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THE LATER YEARS

By the same Author

GOING HOME.

THE EXILES OF FALOO.

ELIZA.

EDWARDS.

ETC.

THE LATER YEARS

BY

BARRY PAIN

CHAPMAN
AND HALL^{LD}



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CHAPTER I

ON the night of the Great Binge in the early spring of 1925, shingle-haired Patricia Verdon wore black satin pyjamas and very long crystal ear-rings. She had her own ideas, and some latitude as to costume had been permitted. The two young art-students who had volunteered to act as barmen assumed towels and tablecloths as aprons. Patricia's younger sister, Katherine, the linguist and mathematician, wore an evening dress, for though she was on friendly terms with three young Bolshevist Russians she was quite willing to be externally conventional. Patricia had invited some of the straiter sect of her acquaintance, who accepted dubiously, came in motor-cars and correct raiment, and left as soon as might be in blank bewilderment asking one another rhetorical questions. Is the girl absolutely off her head? Does one eat sausage-rolls and drink beer at midnight? Is one asked to meet this artistic riff-raff? Was she doing it simply to annoy her father? Could nobody control her? And did you notice the decorations? Well, really!

Patricia and her gentle sister Katherine occupied a flat on two floors at the top of the house. The two floors below that were given over to the Academy of Calisthenics for Children and Adults conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Brewster with assistance from Mr. Leonard Weech. In the ordinary way there was no light whatever on the staircase in the evening, and Patricia and Katherine had in consequence acquired the cat-like habit of seeing in the dark. But on this occasion candles in bottles were placed at the more dangerous intervals on the staircase. As incoming guests climbed the staircase they saw their shadows flickering and leaping upwards. Long before the proceedings were at an end those candles had given out and the departing guests had to depend on luck, the law of gravity, and the occasional striking of a match.

Cloakroom accommodation was limited. The Academy of Calisthenics for Children and Adults all unwittingly did what it could to help. The Academy had a row of pegs for the use of its pupils in the passage on the ground floor. But as the Academy did not function in the evening these pegs could be, and were, appropriated by Patricia's guests. Ladies left their cloaks in Patricia's own bedroom.

Normally a charwoman came in every day to

do the rough work of the flat. Mrs. Towse was in many ways an admirable woman, engaged in bringing up the largest family possible with the worst possible husband. But the charwoman, like the School of Calisthenics, did not function in the evening. The entire staff consisted of the two young amateur barmen. According to the scheme of things which had been somewhat sketchily outlined by Patricia, there was to be dancing to the gramophone in the room on the lower floor of the flat which was ordinarily Katherine's bedroom. The sitting-room immediately above it was to be given to music and polite conversation. There was the piano, and this was supplemented in the course of the evening by three ukeleles, a banjo, and a saxophone, thus destroying the polite conversation without absolutely, if one is to be pedantic, creating the music. The kitchen had been converted into the bar. One of the amateur barmen had placed a saucer on the improvised counter with a notice which said "No gratuities" in large letters, and underneath, the word "refused" in much smaller letters.

Here perhaps it may be noted that Patricia's hospitality was somewhat limited by her means. Her father had money. She had many friends who had money. But she herself had a dress

allowance supplemented at times by some strange activities of her own. Consequently behind the bar in the kitchen there were several dozens of lager beer and a provision of three bottles of whisky for a gathering which exceeded sixty in number. There was excitement, and there was the greatest noise that had been heard in the neighbourhood for a long time. But there was no intoxication.

Patricia was afraid at first that the thing would not be a success, and her excellent nerves almost gave way. Some of the straiter sect of her acquaintance were the first to arrive. They were charming, of course, because they had always known that dear Patricia was so Bohemian. But they brought a Rolls-Royce atmosphere with them that was positively glacial. Taken up to the music-room they passed through a cherry-coloured door into a room of which the walls were dead black. On those black walls, from a cherry-coloured rail hung pious prints of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Patricia, who so rarely did what was expected of her, had once collected them. The straiter sect noted that the electric illumination of the room was supplemented by candles—inferior candles—stuck in ginger-beer bottles. So the straiter sect said “This is Montmartre,” tried

to talk Montmartre, and failed dismally. And then old Mrs. Blake-Morrison said she really must look at Patricia's dear little collection of books. The books were in many languages. There was such time-worn wickedness as Zola and Maupassant, there was Russian, there was Czecho-Slovakian, there was Aubrey Beardsley, there was a selection of our modern filth-merchants. There was hardly anything which a really nice girl could be expected to own. The dowager simply gave it up.

To these entered the first of the art contingent, students and young artists, and among such the advance in the theory and creed of art is generally in inverse proportion to the age and ability. They came with every willingness to be glad and Patricia was as nice as she could be. But that would not have mattered so much if the straiter sect had also not been as nice as it could be. And that was enough to freeze an ox whole.

But very rapidly things got better. More and more of the artistic and the studential flowed in. The pile of curious cloaks on Patricia's bed flamed higher and higher. Dancing began with enthusiasm in the room below and the first ukelele raised its voice in the room above. The straiter sect faded out, and was not sorry to go. By ten o'clock the issue was no longer in doubt ;

you could not hear yourself speak unless you shouted ; so you shouted. By eleven o'clock a small crowd had gathered in the street below and asked the policeman on duty if hell had broke loose or what he supposed it actually was. It was then that the neighbours sent in the first of their complaints ; they soon lost the charm of novelty. After that the party roared and flamed away automatically, with Patricia running after it and grabbing at it here and there as she could. A small group of young people whom Patricia did not know and had not invited, arrived from Chelsea. They looked nice and were quite pleasant, said that Smith was an old friend of theirs, and desired to do an old folk-dance entitled "Keep it up, Mrs. Brown." They started in the music-room. Since, as in most folk-dances, there was an excess of prance and stamp about it, Patricia saw that it would bring the ceiling down in the dancing-room. So she took them down to resume the old folk-dance in the dancing-room itself, and this brought down the ceiling in the room of Mr. Leonard Weech of the Academy of Calisthenics for Children and Adults, and so no harm was done. Later two policemen, urged by infuriated neighbours, arrived for enquiries, stayed for beer, then had some more beer, and narrated lurid stories. The

party was to have ended at twelve, and by one o'clock the last guest had really gone.

Instantly, Patricia became very active. Every window of the flat was opened as widely as possible, and the door was left open. Tons of carbon dioxide by virtue of its weight fell down the staircase. The clean and frosty air, sharply tonic, flowed in. In half an hour the dance-room became once more the bedroom of the gentle Katherine. The settee became once more a bed, duly ordered. The gramophone with all its glorious records was taken out into the kitchen. Every trace of cigarette-ash and other untidiness was removed. And Patricia went to tell Katherine who, helpless with fatigue, lay half-asleep on the couch in the music-room, that she could, and also must, go to bed at once.

This was wisdom. Katherine, who had taken a mathematical degree at Oxford, did responsible work for a firm of actuaries and chartered accountants in the City, and had to be at the office by ten in the morning. Her body was more frail than her spirit, and asked for eight hours' sleep every night. Katherine gazed at her regenerate bedroom in wonder, murmured surprise and gratitude, and in a few minutes was in bed.

Patricia did not feel sleepy or even tired. The

music of the dance still swung in her head, and as a pedal bass to it came the coughing and rumbling of the late railway engines, for her flat was not very far from Euston station. An inner voice reminded her that she had not eaten or drunk for seven hours. So she surveyed the kitchen.

In the saucer of the gratuities was a large number of coins and tokens, mostly derisory ; well, that fecund charwoman, Mrs. Towse, could have them in the morning. A dry sandwich, solitary in a dish, curled its lip contemptuously. There were some perfectly good biscuits—neglected perhaps because the party had been so noisy that you could not hear yourself eating them. There was also one quarter of a pint of milk. But the kitten, with the fine instinct of its race, woke, came out of its basket, and mewed ; so the kitten got the milk. And since fate is kind to the kind sometimes, Patricia found just one bottle of lager beer which had escaped detection by the policemen.

So Patricia took her beer and biscuits up to the black-walled room, relit the gas fire, drew the curtains over the open windows, and sat down on the hearth-rug. And the beer and biscuits were to her as manna in the wilderness. One or two practical thoughts came to her. If you

can get your apology in before the other person can start the complaint, the complaint may not start at all. She would have to be down at the Academy of Calisthenics as soon as it opened to apologize for the fallen ceiling, and to offer to pay for its restitution. She was on quite good terms with the Brewsters. Mr. Leonard Weech, who had one of the best developed bodies and least developed minds in London, was attracted by her. She might also placate the neighbours whom her party had kept awake, saying that it would not happen again.

Candidly, she had not liked those policemen, but it was worth while to be friends with as many policemen as possible when you drove a little car. When her father had bought the big Daimler for his own glory, he had made over the old two-seater to Patricia. She drove well, and generally preferred the car to a train. She was glad that she had arranged with that elderly epicurean, Carteret Rome, that he was not to be invited. Ever since he had gone to live alone in that very small house at Richmond, he had renounced all evening functions in London, though he would sometimes dine quietly at his club rather than travel back to Richmond during the odious rush hours. He would never have entered into the spirit of a Great Binge, and never

have understood it. It would have left him perplexed and melancholy. Sometimes humorous, he was more often melancholy. It had been quite right to leave him out.

Patricia finished her beer, and lit a cigarette. She had already smoked so much more than usual that evening that one or two more cigarettes did not seem to matter. And her thoughts went back to Carteret Rome.

She had not known him for much more than a year. More than old enough to be her father, he could of course have no physical attraction for her, and she was quite aware that the physical was included in the attractions she had for him. His experience was of necessity at war with her inexperience, and once or twice he had in discussion made her angry. She recognized very little authority except to some extent the prevalent mode in women's outward dress ; he regarded that authority with contempt, but there were other authorities that he respected. Yet she found him sympathetic. She would always drive the little car down to Richmond when he asked her to luncheon or supper with him. She thought it worth while.

Meals at the Richmond house were epicurean—brief but generally exquisite. Rome declined to dignify the evening meal by the name of

dinner. He never gave Patricia champagne, but she shared his preference for the good red wines of France. He never asked anyone to meet her. Yet nowhere did she feel better understood or more appreciated. In no other house did she find quite the same atmosphere of peace and rest. In the evenings the housekeeper had gone for the day, and Patricia and Carteret were alone in the house together ; and she found it easy to talk to him and to tell him the things that she told nobody else. For he had seen much in his life, and there was no capacity for shock or surprise left in him.

Through the open window a church clock boomed in dignified remonstrance that it was now three o'clock.

"Good Lord !" said Patricia under her breath, switched off the light, and stole down the stairs in darkness to her room.

CHAPTER II

IF a lady owns a car, drives it herself, washes it herself every Sunday morning, and does her own repairs, she may be permitted on payment of an excessive charge to keep her car at a London garage, but she must not expect to receive the slightest assistance or any simulation of respect from the garage hands.

This afternoon the garage was chock-a-block, and Patricia's car was right at the back. She twice had to get out and move another car a little before she had room to get through. Three garage hands in overalls stood and watched her gravely, and abstained from any offer of help. Why should they help a woman who would merely smile and say "Thanks very much"? Why do anything for any woman, unless a return in money or dalliance seems probable? Their type is not uncommon.

Patricia was furious. She was going to a show with Mrs. Dess that afternoon, and she was dressed accordingly. She was not dressed for the violent exertions and the contact with dust and dirt that had been forced upon her. How-

ever, the damages were not serious—nothing more than a clothes-brush at Mrs. Dess's studio would put right.

Mrs. Dess was a plump young widow, whose husband, a professional racing motorist, had made his last mistake on the track two years previously. Ella Dess did not greatly regret him ; he had been a nice-looking, bad-tempered man, not in the first-class in his profession, and with more talent for expending money than for earning it. She herself was a clever fashion-artist and fashion-writer. She had work on a daily paper and on a feminine journal. Thus she had come into two tickets of invitation for the exhibition of his "Spring Collection" by a Parisian dressmaker that afternoon. She had asked Patricia to come with her from friendliness, for she knew that Patricia was ever interested in the mode. The thought that thus she would be driven to Mayfair and subsequently to her appointment in Fleet Street in much greater comfort than usual and at no expense, had also occurred to her prudent mind.

Patricia was late in arriving at the studio, and Ella was becoming impatient. Patricia explained the delay at the garage and spoke of the mechanics in language of considerable coarseness. Ella smiled. The words were so much out of keeping

with the sweet appearance of Patricia. And though Patricia's mind never shirked a fact, it was not a coarse mind. Her language was the result of rebellion against the well-meaning people who had told her to be refined. Such teaching is futile. Refinement, Carteret Rome had once said to her, is not a matter of euphemism and is only valuable in so far as it is symptomatic of something better.

The French creator of dresses—recently and perhaps not wholly arrived—had no establishment in London. His spring collection was shown in the long dancing-room of a rather popular night-club. At one end of the room was the stage. On either side of the room ran broad galleries, beneath which the spectators sat by the little tea-tables. At the other end was the platform for the orchestra, and from this also the number and name of the dress about to be shown were announced.

Their tickets told Mrs. Dess and Patricia that their seats were under the left gallery and gave the name of the vendeuse. It chanced that they sat behind two well-known actresses—one young and the other still clinging to youth. Many other momentary successes of the stage were present. They had beautiful clothes and knew how to wear them, and how to carry themselves,

for the world of their profession judges solely by appearances. There were pearls and diamonds to an extent that in the reign of Queen Victoria would have been considered in excess of the occasion. But they were not worn ostentatiously ; the falling back of a sleeve or the opening of a scarf revealed them. There were a few men present, and they all looked like good cheque-writers ; yet each avoided the gaze of the others and there was too much resoluteness in their expression of happiness. The orchestra played conscientiously and without the slightest interest in its work, and as much chatter went on as you shall hear from agnostic tourists of many nationalities at St. Peter's, Rome, during Mass on the morning of any Easter Sunday.

" *La Rêve* " was announced. O beautiful but somewhat shop-soiled word ! *La Rêve* (or if you prefer it *numéro dix-huit*—but it is easier to remember a dress by a name than by a number) was a lingerie dress. The lingerie dress entered through the black curtains on the stage and posed for a moment that you might get the first-effect, which was plaintive purity. The lingerie dress came gracefully down the steps on to the dancing-floor, and made the slow tour of the hall that its every detail might be appreciated. There was a mannequin inside the dress who actuated it.

The mannequin was English, very fair, exquisitely *soignée*, and the daughter of a clergyman, but in these great moments the dress is far far more than the woman.

The vendeuse, black and severe of garment, was quite perfect. Never in her noble life had she committed the vulgarity of suggesting—far less pressing—a purchase. Always the desire to buy seemed to come of your own volition—the vendeuse had merely provided the volition. If you did not wish to buy, then she was not there. If you were tempted, she was instantly at hand. She had memorized for the purposes of this afternoon the prices, construction, and materials used, of seventy-eight different models. Mistake or even hesitation were unknown to her.

And now through the curtains came “Dixie,” an evening-dress. Why should an evening-dress be called “Dixie”? Because, little boy, in this way monsieur, its creator, desired to pay a graceful compliment to America, which is the place where the money is. Also, if anything could make the torpid heart of a prohibitionist beat quicker, that dress could. It was of a certain daring. Its colour-contrast began by stunning you, but it left you its captive. The price alone was a heart-stimulant. No dress

this for the pink-and-white blonde. The French-woman who wore it had black hair, and her eyes snapped from artificially darkened caverns. Her skin was tinted one pale and even shade of orange. She carried the dress superbly ; she enhanced it. And she looked like the most dangerous patient escaped from the most chic asylum on earth.

Tea arrived tinkling faintly. A waiter brought round a tray of small sandwiches of many kinds. The little tongs in his hand poised over them like a silver butterfly till middle-aged madam had made her selection. Her bedizened finger pointed :

“ One of these and one of those. Oh, and a cucumber one.”

Down swooped the silver butterfly in glad obedience. Over on the other side of the room the elderly baronet told the two pretty ladies in his open manly way how grieved he was that he had to leave them now to attend his Board Meeting. The Board Meeting was held at his club and there was a whisky-and-soda in it.

The waiters were circulating now with trays of picturesque and fascinating cakes. Said Mrs. Dess gloomily as she began on her third :

“ I ought not to touch these things.”

“ Why not ? ” asked Patricia listlessly.

“ Fat. The whole of the present style is dead

against me. I ought to get somebody with a jack-plane to come and . . .”

She did not finish her sentence, for now the press-photographers got busy. The orchestra, whom nobody fed and nobody photographed, went into the minor.

Dresses, and more dresses, and yet more dresses. “*Enfin seuls*” was a tea-gown mostly of cyclamen *crêpe*, and the choice of “Diana” as a name for a sports dress and coat had a time-worn appropriateness.

And all the time Mrs. Dess, fashion-artist and fashion-writer, never drew a line nor made a note. It was well understood. Monsieur had no desire that a drawing or description of one of his exclusive models should be published to the world, for the emporia of Brixton and Kilburn to copy.

Dresses and more dresses. The afternoon dress “*Pervenche*” came smiling amicably through the parted curtains.

The air in the room grew tired. It bore the clashing perfumes of many toilettes, the scent of Turkish cigarettes drawn from tiny cases of gold or tortoiseshell, and the cloying odour of chocolate, and used tea-leaves, and sugary bun.

“I simply must rush on to the office,” said Mrs. Dess. “You won’t mind if I leave you?”

And Patricia made the reply for which Mrs. Dess had hoped. Patricia would drive her down there in the car. She had seen enough.

Outside in the open air Patricia drew in a deep breath of cold air.

"That place," she said meditatively, "simply reeked of luxury and unreality." And then, as this seemed a little ungracious to the woman who had taken her there, she added, "But it was awfully interesting, and I think I've got some quite useful tips."

"I've seen worse shows," said Mrs. Dess critically. "They don't always give you tea, not by any manner of means."

"Personally," said Patricia as they drove away, "I feel like a dirty thief. I've drunk Monsieur's tea and eaten his bun, I've listened to his orchestra, I've seen his exclusive models, and I've sneaked some of his ideas for my own private consumption. I wonder the police don't arrest me."

Mrs. Dess laughed. "Oh, that's all right," she said. "Our advertising manager's playing him for an order and he's trying to play the advertising manager for a complimentary and not too informative notice in the body of the paper, so he chucked in the two tickets, and the advertisement man passed them on to me. You needn't

let your conscience keep you awake at night over it."

"I won't," said Patricia.

Patricia dropped her passenger at her destination, and turned homeward.

It was beginning to grow dusk as Patricia turned her little car up Regent Street. She was feeling rather depressed now. Katherine would be out with the three young Russians all the evening ; so she would sit alone. She would have to cook some beastly food for herself and she would have to buy the beastly food first. Perhaps it would be as well to give up the idea of eating altogether and go to a theatre.

And then she suddenly spotted, on the pavement on the near side of her, a large tall quietly-dressed man whose walk and general appearance she recognized. As she overtook him she brought the car almost to a standstill alongside of him and called :

"Taxi, sir?"

Rome turned sharply. He grasped his part in the act in a flash. He did not take off his hat, nor did he smile.

"Yes," he said, as he opened the door and seated himself beside her. "Drive to Richmond."

"Very good, sir," said Patricia, who also did not smile.

They went on in silence for a few yards. Then Rome said sharply : "Put your flag down."

"Sorry, sir," said Patricia. There was no flag, of course, but she made the appropriate gesture. "Beg pardon, sir, but was it Richmond, Yorkshire, or Richmond, Surrey, you wanted?"

"Neither," said Rome, and assumed a sudden American accent. "I wanna getta Richmond, Va., U.S.A., and——"

But this was too much for Patricia. She pulled up the car beside the kerb, leaned forward on the wheel, and laughed helplessly. Passers-by looked at her. Carteret Rome smiled grimly. "Well?" he said.

"You can be a damn fool, Carteret, can't you? You might have made me run into a bus or something. Would you really like me to drive you home? I could, you know. I was feeling frightfully depressed until I saw your silly nice back in front of me."

"Let me see," said Rome. "I played bridge at the club until I wearied of it. As all the clerks in the world except three are on their way to Richmond at this moment I thought I'd give it a miss until they'd finished with the trains. But I don't think I want to take you down there to-night, because I told my housekeeper I should

dine in town and there would be no food when we arrived. What I should really like would be for you to drive me, not too quickly, round Regent's Park. By the time you've done that I can take you to dine at some garbage-shop where evening dress is uncusomary."

"Did you learn all that by heart before you said it?" asked Patricia.

"No. I go like that sometimes."

"What would you have done if I hadn't swooped down on you?"

"Don't know. Walked on for another half-hour or so, returned to the club, and dined there probably."

"You'd have liked that better."

"No, I shouldn't. You know it."

This time Patricia made no reply at all, looked straight down at the wheel, moved a lever, and set the car purring on its way again.

By the time they had circled the park more than once, and pulled up at a Bohemian restaurant in Great Portland Street, their talk, which had begun with such light-hearted foolery, had become quite serious.

CHAPTER III

ROME was well-known at this restaurant. Patricia had lunched and dined with him there before. As they went up to his usual table, Rome's usual waiter swiftly removed the bill of fare and the wine-list.

"That man remembers your little ways," said Patricia.

"It pays him to remember. Might almost be called Pelfmanism. And why should I allow their beastly price-lists to be on my table when I have a guest? When you're at Richmond I don't have the week's books on the table."

The waiter explained in French his great pleasure at seeing monsieur again, and monsieur, possibly to show his independence, replied in English.

"Bring two of my cocktails. I'll give you the order then. What would you like, Patricia!"

"No, you do this better than I do. A very short dinner, please. Without stopping to think."

"Certainly. Sole Colbert, noisettes of lamb, asparagus, and a chocolate mousse for the baby."

"Splendid! Now make one all different."

"Plover's eggs. Duckling—with the first of the green peas. Maraschino ice."

"Carteret, my little boy," said Patricia, "you think too much about food. I couldn't have done that in ten minutes with the list in front of me."

"All quite plain and simple. Which do you prefer?"

"I think that little poem beginning with the words 'Plover's eggs' . . ."

"Good."

Carteret ordered the dinner and a bottle of Barsac.

"That's just because I like it," said Patricia. "I believe you hate it."

"Oh, no, I don't. But I'll admit that I could not love it half so much did you not love it more. No, don't try to think it out. Go on with what you were saying in the car."

"What was I saying? I told you about my awful binge."

"Yes, about the strangers in the scarlet waistcoats, slouch hats, and Victorian side-whiskers, who danced the ceiling down in the calisthenic rooms below. It seemed to me you

had an amusing life. And almost immediately afterwards you were telling me your sorrows, and I think you were in earnest."

"I was."

"Well, what's the trouble? Let's go into it."

Patricia sipped her cocktail and said parenthetically that it was lovely.

"The fact of the case is that I've made a mess of my life—or it's been done for me. I wanted to be trained as an artist. That wasn't permitted. I was not desperate about it—perhaps not gifted enough. Then some old friends of ours were going to India and wanted to take me with them. I went. I was away about six months—going from one place to another. Just consider—I'd never been further than Paris before, and had been in Paris for only a few days. Well, that started the passion for travel in me and it's there still. I want to go out and see the whole world. Then my mother died and I had to run the place at home. I did it for two years—and it kept me fairly busy. Besides my father there were my two brothers, who are both devils; and Katherine, who is an angel, was there part of the time too. And there were plenty of relatives and friends visiting us. My position seemed sure and stable enough. It was not necessary for me to learn a way of livelihood.

One day I should be able to travel, and I was quite willing to wait—I say, do plovers really lay their eggs in nests of emerald-green artificial moss ? ”

“ Yes, and the cock-bird ties the satin bow on the handle with his teeth. Don’t be silly, Patricia. Go on with your story.”

“ Well, father’s elder sister, Aunt Hannah, came to live with us and to take on my job. I’d expected it. At the same time Katherine got her present berth. Father didn’t want her to be alone in London, and I was quite glad to go too. So we cleared out to London—to the flat we have now. Katherine was all right—she was equipped to earn and she earns quite well. She’s not expensive—cares nothing for dress or amusements, and has a weakness for helping bankrupt Bolshies and learning new subjects. I was not equipped. I’ve picked up a few oddments, but I don’t make a certain livelihood, and I’m much more expensive. When we left home for London, my father increased our dress allowances by fifteen pounds a year each, and said that was all he could afford to do at present. My Aunt Kitty—my mother’s sister—who’s fond of me, gave me a hundred. Well, so far I’ve got along and I don’t owe anybody anything. It’s just possible if with a

little capital I could get into a sound business—hats or lingerie or something of the kind—my father would lend me the capital. He has hinted as much. But I doubt if a business that was really sound would want either me or the money. It's disquieting. I think, by the way, I've told you all this before."

"No. You've mentioned parts of it now and again. Now I get a definite view—Patricia in search of a career."

"Something like that."

"Why not take the simplest and most popular career of all?"

"Marriage?"

"Quite so. You have attracted a good many men, you know. I am quite sure that you could get married well and rapidly. You could be expensive, you could travel, your future would be assured."

"But if I gave myself to get these things I don't see how I should differ from any other prostitute."

"You women rebels are all very conventional. When you attack marriage you all say the same thing. Can't you see the possibility that you might fall in love with a man who could give you what you want and would be delighted to do so? Wouldn't possibly the fact that he could please

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and was anxious to please you help to make you like him ? ”

“ No doubt there are cases where that might be. But I don't think I'm one of them. I began my rebellion fairly early. I rebelled against ignorance first of all. By the time I was seven years old I no longer believed that the doctor brought the babies in his little brown bag. Later I rebelled against the statement that no really nice girl did this, that, or the other. The pretentiousness and illogicality of that drove me nearly frantic. In consequence I did all the things that no really nice girl does, and did them often. I even got a thrill out of some of them and wrote pages of poetry. There's no thrill left now. I wonder how many men have kissed and caressed me ? All men are swine.”

“ In the same sense that they are also tigers, or rams, or dogs. Men are male and that is in the scheme of nature. You can't criticize nature unfavourably and eat duckling and green peas simultaneously. Your sense of proportion won't permit it.”

“ Dear little green peas ! Much too young to have been taken away from their mother. I dare say you're right, Carteret. Men are as they are made. But I'm right too when I say that I've lost interest in philandering. I'm

twenty-six now, and I suppose I shall go on getting old. The men who have liked me will all drop away from me. The younger girls will think me a back number and tell me so. Why, you yourself, Carteret, will lose all interest in me. I know you. At any rate I've had a good many glimpses."

"It's quite possible and even probable that I shall lose all interest in you when I'm dead. It's as near certain as anything can be that I shall be dead before you are old. Continue your lamentations."

"Oh, I don't want to lament. Luck may turn. Somewhere or somehow I may find my freedom and independence. All I say is that the outlook is not very bright at the present."

"I think you may make too much of freedom. I was forty-seven years old before I had any, and I never missed it. And it never even occurred to me that I wanted it. I could very rarely, even in small matters, do just as I liked. That's probably true of every married man living with his wife and family. It does not depress him because he gives up nothing but what he wishes to give up. All the same, I was over forty-seven and had gone to live alone at Richmond before I knew what freedom was. I hardly knew what to do with it at first."

Patricia smiled enigmatically. "I think you soon found out," she said. "You are very discreet, and veiled, and careful, but you take a good deal of trouble to please yourself, don't you, Carteret?"

"Whom else have I to please? One of my sons is married; the other is in the film business."

"Which is about the same thing," suggested Patricia.

"Much more so, I should imagine. But the point is that one of them is in Australia and was established there even before my wife's death; and the other is in Los Angeles. It is true that my married daughter lives in England, but she has her husband and her babies. And she lives in Manchester. I see her sometimes but not as often as I should like. I am on the best of terms with all of them, but we are perforce separated. I have other more distant relatives, but I have never taken any account of them yet and I don't propose to begin now. My circle of friends has narrowed down by my own choice and act. I no longer meet people whom I do not wish to meet. I please myself, but damn it all, whom else have I got to please? Why do you grumble at me?"

"But I don't. I'm only telling you that I know you and understand you. In some ways

I envy you. But you're absolutely epicure in everything. If you were to marry again——"

"Which I shall not."

"I know you won't. But if you did you would have to marry a syndicate. Every woman friend of yours brings to you something that you want in woman, but nothing more than that. You're not in love with any of them. You're not even in love with me, though you sometimes choose to think you are. Am I right?"

"You must ask somebody who knows a great deal more about me than I do. There are versions of me, you know, which you haven't met. It is my weakness that I take my colour from the people to whom I am talking. There are some with whom I discuss religion, there are some with whom I discuss cricket—with an interest which for the time being is perfectly real. It even affects manner. If I talk to an American, in ten minutes I'm talking with an American accent. I'm not quite sure if there is nothing sincere about me, or if there is nothing false about me. I don't think the problem's worth working out anyhow."

"Why does an ice sting?" asked Patricia.

"Because of the sand which is there. No, I don't know the answer to that one."

"It's funny," said Patricia meditatively.

"There is a point in extreme cold which seems just like extreme heat. The first time I ever knew very intense pleasure I was not sure whether it was pleasure or pain."

"The epicure does not often eat or drink anything which is very cold or very hot, since it is impossible to taste it. It was the American habit of drinking ice water that caused almost the whole nation to lose their palate. Having no palate they could not taste wine and burnt themselves up with strange cocktails and fiery spirits until their own wrath descended upon them and they became Prohibitionists."

"You're probably right. You mostly are about that sort of thing, and I believe it's more the fierceness than the flavour of an ice that attracts. Still that's queer—the meeting of the extremes of opposites. It's like a circle closing up. We are always up against that circle one way or another, don't you think?"

"As how?"

"Well, if you go bulging out into astronomy you come on circles all over the place."

"Ever hear of an ellipse?"

"Yes. Ellipse is merely squashed circle. And if you start dissecting an atom——"

"With a pair of tweezers and your manicure scissors."

"Don't interrupt. If you take an atom to pieces, then you come upon circles again. Big or little, it's always circles. People believe we live for ever and go on and on. It seems to be more likely we go round and round."

"Fireside thoughts. By Patricia Verdon. Lambskin, duodecimo. Three-and-six. How Simpkin and yet again how Marshall!"

"Don't jeer, you devil. I'm being serious. You're often serious yourself."

"Mostly. Still we can be serious without being theoretical. As far as I can see, the bottom has dropped out of everything. Everything that we felt was self-evident and obvious is proved to be wrong. Parallel lines do meet, and two and two do not make four, and something may change from one orbit to another without ever being between them, and we can weigh with fair accuracy what no apparatus can ever enable our eyes to see. Our common words have given way under the strain. To the educated, life, death, time, space, matter, no longer mean quite what they did even twenty years ago."

"That's all true? Seriously?"

"Absolutely. You and I are lost sheep in a black night. Theorize about life and the universe? Why, unless you've passed in the higher

mathematics and physics, you're not even allowed in the hall where the first steps towards theories are being taken."

"Rather heartbreaking. Makes us seem pretty futile."

"We are. Face truth always. But does it matter? Like the gentleman in the hymn: 'I do not ask to see the distant scene: one step enough for me.' I can't form a theory of life, but I can form and test my theories of how to live. It is not uncommon to meet the eminent mathematician or physicist who has no interest in women, no real love of books or of any real art, no cultured understanding of food and wine. He may explain the present, but I'm damned if he can enjoy it. You see, Patricia, men of science with a wide range of culture and interest such as Huxley had, are not so very common. I may be futile, but we can't get it every way, and I fancy that what I lose on the swings I make up on the roundabouts. I wouldn't exchange my keen appreciation of the present—which has come to me too late in life—for the requisite registered qualifications to base an inaccurate forecast on a partial misunderstanding of the past. Waiter, two brandies. *My* brandy, you understand."

For nearly a minute Patricia sat in silence smoking her cigarette, watching Carteret with

big thoughtful eyes. Suddenly she broke out :

" Yes. But don't you ever get sick of it ? Because I do. I go on with it but I don't know why."

" Go on with what ? "

" Doing things. Binges of various kinds, theatres when I don't pay to go in, modern novels when I borrow them, very long films with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse making love to Mary Pickford till Douglas Fairbanks comes to the rescue, ataxic dances with the usual syncopated music and the usual youth who takes me home in the usual taxi with the usual results."

" Visits to Richmond," suggested Rome.

" No. I rather love you. What I mean is doing things for the sake of pleasure that you never get, or doing things simply because everybody else does them. It seems to me that almost the only thing that never bores is learning. Katherine's always learning something fresh—mostly useless—and always stays keen on it."

" There is much to be said for learning. The one definite sign of old age is that one ceases to wish to learn anything fresh. That's why I've taken up Spanish. Your trouble, Patricia, is that you have no career, nothing to absorb your tremendous energy."

"Well, since you let me say what I like, what career have you got yourself? Yes, I know that you write at times, but you don't do it unless you want to do it. You're not dependent on it."

"All true. But you must remember that for rather more than twenty-three years I had a career as a husband and father. It began with a blaze of glory that did not last. It never does last. But for all those years there was something that made me wish to do my duty far more than I ever wished to shirk it. And now I'm alone in the world. Chance has thrown me upon the shore. I lie on the hot sand in the sun. It's not a bad occupation for the aged. But the trouble with you is that you're trying it too early in life and without the previous preparation."

Again there was a pause before Patricia spoke. Then she said :

"I'm glad I met you to-night, dear. I wanted to talk, and I wanted to talk to somebody just like you. Now shall I drive you home to Richmond?"

"Thanks very much, Patricia, but you mustn't do that."

"Shall I drive you to Waterloo then?"

"Not even that. You were up far too late last night. Your eyes are tired. You're going straight back home to bed."



"All right. I will. I'm a good little girl, I am. I'll do anything you tell me."

"Then fall in love as soon as you can."

"If it were possible !"

She drove her car back alone to the garage near her little flat, and walked the rest of the way. As she stood on the steps searching for her key to the outer door, the door opened and before her, lit by the street lamp, she saw Mr. Leonard Weech of the Academy of Calisthenics for Children and Adults. Behind him was another young man, also of athletic build, but considerably taller than Mr. Weech. His eyes were interesting. In spite of herself, it was at this young man and not at Mr. Weech, that Patricia was looking as she said good evening.

CHAPTER IV

"GOOD evening," said Mr. Weech. "You'll be surprised to see me here so late. Let me introduce our prize pupil, Mr. Chisholm."

Patricia shook hands with him.

"Fact of the case is," said Mr. Weech, "our annual show comes off on Saturday week and Mr. Chisholm here is booked for two solos. So I've been giving him a little extra doing to-night."

"I see," said Patricia. "Do you like a little extra doing, Mr. Chisholm?"

He smiled, rather embarrassed.

"It's awfully good of Mr. Weech," he said. "If I'm the prize pupil the rest must be pretty feeble. Still——"

And here Mr. Weech broke in.

"May we hope to see you on Saturday week, Miss Verdon? I know an invitation card is coming to you."

"Yes, I shall be there. I think it's awfully interesting. How goes the ceiling, Mr. Weech?"

"Quite all right. You don't pay a penny, We shall stick the landlord for that. I saw the agent this morning and he practically admits——"

"Good," said Patricia. "Good night, Mr. Weech. Good night."

And she went on her way upstairs.

A low whistle from Katherine's room informed Patricia that her sister had returned. She entered and found Katherine in bed, lying on her back with her knees drawn up, reading a review of high class but very limited circulation.

"Hullo," said Katherine.

"Hullo yourself," said Patricia. "What have you been doing? Where did you dine?"

"I don't think we dined exactly. There was tea once or twice. It was interesting because one got to the truth. You don't always get it in the newspapers—either the correspondent gets swindled by the Bolshies or he's so much afraid of it that he doesn't believe anything they say. So he's wrong both ways. Yes, it was quite interesting. Ivan tried to kiss me when I left, but I suppose men are like that. I hate it. What about you?"

"Oh, I went to that dress-show. And then I happened to meet Carteret and he took me on to dine."

"Like it?"

"Quite a good little dinner."

"I wasn't thinking about the food."

"Wouldn't be a bad idea if you thought about it a little more," said Patricia. "I'm casual enough about it myself, but I don't try to support life by drinking stewed tea with a gang of lousy Russians."

Katherine laughed :

"Yes, but you can't go on doing it," Patricia went on. "You're pretty enough now, but you won't be when you've got sunken cheeks, and wrinkled eyes, and skimpy arms, and an anatomical neck, and withered——"

"Oh, do stop. It's nothing like as bad as you think. Anyhow, I prefer reality to appearance."

"What reality? And appearance is a symptom of reality. Damn the proverb-merchants. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred it is perfectly safe to judge by appearances. That's why most women take so much trouble about them."

"Take so much trouble to falsify them. Is that what your clever Mr. Rome has been telling you?"

"Don't think he ever mentioned it. Talked about me mostly—I suppose that's why I found him interesting. I may have absorbed his point of view. What about your Russians?"



"Not right altogether," said Katherine, sweeping the review to the floor and cuddling down into bed. "The agreement is that we talk English half the time for their sake and Russian half the time for mine. But we all talk French, and we wasted a lot of time in talking it. I stopped it when I could."

Patricia lit a cigarette. "I don't understand your passion for learning some new language."

"In this case I'm taking a rare chance. The ordinary English girl never gets the opportunity of talking Russian with Russians. And they're going home soon and so I make the most of it. It's much more puzzling that you who are so keen on travel, don't feel just the same as I do about it."

"Why should I? I speak French——"

"Fluently but not always accurately," said Katherine.

"I know. I speak English the same way. And with French and English you can get along anywhere."

"Yes," said Katherine, "as long as you stick to the beaten track. And that's never had any particular attraction for you."

"No," said Patricia. "But when you get off the beaten track you're quite likely to come up against some dialect and no grammar and no

dictionary, which you couldn't have learned in any case. With French and English and a willingness to learn anything fresh I am ready to face the world. You're going to sleep, you devil. I'll be off."

"Not actually going to sleep," said Katherine. "I might have closed my eyes."

"You did," said Patricia laughing. "Keep them closed. Good night, dear."

She passed out of the room, switching off the light, and went to her own.

She sat for a few moments thinking of Carteret. She did not quite know how he regarded her, nor even if she wished him to regard her like that. That night he had not kissed her—had indeed had no opportunity. But he had kissed her on other occasions. It gave her not the slightest thrill, nor did it provoke any resentment. She knew she could stop it if she chose, and she had never chosen. Searching right down into her mind she saw that her idea had been that after all she gave very little to one who gave her much more. She was too tired to think it out, and was soon in bed.

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No sooner had Patricia left him than Carteret Rome stepped into a taxi-cab and directed the man to drive him quickly to Victoria station. At

Victoria he just had time to catch a train for Brighton. While Patricia was wondering what he really thought about her, Carteret was not even thinking about her. He was comfortably asleep in a first-class carriage.

He had intended to dine at Brighton, but his chance encounter with Patricia had amused and interested him. She was unsolved. He could not see clearly what she would do with herself. He speculated on the chances of what somebody else might do with her. He had broken his dinner engagement at Brighton, and May would not like that. But if May were out of temper he had no doubt that his arrival would soon restore it. He treated May very well and also very badly.

At Brighton a weary taxi-cab took him in the direction of Kemp Town and deposited him in front of a house which had once been a lodging-house, but was now converted into three flats. Before he had time to ring, May opened the front door. In the presence of the taxi-man she displayed no emotion whatever. She said very little until she had brought him into the lighted room of her flat and had switched off the lights in the passage outside.

She was a woman of forty-three and she might quite reasonably have been taken for ten years
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younger. She was very slender. Her appearance, with her ivory-brown skin and her black bobbed hair, somewhat suggested the film vampire. She dressed the part. Her loose gown was scarlet. Two or three green bracelets encircled one of her bare arms. They were very beautiful arms. Her figure was slight but it was not skimpy or skinny. Her eyes were a deep blue and her expression was strangely simple and sincere. She was by profession an actress and had actually carried out three engagements of one week each during the last two years. But that may have been the fault of Carteret Rome.

"What am I going to say to you?" she said.

"You are going to say that I promised to come down to dinner and that I broke my word. But if you look at my telegram you will see that I said probably dinner. As it happened I was detained."

"What's her name?" she asked, half jesting and half angry.

"I dined at the club," said Carteret.

"I don't care. I don't care," she said swiftly. "As long as I've got you. It's been perfect hell, of course. I'd got rather a nice dinner for you—the sort of dinner that you would like. And ever since then I've just been listening,

listening, listening. Everything that stopped in the street outside this door brought me out. I'd begun to think that you were not coming at all and I didn't see how I could bear it."

"I have come, and we're not going to quarrel. But what on earth is the matter with you, May? We've known each other for a terribly long time—nearly two years."

"But you only come to see me sometimes."

"That's true. But I shouldn't have thought there was anything to get you in that—what shall I call it?—honeymoon condition. I'm old, you know, very old. Why is it?"

"But you're not old at all. I've seen the young men of to-day and quite honestly I don't even like them. But it all comes back to something that I've told you before and that you never quite believe."

"There are very few things that I quite believe. I wish there were more."

"Very well, then. I do really love you. I've said it. That's all there is to it. But you never have believed it and you never will."

"Suppose I told you that I had come down here to break it gently to you that I am a ruined man and have no more to give you."

"It wouldn't make me give you up, if that's what you mean. Things would be different.

As long as I had you I wouldn't very much care. It's pleasanter like this, of course. You're very generous to me. But if you couldn't be generous any more do you think I wouldn't remember that you had been?"

"Yes, that might possibly be. I knew you to be sincere almost as soon as I knew you to be pretty. But it's strange—so much better luck than I deserve. Come here, darling."

She rose irresolutely and walked towards the door.

"Are you coming?" he asked.

She bowed her head. Then she switched off all the lights, and in the darkness came and sat on his knees and put her lips to his.

CHAPTER V

CARTERET ROME rose late and was slow in dressing. For an hour or more he had been vaguely conscious in his somnolence that he heard May moving about the flat. He breakfasted, as his custom was, on excellent coffee, fresh croissants, and honey that had come from the bee-keeper and not from the grocer. Opposite to him, neat in demure dark blue, sat May, sometimes smiling when it pleased her lord to speak jestingly, and sometimes sighing.

"It always ends too soon," she said, when he rose to telephone for the taxi. "That's the worst of it."

"I'm not so sure, May," said Carteret. "I have been told that I am an impossible person to live with. Maybe brief visits are best."

They said good-bye in the flat and by discretion, since it was now day, she did not go beyond the door of the flat. Her reputation was intact in Kemp Town. Miss Arden? Oh, yes. Teaches elocution. Was an actress and still is sometimes, I believe. Quite a nice little thing. Thus did Kemp Town express itself.

In the Pullman, Carteret Rome sat back in his easy-chair, smoked his cigarette, looked downward at the newspapers on the table before him, but did not attempt to read them. He had bought them, he supposed, from force of habit. Politics bored him and it was but rarely that anything of importance happened. He always cast his eye down the death notices in *The Times*, but for a while the papers might wait. His mind went back to May and to the consideration of certain facts.

He and she had been alone in the flat. Her daily servant, as he knew, came at midday and left at six. So May must have done everything for him, even to the polishing of his boots, and they were very well polished. She must have made the water hot for his bath and got the breakfast ready. She took care, too, of the things that he left permanently at the flat so that he would need no luggage when he came to see her. He had noticed the evening before that his silk pyjamas smelled faintly of lavender and that the silver on the ivory of his brushes was bright and clean. The suit which he was now wearing could not have been turned out better by a practised valet. Yes, he could see when he came to think about it that she took much trouble for him. She never made the slightest allusion

to it, and so far he had taken it all for granted. He felt a certain shame about it. It made him feel that she loved him far more really than he loved her. And possibly she had guessed that.

She was not clever. Beside Patricia she was almost old-fashioned. But she had tact and a very good memory. She never forgot any preference that he expressed and never failed to act upon it. She had a beautiful voice and spoke unusually well. She taught elocution two days in the week at a girls' school in Brighton and had private pupils besides. He imagined that she would be a very bad teacher. Few people can turn what is a natural gift in themselves into an art for others.

It was her voice that had first attracted him when she was playing a minor part at a London theatre in an unsuccessful comedy. It made every other voice that he heard on the stage seem common and even ugly. It happened that Carteret knew the actor who was playing the principal part in the piece, and between the acts Carteret went round to his dressing-room for a talk with him. When the piece was over the actor and his wife and May were Carteret's guests at supper. On the two following nights May supped with Carteret alone. She had married an actor and had divorced him six months

later by reason of his manifold infidelities. It had given her a distaste for marriage, but not for love. She was attracted by Carteret from the first time she met him, although Carteret was then very near his fiftieth year. Within a fortnight of their first meeting everything was arranged between them. She did not wish to give up the stage altogether, but so far her work had been chiefly in touring companies which meant much hard work and much discomfort. She had friends in Brighton and was quite willing to live there. So Carteret paid an absurd premium for the flat at Kemp Town, and since then May had been his mistress. He did not see her very often. Sometimes more than a month would elapse between his visits. If anything, they had grown fonder of each other. In the mingled shyness and transport of her passion she was unlike any woman that Carteret had ever met. She was docile and sweet-natured. She did not talk too much. Now and then she said something so supremely unintelligent that it exasperated him, but he believed that he had never allowed his exasperation to be apparent. He had not the slightest doubt of her complete fidelity to him. He knew plenty of married women who, so far as his idea of morality went, compared unfavourably with her. She was neither extravagant nor

greedy. She lived within her income—she was even, she said, putting by a little money.

What was it Patricia had said of him? That if he ever married again, he would have to marry a syndicate, of which each member would bring him something that he asked of woman—no one woman would ever bring them all. There was truth in it. It was to this that long life brought one—the dull niceness of the epicure. When as a boy, terribly ardent and not given to analysis, he married the girl whom he loved with all his heart, no other woman meant anything to him. He asked no more of heaven. If the pitiless years had finally turned that love to tragedy, still there had been—for twelve years there had been—a time when one woman sufficed him in every way.

But how did Patricia know? He did not speak of one woman to another—that had become a rule of life with him. He had never spoken to any living soul of May Arden or of his relations with her. He had never spoken to May of Patricia or of any other woman. But women had a wonderful flair. May, with all her tact, had shown jealousy. Patricia, perfectly friendly and not in the least jealous, had still seemed to know all about it. How the deuce did they know?

Carteret Rome felt thirsty. The wines and spirits of the railways are deservedly suspect. They are for the people who do not know. For that matter Rome never drank spirits in the morning and very rarely at any other time—except for a spot of fine Cognac after lunch or dinner. On consideration he ordered a bottle of lager of a brand which he knew.

He lit another cigarette, and picked up the newspapers. In the death-list of *The Times* there was but one name which he recognized—that of an eminent, determined, and very self-satisfied man of science. An obituary notice, duly laudatory, appeared in another part of the paper. If personality survived death, Rome reflected, Professor Dowse would be the most surprised ghost that day—he would have discovered that there was still very much that he did not know.

Turning over the pages, Rome came upon an item of news that concerned him more nearly. The failure of Sasfray, Peppinworth & Co., Ltd. was announced, and it was intimated that it had not been entirely unexpected. It was entirely unexpected as far as Carteret Rome was concerned. Though he held two debentures of a hundred pounds each in Sasfray, Peppinworth & Co., he knew nothing about them. Those

debentures represented a very small fraction of the money which had come to him on his Uncle Anthony's death ten years previously. He had, with the approval of his solicitors, left the money precisely as his uncle had invested it, and generally speaking those investments had shown good sense and foresight. Incidentally, it was this inheritance, long expected, which set him free from financial worries for the first time for many years.

Few people wish to lose two hundred pounds. But Carteret Rome's income at this time was well over two thousand a year—considerably in excess of his annual expenditure. It was not even certain that he had lost the two hundred pounds, or at any rate that he had lost all of it. There was nothing in that item of financial news to worry him, and in fact it did not worry him.

But suddenly it suggested to him an idea. On the previous evening May Arden had told him that even if he lost all his money she would still love him and still welcome him. That, under the circumstances, was easy talking. The care which she took for him in many ways, of her own will and without a suggestion from him, had seemed evidence that she was really fond of him. That had pleased him. He might be getting old, but he was not dead yet—far from

it. But was he really living in a fool's paradise? Here was the chance to put the whole thing to the test. He could send that copy of the newspaper to May Arden. He could tell her that he had lost money in Sasfray, Peppinworth & Co. He would still be generous—he would continue her allowance till the September Quarter Day. But he would tell her that after that day he could make no further payments. No doubt she could, if she wished, discover that he had no more than two hundred pounds in the firm. But he felt pretty certain that she would not think of that and it was quite probable that she would not even know how to get the information. After all, why should a man say he was ruined if he were not? He wanted to get at the truth—the actual truth about himself and his position. It seemed to him that with a very moderate amount of lying he could do it.

It was, he admitted, rather a mad idea. But there seemed to be no definite reason against it. May might conceivably talk but she and he had very few mutual acquaintances. The chance that she might find she had been deceived did not seem to him worth consideration. Things might leak out in the mysterious way that they do. His creditors, such as they were, might all come down on him in one rapacious body. It

would not matter. He had enough and more than enough lying loose at the bank to cover every single debt he had got. He would not even be caused the slightest inconvenience.

He tried to put the idea out of his mind. It was sheer madness. He turned over the pages of the paper and tried to fix his attention on an extremely well-informed, judicious, and dull leading article. It was no good. The idea came back to his mind. Why had he been so anxious to put it away? The real answer seemed to him to be contained in the one word funk. He feared disillusionment. He was getting along quite happily as he was and even if the happiness were not perfectly well founded and solid, did that very much matter? Perhaps the other possibility frightened him even more. If May Arden answered in the way that he felt sure she would answer, that would make a difference in their relationship. He could not let the generosity be wholly on one side. He would have to suggest, and even to press upon her, a regularizing of the situation. It would end in his marrying her and then there would be the devil to pay. He did not suppose that either of his sons would very much mind, but it would probably mean a definite break with his married daughter of whom he was very fond. Incident-

ally it would mean many other changes. The housekeeper at Richmond who knew and accepted all his moods and tastes and met them so perfectly would not remain under the control of the mistress. Of that there was no doubt, as she had said definitely more than once that she had never worked for a woman yet and, please God, she never would. Then again there would be a wearisome return to social duties of some sort—the kind of thing that had tired and disgusted him for so long. He would lose Patricia. He would lose practically every woman in whom he took any interest, and that would make a very considerable hole in his life. Funk? You couldn't call it funk. It was reasonable caution. It was plain common sense.

But his soul lusted after the truth and would not be denied. When he got back to Richmond one of the first things he did was to make a rough draft of his proposed letter to May. And in the evening he copied it and sent it off.

CHAPTER VI

CARTERET ROME'S letter to May Arden was not long.

"I have had bad news," he wrote. "You will read in the enclosed newspaper-cutting an account of the failure of a business in which my money was invested. I shall continue your allowance until the end of September, and this will give you several months in which to make your arrangements. But after that date I must with great regret tell you that I shall be unable to do anything more for you. So I leave the decision for the future entirely in your hands, feeling that I must not try to influence you."

On the next afternoon Rome received a telegram : "Deepest sympathy. Writing. May."

But he had no letter from her in the morning nor on the days following. It was not till five days later that May's letter, covering many pages, reached him.

"My darling, my dearest love," she wrote. "I have no words to tell you what a shock your letter was to me, and how deeply I feel for you

in your loss. The moment I read your letter I flew to the telephone, forgetting for an instant that you are not on the telephone at Richmond."

(Carteret Rome was not on the telephone at Richmond, and was in the habit of saying that the delight of getting at other people was too dearly bought by permitting other people to get at you. In theory you can keep your number a secret—but not in practice.)

"Then," May Arden continued, "I picked up the time-table, thinking to go up to Richmond to see you. But I reflected that you had not asked me to come, and that in all probability you would be away, seeing your lawyers about this wretched business. Finally, I sent you a telegram and sat down to write to you on the impulse of the moment.

"And you can imagine what that impulse was. There has never been any question of money between us. I love you for yourself alone. All that money could do was to make that love possible. Your visits here were Paradise. The only trouble was that they were not frequent enough. Do you know that once for nearly six weeks you never came near me? It drove me frantic. I sat up late at night, hoping that you would pay me a surprise visit, and went nearly mad. I imagined that there must be some other

woman whom you loved, and I wanted to kill her. That's a fact.

"But, well, as I was saying, you can imagine what my first impulse was. I wanted to tell you that even if we became beggars we could never cease to be lovers. I even wrote a letter which almost said that. If I did not send it, it was because on reflection I thought more of you and less of myself.

"It is very hard to say. But life is very hard, my beloved, and we have to face things as they are—not as we should wish them to be. You are used to luxury—I saw that from the first. You do not really care whether a thing costs a shilling or eighteenpence—if you want the thing. Petty economies would almost drive you out of your mind. From your letter I gather that enough will be saved out of the wreck for you to live alone, probably moving into rooms and so on. Why should I add to your burdens? Whatever it costs me, I will not do it. I will not cling round your neck and drag you down still further.

"Just look at it practically. In one year I can earn just a very little more than enough to pay the rent of this flat. Where are the living expenses to come from? Where is anything to come from? How you would suffer if we tried

it ! That is what haunts me. I could bear hardship, but I could not bear that you should have to bear it because of me.

“And now, dearest, I come to a very delicate point. I could hardly mention it if it were not that I know you will be worrying as to what my future position will be. You have no need to worry. There is a Brighton business gentleman with whom I have long been on friendly—and no more than friendly—terms. He was aware of the position, though your name has never been actually mentioned.

“I showed your letter to him, without of course revealing the signature. He is my only adviser in matters of business, and so far his advice has been very good. To my surprise he proposed that he should take up your engagement as from September 25th (Quarter Day) prox.

“He is a man of a singularly refined and cultured disposition. He is perhaps two or three years younger than yourself—I have no use for boys. Unfortunately he is already married and his visits would have to be more or less *sotto voce*. He does not offer what you have been in the habit of paying, but he offers enough so that I can still live. I thought it wisest to close with his proposition.

“Of course I want to make it clear to you that until the Quarter Day in September I am wholly at your disposal. And that I shall welcome greedily every visit you pay me and that the last farewell will very nearly break my heart. If only some luck would come to me ! If only I found myself in possession of sufficient income for two, you would have had a very different letter from this. I have merely done the best I could under the awful circumstances.—Ever and for ever, May.”

The letter arrived at Richmond in the afternoon, and Carteret Rome read it through several times. Then he came to his decision. He put the letter down in front of him on the table, put one hand on it and said aloud : “This is the letter of a temperamental, kind-hearted, foreseeing, honest whore.”

He read the letter again. He revised his opinion again but saw no reason to change it. He did find that he had some reason to ask what he had been himself, to demand that wholly and fully.

But he knew that he had loved May Arden for one purpose only. Patricia had been quite correct when she said that if he ever married he would have to marry a syndicate. Yet he lingered some time before he came to his final

decision on himself. And then again he said it aloud.

"A fool who thought that his money value was his own value."

He tried to take the thing cynically. He tried to believe that May's letter was very much what he had expected. But it was no good. Had he received the letter which he expected he would have gone onwards with joy. He would have felt that he still counted and mattered. He could have kept his own especial chin up. For the moment at any rate he felt that it was all over. He might think, basing his thought on his own feelings, that he was still in the running, that he could still pursue and capture woman, but the word seemed to have definitely gone out—you are old and nothing but your money matters.

For the time being his principal aim was to get away from the question. He did not want to think about it. It pained and humiliated him. He rang and told his housekeeper that he would be out for dinner. By five he was playing bridge at the Cabinet Club. He dined there and played again after dinner. He was not back at Richmond until midnight. And he had not lost one single rubber. They always said that the luck of the cards and the luck of love went contrarily, didn't they?

Coming back to Richmond he put away from himself once for all the idea of writing any bitter letter to May Arden. Quite clearly she would neither appreciate the bitterness nor the cause for it. He determined to send her the letter of the simple mug absolutely convinced by her sophistry. So he wrote as follows :

“Dearest May, Your letter is everything which I had expected—so sympathetic and yet so wise. Under the circumstances I think I shall not be down at Brighton before the Quarter Day in September. Why should we renew the tragedy of a final parting ? So please make your arrangements as to the future without any regard as to that date. And I can only say, and I say it sincerely, that I hope you will be very happy. You don’t mention the name of the Brighton business gentleman and I can understand your delicacy, but he must be a very happy man to-day.”

He sent the letter off to the post, but he knew that there was very much more to think of. He had eluded it by going to the club and playing bridge. But it could not always be eluded. He had regarded himself as the man in full possession of his powers. He was not a boy of twenty and did not pretend to be. On the other hand, he had no reason to consider himself as an extinct volcano. May’s letter had shut a

gate. He was quite well aware that he could make a similar engagement on similar terms practically any day when he liked. But he no longer liked it. He could no longer believe in it. He could quite understand that one who paid well would win a certain amount of affection from the person he paid. But that was not enough for him. That was something very different from what he thought he possessed. It simply came to this—that he would have to revise his whole life.

CHAPTER VII

THE annual display by Mr. and Mrs. Brewster's pupils, held in a neighbouring gymnasium which was hired for the occasion, was commendably brief. It lasted only one hour and twenty minutes ; so Patricia, who was thirty minutes late in taking her place in the spectators' gallery of varnished pine wood, had not really much to fear.

In the hall below Mr. Brewster, in a frock-coat and white waistcoat, looked rather as if he had fallen out of a wedding. He announced each performance smilingly and in a friendly informal way. Mrs. Brewster dealt conscientiously and in the strictest time with a cottage piano—nothing *rubato* or *appassionato* about Mrs. Brewster. Mr. Leonard Weech, in white flannels and shoes, supervised the order of events ; during one item he got the performers ready for the next.

Patricia watched without enthusiasm two girls of fifteen, in dark blue tunics and knickers with their hair in tightly-braided pigtails, who did what was customary on the hanging rings.

Patricia noticed that Mr. Weech came out

from the entrance to the dressing-rooms carrying four enormous boxing-gloves. He was followed by a young man in a heavy overcoat with smoothed and shining hair. Patricia recognized Mr. Chisholm.

The turn with the two girls came to an end. The middle-aged lady next to Patricia seemed to be applauding with unnecessary vigour. And then Patricia looked at her and saw that this was obviously the mother of one of the girls. So Patricia, who had a good heart, joined lustily in the applause. It was re-echoed from the other end of the gallery—possibly from the mother of the other girl.

“Ladies, and gentlemen,” said Mr. Brewster. “We shall now have a sparring exhibition of two rounds between Mr. Eric Chisholm and Instructor Weech. This is of course supposed to be solely an exhibition of the performances of our pupils, and this is the only item in which one of our instructors is engaged. The fact is that Mr. Eric Chisholm has, under tuition, advanced so rapidly that we have no other pupil at present whom we should think it right to put in the ring against him.”

Marked sensation. All eyes are now concentrated on Mr. Chisholm.

There was no ring. There were no seconds.

Mr. Chisholm dropped his overcoat and appeared in his scanty fighting kit. His shirt, Patricia noticed, was silken ; Mr. Weech's shirt was warmer but less ambitious. The two men stepped into the open space on the floor of the hall and shook hands with commendable gravity. They put on the heavy shock-absorbers, and Mr. Brewster examined them quite seriously. Then he glanced down at the gold watch open in the palm of his hand and gave the word to begin.

The first round was beautifully quiet, tea-party boxing. Mr. Weech did something, Mr. Chisholm did something. And both the things would have been very clever if they had occurred without prearrangement in the course of a real scrap. It is to be feared that the audience was not critically appreciative. It had not the faintest idea which of the men was the better. In spite of the prearrangement anyone who understood boxing could probably have told by that time that Weech could do whatever he liked whenever he liked with Mr. Chisholm.

The second round followed. Chisholm got a punch in on Weech's heart and Weech seemed to slip, and fell. He was up in an instant with blue murder in his eyes. The tense excitement among the audience was awful. Weech pursued his man round the place where the ring would

have been if there had been a ring, and showered in his blows. Some of these Chisholm eluded, and he even occasionally got in a counter. But the infuriated Weech was not to be denied. A punch with his left brought the feather-bed that terminated it into contact with Chisholm's chin, and Chisholm obediently dropped.

"Time," said Mr. Brewster firmly, which as a matter of fact it was not.

Chisholm got up quickly, smiled, took off his large gloves, and shook hands with Mr. Weech.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Brewster, "I am sure you will agree with me that on points I have no choice but to award the contest to Instructor Weech. At the same time I am sure you will appreciate as I do the very gallant and spirited defence put up by our pupil, Mr. Eric Chisholm."

The programme continued. Neither Chisholm nor Weech exhibited the exhaustion which might have been expected. They were scarcely out of breath. Chisholm did not go back to the dressing-rooms but resumed his overcoat, for in the next turn but one he was to conclude the performance with his daring act on the trapeze.

Some of the women in the audience were a little puzzled. It ought, they felt, to have taken the exertions of several strong policemen to

have kept these two murderous fighters apart, and as a matter of fact the two men chatted amicably in rather a bored way while the junior pupils went through their drill.

Patricia looked at her programme. She had missed seeing Chisholm's show with the Indian clubs. She had just witnessed the terrific contest between him and Weech, as to which some doubts haunted the back of her mind, and she proposed to remain for the daring act.

Chisholm's performance on the trapeze certainly moved her. This was not in the least because it was daring. At the moment when Mrs. Brewster's piano stopped abruptly when Chisholm did a final plunge in absolute silence, Patricia was not thrilled by it. After all, it seemed obvious to her from the very start of the thing, in part perhaps from his easy and confident air, that he would be able to do with absolute precision exactly what he set himself to do. The thing that thrilled her was the beauty of the young man's body. It made such lovely lines. And he seemed so supremely unconscious of it.

Outside in the road Patricia found her little car. Nobody had stolen it. But the near-side back tyre was down as flat as a pancake.

"Blast!" said Patricia under her breath.

The tyres were very old and it was only to be expected, but it was none the less annoying. She got the jack out of the tool-box, put it in position, fitted the handle, and got to work. Laboriously she removed the wheel. She was just unstrapping the spare wheel which was to replace it when Eric Chisholm's voice said : " Good afternoon, Miss Verdon. I say, can't I lend a hand there at all ? "

He still wore the heavy overcoat. It was unbuttoned and underneath it was now a well-cut lounge suit.

" Thanks awfully, Mr. Chisholm," said Patricia. " I'm really almost through with it. But still——"

" I'll fix it," he said. Rapidly and securely he fixed the wheel and strapped the other on the back of the little two-seater.

" It's frightfully kind of you," said Patricia. " Do let me drive you to—well, to wherever you want to go."

He smiled whimsically.

" I live," he said, " in a private hotel in the Lancaster Gate neighbourhood. One of the few things I'm certain of is that I don't want to go there. I suppose if I hadn't had the luck to meet you, I should have gone to the nearest shop where I could get a cup of tea and think over things."

"Come and have tea with me in my flat," said Patricia impulsively. "It will probably be a little rough, but you don't mind that."

"No," he said, "I don't mind that. I should like to come very much."

The car paused on its way to the flat for Patricia to purchase new and sticky brown bread and good butter. There was at the flat itself an abundance of caviare, due to Katherine's friendship with her three Russians, and expensive China tea. When they had finished tea there were Russian cigarettes, mostly mouthpiece but pleasingly novel. They talked about the show that afternoon, and Eric Chisholm was quite frank.

"That funny little bolster-fight between Weech and myself must have made you laugh," he said. "Brewster's a showman and of course it was all arranged. We'd rehearsed the whole thing. He knew when he'd got to fall, and I knew when I'd got to fall. No bloodshed, nothing unpleasant to upset the feelings of the parents of prospective pupils. The trouble was not to laugh while one was going through the farce."

"And if it had not been all arranged, which of you would have won?"

"Weech, of course. Weech every time. With ordinary gloves I shouldn't have a dog's

chance with him. Why, just consider. It's his profession. He's at it all day and every day. He's trained to the last ounce. He's far quicker than I am, and he's got a fine pluck too. If only he'd got any inside to his head he wouldn't do so badly in the ring professionally. I'm merely an actor. I'm a pupil of Brewster's to save myself from getting too fat before my time, and also because I knew Weech before he went there. To be candid, he got me rather special terms. Of course as a condition that I shall put up something at the annual show and so on. But it pays me quite well. Weech is a good man. He's the real thing and I can tell you frankly that with the ordinary gloves and real business meant, you wouldn't catch me in the ring with him."

He laughed cheerfully. Patricia felt that she liked his modesty.

Later he spoke quite frankly about himself. He was married and separated from his wife. She was a Catholic and would not give him his freedom. He was a good deal older than she had supposed, and as Patricia now had a closer view of him she thought that this might be possible. But he was still young. He was an actor by profession and had been out of an engagement for some time. But he had sufficient private means to prevent this from troubling him.

"And mind you, Miss Verdon," he said earnestly, "it doesn't pay you, except for some very special reason, to accept under your usual rate. It's easy enough to go down, but if you do it's precious hard to get back again."

"What's your special line?" asked Patricia.

"Well, for about two years I toured the country in revues. Muck, of course, but there was money in it. To be honest, I've only had one London engagement. I made good in it—at any rate I got a very good press. But the piece itself was rotten—only lasted a month. Yes, I should call it a disappointing profession on the whole."

Patricia sympathized. So far they had spoken only of business. He had been quite frank and she had been quite interested. But all the same Patricia was conscious that she had another interest, that she had let this man know it, and that he did know it. Even if they talked of commonplace things his eyes continually asked a question—a question that she was afraid her eyes had almost answered.

"It's awfully jolly in this room," said the man. "If this were mine I should want to stay here all my life. I should guess you felt the same."

"You'd be quite wrong," said Patricia. "The

room is nothing. I want to travel. Wherever I am, I always want to get away."

"You restless little lady," said Chisholm. "I wonder if I might see the rest of your flat?"

"Mighty little to see," laughed Patricia. "But come along."

He gave her his hand to help her up from the low chair in which she was seated.

For a moment they stood there, gazing into each other's eyes.

Suddenly he caught her up in his arms and pressed his lips on hers. And so for a few seconds they remained, she with her eyes closed.

Then she put both hands on his chest and thrust him from her.

"Go away at once," she said breathlessly.

"You're not angry with me?"

"Anger? What's that got to do with it? Go, I tell you." She rapped on the table impatiently. "Go immediately."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Very well," he said. "If you say so, I will go. Am I not to see you again?"

"Sometime. Perhaps. Differently, you know."

She let him find his way out alone, and dropped back into the low chair in which she had been seated.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE heard the outer door close and half sprang up from her seat to call him back. Why did she want to call him back? He was just a man and she had known many. None of them so far had meant very much to her.

And he had asked her if she were angry. That was funny of him. She did not know what she was. How could she? While he was kissing her the whole world stopped and nobody knew anything. Something had arisen within her, something which was not Patricia Verdon, but far stronger than she, and had made her ready to do anything that he wished. And then a wave of instinct—or was it some shattered remnant of prejudice and respectability?—had made her thrust him from her.

How absurd it all was. She had been kissed hundreds of times before and she had always remained completely mistress of the situation, permitting no more than she wished to permit, influenced no more than she had chosen to be influenced. Had she not laughed at the whole thing when she was talking it over with Carteret

the other evening? She had told him that she had never been in love, nor had she. Her concessions to men had been a sort of contemptuous kindness. She was not in love now—at least if she were it was not she but the dominating thing which had suddenly arisen in her.

Why should she be in love? She had seen the man but twice. His body was full of beauty and grace. She might maintain that she was free to love beauty of the body as beauty of the mind, and that nothing we knew could put one above the other. But would she be able to prove it—to justify herself? She would like to talk to Carteret about it. He seemed to have definite views on everything. Eric had spoken of himself quite modestly, and most men bragged and tried in pitiful ways to hide the bragging. She had liked that in him too. She had liked the absolute confidence that he seemed to place in her. She liked the sound of his voice. Could that account——

It was all lies. It was better to be honest. For the last hour his eyes had been on her asking her questions, telling her that he adored her. Even while he spoke of other things those eyes had seemed to speak more loudly still. Then at the last moment he had lost control of himself, as for a few seconds she also had of herself.

Yes, that was the plain truth. But to what could it lead? She did not know. Would she ever see him again? She did not know. Would she ever feel just like that about him again? She did not know.

She rose to get a cigarette from the box on the table, and suddenly intense weariness came over her. She dropped back into her chair again, and in five minutes she was fast asleep.

She was awakened as the light in the room was switched on and Katherine entered in her outdoor clothes. She carried in her hand the letters which she had just taken from the letter-box. Patricia smiled. "I believe I've been asleep," she said.

"Looks a little like it."

"What have you been doing?"

"Oh, I went to see my three Russians off. Two of them wept. Astounding. How can one speak a language idiomatically when one doesn't understand the psychology of the people whose native language it is? By the way, what have you been doing? You look——"

"Yes, how do I look?"

"Tired, old, and rather plain."

"I feel like that," said Patricia. "Give me my letters."

"There's only one for you, and that seems to have been left by hand."

Patricia took the letter. She did not of course know the handwriting. But she had not the slightest doubt that it was from Eric Chisholm. The envelope was of common quality. He had probably bought it in the neighbourhood so that he might write to her at once. She wondered if she could trust herself to read it with her sister looking at her. Then she found that she had to read it. She tore the envelope open.

The letter was quite short.

"How could I help it? I knew from the first time I saw you that I belonged to you. And that will never change. That was why I told you all about myself, so that you could never say I had ever deceived you. I seem not to know the difference between right and wrong, and not to care either. I want you desperately. Forgive me if there is anything to forgive. If not, tell me when I may come back to you."

Patricia refolded the letter, put it back into the envelope, and deliberately yawned. Katherine glanced at the tea-things on the table. "Been having a party?" she asked.

"One Brewster pupil. I went to their show this afternoon. And, Holy Smoke! I've forgotten to get anything in for dinner. I'll go out now."

"No, you won't," said Katherine. "Why

should you cook and sweat for me every night? Besides, I told you, you look tired. I'm full of money. Up to the neck in it. I'm going to take you out to dine with me. We'll go to that place where Carteret Rome takes you. And we'll have some champagne too. Would you like it?"

"Very much," said Patricia. "You really are a brick. I'll go and get ready at once."

She got out of the room as quickly as she could in order that Katherine might not see that tears had come into her eyes. She hardly knew why. It was as if to-night she could not stand anybody being kind to her. It seemed to break her up.

In her own room she took Eric's letter from its envelope, opened her dress, and put it next to her body.

In a few minutes she and Katherine came down the dark staircase together into the street. Katherine hailed the first taxi she saw.

"Tell the man where to go," she said to Patricia.

"This is very nice," said Patricia. "And it's rather extravagant. We might have gone to the garage and got the car out."

"Oh, well, I hardly ever do anything," said Katherine. "When I do, I needn't only half do it. We'll go in comfort and I'll see if I can't take

off those five years that you've put on since we last met."

"Do I really look awful?" said Patricia.

"No. Very tired, though."

It happened that they were a little late at the restaurant. They took the first vacant table that they could see. Patricia was almost ashamed to admit to herself that she felt rather hungry. Katherine, who had spent most of the day with her Russians, and subsisted almost entirely on tea, said that she was ravenous and could eat a live dog. She examined the list before her carefully in consultation with her sister. Patricia smiled.

"Do you know," she said, "that when I dine here with Carteret Rome he never looks at a list at all. He knows what they ought to have and if they've not got it, he blames them. He orders straight away out of his own head. I could never do it. And by Jove!" she added, "there is Carteret Rome himself. Look. Right at the other end of the room, dining with another man."

Rome caught her eye, murmured a few words to the other man, and came over to their table. He was presented to Katherine who had not met him before except in the pages of certain reviews. Rome said he would not be able to sleep that night unless he knew what they were going to

have for dinner. Katherine quite seriously told him, and chanced to use a French phrase, and the next minute they were all three talking French in quite a lively way.

The man whom Carteret had abandoned, scowled bad-temperedly. It was all very well. "Just half a minute," was what Carteret had said. It was nearer five already.

"I must go back to my guest," said Rome. "I'll poison him presently, and when the body's removed I'll come over and join you, shall I?"

"Do," said Patricia fervently.

And when Rome had gone she turned instantly to Katherine.

"And how do you like my Carteret Rome?" she asked.

"I've only known him about two minutes," said Katherine smiling. "His French is idiomatic and the argot's up-to-date, but his accent is clearly English. He suave, he's urbane, he's not beautiful but he looks clever. He's got rather a keen sense of humour, and that really is all I know about him at present."

"You must meet him again," said Patricia. "I ought to have arranged that long ago. Of course he lives down at Richmond and is never where you want when you want him."

And by this time Eric Chisholm had slid away

into the back of Patricia's mind. She was conscious of him still, but conscious of him as something which she could keep till she was alone. Meanwhile she sipped the very high-priced champagne that Katherine had selected and, unromantic though it might be, enjoyed her dinner. She was conscious that Katherine was looking at her a little critically and yet in the kindest way. She could see now that Carteret Rome and his guest, a younger man than himself, were talking very earnestly, the guest sometimes gesticulating a little. Suddenly the young man glanced at his watch, sprang up, struggled feverishly into his overcoat, shook hands with Rome, and vanished. Rome came over to the table where the two girls were seated.

"Would you hate it very much if I came to anchor here?" he said.

"Do," said Katherine.

"And will you have some coffee?" asked Patricia.

"Just had some," said Rome.

"That's no answer to my question," said Patricia.

"For God's sake, keep your temper," said Carteret. "Yes, I'll have some coffee, thanks."

Patricia ordered the coffee and the particular old brandy which alone Rome patronized.

And then Rome began to talk to Katherine. Patricia felt somewhat out of it, but listened to them with amusement and no resentment. Katherine became quite witty. She amused Carteret and he amused her.

But soon Carteret had to go to catch his train to Richmond, and not long afterwards the two girls also left.

When they were seated in the taxi-cab and on their way home, Patricia again said : " What do you think of Carteret ? "

" But I told you. Yes, I like him. Who was the other man ? "

" What, the man who was dining with him ? Bentham, the dramatic critic. He's just gone on to a first night. Carteret told you so. Don't you remember ? "

" Yes," said Katherine, " but that wasn't the man I was going to ask you about. You needn't tell me unless you like. Who was the man who had tea with you in the flat before I came back ? "

" He ? That one ? " Patricia laughed, a little mournfully. " I suppose," she said, " that he's about the only man in the world so far as I'm concerned."

" That was rather what I'd guessed," said Katherine.

CHAPTER IX

THE two sisters sat up till late that night talking. It was perhaps the first time in her life that Patricia had confided in Katherine absolutely. She did it because she was frightened. She wanted protection—protection from herself.

“What am I to do?” she asked. “What ought I to do?”

“Is it any good for me to tell you?” asked Katherine. “Because, you see, you know the answer already and I should think it’s pretty certain that you won’t do it.”

“You mean I’m to go away? I can’t. I’ve not got the money.”

“Oh, I’d love to lend you the money if that’s the only thing that’s troubling you.”

“It’s not the only thing. He thinks I’m angry with him and hate him. And I simply can’t stand that he should think that. I should have to meet him once more before I went away.”

“I don’t profess to understand these things,” said Katherine, “but I should think that would be fatal. I should be blamed for not having

looked after you better. But what can I do? If I gave you advice you wouldn't take it, and you wouldn't because you couldn't. If I told you what I thought of the man it would only make you furious."

"No, it wouldn't. You don't know him as I do. You've never even seen him. How can you judge him?"

"Well, I do," said Katherine dryly. "He may be as modest and as straightforward as you say. He may be as beautiful as you say. But he's a married man. There does not seem to be the faintest chance of a divorce and he's trying to seduce you, and he'll probably do so. Isn't that enough for me? What do I think of him? He's a dirty reptile."

"How dare you say that?" exclaimed Patricia. "I hate you for it! No, I don't hate you. You've been awfully good to me to-night. You wouldn't say it if you really understood him. If I don't go away, isn't there anything else I could do?"

"Yes, you could let me write to him. If I did I don't think he'd come here any more. You'd forget him in time."

"Never in all my life. No, I couldn't let you send that letter. You see, I know what you'd say. I couldn't bear for anybody, least

of all for my sister, to do anything that would hurt him."

"And so we come to nothing. The thing beats me altogether. I suppose there's something wrong in me—something wanting. I can't imagine that it could ever possibly happen to me. When my three Russians got a little fresh they used to puzzle me almost more than they disgusted me. Maybe that's what makes me such a rotten adviser. I see you're going through something but I cannot realize it myself. The whole of this sex question is a nuisance. The propagation of the species might have been arranged in a much neater and more decent way. Of course what I have at the back of my head all the time is that, with all your faults, you're just a bit too good, Patricia, to be wrecked by this rotten actor."

"Don't talk about him like that. You've not met him. You don't know him. It's not fair."

"Well, then, tell me what you want to do about it yourself."

"I ought to write to him at once to relieve his anxiety. I could take the letter out and post it—that would be no trouble."

"What amazes me is that you have met many more men than I have and that you have been more or less in and out of love with some scores

of them, and that yet when we get down to the facts it looks as if I knew the pigs better than you do. I don't know and don't want to know what happened, but I'm pretty certain that your blessed actor is not anxious. He knows. You made him know."

"Made him? Oh, that's a horrible thing to say."

"Not intentionally. It seems to me that the only chance at present is to play for time. Don't write to-night. I can promise you he's not worrying. Don't write to-morrow morning either. Sleep over it. Give yourself twenty-four hours to recover from this madness."

"What's happened to me has happened for ever, and will never be any different. That's what you don't understand, Katherine. It isn't only that it's become me. It's become something which is much stronger than me. I'm just helpless."

"Oh, all right. That's how you feel now. But if I can only make you hold off for a time you may very soon feel quite differently. You must consider, Patricia, that for the first time in your life you've gone mad, stark staring mad. At the moment you're prepared to wreck everything for very little. Now if you love me at all, or your brothers or your father or your many

friends, give yourself a chance. Don't write to-night or to-morrow."

Patricia rose and walked up and down the room thinking. Then she said :

"All right, dear. I'll do as you say. I give you my word of honour that I won't write to-night or to-morrow."

"Good," said Katherine. "That's something gained. Come on to bed."

"Would you hate it," said Patricia, "if I slept with you to-night? I mean, would it keep you awake or bother you?"

"Goodness, no. By all means if you like. But why?"

"When I've got you close to me I feel I'm safe. You're so——"

"So what?"

"So bloody antiseptic," said Patricia quietly.

Katherine laughed, and the two went off together. Patricia did not really sleep very well that night, but she said nothing about it and Katherine made no allusion to it. At breakfast Katherine, with the newspaper in front of her, partook of tea and bread and butter with a sort of mechanical avidity, occasionally flinging scraps of political news across to Patricia.

"Keep your end up, old thing," said Katherine as she left for the office. "Don't write to him."

Things may get better and we'll talk them over to-night anyhow."

Patricia was filled with a burning desire to beg Katherine to throw up the office and to remain with her for that day. But she succeeded in checking herself. It was too silly. She was not a baby. She must keep her self-control.

So Katherine went, and Patricia sat and shivered over the fire in the black-walled room upstairs. She heard the arrival of Mrs. Towse. That fecund charwoman sang hymn-tunes as she washed up the breakfast things. She believed in nothing whatever in this world or the next. But she had no money for music halls and no time to listen to mechanical pianos, and so she sang what she best remembered.

And then Patricia heard Mrs. Towse busy in the bedrooms. And then there came one sharp knock at the front door.

Patricia listened, breathless. Milk boys sometimes did that when they had forgotten to leave the can out.

Mrs. Towse came wheezing into the room.

"A Mr. Cheeseman or some such to see you, Miss. Shall I show him up?"

"Yes," said Patricia.

Eric Chisholm was shown in.

"Good morning, Miss Verdon," he said, and held out his hand.

"Good morning," said Patricia, just touching it. And then Mrs. Towse went out and closed the door behind her, and the two stood facing one another. Patricia smiled—rather a curious twisted smile.

"I'm sorry," said Chisholm. "That is to say, I'm sorry if you hate it. I couldn't help it. I've thought about nothing on earth except you since the last time I saw you. This morning there was no message from you and I couldn't stand it any longer. I simply had to come round."

For a moment she did not speak and he moved towards her. She stepped back quickly.

"Keep away, please," she said. "You're too impulsive. I'm not ready for you. I don't know what I want to say to you. That's why I didn't write. You should have known that."

"Do you mean that you would like me to go away again now?"

"Let me think a minute."

She paced twice the length of the room before she answered him.

"Could you go away and come back again in an hour?"

"Of course. Whatever you wish."

"It's just that I'm going to try to arrange

something. I can't do it much under an hour. You are free for the whole morning—for lunch?"

"I shall always be free if you want me. I shall be back here exactly in an hour. Au revoir." The minute he had gone Patricia sat down and wrote a telegram addressed to Carteret Rome at Richmond:

"May I come to lunch with you to-day and bring a man with me? Please 'phone reply."

Patricia was aware that though Carteret was not on the telephone himself he sometimes deigned to use a call-office and there was one quite near to his house.

She took the telegram herself, knowing that she would be much quicker than Mrs. Towse.

Then she came back and waited. Reading was out of the question. Her mind was too much occupied for that. All that she could do was to wait. She sat so that she could not see the clock. Quite possibly Carteret would not be at home, and then what was she to do with this man? She had just given up all hope when the telephone bell rang sharply and she flew to answer it.

As a matter of fact the telegram had got through unusually quickly, had met Carteret just as he was leaving his house, and he had gone straight on to telephone his answer.

"So glad you're going to lunch with me," he said. "Who's the man?"

"His name's Chisholm. That means nothing to you. I think you'll know quite a great deal about him after you've seen him."

"I hope so," said Carteret. "I only remember one Chisholm and he used to sell me some remarkably good sausages in the days when I lived in London. I hope this is the same."

"I'm afraid it's not. Wait. Be patient. One o'clock, then. Good-bye, dear."

Then she went off to her room. There was still twenty minutes before the hour would be up. She dressed herself with beautiful suitability to the occasion. The bell rang with instant punctuality just as she was trying to make herself look a little less careful and arranged. She let Mrs. Towse clump upstairs with Chisholm and come clumping down again. She knocked at Patricia's door as she passed.

"That Mr. Cheeseman again," she called.

When she entered the room upstairs Patricia found Eric looking so humble that for a moment she repented her coldness and strictness. This time she actually shook hands with him and smiled.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"We're going to drive down to Richmond. Then we are going to lunch with Mr. Carteret Rome. Know him?"

"No. The name seems familiar though."

"Quite likely. He writes in the reviews sometimes. You may have come upon the name there. He's an elderly man and I think he's my best friend."

"Then I shall like him."

"You'll like his luncheon, anyhow. Our dear Carteret is something of an epicure. I've been there often, and so far it has always been with Carteret alone. He's got a housekeeper who cooks like an angel. He has no other servant, and even she is not resident. Maybe he imports other help when he wants it. I rather think we shall be four at luncheon to-day, because I know he dislikes the number three."

"He'll have to find his third guest in a hurry."

"He can do anything of that sort. I hope he won't be dull—he can be very gloomy sometimes."

"I say, you know, this is unexpected. I'm not exactly dressed for a luncheon-party."

"Won't be a party, and you'll do splendidly. Now we'll get the little car out and start. It's no distance, but if we're too early we can always meander about in the Park."

"Well, I'm going to do just exactly as you like—even if I don't know why you like it."

"That's right. But you ought to know. I'm very easy to understand. Come along now."

But all the time that she talked such resolute commonplace her trembling eyes were filled with emotion, and often they met his and often self-consciously avoided them. It was almost as if two conversations went on at the same time—the one prosaic and spoken, the other mute but poetry.

Patricia drove the car out of the garage, and then pulled up.

"You drive, don't you?"

"Yes, more or less."

"We'll change places then. Take care of the old crock—she's not a flier. I don't want to drive. I think I want to go to sleep—I didn't have a good night last night."

For a time she watched him. He drove carefully but without nervousness. Then with confidence she leaned back and closed her eyes. But she did not sleep.

She opened her eyes wide again for the rhododendrons in Richmond Park.

"That's how I like them—in big masses," she said. "The single small rhododendron in the suburban front garden looks skimpy"

and unhappy. I want enough colour to bathe in."

They went on to speak of the past glories of the Star and Garter, and of the view from the Terrace, and of the magnolias that adorned it. And then it was time to seek Carteret's house, and because Patricia knew where to find it she now took the wheel.

The house was small, built of red brick and tiled, and mellowed to a pleasant colour. It stood some three or four yards back from the road, and there was a paved and covered way from the front door to the outer door. Behind the house was a very small garden, with high walls so that Carteret Rome could and did grow his own peaches and apricots. The front wall on either side of the outer door and in a line with it, was much lower and was surmounted by an iron railing. The railing was not pleasing but was rendered barely noticeable by the tall hedge of dark bay behind it. The outer door itself was rather heavily and portentously framed in white stone. Above the architrave, carved in mercifully small letters, were the words "Fountain House"—words which never appeared on Mr. Carteret Rome's note-paper.

As Patricia approached Fountain House, she drew in to the near side to let a big Daimler pass.

The big car pulled up at the house, the smart chauffeur descended and rang the bell, the outer door opened almost immediately, and a lady stepped out of the car and vanished within. All that Patricia could say definitely about her at that distance was that she was slender and well-dressed.

"Whenever a thing doesn't matter in the least and doesn't concern me, I'm always right. That is the third guest of whom I told you. I feel almost as if I had made her. Amn't I wonderful?"

"You are wonderful in many ways," said Chisholm seriously.

Patricia pulled up at the door of "Fountain House." An idea had occurred to her. As a rule she left her car standing in the road, and as long as she put the lamps on when it was dark nobody seemed to mind. But to-day she said:

"If you wouldn't mind, Mr. Chisholm, I wish you'd just take the car on to the nearest garage and stuff it in there. You'll probably be late in getting back, but I'll apologize for you."

The door was opened to her by a rather elderly parlourmaid who seemed to be of good knowledge and experience. They entered the house.

Carteret Rome had made certain alterations in the interior of the house when he bought it.

Originally the front door opened on a passage. Carteret on the left side had added two-thirds of a room to the passage, the other third being converted into a cloakroom. He thought that hat-pegs and umbrella-stands were quite ugly enough to be kept in strict seclusion. On the other side of the passage he had thrown two rooms into one. This gave him a long room about thirty feet by sixteen, running the entire depth of the house and opening through heavy glass doors at the remote end into the garden. It was his custom to use one end of the room as a dining-room and the other end as a sitting-room.

"Mr. Rome and Lady Fairing are in the garden, Miss. Would you like to go out to them or——"

"Yes, that's right. Take me out to them."

The garden was small, but it was charming. Outside the glass doors of the long room there was a paved space up to the edge of the lawn. The lawn was too small for tennis, but it was quite perfect. It chanced that "Fountain House" had always been in the hands of people who liked lawns to be perfect. On either side of the lawn were fairly deep flower-beds stocked rather with favourites of the cottage than with those of the villa. At the further end of the garden there was a group of fruit trees. The grass had been

cleared round the roots of each of these, but otherwise the space was occupied with long grass and various stout and joyous wildflowers. In front of the trees was a stone basin with a fountain. A metal nozzle in the middle of it by arrangement with the water company, sent a fine jet of water three feet into the air when you turned a tap. The tap had been turned on on this occasion. After all, it gave Carteret Rome one more thing at which to jeer. There was no path of any kind anywhere in the garden. There was no crazy paving, no pergola, no rock-garden.

Patricia was presented to Lady Fairing and found to her surprise that, though she had the figure of a girl and was quick and alert in movement, Lady Fairing was in reality a woman of fifty. She had obviously been very good-looking once, and in a way she was quite good-looking still. She used make-up far less than Patricia did.

They talked the easy commonplaces of a first meeting until Eric Chisholm was announced, and when he also had been duly presented they all went in to lunch.

Carteret Rome showed himself a good host. He was not anxious to force or hurry things. They would all be talking much better in a few minutes.

CHAPTER X

LUNCHEON was served at an oval mahogany table at the end of the room furthest from the garden. At first Patricia was quite content to listen. The drive had made her hungry and the smoked salmon was excellent. She liked, too, the wine that she was drinking though she had not the faintest idea what it was. It was a white Tokay of considerable age and rarity.

Lady Fairing was talking motor-cars to Chisholm and treating him as an expert—less because she thought he was an expert than because she knew that all boys liked to be treated as experts. Chisholm modestly repudiated any idea of expertise, but it struck Patricia that he really did seem to know a great deal about cars.

And while these two were talking and laughing together, Carteret found an opportunity to say in a low voice : “ You’ll have to explain all this, you know, before you go.”

“ I know,” said Patricia. “ I have arranged that. He’ll be sent to fetch the car. That’s when.”

"Do you know," said Lady Fairing across the table to Patricia, "that I have known our host much longer than you can possibly have done? I knew him when he was quite a little boy."

"Was he a nice little boy?"

"Horrible," said Lady Fairing with conviction.

"Yes, it's quite true," said Carteret Rome. "When I was a boy of ten I used to sit on her knees and listen to the stories she told me. She was the only woman I ever really loved at that time. But she married somebody else and went to India and for thirty years we never met at all. What a life!"

"Seeing that he's three years older at least than I am we can dismiss the knee episode, Miss Verdon. I may also tell you that one minute before your arrival he was telling me that you yourself were the only person he really loved at the present time."

"Quite likely," said Carteret. "One forms these habits."

In a minute or two Lady Fairing and Carteret Rome got into somewhat earnest conversation and Patricia turned to Eric Chisholm. She was rather pleased with him. He had not shown up at all badly in the company of these strangers. He had been quiet and not self-assertive. Perhaps

he had a little overdone his deference to his host whom he addressed as "Sir."

"I know I'm old" Carteret was wont to say, "but I don't like people to shout it at me."

Patricia wondered if it would be possible to give Eric a hint and decided that at the moment it was not. Presently Lady Fairing called to her.

"Come and help me, Miss Verdon. Carteret here is frightfully angry with me and may murder me any moment."

"Do tell me what the trouble is" said Patricia.

"You tell her" said Lady Fairing to Carteret.

"Well, I will. Jane tells me that she has been going to spiritualistic séances price ten-and-sixpence a dollop. I have been telling her that she must drop it at once. She says she won't."

"But why so serious about it? I suppose you don't believe in spiritualism. At any rate, I should never have supposed you did."

"I do not" said Carteret firmly. "Do you, Mr. Chisholm?"

"To tell the truth, sir" said Chisholm "I don't know anything whatever about it. It's a thing that has never interested me."

"It has interested me all right," said Carteret. "And I'm quite willing to believe in anything if I can. At my time of life things are slipping away and I'd like to get hold of something firm."

But as for spiritualism, I'm finished. I'm fed up. I'm tired of their eternal bleating that their opponents do not understand them. Seeing that their principal exponents are always anxious to jabber about themselves in any paper which will waste space on them and pile in their two-penny-halfpenny books on top of that, all I can say is that if their opponents don't understand them, then it's the fault of the spiritualists. Lady Fairing here tells me of wonderful things that she has experienced, or thinks she has experienced. And she explains them as being the action of spirits. Why? Why on earth? It happens that I know most of the conjuring tricks that have been played on her, but there may be many that I don't know. I may be told of many things for which I have no explanation, but I should never dream of assigning the explanation to spirits. I don't understand electricity, nor probably does anybody on earth understand it fully at present. But that doesn't make us talk catlap about spirits. We wait. The explanation will come."

"Now tell me, Carteret," said Lady Fairing, "is there anything, any one test, which would make you believe or at any rate make you inclined to investigate further?"

"Certainly there is. And I shall never get it.

When a departed spirit sends us through any medium any message which could not possibly have been imagined by anyone still living on the earth, then I shall certainly be very much impressed. I've never seen anything approaching to that yet, and I do not expect to see it."

"You don't profess," said Lady Fairing, "to have read all the spiritualistic literature, do you?"

"God forbid! I've bored myself enough with the illogical truck anyhow. But these spiritualists understand advertisement. They are not hiding their light. If any such message had ever come through, you can be quite certain that we should have heard of it."

"That's all very well," said Lady Fairing, "but it doesn't explain what I've seen and experienced myself."

"It may also have occurred to you," said Carteret, "that it doesn't profess to. Suppose that science had kept the doors and windows shut, and that the telephone and the wireless had been brought to us without any explanation. I'm quite certain you would have referred it all to the spirits though some patient and prosaic physicist would have produced the right explanation in the end. I don't profess to explain your experiences. They seem to be very childish



and inept. I'm not even enough interested in them to want to explain them. But I see nothing in them which inevitably demands the intervention of disembodied spirits. The modern spiritualist is very fond of talking about his science—and science is not the only name which he takes in vain. But nothing less scientific than his jabber and his methods could possibly be conceived."

"You seem very strong on the subject, sir," said Chisholm.

"I feel very strongly about it," said Carteret. "I would gladly believe the whole bag of tricks if it were possible. I find it simply impossible."

"And this is the first time," said Patricia, "I've ever heard you express the slightest wish to believe anything about anything."

"Maybe," said Carteret. "We grow older, my dear, we grow older."

"Bosh!" said Lady Fairing. "You're not old, and you know it."

"I never said that I was. Perhaps it would be a good deal better if I were. I'm in those unfortunate later years when the world is slipping away from one and there is nothing to take its place."

As if ashamed of his seriousness he turned abruptly to Patricia.

"I think I've bleated enough for one afternoon," he said. He filled his glass. It was a dry wine of 1914. It was also, by the way, the first time she had drunk champagne in his house. "Let's drink success to crime," he said.

"Any particular crime?" asked Chisholm.

"Oh, crime generally. You can fill it up mentally with whatever your own special crime may happen to be. What's your special weakness?" he asked Lady Fairing.

"Burglary with violence," said Lady Fairing without hesitation.

And after that Carteret did not again speak seriously until luncheon was over and Lady Fairing's car had come to bear her off to a séance, and Chisholm had been sent to fetch the little two-seater. Patricia told him that she was pretty certain that one of the back tyres was slack and he'd have to see to it. Yes, and he was to fill up the tank with petrol. And this she did merely with the view of keeping him away a little longer. And so at last she and Carteret were alone.

"So," said Carteret, "you've taken my advice. I told you to fall in love, you'll remember."

"You're rather a clever devil," said Patricia. "You guessed then?"

"Guessed? No, I knew."

"All the same, I've not taken your advice. The advice has taken me. The old Patricia that you knew has gone. I'm just nothing—a thing swept the way the wave wants to take me."

"When's the wedding?" asked Carteret.

"There will be no wedding—no ceremony at any rate. He's married to a Catholic and she won't divorce him. What do you think of him?"

"At this moment I'm not mad enough to tell you, Patricia. I wish he wouldn't address me as a schoolmaster. But that doesn't really matter because we shan't meet again."

"Why not?"

"I think it highly improbable. You see, I was very fond of you, Patricia."

"I was very fond of you, Carteret, and I still am."

"Then perhaps you'll understand that I don't quite like the idea of your going to the devil. That's what's going to happen, you know."

She bowed her head in agreement. "I know it," she said. "But knowing it doesn't stop it."

"Well," said Carteret, "if the worst happens, as it probably will, come to me, will you?"

She made no answer in words but suddenly clung to him and kissed him. A motor-horn sounded outside.

"There he is," said Patricia breathlessly.
"I must go."

Carteret rang the bell. "I don't think I'll see you out," he said. "Good-bye, dear. Make my excuses to Mr. Chisholm. I have an appointment with—er—with the flowers outside in the garden." And he passed out into the garden and left her.

CHAPTER XI

PATRICIA made Eric Chisholm drive the car. She herself leaned back with her eyes closed, wondering how much longer she would be able to endure this torture. Presently she said :

“ What do you think of my Carteret Rome ? ”

“ My opinion isn't worth much, but he struck me as being a clever old man, and I should think he has enjoyed himself in his time. He gave me the best luncheon I've had for months, anyhow.”

“ I see,” said Patricia reflectively. She hated the way in which Chisholm spoke of Carteret Rome. But she knew that it would be hopeless to put that point to him.

In Richmond Park Chisholm stopped the car in front of a mass of rhododendrons in flower.

“ There you are,” he said. “ Is that enough colour for you ? ”

“ Thank you,” said Patricia.

And suddenly one of his hands left the steering-wheel and gripped her knee tightly. Some seconds elapsed before she pushed his hand away.

"Go on now," she said sharply. "Go on."

"I think I ought to tell you," he said as he drove along. "While I was waiting this morning I discovered an infinitesimal flat in your neighbourhood. It's on the ground floor. I've taken it. Do you mind?"

"What has it to do with me?" said Patricia.

"I don't see why I shouldn't," said Chisholm. "I'm sick to death of the residential hotel, as it calls itself, where I'm being robbed and disgusted at present. I'm taking the flat furnished by the week. And I must get some old woman to come in the day-time and look after me. I think I shall like it very much. better."

"Quite possibly. Where is it exactly?"

"I've written it down on a card. I'll give it you."

And without stopping the car he drew the card from his pocket.

"Thanks," said Patricia. She dropped the card into her bag without looking at it and once more leaned back and closed her eyes. Would the day never end? How much longer was this to last?

They talked very little during the rest of the drive back. Once he told her that he thought she looked very tired.

"I am," she said. "I shall rest when I get back."

She would have sent him away when they got to the garage, but he said he would just walk on as far as her flat. And there, just as she unlocked the door, he said in a low voice : "Let me come in for one minute to say good-bye to you."

She did not answer, but she pushed the door open. He followed her closing the door behind him. She did not know how it happened but in an instant she was in his arms, her lips fastened tightly to his. Above them the row of hat-pegs used by the clients of Mr. Brewster's Academy of Calisthenics looked down with wooden derision.

She broke from him at last and sat down at the foot of the stairs with her head in her hands.

"I don't know why I did that," she said.

"That's all right," he replied. "To-morrow after dinner you must come and see me in my new flat. I do things quickly. I want you to see how soon I have made it ready for habitation. Will you come?"

"I think not," she said. "I don't know. I wish you'd go away and never see me again."

"I couldn't do that, darling," he said. "It shall be just as you like."

For a minute his hand caressed her hair, and then suddenly he turned and was gone. Laboriously Patricia climbed up the stairs to her flat.

As she opened the door of it she heard the sound of bright and perfectly prosaic conversation. It came to her almost like a tonic. Upstairs she found Katherine and Ella Dess talking and drinking tea together.

"Hullo," said Katherine. "So glad you've come back. Here's Mrs. Dess with the best news in the world for you."

"I can do with it," said Patricia. "Come along, Ella, what is it?"

"Would you like to earn some money?" said Ella.

"I should love it," said Patricia.

"And would you like to travel?" added Ella.

"I'll start to-morrow," said Patricia.

Mrs. Dess laughed.

"It's not quite as sudden as all that," she said. "But my dear editor has gone off his head as he does at times. He has asked me to find somebody who'll go round the world for him visiting the places where fashions do not exist, making sketches of native costumes, and commenting amusingly on them."

"Why don't you go yourself?" asked Patricia.

"Because if I left my job in London somebody else would sneak it. It pays me much better to stay where I am. But I told him that I was in touch with just the person he wanted, and I meant you. There's no hurry. The thing isn't to start for six months."

"But I couldn't do it," said Patricia. "Not well enough, anyhow."

"Of course you can't at the moment. You can draw well and very quickly—you beat me there. You don't know how to draw for reproduction, but if I can't teach you that in six months, I'm a Dutchman. And, above all, you can do the amusing chat to go with the drawings. It's not so easy to find somebody who can do both. What do you think about it?"

"I think you're a perfect dear, of course. If you can make me good enough I'd certainly love to do it."

"What did I tell you?" said Katherine. "It's the very thing for her. I'm only sorry that it can't start sooner."

"That's all right," said Mrs. Dess. "Now you come round some time to-morrow morning, my dear, and watch me at work and ask me any questions you like. That's as good a way to

start as I can think of for anybody who can already draw as you can. You'll get on to it in no time. In a month I shall be taking stuff of yours to show the editor."

And amidst a further profusion of gratitude Mrs. Dess departed.

"So you've been out all day," said Katherine.

"Yes, I'm not making any secret about it. I've been with Eric Chisholm all day."

"But you promised."

"I promised not to write. I didn't. He came here. I didn't want him to come. So I drove him down to Richmond and we had lunch with Carteret Rome."

"And what on earth did you do that for?"

"Because I didn't want to be alone with him. Because I wanted to see how he showed up against a totally different background. He showed up rather well, I thought. But it's no good, Katherine. I stuck it out all day and in the end I broke. He walked back with me from the garage and came inside the door for a moment."

"Well?" said Katherine.

"You know, of course. Kissed me all to rags. I feel nearly dead with it. I hate it and I love it and I can't go on fighting in any case. I'm done. He's taken a little flat near here.

To-morrow night I'm to go round to see it after dinner."

"And suppose you don't go?" said Katherine.

"What's the use of that? Last night it was, suppose I didn't write. What came of it? He won't leave me. He's going to have me. He's stronger than I am. If I don't go to him to-morrow night, I'm quite sure he will come here."

"Let him come. He'll find me here, you know."

"And once more, what's the good of that? Do you think I want you to be rude to him? No, down there in the hall just now I made up my mind it was all over. It's got to be. If only this job that Ella has found for me would take me away next week I might hold out. But it's six months, you know."

"I'm sorry for you," said Katherine. "I can see just by looking at you that you've been through a pretty bad time to-day. Perhaps it was a mistake for us to come to this flat and run the free and independent notion at all. Most of the nice old-fashioned people we knew are dropping us. At any rate, you are dropping them, and I'm not much better myself. It's all got a note of shop-soiled disreputability about it, don't you think?"

"Certainly, from one point of view. But it

doesn't happen to be mine. I've said a hundred times—I've said it to you often enough—that if I fell in love nothing would stand in the way. If things were different—if it were possible for him to marry me—then we'd have that. We'd have the voice-that-breathed-o'er-Eden, and the wedding-cake, and the bad champagne, and sign our names in the book all correct. All those little trimmings are not possible. But you must see for yourself that the fact remains precisely as if they were possible. It all comes to the same thing."

"I don't say that the fact does not remain. But the results are very different."

"And why should they be?"

"Oh, don't be childish. You know perfectly well that they are, so what is the good of arguing about it? I'm not a narrow person. I carry very few prejudices and conventions but I don't want to see you go to hell."

"It's no good" said Patricia. "I'm come for and I know it."

The next morning Patricia drove off early to Mrs. Dess's studio. The new occupation seemed for a while to fill her mind.

"It's very interesting" she said. "But you have some sort of glass to look at it through so as to see the size that it's going to reproduce."

"A diminishing glass. You can if you like, of course. I never bother about it. You get to know by experience what the thing will look like. However I've got one somewhere. I'll find it for you."

She hunted for it, cursed and finally found it. Patricia fixed the glass in her eye.

"Yes" she said. "Makes it look jolly good. Must be much easier than if you drew it the same size."

"Well, we've all got to live" said Ella. "This is for a catalogue and I've got to do about fifty drawings for it. You don't want to spend more time over them than you can help. Do you notice that I only use three heads? Girl, young woman, and middle-aged. I draw the same over and over again, have done for years and nobody cares a damn. Sometimes I think I'll knock out something new, but if I do it won't be for a rotten trade catalogue. You are a lot younger than I am. I'll bet your work will be a good deal fresher too."

At lunch-time Patricia took Mrs. Dess out and gave her the best luncheon that the poor local restaurant could manage. She did not return to the studio afterwards but went straight back to the flat. She started doing a drawing in the same way that she had seen Ella Dess do it.

It was not difficult and it did not quite hold her attention.

Presently she rose, picked up her bag, and took out the card on which Eric Chisholm had written the address of his flat. She looked at it and said aloud : " Now let me see if I can forget that." She tore the card into small pieces.

The telephone bell rang sharply and Katherine spoke to her. There was a rush of work at the office and she would be kept late. She expected to be able to get away by eight. Would Patricia come down and meet her and dine with her ?

" No, dear " said Patricia. " Thanks so much. But that's only postponing. Besides I had a horribly big lunch and I don't want to dine. I'm going to fight it as long as I can. I promise you that. And if it's all no good, what does it matter if it's to-day or to-morrow ? "

Then she went to the writing-table and wrote a brief note to Eric Chisholm.

" I can't come to see you, dear " she wrote, " and I beg that you will not come and see me again or write to me. I'm quite sure that this is the best we both can do under the circumstances. I am really deeply sorry if this hurts you in any way."

She had no difficulty whatever in remembering the address.

She waited till nine o'clock and then went round to his flat and dropped her letter into the box and turned quickly away.

But he was too quick for her. In an instant he was outside his flat and had caught her by the arm, begging, imploring, even commanding. And then Patricia gave up everything.

It was three in the morning when she got back to her own flat. She saw a light under Katherine's door but it was switched off as soon as she entered and she did not go in. She went up to her room and the dawn found her lying sleepless.

CHAPTER XII

SOME weeks later on a fine warm morning Carteret Rome, clad in grey flannel, sat out on the perfect lawn in his secluded garden. On a small table by his side was the bright apparatus of his Continental breakfast with which he had now finished. He smoked a good cigarette and perused a good morning newspaper.

And in the roads near by many people still went forth to their labours till the evening. And if they had been able to see Carteret—a disaster which he had always taken the trouble to avoid—they would have said : “ This is a lucky lazy dog.”

He was not lazy and he did not feel himself to be lucky. He turned the pages of the newspaper more and more quickly and more and more impatiently and at last flung the whole thing down with an exclamation of disgust.

What a world ! What a life !

The culminating point of exasperation had been the photograph of a man on the picture page. It was fattish and round-faced with that blend of timorousness and assertion in the

expression which is almost racial evidence. The man was an author and Carteret had never met him. But Carteret had read some of the works and had read them with hatred and contempt. One of the works had captured the popular fancy and the populace had remained faithful, supported by the minor critics who swim with the stream, and stimulated further by the efforts of the gentleman's paid press agent. His photograph appeared in the paper on this occasion because he had taken the chair at a public dinner. And Carteret knew that if this popular story-writer chose to express his opinions on any subject his views would in the greater section of the press be solemnly reported and considered.

But of course the whole of the picture-page disgusted him. There was the usual fashionable wedding, with the bride and bridegroom smiling timidly and self-consciously, and heartily ashamed of the filthy publicity. There was the usual incomprehensible photograph of the Recent Excavations at Jigga-Jagga. There were photographs of galvanized celebrities who did not look their part and one of the new apes at the Zoo who appeared comparatively intelligent. And there was the usual reminder that whereas King Charles of blessed memory once and for all laid his head upon the block, our own martyred Royal

Family must twice a day lay their heads upon the process-blocks.

Yet the very best of the newspapers had their picture-page. The feature was obviously popular with all classes. It was probably a thought-saver, and we hated to think. Our bookstalls and theatres alike proved it.

He went back into the house to begin work. The study of Spanish had been put aside for a time, and Carteret was busy with mathematics and physics, in which he had the help and guidance of his learned friend Hollisbrook. He did this because the greatest discoveries of science challenged his comprehension, and he had found himself no longer able to ignore the challenge. He was well aware that the work, which now interested him deeply, would be long and that he might die before enlightenment came. But it seemed to him that these same discoveries had sharply divided the few who were the aristocracy of mind from the rest of the world. Carteret had an inclination towards aristocracies.

But this morning after half an hour he put work aside. He was no longer able to concentrate. He was haunted by depression and dissatisfaction with himself.

He had already decided that his experiment with May Arden had been a foolish mistake.

his attention. Then, as he thought over a problem, it seemed to him that he heard a motor-car stop outside his door. He took no notice of it. The sound of cars in the road was frequently deceptive. Presently the front bell sounded and he heard his housekeeper go to the door. He put down his work and, stepping out into the hall, met Patricia as she entered.

CHAPTER XIII

“**A**T last !” said Carteret. “Patricia, my dear, if I weren’t so pleased to see you again, I’d be angry with you for neglecting me so long. It must be six weeks since you brought Mr. Chisholm to lunch.”

“It’s more than eight, I’m afraid,” said Patricia. “To-day I’ve come alone.”

“That’s good. Well, go and get quit of your motoring raiment while I see about tea.”

“Don’t. Really, I’d rather not have anything at all, thanks. Am I interrupting you? Were you going out?”

“Not in the least. I’m going to keep you here all the evening.”

“I shall love it,” she called, as she passed up the stairs.

He put away the books and papers on which he had been working. And then Patricia re-entered. She had taken off her hat, and Carteret looked at her critically.

“You’re too pale,” he said. “You’ve been sitting up too late, and doing too much, and smoking too many cigarettes. Have one now, by the way.”

"Thanks," she said. As he lit it for her, he noticed that she was frowning, as if she were thinking out a problem.

"You know, I'm going away very soon," said Patricia. "I've got a job as special correspondent for *Woman to Woman*. Ella Dess got it for me. I shall be away for at least six months."

"Then damn Ella Dess," said Carteret. "When do you start?"

"Month or six weeks. It was to have been later, but the plan's changed. And don't damn Ella, for she's been frightfully good—teaching me how to draw for reproduction. I shall draw beautifully, and I shall write very witty and amusing articles to go with the drawings—though you don't believe it. And I shall make pots and pots of money."

"All very well," said Carteret. "But by the time you get back I may be dead—which would annoy me. What does Mr. Chisholm think about it?"

Patricia crossed over to the window and stood looking out into the garden with her back to Carteret.

"I don't know" she said in a low voice. "I don't know what he thinks."

"And are you going to leave your charming sister all alone?"

She did not answer and thinking she had not heard he repeated the question. Then looking up at her, he saw to his horror that she was sobbing.

He went quickly over to her and put one hand on her shoulder.

"Why, Patricia dear, what's the matter?" he said. "Have I said anything to hurt you?"

She shook her head. "No, no" she said. "Wait a moment. I shall be all right directly."

She dropped on to the couch and hid her face in her hands. He watched her intently. Slowly she recovered her self-control.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I didn't know I was going like that. It's the first time it's happened. These last three days I was planning everything with Katherine and I never cried at all. You told me to come, you remember. I wanted to tell you all about it but I couldn't begin. And I must tell you."

"Yes, yes" said Carteret. "That's all right. But wait a little yet. You had no lunch to-day, did you?"

"I don't think so. No."

"I thought not. That may have been why you broke down. I'll be back in a minute or two—just lie back and rest."

She lay back with her eyes closed. When she

opened them again Carteret was placing a little tray on the table by her side.

"There" he said. "You'll feel better when you've had that."

She raised the wine-glass and sipped. A shudder went through her.

"That's right" said Carteret. "You must eat those tiny little sandwiches too. You don't want this, do you?"

He took from between her fingers her dead, sodden, twisted cigarette and threw it out of the window. Under his persuasion she finished what he had brought. Later that evening it struck her that she had no very clear idea what it was that she had eaten or drunk.

But it served its purpose. A tinge of colour came back to her face. She felt firmer and steadier.

"I'm all right now," she said. "And the only thing is if Mrs. Bennet came in she would see I've been crying, wouldn't she?"

"That's all right. She won't come in. When I went out just now I sent her away. I told her that we were dining in town. You shall drive me back if you will."

He arranged the cushions so that she should be quite comfortable. Then he sat down opposite to her and filled his pipe.

"Now then," he said "shall we talk? Do you feel up to it?"

"I feel far better than I did. I don't think I shall make a fool of myself again. Carteret, do you remember the day when I brought Eric Chisholm here?"

"Of course I do. I remember every detail of it. I remember what you and I said about it afterwards when he'd gone to fetch your car."

"Then you know what's happened?"

"I think I do but there is more than one possibility."

"I want to tell you that I did really do my utmost to get away from it. He'd taken a flat near us and wanted me to go there one evening. I wrote a letter to him breaking off the whole thing and I took that round and put it in his letter-box. But instantly the door opened and he caught me. He half dragged me inside. He was talking loudly and excitedly and I was afraid people would hear him. After that I gave up. He wouldn't let me go. And I couldn't fight it any more."

"You are still with him?"

"No, oh no. I don't even know where he is or how I could find out where he is. I don't even want to find out. I think that for a fortnight he was very fond of me. I did not see

him at my flat. I think Katherine would have killed him if she had found him there. But even when she was quite certain to be away he would not come. He said he had had a row with the Brewsters and that it would be awkward if he came on any of them. I didn't care a bit the first fortnight. I went to see him almost every day.

"And then a change came. I think he got bored with me. There may have been another girl in the case. From what I heard afterwards that seems to have been quite likely. He asked me specially not to go to his flat without making an appointment with him first. I began to notice other things. He told me many lies. Most of them were quite foolish and pointless lies and I only knew them to be lies because he used to forget what he had said and contradict it himself."

"Tell me" said Carteret. "Did he borrow money from you?"

Patricia shrugged her shoulders. "Not much. Three or four pounds perhaps. It was when we were out together and he found he had no money with him. I never minded about that. It didn't seem to me to matter much. Things went on and got worse. Four days ago I put on a wedding-ring and went to see a doctor. He told me that I was going to have a baby. I had

felt certain of it before I ever went to him at all. I went on from him to see Eric Chisholm. He was angry with me and rather horrible. He told me to come back the next morning, that he must have time to think it over before he decided what to do. So next morning I went back. I couldn't get into the flat. The porter told me that he had paid everything up and left the night before. He didn't know what his new address would be."

"And what did you do then?"

"I'm not quite sure. I walked a long way and about twelve I got back to my flat. I met a man I know coming out. Leonard Weech his name is. Have I told you about him?"

"Yes. He works for the calisthenic people, doesn't he?"

"That's right. He knew Eric Chisholm, and Eric had given me to understand that they were great friends. So I asked Mr. Weech if he could give me Eric's address as I wanted to return a book he had lent me.

"He said: 'I don't know his address, Miss Verdon, and perhaps it's just as well for him that I don't. However, if you're a friend of his I won't say any more.'

"I managed to laugh. 'Oh, you can go on,' I said. 'He's no friend of mine.' So Weech told me his story. It was true enough that the

Brewsters had turned Eric out. He'd been playing about with one of the girl pupils there and she had complained. Weech had lots of stories about him. One of them was that he had told Weech that he never meant to get married and that whenever he thought that it might be expected of him he always told the girl that he was married already to a Catholic who couldn't divorce him.

"I said to Weech : 'He must have been joking with you.' By some inspiration that day I found all the right things to say to Weech.

" 'Yes,' said Weech, 'I thought he was joking with me at the time, but I don't think so now. He's a dirty sweep, and I'm sorry I ever introduced him to the Brewsters. It's not done me any good with them.'

"When Katherine came back that evening I told her all about it. She was as kind as she could be. When I told her that I hated Eric and would never even see him again if I could help it she seemed to think that was the only thing that really mattered, that the rest could all be got over if we made our plans wisely."

"And what plans did you make?" asked Carteret.

"As I told you I'm going away to work for this women's paper. It had already been settled

that as I was travelling alone I should travel as a married woman, as Mrs. Verdon. So in all probability my child will be born abroad somewhere. I don't know where. Katherine means to come out to me when the time comes. I think the thing that hurts me most is the awful humiliation of it, that I should have been so easily fooled, that I should have given all I had to somebody who was worth nothing."

"Of course" said Carteret "you yourself more or less prepared me for what you had to tell me and yet the whole thing puzzles me. Women are not bad judges. On some points on which they are supposed to know nothing they are really very good judges. I always like to have the opinion of a woman on any Bordeaux that I am buying and I very seldom find that the woman makes any mistake. And yet there is just one point, perhaps the most important of all, where every woman seems to go to smash. No woman seems to be able to detect, as most men can at sight, the male cad, particularly if he is good-looking, more particularly if he is good-looking in rather out-of-the-way lines. That's all very nice for the male cad. He can call himself a palmist or a psycho-analyst and simply mint money out of the women who believe in him. You don't mind my saying all that?"

"No, it's very likely true. But what I want you to see, Carteret, is not that I am lost and ruined in the eyes of all my respectable friends and relatives if they knew anything about it, but that I am lost and ruined in my own eyes for totally different reasons. That's really what hurts me. I feel now as if everything were over, as if I never could be clean again, as if I never could be fit to speak to anybody again. We've planned it all out. The child will be born abroad. Perhaps I shall be able to part from it. Perhaps maternal instinct will suddenly wake up and I shall be unable to part from it. But whatever happens, whether the other people know or whether they don't, I shall always know and I shall never forget. It's an awful thing to think that I have in me at this moment the beginnings of the child of about the worst man I have ever known. It makes me shudder—it frightens me."

Patricia heard the closing of a door and the turning of a key.

"What's that?" she said. "You told me Mrs. Bennet had gone."

"So she has now. You see I've tried to arrange for more than one possibility. When you smashed up, I felt, as I still feel, that I couldn't let you drive back to London alone. So I told the worthy Mrs. Bennet that we would

probably dine in London. At the same time it occurred to me that you might not wish to go to a restaurant to-night so Mrs. Bennet has by my directions been putting out some sort of cold supper in the next room. You can choose whichever you prefer."

"I'd far sooner stay here," said Patricia. "I don't want to see a lot of strangers being happy all around me."

"Good. Then you'll stay. But Mrs. Bennet has really definitely and finally gone now. So we can go on talking."

"You go on talking now. I want to know what you think."

"Well, your sister seems to have behaved pretty well to you."

"Yes, yes. She's been perfect."

"And you and she have made your plans. And the luck has been rather with you. You will be away from this country when the child is born. It is quite possible that you might return a month or two later on and that no one would know anything at all about it."

"But I should know. I don't care a damn for the others. This is going to haunt me all my life."

"Wait a moment. I've told you what might be. But the best of plans and the best of luck may fail. The secret might come out. What then?"

"I don't know. I don't want to be melodramatic about it. I've hated, despised, and flaunted public opinion in a great many minor ways. Seemed to me to give a sort of zest to a harmless thing if it exasperated your uncle. But it's a different matter to come up against the whole body of public opinion with yourself agreeing with it. If I were right down on my luck and not in good health, feeling weak and feeble, I might give in. You know what I mean when I say that."

"Yes. I think I know what you mean."

"It would be quite different if everybody thought and talked as you do, Carteret. Do you know that the only reproach you have made against me is that I didn't see the character of the man sooner."

"Reproach? How can I reproach? Look here, Patricia, there are things I don't speak of to you or anybody else, but, damn it, the time has come when I must. How can I reproach you? Am I any better than you? I have been and still am living on conjugal terms with a person to whom I am not married. You have done precisely the same thing. I have not the excuse of youth and inexperience. I have not even the excuse of a great passion. You at any rate had that."

"I thought so at the time. Nothing else seemed to matter and it all seemed quite inevitable."

"No doubt. I cannot say as much. I found I could not live alone. A suitable arrangement came my way. I took it. But in the name of common sense, how can I reproach you? The result is far worse for you because you are a woman, but if we are to talk about such things as sin and guilt, then it seems to me that I am more guilty than you are. It's not easy to see things nowadays."

"How do you mean?" asked Patricia.

He paced the room once or twice, refilled his pipe, and sat down.

"Well," he said, "whether we like it or not we are living in an age of great change and on the verge of an age in which the change will be still greater. I think I've spoken to you before about the advance in physics, the Theory of Relativity, the Theory of Quanta, and so on. I'm working at such things now myself and I'm getting along, though slowly. And what I see is that it is not merely a question of correcting old mistakes but it's a question of acquiring an entirely new and different way of thinking. Much the same thing is likely to happen in our approach to morality. Our present view of

morality is merely a convention for the greater good of the greater number and as such it works fairly well on the whole, but with a good deal of injustice by the way. But we've linked up our ideas of morality with our ideas of religion and God. Now I'll say nothing about the Revelation of the books except that those who believe most strongly in their inspiration would also admit that there is a totally different revelation."

"What's that?"

"Nature. The more we study it, the more untenable become all the ideas of God which have been taught us. That God is a personality in anything like the sense we supposed, is quite unthinkable. That God is swayed by any human emotion whatever is perfectly ridiculous. A total disregard of such things is shown in pretty well every ordinary happening. Take your own case. You won't mind if I talk brutally, will you? It would seem that the Great Control does not care in the least whether you loved or not. Love is so much poetry-bait put down for you. It does not care whether you are ruined or not. It probably does not admit that you are ruined in any way whatever. You would be if people thought you were, but only because they thought you were. The one thing on which nature insists is that if a sperma-

tozoon enters a fertile ovum, then a baby follows. That is the one and only point which nature really seems to regard at all."

"You reduce romance to a question of base mechanics."

"I should say that I do nothing of the kind. I object to your use of the word base. It is very common. They say that some things are low and others are high and they are only low or high because we choose to think so. And we might have the decency to remember that we are not necessarily the last word. Romance will always be romance. Mechanics will always be mechanics. Tell me, Patricia, did you ever think much about religion?"

She shook her head.

"How could I?" she asked. "The Catholics think the Protestants are damned. The Moslems think the Catholics are damned. The Protestants are sure the Moslems are damned and it's all too childish and silly. I simply gave it up."

"You shouldn't give it up. It's interesting. That is, it becomes interesting if you approach the subject with a decent humility and love of truth. If your study of nature seems to show that God has no human emotion whatever, accept it. If it seems to show that God acts quite unreasonably, accept it again. For the one spermatozoon

that fertilizes the ovum many die and are wasted. The elm tree produces millions of seeds that never germinate. Am I to conclude from this that God is silly and wasteful? I don't think so. The only proper conclusion is that here is a way of thinking and acting which are totally different from mine. I do not understand them, but can I expect to understand them? It would be a strange thing indeed if on this speck of a planet we could understand God. We can go on trying to find out more but to do that it seems to me that a great many of the old ideas will have to be thrown overboard. Here, as in physics, we've got to learn to think in a different way altogether."

"You don't suggest a very comforting sort of religion."

"I'd sooner have truth than comfort any day. However, we've wandered away from the subject, Patricia, and you're the subject."

"Then advise me. I've sat up half the night with Katherine talking it over. It may not be perfect, but there is no other way out of it."

Carteret rose from his place. "Yes, my dear," he said. "There is another way, and you're going to take it. You're going to marry me, Patricia."

CHAPTER XIV

"WHAT are you saying?" said Patricia.
"You can't mean that."

"I do mean it. And the decision is not so sudden as it seems. I've thought about you often since you were last here, and of what I should do in a certain case—the present case."

"Carteret dear, I don't think I could. . . ."

"One moment," said Rome. "I'm very fond of you, and I've often told you so. But I am more than old enough to be your father, and I don't forget it. The marriage would be nominal. Its only object would be to protect you and your child. I promise you to seek nothing else from it."

"You're being far too good to me."

"I shall be doing what for my own sake I shall be quite glad to do—I'll explain that presently. But tell me if you see any practical objection."

"It looks as if Katherine and I had planned this, and I had come down here to try to lead you into it."

Rome smiled. "It might look like that but for two things. I know you too well, and I am

not a fool. We can let that pass. What other objection ? ”

“ There’s this. You may not be young, but you are not so terribly old. Men much older than you have married. Suppose you found somebody else whom you wanted to marry.”

“ It will not happen,” said Carteret firmly. “ And if it ever did, we—well, we could deal with the situation.”

“ Ah, but that’s not all. Didn’t you tell me once that your daughter would never forgive you if you ever married again ? What about your sons ? What about Mrs. Bennet ? ”

“ There, I admit, you are on more solid ground. I did at first feel a little anxious about Myra. She was devoted to her mother, and for that reason she would resent any second marriage of mine. But I’ve thought it over, and I do not believe the resentment would last. Myra’s not mean, nor greedy, but she can’t be quite blind to her own interests. Besides, she likes me better than she did. The boys will be all right—they have common sense. Mrs. Bennet likes you far better than most of the people who come here, and I don’t suppose you would want to interfere with her much. But after all, whether she went or stayed is, comparatively, a matter of no importance. I think that objection might be set aside too.”

"There must be others which I shall think of in time. Tell me what you meant just now when you said that for your own sake you would be glad—that puzzled me rather."

"I'm not sure that it doesn't puzzle me too a little. I'll tell you the facts. You know that for the greater part of my life I did not live for myself. I had a wife and family. I was a poor man, and I worked very hard at work which I despised except for the money it made. For many years I was quite happy, and then came the time which I now try to keep from my thoughts. I could go into details, but I won't. I gave everything and took nothing, but that was not the reason why I suffered. When I came into money, that delivered me from the work. The suffering remained. No doubt I was to blame in many ways, but selfishness was not one of them."

"Would you say that your marriage was happy or not?" asked Patricia.

"Both. Perhaps most marriages are. On-lookers, who never see anything that matters of the game, thought it wonderfully happy and I did not deceive them. You know what has happened since. Fate flung me up on the shore of a desert island, as it were. Nobody needed me any more. Duty was dead. I had only myself to please. It was a thing that I had never

foreseen or thought about. At first I was almost afraid of my own liberty. But it grew on me. It was no longer necessary to entertain in my house a number of people whom I loathed, and to be on friendly terms with them. I could choose my own friends. In many lesser ways all my long-suppressed fastidiousness came to the surface. I took very great care to please myself. I think I have done nothing else for years."

"You've always been very good to me."

"If so, it was to please myself. You interested me, you charmed me, as you still do. I don't say that my selfishness was wrong. It has brought me lots of pleasure and, perhaps, even a little happiness, but it can be carried too far and driven too hard. It begins to lose its savour. There's not very much wear in it. Some who have gone my way have ended in the asylum, or in suicide, or in the Catholic Church. I doubt if I am of that type, and I know what I want. I want somebody to look after—somebody to whom I can sacrifice something. I wouldn't swear that I could work out all the reasoning for it, but I'm quite convinced. However absurd and fantastic it may sound, it's true. I shall look after you very well, Patricia. In a mundane way the marriage may save you—it saves a wayward girl who for a while went mad from excessive

and malicious punishment by illogical, hypocritical and damnable society. But far more will the marriage save me.

"Save you from what?"

"From myself. Patricia, dear, pledge yourself to me. Give me your hand on it."

Instantly her hand sought his and for a few seconds held it tightly.

Carteret was a little embarrassed. He was not well-skilled in emotional scenes. Perhaps he had said too much—and about a subject on which usually he was intensely reserved. He felt almost as if he had made a speech, and he did not like speeches. He had been absolutely sincere and yet, distrusting himself, he was not sure that he had not used some of the phrases of a poseur.

The clock struck. Carteret took a cigarette and became matter-of-fact.

"Then that's all right," he said. "Now look here. I'm sorry, but I've got to slip out and send one or two telephone messages. I shan't be five minutes, unless the office is more insane than usual. You don't mind?"

"Of course not, but I know how you hate the telephone. Let me go and do it for you."

"Very sorry," said Carteret, smiling, "but I can't trust you. Many thanks all the same."

On his return from telephoning Carteret found Patricia perfectly tranquil and composed but looking very tired. She also gave him the impression that she was trying to say something for which she had not found the words.

"It's queer," said Patricia, as they sat together at supper, "I don't seem to belong to this somehow. It is just as if I was standing by and looking on at it. There was a girl who fell madly in love with Eric Chisholm and gave up everything for him. It doesn't somehow seem to be me. And I'm going to have a baby one day and that doesn't seem to be real either. Nor does it seem real that you're going to marry me. I wonder why that is?"

"I should imagine," said Carteret, "that it is because you are emotionally worn out. You've been through a terrifically trying time, you know, Patricia. Your emotions no longer react to anything that happens. That, I think, may give you the sense of unreality."

"Yes, that seems rather likely. It's a kind of mercy, isn't it? There's a limit to everything. The worm does die and the fire is quenched. And yet in a way it worries me. I'm feeling all the time that there's so much I want to say to you. And yet I can't get it now. Only don't think that I don't appreciate or that I'm ungrateful."

"I shouldn't let any of that worry me in the very least if I were you. Now when you've finished your coffee, you're going back to town. I'm going with you of course. You're not going in your nasty little car. That will be driven back by a man from the garage down the road. Another man will drive us in a magnificent deeply-upholstered closed car. That will be more comfortable for me and will also save me the night air about which I'm nervous."

"You splendid liar," said Patricia. "I can't talk now, but I'm remembering it all. I shan't forget one word of this evening. What are you going to do when you get to town?"

"I'm going to see you to the flat, of course. Then I shall get back into the car and return here. Both the garage men will come back with me, which is handy, because if one of them fainted the other would take on the job. Go and get your things on, my dear.

Both cars were standing in front of the door when they came out of the house. The little car scurried fussily away at once, driven as well as Patricia herself could have driven it. A uniformed chauffeur held open the door of the big car, put the rug round them, and returned to his place. The big car slid softly away. It

was just as they were entering the park that Patricia said :

“ I think I'd like to go to sleep. Do you mind, Carteret ? ”

“ No,” said Carteret. “ I think it would be a good idea. I might possibly go to sleep myself.”

He put his arm round her and drew her nearer to him. She rested her head on his shoulder and was asleep almost instantly. But Carteret's own eyes did not close. He had the impression that the car was driving him away into a new kind of life and perhaps a better kind of life than he had known yet.

And when they reached their journey's end he went up the stairs with Patricia, lighting her with an electric torch which he took from his pocket. He would not come into the flat.

“ No,” he said. “ I'm a lazy man and I must get back to bed, but you're to lunch with me at the same old garbage shop to-morrow at one. You won't forget, will you ? I shall have lots to tell you then. Now go and let Katherine know all about it. Good night, dear.”

She whispered a few words of reply that he did not quite catch. He heard the door of the flat close behind her, and then went quickly down the stairs.

CHAPTER XV

AS Carteret drove back to Richmond he was conscious of a curious feeling of exaltation that he had not known for some time past, and it rather surprised him. He was not given to self-analysis, and did not try to explain the reactions that life had upon him. In such matters the eupeptic are generally careless. Had he not boasted once to Patricia that, from any scientific point of view, he might know nothing of life, but that he knew how to live and most men of science did not? And there had been some substance of truth under that boast.

He had, as he had told Patricia, come to no sudden decision that day. At his early meeting with Eric Chisholm he had taken the young man's measure with fair accuracy, and he had known that nothing he could say or do at that time would save Patricia from her overpowering infatuation. And not long afterwards he had seen that there was only one thing he could do to save his friend if the disaster came—the thing which he had just done. But at that time his mind had been troubled. Would he ever

be able to bring his daughter, Myra, to reason ? There would be the devil of a business with Jane Fairing. Even his priceless housekeeper, Mrs. Bennet, had told him that she would never serve a woman if she could serve a man.

And now that it was all settled these troubles scarcely crossed his mind. They were trivialities which he was confident he could deal with as the occasion arose—things not worth thinking about. His mind was serene and well-content.

The car drew up before his house. He paid the men from the garage—too generously, as usual—let himself in with his latchkey, and switched on the lights in the hall. For a moment or two he stood still. The house seemed very silent, and empty, and lonely. Often before had he returned at night after his housekeeper had gone, and the house must have been just the same, and he had never given it a thought ; to-night it struck him keenly. The bolts on the front door clanged cheerfully as he thrust them home. Then, as he had worn neither hat nor overcoat in the closed car, he passed direct into his library.

The logs which he had put on before he went out were little more than red embers. He raked them together, put on more dry wood, and with the help of the bellows soon had a blaze. Then

he put out the decanter of '75 brandy and a wide-mouthed glass on the table beside his chair. Not for him to-night that fat and blue-bound volume wherein the erudite Hermann Weyle speaks, solely to the elect, of "Time and Space." He had bought an evening paper in town, and he now picked it up.

And it chanced that his eye fell first on an advertisement—quite a small advertisement—that told him that at such-and-such a place and such-and-such a time, in return for a small admission-fee, he might hear the Rev. Hugh Wilberforce Gumm speak on "The Survival of Personality after Death."

Impatiently he flung the paper from him. For a moment he wished that Patricia were seated in that vacant chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, that she might share that feeling of furious contempt which the poor little advertisement had stirred up in him.

So H. W. Gumm (Providence, what a name !) was going to tell us all about it, for where nobody knows, all may be authorities. Once more that senile personality-problem, beaten to a frazzle and worn to a skeleton, was to be lashed round the ring, till it limped out by that same door wherein it went.

He could picture the shabby hall, with H. W.
L

Gumm and other proud and knowing patriarchs on the platform. He could imagine on the meagre benches the meagre audience, fragrant with the egg, the bloater, and the cocoa of innocuous evening-meals. And what came they out for to see? To what end had this expenditure of ill-spared sixpences been made? As the end of it all would there be even an illusion of certainty?

He recalled that once he had come on a congregation emerging from some corrugated temple and had heard one lady say to her friend: "Of course he had a narce voice, very narce—I'll say that for him. But I didn't 'old with anything he said."

All this fuss about the survival of personality after death seemed to Carteret ignoble and vain. It was the race and not the individual that seemed the objective of nature—careful of the type and careless of the single life. But the fuss was after all characteristic of a vulgar, sentimental, self-seeking epoch. All individuals seemed sure of their importance. The popularity of the fuss seemed to be sempiternal.

No newspaper correspondence connected with the subject had ever failed. The river was in spate. A torrent of letters from the partially-educated foamed daily into the letter-box, until

the editor, requiring his space for other matters, shut the gates. Carteret could have been much interested in such letters had they been simply sincere, but they never—or very rarely—were. The writers were too conscious of their approach to the white light of publicity ; they made-up and they posed for the camera. Their needless attempts to be literary were pathetic, and might have drawn tears from the lions in Trafalgar Square. They had not learned the very rare art of stating exact truth—saying precisely what they meant to say. Seldom did Carteret even glance at a correspondence of that kind nowadays. The same subject had its recognized social place also. One could not be always talking of winter sports and polo and bridge and scandal about one's dearest friends. Once you introduced the hereafter that struck a deeper tone ; it gave the intellectual note, and it had the advantage that absolutely anybody could do it. Popularity has a commercial value and that is soon recognized. Many a "medium" exploited the agony of the recently bereaved at ten-and-six a time and watched with stoical fortitude the descent of the credulous client to nervous breakdown or insanity or even death. The law did not intervene and no doubt one has a living to make.

And did any personality survive ? Even in

this life normally age changed us all slowly. There was a whole list of diseases besides which had their definite and recognized effect on character. Climate, environment, society, and many other things would affect that character. It was a very common thing to hear it said that certain people had changed. But those who said it rarely realised how absolutely true it was. Carteret had but to glance back through his own life to find two instances, one of which was himself. He could scarcely find a point of resemblance between what he was now and what he had been twenty-five years previously.

He poured a little of the '75 brandy into the glass and sipped it with critical approval. Again the stillness of the house struck him. He walked up and down the room humming to himself in order that he might hear a sound.

There came into his mind a rough analogy which he had jotted down two years before. He turned the pages of an old note-book till he found the passage. He read :

“ The river Thames is the river Thames. It is so marked on the maps. We can see it and recognize it. And yet not one drop of the water which was in that river a year ago is there now ; it has all passed out into a wide and mingled oblivion.

“ The river Thames is merely an expression

for a known direction which water has taken in the past and may be expected to take in the future. When the water of the river is freed from controlling banks—just as the soul is set free from the body—and passes out into the estuary, it may ‘survive,’ but it certainly does not survive in the shape or form of a river.

“Again, the river is associated with the banks but not joined to them. The river may affect the banks and the banks the river. So were mind and body, associated but not joined. And so too did mind and body interact.”

Analogy is not argument—Carteret Rome had never supposed that it was—but sometimes it is rather illuminating.

And if that were the end of personality, what was the beginning? A chance meeting of a more or less good girl and a bad handsome actor. The girl is infatuated—practically demented : the actor is treacherous. A brief and unblessed union, and as a result an unwanted child. A new personality with betrayal for its birthday present. Why? From the individual as distinct from the racial point of view Rome could find no answer.

“Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, Who is our Home.”

Possibly the birth of one of Wordsworth's illegitimate children suggested the beautiful thought to him. What a life !

And all this excessive importance that we attach to our miserable personalities and their survival might be one of the causes why we ascribe to God qualities and even frailties which are purely human. We could believe that God made and sustained the universe, and yet pray : " Thy will be done ! " It was more inept than if a crawling microscopical bug said to the Scotch express : " Don't let me detain you." " Thy will is done " might be obvious but it was at least reverent. Yes, we should walk humbly, very humbly.

And once more Patricia came back to his mind. He could picture the journey of Katherine and himself to her when the time came and hoped that an English doctor would be available—well, that could probably be arranged. He could not say whether Patricia would hate or love the child—in either case she was sure to do so fiercely. He thought it more probable that the maternal instinct would assert itself. And afterwards she would come to live in the same house with him at Richmond. Why not ? There was plenty of room. Mrs. Bennet had already hinted that she would prefer to live in and there was a

little bedroom for her. Patricia would take the big room next to his own.

The clock struck. Good Heavens ! He had sat up much later than he intended. He switched off the lights on that floor and went upstairs to his own room. There was the door that led through into the room that was to be Patricia's. He unlocked the door, opened it a little way, peered in, and then stepped back quickly. He returned and flung the door wide open so that the light from his own room could stream into it.

Yes, that was all right. Merely a chance arrangement of a white dust-sheet on a piece of furniture.

For a moment in the bad light he had supposed it to be something else.

CHAPTER XVI

CARTERET ROME reached London soon after ten on the following morning and went on at once to the office of his solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields—he had telephoned the previous evening for his appointment—and saw the senior partner, Stephen Grays. Grays was an old friend of Carteret's but he kept business in a compartment apart. He showed no surprise. He gave Carteret the information required as to the shortest time in which a civil marriage could take place, and in one or two respects Carteret found that things would not be quite as easy as he had hoped they would be. Grays also took instructions for the settling of £300 per annum on the future Mrs. Rome on her marriage and agreed that his firm should act as Trustees of the settlement. He reminded Rome of one or two points which might have escaped him. For instance, it had not occurred to Rome that he would have to sign a new will after his marriage.

It was only after the business side was com-

pleted that Grays permitted himself to be an ordinary human being.

"Well, you know, Carteret," he said, "I can't say that this altogether surprises me. You were always a young man for your years and you were bound to marry again. By the way, is the news to be made public?"

"I think not," said Rome, "not yet. Of course these things have to be proclaimed in time, but we both wish to avoid the reception and the shoal of presents and everything of that kind."

"Perhaps you're right," said Grays. "Anyhow I congratulate you and wish you the best of luck."

There was plenty of time for Carteret Rome to walk on to his next appointment which was with his friend, a mathematical coach, Hollisbrook, at a flat in Museum Street.

They did an hour's mathematics, Rome taking many notes. At the end of it he put a point-blank question to Hollisbrook.

"Any good going on?" he asked.

"I think so," said Hollisbrook. "Yes, on the whole I think so."

The ash from his cigarette dropped into a corrugation on his rather protuberant and very dusty waistcoat, and there remained. It was not the kind of incident of which Hollisbrook

took notice. His whole room was dusty. His hair was dusty. He had long since accepted dust as the inevitable thing against which one does not struggle.

"I didn't think so at one time," he went on, though I agreed to give you a trial. The chances were all against it. You see, you're not a young man and you'd wasted your youth on classics."

"Not wasted. You're wrong there."

"Maybe. Anyhow, I found you were a great deal better grounded in mathematics than I had any reason to expect and you've not been too badly taught. It didn't take you long to pick up again what you'd forgotten. Also, you've worked hard—worked very well you have—much better than I ever expected you would. Mind you, I don't understand your type of mind. I tell you something elementary and you have to sweat at it for weeks before you really get it. I tell you something that's really rather difficult and you're on it like a knife. There's no sense in it of course. Still, there it is. You'll probably never be what I should call a thorough good mathematician as I am myself. I don't suppose you ever expected that, but at any rate you can stand on your own feet now and you know a good deal of the language of mathematics which is, of course, the only language in which things of

ultimate importance can be discussed. Relatives and friends and vermin of that sort come to me and say : ' Oh, George, couldn't you explain to us relativity, and quanta, and the atom, and so on —just to give us a rough idea of it. I tell them that I could do all they want but they wouldn't understand a word I said. Of course there are popular books that give a more or less general idea of the thing, and I mostly mention them. Though I don't put a very high opinion on them myself. But as for you, that's different. You're tackling things the right way. You stick to it, Rome. You go on."

" I will," said Rome, " and I'm glad to have your encouragement. All the same, Hollisbrook, you're a desperately narrow man."

" One must be narrow to be deep," said Hollisbrook with something that came dangerously near to being self-satisfaction.

" I've heard that said before," said Rome, " and heard it frequently. There's nothing in it. You'll never be the man of science Huxley was, and over and above that he was a man of very wide culture."

" Possibly. Of course he was on a totally different line of country. I doubt if he ever heard of the integral calculus. At the same time no doubt he could have asked me things about

the innards of a cray-fish which I couldn't answer. The cases are quite dissimilar."

"Well, why do you attack the classics?"

"Because I hate 'em and always did hate 'em. When I had to pass preliminary examinations in which Latin was one of the subjects required, I tell you frankly that I cheated and so I just squeaked through. That left me free for work of more importance. If it were necessary I'd do the same thing again."

"Quite so," said Rome. "That's all I wanted to know. I've seen a good many attacks on the classical education but never one from anybody who really received it—never, that is, from anybody who knew what he was talking about."

"Anything else to grumble at?" said Hollisbrook, as he lit another cigarette.

"Lots," said Carteret. "I doubt if you could tell me straight off who is the Chancellor of the Exchequer."

"He don't interest me. He's a dirty thief, anyway. I get bits of yellow paper in long envelopes with figures on them, and I write a cheque for what the figures happen to be, and that's the end of it till next year. Why should I know what his name is?"

"It's part of your duty. And again, every now and then you come to the club to lunch."

"Are you going to grumble at that? If you knew how perfectly beastly the food here generally is, you wouldn't be surprised at it."

"That's not the point I was going to make. After lunch you stay on and play bridge for a few hours. You're a fine mathematician, but if you ask me you're a perfectly rotten bridge-player. Can you explain that?"

"Of course I can. No mathematician is ever an arithmetician. He can't bend his mind down to fiddle-faddle of that sort. Why, I doubt if I could say the multiplication table correctly without stopping to think, and I'm quite certain I couldn't do the tables of weights and measures."

"Well, it's nothing to your credit. But we'll go on to a point in your own line. Would you say that Feltham was a fine mathematician?"

"I suppose he couldn't hold the position he does if he wasn't. At any rate, most people would tell you so."

"Then why is it that you try to crab every single thing that Feltham writes? You're always down on him, and for that matter, he's always down on you."

"I can't help that. If he builds up a structure based on something which he knows and I can show him that he does not really know it, and that conditions may be very different, haven't I

got a right to speak out? I say nothing worse of him than he says of me anyhow."

"Oh," said Carteret Rome, "you're fine chaps, both of you. And also you're a couple of cantankerous face-scratching babies, and you both ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

He glanced at his watch and said that he must be getting on.

"Pity!" said Hollisbrook. "I was just going to ask you if you noticed anything wrong about me not to hesitate to point it out. However, that must be for another time."

Both men laughed cheerfully.

Carteret arrived at the restaurant just in time to meet Patricia emerging from the *cul de sac* where she had left her car. She looked better than she had done when he last saw her. There was a shade more colour in her face and though her smile was a little melancholy, still she smiled.

"Now I'm safe," she said as she shook hands with him, and that puzzled him rather.

They went on upstairs to their luncheon table. Carteret gave his orders to the waiter rapidly and then turned to Patricia.

"Tell me now," he said. "How did you sleep last night?"

"I slept very well during what there was of it. But we didn't go to bed till very late."

“Silly of you. What’s your excuse?”

“Well, Katherine and I sat up talking for a long time. That was natural, wasn’t it? You see, she was a good deal surprised at what I had to tell her. I’m not quite sure she realizes it all even now.”

“She has no objection to offer, I hope.”

“No, not exactly. She’s tremendously touched by your kindness. She’s very grateful. She loves you. At the same time she rather disturbed me because she said that any man who would do for me what you are doing must be in love with me, and that in that case I seemed to be acting unfairly. Bilker was the word she used.”

“And what did you say?”

“I said that if you had been in love with me you would have hated and despised me after the story I had to tell you.”

“You’re charming people, both of you, but you don’t know everything. However, Patricia, I shall be taking your education in hand very soon and I shall teach you quite a lot.”

“I’ll learn,” said Patricia. “I’ve got a good deal to learn, haven’t I? There’s just that to be said of a girl who makes a mess of her life as I’ve done—she knows that there are still some things to learn.”

"Come, come," said Carteret, "don't be too humble and pious. Eat your oysters and thank God. Now let's talk about something else for a few minutes."

"I'll eat my oysters," said Patricia, "for I like them very much. And I will thank God. But is there anything on earth that we could talk about except what we are talking about? It's filled up the world as far as I'm concerned."

"When we met you said: 'Now I'm safe.' What did you mean by that?"

"Because I was with you, of course. As long as I'm with you I've no fear of anything. Nobody could be. You take it all in hand. You arrange it. And you're always right."

"This is glad news even if I don't agree with it altogether. Tell me, did Katherine suggest anything else?"

"I had said that you wanted the arrangement to be secret at present. She asked for how long it was to remain secret. You see, she's very anxious to do exactly what you wish, and so am I."

"That's very good of you both. But as for the secrecy, my only idea was that it should not be made too easy for people to find out the when and where of our marriage and that you should be able if necessary to tell them that it took place

months ago. Otherwise it's entirely at your discretion. Either you or Katherine can say that you're married to me whenever you like. I promise you I'll support the claim. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, I see of course. But I don't suppose it will be necessary to say anything for some little time yet."

"I've been to my blessed lawyers this morning," said Carteret. "I can't give you the exact date just yet but I will as soon as I can. We shall be married very soon."

"Look here," said Patricia, "I've got some money left still. You must tell me what all this costs, won't you?"

"No, I won't," said Carteret. "It's nothing much, anyhow. You must remember that you're going to be my wife, and in that position you must submit to some money arrangements which otherwise you might not like. And you must do it because I have my own credit and dignity to think about. This morning, for instance, I arranged to settle three hundred a year on you for life."

"No, no, no," said Patricia. "If I ruin your life, at any rate I needn't steal from your children."

"I knew you'd feel like that," said Carteret, "and that is why I've settled such an extremely

small sum. None of my children will feel it. I should doubt if it would be enough for you to live on. But probably there will be money coming to you from your father in the end and also, as you've already shown, you can make money by your work. Possibly later on you will come to live with me at Richmond—I mean, to live under the same roof with me. I should hate it if you had to come to me every time you wanted to spend twopence on hairpins. The arrangement is as much to my advantage as it is to yours, I can tell you. Just don't worry. Leave everything in my hands. I'll do as well as I can."

"Might I ask one thing?" said Patricia earnestly.

"Anything, of course."

"On the day we're married I don't want there to be anything in the least festive about it. I don't want to lunch or to dine with you that day. We meet at the registry office and we part as soon as it's over. You don't mind that?"

"No," said Carteret Rome. "In fact I think I understand what your feeling is about it."

"By the way," said Patricia, "I heard from my editor this morning and the date's been changed again. I don't leave for two months."

"He seems a changeable gentleman."

"He says he's not, but that things happen which force him to alter or modify his plans."

"Well, my dear, it doesn't seem to matter very much. When the time comes I shall come out with Katherine to look after you. But I shall be getting letters from you all the time, shan't I?"

"Of course. I'd like to add up all the different things you're doing for me and just realize how wonderfully good you are to me. You're kinder to me than anybody's ever been in my life before. But I'm not going to think about it now because it would make me cry."

"Quite right," said Carteret cheerfully. "You can't cry in here, you know. They'd throw you out and I should probably be arrested."

"What for?"

"Oh, goodness knows. Contributory negligence. Something of that kind. And now, whether you like it or whether you don't like it, we're going to talk about something quite different. It's not good to get one's mind too much fixed on one subject. Do you know, I did an hour's mathematics like a good schoolboy this morning."

And he proceeded to give her an amusing account of Mr. George Hollisbrook.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sun shone brightly. Carteret Rome, with his hat on, stood in the outer hall of his club. He opened the book catalogue which had arrived by post and had just been handed to him by the porter. He turned a few pages of the catalogue but as he had no taste for high-priced and esoteric pornography he dropped the thing into the fireplace. He wondered how such things managed to get through the post office. He lit a cigarette.

And then he heard a cheery voice.

"Hullo, Rome," said a friend of his. "Just coming in or just going out?"

"Just going out," said Rome. "But I don't expect to be away for more than an hour. I shall be back to luncheon."

"Good," said his friend. "Then I'll probably see you at bridge later."

"I hope so," said Rome, and passed out down the steps of the club.

There were plenty of taxis in waiting but Rome did not take one. For a while he walked. Then he selected an omnibus which would take him

as far as Oxford Street. It was only then that he took a taxi to his destination.

He was back at the club within the time he had mentioned. He found old Hollisbrook divesting himself of his overcoat.

"This is good," said Carteret. "What brings you here?"

"Three bad eggs. Not one. Not two. Three. Three, one after another at breakfast this morning. The old woman whom I overpay to fail to look after me seems to have invested in a cheap line of eggs. She's probably made all of the filth into something for my lunch. I ran away. That's all there is to it. I simply ran away."

"I think you are the most unpractical idiot I ever met," said Carteret.

"Thank you for your kindly words," said Hollisbrook. "Why?"

"Because you employ an incompetent fool. Because you've not got enough sense to look after your own food. Because you can't even manage your own business."

"You don't understand," said Hollisbrook loftily. "In some respects I've trained that woman. She never even tries to dust my writing-table now. It might take me weeks to break another woman into it. You take a great deal too much trouble yourself about the way you

live ; it's got a touch of applied science about it and that's a thing I never could stand. Pure mathematics leading to nothing and helping in no way form about the only subject worth consideration."

"You ought to be in the lunatic asylum," said Carteret. "You probably will be to-morrow, so you shall lunch with me to-day."

"Thank you very much," said Hollisbrook, "I shall be charmed."

Carteret Rome intentionally selected a table at which two only could be seated. They lunched excellently, and presently Hollisbrook wandered into his own subject as Carteret had known he would. He spoke only of the imaginative side of it and suggested any number of unsolved problems of the greatest interest.

"But these things are in the waiting-room," said Hollisbrook. "We've not really got on to them yet. But we shall, we certainly shall. We can look forward. There's no end to science. I shall play bridge this afternoon."

"I'd sooner you went on talking," said Carteret. "However, the points here are low and I suppose I must go through with it once more."

"You'll see," said Hollisbrook. "I'm not a scientific player. I admit that. I could not degrade science to the uses of any game. But in

bridge I feel that I sometimes have a sort of flair. My unconscious mind comes into action."

"Then you'd better stuff it back again. What was that you were saying just now about the tensor transformation theory?"

And Hollisbrook let himself be lured back to mathematics once more.

Rome played but one rubber of bridge that afternoon. It was a rather prolonged and very interesting game. He was on the losing side but he did not feel that he had anything with which to reproach himself. He left because he wished to get back to Richmond by train before the rush hours. He paused a minute or two on his way out of the card-room at the table at which Hollisbrook was playing. Hollisbrook's partner was a duffer and they were playing against two reasonably good players. Hollisbrook visibly rejoiced.

"Look at this, Rome. We've won four rubbers in succession and in three of them the other side never scored a solitary pip."

"Never mind," said Rome. "You'll get a hand on which it is possible to lose one of these days."

Carteret's housekeeper had not gone when he reached home, and by his direction she brought him a cup of China tea.

While he sipped that he began to think. He had a good deal to think about. For that morning during his absence from the club he had married Patricia Verdon.

Katherine and Patricia had driven up in the little two-seater a minute or two after Rome had reached the registry office. The two women were in dark clothes and neither of them seemed very animated. Patricia in particular was serious to the point of depression. He had asked them to come over to Richmond on the following day to talk things over but the following day was a Friday and Katherine could not get away from her business. So it had been settled that they should meet on Saturday. The wedding ceremony had been brief, prosaic, formal, dusty. Carteret Rome was married but there seemed to be nothing whatever so far to remind him that he was married. It seemed to him that he had been through a farce played not on his own account, not even on Patricia's account, but on account of the view which society took of the irregular unions.

Mrs. Bennet brought in a letter which had just come by post. It was addressed to him in Lady Fairing's handwriting and he threw it down on the table unopened with some slight irritation.

"I don't know if you would care for me to remain to-night, sir," said Mrs. Bennet. "I have nothing whatever to do this evening and I could get dinner for you quite easily."

"Very well, Mrs. Bennet," said Carteret. "I think I should like that, thank you. I'll leave you to settle what it's to be. But let it be something very light. And yes, I think on the whole I'll drink champagne to-night."

He had been glad that Mrs. Bennet was going to remain for another hour or two. Why? He knew the answer. For a little longer time than he had expected he would know that there was some ordinary living person in the house with him. He would expect to see her very little if at all but he would hear her moving about. He would know that there was somebody with him. He would not be crushed by the awful feeling of loneliness which had oppressed him of late.

So much did it restore his calm of mind that he was able to work placidly at Maxwell's Equations until dinner was announced.

Alone in the room he opened the champagne, poured out the first glass, stood up and looked towards London. He raised his glass.

"To you, Patricia," he said aloud, and drank.

He had never had the slightest intention of

doing anything of the kind. It was quite unpremeditated and he was not a man who was inclined to fanciful and imaginative things.

After dinner Mrs. Bennet brought his coffee and the '75 brandy and put them down on the table beside him. Jane Fairing's letter still lay on the table. He looked at it with disgust. Jane's hold on his affections had always been one-sided and precarious but to-night for the first time and for no reason that he could name he felt that he hated her. He tore the envelope open and read :

"Darling, I'm coming to lunch with you to-morrow unless you 'phone to forbid it. I have had the most marvellous and interesting experience about which I am dying to tell you. Perhaps if you promise to be good I shall drive you back here with me afterwards."

Rome's first impulse was to go out and telephone at once the first excuse that might occur to him. He could read fairly well between the lines of that letter. And then he changed his mind.

"Let's get it over and finish the thing finally," he said to himself. "Let the bitch come."

Mrs. Bennet entered robed for departure.

"Is there anything more I can do for you to-night, sir?" she asked.

"No, thanks, I think not," said Carteret.
"I have Lady Fairing coming to lunch to-morrow.

"Very good, sir," said Mrs. Bennet respectfully.

"And I shall be having Miss Verdon and her sister to lunch on the following day."

"That will be very nice, sir," said Mrs. Bennet, smiling approval.

And so the two luncheons were arranged. The shops were now shut, and Carteret did not permit any avoidable call from a tradesman, so post-cards had to be sent. It occurred to Carteret that Mrs. Bennet took somewhat austere views as to Lady Fairing's requirements but was well disposed to take any amount of trouble for Patricia Verdon. Well, he had known that all along. Without one word said he had known that for some reason or other Mrs. Bennet did not like Lady Fairing and that she did very much like Patricia. Well, that was all to the good.

When Mrs. Bennet had gone once more that feeling of almost desperate loneliness seemed to settle over the house. He was on a desert island and nobody cared a curse about him. True, for some years before that same feeling might have happened to him but it never had. He could put it all right and he would. Mrs. Bennet

would be quite glad to sleep in—it would add to his comfort and incidentally would save her the cost of her room and her breakfast.

And so next day, shortly before one, Lady Fairing arrived expensively dressed, in her expensive motor-car. Carteret went out cheerily to greet her and heard her order her chauffeur to be back at three. For this he was not without feelings of gratitude.

She threw down her cloak in the hall and came into the sitting-room which was also part of the dining-room. There he kissed her somewhat perfunctorily. She was certainly a wonderful woman for her age. He noticed that even now. But he did not want her and he felt that he would never want her again.

"Oh, Carteret," she said, "I've been through such a wonderful experience. Even you will have to believe now."

"I hope not," said Carteret.

"But you will. She is the most wonderful medium I have ever come upon yet. She is called Osiris."

"Is she indeed?" said Carteret briskly. "Funny, isn't it? Because of course Osiris is not a female name. It is the name of a male Egyptian deity, the husband of Isis."

"I didn't know that," said Lady Fairing.

"Do you know, I really didn't know it. I'm not even certain she knows it herself."

"I'm prepared to bet sixpence she don't," said Carteret. "However, we'll leave all that for the present. If you put me in a bad temper I shan't be able to eat any lunch. Come now, drink your cocktail and we won't come back to this subject till after lunch."

Lady Fairing let herself be persuaded and Carteret Rome showed that he was a good host. He kept her interested and amused throughout luncheon. He gave her much information about people in the public eye and some of it was quite true.

When they lit their cigarettes after luncheon Lady Fairing said earnestly :

"Well now, Carteret, you've got to let me talk to you very seriously."

"Well, if it's necessary, go ahead. What's the trouble ?"

"It's this Osiris."

"I see," said Carteret, "the lady with the gentleman's name. If you want to talk about nonsense of that kind, by all means talk about it."

"Now look here, Carteret," said Lady Fairing earnestly, "I've been thoroughly into this kind of thing and you have not. You've not taken that trouble and yet you lay down the law."

"Yes, I think you might cut that all out. I examined as far as I thought it worth while. Now I attach no importance to any of it. However, tell me a plain story and I won't interrupt you."

"Well, I will. Yesterday our little circle was sitting with Madame Osiris——"

"Or Mrs. Jenkins as the case may be," said Carteret cheerfully.

"You told me you wouldn't interrupt. We had a wonderful time, really wonderful. It is remarkable that we can get in touch with the very greatest minds of the past—with Newton, for instance, or with Wordsworth."

"It would be," said Carteret.

"But when it was all over Osiris laid a detaining hand on my sleeve."

"Did he indeed?"

"She—not he. I have explained that to you before. How can you be so tiresome? As I say, she detained me. And she told me that she had an urgent message for me from the spirit world. She said that I was mixed up in an intrigue with a man and she described the man. It was you, Carteret, almost exactly, but for the fact that you do not wear a beard. And Osiris went on to say that the spirits had assured her that our relations were—er—guilty and must be

broken off. The other alternative was that we should be married immediately. Now that is really important, Carteret. It cannot be a coincidence. We cannot dare to let it go past. What are you going to do about it ? ”

“ Well,” said Carteret. “ I’m in no great hurry. At present I should propose to do nothing about it. You know, Jane, you are falling into your customary fault of making much too much about far too little. I do not seem to have any reason for worrying much.”

“ You’re hopeless. Your eyes are blinded. Well, I am guided by Osiris and I must speak plainly. Would you consent to regularize the present situation ? Would you marry me ? ”

“ What is the alternative ? ”

“ Our present relations must be broken off. As you know, I’ve never felt easy, I’ve never felt happy about it. I have told you time after time that you should not, and yet you do.”

“ Good,” said Carteret. “ You force me to a decision. I cannot marry you, but I accept the alternative and I hope we shall remain good friends.”

A sound from the outside gate announced Lady Fairing’s motor-car.

“ You surprise me,” said Jane. “ You also pain me. I thought you cared more for me than that.”

"Sorry," said Carteret. "I don't know that I have anything to retract."

"You won't come back with me to London in my car—just for once? To say good-bye, as it were."

"I think it would be better not. I've merely accepted the conditions that you yourself have laid down. That's no reason why we shouldn't remain friends."

"Friends? That doesn't mean much. I'm going, Carteret, I'm going."

He escorted her to her car. And when the car had vanished he did three of the deep-breathing exercises with which he was familiar. He then went back to his house and got to work.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEXT morning among the letters that Mrs. Bennet brought in with Carteret's early cup of tea was something rather bulky from Jane Fairing. It was not unexpected by him. She was a terrific letter writer. She also underlined words frequently and on no ascertainable system—a practice which he detested.

“Do *just* review the facts,” wrote Jane. “You were *very* wicked as a boy and you know it, and I admit that I was myself to blame. We met after many years and again gave way. Neither of us wished to marry. It was all sordid and hateful though perhaps at the time we did not know it. But I was just beginning to be interested in spiritualism and had not yet come *fully* to the light. That *miraculous* message which Osiris brought to me from the other side was the culminating point. After that I could not dare to go on as before.

“I confess, dearest, that you have disappointed me. That message was so wonderful—so *inexplicable*—that I felt sure it must make *some* impression. But I was met with the same intel-

lectual pride, the same obstinacy, the same flippancy as before. It did not even occur to you to ask yourself how, *except* by supernatural means Osiris could possibly have *known* what she did. You have not even the patience to investigate what you despise.

"But I am full of faith and hope. One day you will come into the fold. I am sending you some leaflets—*quite* short—which I should like you to——"

But that took Carteret Rome to his limit. He sprang out of bed and did breathing-exercises vigorously. That was curious—when he had finished an interview with Jane or a letter from her, he was very likely to do breathing exercises.

Downstairs, he destroyed her letter and leaflets. Then he sat down and wrote to her. His letter was not brief enough to be rude, nor was it long enough to be enthusiastic. He wrote temperately, kindly, and tactfully. He also wrote firmly and finally. All through he had it in his mind that one day he would have to tell her he had married again.

The morning was at first stark and grey. There was white frost on the lawn, and the fog-signals banged peremptorily down by the railway-lines. And then the weather experienced a sudden change of heart. A gentle west wind swept off

the fog, the sun shone bravely and brightly. It seemed that the spring had sent a day in advance to show what she could do.

Carteret Rome had no inclination for work that morning. He read his newspapers thoroughly and conscientiously. He went out into the garden, and detected and slaughtered two plan-tains on the lawn. He wandered without purpose into the town and back again. The thought came to him sharply, like a knock on a door, that his mind was occupied—Patricia was coming to see him.

She had been to see him often before, and the anticipation of her visit had always been pleasant. But never before had she so filled his mind. He could explain it all of course. He had entered into a new and very unusual relation with her. He had no conception to what it would lead. So much depended on such slight chances. For years he had steered his own course quite definitely, and now he was as a cork thrown on the sea-waves. He had not a moment of regret. But he had brought a great change into his life, and it was no wonder that it had filled his mind.

And there had been other changes too. For a long time after his first wife's death he had been very content to sit alone of an evening.

He had cooked perfectly his own slight evening meal, and had enjoyed it greatly. And afterwards he had enjoyed the writing and the reading without any chance of interruption. Sometimes, having built up his fire with care and foresight, he would sally out to a theatre. The performance was seldom any good but that did not much matter. No theatrical performance is so bad that it cannot teach or tell something of interest to the artistic observer.

And that had all gone—and rather suddenly. There were evenings still when mathematics absorbed him—when he had got to see it—got to get it—and laboured on into the small hours well content. But far more often he felt that humanity was pulling him, the recluse, back again. He wanted to hear the clink of a dish or any sound of humble human agency. He wanted to see the plain but benevolent face of Mrs. Bennet showing in the doorway, as she enquired for his orders for the morrow.

Katherine and Patricia arrived, as they had said they would, soon after 12 o'clock. Carteret looked at them carefully. There was no sign to-day of any depression about Katherine. She seemed bright and smiling. But Patricia still seemed to have altered. Carteret thought she looked more beautiful than ever but the beauty

was of a far more serious character. This was not the Patricia who, clad in black pyjamas, had engineered her eccentric party. This was not the Patricia with whom he had spoken so lightly and so often on so many subjects. She had come up against life, against the full derisive force of it, and she still seemed a little stunned.

This was the first time that Katherine had been down to Richmond to see Carteret. And at his suggestion Patricia showed her all over the house, for Patricia knew every corner of it.

"You know," said Katherine after her survey, "this is a very much bigger house than I'd expected. It's bigger than it looks from the outside. You've got five bedrooms."

"Quite possible," said Carteret. "The house goes back rather further than one would think."

"And your garden looks as if it would be a perfect dream."

"I speak of it at present as my back-yard. There is nothing there."

"But there will be. I can see it all coming. You know, you've made this a gem of a place."

"I wish I could think so. I've done what I can but 'gem' is about the biggest three-letter word I know. Patricia, wake up. You're going to sleep."

"No," said Patricia, "I'm only listening."

"And there I think you're wrong," said Carteret. "Of course we all want to hear. I should hate to be either blind or deaf. But listening is another matter, don't you think? There's a meekness about it—a sort of obedience."

"How do you mean?" asked Patricia.

"Well, people with the wireless listen patiently while 2 LO flings them nice bits of assorted concert and a lecture on Vanished Phylae and a practical snack on 'What to do when your chickens cough.' People listen to sermons and never even try to hit back. Wretched boys listen to their wretched schoolmasters. Butlers listen to pompous imbecilities and manage to say 'Very good, sir,' at the end of it. We can easily listen too much. To listen is a confession of inferiority—general or localized."

"Yes," said Katherine, "but what about refusing to listen? That's a claim to superiority."

"And one of our most priceless possessions. Why not? Even if the claim is not supported by facts it gives a glow. That glow is valuable. Facts are overrated. No book contains as many facts to the space as a dictionary, but at the same time no book is duller reading. The only people who read dictionaries are the authors who are trying to find a few new words. Why, even a

theory loses most of its charm when it has passed into well-established fact. It has gone from the adventurous to the prosaic."

"I wonder how much you mean?" said Patricia.

"No one," said Carteret, "would be better pleased than I should be to know. But I don't."

"Anyhow," said Patricia, "I'm inferior. It weighs on me. I've fought and lost. Probably a lot of other girls have done the same. Nature doesn't worry much—it goes plugging along on the same lines whatever we do. If only there could be a little more decent sympathy between man and nature."

"Or between man and God," said Carteret. "However, if you're inferior you shall be put to the lowest menial work. It is still twenty minutes before luncheon will be ready. Let us make here three cocktails, and as the glasses are there ready and you know your way about my sideboard, you shall go and make them. And then——"

"I'm not sure if I should make one for Katherine. She never does, you know."

"She will to-day," said Katherine. "See that you make them very well."

With a mournful smile Patricia turned to the sideboard.

Carteret, who so far had watched expressions and intonations almost more than words, still waited his time. Patricia was not happy. He felt quite confident of that. It troubled him. It seemed to him horrible that she should be unhappy and trying to play up and perhaps for the first time in her life not quite succeeding in playing up. Well, things had to be taken gradually. They would get down on to the bedrock soon. He wished almost that he had not asked Katherine. He both admired her and thought her delightful. But perhaps he could have put things right more easily between Patricia and himself if Katherine had not been there.

"Well, now," he said, "what are the plans? That's what I want to know. What do you mean to do, Patricia? Apparently you are under some sort of contract with a brainless Aztec who runs a magazine for women."

"I am," said Patricia. "I should be inclined to think him an Aztec just as much as you do for he is exasperatingly incomprehensible and often doesn't seem to understand what he wants himself. But he gets there—that's the whole point. He brings out schemes which make Fleet Street laugh until it is ill. And then those schemes do really come off and Fleet Street starts to produce

something as near like them as possible. I've no admiration for him and no liking for him, but he does make me believe that he knows his job even though he gives an inexperienced girl like myself this big commission. Well, as things stand at present in about ten days I start for New York. After that India, China, and Japan, and anything else in the neighbourhood which takes my fancy. Then Palestine and Egypt, and from there I drift up through Europe—Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, and Spain."

"And what about Germany?"

"I don't think he's mentioned it. He does not seem to be worrying about it. But of course the programme is not full yet. Further items will be stuck into it."

"And what about you, Katherine? Are you going to be left all alone in that topmost flat?"

"I thought I was," said Katherine. "But now it's not so sure. It seemed to be hopeless to try and let a flat like that up at the top of a house without a lift and without even a light on the stairs at night. But it looks as if you could let absolutely any flat nowadays, particularly if its decorations are a little out of the way. And when Patricia has anything to say about it the decorations always are out of the way. I'm inclined to think that we shall be able to let.

In that case I shall probably clear out to the Elsinore Residential Club for Woman Graduates. I've got plenty of friends there. It won't be at all bad."

"I see," said Carteret. "I see. Yes, in all the external matters things seem to be shaping very well. Tell me now, Patricia, when it's all over, if I very much wished it, would you come and live here? Could you trust me well enough?"

Patricia seemed to think for a minute. And then she spoke.

"I'm not able to think of anything on earth, Carteret, in which I couldn't trust you absolutely."

"That's very sweet of you," said Carteret.

And then Mrs. Bennet proclaimed luncheon.

"Now then, Katherine," said Carteret as they sat down. "Tell us about this Elsinore contraption."

"Well, to start with it would be much nearer to my office than our present flat is. It's not intended for the very rich nor for the very poor. What you get is a bed-sitting-room. A curtain covers up the alcove where the bed is during the day. You have a gas-fire and your own meter. There are not quite as many bathrooms as I should like, but they say it arranges itself all right. Downstairs there are the big rooms, dining-room, drawing-room, smoke-room, and

so on. The catering is run scientifically and economically. You get three courses for dinner every night for half a crown and you get chicken every Thursday."

"How terrible," said Carteret. "If I knew I were going to get chicken every Thursday I should shoot myself."

"If you are there for luncheon you can get something cold, but of course hardly anybody ever is. You get hot luncheon and dinner on Saturday and Sunday. As I told you, I know several of the girls there and I think it is just the kind of thing that would suit me."

"Well, I wouldn't like to put you off it," said Carteret, "but it wouldn't suit me. It's a great deal too communal. I've grown old and individualistic. I want my bath when I want it, I want my food exactly as I like it, and I wouldn't have any avenging angel telling me I was to have cold luncheon five days in the week. Still, after all, you are you. If it suits you there's no more to be said. I expect it would be much cheaper to live there and to let the flat."

"I am sure it would."

"And what are your plans, Patricia?"

"I'm more or less at the mercy of my insane editor. At present the arrangement is that I sail in ten days and I am to buy my kit as I go along,

and also they don't mean to allow too much for it. In a way I'm very glad that I'm going to travel at last. That idea has always stuck to me."

"I know some decent people in the United States and elsewhere," said Carteret, "to whom I might give you letters. They'd be good to you and look after you and all that sort of thing, you know."

"That would be very kind of you," said Patricia, "and I should like to have them, at any rate for the first month or two of the trip. After that, you see——"

"Yes, yes," said Carteret.

"One hates explaining," said Patricia. "One doesn't even like lying more than is absolutely necessary."

"Nor I," said Carteret. "But a lie sometimes has its uses—even moral uses. Perhaps the schoolboy was not so very far out who defined a lie as an abomination in the sight of the Lord but a very present help in time of trouble."

The two girls left soon after three. It had been arranged that Carteret would go to the boat with Katherine to see Patricia off, and that they would meet again before that event.

And then Carteret went back into the house. He refilled his liqueur glass, lit another cigarette and began to think. He had not kissed Patricia

this time, nor had she kissed him. He could not have given any definite grounds for his belief, but it did seem to him that she had been really fonder of him than she had ever been before. It was nothing to build upon. It was probably a passing mood due principally to gratitude. Perhaps he would know more when he went to see her off on the boat. And perhaps he would never know anything.

By this time the luncheon table had been cleared and he sat down to steady work.



CHAPTER XIX

CARTERET ROME was seldom late in the morning. In the very dark days in December and January he might make an exception, but generally he was downstairs by nine and on this morning, which was again spring-like, he was down even before nine.

He lingered over his coffee and the newspapers. There were one or two things in the newspapers which interested him that morning.

And suddenly there came a sharp double rap at the front door. He troubled little about it. It probably meant a telegram and a telegram probably meant more hysteria from Jane. Mrs. Bennet brought in the orange-coloured envelope and he looked at it with distaste.

But he opened it. And he read :

“Accident to Patricia. Going on well, but do come if you can. No answer needed if you are coming.—Katherine.”

And in about two minutes Carteret had ordered up a car from the garage at the bottom of the street and had countermanded luncheon.

For a moment Carteret hesitated as to putting

through a telephone message. He decided against it. Katherine had said that no reply was needed if he were coming and it was quite possible that there would be nobody there to take the message at the other end.

Carteret Rome was respected as an employer and nobody was anxious to lose business with him. The car was at his door with wonderful promptitude.

"Look here," said Carteret to the driver. "Here's the address. You've been there before. This time I'm in a hurry. I don't particularly want you to break your neck or mine. Otherwise get through as soon as you can and I pay all fines. Now then, step on the gas and get along with it."

"Very good, sir," said the driver. "I know you're not a nervous gentleman. I shan't be any longer than I can help."

Nor was he. Rome sent him to a neighbouring garage to await further orders. It chanced that owing to an influx of pupils for the Brewster establishment the outer door of Patricia's flat was left open. He climbed the steps and rang. Katherine answered the bell to him as quickly as if she had been waiting. She was dressed as for business and neatly arranged. You had to look at her twice before you realized that she had not

had an hour's sleep the previous night. Carteret grasped her hand.

"Is Patricia here?" he asked. "Can you take me to her?"

"No," said Katherine, "she's not here. She couldn't be. Come along in and let me tell you all about it. I've done the best I could. I had to make up my mind for myself and you may be angry about it. But really I did the best I could. Come upstairs."

So they went upstairs and into that weird and rather decorative room with Patricia's improbable prints hanging on the wall. Katherine sat on the edge of a chair and gave no theatrical sign of any emotional disturbance.

"Quickly," said Carteret, "as quickly as you can."

"When we came back from Richmond yesterday," said Katherine, "we loitered about in the car doing some miscellaneous shopping, for there were things that Patricia needed for her travels. And then we came along up the Edgware Road. I heard a great noise and a biggish car came zig-zagging down the road with a number of people yelling after it. I didn't need to say anything to Patricia. She had seen it all as soon as I had and she pulled the little car into the near side and stopped. I don't think she could have done

any better. As the big car passed us it gave a swoop and seemed just to touch us. It was hardly more than that and it went on again at once without waiting. But it turned the little car over and Patricia was hurt. I myself escaped altogether but there was Patricia lying senseless. It was pretty awful."

Katherine seemed to pull herself together, and continued.

"There was the usual crowd all round in a minute and, thank God, in that crowd there was a good young doctor and an intelligent policeman. Patricia was taken off to a private hospital near by where she has her own room. There was concussion and it was rather late before she recovered consciousness. There was bad bruising, of course, but no bones broken. But—"

Katherine covered her careworn face with her hands, said "Oh, my God!" and then remained silent.

"Come, come, dear," said Carteret kindly. "Wait a while if you like, but I want to hear the rest."

"Yes," said Katherine. "This is where you may think I took too much on myself. You know—well, things happened. Patricia was wearing her wedding-ring at the time. I had to describe her as a married woman. I gave your name."

"That ought not to worry you. If I had been there at the time I should certainly have given it myself. I knew I could trust to your discretion and I know it more than ever now. How has Patricia taken it?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid," said Katherine. "I saw her only for a minute or two last night after she had recovered consciousness and again for about five minutes this morning. She seemed terribly depressed—she said that she hoped she would die. I thought it would be the best thing if I brought you along at once, for I knew you would be kind and consolatory to her. Oh, yes, and I remembered to telegraph to Ella Dess to go to that editor. I telegraphed father too and have had a reply that he will try to be up here to-morrow morning. Is there anything else I should have done?"

"Not that I know of. Shall we go along now and see Patricia?"

"Can't. They have their rules, you know. Of course, if the case were very urgent and you were her husband they might let you in for a few minutes. Otherwise we can't go before four. They tell me she's in no immediate danger and we can wait till four. Could you manage that?"

"Yes," said Carteret Rome, "I can manage that. Till then, would you mind very much

if I sent you to bed? You're played out, you know. I'll bring you a little lunch in about two hours' time. I'm quite a good cook and can look after everything myself very well."

"I couldn't let——" Katherine began.

"Come, come," said Carteret sharply. "I can't have talk of that kind. Don't make things worse. Do what I tell you, and get into bed with the certainty that you have done splendidly so far and that I am very grateful to you for it."

Katherine was on the verge of breaking-point.

"I'll do what you say," she said, nearly whimpering. "You're frightfully kind. I suppose you'll see about the telephone and so on."

"I shall have to be out for about a quarter of an hour to get in supplies. While I'm out that old charwoman of yours will look after the telephone and call you if necessary. I'll look after it myself when I get back. But there will be no telephone this morning. You will just stay quietly in bed until I bring you lunch. See?"

Katherine nodded. She moved towards the door. Suddenly she darted back and clasped one of his hands fervently. Then she went out.

Carteret Rome investigated the kitchen and found it very much as he had expected. Giving himself to reflection he remembered that there

was a shop in the neighbourhood where good things could be bought. He slipped the keys which Katherine had given him into his pocket and went forth.

He found his shop. He purchased smoked salmon, turtle soup of the bottled variety, a large terrine of foie gras, brown bread, fresh butter and eggs. No, they were not to be sent ; he would take them with him. He also took with him a bottle of champagne bearing a label which inspired confidence. Considering that he had not carried any parcels for quite a long time, he carried them very well and brought everything back to the flat intact.

He laid the table for two people. He put everything in readiness with the soup gradually warming on the top of the gas-stove. He took down one of the more wicked volumes from the shelves and began to read it. The charwoman had gone. The flat was strangely quiet. It was half-past one when he tapped at Katherine's door.

"Come in," she said. And he went in.

"Look here," said Carteret, "shall I bring you your luncheon in here on a tray or would you rather come up for it?"

"I'd very much rather come up and have it with you. Do you mind a dressing-gown?"

"Goodness, no!" said Carteret. "Don't be too long."

He went upstairs and cut thin brown bread and butter and made toast. As he was finishing it Katherine entered. He explained the programme to her rather apologetically.

"I ought to have consulted you," he said. "I am afraid that I'm inclined to think that if I get what I like myself everybody else is bound to like it."

"I do like it," said Katherine. "A fool would have got me a beastly chicken. In time of illness or stress they always get you a chicken, don't they? And I'm not sure that I like it very much. This is far, far better. You're awfully good to me, Carteret."

And then the talk went swiftly back to the subject of Patricia.

"What I want to know," said Carteret, "is why she is depressed."

"They didn't let me stay long enough to find out much about that. I think it's principally about you. But she says that the whole of life is just one hellish joke."

"I don't understand why she should be worried about me," said Carteret. "Perhaps I may be able to find out when I see her this afternoon. How long do you expect she will be in the hospital?"

"Three weeks at least. Perhaps a month."

"I see," said Carteret. "I shall tell her this afternoon that the only thing it will be necessary to say to her father is that she is married. She will not be able to do much talking. It will be a good excuse to refer him for the rest to me."

"Then you're going to be here to-morrow morning, too?"

"I am."

"I don't know," said Katherine hesitatingly, "but it's possible father might be angry with you."

Carteret Rome shrugged his shoulders.

"Not at all unlikely," he said. "Probable, in fact. But I don't intend to quarrel with him if it can possibly be helped. Of course, if it can't, it can't. And what about that magazine?"

"That I don't know at all. Ella Dess is coming in this evening to tell me about it. The editor might give it up altogether. He might postpone it. He might send Ella in Patricia's place. But Ella can't write as well as Patricia does. She's all right on the informative side but she's not amusing."

"I don't know that we need worry much about it. Patricia will now be publicly acknowledged as my wife. There's no reason why my wife should go running over the world making draw-

ings of Americans and chimpanzees, and so on. Of course, I'd let her do it if she were very much set on it, but I think I might have alternatives to propose which she would prefer."

"But what about the editor?" asked Katherine.

"Oh, damn the editor! He can think out some new idea. I'm not worrying about him anyhow."

Luncheon came to an end.

"Look here," said Rome. "I've got a car here just near this place, and it shall be here at ten minutes to four to take us to the hospital. Until then you'll go back to your room and rest again."

"There's the clearing away," said Katherine doubtfully.

"No, there isn't. Let me be the boss. Let me tell you what you're to do. Otherwise I might lose my temper."

They both laughed. Katherine went back to her room.

Carteret Rome lit a cigarette and took off his coat and laid it across the back of a chair. In the days when the view that every man should be sufficient for himself had particularly impressed him he had learned to do every kind of domestic work. He was accustomed to say openly that he would ask nobody to do anything for him which

he was not perfectly able to do himself. The vain boast was met by the man who asked him if he ordered his boots or manufactured them in his own factory, and Carteret, who could always laugh at himself, laughed.

However, Carteret carried the luncheon apparatus down to the kitchen and washed up and put away things thoroughly and precisely. This being done he put on his coat, glanced at his watch and went forth to the garage. He found his car and driver and brought them back with him.

He and Katherine went on to the hospital together and passed up the wide steps of the entrance. A uniformed porter who seemed to recognize Katherine opened the doors to them.

"Yes, miss," said the porter. "I'm glad to say that the report is that Mrs. Rome is going on fairly well. I suppose you and this gentleman wish to see her."

"Yes. This is her husband, Mr. Rome, you know."

"Very good, sir. If you step across the hall to the waiting-room I'll 'phone through to the nurse. I don't suppose you'll be kept waiting a minute."

They had arrived at a minute or two before four, but there were already people in the waiting-

room. They looked both anxious and awed. A couple of them were called out by a uniformed nurse and trod very softly. But the floor-cloth was highly polished and their shoes had rubber tips so that at each step they squeaked and suffered shame and agony.

"It's just efficiency," said Katherine. "Once the idea of efficiency grabs you, you can't listen to reason any more."

A nurse came in and said that Mrs. Rome was now ready to receive them.

"I'd like you to see her first," said Carteret. "I'll wait outside here."

Standing outside in the passage Carteret observed many nurses on their way past him. They bore tea-trays and each tray was arranged in the same pattern. There were slices of bread and butter. There were slices of some pestilential cake arranged and built up, growing in height according to the number of teas to be provided. Probably, Carteret thought, two slices to each person, and quite enough too. And he recognized that the charge for tea for visitors would probably be a shilling per head.

Katherine came out again.

"Yes," she said, "she's much better. She's really a great deal better. Last night I thought she might die and I don't think that now. But

she still seems very dejected. Cheer her up if you can."

"Right," said Carteret, and passed into the room.

The light in the room was dim, perhaps intentionally dim. Carteret had to peer for a moment before he could see clearly. Then he saw a uniformed nurse who had been bending over the head on the pillow lying with the face turned a little downwards.

"Good evening, nurse," said Carteret, and coming to the bed, took one of his wife's hands and bent over and kissed her forehead. The nurse discreetly withdrew.

"Well, Patricia," said Carteret cheerfully, "you've frightened us all out of our lives, haven't you? But you're getting along all right now, and you'll have to make it up to us afterwards."

She turned her face to him and looked at him carefully. There was a slight pause before she spoke at all. "Yes," she said, "I'm getting better. They don't think I'll die, though I wish I could. I'm a bilker. However, I've thought it out all right. There's nothing to do here except to think. I can put it right."

"Come, darling," said Carteret, "what's all this babble about? What do you mean by that? I promise you that I don't know."

"You married me only because I was going to have a baby. Now I'm not going to have one. You told me you were living with another woman and I know you like her better than you like me. It's not much wonder. But at any rate I can give you your freedom back. I can and I will. Oh, I will, I will."

"Don't get excited, dear. Except for the fact that you are ill this is the best thing that could have happened. My marriage to you has done as much as I expected from it. As to the other woman, that was definitely broken off some time ago. Really I never cared for her as much as I care for you. If you really think you owe anything to me and want to give me happiness you'll get well as soon as ever you can and come to stay with me in Richmond."

"You mean all that?" asked Patricia.

"Every word of it and perhaps even more than I have said."

Her hand tightened on his.

"I can't talk any more now," she said, "but I shall sleep much better to-night, and it's all you."

"That's good," said Carteret. "I expect your father will be seeing you to-morrow. If he asks you anything about our marriage, don't let it worry you. Just refer him to me. I can

put that all right. Don't forget that you promised me to sleep well to-night. You must. I love you, you know."

He bent over her, kissed her again, and went from the room. In the passage outside he found Katherine sitting on a highly-polished pine-wood bench waiting for him. She sprang up at once.

"How is it?" asked Katherine. "Have you been able to do any good?"

"I hope so," said Carteret; "I think her mind is more at ease now."

"I've been talking to the doctor and the nurse," said Katherine. "You see, father will be here to-morrow. They both say that they will tell him of the injury to her head and so on but that it won't be necessary to say anything of—of the rest."

"Thanks," said Carteret. "That's right. I ought to have thought of that point myself. Certainly it should make explanations easier. I may tell you that from this minute I shall speak quite openly of my marriage to your sister. There is no longer to be the slightest secrecy about it. Tell everybody, as I shall."

"And what are you going to say to father to-morrow?"

"Well," said Carteret smiling. "It will have to depend to some extent on what he has to

say to me. I think perhaps he has some grievance against me, but it is very slight and he must not be allowed to exaggerate it. Now then, I'm going to drop you at your flat. I shall then drive to the club and stay there just long enough to tell some suitable person that I remarried some weeks ago. I shall then leave him to do the rest, as he undoubtedly will, and I shall go on home. What time do you expect your father to-morrow?"

"He comes by the fast train, and should be here by ten."

"Then I shall be here by twelve. Don't you worry, Katherine. Everything's going to be all right."

CHAPTER XX

MR. VERDON was a good man who had found life worrying. Worry had made his hair scant and his trim beard white but had left him a reasonable rotundity. At present his expression was one of utter blank amazement.

"Patricia married?" he said to his daughter Katherine. "I was told nothing about it."

"I think nobody except myself was told anything about it. However, it is to be kept a secret no longer."

"What is the name of the man?"

"His name is Carteret Rome."

"Never heard of him. Is he a gentleman? Is he able to support a wife? Or is he an unprincipled adventurer?"

"I should say he is a gentleman and he is certainly able to support a wife. I have known him for some time now and I think extremely well of him."

"Do you? That's in his favour at any rate. But why did he keep the marriage a secret?"

Why didn't he come to me in a manly and straightforward way and——"

"I think you'd better ask Carteret himself all that. He's coming here this morning on purpose to see you. O course you'll remember that Patricia was of age. Carteret is much older than she is."

"Oh, I don't say he wasn't within his rights. I can even understand that Patricia with her romantic ideas might have preferred secrecy. But still there is the question of ordinary courtesy to myself. He seems to have forgotten that."

"I don't think so," said Katherine. "He does not make that sort of mistake. I can imagine that he might be rude if he meant to be rude, not otherwise."

It was perhaps a little curious that when Carteret Rome was introduced into the room he was the only person who was not in the least embarrassed. He did not say much. He did not chatter. He responded at once to anything which Mr. Verdon had to say and left him in a considerable puzzle as to what he was to say next.

Finally Mr. Verdon took his bull by the horns.

"I think perhaps, Katherine," he said, "it

would be as well if you left Mr. Rome and myself alone together for a little. There are points which he might like to talk over."

"Good-bye, Katherine," said Carteret, "we shan't be very long."

"Well, now," said Carteret, turning to Mr. Verdon, "one thing I see clearly is that I owe you an apology. I should have told you the whole thing from the first just as I told Katherine. But you are a man of the world and will understand things that a younger man might not. My marriage with Patricia was no ordinary marriage. It was the marriage of an elderly man with a young girl. That kind of marriage gives rise to a good deal of comment and neither Patricia nor I wanted it. We did not want the wedding presents—I'm not a rich man, but I can buy anything we require. We did not want the confetti and the choral service. We did not want to see ourselves on the picture page. We did not want to imagine the comments of venomous people. We took the one step which would cut that all out. It may have occurred to you that in the ordinary way we suffer the greatest intrusion on our privacy at the moment when we least desire any intrusion at all."

"That is so," said Mr. Verdon. "That is certainly so."

"I can assure you that there was never any intention on the part of Patricia or myself of keeping our wedding secret from you. It was merely a question of the time for telling. When Patricia was thrown out of her car she was wearing her wedding-ring, and Katherine—very sensibly in my opinion—described her at the hospital as a married woman, giving my name. She was perfectly free to do that at any time. The whole point is that if I had announced my marriage before it took place I should have been subject to a great deal that I wished to avoid. By announcing it a few months later I knew that I should succeed in avoiding it. You must remember, Mr. Verdon, that I had not had the pleasure of meeting you then. Patricia was of age. She was living on her dress allowance and I think she was not earning very much money. She is a spirited girl, perhaps even too ready to act in an independent way. Naturally the thought of her safety was present in my mind. Of course, I'm not pretending that my marriage was anything in the nature of a philanthropic enterprise. It wasn't. Still, as you know, Patricia had a small dress allowance and no special ability for earning a living."

"I don't know, of course, what she told you," said Mr. Verdon, "but I was quite prepared to
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put money into any business which seemed to offer her a chance."

"So she told me. But there was no business that offered her a chance. No doubt she could have put your money into a hundred things but she had no wish to waste your money and proclaim herself a failure. Well, what's the good of talking. I became very fond of her. I managed to make her fond enough of me to marry me. What more can any married man say? I've settled three hundred a year on her. Apart from that I will do the utmost I can to take every care of her."

"I'm sure you will," said Mr. Verdon fervently.

And from that moment Carteret Rome's attitude to Mr. Verdon was not apologetic at all. But Mr. Verdon's attitude towards Carteret Rome had become slightly apologetic. Nothing of course happens as it ought to happen.

Katherine was recalled and conversation became general. Mr. Verdon seemed a little anxious to prove that he was well up-to-date. He said it was his definite opinion that Zola was a fine writer. He added that he considered Aubrey Beardsley was a great artist. This was largely due to Aubrey Beardsley's line. Carteret Rome became a little impatient and bore

them both off with him to lunch at the Ritz Grillroom.

At three they returned to the flat. By this time nothing could have been more gentle and genial than Mr. Verdon. His mind was at rest. He was entirely satisfied with his new son-in-law.

Carteret's mind was also at peace. He had made statements which did not represent the truth. He had made others which suggested falsity. But he had not done any of them on his own account. It had all been for Patricia. He had no feeling that he had deceived anybody. He had slightly the feeling that he had humoured a child.

At the hospital Carteret accepted the privilege of a husband and was the first to enter Patricia's room. She seemed to be recovering rapidly and was much more animated than on the previous day. As regards her father, he told her simply that it was all right. There had been a dislike of publicity on both their parts at the time of the wedding, and Mr. Vernon had accepted this.

"You'd get anybody out of anything, wouldn't you?" said Patricia wistfully.

"I don't know about that," said Carteret. "But I'd try if I were fond enough of them. I mustn't keep you too long, Patricia. You've

got your father and Katherine to see yet. I think I'll send the two in together. Then you'll get back to rest sooner."

"You're my husband," said Patricia.

"I am," said Carteret.

"Then you must kiss me before you go away."

His lips touched her cheek and he went out.

Mr. Vernon was paternally affectionate to his daughter Patricia. As regards her marriage he was gently facetious but so evidently well satisfied that Patricia could not be disturbed by it. Katherine and her father returned to the hall where Carteret was awaiting them. And immediately Katherine saw at the back of the hall a young man in a blue serge suit. His figure was distinctly and emphatically athletic though he was by no means a big man. His face was serious and not markedly intelligent.

"Excuse me for just half a minute," said Katherine, and went over to the blue-serge young man and shook hands with him. The two began talking.

Katherine's half-minute became five minutes and then ten and then bordered closely on the quarter of an hour. Mr. Verdon had already been fidgeting with his watch.

“ You see,” he exclaimed to Carteret. “ This is rather thoughtless of Katherine. I’ve got to get home to-night. I’m expected. My seat in the train is taken and I have no bother with any luggage, but still——”

And then Katherine broke off her conversation with the young man and rejoined them full of apologies.

Thanks to Carteret’s motor-car Mr. Verdon caught his train with plenty of time to spare. He was travelling first-class and had the compartment to himself, which rejoiced him. He travelled very seldom and always in as much comfort as he could buy. At the same time if either of his sons journeyed about the firm’s business, as sometimes happened, the son always went third class, Mr. Verdon stating with great truth that at that age he himself had always travelled third. He secured his place for the first dinner on the restaurant car and returned to his compartment. He had bought evening papers but the time had not yet come for them. There was much to think over.

On the whole he was well pleased. He was very fond of his daughter Patricia and had been distressed by hearing of her motor accident, and he was glad to find now that she was going on so well. He was perfectly satisfied with her

marriage. The reasons for previous secrecy did not seem to him reasons which would have appealed to himself personally, but no doubt different people were different. The question of Patricia's dress allowance occurred to his business mind. He had not spoken of it, but of course it would be absurd to continue it now. A young married woman with an allowance of three hundred a year did not require any dress allowance from her father. He did not propose to discuss it at all. He would merely discontinue it.

An attendant announced to him that the first dinner was now ready, and he made his way to his place in the restaurant. The dinner was, as it always was, third rate, but with Mr. Verdon, as with many others, the miracle of dining in a flying car still had great attractions. He had drunk wine at luncheon, but now he chose the beverage which always specially appealed to him. He drank a bottle of stout. A little later he drank another. He took a dose of fire-water with his alleged coffee and returned to his compartment a happy man.

Yes, things were shaping very well. Katherine would always be able to look after herself. Patricia was now well provided for. His two sons were inclined perhaps to be somewhat wild,

particularly the younger. But they were both in the business and he had good reason to believe that they knew on which side their bread was buttered.

He was vaguely conscious of a fly in the ointment somewhere and he managed to define and place it. This Carteret Rome and his daughter Katherine had been just a little superior. Nothing offensive, of course. No one could have been more charming to him. At the same time he had to acknowledge that they had not been impressed by what he had to say about Zola or Beardsley and they had spoken of artists and authors whose names were really unknown to him. As a young man he had been in the van—quite in the van. But now he seemed to have slipped behind. Perhaps he ought to go up to town more frequently. Wonderful dinner they did manage to give you on these restaurant trains.

He lit his pipe, picked up an evening paper, and in two minutes was comfortably asleep.

After they had seen Mr. Verdon off, Katherine and Carteret returned to the flat.

“Tell me,” said Carteret, “who was your friend in the blue serge at the hospital?”

“That’s just what I wanted to talk to you about. His name is Leonard Weech and he’s an instructor

at the Brewsters' gymnastic game downstairs. He was always desperately fond of Patricia. No, he never told me so, but somehow one gets to know these things. He never bothered her. He knew he had no chance. But he had heard of her accident and had called at the hospital to enquire.

"Decent of him," said Carteret.

"Yes, quite natural. What he was telling me about was his recent meeting with that man Eric Chisholm."

"You don't say. How did that come about?"

"Merest chance. He was taking some sharp walking exercise one night last week and at the end of it turned into a public-house close to Wimbledon Common to get himself a glass of beer. And in the bar stood Eric Chisholm who was quite by way of being hail-fellow-well-met. This seems to have made Weech angry. He said he didn't want to speak to Chisholm or to have anything to do with him. He'd managed to get Chisholm into Brewster's on reduced terms and in return for that Chisholm had messed about with one of the girl pupils and Weech had got into trouble over it.

" 'Stuff and nonsense,' said Chisholm. 'I'd nothing to do with any of the girls in Brewster's.

Why should I? I was getting all I wanted from those two Verdon sisters in the flat above.'

" 'Were you?' said Weech. 'Just step outside on the common with me.'

" 'What for?'

" 'For what's coming to you.'

" 'What do you mean? I'm not going to fight with you, Weech. I know you can lick me.'

" 'Don't mind about that. It won't be a fight. It'll just be some punishment. If you won't come outside you'll get it in here. It wouldn't save you anything either. I should get my name taken and lose my job with Brewsters and so I should probably be tempted to hurt you more.'

" 'All right,' said Chisholm, 'if you insist I'll come. At the same time I don't know what all this fuss is about. I meant no harm. What's the sense of fighting in the dark like this?'

" 'There's a full moon,' said Weech, 'and I may be able to give you the advantage of some lamplight. I shan't be very long over it.'"

Katherine was not able to describe the fight. Weech had gone principally for the face. He had told Katherine that he did not think Chisholm would be in a position to do much love-making for at least three weeks, and it might be longer.

"Good," said Carteret. "I'm by no means sorry to hear it. I rather wish I'd done it myself. At one time I was all right at that game but I suppose I'm too old now. Tell me, what kind of chap is Weech?"

"I should say he was under-educated and not very intelligent. He seems to have given himself up almost entirely to athletics. He's followed the line of least resistance and done well. He has some fixed ideas. He knew that he never had any chance with Patricia and he behaved accordingly. He had his fixed opinion about people who jabbered about women by name in public-houses and he did not like it. He liked it still less if he happened to know the women. He's given Chisholm a word or two of warning and I don't think they will be thrown away."

"Well," said Carteret. "I must be getting home again. Good night, Katherine. Patricia must come back with me to Richmond as soon as she is well enough. I wish——"

"Go on," said Katherine. "Say what you were going to say. I'm only me, you know."

"I was going to say that I wish to God that I were really and truly married to Patricia."

"I think she knows that," said Katherine.

"Do you think there will ever be any chance for me?"

“Yes. Sometimes I wish I didn’t.” She turned quickly from him. “Go now. Don’t ask me any questions.”

CHAPTER XXI

FIVE weeks had passed. Miss Edith Worker was in possession for one year of the furnished flat which had previously been occupied by Patricia and her sister. Miss Worker, under the pen-name of Violette, wrote amorous tales and verses which had some kitchen popularity. She was forty-eight years of age and she knew a great deal more about a publisher's agreement than some publishers do. She was not wholly satisfied with the flat. The pictures had gone from the walls and many books had gone from the bookcase. But she was aware that she could not get more for less money and therefore resigned herself.

Katherine had gone off to the Elsinore Club where they have chicken every Thursday. She found many friends there, particularly Amy Bartlett who had been at Oxford with her. Hospitality at the Elsinore Club was not reckless or profuse but it was quite customary for one woman to ask another or even two to come for coffee to her room after dinner at night.

One evening Katherine invited Amy Bartlett. Amy Bartlett was thin and somewhat square-faced but there was no doubt whatever about her ability or her tastes. It was on the cultivation of the mind that she was chiefly centred but she was not wholly free from an appreciation of the pleasures of the table. She could be generous but she disliked any infringement of her rights. If on some black Thursday there had been no chicken it is certain that Amy's letter of complaint would have been the best sent in to the management. Her ambition was bounded on the north by a prospective school or institution where, being both the proprietor and the head-mistress, she could carry out her special views as to education.

She and Katherine sat on opposite sides of the gas stove in easy-chairs. In front of the gas stove coffee was kept hot in a china percolator.

"In some ways, you know, Katherine," said Amy, "the Elsinore Club is something of a disappointment to me. It's not working out quite as it should."

"How do you mean?" said Katherine.

"Well, do you ever listen to the conversation at the dinner-table or in the drawing-room afterwards?"

"I don't think I have much. You see, I'm generally talking to one or other of the women who are sitting next me."

"Well I have, and I don't like it. Every woman here has the degree of a graduate or the equivalent. Presumably not one of them is a fool. Yet how often does one hear them speak of their work or their ambitions? Very rarely. They babble on like a lot of silly flappers. The only subject is the boys, as they call them. And it is all vanity and vulgarity. The aim seems to be to attract as many of these boys as possible and to marry none of them. There is no genuine passion about it. I sometimes wonder if there is any genuine passion left in the world at all. It doesn't concern me personally. I'm not attractive and no man has ever wanted me, nor have I ever wanted any man. And I never shall."

"I don't think," said Katherine, "I would be too certain about that if I were you."

"You must remember," said Amy, "that I am talking of a thing that I really have thought about. If women are going to take their proper place it won't be by messing about with their blessed boys or by going to revues or night clubs. They've got to put everything they have into the struggle and cut out the rest. I know perfectly well what I want."

"Well," said Katherine, "I don't. Tell me what it is."

"At present," said Amy, "I am, as you know, teaching in a school. It is a good school run mostly on lines that I approve. I earn a very fair salary and I might almost say that I enjoy my work. But, you know, Katherine, it's not my ideal. I want a school of my own—one of which I have the complete control. I don't want to teach kids the alphabet and I think I should take no girls under the age of twelve, but I should try to impress them with my view that they are competing with men and that they must therefore make any sacrifice to get the highest possible amount of efficiency. To be candid, what I should aim at doing in the long run would be to found a celibate order."

"But why found it? There are convents enough, you know."

"I do, and I wholly disapprove of them. Celibacy in my case would be founded entirely on a rational basis. It would have nothing whatever to do with religion. Members of it might have this religion or that and as much or as little of it as they pleased. But that would not concern me. And, after all, it is not so very much that I ask. There are very many surplus women in the world, and there must be. What I want to

do is to make an efficient weapon out of the surplus women—something which will never be distracted by love or domesticity and will simply concentrate on its own work. What do you think ? ”

“ What I think,” said Katherine, “ if I may speak candidly, is that your ideas are rot. Take the example of men themselves. Most of the leaders of science have been men. The names of two women occur to me and there may be more, but I am quite sure that the minority is immense. Now how did those men live ? In the great majority of cases it was not in a hermitage. They married and they had children—often lots of children, and they enjoyed their domesticity and it never spoiled their work by one straw.”

“ So far as you know,” said Amy, “ so far as you know.”

“ At any rate, even with what you regard as a handicap they managed to beat the women of their time. And you must remember that the view you take to-day, my dear Amy, is not necessarily the view that you will take next year, or even next week.”

“ Don’t know what you mean,” said Amy.

“ Well, I’ll tell you. When nature talks we’ve got to sit up and listen. We may prefer to get on with our work, but we’ve got to sit up and

listen because we can't help it. To that extent we are predestined. And if a clever woman like you chooses to form an order of irreligious nuns it won't make a pin's head of difference. I know of a case that rather illustrates the point."

"Tell me about it."

"Oh, well," said Katherine, "it's not very interesting. It was an intellectual woman of, I suppose, about our own age. She had never been in love and she thought herself incapable of it."

"And who was the beautiful young film star who made her change her mind?"

"The man was neither young nor beautiful. There was plenty of character in his face and he was not repulsive, but he could not have been called handsome. He had many faults. I should say he did his utmost to spend the latter years of his life solely in self-indulgence."

"Well, my dear, one doesn't fall in love with that."

"No? But he was a very kind man and that kindness will often shine through the self-indulgence and conquer it. He was also a very clever man—a man whose society was always agreeable. His interests were distinctly wide."

"Yes, yes," said Amy. "Then why didn't the poor wench marry him?"

"Oh, there were one or two reasons," said Katherine, with perhaps just a trace of bitterness in her smile. "He happened to be married already. As a matter of fact he happened to be her brother-in-law. Also he was not in love with her."

"So she pitched herself into the river."

"No, she didn't. She just went on with her work. You must have been reading unwisely in modern fiction, Amy, if you think that decency and self-control are wholly dead even nowadays."

Amy seemed to think the matter over deeply. Then she put down her coffee-cup and took another cigarette.

"Your coffee's good," said Amy. "If you choose to order a cup after dinner downstairs it's threepence and the filth isn't fit to drink. I'm going to have a hell of a row about it."

"Do," said Katherine smiling. "I'll back you."

CHAPTER XXII

CARTERET sat alone in his study. He had been in his house all day, for on the next day Patricia was coming to reside there and he had still found things which he might do for her comfort and pleasure. He could think of nothing else—at any rate until he consulted her further.

He took out from his note-case two letters. One was from Lady Fairing in reply to his brief intimation to her of his marriage. It was an angry letter. It told him that he was a liar, a traitor and a coward—all underlined. It announced a complete alteration in her will from which his name was now entirely excluded. "In future I *do not know you*," she concluded, and he was very pleased to read it. In case it should ever become a useful weapon he kept that letter.

The second letter also pleased him but for different reasons. It was from his daughter and was a very kindly letter. She said that she had never expected that he would always be able to live alone, and knew no reason why he should.

She looked forward to meeting Patricia and wished them both every happiness. She had taken the event far better than Carteret had expected—in fact as well as possible.

It was to himself alone that he owed his principal trouble now. When he had asked Patricia to marry him he had promised that the marriage should be merely a formality—he had practically repeated this when he asked her to come to live at his house at Richmond. It had seemed quite safe then ; he had been very fond of her, and had always been, and was ready to make considerable sacrifices for her happiness. But he knew how much his feelings had intensified lately. He was in love with her now. He wanted her, and she was the only woman in the world that he wanted. His life would be a torture of Tantalus.

No doubt he had but to break his word. Patricia had seemed much fonder of him of late. This might be put down to gratitude, which she felt strongly. She did not seem to forget one little thing that he ever did for her. Nor for that matter did Katherine. Their chorus of praise was almost embarrassing. If he told Patricia of his feelings towards her he had no doubt that she would give him all he wanted and would be glad to do it, but that would be

solely from gratitude. It would not mean that she loved him as a woman loves her lover. He would merely have bought her, as he had once bought May Arden. He would probably lose much of her respect for him. He would certainly lose all his respect for himself. It did not seem to him to be a very good road to happiness.

He did not see any such road. He would just have to go as he had planned, as long as he was strong enough. When he felt that it was unendurable, he would invent some scheme which for a while would separate Patricia from him ; her love of travel might serve as a lure. And there was another possibility. It had never been his intention to make Patricia live a solitary life with himself ; she was to entertain at his house ; she was to bring there the young people whom she liked. And Patricia was very attractive. Perhaps she would fall in love with some young man who wished to marry her and in that case Carteret felt that he must not stand in her way. He would provide the evidence for her to divorce him and then go back to his solitude, increase his study of mathematics, and cut out romance from his life altogether. A man in his later years had no right to expect romance.

And yet when he came to ask himself, he did not find anything that he wished he had done

differently. At the time when he first asked Patricia to marry him, he had been wholly unselfish. His one idea had been to save her from the results of her infatuation with that low hound, Chisholm. And he had succeeded. There would be no pious or impious voice to cackle over her "ruin." Her beautiful eyes could look the world in the face.

Even if he had loved her then as he loved her now he could not have done any differently ; or he would have felt that he was but buying love and buying it ignobly.

It seemed to him that the strength of his own approval would add to the strength of his self-resistance. And even the pleasure of her society alone would be by no means negligible. He would not have to suffer from the fatuous religiosities of Jane Fairing nor the sugar-coated business-qualities of May Arden. Patricia, he felt sure, would always please him, and would never bore him, by those persistent efforts to be bright which had often depressed him in other women.

What was he doing ? He was thinking of points which had greatly pleased him in Patricia. It seemed unlikely that this would make things any easier for him. " Conduct of a fool," he said to himself.

When we wish to change the subject of our

thoughts we often have the delusion that movement and a change of scene help. Carteret opened the door and walked down the garden quickly. At the end of the garden the moon swung low behind the trees. A little breeze moved the leaves and showed to him Patricia's face as if carved in light. He knew it was merely coincidence and yet it impressed him. Three times in succession it happened.

"What's the use?" said Carteret to himself. "I've been telling myself of all the fine self-denying things I'm going to do and you're too strong for me, Patricia. Even these chance moonlight pictures of you show me that. I wish that I were your age, Patricia, or that I were twenty years younger than I am. Failing that I rather think that I wish I were dead."

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR five days Patricia had been living in Carteret's house at Richmond. This evening she stood in her own room looking around before she began to put on the black rest-gown that she wore when she and Carteret dined alone together. She had chosen her room a week before she came to live there and had at the same time been most pleasantly welcomed by Mrs. Bennet.

"If he'd married her ladyship," said Mrs. Bennet, "I really can't say what I should have said—or done."

Patricia found many changes in the room when she came to it a week later. The electric lighting had been increased and made more convenient. Her own pictures hung on the walls in much the same relation that they had borne before. An exquisite little bookcase held much of new interest for her. Every piece of furniture in the room seemed to be a delight. The key of the door into Carteret's room with its shining gilt handle was now on her side of the door and the door was locked. It was quite

obvious that Carteret had taken a lot of trouble for her.

Patricia had watched Carteret very carefully during those five days. He had been uniformly cheerful and often very amusing. Each day he was alone for some time for his mathematical work. Once he had gone up to town and he had taken Patricia with him. She was well satisfied. Never in her life had she been as fond of Carteret as she was now.

For this reason it hurt her to see that in spite of his best efforts he was becoming rather a melancholy man. She knew perfectly well why. He was keeping his word exactly and he did not want to keep it. She knew now that she did not want him to keep it either.

In real life the misunderstandings of love between man and woman cannot long be maintained. The actual words may not be spoken but the very tones of the voice speak. Nothing is articulately demanded but the eyes ask and plead. The slightest action or gesture becomes filled with implication. Each reads the other as an open book. Things rush to their conclusion for the forces involved are too potent for delay—too potent for a man's strength or even for a woman's modesty.

Patricia had made no precise plan. She would

take or make her opportunity that night but, knowing what her intentions were, she knew that it might be difficult. She looked at herself in the long glass. Yes, she was beautiful, and it pleased her. But to-night it seemed to her that there was something in her face—something in the eyes or expression—which had not been there before. It might be just imagination. She turned away and came slowly down the stairs.

In the hall through the half-open door of the study she could see Carteret. He had the evening paper before him, but he was not reading it ; he seemed to be lost in thought. But he sprang up smiling as she entered the room.

" Patricia," he said, as they sat at dinner a few minutes later. " Do you find your room all right ? Is there anything you would like altered ? "

" It's the most charming room I ever slept in, and I've found a wonderful old atlas in the bookcase. Every night I can voyage over uncharted seas until I reach the *terra incognita*."

" Do you want to get to the *terra incognita* ? "

" Every woman does. But it's not the same thing for all of us. Tell me, Carteret, how did you manage to find that quaint old lock with the gilded key."

" Fluke. I went into an antique shop in

Great Portland Street to see if I could get an old Spode fruit-basket. I couldn't get any Spode but I found that lock and key lying about and liked it. So, as they weren't particularly greedy that day, I bought it."

"I don't think I ever saw one like it. They don't make ordinary things beautiful nowadays, do they?"

"No. They prefer to find the ugliest pattern and then repeat it—by machinery if possible. By the way, talking of that old atlas, you lost your great chance to travel."

"I lost that particular job. I might find another."

"You mean you could ask for it. I don't quite like the idea of you asking anybody—except myself—for anything. However, it won't be necessary. I've been thinking it over and I don't see why you shouldn't take a couple of months or so in the Near East in the coming winter. Would you like it?"

"I should love it. What time would it suit you to come?"

"I'm not sure," said Carteret, speaking rather slowly and deliberately, "if I could manage it for myself. But that need make no difference to you. You could take Katherine as your guest. She would learn much Arabic so as to astound

the donkey boys. But if she couldn't come you must have many friends and you could choose somebody else."

"No," said Patricia, "I don't want that. Really and truly I don't. I'd sooner stay here with you."

Her voice was sad. He tried to reply lightly.

"You flatter me, my dear. By the time the winter is here you may be glad to get away. You needn't hurry it. We can leave it for the moment."

And at this point there appeared excellent bacon and baby broad beans, and the epicure awoke.

"This, Patricia," he said, "is a very simple and homely dish, but it is one of which every wise, good and just man will wish to partake in its due season at least three times in the year. No parsley sauce."

"Oh," said Patricia, "but isn't it wicked not to take parsley sauce with broad beans?"

"Wicked?" said Carteret. "Why, it's not even illegal. A little plain butter melted with a sprig or two of fresh mint allowed to cook in it while it is melting—that is all that nature demands."

"I'll tell you what," said Patricia. "You ought to write a cookery book and a Guide to Life."

"One of these days I may aspire as far as the cookery book. As for the Guide to Life, if I knew of anything of that kind that was at all reliable I believe I'd buy it and learn something."

The night was warm. Mrs. Bennet had arranged outside in the garden lounge chairs and the table which bore the coffee, the dry white curaçoa which had recently captured Patricia's affections, and the old brandy which alone Carteret Rome regarded as a liqueur.

"I'm going to talk seriously this evening," said Patricia as she lit her cigarette. "I'm going to make you tell me lots of things. First, tell me what you think about love."

"Can't we start on something easier?" asked Carteret.

"No," said Patricia firmly, "and I want your true real answer, not just chaff. Take a few minutes to think about it if you like."

He did take a few minutes. Patricia waiting drank in the scents of the fragrant garden. Carteret had always specialized rather in evening-scented things. To Patricia it seemed that the whole night was impatient and expectant.

And now Carteret spoke. "I think," he said, "that I have nothing more to say than the commonplace that sexual attraction is an essential part of love but does not in itself constitute love."

If we depend on that alone, love's life is very short. I fell in love, and rightly in love, when I married. In the end it all came to nothing or to very little. But I managed to hang on and to do my duty to some extent at any rate, and I'm very glad of it. I suppose it was possible because there were children to think about and because I had not married for sexual attraction alone. Of late years, as I think you have guessed, there have been other women who have had a strong sexual attraction for me but nothing else that they could offer. And so they slipped away. I cannot even pretend that it gave me any great pain to part from them. Of course, I don't know anything about this, Patricia. I'm giving you only my own experience."

"I think it is mine too," said Patricia. "Eric Chisholm drove me mad once and now he means nothing to me and could never mean anything to me again. Carteret dear, will you answer one question truly?"

"What will you give me if I do?"

Patricia reflected. "I'll give you a present," she said. "It's not much of a present for it's only something which you once gave me. You've always done all the giving, haven't you? Yet it's just possible that you might like it."

"Tell me the question," said Carteret.

"It's this," said Patricia, rubbing the scented verbena in her hands. "I've thought lately that you were fond of me. I may be wrong. Is it true?"

"Dangerous talk, this," said Carteret. "It is true."

"I've even thought that you were very fond of me, that now at last you were indeed in love with me. Is that true too?"

Carteret bowed his head in assent.

"And now," said Patricia, "I will give you your present. I will give you back the promise you made when you married me, that our marriage should be nothing more than a formal arrangement."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"You know. You must know. I've always loved you, but it's only just in the last weeks or perhaps days that I've been in love with you. I won't worry through a catalogue of all you've done for me but there is not one little thing in it that I have forgotten. You are the only man in the world. You are the only person I trust. You have the whole of my love and you have it for ever, whether you want it or not."

"When did the change come, Patricia?"

"I hardly know. I've not been here very long, have I? But I want to tell you that every

night since I have been here the door between our rooms has not been locked and it will not be locked to-night or ever again. And my heart too is open to you."

THE END





