leisure in which to think over the events of the day. She was in a condition of suppressed excitement, a little overwrought by the old lady's unexpected collapse, and greatly stirred by the remembrance of the wonderful collection she had seen, and haunted by the vision of those emeralds in the air, which had glistened before her for one brief moment and vanished even before Mrs. Bracebridge had fainted away.

The more she thought of them, and of their relative position to each other, the clearer it became to her that they were being worn by some Presence not made manifest, but undoubtedly hovering around in that house. She longed to see them again. They were of a very fine dark colour, velvety and without flaws, and she said to herself repeatedly that they were the most beautiful emeralds she had ever feasted her eyes on. She leaned back in the arm-chair by the fireside and meditated on them. She wondered what their history could be, and what strange chance, what mysterious break in the link of connecting circumstance had kept them separate from that family collection to which they belonged. She had no doubt about that. Rovers, free lances though they were, they belonged to that wonderful company of treasures, which were in every respect worthy of them. Tamar, trying to solve the secret, was conscious that never in her life had she so much wished to be in direct touch with that Unseen World, believed by many to be near us, within reach, within sight, within hearing, could we but know the secret of adjustment.

She closed her eyes, and was caught in a network of surmise and memory.

The fire lost its brightness, and then burnt low. The priest's room became chilly, and still more chilly; but beyond shuddering once, Tamar took no heed. Then the curtains by the window moved ever so slightly, almost imperceptibly, and inaudibly. Tamar must have heard some faint sound, for she came out of her reverie,

and turned her head slowly in that direction. She did not open her eyes; but there was a look of tremulous expectancy on her face, and she bent forward a little, as if listening. After a few seconds, as we reckon time, the alertness of her attitude relaxed. Soon, however, her attention was again arrested in some mysterious way, for again she leaned forward listening and waiting, and with eyes closed as before.

But at last she opened them, and stared straight in front of her, not changing their range of vision by so much as a hair's-breadth.

And slowly, slowly as she watched, one small speck of green, faint at first and then deeper in hue, showed itself in the air, and then a second manifested itself, and then a third. There was a pause, during which Tamar's heart stood still. But soon these specks of green light began to grow in size and strength, and she saw them gradually form into emeralds—the very emeralds of which she had had a glimpse before: the ring, the cross, the necklace; the same velvety emeralds of darkest colour and without flaws. More wonderful than ever did they seem to her, but this time she did not clutch at them. She only watched in an ecstasy of delight, thrilled to her very soul by their matchless beauty, and entirely free from any lust of possession. Her face shone with a pure rapture such as one sees sometimes on the faces of those who are spell-bound by the magic of the rising or the setting sun. So enthralled was she by this vision of loveliness, that at first she did not perceive that a dim Presence was beginning to reveal itself to her. But when she realised, a low cry broke from her lips, and she half-rose, supported herself with her left hand against the arm of the chair, and finally stood erect and calmly expectant. The Presence grew distincter and yet distincter; and Tamar saw before her a beautiful woman, about thirty years of age, in the dress of the latter part of the eighteenth century. The emerald ring was on her right hand, and the emerald necklace encircled her neck. The emerald cross lay on her breast. She smiled gently, raised her left hand with dainty grace, and pointed to the jewels in succession. And

at the same time these words were borne to Tamar's brain:

"These emeralds shall be yours, because you love jewels, worship them with an impersonal worship, and are capable of looking at them with the larger vision. No one in this house has cared enough, not even the old woman who reigns here now. Her love for jewels has never been free from the lust of possession, the pride of ownership. But because of your larger vision, I can entrust them to you and reveal myself to you. For the larger vision ranges beyond the barriers. The jewels shall be yours. Never shall the old woman have them. The message shall go forth to your world that the jewels shall be yours."

"*The jewels shall be mine—the message shall go forth,*" Tamar repeated in a voice that was charged with wonder and emotion.

As she spoke the Presence faded into vagueness, shimmered for one fleeting moment, and was lost to sight. But the emeralds lingered awhile and surpassed themselves in lustre and depth of colour. Then they slowly shrank to mere green specks, and in their turn vanished.

All was darkness again: gone the radiance of the eighteenth-century lady; gone the glory of the jewels. But as from a far distance, these words travelled to Tamar: "*Because of your larger vision.*"

She stood for a moment motionless, spellbound, awed, and then, with a deep sigh of exhaustion, sank back into her chair, and passed into a dreamless sleep.

IV

TAMAR slept the whole night in the arm-chair, and did not wake until about nine in the morning, when she opened her eyes and saw her old hostess seated on a high chair on the other side of the hearth, and bending forward, as ever, upon her black cane.

"Well," said Mrs. Bracebridge, "and so you have not been to bed?"

"Apparently not," Tamar said drowsily.

Mrs. Bracebridge chuckled.

"I suppose you thought you might have a chance of trying the iron safe?" she said. "But you would have been frustrated. Jenkins was on the alert. And so was I. I have not slept five minutes."

Her meaning did not at first reach Tamar's brain; but at last she understood the purport of the remark. The amusement it caused her, woke her up entirely. She, too, laughed.

"Oh, I see," she said. "You guarded the collection lest I should visit it. Well, I appreciate your caution. I should have done the same."

The old woman removed her right hand from the head of the cane and stretched it out to Tamar, who took it with a smile.

"How well we understand each other," old Mrs. Bracebridge said.

Tamar nodded.

"Yes," she said, "we are certainly comrades."

She paused a moment, and then added a little hesitatingly:

"I saw all the jewels I wanted to see, here, in this room, during the night."

"You saw the emeralds again?" the old lady asked with painful eagerness.

Tamar gave silent assent.

"Ah," moaned old Mrs. Bracebridge, "I have hungered for years and years to possess them, and to see them in their right place, in that family collection to which they belong. And for years and years they have mocked me and eluded me."

"Have you never cared for them for themselves, for the wonder of them, the beauty of them, the glory of them, the softness of them?" Tamar asked dreamily.

"Why do you ask that?" Mrs. Bracebridge said sullenly.

Tamar made no answer. She appeared to be wrestling with herself.

"Why do you ask that?" Mrs. Bracebridge repeated imperiously.

And still Tamar was silent. She was engaged in a conflict, secret, intense, desperate.

"Why do you ask that?" the old woman again said, tapping the floor impatiently with her cane.

"Because, if—if you were able to care for them for themselves only—apart from all other considerations—family honour, family pride, and the like, I believe—yes, I believe they might yet be yours," Tamar answered, turning away from her.

"And pray, how do you know that?" Mrs. Bracebridge said scornfully.

"*I know*," Tamar replied quietly. "That is all I choose to tell you."

That was all Tamar would tell to the end of her visit. The old lady's anger, sullenness, cajolery and praise took no effect on her stubbornness, and elicited from her no details of the manifestation which was as real to Tamar in the morning as it had been in the night.

Mrs. Bracebridge began with praise. She knew well enough that Tamar's book on "Precious Stones" was the apple of her eye.

"Your book, in spite of certain inaccuracies, is a masterpiece," she said. "A veritable treasure house."

"It does not need you to tell me that," Tamar said grimly, though the words of praise were secret milk and honey to her.

"Perhaps you would like me to give you that piece of Spode you admire," Mrs. Bracebridge said, trying again, and this time with a coaxing smile.

"I should not care in the least to have it," Tamar answered, assuming entire indifference. "It is all very well in its own surroundings. It stands out here, no doubt, as something exceptional. But in my shop, for instance, it would seem——"

She shrugged her shoulders.

Mrs. Bracebridge made one more valiant attempt to reach Tamar's inner citadel of reserve.

"I think you quoted ten guineas as the fee for your visit?" she said, closing her eyes. "Suppose we make it twelve guineas?"

"By all means make it twelve guineas if you like," Tamar replied, smiling indulgently. "I always take

as much money as I can get—naturally. But I'm not intending to give you any more information on any subject whatsoever for that extra two guineas."

She added :

"I've told you what I know. But I will repeat what I said. If you want those emeralds, don't think about the collection. Think only of the emeralds themselves. If you see them again, look at them with 'the larger vision.'"

"'The larger vision!'" mocked the old woman. "'The larger vision!' indeed! Thank you, my own normal sight is good enough for me. Well, I think, after all, we'll keep your fee at ten guineas."

They both laughed. There was no doubt that they amused each other immensely, and that their brief intercourse had been a real enjoyment to them both. Mrs. Bracebridge owned up to the fact, produced the fee not ungrudgingly, and asked Tamar to come again some day and bring one or two of her own stones for inspection and criticism.

"I don't at all dislike you," she said. "Come again, but without a fee, of course! No one is worth two fees."

"Yes, I will come," Tamar promised, and she glanced around the hall where they were standing, and had a parting thrill of pleasure over the old-world atmosphere of the Manor House.

"And who knows, perhaps I may be able to tell you that I have seen the emeralds with the *larger vision*," Mrs. Bracebridge continued with a twinkle in her wicked old eye. "That would be a piece of news, wouldn't it?"

And she shook with quiet laughter, and quite worried poor, frail old Jenkins, whose concern and anxiety for his mistress struck Tamar as being something rare and beautiful.

"Madam, be calm," he urged in his cracked old voice. "You have so little strength, and you are exciting yourself too much."

She gave a final nod of farewell to Tamar and let Jenkins take her away; and Tamar watched them mount the stairs slowly and disappear along the passage leading to

the boudoir. But he was certainly suspicious of Tamar, and unwilling to leave her alone, even for a moment: for he returned quite quickly for him, and almost fell forward in hastening to open the door for her departure.

"I gave my old comrade the chance," Tamar said to herself as she crossed the moat, and passed into the little park. "I am glad I gave it. But still more glad she could not take it!"

V

SEVERAL weeks after Tamar's visit to old Mrs. Bracebridge, Christopher Bramfield, the diamond merchant, came to the shop bringing some fine emeralds which he wished her to see. He had secured them for himself, but was quite willing to hand them over to her if she felt inclined to pay him the price which he had given for them. Bramfield, who had been Tamar's friend for many years, was always generous to her, and his unfailing kindness was often rewarded by displays of ungraciousness which would have alienated a less devoted colleague. But he understood her, and continued to accept her on her own terms. So he only smiled when she told him that she did not want to be bothered with any emeralds, being at the time much taken up with a large deal in some specially beautiful and valuable black pearls which engrossed her attention and captured her imagination.

"Well, you might at least look at them, T. Scott," he said good-naturedly.

Tamar frowned, and pushed the packet roughly away.

"No," she said, "they won't interest me. I can only think of pearls just now. My mind is tuned to pearls."

"You will only think of emeralds when you've seen them," he said. "I've never seen more beautiful ones. However, if you intend to remain obstinate, by all means do so. I'll be off and remove my treasures. But don't say I didn't give you the chance. That's all I wish to impress on your agreeable mind. Good-bye."

He was half-way through the shop door when Tamar recalled him.

"Did you say emeralds? Well, perhaps I'll look at them," she said slowly, as if pondering the matter.

He returned to the counter, opened the packet, and laid before her an emerald necklace, an emerald cross, and an emerald ring. She started back when she saw them, but oddly enough, so Bramfield thought, *did not touch them.* He had so often seen her snatch and grab at the jewels he brought her, that he quite expected that she would at once have taken entire possession of these truly wonderful stones. Instead of which, she leaned over the counter, on her elbows, and stared at them without vouchsafing any remark.

"Well," he said, after waiting for some time patiently.

"You can leave them," she said in a low voice. "I will give you a receipt."

"There, I knew you would like them," he said with pride. "Keep them a few days, and then make your decision. I hope you will decide to have them. It was borne on me strongly that they ought to be yours. Otherwise, upon my soul, I don't think I could have parted with them. The colour, and the velvety quality of them are positively haunting. The stones are almost flawless. This necklace, for instance."

As he spoke, he took it in his hands and held it towards her, but still she did not touch it.

"Why don't you take it and examine it," he said half cross and half puzzled.

"It is enough to see it," Tamar said dreamily. "Leave it there."

He glanced at her face and saw on it an expression of entire rapture, indescribable and baffling. It struck him that she was not so much looking at the emeralds as *beyond them.*

"Very queer is T. Scott these later days," he thought.

Aloud he said:

"Well, I'll leave you to enjoy the emeralds alone. I'm quite sure you'll forget all about your black pearls."

Bramfield's words proved to be true, for the remembrance of the pearls passed entirely from Tamar's mind. And she forgot to write an important letter about the

negotiations in connection with them, and neglected all her other affairs, and even dismissed one or two of her profitable clients with more than her usual brusqueness.

She locked the shop door at an early hour in the evening and retired into the inner room. She took the emeralds in her hands, but held them rather far from her, as if she wished to gaze at them from a distance, out of her reach, across a barrier, invisible, imperceptible, yet actual and definite. She placed them on the table where she repaired, altered, or restored jewellery and china, and separated them from each other with almost reverent care. Finally she examined them; but with reluctance, more from a sense of professional duty, from a sense of homage to the precious stones as precious stones, than from any commercial and critical impulse. It was curious to see Tamar, ordinarily so ruthless in her methods of appraising and valuing, on this occasion diffident, tremulous, humble, and even apologetic. Long after she had replaced them on the table she sat contemplating them.

Once or twice she said in a whisper:

"The same emeralds, velvety and without flaws."

And again:

"The same emeralds; velvety, flawless.—I should have known them anywhere."

As she sat there, dead to the world, entranced and enthralled by the beauty of these jewels and entirely free from the lust of possession, it was borne on her that her name was being uttered. She turned in the direction of the Jacobean couch and listened intently. Once more the sound of her name reached her, this time slightly louder than before, though ever faint and feeble.

Her heart beat wildly, and a thrill passed through her: for she felt instinctively that the barrier shutting out the Unseen World was again being slowly withdrawn. So she waited and watched in silence and patience, and after a long time it seemed to her that a dim and shadowy figure, undistinguishable in detail or outline, crossed the room, paused, groped about, and came to the work-table and bent over it. It grew distincter, but Tamar

closed her eyes, unable to bear a further strain of concentration. When she opened them, she saw standing before her the beautiful Presence whom she had gazed upon a few weeks previously in the old Manor House. But now the lady wore no jewels: no emerald necklace, no cross, no ring. She raised her left hand and pointed to her neck, her breast, her right hand, and then, with that same charming smile which Tamar had noticed before, she pointed to the emeralds lying on the table. And at the same time Tamar's own words echoed back to her:

"*The same emeralds, velvety and without flaws.*"

Tamar sprang to her feet.

"Yes, yes," she cried with a rapture which had something solemn and reverent in it, "the same emeralds —the most beautiful emeralds I have ever seen in my life."

The vision faded and was gone. Tamar stood for a long time, motionless and tense, with her arms stretched out as she had thrown them forward in that moment of eagerness and enthusiasm.

She was recalled to outer circumstances by the double knock of the postman at the shop door, and when she did not answer, by a further summons, which succeeded in making her pay attention.

She had to sign for a registered packet, which she put in a drawer. But there was another letter which was addressed in an uneducated handwriting; and this she opened. She turned it over and saw that it was signed R. Jenkins. It ran thus: "Madam, plese come to my mistress she is verry feable she spekes of you allways plese come yours respecfully R. Jenkins."

Nothing else but that. Not a single word of explanation as to whether Mrs. Bracebridge herself had told him to write, or whether he had taken the matter into his own hands out of faithful concern for his old mistress's welfare.

And, in any case, why should she go? What was that old woman to her? Why should she be called upon to leave her business and all her own affairs and

have the expense and trouble of the journey to Dorsetshire for the sake of gratifying a stranger? Perhaps not even gratifying her. She would be far more likely to say: "I never sent for you. What have you come for? Don't think for a moment that you will get a fee out of me. No one is worth two fees."

Tamar heard her say these very words, and she laughed. The remembrance of her visit swept over her, and the whole scene was conjured up for her: the old Manor House, proud and dreary in its isolation: the feeble old woman, with her bright eyes and mocking manner, a rival in rudeness and in jewel worship: and that aged retainer, frail and tottering himself, on whose trembling arm she had to lean for support, probably because no one else would bear with her.

A sudden longing came over Tamar to go to her; and the more she thought of her, the more she desired to see her and do something or other to give her pleasure. Yes, she would go and would fulfil her promise to show the old lady some of her own treasures. It would not hurt her to take a few in her pocket; and it would be stimulating to both of them to have a battle royal over the merits or faults of, say, those very curious rubies lately bought from the Austrian ambassador, or that amazing black pearl, or those cornflower-blue sapphires on which she set great store. Tamar got up to take them out of the safe, but as she was handling the rubies, she stopped short and turned to the table on which the emeralds lay. She put the rubies slowly back and closed the safe.

"If I take her anything, it should be the emeralds," she said aloud.

"No, I can't take them," she said, shaking her head. "If she sees them, she will want them."

She opened the safe again.

"I will take instead the rubies, the sapphires, and the black pearls, all of them," she said. "She would want the emeralds fiercely. She can't have them."

She began to argue with herself.

"It is not any concern of mine if her collection is incomplete. What do I care?" she asked.

But an inner voice answered :

" You know perfectly well those emeralds belong there."

" They were given to me," Tamar remonstrated.

" You know perfectly well they belong there," the inner voice said. " You ought to give the old woman the chance of buying them back."

" Never," Tamar said defiantly. " Never."

" At a handsome profit," the inner voice added.

" No, not even at that," Tamar replied. " They are mine, and I shall keep them. If the old woman has hungered for them all her life, she can just go on hungering to the end. She is nothing to me."

" She is something to you," the inner voice said. " And you know it. She is a comrade. She and you worship at the same shrine. If her adoration falls a little short of yours, it is only due to circumstances. You must treat her as a true comrade, and let her see those emeralds."

" No," Tamar said stubbornly.

" And buy them if she wants to do so," the voice added ruthlessly.

" No, no," Tamar said with fierceness. " No, no. Never, never. That ends it."

But it did not end it ; for all through that long night Tamar wrestled with herself, sleeping and waking. She was pursued by the Presence of that eighteenth-century lady, no longer smiling, but menacing. Emeralds floated before her, chased away by rubies, cornflower-blue sapphires, and black pearls. Thousands of aged retainers implored her on their knees to yield up those emeralds, and a chorus of voices told her to treat the old woman generously as a true comrade of the spirit ; and another chorus warned her against being a weak fool, and exhorted her to cling on to her treasure and let no one have it, and certainly not that arrogant and worthless old woman, whose course in any case was almost run. In all the tumult of action and sound, only Mrs. Bracebridge herself was passive and silent. She appeared throughout a proud, detached personage, unconcerned with the results of the contest, but hugely amused by the havoc she was causing. She merely bent forward on her black cane,

and in this favourite attitude surveyed the crowded arena with eyes which were brighter than diamonds and which sparkled with mischief. She was, in fact, by reason of her calmness and quiet mirth, an immense comfort to poor Tamar's distraught brain. Although she did not speak a word, she seemed to be saying the whole time: "Well, really, this is very funny, and in spite of Jenkins, I shall laugh as much as I please."

Tamar woke up with a laugh.

"I shall go and see her," she said. "And I shall take the emeralds as well as the rubies, the black pearls and the sapphires."

VI

MANY conflicting thoughts surged in Tamar's mind during her journey to Dorsetshire, and once or twice she nearly made the decision to show only the rubies and sapphires and black pearls, and not the emeralds. But the long struggle ended in a triumph for the more generous part of T. Scott's nature; and she resolved not only to produce the emeralds, but also to give the old lady the chance of buying them and thus completing the collection and restoring what she considered to be the family honour.

"I must, of course, sell them at a considerable profit," Tamar reflected. "But not too considerable."

But even then Tamar was not making a light sacrifice, since no profit could compensate her for the loss of the emeralds which had come to her so strangely, and which even Bramfield had said belonged in some mysterious way to her, and her only. She passed through real suffering when she looked at them for the last time, and knew that very soon they would be hers no more, and that all that would be left to her, would be the memory of their marvellous colour and quality. But something stronger than her worship of precious stones urged her to relinquish her own right to them; and her sacrifice, though reluctant, was not grudging and mean. Indeed she already found herself counting on the pleasure of seeing the old woman's surprise and delight.

" Of course she'll be rude and scornful at first," Tamar reflected with a smile. " But I understand that. I should be the same."

She arrived at the Manor House and rang the bell. Jenkins appeared after some time, and was greatly stirred when he saw her. He put his finger to his lips, looked first in this direction and then in that, and having satisfied himself that Keturah was not within hearing, said in his cracked voice :

" Don't tell her I asked you to come. She'd be very angry, and she has no strength to be angry with. She is very feeble—very, very feeble."

He shook his head gravely as he spoke, and there were tears in his eyes.

" I understand," Tamar said kindly. " She shall think I have come, as I promised, to show her some of my jewels."

The old fellow's face brightened, and he was on the point of leaving Tamar to wait in the hall, when he changed his mind and signed to her to follow him upstairs. It was again obvious that he did not trust her, and did not wish to have her out of his sight. He left her standing outside Mrs. Bracebridge's boudoir, and disappeared into the room. He returned in a minute or two, with the ghost of a smile on his face and the ghost of an apology in his manner.

" I was to make sure that you didn't want a second fee," he said, not looking at Tamar.

Tamar smiled, and said :

" Tell your mistress I've accepted the fact that no one is worth a second fee."

Jenkins retreated, chuckling a little, and soon beckoned her into the boudoir. He held the door open for her to pass in, and then withdrew, to take up his guard, as ever, outside, within call and within reach. He was evidently satisfied with the success of his secret planning, and in leaving, glanced at Tamar with some slight degree of approval and confidence.

Tamar approached the couch where the old lady lay wrapped up in innumerable shawls and rugs. She looked

much older and thinner than a few weeks ago, and her eyes had lost their extraordinary brightness. But a spark of mischief came into them directly she saw Tamar, and a slight rallying into her manner.

"Ah," she said, "so you've come, and as I understand clearly, without expecting a fee. Well, I don't at all object to seeing you. I rather like it. You can sit down."

"Thank you," Tamar said submissively, and she drew a chair to the side of the couch.

"I want to show you some stones and ask your advice," Tamar began.

"So you want my advice," old Mrs. Bracebridge said. "No one has ever wanted my advice. It's most stimulating. And at my time of life. Most remarkable. Most diverting."

She laughed quietly, and seemed immensely amused by the idea.

She watched Tamar in silence for a few moments, and then went on:

"You remember you said something absurd about 'the larger vision.' That amused me, too. I've laughed and laughed over that until poor Jenkins has implored me to keep still. Jenkins is always ludicrously anxious about me. He insisted on my lying down wrapped up in this compact and uncomfortable fashion. Well, why don't you speak and show what you've brought, instead of staring at me as though I were a mummy. I may look like one, but I'm not one yet."

Tamar in answer produced from her pocket a small parcel, which she began to unfasten slowly. She planned to show first the rubies, then the black pearls, then the sapphires—and finally the emeralds. But she could not carry out her scheme because, by mistake, she opened the packet containing the emeralds, and before she could cover them over, Mrs. Bracebridge's quick eyes had seen those glittering stones.

"Emeralds!" she exclaimed, raising herself suddenly from the couch. "Emeralds! Let me have them."

She snatched them convulsively from Tamar's lap, examined the necklace, the cross, the ring, uttered a

low cry of rapture and triumph, and clutched them to her heart.

"The same emeralds," she cried. "At last, at last I have them—at last they are mine."

She sank back on her pillow, gave a moan of pain, closed her eyes, and still clutching her treasures, passed from this life.

THE HOLIDAY

I

IT was curious how Marion Silverhowe hankered after that little moorland hamlet in Yorkshire at the back of beyond. She had found it a year ago whilst she had been on the tramp with one of her friends, like herself a class teacher at one of the large London High Schools. And to-night, when she had to make a decision about a most tempting invitation to Scotland, the little lonely place and the people she had met there put in such an insistent claim that she resolved at least to begin her holiday in that neighbourhood.

She saw the scene before her now. Moors rose in billows all around. In the distance were the austere fells. A wild ravine pierced the hills near by, and at the foot of one of them lay the tiny hamlet, in the days of hand-loom weaving probably a prosperous place, but now consisting only of a few scattered cottages, a fine old ruined hall, with noble mullioned windows still intact, a school-house, small but beautifully proportioned, proud also with its mullioned, diamond-paned windows, and a large and curious building dated 1701, a Foundation Hospital for Indigent Women, the gift of a pious man of the past. A stream ran through the village, and boasted of no less than three bridges, one of modern structure, another for pack-horses and foot passengers, and the third, of undressed stone, worn by centuries of use. Marion was lingering by it whilst her friend sketched it, when sounds of laughter from the school-house reached her. And she had been impelled to peep through the half-open door, and steal a

glance at the class of little boys and girls and their teacher making merriment together.

The teacher was more than middle-aged, and belonged to a past type of schoolmistress, probably not too much burdened with the weight of wisdom; but she had a charming expression of countenance, and it was obvious that there was an excellent understanding between herself and her pupils, some of whose faces were extraordinarily eager and alert.

The children had caught sight of the stranger and fixed their eyes steadily on her. Little Tom Prior, whose blunder in his reading had caused the united outburst of mirth, stopped suddenly.

"Go on, Tommy, and try and do better," said the schoolmistress indulgently.

But all he did, was to stare at the door, and then point towards it with one fat finger, which he then put in his mouth and sucked.

The schoolmistress turned round to see what momentous happening was distracting the attention of her scholars, and at once advanced towards Marion, not with the frown of reprimand which the outsider knew full well she deserved, but with a smile of welcome.

"Please forgive me," Marion said. "I could not resist peeping in. I'm a teacher myself."

"Do come in," the schoolmistress said. "We do love to see a visitor sometimes in this lonely place—don't we, children?"

"Yes, teacher!" they answered in chorus.

"It relieves the great strain on our brains," said the schoolmistress, with a twinkle in her eye.

Marion laughed, and entered gladly. She had an easy way with children, and at once made friends with these little strangers. There were twelve, and they came from distant parts of the moorland, from over the hills and far away, through snow and sleet and slush and rain and wind, until spring and summer gave them the promise and the fulfilment of more genial conditions for their journeyings in search of wisdom. The wonder was that they ever survived the winter ordeal. But they survived and thrived,

and perhaps even picked up a crumb of knowledge here and there.

She was shown their copy-books and drawing-books. With due enthusiasm she praised weird pictures of pigs and cows and horses and trees "done from memory." And she was introduced to what the teacher called the school library, a pitiful collection of about half a dozen well-worn children's books of ancient date. Marion thought it tragic that in these days of book wealth, no gleanings even should have reached this solitary little outpost. She promised to send some nice new volumes, and asked the children what they would like.

"I'd like a book about the fairies," said Gertie.

"I'd like a book about the Red Indians," said Billie.

"I'd like a story about lions and tigers," said Tommy Prior; "them what eats you up."

And Marion laughed, and said she would remember all their tastes.

They did not want to part from their new friend, but followed her and the schoolmistress into the tiny chapel attached to the school, and lingered around until a pretty little old lady came in view: when they made a dash at her, and nearly overwhelmed her with demonstrative greeting.

"Do you see that old lady?" the schoolmistress said to Marion. "Doesn't she look a sweet old thing? And that's what she is. The children and I love her dearly. She is one of the ten old ladies living in the Foundation Hospice yonder. I think she must have seen prosperous days in the past. But she has lived in the neighbourhood for many years, or else she would not have been admitted to the Foundation. She comes to read poetry to the children, or to tell them stories, or talk to them about interesting things. She has a ready answer to all their questions. Sometimes I envy her a little and wish I knew as much. But I am so glad for their sakes that we have her. And glad for my own sake, too, of course. We simply shouldn't know how to get on without Mrs. Glenrose. Will you come and speak to her?"

Marion saw that the little lady was about seventy years

or so. She was distinctly dainty, though shabby, and wore her clothes with that mysterious grace known only to the favoured few. Her face was delicate and refined, and her bearing had a gracious dignity combined with an engaging ease. She was evidently quite a personality; and it struck Marion at the time that she would be unforgettable. Whoever she was, and whatever life had done to her, it was obvious that she had retained some lightheartedness and sense of fun. Humour played round her sensitive mouth, and her bright eyes had a lingering light of mischief in them.

"Mrs. Glenrose," the schoolmistress said, "this lady is going to send us some new books. Isn't it good of her?"

"What delightful news," said Mrs. Glenrose, smiling at Marion. "Do you know, I woke up this morning feeling quite sure that something pleasant was going to happen. And I found that my rose-tree was in bloom—and now we hear about new books. What more could one want, I wonder?"

They took Marion to see the old ruined Hall, and were followed by the children and by Tim, a strange-looking dwarf who was accompanied in his strolls by a bodyguard of eight cackling geese. Afterwards they went to the Foundation Hospice, the haven of ten old ladies in their declining years.

Marion greeted two or three of them who were lingering in the paved courtyard, and sat down for a few minutes in Mrs. Glenrose's kitchen, which, poor and humble though it was, bore signs of refined taste. One or two pretty landscapes, some books, and several carefully tended ferns proclaimed the owner to be a lover of sweet things. Marion took up a book by hazard. It was the "Golden Treasury of Verse," and it was open at Wordsworth's "Ode to Immortality."

"You love poetry," she said, turning to Mrs. Glenrose.

"Yes, I love poetry," the old lady answered dreamily. "And that ode is one of my favourites."

She murmured half to herself:

"The splendour in the grass, the glory in the flower, the innocent brightness of a new-born day, the obstinate

questionings, the immortal sea which brought us hither—ah, how beautiful all the language is."

Marion came away arrested, mystified. On her return to London she sent books to the school library and volumes of poems to the little old lady. And probably nothing in recent years pleased her so much as the acknowledgments from the schoolmistress of H—— with the signatures of all the scholars, and a letter from Mrs. Glenrose in the fine pointed Italian handwriting of a bygone time. They all dwelt in her memory. They became inextricably woven into her love of the moors. She thought of the heather and peat bogs and the wail of the curlew, and the wonderful clouds racing over the wild moorland, and the children, and the mists veiling the rugged fells, and the rills and streams and deep glens, and the teacher who loved her flock, and the mystery of the mountains in the fading light, and the little old lady from a fairy book masquerading as a Foundation pensioner, and the cattle grazing on the uplands, and the cattle-barns dotted here and there, and the shepherds' huts, and the rush of the pure, fresh air, magical in its healing power.

These were the memories which crowded on her and made her decide to answer to their call.

That night, probably because she was steeped in their remembrance, she dreamed of all the delights which the moors had to offer her; and strangely enough also of her father who had been dead for three or four years. It was the first time she had ever dreamed of that stern, grave man who had always been good and gentle to her, however forbidding and reserved to the outside world. Her mother she had never known. She had died soon after Marion's birth, and he never spoke of her; and there were no lingering traces of her personality in the home: no portrait, no photograph, no little possession of hers surviving from her past. When Marion grew up and asked for details about her unknown parent, she learnt nothing save that her mother had been an orphan, fair and lovely as a flower, bright in her nature and not meant for death. Yet he had lost her. And it seemed that he had never recovered from the blow he had sustained.

"I cannot speak of her," he had said almost imploringly. "One has to live one's life in one's own way. Be merciful, my child, and leave me alone with my memory of her."

But after his death, she found amongst his papers a daguerreotype of himself as a young man and his bride. She hung it over her bed. And when she dreamed of her father that night, she saw him as he was in that faded portrait, young, grave-looking even then, and with a quiet nobility of countenance which Time did not destroy.

II

In a day or two Marion went off to Yorkshire, arrived at her destination in Wharfedale, and put up at the small inn in C——, where she and her friend had sojourned the previous year. The next morning she tramped over the moors to the hamlet of H——, and scarcely noticed the six miles stretch: so fresh and uplifting was the air on this perfect May day. The lights were soft and caressing on the distant fells, and the belt of trees on the lower slopes was only barely touched with delicate green tints. The highest peaks showed even a shimmering of snow. The dove-coloured clouds racing over the moorland displayed an ever-changing scene of wonder of which summer in its more garish beauty could never boast. The peat-marshes were sending out their salt-laden breath, and the heather, not yet in bloom, was nevertheless preparing to receive and bestow its priceless purple jewels for all the world to behold in unmatched splendour.

Marion stepped down into the vale, and arrived at the little village with its stream and bridges. She passed the ruined Hall, and the Foundation Hospice, and did not pause a moment until she had reached the school-house.

She found, to her great disappointment, that it was closed. There were no signs of the children, no sounds of life in the precincts. She turned away feeling sad and disheartened: for she had been imagining to herself the pleasantness of a surprise visit, and anticipating a warm welcome both from children and teacher. Then across

the pack-horse bridge Tim, the queer dwarf, came waddling, followed by the geese, which hissed menacingly at her.

He drove them off as she advanced to meet him. He remembered her at once, for it was only on rare occasions that strangers came to H——.

"You was here before," he said. "You was speaking with the schoolmistress."

"Yes," she answered, smiling kindly at him. "Tell me, is the school closed?"

"Teacher be dead," he answered. "They be a-burying she to-day up to Settle."

"Dead!" Marion repeated. "Dead!"

He nodded.

"She be dead of the influenzy same as my old mother died from three years agone," he said.

He retreated across the bridge with his strange companions, muttering to himself:

"Three years agone, three years agone."

Marion stood looking after him, a chill at her heart. The schoolmistress dead, her quiet life over, her work in this lonely place done, her love for the children, her pride in the growth of the treasured library, her regrets over her own shortcomings things of the past. Words from her last letter sent in acknowledgment of a further instalment of books, stole back to Marion's remembrance:

"If we go on like this, our library will become the pride of the moors, as well as the pride of our hearts. How well you know what to send to supply our needs. How I wish I were like you, and could give the children what you could give of stored knowledge and bright interest. For they ought to have the best. All children ought to have the best. When you come to us again—and I know you will come—I want you one day to give them a lesson. Will you? And I shall sit by and watch their little faces brighten up with a light which I could never kindle, no matter how much I tried."

Just three weeks ago that letter had come from her. And now she was dead.

Then Marion, half in a dream, wended her way to the Foundation Hospice. An old woman was brushing some

clothes in the courtyard, and another was carrying some flowers into the chapel which divided the two wings of the building. Marion greeted them both, and was turning off to the right-hand side to find Mrs. Glenrose's quarters at No. 8, when the old dame who was brushing the clothes said:

"I live at Number 3, on the left. Perhaps you be a-coming to see me, too?"

"Why, yes, of course, if you wish it," Marion answered. "I should like to come."

"Visitors be scarce here," the old dame said. "Schoolmistress often looked in. And now she be gone. She be buried to-day up to Settle."

She shook her head gravely, gave a final shake to the clothes, dropped her brush, which Marion stooped to pick up, and disappeared into her own domain.

Marion remembered that the schoolmistress had told her that the old women were jealous and hurt if visitors did not call in at all the ten houses; and she forthwith made up her mind to acquit herself in the manner expected of her. Then she knocked at No. 8, and a voice bade her come in.

Mrs. Glenrose was seated in a low chair drawn up to the fireplace. She had a book in her lap, but she was not reading it; and her knitting had fallen down on the floor, and had been annexed by a kitten which had wantonly unravelled it, and then, apparently worn out with its antics, had gone to sleep embracing the remainder.

Mrs. Glenrose looked up; and Marion saw that she had been weeping. She saw that the book in her lap was the Church Service, and that it was open at the Burial of the Dead. She knew Marion at once, smiled through her tears, and held out her hand.

"The schoolmistress is dead," she said in a broken voice.

"I have heard," Marion said gently.

"Yes, she is dead," Mrs. Glenrose repeated. "I was trying to read the Service, but I cannot. Perhaps you could. We have talked of you so often, she and I."

Marion took the book and read the sad and beautiful words, over which so many hearts have been wrung whilst

the quiet dead have waited on their biers, and then have been lowered into their last resting-place.

The little old lady did not weep now. She leaned back in her chair, her hands folded together, and her eyes closed. When the end came, there was a long silence. She herself broke it.

"She was my only friend," she murmured. "And she was generous-hearted. She was not jealous that I loved the children; she let me share them with her. She has gone—and they have gone, too. In due time another schoolmistress will come, but she will never let me share them with her."

"Yes, yes, she will," Marion urged. "Be comforted. You have not lost the children. They will want you all the more."

"Little bits of poetry, fairy stories, little pieces about Nature, all sorts of things she let me tell them," Mrs. Glenrose went on. "She liked to hear them, too. She didn't despise the old Foundation woman. A new schoolmistress will be quite different, I know. When my friend was ill before, a stranger was sent to take her place; and when I went to the school-house, she told me there was no need for me to come. And it will be the same again. I have lost her—and I have lost them."

She was silent for several minutes, and Marion waited and stared fixedly on the ground. She felt that she would have given worlds to comfort the sorrowing old lady; and all she could do, was to offer a passive respect to the grief which was beyond her power to assuage.

At last Mrs. Glenrose continued:

"There are always certain things in our circumstances which keep us going. Her kindness and appreciation kept me going here. I depended on them. And now I shall have to stand alone. Yet that is what it always comes to in life, sooner or later. One has to stand alone."

She raised herself on her chair and went to the little bookcase, where some of the books Marion had sent to her were arranged together on the top shelf. She turned to Marion and pointed to them with a pathetic smile on her face.

"I assure you," she said, "you made us very happy

with the books you sent to her and me and the children. I cannot tell you what delight you gave us. And she was so proud that you did not forget us. No books sent out into the world have ever been more welcome. Only those who love books and have had to do without them, can know the heartache at being deprived of them, and the real ecstasy of once more owning a few of the choicest. It was a good day for us, my dear, when you came tramping across the moors to this out of the way, out of the world corner of the globe.

A question rose to Marion's lips, but she checked it. She had no right to inquire how this refined, sensitive, educated old lady chanced to be stranded in a Foundation Hospice for indigent women in a remote hamlet of Yorkshire. But she knew that there must needs have been a tale—and a tragedy. And now there was this added sorrow of a friend and companion lost for ever, doubly precious also in a life barren of outside interest.

It was borne in on her that she had had a definite call to comfort this old woman in her grief and loneliness; and it flashed through her mind as an inspiration, that the best way of doing it would be to offer to carry on the school until the end of the term, and have the fairy stories and adventure tales and bits of poetry and little pieces about Nature continued in exactly the same way as in the time of the schoolmistress.

"Why not, why not?" she thought. "Moreover, if I could bring it about, I should be fulfilling the very wishes of the schoolmistress expressed in her last letter. Why shouldn't I?"

She did bring it about. Her offer was gladly accepted by the authorities: her high degrees, her standing in the educational world, and the difficulty of securing anyone willing to go to that lonely moorland outpost breaking down at once the barriers of red tape. And she was able to write to her astonished friends in London, that she was acting as elementary teacher in the school which had haunted her, filling in a breach, interested in her unexpected work, and half-believing that she had discovered a genius in a naughty, grubby little boy called Tommy Prior.

"Who can tell," she wrote; "perhaps one day he may be a Prime Minister—or Lord Chief Justice—or Chancellor of the Exchequer."

III

And the door was not closed on Mrs. Glenrose. She shared the children with the new temporary schoolmistress, and came in to read poetry and stories, sometimes the old poems and tales which the children had always loved, and often new ones from the fine fresh books now belonging to the school library. The pang of her grief lost some of its first acuteness; and Marion had the joy of knowing that she had contributed to the healing of the wound.

She herself was extraordinarily successful with her little moorland scholars. She was fond of children, and she knew well how to interest their minds, minister to the eagerness of the eager ones, and tone up the reluctance of the slackers. The words of the teacher who had passed away, came true. The faces of the pupils brightened up with a light which she would never have been able to kindle. If she knew, her generous spirit must have been immeasurably glad and grateful.

She was not being forgotten. Wreaths were woven for her grave, a portrait of her was hung on the wall near the blackboard, and her name was not banished to an unnatural silence.

Marion, who had always loved the moors, grew into the very life of the countryside, and roamed the expanses, sometimes alone, and often with the children, who took her to their favourite hunting grounds, up hill and down dale, alongside the shining river over the stepping-stones, through the emerald meadows, near the mountain-rills and ghylls where the fairies dwell, over the bracken and heather, past the great boulders and the lonely shepherds' huts and the cattle barns on the uplands. She gathered the wild roses, and watched the heather beginning to wear its wondrous finery of jewels, and the fells donning or doffing their veil of mystery, and the sheep changing

pasture and the cattle winding their way home in a long, thin line, and the circling and flight of the wild birds, and the play of the clouds, now mild and gentle, now headlong and tumultuous. Her days were full and busy, with school duties and Nature's summoning, and her exacting old ladies in the Foundation Hospice, who had to be safeguarded from jealousy, and Tim, the dwarf, who demanded quietly but definitely his share of sympathy and attention both for himself and his geese. Marion, who gave easily and without effort, met all the claims, and enjoyed each day more than the last.

So the happy weeks passed by, the term came to an end, the school was closed, and it was the last evening of Marion's sojourn in Yorkshire. She was spending it with Mrs. Glenrose. Many and many an hour these two had passed together, sometimes in the tiny kitchen of No. 8 at the Foundation Hospice, or in the school-house, or else quietly strolling along the lane which led up to the moor. They had grown to love each other, and they were parting with a sad reluctance which each guessed at without words. Marion was strangely drawn to her, though always mystified by her. Her little outbursts of fun and light-heartedness, a certain gay insouciance of character, a bravely stoical attitude towards life and circumstance gave her a charm which was irresistible, and which partially but not wholly obscured some traces of selfishness. And her love of poetry and of all literature made her, of course, an interesting companion with whom it was possible to talk about things that mattered. She was, in fact, a personage, all the more attractive because she was baffling. Baffling also were her prettiness and dainty grace, which poverty and humble condition had not been able to suppress.

But on this last night of their comradeship she herself raised the veil of mystery which surrounded her. She put down her knitting, and said quite simply, without any preliminaries :

" Dear young friend, I have given you no confidences, and I am grateful to you that you have never asked for them. But you would not have been likely to do so. You

are too kind and fine for any such intrusiveness. Yet you must often have wondered why anyone of my description should be ending her days as a pensioner in this Foundation Hospice ? "

" I cannot say I have not wondered," Marion answered, flushing a little from shyness. " But one knows, of course, that life brings many changes."

" You have taken me just as you found me," Mrs. Glenrose went on. " Never a word have you spoken, never a sign of curiosity have you shown, never a faintest suspicion of patronage. It has been a case of equal terms, equal companionship, equal dignity of intercourse. You will never know what this has meant to my pride. And you leave behind you unforgettable memories for which I shall always be giving you thanks. Your holiday is over. You will go your own way again, and take up your life, which will be all the happier because of the happiness you have brought to me, and the consolation in a time of great distress, and because of the good work you have done in this little hamlet which you rightly call the back of beyond. God bless you, my child."

She rested her hand for one minute on Marion's head.

" I am not going to tell you the whole of my life's story," she continued. " It is not worth telling. Only this much I want to say to you. You have seen my love for little children, haven't you ? Well, I think that has grown and grown from heartache. Forty years ago this very day, I abandoned my own little one, forsook home and husband and helpless babe—forty years ago. Yes, I abandoned them, without a thought, without a regret."

She paused, and then went on :

" I cannot truthfully say, my dear, that I have spent those years in sackcloth and ashes. I suppose that is what I ought to be able to say. But I cannot. I have really enjoyed my life. I believe I have enjoyed it far more than if I had stayed on dutifully with husband and child in a well-appointed home with every comfort and luxury—and securely sheltered from the outside world. I have lived—not grazed. And I have worked. There came a time when I had to work, and for twenty years

and more I was in a large tailoring firm in Liverpool, earning honourable money."

Marion did not look up. She was thinking that there had been moments when she had almost guessed that this would be the story of the little old lady.

"I never saw husband or child again," Mrs. Glenrose added. "I never wanted to see him. He bored me. And I sometimes think that being bored is the greatest danger that life has to offer. Even now, after all these years, I could shudder to remember how my zest died down in his company. If he had wished to have me back, a thousand times I should have said 'no.' But he made no such offer. The divorce went through quietly and with no anger on his part. But he did say one thing which cut me to the heart because it was true. He said that if I had abandoned only him, he could have understood, but that a woman who abandoned her own little child was outside the pale of love. Hard words—but true. Don't you think so?"

Marion's face twitched. She did not answer that question. Instead she asked one herself.

"Have you never wanted to see your child—your son or daughter—which was it, I wonder?" she said very gently.

"There have been times in the past when I have longed to see what my wee girl had grown into," Mrs. Glenrose answered. "But I got over that. One does get over things, though one may pretend not to."

"And you never long, now that you are old and alone and would perhaps be glad of the affection she might have to offer?" asked Marion.

The little old lady shook her head.

"The very last person on earth I should wish to see would be my daughter," she said. "To begin with, I have no right to inflict myself on her, and then I should be horribly uncomfortable in her presence. She would be the same in mine. She might try to work up some affection for me out of pity or duty. I should hate that. But whatever she did, she would be judging me, naturally enough, and I should be feeling guilty and humiliated.

No, my dear friend, I have no wish to meet her now. I should regard such an event as a calamity, disturbing to my peace of mind and the even tenor of my ways in my old age."

She added with a smile which had some mischief in it:

"And, you know, there is always the chance that she might be boring—like her father! She probably would be, since daughters are said to take after their male parents."

Marion laughed. Criticism and disapproval beat a hasty retreat, and she bent forward and gave the little lady an affectionate hug.

"You're downright naughty—that's what you are!" she said.

"Perhaps I am," said Mrs. Glenrose with a soft little laugh.

"That boring husband of yours—did he share your love for poetry and all the sweet things of literature?" asked Marion. "It would interest me to know."

"No," Mrs. Glenrose answered emphatically. "He was a dry-as-dust lawyer. The poems that entranced him were moot points in law. Appeals. Higher Court decisions. And the range of his reading was legal history and judicial proceedings. *But the other one* for whom I left him—ah, he was a poet, one of Nature's singers—a wild, beloved, impossible, thrilling, maddening, enthusiastic, gifted, glorious creature. He died in a drunken brawl—after—after he had tired of me and gone from me."

Her face lit up as she spoke of him.

"A glorious creature," she cried. "He was worth while—indeed he was! I thought it then—and I think it now."

Then, with sudden impulse she said:

"I will show you what I have shown no one else all these long years—his photograph, and the portrait also of him who was my husband. I'll show you them because I love and trust you, and because you have been so good to the naughty old Foundation woman."

She hastened, almost darted to a cupboard, drew out a small tin box, opened it with a key which was suspended round her neck, and with hands trembling from excite-

ment took out a small parcel. In her eagerness she broke the thin elastic band confining it, and the papers were scattered on the ground. Marion was going to gather them up, but she waived her off and knelt down herself amongst them.

"Here is the poet's portrait," she cried, holding it out to Marion. "A wonderful face, isn't it—the face of a genius—he was a genius—if he had lived, the world would have known him for what he was."

Marion looked at it in silence. It was indeed a wild, thrilling, inspired, wonderful face.

"And this was my husband," Mrs. Glenrose said, picking up another picture and holding it out to Marion. "You see he was handsome and fine and noble-looking—wasn't he—but without fire—but he was noble—yes, he was noble."

A cry almost broke from Marion, but she suppressed it with an effort which cost her every bit of strength of brain and body. It was the picture of her father as a young man with his bride—the treasured picture which hung over her bed.

"Yes, he was noble," she repeated gently.

And without another word she handed it back.

So the little old lady in the Yorkshire hamlet at the back of beyond never knew that the friend who watched for two years over her welfare, visited her, sent her books, wrote to her, and bent over her when she was dying, was the daughter whom she had abandoned and whom she never wished to see.

THE DISTANT SCENE

IT was an April night in the Yorkshire village of S——. Bitter blew the wind. Old Jonathan Hunt got up from his bench where he had been putting the finishing touches to the back of a violin. He stared at it for a long time, and then nodded his head gravely.

"Yes," he said aloud, "it's the most beautiful back I have ever made. I have done nothing better than this. This fiddle will be my finest."

But for once the old fiddle-maker felt no thrill, no elation. For once no pride of skill, joy in creation, enthusiasm for art upheld him. Twenty-five years and more he had been sustained by the belief that he was working for the generations to come and making for himself a name which, obscure now, would perchance in later days be found in the glorious record of famous luthiers, side by side with Stradivarius, Guarnerius, Amati and all the other honoured dead. It was a large belief which obtruded itself on no one: for Hunt's dreamy, gentle, retiring nature could never have made an aggressive claim nor fought a hostile verdict. Yet its very secrecy fostered its growth.

And now it had failed him. When he laid aside the beautifully-modelled back, fashioned out of an amazingly fine bit of beechwood, his certainty of its perfection was suddenly devastated by indifference and doubt. The ground on which he had been standing securely for half a lifetime fell from under his feet.

What had he been doing all these years? Making fiddles which no one would ever play on. Striving to build up a name of which no one would hear. And even

supposing that by mere chance it would be heard of in the days to come—what then? How could that affect him—dead and gone? Why should people work for the future? Why should they fix their eyes on the distant scene, and suffer the real things of the present to steal past uncaptured, unheeded? That was what he had done. Fixed his eyes on the distant scene, pushed aside contemptuously all the joys of everyday life—comradeship, friendship, love. Sacrificed everything to an idea.

He glanced around at the fiddles lying on shelves, hanging from the old oak beam, cradled in cases, peopling his home, where there had been room for nothing else save these outward and visible signs of the Great Idea. They had been to him sweetheart, wife, children, grandchildren, friends. Dearly had he loved them. Great had been his pride in each one of them. Never had they failed him in their meaning and value—until now.

And why now? Was it that dream last night? Was it Nancy's voice calling to him out of the past? He heard it again. He heard her merry laugh and saw her bewitching young face, with its dancing eyes and teasing smile.

"Why, sure, Jonathan, ye've smartened yerself up mighty fine this May Day. Art going a-courting at last?"

"Aye, aye, Nancy," he answered. "I be come to court ye, Nancy Elsden. You be the only woman for me in this world."

"Then why didn't ye say that before, lad?" she said. "Many's the chance I've given ye, Jonathan lad, till maid's pride forbade me further. And now it be too late. I be promised to Harry Alcock over to Skipton. A good boy, and one that knows his own mind."

"Too late!" he cried. "No, no, Nance—don't say it be too late!"

"Too late," she repeated softly and still more softly, until her voice had died into silence, and the radiant vision of her grew dimmer, lingered tremulously, faded reluctantly—and was gone from his dream without a trace. But not gone from his life. For he heard her now, saw her

now, fifty years of time receding and making way for the past.

And a sudden longing seized him to see once more the home where Nance was reared, that distant, isolated farmhouse which had stood defying the winds and storms of the wild upland for two hundred years and more. As boy, as lad, as young fellow, he had been there many a time, and he knew the path over the moors well, though it was long ago since he had trodden it. He could almost count the times he had passed that way since Nance had told him that he had come too late to court her—too late—too late.

He smiled, wondering at himself. His noble face lit up with a tender radiance.

"An old man impelled by a memory," he murmured.

It was a strange thing to want to do. Yet at the moment he wanted to do it above everything else in life. Late though the hour and dim the fading light, go he must and would, over the west moor, down into the dale, through the little remote village with its many ancient bridges, with the long winding dene ribboned with its silver stream, and then up again on the heights, and so on and on over the moorland until he reached Nance's home.

He locked the workshop door, and as he was turning away, the sound of something falling arrested him. He opened the door and found that one of the fiddles hanging on the wall had broken from its string and crashed to the ground. He glanced at it as one having no concern in its fate, and let it lie there, hurt or unhurt. Yet a few hours earlier he would have handled and tended it as lovingly and anxiously as a mother her sick child. But now his one pervading idea was to seek the moors; and he shut up the room again and hurried away.

The desolation of abandonment settled on the workshop, where the fiddle-maker had toiled so many years with an enthusiasm which had never faltered and a rare skill mellowing to perfection. It seemed like a deserted temple from which the presiding deity had been visibly and invisibly withdrawn.

The master had gone. The informing spirit had fled. The place was dead.

The old man passed up the village, turned off into the Roman Road, and thence gained the moorland. The wind blew; cold and tempestuous clouds were racing over the fells in reckless rivalry. A storm was brewing, but the fiddle-maker took no heed of its warnings. His mind was intent on reaching the gaol for which he had set out; and wind, rain, snow, hail, thunder, lightning could not have deterred him that evening: for he was under a spell, caught in a net, held in a bondage.

Only of Nance did he think as he passed over the same ground he had trodden many a time on his way to her home.

"Aye, lad, but you're clean daft over yon fiddles of your'n," he heard her saying. "Dead bits of fuel, I call they. Here, Jonathan, spare me one or two of them. Logs be scarce up at ours, and I be sick and weary of the smell of peat. Come now—this crazy-looking one, Jonathan. Doan't be a-telling me that anyone could bring a sweet sound out of yon crazy affair. But on a fire 'twould make a lovely crackle. Now don't ye refuse."

He laughed at the memory. Never had he taken offence when Nance teased him. No one had known—he had scarcely known himself, dreamy, far-away spirit that he was—that he had dearly loved her teasing.

"Well, well, lad," he heard her saying, "and so that be a thing you call a scroll. I calls it just a peg, a plain peg, Jonathan. And it be a plain peg I'm a-wantin' to hang my grand new dress on which Auntie Sally gave me to Christmas. What? Ye'll not give it me? Fie, fie, curmudgeon!"

But though she had teased him well, she believed in him, and had ever defended him staunchly when others laughed at him and thought he was a fool for putting all his spare time from cabinet-making into the fashioning of fiddles.

"Leave the lad alone, Tom Sears," he heard her saying. "Jonathan's got something in him you hasn't got and I hasn't got, nor no one else in this village. He'll be having a gran' name of his own some day when you and I be forgotten."

Once she had even brought him a bit of wood, part of

a worm-eaten old oaken beam from one of the ancient barns belonging to her own farm home.

"Look what I've brought ye, Jonathan," he heard her saying triumphantly. "Ye can make a just lovely fiddle out of this rubbage. Now, don't ye go putting on any of those airs of your'n. Don't ye be a-telling me 'tis no use."

"It *is* no use," he had said contemptuously. "Oak be no good for fiddles."

"Curmudgeon, curmudgeon, curmudgeon!" he heard her calling out as she ran off, and laughing light-heartedly as alone Nance could laugh.

Fifty years ago—and the laughter that was only hers ringing clear and fresh across the moors—and the belief that was alone hers stealing out of the past to support the falling structure of his own.

The storm broke loose and raged around him. Battling with wind and rain, and baffled in the darkness, he lost his way, and wandered dazed and bewildered over the moors, as many another has wandered and perished on those wild and lonely heights sucked in by the treacherous bog. But no such sad fate awaited the fiddle-maker. He stumbled across a cattle-barn, one of the many scattered about the uplands; and there he took shelter and waited for the tempest to die down and the darkness to fade into the dawn. And even there, thoughts and memories of Nance encompassed him. It was as though she had cast a protecting mantle over him and held him safe. Her belief in him began to wage silent battle with the paralysing indifference which had settled on his artist's soul. Over and over again he said aloud:

"Nance believed in me."

Then a very strange and wonderful thing happened.

The wind ceased suddenly, and strains of music reached him, faint at first, and then growing in tone and richness.

It was the voice of a violin. It held the fiddle-maker in an ecstasy of wonder and delight. Listlessness and gloom of spirit were dispelled as if by magic. The mysterious music thrilled through him, quickening his pulses, rousing in him renewed pride in the work of his hands, renewed

faith in the worth of his great idea, renewed hope that his days had not been vainly spent in striving to fashion sweet-toned instruments to carry messages of music into the world—music breaking in like radiant light on the darkness of the spirit, in the blackness of the night, in the desolation of lonely space, in the wilderness of life.

"Not in vain, not in vain!" he cried aloud.

And then, the first excitation of spirit over, he began to wonder where the music came from; and ghostly legends of the countryside which had borne no meaning to him, now crept into his remembrance. There was a story of lights seen at certain times in a lonely half-ruined house in a deserted hamlet, and of a fiddler making wild, tumultuous music or soft caressing melody. And here was the music —yes, and yonder were the lights. He must seek the fiddler out—earthly or unearthly, he must meet him face to face.

He started, guided by the light which shone afar bright and steady, and by the music which seemed to be filling the very universe. The way was long, but he felt neither fatigue nor doubt, and only knew that he must reach that beacon for which he was steering. But when at last he was near it, the light was extinguished and the violin hushed.

Was it true, then, that he had been listening to music not of this world—fleeting, elusive, inaudible at close range? He knew not nor cared. It was all one to him whether the marvellous player with the master touch were angel or devil or human being, if only he were able to recapture some of the entrancing strains which had lured him thither.

He waited with trembling eagerness. And suddenly a welcome sound of tuning reached him, and the light shone again, trebled in brightness. He saw then that he had wandered far away from Nance's home, and was outside the grim and ill-omened "Herders' Inn," an old house of call which had been shut up and deserted since a foul murder had been perpetrated there many years previously. Living apart from outside circumstances and wholly absorbed in his work, news had never reached

him that it had been opened again. But it was obviously tenanted now. The sign showed distinct and now, caught by a shaft of light from the illumination within. The beacon, then, was earthly, and the musician of divine powers, belonged to this world. The certainty brought a feeling of relief to the fiddle-maker, and an anticipation of joyous encounter.

He knocked. No one answered, and the tuning went on apace, and was followed by wild arpeggios and dashings up and down the finger-board which made his very heart stand still from wonder and expectancy. And what a tone! God, God, what a tone! As he stood waiting on the threshold, he said to himself, with an intensity of passionate fervour, that if he could make a fiddle to sing with that rich, soft, permeating mellowness of tone, he would die a thousand deaths, make any and every sacrifice, pass through any suffering of body or soul.

He knocked once more, louder this time, and after a pause, which seemed to him centuries, the door was opened on the chain, and a man's voice said:

"Who is it? What do you want?"

"I am a lover of music," was the answer. "I have been wandering over the moors and lost my way in the storm. I heard wonderful music which guided me here."

The chain was dropped and the door opened wide. The light revealed a man, short and slight, with bushy hair and rather wild in appearance, but of friendliest, kindliest countenance. His violin was tucked under his left arm.

"Come in, come in," he said gaily, "whoever you are, come in. But if you are a lover of music, you're doubly welcome."

He glanced at the old man's fine face, caught the keenness and vision in his eyes, and, artist as he was, sensitive in all his fibres, knew instinctively that he had before him someone who counted.

"You're drenched through and through!" he said, with impulsive concern. "Never mind. I'll put you right. Slip off your coat and slip into my overcoat—here it is. And come into the kitchen. I've just piled on some more

logs, and I'll give you a hot drink of coffee. Then you won't take any harm from the storm."

Jonathan Hunt smiled his thanks to his new friend, followed him into the kitchen, and sank down gratefully into the lang settle. The fire was burning merrily, the kettle was already boiling industriously, and a coffee-pot was warming on the hob—signs of cheer and comfort which heartened the tired old man now come into a haven. He glanced around with quiet content, saw that the violin-player had placed his fiddle on the window-sill, and that his bow was lying on the dresser, and that he had rigged up a desk on the kitchen table with books and a pastry-board, and scattered his music on the floor in happy disorder. He had evidently been spreading himself in that kitchen and reigning supreme. And meanwhile he flitted about joyously, making preparations to entertain his unknown guest. All his quick movements were graceful and easy. Kettle, coffee-pot, cups, saucers, milk-jug, cheese and bread floated in the air as consecutively as the notes of a glissando passage, melting imperceptibly one into the other. Only when he was satisfied that he had done everything to make the old man comfortable and warm, did he seize his fiddle and tune up afresh. He nodded at him, a most winning smile on his face and in his manner all the charm of a gracious personality.

"I couldn't sleep to-night," he said. "I went to bed at the same time as the old people of the house. I tossed and tossed, and then came down, and have been fiddling away like one possessed. In a mood for it, you know. Worked up by the storm, I suppose. Restless and excited, as one is when there is a huge, enthusiastic audience hanging on one's every note."

"I thought at first you were a spirit," the fiddle-maker said in a low voice. "You may perhaps know of the legend of the fiddler heard sometimes at night in these parts, and of lights seen in a lonely house. When the music ceased and the light went out, I believed the legend was true."

"Well, it may be true," the violin player said. "Why not? But in my case, I was suddenly seized with remorse

lest I should be disturbing the old couple who keep this inn. And so I put down my fiddle and blew out the lamp. But I'd no sooner done that when I felt that even if I frightened them out of their wits, I should have to go on all the same. Mercifully, they are as deaf as posts. But anyway, I couldn't stop. So I lit up trebly and tuned up again! I think the loneliness and weirdness of the place seized hold of me. I couldn't have borne it without my fiddle. But directly the fiddle shared it with me, then things began to happen to me—big things, huge things."

"Born of loneliness," the old man murmured. "They can only happen in loneliness and through distress of spirit."

"Ah, you, too, know that," the violin player cried eagerly; and he glanced at the fiddle-maker as if he half wished to question him about himself. But the impulse died, and his thoughts returned to his own mentality.

"Yes," he said, his eyes flashing with excitement, "big things, huge things happened to me. I tell you, that to-night I have soared to heights I have never reached before. Because of to-night I pass to a higher plane—I know it, I feel it—and the world will know it, too."

He raised his bow arm, held it suspended for one moment in the air, stared at the old man with eyes that saw not, struck a few full-toned chords, and began.

How long did he play? What did he play? Who was he? Was it a man playing, a soul throbbing? What did it matter? All that the fiddle-maker knew, was that heaven and earth passed away. Nothing survived except a world of sound. Out into the wild and stormy night music had sent her mystic message to him and guided him to the safety of her magic realms. And now she cast fresh spells about him and unveiled to him new visions of glorious fulfilment. Old memories, old regrets fled even as ghosts fading before the break of dawn. Nance vanished last of all, but left her laughter and her belief interwoven with the harmonies and the echo of her words: *"A gran' name—a gran' name when you and I be forgotten."*

The last lingering notes died into silence. The fiddle-

maker sprang up, his face aglow, his trembling arms stretched out before him.

"Ah!" he cried, "that is what I have striven for all my life—to make instruments with voices fit and worthy to speak the divine language of music. The goal may have been distant, and distant it may remain, but I have never lost sight of it until to-night, and to-night I have found it again—helped by an old memory—yes, helped by an old memory—found it again for evermore."

"A maker of instruments?" the violin player exclaimed, clutching at his arm in his intensity. "Ah, I knew you were a poet. When I opened the door to you, instinct told me that you were a poet of some kind, someone that knew the heart of hidden things. Then you have been the vast audience, invisible, pressing round me, lifting me, inspiring me so that I have been able to pour out all the best in my soul and nature. A maker of instruments. Well, well, we are in very truth comrades. Here, my friend, take this violin and look at it well. A beauty, isn't it? You've heard its voice; now observe its faultless curves. Did you ever see a more lovely back? What do you think of the noble scroll? No, no, don't ask if it is a Stradivarius or a Guarnerius or an Amati, or any of those wonderful old artists of the past. It is the work of someone unknown to fame now, but destined to be honoured in the years to come. Of that I am absolutely sure. I'd stake my reputation on this belief. I prize this violin above all others. I adore it. It is part of me. With it I have spoken to thousands in many countries—moved thousands. I owe it untold gratitude. Here, take it in your hands and see for yourself."

The fiddle-maker took it, turned it over—knew it.

"My God! My God!" he said, almost in a whisper. "*It is mine!*"

He clasped it to his breast. His head bent over it.

The violin player, famous in many lands, turned aside in reverent understanding.

THE MESSAGE

I

IT was on a February morning, 1918, that Helen Cresswell, a learned lecturer well known in educational circles, was interrupted in her library whilst she was deeply immersed in the preparation of an address on "The Springs of Romance in the Literature of Europe." The maid, with obvious reluctance and definite doubts as to her reception, brought in a card.

"I had to bring it," she explained. "The lady wouldn't take any refusal. She sat down on the hall chair, opened her little dispatch case and made herself at home, and said she'd wait till you were free. When I told her you were busy with your books in your library and mustn't be disturbed, she only laughed and said books didn't matter and she'd got to see you."

Helen Cresswell frowned and looked as if she could have annihilated both Doris and the insistent stranger on the hall chair; for she considered that she was in the midst of a most eloquent and original summing up of Elizabethan influence on literature, and it was aggravating beyond words to be put off it. She glanced impatiently at the card, which was marked *Urgent*. It bore the words, "Gertrude Linton, *Friends' Society for Relief of War Victims. Dutch Red Cross. Member of British Committee for Repatriation of British Wounded, etc.*"

Her expression changed, and also her attitude of mind.

"I can well imagine that engaged on such work, she would think books don't matter," she said half to herself. "They don't. Ask her in at once, Doris."

A bright, engaging woman of about thirty-six years stepped into the room and seemed to bring sunshine and good cheer and dash, and all those electric attributes which go to make that magic quality called resilience.

"Miss Cresswell," she began, without any preliminaries, "I come on a rather curious mission on behalf of a German woman."

Miss Cresswell's face fell. She stiffened up at once and succeeded in looking the picture of implacable hostility.

"I don't think I want to hear anything about German women," she said severely, but not disagreeably. There was something about her visitor's presence which dispelled any real inclination to truculence.

"No, I don't suppose you do," said Gertrude Linton, smiling. "Not one of us does, if it comes to that. I'm sure I don't. So please don't imagine I'm a pro-German. I'm nothing of the kind. I'm entirely British—by birth and sentiment. Disgustingly so, I think sometimes. I wonder whether it is an incurable illness. I suppose it is."

Miss Cresswell laughed softly.

"I don't know," she said. "Anyway, it will take a long time to cure. Well, tell me about your German woman. I had hoped when I glanced at your card, that you had come on behalf of one of our wounded soldiers."

"She isn't my German woman," returned the other gaily. "I won't have her at any price. She is yours—yours entirely. And I *have* come on behalf of one of our soldiers—one of our wounded boys repatriated from prison in Germany. He entrusted me with a message from your old school friend *Leonora von Blumenstein-Erzbach*."

"Leonora!" exclaimed Miss Cresswell, her face lighting up at the sound of that name. "Tell me what you know of her. I have longed for news of her through all these dreadful years, though I have tried to put the thought of her from my mind as of one with whom I'd no more concern."

"I can only tell you what I have learnt from Private Jenkins," Gertrude Linton said. "I have been stationed at Rosendaal, the Dutch frontier, meeting the exchanged wounded prisoners from the German Red Cross trains; and Private Jenkins was one of them. And in this particu-

lar instance I was in charge of him and several others on the boat home. I wish you could have seen the look of wonder and happiness on their faces as we neared shore. It was unforgettable."

She paused a moment as the memory of the scene held her.

Then she went on:

"Private Jenkins had been very badly wounded and gassed, and had been a long time in hospital in Germany. Your friend was one of the nurses there. You know you cannot get many details out of them about their experiences either at the Front or in the German prison camps and hospitals. But I gathered that, as far as she could, your friend with the awful name—which I should tell you nearly did for his poor brain—had been very kind to him, and he had promised to try and deliver a message to you. It was troubling him very greatly, and he was awfully relieved to get it off his chest. The message was that her son Berthold had died and was buried at Vimy. She would probably never know nor see his resting-place, she said. But if by chance you went there when the war was over, she begged you to try and find his grave and kneel beside it for the sake of old times. She thought you could not refuse, because of all the fun and laughter and happiness you had had together as young girls and young women."

"Yes, yes, we had great fun together," Miss Cresswell murmured—"happy, happy times."

"I suppose she had pitched on Private Jenkins because he was one of the best hearted—and that's saying a good deal, you know," continued Gertrude Linton. "And also he had come from Oxfordshire, where she had often stayed at Wroxton, not far from his native village, H——. But he was not highly endowed with brains; and it must have been a tremendous mental effort to him to remember all the details of her message. I wish you could have heard him telling it all to me. I half laughed and half cried because it was really so comic and so pathetic. He was so anxious and conscientious about it. He said:

"'And she kep' on saying, she did, that yon English

friend of hers couldn't say no, not she, them being kiddies together in the parst and them laughing and skylarking same as all kiddies do. I got that right enough. But her name did me in, it fair did, until one of the chaps told me to remember something about *bloomin' stone hurt yer back.* Near enough, too. Her son's name was easy—Berthold. For you see I've got a brother Bert, twelve years old come Michaelmas, and I kep' on saying: 'Bert ain't old—Bert getting old—Bert old—see?' So you see, Miss Cresswell, Private Jenkins tried his very best to be a scholar in order to do a good turn to the enemy."

She took from her letter case a dirty and crumpled piece of paper and handed it to Miss Cresswell with a marked reluctance.

"I hate parting from it," she said, "but of course it is yours. You see Tommy has written down, to the best of his ability, the German names, and your name and address, and a few particulars about the probable situation of the grave. Did you ever see such a wonderful document? Well, I give it up to you. I shall never forget his look of relief when he shed his responsibility! But he was quite firm and fierce with me, and made me swear to play the game, find you out, dead or alive, and let him know I had not failed him. So to-day I shall send him a line to his home; and then his mind will be at rest."

Helen Cresswell was deeply moved by the story. All her sternness had gone.

"I shall go and see Private Jenkins," she said. "It is the least I can do."

"That would be ripping of you," Gertrude Linton said, hugely delighted. "He is, or was, a farm labourer at H——, near Banbury. He won't do much farm work again, poor boy, and not much thatching either, at which he was an expert, so he told me with pride. But you'll find him cheery and uncomplaining and unbitter—a lesson to me and you and everyone—like they all are. And now I'll be off, having discharged my errand and disturbed you long enough from your books."

But Miss Cresswell would not let her go; and for a long time Gertrude Linton lingered and told her eager listener

something about her life in Holland and the scenes at the Dutch frontiers, stories grave and gay of refugees and interned soldiers and escaped prisoners and spies, and pitiful tales of our repatriated wounded.

And when at last she took her leave, dull and unprofitable seemed Miss Cresswell's books to her, flat and uninteresting her carefully prepared lecture on the Springs of Romance in the Literature of Europe. Living facts had entered the study and driven out literature.

She sat thinking of the scenes which had been conjured up for her, and of Private Jenkins and his intellectual feat undertaken on behalf of the enemy, and of Leonora, friend of her childhood and girlhood, with whom she had never lost touch until a few years before the war. All the memories of happy companionship came back to Helen Cresswell. She saw Leonora as she knew her first, at the Hohe Schule in Dresden, fat and flabby, with coils of splendid fair hair and a tremendous appetite for nut tarts, and an easy good nature which survived all attacks of chaff and teasing. She recalled all their fun and mischief, all their confidences, flirtations and rivalries.

Almost she heard her saying:

"Na, na, Helen, I give you the geography master for a *Schwärmerei*. He is too ugly for me, but he's good enough for a pig of an English girl! Take him!"

A thousand wars could not blot out those memories. She smiled and held out her hands to the past.

II

A FEW days afterwards Miss Cresswell journeyed to Banbury, and thence took a trap which landed her at the tiny hamlet of H——. She made inquiries at the one shop of this metropolis, and learnt that Private Jenkins's home was but a step away, the last cottage "down-street" on the left, with the fresh patch on the thatch, and a queer little window at the top, like an eyebrow presiding over half an eye. Here she found him, disabled of one arm and one leg, and still suffering from the effects of gas, and very frail-looking, thin and worn, but extraordinarily cheerful

in spite of all he had gone through, and with no trace of bitterness or anger in his heart. On the contrary, he thought himself very lucky to be in his own surroundings again, and only said he didn't want to go to that 'ere France or that 'ere Germany again. H—— was a good enough place for him.

"You know where you are here," he said quaintly.

Like many another soldier, he had nothing to say about his experiences. He was just one of the many thousands of lads caught in a net, and caring for and understanding nothing of the purpose for which they were caught, in spite of all the grandiose newspaper talk about enthusiasm and patriotism and noble idealism. Miss Cresswell could not get much information from him either about her old friend or about conditions in a German prison hospital.

"It might have been worse," he said. "It were all right."

"And was she really good to you, Private Jenkins?" asked Miss Cresswell eagerly.

"She were all right," he nodded. "Her did what her could."

But by patience and perseverance and Woodbines she managed to drag a few details out of him. She was fat. Miss Cresswell laughed at that. She spoke English same as he did, but thick like. She was fond of her son same as his mother was of him. She was always a-grieving over him and looking at a photo of his bullet head same as all the Fritzes had.

"I was fair sorry for she," he concluded. "I thought it were just like my old mother a-grieving over my corpse, and so I promised she I'd take her message."

That was all. But there was no mistaking his satisfaction in knowing that the message over which he had expended so much trouble and brain power, had reached the right quarter. As far as Miss Cresswell could make out, it had been a source of more anxiety to him than all the bombs at the front.

"It were the name what did me in," he repeated several times. "But I went on, dogged like, same as if we was trying for a trench—see?"

And then, half shyly, half brusquely, as if no doubt fearing to appear silly and sentimental, Private Jenkins said :

" Perhaps one day, when this 'ere war is over, you'll be doing what that German female wanted. I should if I was you. Poor old Fritz, you know, he can't help hisself any more nor we could."

She promised him that if ever a chance arose for her to see the battlefields, she would not forget that Berthold von Blumenstein-Erzbach lay buried at Vimy.

Private Jenkins nodded. He was satisfied that he had done his bit in more ways than one, and that now he was free to forget all these tiresome and unnecessary happenings in the great world outside H——. Now, with easy conscience, he could concentrate on the things which really mattered in everyday life, the importances and events of the countryside where he had been born and reared, and to which he had returned, in more or less exactly the same mental condition in which he had left it three years previously—the story of thousands of our boys taken from these tiny hamlets throughout the length and breadth of England.

Yet there was a difference. Miss Cresswell extracted from him that before he went to France, he'd never given much thought to or wanted to possess one of those ugly white-faced Herefordshire Cows which are a familiar feature in the Oxfordshire pastures. But it appears that they had haunted him in his dreams in his prison hospital. He did not put the idea into so many words, of course; but they had evidently conjured up to him the thatched cottage with its eyebrow window, peaceful scenes, winding lanes, green fields, cornfields, the upturned brown earth, the barns and stacks and all the things which spelt home. But now he rather thought he'd like a cow, one of these days, when he was better. Bert could milk her, and perhaps he could manage to tumble along and " mind " her. It was his only ambition, dimly visualised and barely breathed. But Miss Cresswell resolved then and there that it should be materialised. And it was Bert himself and Miss Cresswell herself who drove White Face home from Banbury cattle market one Thursday afternoon.

" Well, I never," said his mother, as she contemplated

the cow. "Bob must have been a-doing something after all in that 'ere France where the war's going on what they speak so much on."

Jenkins's war record did not make him half such a hero in the village as the unexpected gift of that Herefordshire cow.

III

THE war had ended, and the armistice was some four months old. Helen Cresswell was wandering about alone amidst the desolation of the plains of Vimy.

She had been unable to keep up with the other members of the party, who, under the charge of two French officers, were making at a breakneck speed for Vimy Ridge. She had tried; but realising the impossibility, she gradually fell back, until her comrades became distant dots on the landscape, and then were lost to sight. She regretted that she would have to miss the military lecture arranged for this company of twenty Englishwomen, who in those early days of the armistice had been invited by the Mayor of Lille to visit the Devastated Areas, see for themselves the piteous plight of Northern France, and go home and tell the story so vaguely realised then—and now.

But after a spell of disappointment, she began to be glad, both physically and spiritually, and thankful to be alone, alone on the scene of tragic happenings, alone in the silence and desolation, to think of the courage and endurance of the men who had laid down their lives there, alone to sift out the bewildering emotions and impressions of these amazing two weeks in which she had seen miles and miles of devastated land, countless ruined and obliterated towns and villages and wrecked homes, and those deliberately destroyed factories—sights inconceivable, unbelievable, unless seen by one's own eyes.

There was no sign of animal life, no sound of human life, no music or stir of bird life. All round her stretched a seemingly unending expanse of trenches and dug-outs, shell holes, some of them full of water, barkless, bleached tree-trunks twisted like writhing ghosts, masses of rusted

barbed wire ramping like dead bracken on the ground, and debris of all kinds.

But Nature was beginning to cover up, with her carpet of green, the hideous ravages of war. She was fringing the grim shell-holes with a delicate greenery; she was creeping stealthily round the trenches; she was bidding the violets and wood anemones to spring up here and there amongst the dead trees and blackened bushes, as if to proclaim a message of hope.

Miss Cresswell wandered about for a long time, intending to find her way back to the main road where the military motor lorry and Corporal Dobson, the driver, cheeriest and friendliest of souls, and his mate, would be waiting for them somewhere near the great cross to the memory of the Canadians who fell at Vimy in April, 1917. But she missed the trail, and only lit on the main road after much searching. There she sat down on a heap of scrap iron, cleaned her boots, which were caked with mud, and collected her senses. There was no trace of the lorry, no trace of anyone.

She supposed something would happen eventually. Corporal Dobson would be sure to come along. He had driven the party for so many miles, that he had learnt to look upon them as his special charges, who had come to France at his personal invitation. He had been all through the war without a scratch except from a sardine tin, so he said, and since the armistice he had been hauling coal—a job he did not care about. He was exceedingly pleased to have been told off to haul his country-women, and he spared no pains to do all he could for them. Yes, Miss Cresswell felt certain he would turn up; but she thought vaguely that if nothing did happen, she would go in pursuit of him. Meantime she would remain on that scrap iron and await developments.

And as she rested, scenes and memories of our own peaceful, untouched countryside rose before her as if in contrast to this stricken land. Her thoughts wandered to Private Jenkins's picturesque little village, with its fields and pastures and winding lanes, and thatched cottages, and trees and hedges, and cows strolling leisurely along the by-roads, munching as they went. She smiled

in thankfulness, and then visioned to herself White Face swishing her tail and munching whilst Private Jenkins "minded" her on her daily promenades.

Suddenly she looked across to the other side of the road and saw what appeared to be a little group of graves. She went there, and found an enclosure with about six or seven mounds with wooden crosses. To her surprise she discovered they were German graves. She scanned the names well to see if by any chance she could find that of Berthold von Blumenstein-Erzbach. There was no such name, and no cross carved with an edelweiss answering to the description furnished her by Private Jenkins.

She took from her pocket-book the paper with the details of the position of the grave, but could make nothing of it. She was still studying it hopelessly when the cheery voice of Corporal Dobson called out:

"Just spotted you. My mate and me was beginning to think we'd lost you all. The old bus is waiting about a quarter of a mile further down. That's where we'd reckoned you'd all come out. But I thought I'd better take a stroll round and see. Are the others coming along?"

"That's more than I know, Corporal Dobson," Miss Cresswell said. "I can only tell you with shame that I couldn't keep up with them. So I've wandered about alone."

"A good thing you didn't stick in the mud or fall into a shell hole," he said with a friendly grin. "And a pity you didn't get to the Ridge. But I don't think much of them two Frenchies. They wouldn't be telling you nothing what I couldn't have told you twice over and in a tick, as it were. You come along with me, and I'll show you a thing or two. See here, this German helmet. You can have it, if you want it. Lots of things round here belonging to old Fritz. Fritz was here a long time, you know, and made hisself jolly comfortable in some of the best dug-outs I've seen. I'll show you a good few of them further down, and dozens more of them little cemeteries. They're all Fritz's graves. Yes, Fritz made hisself at home here, and buried hisself, too. I've been looking at one or two of them, and sort of tidying them up a bit. Had to do it, you know, for it's my job in Blighty, and

mighty glad I'll be to get back to it when I'm demobbed."

"Corporal Dobson," Miss Cresswell said impulsively, "I wonder whether you would help me to look for a German grave—that of the son of my old school friend, who is buried at Vimy somewhere. I know, of course, there is not much chance of finding it, but I promised I would try if I could."

In a few words she confided to him the story of the message.

"Ay, ay," said Corporal Dobson. "And why not? Poor old Fritz couldn't help hisself any more nor we could."

"That's just what Private Jenkins said," put in Miss Cresswell, with a catch in her voice.

"Ay, ay, I bet he did," answered Corporal Dobson quietly. "Now let's have a look at that bit of paper, and we'll see if we can't find the spot."

"I, of course, can't make head or tail of the situation," said Miss Cresswell. "But you see the directions say it was near a dug-out, that there were seven graves in the enclosure, and that her boy's grave had a cross with an edelweiss flower carved on it."

"By some pal that was fond of him, I expect," nodded Corporal Dobson. "Well, this is the right-as-rain region, no doubt about that, but whether he's lying in one of those enclosures down yonder remains to be seen. Now you follow me, and we'll work down towards the old bus."

He looked up as he spoke, scanned the horizon, and lit a cigarette.

"Nobody in sight," he said, "nothing doing as I can see. Them two Frenchies are leading them a dance, I expect! You're well out of it, you know, and we've got time to do this German job for poor old Fritz's mother. If we find it, we'll tidy it up. And if we don't find it, you can't say as you've shirked, can you? Come on now, and mind how you step. This 'ere Vimy plateau aren't as good walking as Hyde Park."

They found the grave after toilsome searching, a searching which would have been an entirely hopeless task without Corporal Dobson's willing and patient help. From time

to time he consulted the paper, and furrowed his brow over the name which had been such a nightmare to Private Jenkins.

And at last they ran it to earth. The letters on the cross were faint, but still readable; and the wood had split across the heart of the edelweiss. But the edelweiss was there, and the letters were there, and there could be no mistaking the last resting-place of Leonora's son.

They tidied up the little enclosure with its seven graves. Helen Cresswell placed amidst them the wood anemones, those sweet harbingers of spring, which she had gathered in her wandering over Vimy plain; and Corporal Dobson nodded with professional approval when he had surveyed their work.

"It looks better," he said, thoughtfully. "It needed a bit of tidying up—same as the poor old world needs."

He turned away and again scanned the horizon in search of his missing flock, and then strolled down the road, softly whistling *The Little Grey Home in the West.*

But Miss Cresswell knelt down for a moment and closed her eyes.

What were the thoughts and hopes passing through her mind—hopes for the healing of the nations—for the tidying up of the world—hopes that all these young boys of all the countries had not died in vain, and that of their sacrifice would be born a new order in which war was a legend of barbaric times?

She rose, took out her Kodak, and photographed the enclosure, and was passing on her way to join Corporal Dobson when some idea flashed through her mind.

She returned to the graves, deciphered, as well as she could, the names on the other six crosses, and wrote them down.

"The other mothers," she murmured.

IV

THIS was part of the letter which Miss Cresswell received some weeks later. It came by way of Holland under cover to Gertrude Linton:

"I knew that meine geliebte Helen would not fail

me. My friends had said you would. They were with me when your letter came. I read it to them, every word, and showed them the seven photographs and the list of the six names for the other mothers. One of them was present. Her son was in Berthold's regiment. She had been one of the bitterest amongst us. But when she was going, she turned to us all and said:

"'Friends, listen, I take back every fierce word I have spoke against those pigs of Englishwomen.'

"And for myself, meine geliebte Helen, I am always your grateful and ach, ach, always your fat school friend, LEONORA VON BLUMENSTEIN-ERZBACH."

THE WOMAN PAVEMENT ARTIST

I

IT was twilight on a late autumn day, and Theodora Hearn sat in her little studio thinking things out. Money had ceased to come in, orders had ceased to flow. No one wanted her delicate and lovely pictures of old world gardens. No one wanted her illustrations to books. She had been given to understand that her style and treatment were out of date. Modernity had swept over her, swept past her, swept her away.

She was not in the least bitter about this misfortune: for she had a fine and generous understanding, and could see wide spaces everywhere. She knew her work was good; she knew it had certain qualities of distinction which her sternest critics had never denied her. But she recognised that the time for it was past; and if she had been a rich woman, she would have accepted the fact and gone on creating merely for the joy and rapture of creation, and with no further striving after recognition or remuneration.

But being poor, she had, whilst accepting failure in her own familiar genre, to devise a new departure which might ensure some measure of success. The increase in rent had to be met somehow if the home was to be saved. For herself it did not matter very much how or where she was housed; but it did matter enormously for Gwendolen—Gwendolen, fierce, proud, frail, and often ill, with literary gifts which had never found appreciation, yet were of unusual fineness, but too wayward and elusive to materialise into definite expression.

What was to be done? Dividends had dwindled or were

quiescent. Small incomes were more than halved, expenses more than doubled, and work was not forthcoming—the plight of thousands in this year of grace, 1921.

Theodora sat by the empty anthracite stove, and half laughed to herself that she should draw up her chair to this husk of former warmth.

"Imagination does a great deal," she said. "If I see the red glow of a fire with my mind's eye, I may feel the comforting heat in my brain and body."

She thought and thought, but nothing came of her deep pondering. She could evolve no scheme that had any promise of success; and she ended by falling into a state of entire listlessness, when a curious thing happened. She chanced to turn round in the direction of her easel, and to her utter astonishment, it was shrouded in a veil of mist which parted as she looked, and which revealed, not her easel and the landscape at which she had been working, but instead, a blank wall, a pavement, and the figure of a woman who had drawn some pictures on the pavement, propped up others against the wall and was now busily engaged on a small painting. She sat on a camp stool and was supporting the block on her knees. A bowl for money reposed on her left-hand side.

So vivid was the scene, that Theodora called out:

"Please, do let me see your picture."

The woman looked up and smiled. She appeared to be on the point of holding out her picture for Theodora to see, when the mist crept back, obscured the scene and then dispersed; as on the mountain-side it steals over the villages, covers them from view a while and, passing away as though by magic, leaves them revealed once more in intimate detail. Even so Theodora saw again the easel and landscape, her palette and brushes and her portfolios in their accustomed places, clear, distinct, definite.

She had started up and stood riveted to the ground, her hands clasped over her head, her eyes fixed on the space covered but an instant before by the pavement vision. She breathed deeply as one does breathe in some great emotional excitation.

Where had she met that woman? Her features were

curiously familiar, and yet there were differentiations which destroyed their familiarity. Who was she? What was she? Was she a figment of Theodora's own brain, a projection of her own subconsciousness, a quickening of some forgotten experience? Or was she a direct messenger from the Unseen World, showing to her a path she might tread, revealing to her a possibility which would not have suggested itself in the ordinary circumstances of every-day life?

As far as Theodora remembered, a plan of this nature had never occurred to her when she was battling with her doubts and difficulties and disappointments, and turning over in her mind all the different ways and means within her reach of earning money. Schools she had thought of—private schools, art schools, designing furniture, fashion plates, advertisements for every conceivable thing—such as electric lamps, polish, sauces, whiskey, soap—work of any kind, no matter how uncongenial to her artist soul, to be done in the quiet and privacy of her studio, amidst her own surroundings, in her own atmosphere. But to exhibit her art on the pavement, to sit in public and draw pictures to tempt the passers-by: this scheme had never once to her knowledge intruded itself even on the outer threshold of thought.

She shrank from it now. She shuddered at the bare idea, and sought to banish it from her brain. She put on hat and coat, went out hurriedly to do some household shopping, called at a friend's house and took a hand at bridge. But the vision remained with her despite all her attempts to escape from its spell. And she brought it home with her, took it to bed, dreamed of it and awoke in the middle of the night murmuring:

"*Please let me see your picture.*"

She rose from her bed, dressed herself and stole noiselessly into her studio. Half in apprehension she glanced in the direction of her easel. It was there as usual, unconcealed by mist, usurped by no spirit picture. The lovely little woodland scene at which she was working, reposed in its own place, awaiting her touch; and palette and brushes were as she had left them when she fell into her

mood of despondency the previous afternoon and was seized with despairing doubt about the use of working and wasting precious money on paint and canvas for pictures which never sold. Yes, these definite, material objects were all there, inviting, challenging her. No vision there to be seen with the outer eye.

But with her mind's eye she saw it, clearer than ever.

Suddenly the tension of her spirit relaxed.

"But tell me, now, why shouldn't I become a street artist?" she asked aloud. "No one need know. Gwen need never know. No one's pride will be hurt except my own; and after a time even that will have lost its sensitiveness. Only the beginning will be the real penance. And if the money comes in, the sacrifice will be more than worth while, for Gwen's sake—more food, better food for Gwen, the increase in rent met and the home saved. Courage, Theodora."

She was blest with a resilient temperament, and almost at once the Dæmon of adventure seized hold of her, and she began to arrange the sort of pictures she ought to paint. She decided that for the pride of her position, she must disguise her own style. Even if she had not a large public for her pictures, she must pretend to herself that she had. She owed it to herself not to forget that her pictures had been hung several times in the Salon, and also that she had held her own exhibitions in the past. It was her duty to safeguard the pale ghost of success which had once hovered vaguely around her. Yes, she must certainly disguise her art, and, of course, herself.

She took out some crayons, and dashed off a study or two on the back of some old bits of cardboard. She became greatly amused and intrigued. And she smiled, chuckled, laughed and said aloud:

"And it will be a change, Theo, a change and an adventure, Theo. The deadliness of monotonous failure gone and past. A break in despairing respectability. There now, my masters—how about that? Is it commonplace enough and yet striking enough to arrest the passers-by?"

She tried first one subject and then another. She could not keep off the gardens; but the garden she finally evolved with puckering of the brow, could never have been mistaken for her own delicate studies, known and loved by the few. Once she got up impatiently, threw the boards from her and exclaimed truculently:

"No, I can't—I won't—the thing isn't possible."

But the next moment she penitently picked them up, and went on experimenting, with half a tear trickling down her cheek.

"Yes, I can do it," she said. "I can dash off some rough chalk sketches on the pavement, and I'll sit on a camp-stool like that woman in the vision, and paint in public some little things in a better style. And now, having learnt to disguise my art, I must learn to disguise myself. Yes, Theo, you must disguise yourself, whether you like it or not. You must have heavier eyebrows, a less aristocratic nose—what a shame—but it must be done—and some of the humour must come out of your mouth—yes, my dear, I insist on that—and you must manage to look pathetic and broken—even though you never will be broken and never will be pathetic. But if you don't manage to look the part, the experiment will fail. Come now, let's see what we can do. Where's that box of make-up from last year's pageant for the Endell Street Hospital?"

She rummaged in her cupboard for odds and ends, found it, established herself before a mirror, and began her work of disguise.

She gave herself heavier eyebrows, darkened the skin underneath her eyes, toned down the humour lurking about her charming mouth, and touched in on her cheeks clever lines which told of suffering of spirit and appealing pathos. When she had finished the details, she put aside paint and grease pot, and surveyed herself critically in the glass.

Yes, the disguise would stand scrutiny. Perhaps the pathos line must be a little deeper, and by hook or by crook the mouth must be made more stern and grim. The eyes were all right and stood out sad and piercing

from their darkened frames. The nose was the trouble. It still looked most annoyingly distinguished.

"If I could negotiate my aristocratic nose, the pride of the family since time immemorial, no one would recognise me. Even Gwen might look at me when I'm properly dressed for the part, and but for my nose, never know it was her own Theodora. But when I've disimproved my nose, I shall be quite safe."

All at once, as she stared at herself in the mirror, it was borne in on her that she had seen the face which now was hers—somewhere, sometime, where?—when? And in a flash of remembrance she knew. It was the face in the vision which had been strangely familiar to her, yet not recallable.

The face in the vision had been her own face, disguised as now.

Her arms fell to her sides. Her heart stood still. Was the pathway indicated by the vision not a mere suggested probability, then? Was it definitely the road she must take, willing or unwilling—a road marked out for her, inexorably destined for her, since she was that woman in the vision and that woman in the vision was she—one and the same. And was there not a gulf between the two conceptions—between the freedom of the one conception and the bondage of the second? With one, a choice, an idea, a sign-post; with the other a ruthless exaction, an enforced fulfilment of preordained fate.

Her gaiety fled, her eagerness for the adventure died. She sank into the chair and wept tearlessly, silently. She wept over the delicate and dainty little miniatures which no one wanted, the lovely gardens and old world cottages which failed to attract the new, garish rich; the quiet woodland scenes with clumps of primroses and carpets of bluebells which made no appeal to the eyes which had not yet learnt the beauty of Nature's poetry. She wept over her unfulfilled ambitions, her unsuccessful strivings. Why had she failed? Was it that she had not, in spite of all her agonising, agonised enough? Was it that she had not steeped herself enough in her art, had not sacrificed ruthlessly all the things which did

not matter, to the one thing which did matter? Not enough blood and tears—tears and blood, without which true art can never find true utterance?

For a long time Theodora lingered, mourning over lost opportunities, lost enthusiasms, endless non-fulfilments, poignant memories of faltering service at the altar of art, lapses from idealism, accesses of materialism, intervals of indifference and carelessness culminating in failure. It was herself and herself only she blamed. She believed that if she had been great enough, she could have conquered. In the acuteness of her unreasoning self-reproach, she forgot the changed and changing taste: the chasm between the world of to-day and that far-distant world of four or five years ago: the new tendencies and developments: the currents and cross-currents of the stupendous upheaval of social life. With humility of soul Theodora only remembered that of her fine and delicate gifts—she knew them to be fine and delicate—she had not made the most. It was better so; for this path of the spirit leads to no bitter waters. And sadness without bitterness can be a sacrament.

But comfort came to Theodora in her dark hour. The art she had loved and served more faithfully than she realised, stepped forth from its mysterious realm to help her. A new idea for a picture flashed across her mind, and she seized palette and brush and was caught in the joy and rapture of creation—creation after suffering unspeakable.

"If I have this for the secret recesses of my soul," she cried, "I can face that other life in the vision."

II

She faced it with a brave gaiety all her own. She sallied forth the next day and prospected, and finally settled on an appropriate hunting ground at the bottom of the Haymarket, where pavement artists appeared to be tolerated by the police. She visited several of her new fellow painters, observed closely their habits and methods

of proceeding, and watched their chances with the passing public. When she had taken soundings and felt ready to embark on her adventure, she invented the post of art teacher at a phantom school in remote Wimbledon, and had the hardihood to tell Gwendolen that she had been appointed to it, at a very modest salary, it is true, but at least regular and certain. She laughed secretly when Gwendolen, who was proud beyond all dreams of human pride, reproached her for letting herself down in this miserable fashion.

"You, a lovely artist, Theo, to become a hack teacher in a wretched little private school for tradesmen's children!" Gwen said, her eyes flashing fire with indignation. "It's unbearable—simply unbearable."

Theodora shrugged her shoulders good-naturedly.

"One must do something," she said. "One might do worse."

"But you can't teach," Gwen urged, "you never could."

"Oh, I think I can teach well enough for the tradesmen's children," answered Theodora, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Well, perhaps you can," said Gwendolen, placated by that thought. "But the post isn't worthy of you."

"I'm quite aware, darling, that nothing is worthy of me from your point of view or mine," laughed Theodora, giving her a hug. "But if pictures don't sell and no commissions for illustrations come in and dividends don't pay, where shall we be landed?"

"Better starve than lose one's pride and dignity," said Gwen grimly.

"But I don't want to starve," insisted Theodora cheerfully. "I want to eat and thrive and enjoy myself as much as I can, even in this upheaval."

"You've always been extraordinarily careless about pride," reprimanded Gwen; "Mother always said so."

"My child, that was years ago," put in Theo. "Years ago don't count now."

"They do with me," her sister said, "just as they ever did."

Theodora knew her words were true. All the more

reason, then, that the career she was entering on, and the disguise she was assuming should be placed beyond the pale of all recognition. For if Gwen considered that a school in Wimbledon was an insult to one's pride, what would she think of a pavement artist's pitch in the Haymarket ?

She could not help laughing, even though at the back of her brain lurked a frail ghost of uneasiness. But she chased it away when it worried her. Gwen's habits were sedentary, and she hated the London pavements and shunned the town; and it was not at all likely that she would ever light upon her sister in her new setting. Moreover, if an ill chance did bring her in the neighbourhood of the pitch, there really need be no undue alarm, since the disguise would be absolutely effectual now that she had found some means of treating her aristocratic nose.

" Hollow my cheeks, piercing my eyes," she reflected. " Gone my laughing mouth, gone the distinction of my wonderful nose, the pride of the family. All will be well."

Theodora took no one into her confidence except an old school friend whom she could absolutely trust and who had a photographic studio at the top of one of the buildings in a street off Piccadilly Circus. A key was given to her, and it was arranged between the two that she could make this retreat her headquarters, arrive at an early hour, complete her disguise on the spot, and keep all her paraphernalia of office at hand. The day came when Theodora, with beating heart, but well braced up for the adventure, emerged from headquarters, took up her position and began her new career.

She had remembered every detail of that vision which had prompted her to action, and she imitated the scene with faithful precision. She had prepared a few little ordinary pictures, suitable, so she thought, for the occasion, and these she placed against the wall, and in addition chalked a sunset, a moonlight sea scene, and a pot of geraniums on the pavement.

" Sunset and moonlight for the dreamers, and geranium

for the garish and smug," she thought with a laugh. "All tastes are provided for by Theodora."

She was unaware that her delicate touch had endowed even that pot of geraniums with the beauty of an idealism which ran the risk of not appealing to her pavement public.

She sat down on her camp stool and began to paint little landscapes about twelve inches square in size. She tried to become absorbed in her task and detached from the happenings of the outside world; yet, for all her efforts, she could not refrain from keeping one eye on the passers-by to see whether they were interested in her little exhibition and likely to drop any contribution into her bowl. She never knew how she endured the penance and suspense of the beginning of her enterprise. If she had not been engaged on a definite bit of painting, she could not have borne the misery of the position in which she had placed herself. More than once she felt almost compelled to scream, run away ingloriously and hide herself. But she controlled her nerves, calmed her beating heart, steadied her trembling hand, and bent ever more intently over the painting block. And gradually a strengthening courage rewarded her strivings.

"If I can stand this ordeal, I can stand anything," she thought. "So at least I am being disciplined for every trial that life has to offer to impoverished bread-winners."

Humour came to relieve the strain when a gigantic policeman, passing on his beat, deigned to pause and praise.

"Mighty pretty, Ma," he vouchsafed, nodding approval from his Olympian heights. "The best lot we've had on this pitch for a long time. Shouldn't mind buying the geranium pot myself."

A twinkle came into Theodora's eye. She thought she would have given worlds to see Gwen's expression of countenance on hearing these words of encouragement bestowed on her beloved sister by a member of the London police force.

At first the public only glanced and passed, and the

little bowl remained empty. But she had not to wait long before the tide turned. The passers-by lingered more frequently, and pennies were rattled into the bowl, and, by the sound, lighter coins sometimes. Theodora alternated her acknowledgments. Sometimes she said, "Thank you." At other times, "Very much obliged." Now and then she merely inclined her head gravely as if she were a disguised princess, or smiled her thanks with a radiant graciousness. On other occasions she bent more intently over her work, fearing that if she risked looking up, she would probably throw the bowl and all its contents at the last donor's head. From her calm impassiveness no one could have guessed the tumultuous emotions battling in her breast.

Workmen stopped and gave, fashionable clubmen, handsomely dressed women, showy shop girls, gay flappers, quiet, thoughtful people who stood arrested, glanced at the artist, went by, returned, and with apologetic wistfulness made an offering to the bowl. The lovely and unusual little pictures of gardens and cottages, woodland vistas and river reaches, appeared to appeal to everyone.

The remarks were interesting.

"My, isn't that cute," said an American woman.

"Priceless, aren't they," said a flapper.

"A bit of all right," said a workman.

"Very charming indeed," murmured a clubman, "very attractive."

"Delicious," said an elderly lady, stifled in furs.

"Jolly good," sang out a school-boy. "Top hole, I call them."

"Damned fine," nodded an electrician.

One old gentleman, who had merely bestowed a fleeting glance at the pictures, came back, lingered a long time, and finally put a Treasury note into the bowl. He coughed a little nervously and said:

"Pardon me, Madam. I know good work when I see it. Why are your paintings not in an exhibition gallery?"

"The upheaval, sir," Theodora answered simply.

"Ah yes, the upheaval, the great upheaval, to be sure," he replied gravely, raised his hat and walked slowly on.

He was obviously very disturbed. He never knew it, of course, but the raising of his hat nearly proved fatal to Theodora's fortitude. It was symbolic of respect and sympathetic understanding; and she had not bargained for those rare offerings when she schooled herself to keep her emotions in check. But she recovered her composure when another and more rough and ready client said:

"Look here, Ma, I'd just jolly well like to buy one or two of these little affairs. What's the tune?"

"The tune is two shillings," she answered, smiling at him almost gratefully for his brusqueness which brought healing to her.

"Well, I'll have the geranim pot and those blue flowers —bluebells, aren't they? My little girl thinks a deal of bluebells, and the Missus, she'll like the geranims," he said cheerfully. "You should do a lot of the geranim pots. They'd sell like hot cakes. And here's five bob, Ma, sixpence extra on each for good luck—see?"

He brought good luck, it would appear; and at the end of that first day Theodora had earned more money than during the last six months of her artist's life in the hallowed seclusion of her studio.

"If every day were to be like this one," she reflected, "Gwen and I would end in Carlton Terrace, which Heaven forbid."

Yet that night as she threw off a few geranium pots, there was no gaiety in her face, no gaiety in her heart.

III

But of course every day was not the same. There were many ups and downs, and sometimes one pitch was better than another: for she preferred to vary her hunting grounds. There were dull days when people were depressed and had no desire to look or give, and sunny days when their spirits rose, and hearts and purses were opened, and they gladly gave and bought. Except from actual experience, Theodora would not have believed that outside trade

could be so varyingly affected by the changing conditions of weather and street life. Rain, wind, frost, sun, accidents, fire alarm, congestion of traffic, important functions of the day and all sorts of unexpected occurrences either ministered to her service or else conspired against her success.

At least her new life was not dull. It afforded surprises which alternately depressed, stimulated and amused, and it gave opportunities for many fresh acquaintanceships with others of her calling. The wood carver, the organ grinders of many walks in life, the one-legged sailorman who sold toys of a nautical description, the old man who sold matches, the queer-looking artist who exhibited Japanese pictures—all these, to mention a few only, became known to her and formed part of her personal life. The violinist who played so charmingly on the curb, proved to be an old friend whose music she had often enjoyed in public and private. To him she surreptitiously presented herself, and all he said was :

" *Et tu, Brute.*"

But in his music he said more, and played to her one or two of the pieces which she had specially loved to hear him interpret in the prosperous past.

Then she had the unfailing entertainment of never knowing who might turn up at her pitch. As long as it was not Gwen, she was ready for anyone. Once an old school friend appeared on the scenes and gave her threepence. Once a former fiancé handed her three halfpence. He had always been on the mean side ; and that was why she had broken with him. She remembered saying :

" Cecil, if you're mean and cheeseparing as fiancé, I tremble to think what you'll be as husband. Now I've found this out, nothing will induce me to marry you. Good morning."

But now she nearly said :

" Thank you, Cecil, but aren't you being too generous ? Wouldn't one halfpenny be enough ? Good morning."

She longed to tell Gwen of this episode ; indeed she found that all her caution and self-control were needed to refrain from pouring out the whole story and the events

of each day. Sometimes she wondered whether Gwen knew without the telling; for the bond between the sisters was a close one, and their thoughts travelled to each other in easy transit of love and sympathetic understanding. But in this instance Theodora had deliberately constructed a formidable barrier which she hoped would serve; and she resisted all natural inclination to weaken it. Whatever happened, Gwen's pride, almost fierce in its intensity, must be respected and safeguarded; and Theodora could only hope that the dire secret would never leak out. But often she looked up, seized with sudden fear lest the dreaded moment of discovery had come at last.

As time went on and nothing of the sort transpired, Theodora gained confidence, all the more easily since Gwen's time and strength were taken up with a heavy bit of hack work for one of the publishers. So danger seemed at a safe distance. Theodora, particularly dashing and light-hearted one morning, took less care over her disguise, left her nose to shift for itself and even ventured on one of her favourite subjects for the benefit of the public—a sundial in an old garden, done in her own natural style.

But she had no sooner propped it up against the wall and settled down on her camp stool, when she had reason to regret her rashness. To her horror, Gwen came strolling along, glanced at the pictures, and then stopped suddenly in front of the sundial scene which evidently arrested her attention. Theodora's heart stood still as she bent more closely over her painting block.

"What a fool I've been," she thought. "She'll recognise the picture, and of course she'll recognise my nose—and then there will be a scene."

Her fear proved groundless. Gwen merely dropped some coppers in the bowl, and passed on her way exactly as all the others. When the danger was over, Theodora was able to breathe a sigh of relief and even to amuse herself over the humour of her sister's innocent contribution to the expenses of the household.

"Nevertheless," she said, "I must not take such risks again, and I shall not come to this pitch for a long time.

I don't believe she suspected anything; but I shall soon know from her manner this evening. Meantime, Theo, don't worry, but enjoy your good pitch while you've got it."

And as if to compensate her for her moment of anxiety, fortune smiled on her with especial favour that day, and sent her home with added plunder.

IV

THERE was no sign in Gwen's manner to show that she was harbouring even the faintest suspicion of Theodora's doings. On the contrary, she asked after the school and pupils in the usual way, and received the usual information that the work was more or less boring but bearable, and that the two girls who showed distinct promise were making quite miraculous progress.

Theodora had invented names for these budding geniuses; and Ethel Jones was supposed to have a special gift for heads, while Winifred Hardcastle's talent lay in the direction of landscapes. She mixed these phantoms up once or twice, it is true, but she believed they served her purpose in giving "local colour" to her phantom suburban school; and Gwen apparently accepted them as flesh and blood realities.

So Theodora went to bed tired, calm and content; but Gwen, tempted by the cheery fire which nowadays warmed the studio, decided to sit up an hour or two longer and make a beginning with an article for the Encyclopædia Britannica for which she had taken notes that morning in the reading room of the British Museum.

But she could not concentrate. Her mind travelled always to that woman pavement artist and that sundial picture. Of course sundials were very ordinary subjects. In the last number of *Country Life* which a friend had brought in, there were no less than three sundial pictures by different artists. She had thought they were not a

patch on Theo's work, and to make sure, she found the magazine and studied them well.

"Not a patch," she said.

Then she looked up.

"But that pavement picture was," she said.

She glared into space.

"It was every bit as good," she said slowly.

A strained expression came over her face.

"It was even like Theo's," she said still more slowly "It might have been Theo's."

She held her breath.

"Could it have been Theo's?" she asked herself in a whisper.

She sat back in her chair.

"Could the woman have been Theo?" she kept on saying. "Oh surely, surely not. Her pride would forbid, her sense of the fitness of things—surely, surely not—it was merely a coincidence—that's all—there could be nothing more than that in it—hundreds of people paint sundials—and yet . . . no, no—it isn't to be thought of for a moment."

But she did think of it, and though she tried hard to go on with her work, her thoughts wandered off always to that pavement artist, and could only be recalled with difficulty and even then not captured. At last, worn out with effort of will and vague yet encompassing anxiety, Gwen fell asleep.

When she awoke, she wondered at finding herself in the studio, and then remembered the circumstances of her extreme exhaustion of mind and body. The fire burnt low in the grate; the oil lamp was flickering out; the room was almost in darkness. But suddenly it seemed to her that a light broke across the wall nearest to Theo's easel. She started up in quick alarm and saw a mist creeping over the easel: saw it part slowly and disclose a blank wall, a stretch of pavement and the figure of a woman who had chalked some pictures on the stones, propped up others against the wall, and was now intent on a small painting which she was supporting on her knees.

So vivid was the scene that Gwen called aloud:

"Look up, look up, show me your face—who is it? Is it Theodora—no, it cannot be Theodora—I can't believe it."

But as the bent head was raising itself, the vision faded and merged into the mist which lingered for a moment and then dispersed, leaving all as before.

Gwen stood, as Theodora had stood, riveted to the ground, breathing deeply in great emotional excitation.

V

She went the next morning to the same spot at the bottom of the Haymarket where she had seen the woman pavement artist; but she found instead a man occupying the pitch. She saw bright-coloured pictures of robins picking up crumbs, and a barge with tan sails and a lighthouse shedding its radiance on the sea, and a sunset, the like of which Nature, capable of most things, could never have fashioned in her most wayward mood. Day after day she journeyed in that direction, but not a sign could she see of the woman artist. For Theodora never ventured now to her favourite ground, and was doing good business in other parts of London.

Once or twice the police had moved her on, on the occasion of Royal progresses and of a public funeral. Otherwise no one had interfered with her; and she pursued her new career with increasing confidence and enjoyment. She had been bored to extinction with failure and disappointment and the respectable dullness of a life in which nothing happened. Now at least she was not dull. The day was full of events; and she had the companionship of the world around her and was adding hourly to her knowledge of life and character. A score of times she said to herself that if she had been a writer, she could have garnered in material for many strange stories.

It was a poor day when she only amassed ten shillings, and occasionally she sometimes had commissions, chiefly

from Americans. She polished off these orders in the photographic studio of her ever faithful school friend, Chris, and eased her mind, too, by telling her experience to that devoted listener. If she had not had someone in whom to confide, she could never have sustained her reticence towards Gwen. Chris was her safety valve; but she often wondered how long she would be able to keep up the deception. More than once she thought Gwen looked at her a little queerly when she plunged into an ecstasy over her budding geniuses at the school.

"I don't think I believe much in your geniuses," Gwen said grimly.

"Don't you, dear?" laughed Theodora. "Well, you are not the first one who has disbelieved in geniuses."

But that was the only time when Gwen gave utterance to disturbing words; and Theodora had not the least idea of what was going on in her sister's mind, not the least suspicion that on the days when Gwen felt up to the effort of battling with the crowds in the London streets, she left her writing-desk and wandered about, searching now here, now there, for the woman pavement artist who had painted the little sundial picture, and who might perhaps prove to be Theo in disguise.

She knew that Theo did not go to Wimbledon. She had made inquiries and learnt that her sister had deceived her about the school which had no existence. But she went somewhere. Now where did she go, and what was she doing? What was it that necessitated a secrecy which had hitherto been unknown between herself and Theo? Her mind was in a turmoil; and she was riven by many conflicting emotions which would give her no peace until she had found out the truth.

But of one thing Gwen was certain, and that was Theodora's devotion. If Theo who, after all, cherished a deep sense of the dignity of art, were indeed that pavement artist, there could be no doubt that she had adopted this means of livelihood for her sister's sake only. And as this thought grew and blossomed into fairest flower, Gwen's pride died down and gave place to tender solicitude and added love.

If Theodora could have known of this change of outlook in the mind of the being whom she loved best in the world, she would only too gratefully have ended her deception and shared the secret with her sister. But though their spirits were knit together in closest bond, nothing of this knowledge reached Theodora, probably because she was so entirely taken up with her adventure and had no powers left over for scrutiny and observation during the few hours of her home life. She went confidently on her way, and ended by living in a fool's paradise of security.

She even ventured back to her former pastures at the bottom of the Haymarket, and did such good business there that she returned and decided to hold on until some crisis occurred, or the police ordered her off. Nothing untoward happened; the police were most friendly and indulgent, and the public were interested and generous. She became quite reckless about her disguise and the choice of her subjects. She neglected her nose, discarded geranium pots, robins and bunches of grapes, and went to work on her own natural lines, reproducing gardens and sundials, windmills and soft little woodland scenes to her heart's content.

And one morning she indulged herself by risking a preaching cross in a lovely little village which had been dear to Gwen and herself for many years.

But she had no sooner finished it and set it up against the wall, than she had good reason to regret her rashness. Immediately after she returned to her camp stool and began a new picture, Gwen arrived. She stood stock still before the tell-tale preaching cross.

"Ah, that settles it," Gwen said under her breath.

Aloud she said:

"I know that scene. I know it very well. It's Lethbridge, isn't it?"

Theodora did not look up, but nodded and mumbled: "Yes."

"Did you copy it from a picture," Gwen persisted, bent on making the pavement artist speak, "or have you been to Lethbridge?"

"I have been there, many years ago," faltered Theodora, in what she hoped was a disguise of voice.

"Yes, Theo," said Gwen quietly, "*with me.*"

Then Theodora looked up helplessly like any other criminal run to earth.

"I've suspected this for some time past," Gwen said. "I saw you here once before, Theo, and since then I've come back repeatedly to make sure, but never found you again. I've wandered far and wide in other directions looking for you. And this morning I've been walking up and down on the opposite side, watching you and studying your face. A very good disguise, dear, but your nose gives you away. You couldn't hide your nose—the family pride. And when I saw the Lethbridge preaching cross, I knew for certain that I had found my long-lost sister. You know, darling, I never believed in those budding geniuses in the school. But I will own that I did believe in the school until I learnt it didn't exist! Well, good-bye, Theo. I'll see you back from Wimbledon at the usual hour. Don't be late."

There was a twinkle in her eye which poor Theodora in her distress did not see, and a rallying tenderness in her voice which escaped her in her confusion.

"Gwen, don't go," she pleaded. "Say all you have to say to me and then forgive me. I did it for the best—indeed I did. Life has been so baffling lately, and I've been puzzled to death to know what to do. Nothing seemed to me to matter except to secure our home where we've been so happy and peaceful. And as for the secrecy—I've hated it. I only went on with it to save your pride—you will believe that, won't you?"

"You haven't saved my pride," Gwen answered in a low voice, and with eyes which had suddenly gone dim. "You've killed it."

"Killed it?" repeated Theo wonderingly.

"There's nothing left except larger love and deeper gratitude," Gwen whispered with a radiance on her face which carried its sure message to Theodora's heart.

"Oh, Gwen," she cried, "I feel years younger already!"

"Come home early from Wimbledon," her sister said, smiling half teasingly.

Then with an exquisite touch of humour she dropped some coppers in the bowl, and passed on her way.

THE LITTLE GREY HOME IN THE WEST"

MADAME TERESA ARNECLIFFE, a famous soprano, had been singing in Aberdeen, and on her way down from the north she broke her journey at Glasgow, for the purpose of visiting an old friend of her mother, who lay dying. She put up at the leading hotel, and contrary to her custom, took her dinner in the public dining-room, at a small table near one of the windows which looked out on to the street.

A barrel-organ was being played, much to her annoyance. She turned in her imperious way to the waiter.

" Have that noise stopped," she said. " Give the man a couple of shillings to go away."

But as she was fumbling for the money, the organ suddenly struck up with *'The Little Grey Home in the West.'*

Instinctively the waiter smiled at her, and she smiled in return.

" Very familiar music that," she said good-humouredly. " No, don't send the man away, waiter, but give him the two shillings."

But he did not dash off to do her bidding. Instead, he stood listening to the tune which called up memories of training camps, rest stations at the front, hospitals in France and at home. Battlefield scenes rose before him. Emotions, quiescent for many months, bestirred themselves afresh. In that brief moment the ex-Service man passed through the gamut of remembrance, and only recovered touch with the realities of the present when someone brushed past him rather roughly and roused him to the consciousness of being a waiter in an hotel, and no

longer Pte. A. Jefferson, 47th (2nd London), three times wounded, at Festubert, Vimy and Ypres.

He pulled himself together, flushed a little, as if embarrassed at having forgotten his duty of attending to the wishes of his client, and was about to murmur some sort of apology, when he saw that she was unaware of his continued presence. Her eyes were closed. She was drumming gently with her fingers on the table. Very tensely sympathetic looked her countenance.

She was thinking of the thousands of men to whom and with whom she had sung that song in the training camps and hospitals at home, in France, in the hospitals at the bases, in rest stations behind the firing line and farther.

Up and down the country she had travelled in England; and in France she had penetrated as far to the firing line as the military authorities would permit, chiefly as far as Poperinghe, Bailleul, Locre and St. Omer.

From the moment that war had been declared, she had consecrated her gifts to the amusement of the men, and thought herself blessed indeed in having something of definite service to contribute to the common cause. She threw aside all her imperiousness, all her spoilt ways, to which a *prima donna*, forgetful of her high calling, often succumbs, and rose up a workaday human being once more.

" To pretend to nurse, when I haven't a notion about illness, would be absurd," she had said. " But I can sing for the men. Wherever I am wanted, I will go—any distance."

When she first expounded this idea to a Brass Hat, he smiled indulgently.

" Dearest lady," he said, as if dismissing the playful idea.

" But don't you realise," she urged, " that the boys will need to be amused ? They will need entertainment when they are training, need it when they are resting, need it in hospital when they are suffering and recovering."

The Brass Hat shrugged his shoulders. If she had not been a celebrity, he would have been downright rude; but as she was herself, one of the best-known singers in the world, with a voice of finest, purest calibre, and a fame

which attracted vast audiences wherever she went, he had to content himself with polite discouragement only.

But in the end she conquered, and was one of the first to sing at the concerts organised by a famous and devoted actress for the troops in France. On that occasion and afterwards, at all times and in all places, the men had asked for '*The Little Grey Home in the West.*' They would never let her off until she had sung that song, and they had joined in the chorus: for it was her invariable habit to step forward and say:

"Chorus, gentlemen."

And now as she sat drumming on the table, visions rose before her. She saw the worn, tired men at the Front. She saw them in new khaki, old khaki, hospital blue. She saw the bandaged heads and limbs, and the boys who had lost an arm or a leg or both—and the blind. She was overwhelmed once more with the realisation of what these brave and heroically enduring men had passed through, for her sake, the sake of all. Their voices reached her. Every emotion which had ever beset her when she heard their voices singing with her, especially in hospital, now assailed her with the poignancy of memory. In those brief moments she lived those war years over again, and was one with those men in their tiredness, their sufferings—and their amazing cheerfulness. Almost she rose and said:

"Chorus, gentlemen."

When the waiter came back, he had learnt who she was. He was one of the thousands who had heard her, sung with her, been comforted by her music and refreshed by her inspiring presence. Here was his chance of thanking her, and he took it: for in the early days after the war, barriers were still levelled to the ground, and everyone was reachable without preliminaries.

He roused her from her reverie by placing her soup before her and pouring it out. And then he said quite simply:

"Madame, you used to come and sing to us in the war. I've so often heard you. Once in hospital in London when you came I had an awful hump—until you sang. And once in Poperinghe I was sort of done in and broken

up with three of my chums killed by my side at Messines, and had lost heart—until you sang. And there were other times. I want to thank you."

Her face lit up.

"And how am I going to thank you for all you did?" she said.

She held out her hand to him, and he took it with a dignity which was entirely unconscious. He and she were once again part and parcel of the great united army of the British Empire who had worked, suffered, fought, cared, despaired, hoped, triumphed together, upholding each other in the dark hours.

Later in the evening some friends called in to see Madame Arnecliffe. They were on their way to a large Labour meeting which was to take place in the Assembly Rooms. They suggested that if she were not too tired she should go with them.

"It is sure to be interesting and exciting," they said. "Probably very turbulent, as there is a great deal of anger and indignation with the Government, and things are in a very queer state here. The men are not only irritated with the Government, and their employers, but also with their own leaders and with each other. One group of men against the other, no one group studying any interests except its own. In fact, they are all horrid to each other—no kindness or charitable disposition of mind anywhere. But the meeting will be deeply interesting and instructive, too. Come along, Teresa. We'll see that you don't get too much hustled. And it will do you good to leave the realms of song and see what is going on at this moment in the workaday world. You might just as well come as sit alone in this boring hotel. At least you won't be bored at the Assembly Rooms."

They were old friends, knew and loved her, and had the right to tease her.

"Jolly good thing for you to drop being a platform princess for once, and form part of a perspiring crowd," they added.

She entered into the spirit of the thing, and allowed herself to be dashed off to the hall, which they found already packed. The atmosphere was highly charged with the electric currents of anger, opposition, hostility, rivalry and discontent. The men were angry with their trade union leaders. Engineers, joiners, riveters, moulders, blacksmiths, hand-platers, dockers, and indeed, representatives of all trades and callings on the Clyde were at loggerheads with each other. All were furious with the Government, and impatient with the findings of Government Commissions; and the whole assembly was united in its deadly hostility towards Capitalism. Pacifists, Bolsheviks, Imperialists, and Internationalists, Socialists, Liberals, Conservatives—all shades and opinions in politics and economics were to be found in that vast gathering of many thousands.

The chairman and speakers took their places on the platform. But he had scarcely finished the opening sentences of his address, when the trouble began. Interruptions came from all directions. At first he took no notice of them, but proceeded calmly as if he were talking to a sympathetic and an attentive audience. And perhaps, if he could have continued to keep his temper, he might have conquered the territory and held it in trust successfully for the speakers who were to come after him.

But James Overbury was by nature irritable and impatient: from a psychological point of view, entirely unfit to be a chairman at any meeting likely to be turbulent. He called:

"Turn those men out."

The stewards made dashes at the interrupters who were springing up everywhere. Resistance grew; and soon free fights were occurring in many parts of the hall. The chairman concluded his speech abruptly, and called on one of his colleagues to try the force of his personality: for he was a favourite amongst all sections of the industrial world. He made a valiant attempt, but was shouted down; and an ugly rush was started for the platform. The organ came to the rescue and pealed forth suddenly to drown the din.

It was then that an inspiration seized Madame Arnecliffe, who was deeply interested in and stirred by the tumult. Her principal thought as she sat amongst the audience was, that she was surrounded by the men who had fought in the war, hundreds of whom she must probably have faced when she sang to them at home and in France. How would it be if she faced them now? Could she weld them into harmony by the power of their memories, by the sound of her voice, by the force of her caring? For she did care. She had cared for them in war-time, and she cared for them in peace-time, and admired them with all her heart. Their courage, their endurance, their heroism, their cheerfulness, had eaten deep into her soul. She had learnt, from intercourse with them, lessons which she could never forget. She had learnt from the living how to live, from the suffering how to suffer, from the dying how to die. She saw them once more in their new khaki, in their soiled and war-worn khaki, in their hospital blue. They became again her war audience whom she had been wont to hold enthralled.

Could she enthrall them now?

The minute that the thought was born in her brain, she acted. She fled from her seat, made her way somehow through the excited groups, reached the door leading from the hall to the rear, found out the stairs to the organ loft, and dashed in to the astonished organist.

"Quick, quick!" she cried; "Modulate into '*The Little Grey Home in the West.*' You know it, don't you? '*The Little Grey Home in the West.*' Quick, quick, I'm Madame Teresa Arnecliffe. I'm going to sing that song to the men. You know it, of course—you remember how it goes?"

He glanced at her, bewildered by her sudden appearance and demand, but his mind wrenched itself from '*Pomp and Circumstance,*' which he was thundering out, and tried to focus on what she wanted.

"'*The Little Grey Home in the West*'? '*The Little Grey Home in the West*'?" he repeated vaguely.

"Yes, yes," she said excitedly, "don't you know it? Don't you remember it?"

She hummed it.

His face told her that he knew, and before she had left him, he was finding his way by skilful modulation to the tune which he, too, had heard countless times during the long years of war.

Then she bombarded the platform, reached the chairman, announced herself and her intention, and faced the vast assembly. It was the work of a brief moment. She had taken the platform by surprise; and there was a pause in the onslaught of the stormers and a suspense amongst the audience.

She stepped forward. Her voice rang out clear and sweet.

"'*The Little Grey Home in the West*,'" she announced. "And chorus, gentlemen, as usual, when the time comes."

She began.

"By gum," said one of the men, "it's Arnecliffe. I heard her at Poperinghe."

And the news was flashed like lightning from bench to bench.

"I heard her at Salisbury," said another.

"I heard her in hospital at Etaples," said another.

"So did I," said another, "and afterwards at Endell Street."

"I heard her at Locre," said another.

"I heard her at St. Pol," said another.

"I heard her at Bailleul," said another.

"I heard her at Rouen," said another.

Their memories were stirred, as she knew they would be; and as the well-known words and music fell on their ears, there was a hush which spread like a healing balm.

Visions rose before them of the scenes they had witnessed, the dangers they had escaped, and the horrors and agonies they had passed through. Once again they lived through the turmoil and the tragedy; once again they took the enemies' trenches, and saw their comrades fall. Once again they lay in hospital, suffering, recovering, their hearts full of thankfulness to be at peace, tended, cared for, far removed from the rack and grimness of the terrible battle zone. Once again they felt the thrill of unison engendered by

a common danger, a common suffering, common reverses and common triumphs.

Never did Mme. Arnecliffe sing more beautifully, not even in her moment of greatest triumph in opera or on concert platform; for she was thinking all the time:

"They must be made to know afresh that we are all one, as we were in the war. I must and will take them back to the days when everything else was in abeyance save our united determination to endure together—and win through together."

And because she cared so passionately, her message was borne on the wings of her glorious voice. One by one the men's faces softened as pictures of the past formed themselves afresh and memories claimed their minds: and a few of the most sensitive amongst them succumbed at once and joined in the chorus at the end of the first verse, whilst others remained silent, grim and sullen.

She sang on, nothing daunted by their scanty co-operation.

But the second time, more responded, and each time fresh groups in different parts of the hall were caught by her influence, and added their voices to the ever-increasing volume of sound, some of the men looking half-sheepish and ashamed, others shrugging their shoulders, yet singing for all that, and others with a glad expression on their countenances as if they had freed themselves from darkness and saw light. At the end of the last verse she stepped forward in her old way they knew so well, raised her hand and said:

"Chorus, gentlemen, all of you—everyone."

The whole audience sang with lusty throats. And it was one of the most turbulent amongst the engineers who sprang up excitedly and shouted:

"Chorus again, boys, and then three cheers for Arnecliffe."

She slipped away, disappearing before they realised she had gone. They yelled and thundered for her; and when she came back to the platform she did not bow or smirk or receive their homage as a personal tribute to her own gifts. She had soared far above the personal, and she stretched out her arms in a grave and fine entreaty, as

if including all present. If her action had been translated into words, those words would have been:

"We are all one—we must remain as one, my brothers."

The proceedings were resumed and the meeting passed off quietly.

Printed in Great Britain by
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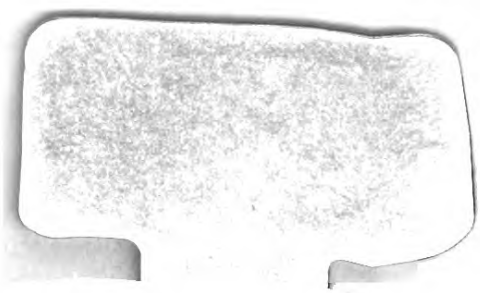
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